

NewEvangelists.org

new
evangelists
monthly

January
2014

New Evangelists Monthly #13

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Forward

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

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

eBook editions such as this are available within a few days following submission deadlines (the second Saturday of each month). eBook formats include .mobi for Kindle users, .epub for most other eBook readers and .pdf for everyone else.

For the latest edition of *New Evangelists Monthly*, or for more information about this New Evangelization initiative, visit us at:

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A Snapshot of the Face of Jesus [at mommynovenas]

Shimmering stars in the chilly, Autumn sky appeared poised to rain the beauty of Our Heavenly Father's creation all around us. As our family began another busy week, we were still filled with the exhilaration of what had transpired the day before.



On Sunday, September 29, 2013, the Ogdensburg Diocesan Mass for the Year of Faith was celebrated at the 1932 Olympic Arena in Lake Placid, NY. The Papal Nuncio, the Most Reverend Carlo Maria Vigano and our Bishop, The Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley were celebrant and homilist. We arrived an hour early. The arena was already brimming with faithful Catholic Christians, pilgrims young and old, who had travelled from every corner of our 12,036 square mile Diocese. Each face was illuminated with excited anticipation. Flashing cameras highlighted the many smiles and greetings. The beautifully candlelit altar and centrally placed Holy Crucifix transformed the arena into a glorious place of worship. Lovely swirling azure brush strokes graced the canvas of a magnificent painting of Our Lady tenderly embracing the baby Jesus. Bright red banners, artistically representing various parishes of our Diocese, were among the unique adornments displayed throughout the arena.

The "Joyful Youth Choir", a talented and valiant group of Catholic high school students, initiated the celebration with "The Lord of the Dance". It must have been daunting to sing to a couple of thousand attendants, yet they performed as though they were used to large crowds. Knights of Columbus in traditional color guard, diocesan Priests and acolytes, accompanied Bishop LaValley and Archbishop Vigano in the opening procession with reverent humility. The resplendent singing of the three hundred strong choir and very gifted musicians, was joyful and uplifting. What

followed was a most beautiful Eucharistic celebration. The sublime liturgy was at once humble and majestic, giving all honor and glory to God. Fragrant incense accentuated the serene reverence with which passages from Holy Scripture were chanted and read. The congregation zealously echoed refrains, complementing the choir's melodious intoning of the Psalms.

Bishop LaValley, as always, spoke from his heart. He truly understands the challenges and fruits of rural life in this beautiful, mountainous wilderness we call home. What he said was genuine, thought provoking and moving. He shared with us many gems that will enrich my spirit in the days to come.

Bishop LaValley spoke of the "beautiful faces of faith, each in love with Jesus", the "power of the Eucharist" and the "willingness to be transformed by it". Listening to his words, I was reminded of the beautiful spiritual rewards of contemplating the Holy Face of Jesus. I pray that these meditations will ever ring within my soul.

Energized by our Bishop's call for us to go forth and tell the story of our Savior's enduring Catholic Church, the choir and congregation clapped as we sang in unison "God is here, God is Here, one thing I know, God is Here". Most impressive was the solemn reception of communion by over two thousand faithful, accompanied by the choir's glorious rendition of "Ave Verum Corpus" by W.A. Mozart.

A prayerful meekness gently radiated from the Papal Nuncio, as he spoke to us from his heart and the heart of Francis, our Pope. I really felt inspired to bear within my heart "the song that is ancient but ever new," and to be willing to say "I will proclaim Your Name to my brothers and sisters!" Moved by the Holy Spirit, an angelic, melodious "Amen" was the lovely response from the heart of the choir conductor.



The memorable time after the celebration was filled with the joyous activity of lively greetings and smiling photos with the Nuncio and Bishop. Their gracious humility and earnest desire to personally greet each of us was heartwarming. Their generosity reflected the immense love of Jesus.

Families and clergy from throughout this vast diocese greeted and embraced each other, enthusiastically sharing stories about their loved ones, children and grandchildren. Gleeful admiration of family snapshots and the telling of good news about marriages, babies on the way,

graduations and new jobs were lovingly mingled with consoling prayers. There were excited recountings of answered prayers, miraculous healings and accomplishments as well as comforting assurances of prayer through trials. As in every Diocesan gathering I have ever attended, there was ample hugging, laughing and taking of photographs with family and friends. We talked with a sweet novice, a soon to be ordained Deacon, a cheerful Sister of Saint Joseph who told us about her students and a devoted priest who had served overseas. We are still feeling the sparkling joy of our visit with our Bishop and Papal Nuncio, who we met in person.



The soft spoken Italian Archbishop Vigano conversed so kindly with our family in his beautiful Spanish. He delightedly told us how much he had enjoyed the [*Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City*](#). We were so honored and grateful for this wonderful conversation with the Archbishop!

As my family continues to reminisce about the beauty of that day, we realize that what we experienced was a beautiful snapshot

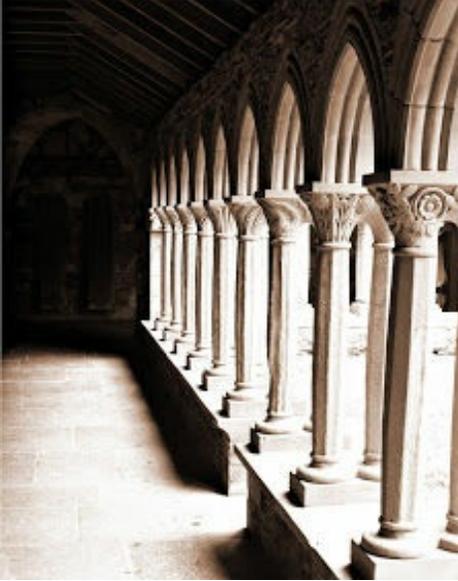
of the face of Jesus. May we faithfully share Him with everyone we meet!

This contribution is available at <http://mommynovenasdelora.blogspot.com/2013/10/a-snapshot-of-face-of-jesus.html>

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Alone With None But Thee, O God (King of Kings) [at ~ Breviary Hymns ~]



Inside the Cloister of Iona Abbey
[Alone with None but Thee, My God](#)

is an anonymous translation from the

The Hymnbook

(1971) of

St. Columba's Affirmation

, attributed to

[St. Columba](#)

(521-597). The Irish born Columba, (also known as Columcille, Colum, Columbus, Combs, and Columkill) founded no less than 27 monasteries in Ireland by the time he was 25 years of age. In 563, he along with 12 companions crossed the Irish Sea to establish the

[Iona Abbey](#)

. Columba would eventually venture further into Scotland and even the Outer Hebrides in his efforts to spread the Gospel. Sung at Morning Prayer in the Divine Office,

[Alone with None but Thee, My God](#)

is set to the tune:

[Auch Jetzt Macht](#)

, first published in the Choralbuch of 1816. The following video features a popular version (set to a different tune), re-titled: "King of Kings", as performed by

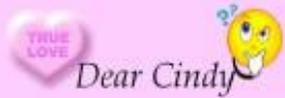
[The Priests](#)

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Dear Cindy ~ My Friend Says Her Friend Likes Me [at The Veil of Chastity]



Dear Cindy,

I spend a lot of time with my girlfriend, Sandy, and her husband, Joe. Joe has a friend, Tim, and it seems Sandy is trying to set us up. I am not sure how I feel about Tim and I am not sure if it is a good idea to be thinking of him in terms of the future. I can't tell if I am attracted to him or not. He has been sort of unclear about his interest in me but my friend says I should give him a chance and that he told her he was attracted to me.

He has not asked me out on a date and has not singled me out with a phone call. He does some things that would indicate interest like emailing and texting me. And, he pays me very nice compliments. Should I be doing anything to make things happen? Or, should I tell him to stop texting me so that I don't get my hopes up with him?

Thank you!

Unsure of What To Do

Dear Unsure of What To Do,

As the female, I believe your job is to **'do nothing.'** Ha. Easier said than done. It is very tempting to try to 'help' things along and make something happen when a guy is not taking the lead or **acting** on his feelings. But, it may help to keep in mind that you do not need to control this situation. Nor do you need to control this guy or tell him that he cannot text you anymore. Most of what needs to be done is to, *and here comes the hard part*, control yourself. Blah.

If Sandy asks if you are interested in him, just say the truth: *'I don't have enough information to know. If he asked me out on a date, I would go.'* Then, follow the [three-date rule](#). If he does take you on a date, demonstrate your ability to be discreet by not sharing anything with Sandy. Only divulge your feelings to Tim *if he asks you*. Things can be rather tricky in this type of set up with friends-of-friends, so one way of maintaining your dignity if things do not work out is....[discretion](#).

It is also interesting that Joe has elected to stay out of it. This indicates to me that he is not

convinced of Tim's *strong* interest at this point. In general, I believe that a guy will think long and hard about starting to date a friend-of-a-friend because of the potential for feelings to get hurt if things don't work out. So, **allow Tim to go through this process** and do not push things one way or the other. Again, **do nothing**.

I see that you are not sure if you are attracted to him. This is not a problem for you to solve. You don't need to 'try' to be attracted to him. Your attraction to him should be based on the information you obtain during the courting/dating process.

Also, you don't need to figure out the end of the story. You don't have enough information yet. It is **Tim's job** to give you the information you need to consider him. This is done through the **dating process**. And, as of yet, as you said, he hasn't done anything about it. Why? We may never know. It could be '[The Veil](#)' in that he sees something in you that he is attracted to but God is protecting you for whatever reason. It could be a timing thing and that God is doing a bunch of behind the scene work to prepare for the future.

But, none of this can be known at this point so you can only look at the information you have today: He texts you and emails you and pays you nice compliments. But, he has not initiated anything beyond a flirty friendship.

This is why I so sincerely believe in [The Veil](#) and why I encourage girls to **let go** of the **calculating, controlling and figuring out**. Only God knows the future and this is our biggest faith walk with Him.

Living a life of [Chastity](#), you have something beautiful and holy to offer a man. Be steadfast in this belief about yourself. Make the guy **work** for your affections. **The effort that a man exerts to obtain a girls affections confirms to him his level of interest in her**. Allow a man to go through this important process.

What can you do? [Smile that gorgeous smile](#) of yours and free your mind of the calculating. I know you want to figure out if it is okay to put your affections toward Tim (I was quite a 'calculator' too) because you want to avoid looking foolish. But, wisdom says to **evaluate things as they are, not what they could be**, and recognize that, frustratingly so, you have very little information at this point.

"God is the author of Reality, so it follows that if we live according to what is real, what is true, instead of the ideas and plans and fantasies and illusions we have in our heads, we will be much happier." [The Evangelista](#)

Here is what I recommend. Smile at him and look him in the eye. Beyond that, let him do the work of courtship. And, respond sweetly when he does. That is it.

I know it is difficult when you cannot see the future. I want to encourage you as I speak from way beyond the other side.....everything is going to be fine, my friend. God's got this!

God love and bless you! Cindy

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2013/12/31/dear-cindy-my-friend-says-her-friend-likes-me/>

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Top 13 and "Mosts" Posts of 2013 [at Campfires and Cleats]

Hi there and welcome to my "Top 13" and "Mosts" of 2013~

What a fantastic way to revisit fellow bloggers' gems

or catch what we may have missed throughout the year!

Thank you, Sarah and Monica for the fun and for hosting!

My "top 13"

are *memoir* in feel,

as my Memoir Monday blog hop was a huge part of my 2013 blogging life,

posts that reflect *special events* in our family life,

bearing in mind that even the ordinary can be extraordinary,

posts that were just plain *fun* to write,

posts that reflect *causes* of which we are passionate,

posts that express our *faith* and related

activities throughout the liturgical year,

and posts that are *reader favorites*.

I actually found it hard to choose only 13

because each post has become a piece of my heart.

I remember what I felt as I wrote each and I recall

the interactions with you, my readers,

as you spent time here, read and shared *your* thoughts.

Drafting this Top 10 list was a real reminder of

how very blessed I am to be a part of the blogosphere.

"*Thank you*" doesn't seem big enough....

So, here's *my* list, in absolutely no order~

I hope you can grab a cup of tea and stay awhile....

Sarah has added a "Mosts" twist to the Top 10 lists, which is so much fun....

Look for that at the bottom!

And blogger friends, I'm eager to get reading *your* Top 10!









and please don't miss the Respect Life video that my son created

for which he received a diocesan award,

which is in this post:

It's really beautiful--

we're so proud of him and I love sharing his work.





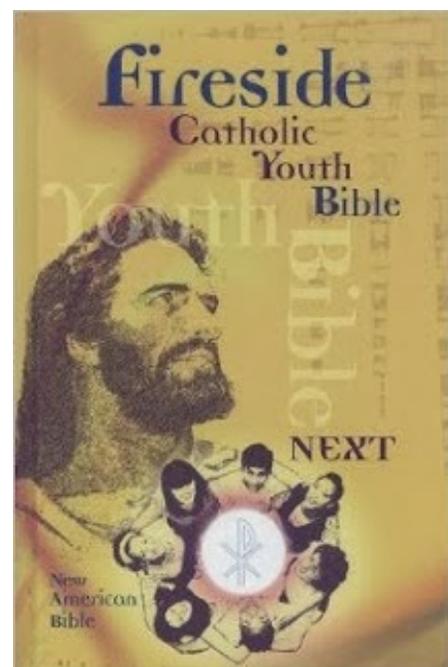
Of Guardian Angels and Candy:

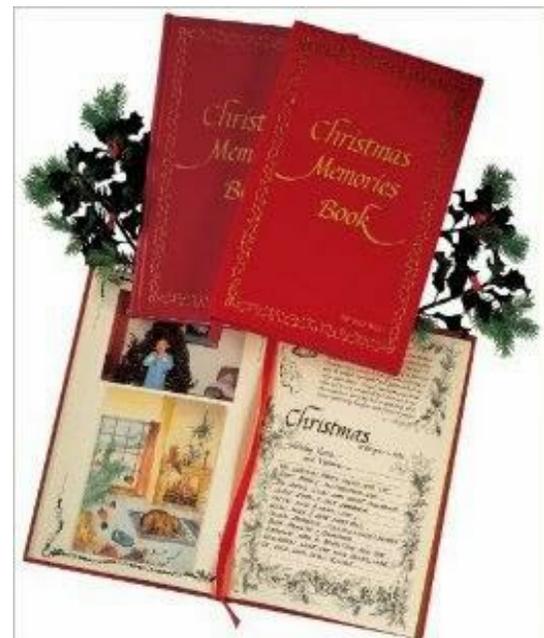
A Mid November Daybook



Schoolroom Organization and Schedules:

Our 9th Year of Homeschooling





An additional category I'm adding after my Top 13:

~~The "My kids work for me on the blog!!" Category~~

So here are my favorite posts done by my kids:

My older son, extreme pogo-er and video creator extraordinaire (!)

created a cool "movie" for a Wordless Wednesday post:



...and my little guy was my guest post-er in a series of fun and pretty popular rocket balloon making posts for my Artful Friday series back in June with :



Now here's a bit of a twist to the blog carnival.....

In addition to the "Top 10,"

here are a few "Mosts:"



Most clicked:



Post with the Most Comments~



Post with the Best Picture~

Wow, this was hard...but I'd say my best blogged photos are in this post....:



Post that was the hardest to write~



Post that was my personal favorite~



This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2013/12/top-13-and-mosts-posts-of-2013-with.html>

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Why I write what I write

I sit tonight at a probably 10' long table alone, along a wall in Starbucks, because when I got here, it was the only available table close to an outlet. I haven't plugged my computer in yet, distracted so far by the patrons to my right -- a stepmother and adult stepdaughters, who sip seasonal beverages and discuss the family's patriarch.

Who they suspect is involved in infidelity.

Who has been unfaithful before.

Who isn't happy.

"I can't say I'm in it for the long haul," stepmother warned. Stepdaughters understood. I understand, too.

This -- a real life representation of relationships at nearly their worst (It *could* be worse.) -- hurts my heart. And my soul. And my head.

This is why I write what I write: Not solely because marriages disintegrate, but because marriages still start that are going to disintegrate. Because marriages that are going to disintegrate don't actually have to start.

I write what I write because "

[marriage is the new 'going steady.](#)

"" and isn't designed to be. I write what I write because love is far greater than our culture says it is, and somebody has to say it.

When I write it is with the hope and prayer that readers who are married receive whatever they need to start to rebuild or reinforce a marriage's foundation; with the hope and prayer that readers who are single and mingling receive what they need to discern when to stop or start a relationship; with the hope and prayer that readers who discern marriage don't do it if disintegration is likely, or an option; with the hope and prayer that readers who are single for good will know it doesn't mean life for them is loveless.

And your prayers while I write are appreciated.

This contribution is available at <http://www.arleenspenceley.com/2013/12/why-i-write-what-i-write.html>
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Christmas Lights [at NOLA Catholic Experience]

By Fr. Kyle Sanders

When I was a child, it was a tradition of my family to attend one of the Christmas Vigil masses and then go out to eat at a fine restaurant. I don't even remember the food, but always the company and the experiences we had as a family together.



After the meal we would make this Christmas light pilgrimage. We would start at [Celebration in the Oaks](#) in City Park and look at all of the various light decorations in the warmth of the car. Then we would travel from there to [Al Copeland's house](#) and look at the stupendous display of lights there. Finally, we'd return to Kenner to Texas Street where a whole block was lit up, lights covering every house and even on the phone wires. It was so magical for myself and my younger sister. We would always look forward to those pilgrimages. Those places seemed to hold us captivated. Little lights of varying colors lit up the darkness of night and turned places into little spots of daylight, little oases in the cold dark night of Christmas Eve.

Those green strings of small light are forever connected to Christmas in the national consciousness. Even when they're used to light an apartment or a bar anytime of year, they are called Christmas lights. What comes with them being put up around and outside the house is preparation to celebrate Christmas.

These lights are a symbol of celebration. They don't adorn the eve of the house all year long (unless someone is extremely lazy). They signify something different. This is a special day that requires excess in normal decoration. It points to festival and joy and excitement, all around one day.



The light of the world dawns on the darkness of human nature. Dawn from on high breaks upon us at Christmas when darkness flees from the light of divinity united with humanity to bring new light to the world, a light that does not flicker or short out, but stands as a beacon of hope for freedom from the slavery of sin. Jesus Christ fulfills the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites out of Egypt. He directs all humanity to divinity.

And what symbols his coming to the Gentile world? A gleaming star, for which the wise men from the East come looking for the king, shines in the darkness of the oppression of the reign of Rome, which itself symbolizes the reign of sin on man. Sin takes over and taxes our body and mind. It makes it difficult to pray. It reigns with terror and fear. Christ comes as the light to set ruin on the reign of sin.

So the next time you see Christmas lights let your heart turn to the light of Christ. These little lights become a revelation of God's love for us.



Fr. Kyle Sanders

Fr. Kyle grew up in Kenner, graduated from Archbishop Rummel High School, and entered the seminary after graduation. He has been active in blogging since 2007 over at reverencedreading.com where he co-writes about seeing God in the mundane. He's appeared as a guest on several other blogs and podcasts and is a part-time participant in the podcasts Steampunk Chesterton and SportsFathers. He was ordained a priest in 2012. He is the parochial vicar at St. Rita of Cascia in Harahan and is the chaplain at Cabrini High School. He loves to read, play music, write fiction, and collect fountain pens. You can contact him at ksanders@arch-no.org.

Check out Fr. Kyle's other projects at:

<http://reverencedreading.com>

<http://www.steampunkchesterton.com/>

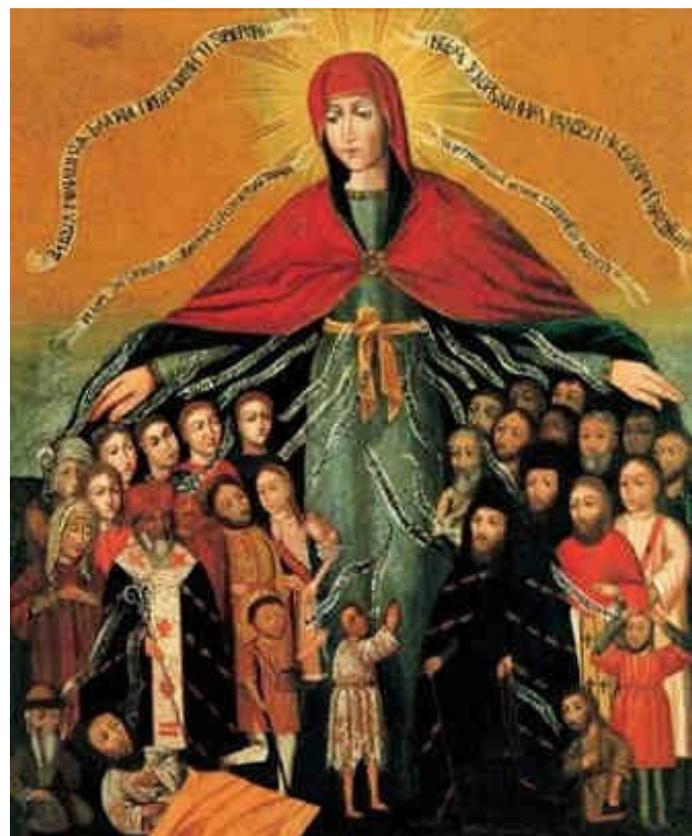
<http://thesportsfathers.com/>

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The Most Beautiful Mother [at Suffering With Joy]

December 11, 2013



Icon, Schutzmantel Madonna, Ukrainian

Throughout the liturgical year we celebrate many different feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary. All relate to a particular event in her life, such as her birthday, the Annunciation, or presentation in the temple; or an attribute, such as Our Lady of Sorrows, or the Immaculate Conception; or her status, such as Queen of Heaven; or a particular apparition when Jesus sent His mother to us for a specific purpose, such as Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Akita, or Our Lady of Guadalupe. When we start counting all these particular feasts we see that not one month of the year passes without celebrating a greater or lesser feast of the Mother of God, and sometimes two or three. Each one reminds us of something about her that we can dig into deeper and profit from spiritually. But is that enough to advance in holiness?

We can know a great deal *about* the Blessed Mother from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, but is she a real person to us, someone who looks after us individually as a mother, someone with whom we have a personal relationship, someone we can count on in a time of need? Do we really understand the maternal ties she has with each of us, and how much she desires that we individually profit from her Son's redemption of us and all creation? Do we see ourselves as true

children of Mary?

If we accept Mary as our Mother, the gift that Jesus gave us at the foot of the cross, we agree to let her shape us according to the will of God. We agree to treat her as our Mother, turning to her when we feel vulnerable. Jesus willed this. He wanted to share her with us all. He is not the selfish son of privilege who keeps the best for himself while handing His castoffs to His entourage and shrugging off their troubles and misery. Instead, He wants us to live with Him sharing all that He has, and the one thing more precious than all that He created and has is His Mother.

We love the Mother of Jesus because He loves her, and because she, more than anyone else in creation, is worthy of our love and can teach us how to love Him the way He desires to be loved. She is the best teacher of how to follow in His footsteps because she alone has done it perfectly, and in her perfection of charity desires that we all become as much like Him as we possibly can; He who is one with the Father and the Spirit and who wants not one person to be lost forever in darkness and misery.

We are intended for an eternity of divine union with God and each other. Because of our human frailty and limited intellect we cannot imagine except in a limited way, how much God desires that union with us, nor how much the Blessed Mother and all the saints in heaven desire it for us. Various writers describe this desire as “burning”. St. Paul describes it in Heb. 12:29 as “Our God is a consuming fire.” Let us just accept the fact that our Mother wants what God wants for us, and she is determined to help us get it. She has already set the example, and if we reach out to her, she will lead us to her Son.

In Meditation #6 of *Divine Intimacy*, Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene writes:

The two essential conditions for achieving divine union are found in the fullness in Mary. The first condition, which is a negative one, is that there be nothing in the soul’s will which is contrary to the divine will; that is, no attachment which would cause it to be subject to a creature, so that this creature would rule in its heart in any way, or impel it to act for love of this same creature; all such attachments must be eliminated.

The second condition, which is positive and constructive, and is the consequence of the first, is that the human will be moved in all and through all, only by the will of God. This was realized so perfectly in the most pure soul of Mary Immaculate that she never had even the faintest shadow of an attachment to a creature; in her soul there was never any impression of a creature which could move her to act; she was so completely seized by divine love that she could act only under the inspiration and motion of the Holy Spirit.

Thus we see Mary as the most pure spouse of the Holy Spirit, not only in relation to her divine maternity, but also in relation to her whole life in which she was moved only by His impulse.

Lest we think Our Lady had it easy because she didn’t suffer from concupiscence and the powerful

draw of the world, let's consider that she was still a human being subject to our physical aches, pains, exhaustions, and annoyances. Mary had to sweep out the house every day, take Jesus to the market to buy their food, and then cook it in the courtyard. No doubt she had to kill a few bugs that had made their way into the Holy Family's house.

She had to draw water from the town well and tote it back to the house. Some days she had to do the laundry and schlep it up the outside steps of her house to hang it on the roof where probably a bird or two left droppings occasionally on her clean clothes which she then had to clean again. She had to change stinky diapers, weave cloth for the family's clothes and sew them.

Mary had to deal with her neighbors who shared the courtyard with her and no doubt there were occasions when she wanted some quiet instead of hearing about the kind of petty annoyances we all face every day. There must have been times when she looked after Jesus and His noisy, rambunctious playmates so other mothers could get some things done without having to worry about their children.

The Holy Family didn't have heating or air-conditioning so were hot in summer and cold in winter. There was no electricity or gadgets that make life so easy for us today. When they traveled to Jerusalem to worship at the temple she had to get everybody ready for the three day trip over the mountains. And let's not forget that they were devout Jews who prayed the psalms throughout the day and night at specified times.

Through all the daily grind she lived an ordinary life on the outside and a life of recollection on the inside. At the foot of the cross she resembled the mother of every criminal publicly shamed and executed, while on the inside, full of grief and agony, she again gave God the biggest "Fiat" of a lifetime in full surrender to His will. Years later, after nurturing the apostles in their fulfillment of Christ's command to "go forth and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19), Mary had the joy of seeing her Son once again when He came to escort her to heaven.

When we reach out to seize Mary's hands and ask her to teach us how to follow Jesus, we are not grasping for some syrupy sweet porcelain doll-like creature who minced her way across the streets and roads of Galilee and Judea where the dust and filth of the earth never soiled her garment. We are grasping for the hands of the greatest Mama Grizzly ever, who means to protect us under her mantle from the snares of the devil and of whom Satan is rightly terrified in the sight of the pure glory and power of God shining through her being. She is the most beautiful Mother because she is the great *mulier fortis* clothed in the sun, who by the grace of Jesus Christ belongs to us and we to her, in the perfection of charity. Is this real enough? It is for me.

HT to Christian at [Smaller Manhattans](#) who posted on the Schutzmantel Madonna. Those images and the meditation in *Divine Intimacy* for December 8 inspired this post.



Schutzmantel Madonna, German origin

[V. Praised be Jesus Christ!](#)

R. Now and forever!

(Click on the link above to read why I end my posts this way.)

This contribution is available at <http://www.sufferingwithjoy.com/2013/12/11/the-most-beautiful-mother/>
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Mama Wattn't Skeered A'Nuthin [at Forget The Roads]



For the past 20-some years now, I have been a citizen of “Y’all” land, a world in which my habitual expression of the second person plural, “you guys,” sticks out like a sore Northern accent. “Hey” is the standard greeting here; I usually say “hi.” I once had an entire misadventure with a frustrated gentleman who asked me to get him a “pin” – he finally got what he wanted from a native Virginian who knew that the man was actually requesting what I tend to think of as a “pen.” The preposition “on” is, in this part of the world, a two-syllable endeavor (sounds like “owen”), and the hospitable folks of central Virginia will ask if you wouldn’t like to come over to “err house” rather than “our house.” Neither my children (my son was born here) nor I have succumbed to the charms of the local dialect, although my daughter had a close call in her childhood. I said something to her one day about Moses and his arch-nemesis, Pharaoh. She seemed not to know what I was talking about, and yet I knew that she had recently had a lesson at her Baptist Sunday School on this subject. I asked again, and the light dawned. “Oh!” she responded to her know-nothing parent: “You mean FAY-row!”

Central Virginia is about an hour and a half from the North Carolina border, where the southern accent thickens and congeals. One of my workmates hails from Johnston County, and she was telling us the story of her family, a rather sad tale of a bipolar, alcoholic father and a mother who fought determinedly to keep the family from going under. As my friend’s North Carolina drawl assured us, “Mama wattn’t skeered a’nuthin.”

I remember Karol Wojtyla, Blessed John Paul II, being described in similar terms: he was fearless. He insisted that we take to heart the words “Be not afraid!” – and proceeded to live by those words himself. He took on the Communist regime in his homeland – and it was the communists who backed down. He survived several assassination attempts, and kept coming back for more. He did not shy away from proclaiming to the world the truth of the nuptial meaning of the body, though the world rejected this teaching, or worse, ignored it. He faced his Parkinson’s disease with characteristic resolve, and taught all of us, his spiritual children, how to die with faith, hope and love ablaze in our hearts. What do you suppose the secret to the Pope’s fearlessness could have been?

I think he took after his Mother.



Remember, John Paul II was the “totus tuus” pope – “all yours,” the “yours” meaning Mary’s. Being “full of grace,” there is no room for fear in her heart, as many depictions of her attempt to convey. Some speculate that the first New World Marian apparition was actually called “Our Lady of Coatlxopeuh” (pronounced something like “Guadalupe”), pointing out that this means in the Aztec language “She who crushes the head of the serpent.” Wow. We have copperheads in central Virginia, and I’m here to tell you, there’s no way I’m attempting to tangle with them. I’m afraid of them.

She’s not.

And she tells us, as she told poor, frightened Juan Diego, not to be afraid, either:

Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more?



Listen at her! as they say around here. Could any words bring more comfort in times of stress? Jesus gave this woman to us as our Mother, the woman who took to heart the angel’s command, “Fear not!” As children of the Father, we are under her shadow and protection. We can rely on our Mother to **beat the tar** out of whatever’s trying to harm us.

Great day in the morning!

Thus trusting children of Mary, like her son Blessed John Paul II, can live lives remarkable not just for their goodness, but for their *heroic* virtue. The Virgin trusted God her Savior, and that trust begat courage. Our Mother passes that inheritance of fearlessness down to us.

Mama wattr’n’t skeered a’nuthin.

Neither should her children be.

On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Deo omnis gloria!

This contribution is available at <http://forgettheroads.com/2013/12/12/mama-wattnt-skeered-anuthin/%20>
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The Salvation Army: 5 Ethical Questions to Ask Before You Feed the Red Kettle [at Designs by Birgit]

Ring-a-ling-a-ling - the bell beckons passers by to drop their change into the red kettle of the Salvation Army (SA). Yet even charity isn't as simple as it seems. What ethical problems surface when the SA is scrutinized? Shouldn't we be concerned about the destination of our good deeds? When it comes to large organizations, it isn't enough to blindly give. As Catholics (or any Christians, for that matter), we have a moral obligation to hold charities accountable. Since there are many options, we are capable of making a difference by giving to good, morally sound organizations. Last year, I wrote an

[in-depth piece](#)

outlining and providing sources to some very disturbing facts about the Salvation Army. Here, I have condensed the information in an easily read list of five:

What's the Salvation Army's Stance on Abortion?



On the surface the beginning of the

[SA Positional Statement](#)

is morally sound. There is acknowledgment that all people are created in the image of God and therefore have unique and intrinsic value. They further state that human life is sacred and everyone should be treated with dignity and respect. The Salvation Army also accepts that life

beings at the moment of fertilization. So far so good.

Later, in same section, there are shocking contradictions. The Salvation Army notes that termination *can* occur when 'carrying the pregnancy further seriously threatens the life of the mother' or diagnostic procedures identify a fetal abnormality causing only a 'very brief post natal period'. Further, rape and incest also represent a 'special case for the consideration of termination'. These exceptions portray a troubling contradiction to the professed 'sanctity, unique dignity and respect' due to the 'image of God' found in our unborn brethren.

Salvation Army and Planned Parenthood - What's the Connection?

In order to determine collusion between the Salvation Army and Planned Parenthood, we must look at material cooperation as well as monetary support. While SA may not directly contribute to PP, there is evidence that they do partner with one another. Research by

[Life Decisions International](#)

has found this to be the case and has landed the Salvation Army on their Dishonorable Mention list. Further, American Life League has also found a troubling connection between the two. Simply considering 'all the good they do' is not enough to excuse or waylay this compromise of pro-life principles.

How About Contraception?

As we further peruse the SA website we can also find stated support of contraception in their international positional statement:

“A serious commitment to the protection and care of the unborn calls us to a commitment to the prevention of unwanted pregnancy through means such as access to reliable birth control...”

Yikes, yet another position not in sync with Holy Mother Church! Don't they know that contraceptives are also

[abortifacients](#)

?

What Does the Salvation Army Teach About the Sacraments?

Here we find even more, compelling incompatibility. The SA is a heretical organization/church. Founder, William Booth, completely

[rejected](#)

the Sacraments. Although for some years he continued to follow the Protestant tradition of two Sacraments – Baptism and the “Lord’s Supper”, he held they were purely symbolic - until finally he dispensed with them altogether. In practice, many adult recruits had never been baptized – nor was it required. In the end Booth had come to the conclusion that, not only were the Sacraments not vital – they were a mistake. Therefore, in his “Foundation Deed” he

[abolished](#)

the Sacraments completely. This is definitely not a good match for Catholic charity.

Aren't There Better, Moral Alternatives?

And now for an answer to our moral Advent/Christmas alms-giving conundrum. Might I suggest a great, ethical alternative to the Salvation Army?

[Cross Catholic Outreach](#)

feeds the poorest of the poor in Honduras – 94.8% of your donation goes directly to these efforts. Their support of the missionary efforts of the Catholic Church in the developing world is endorsed by more than 70 U.S. Bishops. Cross Catholic Outreach is also an affiliate of Catholic Charities. Please prayerfully consider them when you make your Advent alms-giving decisions.

In closing, we should ask ourselves, "Do the good works performed by the Salvation Army outweigh their acceptance of abortion exceptions and support of contraception"? Will we look the other way instead of considering their cooperation with Planned Parenthood, support of

abortifacient birth control, or their heretical beliefs? In a word, 'no'. After all, there are many options for charitable service to the needy. We can easily find more worthy and life-affirming recipients for our alms. Rather than giving to a sect (SA) that has little moral common ground with Holy Mother Church, our focus should go to more suitable recipients.



EVERY child is a GIFT of GOD!

This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-salvation-army-5-ethical-questions.html>
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More on Thomas Merton [at Blog of a Country Priest]



David, a would-be commenter, wisely copied and saved a comment which was apparently blocked by my spam filter.

(This blog attracts thousands of spam comments, so my filter settings are strict. If you leave a comment, and it doesn't appear, please don't hesitate to e-mail me at frjohncorrigan@gmail.com.)

Anyway, David e-mailed me his comment, which I reproduce here. It gives further insight into Thomas Merton, and provides additional reading — something to alternate with the Matthew Reilly or Tom Clancy or similar airport novels which so recommend themselves on sunny summer days!

Father, I commend you for writing about Thomas Merton (Fr Louis). He has been praised (and castigated) by many people in those 45 years, but your generous appraisal of his (and all our) sinfulness is humbling. Thank you for that.

His falling in love with a nurse, though, was more than simply 'at one point' in his life, as you suggest, but, tellingly, came close to the end of his life when he had been a professed monk (and priest) for many years and was already well established in his hermitage at Gethsemani. His later diaries record his love for 'M', but also his anguish, and he is very open about the lengths to which he tried to see her; making 'illicit' phone calls from the Porter's Lodge and meeting her in the more remote grounds of the Abbey near his hermitage. His openness about it all is extremely moving and humbling – very much in the tradition, as you say, of St Augustine's *Confessions*.

One priest I knew once, simply, and sadly very caustically, dismissed Merton to me as 'a fraud', probably without ever having read anything by him. How wrong he was.

Merton was very much a man seeking to work out his vocation as a monk, which he never lost or gave up on, despite his anxieties about its realisations at times. His middle and later years at Gethsemani were very much about his seeking a form of monastic life and practice that

would grow and develop (and not be restrictively elitist) for contemporary men and society.

A most telling statistic is that in his time, I think as Novice Master (though it may have been his whole time there) he counted up to 2,000 men who had sought entrance and had not followed through with the life he and his fellow monks were striving to live. He genuinely believed in the enormous validity of a monastic vocation, but increasingly sought to make it more aware of, and more relevant to, contemporary society and the sort of aspirant to that life those 'unsuccessful' 2,000 men represented.

I realise that most who come to read Merton for the first time tend to do so from his first major published work, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (edited and abridged in England by Evelyn Waugh as *Elected Silence*), and written in the first flush of his enthusiasms for monastic life at Gethsemani as it was in the 1940s. But my recommendation would be to read one of his much later works to see how the journey he was aspiring to in that first book actually developed before he was so tragically electrocuted. *Contemplation in a World of Action*, is a collection of some of his most reflective writings on the monastic life in the 2 or 3 years before his death, and easily available second-hand. I recommend it very highly.

This contribution is available at <http://www.acountrypriest.com/more-on-thomas-merton/>
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Flow Charts and Prayer [at Flow Chart to Surrender]

December is a very, very busy time of year. I work in the transportation and logistics industry and it goes crazy around Christmas. There is a lot going on, and frequently we cannot entirely predict how it will go. As a natural planner, this drives me nuts. Some things, like my planning numbers, should never change!

This problem at work is rather minor compared to the rest of life. Crazy things happen there all the time - life is not tidy. My dad had a partial hip replacement last week. He's fine, but there were some unexpected problems once they got in there and the surgery took longer than planned. He's spending more time away from home than planned. I'm quite certain none of that was on his list of things to do this month. Unexpected and not tidy! Tomorrow I hope to go visit him, but don't even know if I can travel due to a very rude ice and snow storm. Unexpected and not tidy!

I see on Facebook the unexpected and untidy all the time. There's a family dealing with a crisis. Nobody plans a crisis. There's a mom posting about her sick toddler with the fever. I can't imagine that's very tidy. One of my friends keeps liking statuses from a man regarding his horrific cancer treatment. It doesn't seem he was anticipating that showing up right now.

When things like these happen, I really want a flow chart. This should come as no surprise to those who know me or just read my blog title. I want a plan. I want a list. I want action items. I want to know what I need to do and in what order to prepare for the well-defined thing that comes next. I want it to be neat and tidy and planned and expected and explainable and organized. In my head, I want it to be predictable.

In my class this semester, my instructor discussed the idea that the Bible does not give us a map - it only gives us a compass. We need prayer to know where to go. Talking to the God who created this all and can see the whole picture (predictable from His vantage) is the only way to make sense of it all. And when I pray, I remember that life isn't tidy. It isn't meant to be. Jesus' life certainly was not tidy, or predicable.

God promises to guide us, but we must go to Him in prayer. Jesus prayed frequently and at length. We may not get a flowchart out of the deal, but the next step will always be clearer and easier to take than without the light of the Lord. Let us go to Him in prayer!

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. -Ps 119:105

Let us also remember that God had something to do with the path we are traveling. The God who created the Universe certainly has the power to guide us in the future, but what has happened before in our lives can serve to help us in our current trials. The path behind us may have helped us to prepare for the path ahead.

This contribution is available at <http://flowcharttosurrender.blogspot.com/2013/12/flow-charts-and-prayer.html>
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Family + Advent + Singleness [at Jumping In Puddles]

It's 10pm* on a Saturday night. I'm in comfy PJs, chillin' at home.

I declined an invitation to go to a "kegger" by a coworker. Instead, I opted to hang out with Mart, Tom and the babe (which isn't unusual, I know) and spent a lovely evening at the beach, chatting and watching the babe totally love the waves and sand.

Last night, we went to the Christmas Story that my parish puts on every year. I wasn't able to go last year, as I was already back in DC for Christmas. It was beautiful! The kids were adorable. Baby Jesus did so good, until the angel handed Him (really He was a she!) to Mary. It was just precious. I mean, let's be honest, Jesus probably did a lot of crying, too, when He was a wee babe. The choir sounded amazing, per usual.

The families were buzzing all around.

That's what we think of this time of year, ya know? Family. And for us single people, when we are far away from family, it really stinks. We don't have the husband (or wife) with the kiddos of our own. We don't always have the option of going home, or going to where family is. It's reality.

So, our friends become our family. And Mart, Tom and the babe are my family. They are so much more than friends. I am so incredibly thankful that I have them in my life. I am so incredibly thankful to God every.single.day for allowing them to be so open and welcoming to me.

That's why I chose to spend the evening with them. I didn't want to go to a party, and maybe drink too much and be around people that I didn't know at all. I wanted to be with family that I love and that love me, especially during this very family-centered time.

Advent is such a special time. A time to prepare our hearts. For the joy and love of Christ. It's also so romantic and wonderful and magical, ya know? I let my mind wander a lot during this season. I have thoughts about meeting the perfect guy, having some magical kiss under the mistletoe, going on romantic dates, drinking hot chocolate blah blah blah. I get sucked into the sappy, romantic Christmas movies on Hallmark and Lifetime. Which then perpetuates my wandering mind of wishful thoughts that are so far from reality.

It makes me feel crazy, sometimes. It's a choice for me (allthetime) to not think about it. And, it's hard.

But, you know what? Just as Advent is a time for preparation... so is this time of singleness. There is so much joy and love and anticipation. It's not always easy to be purposeful during Advent, and neither is it always easy to be purposeful in my life in general. But,

[as we have talked about with NAS](#)

, there is so much that I can be doing now in this season of my life to prepare for the next. It only makes sense. We are always in some sort of preparation mode. If it's not preparing for a husband, it's preparing for a baby, if it's not that, it's something else. Ultimately, in all that preparation, we should be preparing our hearts, always, for Heaven.

And really... that's our ultimate goal. To prepare our hearts for Him.

Always.

**it's now 11. It took me a while to write this, what can I say?!*

This contribution is available at <http://jumpinginpuddlesisfun.blogspot.com/2013/12/family-advent-singleness.html>

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Learning to Love... Others [at Footprints on My Heart]



Well, hello there! It seems like it's been a little while because I stepped away from the blog during Advent in order to refocus on my relationship with Christ. The bottom line is I needed to place a higher priority on my prayer life and Advent's arrival was rather timely for that purpose, so I seized the opportunity by scheduling a few posts and logging off for a few weeks. If you noticed a shift in recent content, that's why. I'm happy to say that I am back now and, on this Feast of the Holy Family, happy to share a few family stories from Christmas vacation!

It has been y.e.a.r.s. since I traveled around Christmas, but it finally happened again this year! Surprisingly, I believe this was the first vacation I've taken since creating this little blog just over a year ago. Happily, the destination was my grandparents' home on Long Island.

I realized several days before that I would be the oldest granddaughter present {there would be no cross-over with other relatives this time and we were only my dad, my little sister and myself} and I confess I felt a teensy bit of pressure because of this. Nonetheless, I was very much looking forward to a short vacation -- my first one in nearly 1 1/2 years!

With each visit to my grandparents, I learn to love and appreciate them more and more. Here are a handful of stories from this week's visit:

>> Since I was a little girl, there have been particular landmarks that I look forward to seeing during each trip, including:

[Our Lady of the Highways](#)

, the Smithtown Bull, and the first glimpse of the Bay. Eager as ever to spot each one, I chuckled to myself this time realizing that during my childhood they were probably originally used to help keep us youngsters entertained during those 6 hour car rides with all 8 of us packed into the old 12 seater.

>> I enjoy humor so much. So, so, so much. But I was not so good at recognizing it when I was younger. Back in the day, I took life much too seriously and took people at their word. The older I become the more hilarious I realize my grandparents are. I now appreciate them more and play off their humor alongside my dad and it is just the best, happiest time!

>> "Love isn't love until you give it away." {or something like that} -- sounds sweet, right? Now put it into practice. Scarcely had we arrived at their house when I found myself helping Grandma put the groceries from earlier {before we arrived} away. Then, despite my desire to lay down and take a nap {we left our house at 6am!!} I cheerfully played a game with dad and Grandma and had the best time joking and laughing together {sarcasm totally runs in the family...}.

>> Afterward, while helping with dinner preparations, I had a little revelation: I like mushrooms, but not raw ones and Grandma asked me to put some in the salad that first night. Of course, I obliged, painfully aware that it was

not

my first choice. Later, Grandpa helped himself to some salad and noticed that there were no tomatoes. I don't like fresh tomatoes either, but I assure you their absence was an honest mistake. And suddenly I realized an important lesson about love: it's not all about me, it's about

you.

It only took me 21 years to realize the beauty of denying oneself in favor of the others' preferences... {and, folks, this is

after

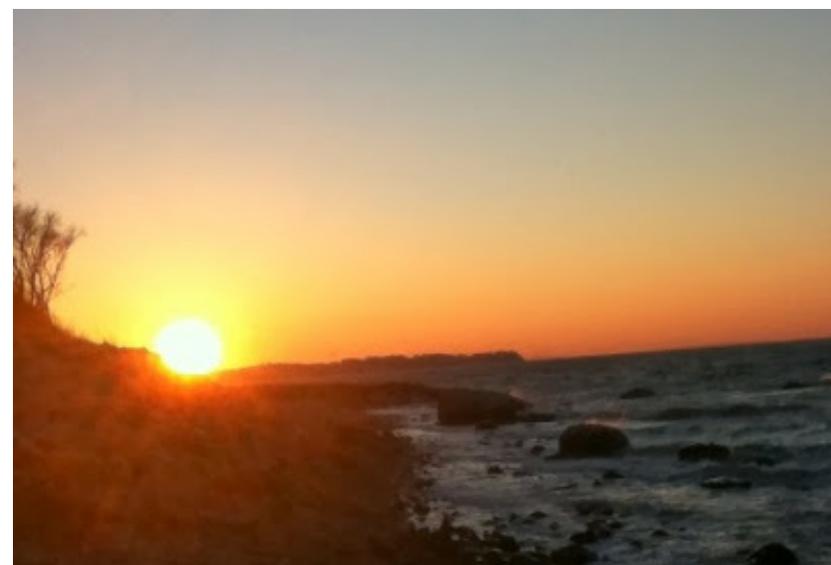
having grown up in a big family}

>> Walking down my grandparents' street with dad is a special gift because the activity brings back so many memories for him. This time he pointed out several houses, likened one of them to 320 Sycamore, and told stories of the time he, Grandpa, and my uncle brought a telescope to the Light House to watch for a comet and the weather had been very similar {cold and windy, the wind making it bitter cold}. Vacations over the years have lead me to love my grandparents' home so much and stepping into my dad's childhood through his stories and simply being in the house in which he grew up is so, so special.

>> Dad and I attended daily Mass at the parish at which he was raised and, upon returning home the second day, Grandma asked me if I had seen anyone I knew at Mass. Despite the number of vacations to Long Island, we don't have any "vacation friends" up there, so I missed not a beat and said, "Yes -- Jesus!" She chuckled and said, "Oh, he was there?" 'Tis a lovely thing when one can enjoy such moments.

A 24 hour bug chose the 45 hours of our trip to visit my little sister. She was a champ and politely excused herself from several activities in order to take a nap during the second afternoon. She and I managed a walk to the beach on the first afternoon, before the bug made its presence known, and we characteristically did a mini photo shoot. The beach on the day after Christmas is just too good an opportunity to miss, so we skipped some rocks then walked over to the beach side of the Light House {where the wind made it bitter cold} and snapped a few pictures of each other with the dramatic-for-that-beach waves and gorgeous sunset in the background. We left when my iPod died and our fingers were about to fall off from impending frostbite...not to mention the sun had said goodnight and I was wearing a brown coat -- not the most ideal for walking back on a street with no sidewalks. I'll have to ask my sister for the pictures we took of each other, but here's the sunset we saw there.

Merry Christmas!



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Gratitude for the Season [at Young Married Mom]

The second half of this year was a big transition for our family, and it's been both wonderful and challenging. I've only recently come to realize that it's okay that we're not totally settled yet. With two little kids, and hopefully more to come, we're going to be in a state of flux for the next eighteen years, at least.

And so, with the wisdom of our parish priest and the insight of a brilliant man named Henri Nouwen, I'm trying to live each day for what it is, rather than trying to get through it until the next thing comes. This requires patience (which I'm still working on) and gratitude.

I'm grateful for the joy that multiplies when our family gets together for the holidays . . . for my boys—John, Jacob, Ethan, and Henry, and all they have brought to my life, all they have taught me, and every way they've challenged me to be a better version of myself . . . for my home—a warm, (mostly) dry, and safe place to build my family, where my kids get to see their grandparents and at least one aunt every day . . . for my work—the more I do it, the more I understand how much writing and editing is a part of who I am, and how I see and make sense of the world.

And there are little things, too. . . . Jacob and Henry wrestling together, and then giving each other hugs and kisses when they say good night . . . Henry's smile after he'd been sick a few weeks ago, even if he did throw up again a minute later . . . the fact that babies dance before they walk . . . Jacob becoming obsessed with *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and reenacting scenes on a daily basis . . . his understanding of the nativity . . . his offering to lead me in a rosary in the car recently . . . for every moment I get to spend with my children, watching them become—watching them be—the people God made them.

Gratitude inevitably leads to hope. While I was thinking about and reflecting on gratitude this Advent, I got an email from a man named Cameron Von St. James, offering to share his family's story of hope, love, and joy.

Here's what Cameron shared with me:

My name is Cameron Von St. James and my wife Heather is an 8-year survivor of mesothelioma – a rare cancer caused by asbestos exposure. When she was diagnosed, she had just given birth to our little girl, Lily. Heather was told she only had 15 months left to live. I was quickly thrown into the role of caregiver, and together we decided we would do whatever it took to beat the cancer. Nearly 8 years later, Heather is cancer free and doing what she loves most; raising Lily. Because she beat the odds and is one of few long-term survivors of mesothelioma, it is our mission to spread awareness of mesothelioma by sharing our personal story.

This struck me for obvious reasons, but even more powerfully so because Lily, or a variation thereof, is a name I'd like to give to a little girl one day.

Because Heather was diagnosed in the holiday season, this time of year can be hard for her, as it is for many. So every day of this month, she's choosing something other than sorrow: thankfulness, and she's asking others to join her. My post today is part of their "30 Days of Thankfulness."

What are you thankful for this Christmas?

Please join me in offering a prayer of thanksgiving for Heather's life today!

For more about Heather's story, click here: mesothelioma.com/heather

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

This contribution is available at <http://youngmarriedmom.com/gratitude-for-the-season/>
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Are you Stealing Christ's Job? [at joy of nine9]

In the Old Testament, the Azazel goat, translated as scapegoat, was one of two goats chosen for a ceremony on The Day of Atonement. The first goat was sacrifice but a priest would lay hands on the second goat and symbolically transfer all the sin and guilt of the community on to this animal. The scapegoat was then driven into the desert, to die, thus cleansing the community of its sin.

“And when he has made an end of atoning for The Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.”

(Leviticus 16:20-22 RSV)

Every society, every culture has a tradition of a scapegoat, someone to blame and punish for the sin of that particular society. It follows then that in the beginning of the spiritual life we are when confronted with our own sinfulness and those around us, we are conditioned to act like the scapegoat. When I take on the identity of a scapegoat, even if I live a devout, disciplined, ascetic lifestyle with a daily round of mass, rosaries, Eucharistic Adoration and frequent confession, I still fall into a trap. It is a trap that all of us fall into as we try to become devoted disciples of Jesus. It is a piety that in the end focuses on ourselves, our actions, our devotions and effort. I am at the front and centre, not God.

To make a shift from an egocentric lifestyle to a God centered lifestyle is tricky business. Thank heavens the Catholic Church has always understood the need for spiritual directors but the fundamental difference between self-centered piety and true, vibrant life in Christ is when we give up trying to save ourselves and surrender to Jesus. When we consciously choose Christ, the switch is immediate from misery to joy, even if we seem to suffer just as much in our external lives.

A: We proclaim your death, O Lord,

and profess your Resurrection until you come again. B: When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord,

until you come again.

C: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection, you have set us free.

When we act like a victim sacrifice, suffering for our own failings or like a scapegoat who suffers

as the result of others sins, we might like to think of ourselves as saintly martyrs but our suffering is anything but holy. There is no act filled with more pride. We are in fact stealing Christ's job. Christ came to suffer and die on the cross for our sins. He is the sacrificial lamb who takes away all sin. He is like the scapegoat of the Old Testament, burdened by the sins of the people who by his death and resurrection, justifies everyone by the power of His blood in the eyes of God the Father.

It takes humility to realize that our miserable, self-inflicted suffering does not save anyone, least of all



Ron DiCianni

ourselves. Accepting Jesus as our Saviour really goes against our grain as human beings because we want to earn our salvation, purify ourselves by suffering out of a misplaced sense of guilt. Ironically it usually takes suffering to break down our ego and pride. Once exhausted by trying to save ourselves, we often must hit bottom before we are desperate enough to change, to let go of our pride and control and surrender in humility to Christ our Saviour. Only the drowning man even realizes that he needs saved, only a sick man grasps the truth that he needs to be healed.

Isaiah 53:5 (NASB)

But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.

Yes there is a place for redemptive suffering but what most of us experience is far from redemptive because our suffering is not in union with Christ's. Redemptive suffering is not long-faced misery but in fact joyful because it is life-giving and life affirming as we live in, with and through Christ our Saviour. It might involve physical pain but it is lived in the Light, in peace and in joy. When we are no longer the centre of attention but Jesus is the centre; all heavy,

psychological despair and mental anguish dissipates like insubstantial mist under the burning sunlight.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB)

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanuneau.wordpress.com/2013/12/15/are-you-stealing-christs-job/>

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Epiclisis [at Smaller Manhattans]



Size doesn't matter

Up until I was eight years old I belonged to St. Francis de Sales parish in Houma, La., whose church is a lovely Gothic revival structure completed in 1938. My Catholic imagination was well-nurtured by its elegant proportions; the Bible stories vividly presented in the stained glass windows; and a dove whose wings overshadowed the crucifix, tabernacle and altar. The dove was painted on the green underside of a gracefully arched canopy which was cantilevered from the wall just above the crucifix.

Of course I knew the dove represented the Holy Spirit. But the canopy made the point, not the bird. It emphasized and protected Jesus on the cross; and also in his little house, the Tabernacle. It was clear to a kid: what's under the canopy is more worthy of attention and protection than what's

not

under it. I didn't understand until decades later that the canopy was yet another expression of Biblical-liturgical

[overshadowing](#)

; and that the little canopy was properly called a baldacchino.

At Mass, I'm frequently reminded of that green canopy during the Epiclisis:

Roman Missal 3rd Edition, Eucharistic Prayer II: "Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by

sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

Roman Missal 2nd Edition, Eucharistic Prayer II: "Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

I remember the canopy not so much because of the words, but because of the gesture which accompanies those words:



Is the priest making a little canopy over the gifts? I think it's implicit in the gesture. More specifically, I think he's

overshadowing

the gifts. I know, the prayer doesn't say that. I'm conflating "Let your Spirit come upon these gifts..." with this bit of Luke 1: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." But I like the overshadowing gesture; and if I had been in charge of the New Translation, that bit would be something like "Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy; and let your power overshadow them, that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ." But I can't find any Mass in Latin that mentions overshadowing even once; so it'd be going beyond the Latin to include any explicit mention of it.

But Christianity is bigger than the Latin Church. And the Eastern Christians usually embrace mystery with an enthusiasm that often escapes the rational West. Are any of them explicit about overshadowing in their Divine Liturgies?

At least one is, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In the opening prayer of its Divine Liturgy we hear, "How awful is this day and how marvellous this hour wherein the Holy Spirit will descend from heaven and overshadow and hallow this sacrifice. In quietness and in fear, arise and pray that the peace of God be with me and with all of you." I like that.

And at the epiclesis the priest says, "We pray thee and beseech thee Lord, that thou wouldest send the Holy Spirit and power upon this bread and upon this cup." I think the couplet of 'Holy Spirit and power' alludes to Luke 1 as well, but a bit more explicitly than the Latin Masses do.

So in April of next year, when we are discussing the Epiclesis in Catechism class, I'll make the same gesture as the priest. And then I'll get the kids to figure out what it means, and connect it to other overshadowings they're already familiar with. Time permitting, I'll draw the old canopy at St. Francis and a baldacchino; and have the children tell me how they relate to the priest's overshadowing hands.

This material is also covered in this short [audio file](#).

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2013/12/doesnt-matter-up-until-i-was-eight.html>
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For a Child is Born to Us (Isaiah 9:6) [at The Road Home]

A house-full of people. Laughter. Conversation. Drinks. Food. Lots of food. Gift wrap and bows.

A table so long it extended out of the dining room. Out the back door and in the front door to let the pups in. 14 grown-ups. 2 small ones.

That was our house on Christmas Eve.

Just the way I like it. Full. Loud. Overflowing with people, food, and love.

Somehow though, amidst all the busyness, there were moments of sadness, when our infertility snuck up on me and I felt the heaviness. Like when opening gifts and my Nan, again, offers her thoughts on my running. I couldn't just "take it", I clearly told her my doctor knows I run and it's not a problem. Rather than apologize, she just says "oh, you heard me?" Fortunately my common sense kicked in before my anger bubbled over. She is 85. She has a different perspective from a different time. She means well. And before I could dwell, there was another gift being opened to draw my attention and pull me out of myself.

Then there was during dinner, I looked up and saw everyone around our table, The Man at the head, leading our prayer. The joy in my heart was bittersweet. I loved the full table, I loved listening to The Man pray for God's blessings, but I wanted it to be full of our children. Full of our grandchildren some day. I fought those tears hard and I won, mostly because it was time to explain what everything was and I could slip back into "hostess" mode and could not be in "infertile wife" mode.

A few times over the day I found myself alone in the kitchen and I felt the loneliness. I felt the emptiness of my body; the brokenness. Each time, something ready to be stirred or someone needing something rescued me from my tears before they spilled over.

And so the afternoon and evening went.

Around 10:00, everyone headed home and The Man and I did a little bit of cleaning up. I sat down to practice my reading for Mass. I read it three or four times and then headed up to get ready for Midnight Mass.

We arrived for the 11:30 Christmas Eve Carol Service and it was a perfect way to transition from the business of a house full of people and doing for others into the prayer of the Mass. As the proclamation of the birth of Jesus was chanted, chills came over me and a sense of calm that I'd not felt in a while.

It wasn't until I was standing at the ambo, proclaiming the First Reading (Isaiah 9:1 - 6) that the

words of the reading finally sunk in (this isn't unusual for me), specifically these words:

For a child is born to us, a son is given us.

And in that split second, all of those hopes for our own miracle washed over me. The irony that I was reading those words as I was feeling the cramps that were reminding me of another failed cycle was not lost on me. The anger that once again, I, an infertile woman, am proclaiming scripture about a miraculous birth. And then, the whisper of words from my retreat this summer: *mystical fertility is more important than physical fertility*, echoed somewhere deep in my soul. It all happened within a split second, noticeable only to me (there are many times when my choleric temperament is truly a gift).

As Mass continued, I continued to hear whispers, first from the second reading (*The grace of God has appeared, saving all...to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ*) and then from the Gospel (*Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy...a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.*) Finally, Father's homily, challenging and beautiful. And a reminder of this mystical fertility to which we are all called. Focusing on bringing forth Christ into our lives and world, that it is our responsibility to make sure Jesus is born for every generation.

I wish I'd spent this morning hiding that stick with two pink lines in The Man's stocking instead of seeing the drastic temperature drop that confirms the cramping and BB of the past two days are indeed the opening act for AF (I wasn't surprised, it was just one more reminder, just as when AF fully arrived, that I am still infertile). I wish, as I'd read those lines at Mass, I'd had the best kind of secret to be sharing soon, that a child was going to be born to us, a son or daughter. For whatever reason, those wishes are not being granted. These prayers for a child continue to be answered with a "no."

I am hearing Him very clearly, but I am resisting it. Like a child being told what she doesn't want to hear, I am sticking my fingers in my ears and shouting "I can't hear you; I can't hear you!" Except, His voice comes from that place inside me where I've invited Him in, and it cannot be shouted down or tuned out. He is calling me to mystical fertility rather than physical fertility. I don't know if it is a permanent call, but it is clearly the call for this day. There is joy in this, joy that we all share in our call to bring forth Christ to the world. There is peace in this, peace that we all share in our confidence in our Savior. There is sorrow in this. Sorrow that comes from letting

go of what I want and finding a way to want what He wants, for as long as He wants it.

He is the same.

Wonder-Counselor. God-Hero. Father-Forever. Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9)

He is the same.

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice. Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord. (Psalm 96)



This contribution is available at <http://www.theroadhomewv.blogspot.com/2013/12/for-child-is-born-to-us-isaiah-96.html>

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Pulling Over

- Gospel LK 1:5-25
- In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.

Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him.

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord."

Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time." Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute.

Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home.

After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others."

In a results driven society, how much do we value the process? It took me five hours to get home from physical therapy the other night. I was in enough pain to be worried about passing out that I had to pull over a few times. She was twenty years older than me and yet she called me Mam. I met her at the last service stop on the way home. The same one I've been passing once a week for the past three months. I recognized her as I got out of the car and started a conversation. To say she's in a tough spot would be an understatement. To say we were both looking for Christmas

miracles is true. I don't know if her prayers were answered but I know that us meeting was the reminder I needed about God's timing.

Last week I was going to write a reflection on this Gospel. Though the truth is as much as I was going to write it, I barely even read it never mind meditated on it. A friend mentioned that there might be more than a few things God would show me through Zechariah's situation. At quick glance, I garnered there was some part about Zechariah getting good news and then having to wait to talk never mind see the fulfillment of said good news that struck me as a "I'm sure there is a wonderful lesson in here that I don't want to be asked to live right now" kind of way. Thus, I avoided it. The thing though is that in my attempt at avoidance, it's all I kept thinking about.

The first thing that came to mind was a New Years Resolution I was offered in confession over three years ago. Fr. Dom, a soft spoken, gentle, Dominican priest from Australia who I met in New Zealand, encouraged me to "love your mess and rip up your time table."

As we celebrate Christmas, can you recognize Jesus' presence in our mess -the unresolved questions, the answered prayers, our own weakness? As we contemplate love incarnate laying in the stable, can you place your own heart in the manger and love all that is unsettling for you?

Even more so, can you rip up your time table and surrender to God's good timing? Now I don't know why God made Zechariah mute (sorry to disappoint), but as I think about that time for him and Elizabeth I can't help but wonder the ways they grew in communication and love like they never knew before.

We don't plan the road blocks, detours, or the times we have to pull over. Yet, if we let them, God's presence, lessons, life and love, can be found in these presents. In fact one of the lines that jumped out to me was "people were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary." Zechariah had an encounter with the angel and he remained in the sanctuary. Do we create the space and take the time to reverence the moments God speaks to us?

Do you love your mess and have you ripped up your time table?

I dare you to allow 2014 to be the year you do both for you will have joy and gladness. "In God's marvelous plan, Divine Providence often uses the tiniest twigs to do good works... What would life be without acts of charity?" St. John pray that like Pier Giorgio we may soar verso l'alto,

Merry Christmas,

Coop

Love is too much to give us lesser Things

Top 10 Favorite Postings from 2013 [at Children's Rosary]

Dear Friends,



First Children's Rosary in Sulphur, Louisiana

At the close of 2013 there is much to be thankful for. This year has brought many new Children's Rosary groups spreading across 5 continents. We saw the first copy of the Children's Rosary book..the closure of Neumann Press ending our books short run of availability and then the wonderful solution Our Lady led us to which was having the students at the American School for the Deaf help to print the books in their vocational print shop. Through the help of many members we had the Children's Rosary book translated into Spanish and also published. We had the introduction of our Spanish Children's Rosary website: www.rosariodeninos.org Most recently we had the beautiful gift of our Children's Rosary song: Rosary Children which was recorded and can be heard on our Spanish website (release of a CD is scheduled for early 2014).



The Children who traveled to the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC

Other wonderful blessings for our group included the children leading a Children's Rosary at the Little Audrey Santo Eucharistic and Pro-life Conference, a special Rosary on Father's Day at My Father's Retreat House in Moodus, Connecticut and this fall traveling by bus to Washington DC to lead a Children's Rosary at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Yet maybe the greatest gift of all are the prayers that have floated up to heaven from each of these children carried by Our Blessed Mother and presented to her Son. The true effect and importance of these prayers may never be known to us in this life.



First Children's Rosary meeting in Nairobi, Kenya

In looking back over the year I wanted to share some favorite posts from Our Blog. Some may have found us recently and may not have seen some of these postings. Each one has been chosen for a different reason. Some mark a particular milestone others share stories of grace and inspiration. My top choice of the year is a post that recently I went back to after many months. After reading it again I found such consolation in it and have found that spiritually I am never far from the feelings shared in it. I give it the top place as I pray it may help another soul feeling the same thing.

(three separate posts but are part of a story so to speak)

Honorable mentions:



First Children's Rosary at Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Timor Leste

Looking forward to the new year I am reminded of a portion of the Gospel of John:

“The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

The words of the Gospel seem to assure us that there is little use in spending time trying to predict the direction the Holy Spirit will carry something. One only has to be ready for the Spirit to open the door and then be ready to move with it. As we enter this year there is no way of knowing where the Spirit will carry the Children's Rosary or each one of us. Yet we take our Rosaries in hand and pray that the Lord will guide each step and send his Mother to always keep a firm hand on the other end of our rosaries that we may always be moving closer to Him.

This contribution is available at <http://childrensrosary.blogspot.com/2013/12/top-10-favorite-postings-from-2013.html>

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Stripped Down to the Heart [at A Spiritual Journey]

I just watched a 6-minute BBC video online on "Global notable deaths of 2013." The deceased were Hollywood stars, influential writers, world statesmen, and so forth, names most of us would recognize. My thoughts are that when they (and later us) all appear before the holy, mighty, immortal God, all past fame, wealth, and power no longer count except what dwelled in their hearts. All become little, powerless creatures completely at the mercy of our creator, each receiving exactly what he or she deserves.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2013/12/stripped-down-to-heart.html>
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I am not ashamed to call Mary Mother! [at About the Rosary]



St. Paul says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16) This is true for all the gospel message of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. At the crucifixion, Jesus gave Mary as Mother to the disciple whom he loved. We read, “When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” (John 19:26-27)

This above act of love of a dying Son entrusting a sorrowful Mother to a beloved disciple is one worthy of our imitation as beloved disciples of Jesus whom we claim to be our Master. The Master in his wisdom thought it wise to give his Mother to us for a good reason. Who are we to refuse such an offer from our Lord Jesus Christ? After all, we all know that Jesus honoured his heavenly Father and his earthly Mother perfectly than any child ever did. “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12, Leviticus 19:3, Deuteronomy 5:16, Matthew 15:4, Mark 7:10, Ephesians 6:2)

Mary our Mother herself under the influence of the Holy Spirit proclaimed, “For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.” (Luke 1:48 RSV) Would you obey Jesus? Would you accept his Mother as your Mother also? What are you waiting for?

This contribution is available at <http://www.abouttherosary.com/mother/>
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On Being a Brat, And a Bit of a Pharisee [at Blessed Are the Feet]

So, it's been a bit of a stressful week around here in the mission field. We had some crazy unexpected moments when our bank (thankfully) noticed some fraudulent charges on our account and blocked our debit card, which is our only way to make purchases and access cash here. Then the notice from our landlord that they want to sell our house, so we need to be out by the end of January. Our oldest returning to Costa Rica after a time in the States, traveling alone internationally, through icy and snowy Detroit with threats of cancellations. And then, a twelve year old who required an emergency appendectomy and a three day hospital stay.



Ironically, this kid was a total champ and never complained once. Clearly, he has learned not follow my example.

And I am admitting that by the time I found myself shivering next to hospital bed at 4:00 am working on 20 minutes of sleep, I was feeling pretty sorry for myself.

You see, living life overseas, you get a glimpse of the way the rest of the world sees Americans. And sometimes you get a glimpse of where their impression of us as a bit pushy and bratty comes from. I have come to self-righteously applaud myself for learning to blend in to another culture. To speak their language and do things their way and not get my feathers ruffled when it makes no sense to me. (Okay, I get them ruffled, but I keep it between me and my husband.) I do not think most Americans are at heart spoiled people who intend to be single-minded culturally. I think we do not quite realize how the fierce individualism that is a core value of our culture makes it easy for us to off as having a sense of entitlement in cultures where that kind of individualism does not have high value, where what is valued is an inherent understanding of cultural norms and rules and a willingness to quietly do what is expected.

I thought I had become pretty willing. I mean, I've gotten used to sweeping and mopping my front porch because it is a rule, and have instilled in my kids the fear of ever walking barefoot, and the habit of not showering at night because it is bad for you, and I even remember to have three forms

of identification and documentation on me at all times. I was a pretty proud little peacock, all right. Until our hospital stay revealed me for what I am, still a bit of a brat, and because of my pride, a bit of a pharisee too.

You see, when your child is sick, your comfort reactors go into overdrive, right? You want to mother and nest and make everything just so for him. In the States, our hospitals and doctor's offices tend to reflect that. There is an attempt to make things feel cozy and homey and give you some sense of control over the circumstances and environment. Here? Not so much?

We have discussed the reality of medical emergencies here before, theoretically. And agreed, theoretically, that the medical system is adequate to handle most situations that would occur and that the \$70 a month we pay for total medical coverage made any small sacrifices we had to adjust to worth it. I was SO above the American bratiness that demanded everything be just so for my kids. And me.

Until I wasn't. Which happened when theory became reality.

I am embarrassed by how that ugly sense of entitlement reared its head. Never once was worried about my child's actual medical care. First of all, it was an appendectomy, not a brain tumor. Secondly, we were in the highest rated hospital in the country, where preemies are treated in intensive care, and kids are cured of cancer. I was totally confident in the actual medical care Gabriel received.

What made me uncomfortable and left me feeling like this was not good enough for my child (and if I'm being honest, me) was all purely environmental...ambience, people, the place lacked ambience. And there were so. many. rules. And it made me feel stupid and humiliated that I had no inherent understanding of those rules and had to be corrected to the not so understanding nurse supervisor. I felt like a child out of his element, and raw with emotions. And when a child in that situation gets corrected, how does he respond? Well, by pouting publicly on Facebook like a true brat, of course.

And pout I did. About the uncomfortable chairs and not being allowed to put my feet up. About not being allowed to charge my phone. Or eat my Hershey's kisses. And on the inside? I pouted about a whole host of other things. About only one of us being allowed to enter the hospital at a time. About the dumb card that has to get whole punched when you change care takers so you don't exceed your limit of three changes per day. About iron beds and three public showers and toilets for a ward of at least 50 kids. About nurses who talked loudly and flipped on light switches every fifteen minutes all. night. long.

I tried to convince myself it was just sleep deprivation, but when I started to have obsessive thoughts about Starbucks peppermint mocha cappuccinos and shopping for shoes, I had to admit the truth. I am still a bit of an individualistic, entitlement minded brat, and a bit of a pharisee for the way I've judged others with those tendencies.



Yeah. I bought shoes and new outfit to celebrate his release. Long way to go, I tell you.

I spent a long night repenting and ask God to show me how to be like the Virgin of the Manger, who laid her little down in less than perfect conditions and humbly accepted that God chooses to be Emmanuel in humble places, where there is room for Him because He is not crowded out by what was there before Him, where there is need for Him because the need is not met by self-sufficiency, and where a world cries out for Him the silent darkness because it has not lit its own way.

Yes, I was humbled by my confrontation with my inner brat and pharisee. But perhaps it was just what I need to bring me deep into the spirit of Advent. Seeing how far I have to go to truly be Christ-like. And seeing that on my own, I am just a pouting, broken little mess.

When we arrived at our hotel after Gabriel was released, the maid came to make the extra roll-away bed and was inquiring about how he was. She smiled wide and declared, "That hospital is the BEST. The nurses are so wonderful. My four year old son died of cancer there two years ago. But they helped him so, so much and were so kind to me." Apparently. not being able to put her feet up wasn't that big of a deal.

And so I find myself at the foot of the empty manger and begging Him to come. Emmanuel, come. And save me from myself. Because I am far from you. And I cannot raise myself up. I need you to come down and rescue me. Free me from by inner brat and my inner Pharisee. Let love burn away my messiness and bring me liberty. And make me happy in the stables where the Jesus-lovers belong.



So grateful that being a brat doesn't exempt you from having awesome kids.

This contribution is available at <http://colleen-fromthefield.blogspot.com/2013/12/on-being-brat-and-bit-of-pharisee.html>
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Death Bells Toll {Westminster Abbey, BC} [at Glimpse of Peace]



Following the Mass of Christian Burial, Fr. Fulton's body is solemnly processed to his grave in the abbey cemetery.

At first Peter didn't understand why the abbey's solemn bell

sounded repeatedly at an uncommon hour on a recent Sunday afternoon. Soon a priest passed by announcing that Father Michael had died, and asking the high school boys to pray for the repose of his soul. As the death bells continued to sound, the monastic community began mourning the loss of their departed brother and praying for his swift passing to his heavenly reward.



Lowered into the ground by brother monks and Benedictine postulants, Father Michael is laid to rest following graveside committal prayers on a bitter cold December morning.

Today [fewer and fewer Catholic families are opting to include a funeral Mass](#)

(or wake or burial) for their deceased Catholic relatives. Many of the

[funeral Masses that are being said](#)

for our deceased are tainted with abuses, including proclamations that the decedent is 'already in heaven.' This common and unfortunate occurrence at modern Catholic funerals all but deletes the possibility that the soul may be

saved yet suffering

in purgatory, relying on our prayers to aid their passage to heaven.

Father Michael's funeral at Westminster Abbey followed an authentic Catholic approach

to burying the dead with the full Rite of Christian Burial: a wake (overnight prayer vigil with the body in the Church), a funeral Mass (celebrating the life of Father Michael within the context of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus), and the graveside committal (prayers of committal and final commendation). A profound witness for the high school boys, major seminarians, the family and friends of Father Michael and the Westminster Abbey community, this funeral was a reverent, solemn and joyful liturgy; authentic Catholicism in action.



High school seminarians participate in the burial rite of Father Michael Fulton, OSB+ (b. 1926-d. 2013)

Newly acquired official documents

made it possible for me to travel to and from the funeral in Canada with our one-month-old foster daughter,

Angelina

. Her first funeral,

Angelina

stayed toasty warm in a fuzzy suit from Owen's family, a handmade hat from Elle, a toasty blanket by Christine, and brought smiles to many faces on this solemn occasion.



Father Peter meets 'Angelina'

A keepsake from Father Michael's funeral

included the story of his path from family life to and through his many years as a Benedictine Priest, and also gave a glimpse into his holy death:

On Friday, November 22, he suffered a mild heart attack. He recovered somewhat in hospital, but on Sunday, November 24, he took a sudden turn for the worse. When he was anointed, it was the passage of the good thief from the feast of Christ the King that was read to him: "Today you will be with me in paradise." With characteristic obedience he waited until Father Abbott arrived, acknowledged his presence and then passed to the Lord as the prayers of commendation were being completed.



*Peter shares his foster sister with his Benedictine teachers and the monastic community. **As they had so lovingly cared for him and prayerfully aided him throughout his life***

, the Benedictines of Westminster Abbey, BC, showed tremendous charity for Father Michael in his death.

Dear Lord, Let perpetual light shine upon him, and may the soul of Father Micael Fulton, OSB, through Your mercy, Lord, rest in peace. Amen.

[abbey-bc.html](#)

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The Cradle and The Crucifix [at The Back of the World]

The last several weeks of 2013 were for me, much like the rest of the year, marked by both tremendous joy and deep pain.

As evening set on November 30th and the Advent season began, my wife and I discovered wonderful news: we are expecting our third child, due sometime in late July or early August! We made the news public the day after Christmas, and have been both rejoicing as well as asking for the intercession of St. Gerard, patron of expectant mothers.



But then, the very next day, we were struck with the sudden news that my dear friend, Jon, had passed away suddenly from a brain aneurysm. Only in his thirties, Jon has left behind a young widow and grieving parents, siblings, and friends. He is the second groomsman from my wedding to have passed away in the last six months. Any prayers that you can spare for the repose of his soul, as well as for the comfort of his wife, are deeply appreciated.



Hans Urs von Balthasar said: ***“Christmas is not an event within history, but is rather the invasion of time by eternity.”***

This Christmas, I have been forced to think a lot about life and death. These events happen within time, and are marked by great feeling: we cry for joy at the expectation of a child, we weep with grief at the passing of a friend. But so, too, has all of humanity before us... is not all of this just part of the natural cycle of things? You are born one day, some other day you will die...

It is only in light of the Christ Child that all of this takes on a meaning beyond just the immediate concerns of this life. Christmas has forever changed both birth and death. The Infant King we celebrate is God-become-man, and by His birth he hallows the birth of every child, and by His death He sanctifies the death of those who belong to Him. In His person we find an eternal reference point for all that happens within the time that we are given here on Earth. Eternity has indeed invaded time, and time has been lead away captive. Therefore, we do not lose hope.

And so as one year ends and another begins, let us resolve that, whether the next twelve months hold for us life or death, joy or sorrow, we will repeat the refrain we have heard this season: *“O come, let us adore Him...”*



This contribution is available at <http://backoftheworld.com/2013/12/31/the-cradle-and-the-crucifix/>
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How We're Failing Our Children [at Working to be Worthy]

I'd like you to meet a friend of mine from college. She was a cradle Catholic, born and raised in a Catholic family, very active in her parish. When we met, she was a born-again Christian. Today, she is not a Christian. Here's a description of her upbringing, in her own words:

Catholicism to you is so different from Catholicism to my parents. I definitely grew up in an actively Catholic family: church every Sunday, my mom taught Sunday school. I was in the Teen Music Ministry that played music once a week at Mass. I taught 3rd grade Sunday school when I was in high school. I was my church's, and possibly my county's, only member of the Diocesan Youth Council. I was one of two DYC members to represent the youth on the Bishop's council, whatever that was called. I attended the Christian Leadership Institute, led by my diocese, and then the next summer came back to work on the kitchen crew. The next summer, loving it so much, I volunteered to lifeguard. You really can only attend once, unless you find roles for yourself. I attended the 1999 National Catholic Youth Conference.

I did everything a teenage Catholic could do to get involved, but I didn't really know what it stood for.

When I became a Born Again Christian, I questioned Catholicism. I then learned that my parents didn't follow all of the Catholic beliefs. They used birth control, for example. So, I'm not used to knowing what Catholics actually believe.

Where did we, the Church, go wrong? Could we place part of the responsibility on her parents, for not practicing what they preached? Sure. But look at how many other adults were charged with teaching her the faith. This wasn't an apathetic teen, looking for her earliest opportunity to leave the Church. She loved it. But when questions were raised, she had no answers.

I wish I believed her story was an anomaly, but it's not. I can immediately bring to mind others - from active Catholic families - who no longer practice, some who no longer believe in God. We are failing our children. Certainly parents are the first catechists, but it's reasonable to assume that others have the opportunity to contribute a great deal.

What we are doing is not working. Retreats and songs and inspiring speakers and prayer teams are great, don't get me wrong. But unless we TEACH the faith, it cannot be learned. How to best do that, I don't know. Maybe no one does. But unless we want to continue to hear stories like my friend's, we better start working on answers.



She and I did a clown ministry in college (she's not pictured here)

This contribution is available at <http://workingtobeworthy.blogspot.com/2013/12/how-were-failing-our-children.html>

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Bless This Mess [at FranciscanMom]

Every Christmas it's the same. Too much shopping, too much wrapping, too many things to do, too many people lamenting that there's not enough focus where it really belongs: the coming of the



Savior.

We're all overburdened, overworked, overextended, over the limit, and overwhelmed. And all the craziness that comes before Christmas is enough to send anybody over the edge.

Maybe that's the point of it all: to make us realize *just how much* we need that Savior, how much we need redemption, how much we need to find rest for our souls.

If our preparations for Christmas leads us to realize our limits and brings us to our knees, then we have well and truly prepared our souls. It is only when we are on our knees, before the Cradle and the Cross, that we will be ready to receive the greatest Gift.

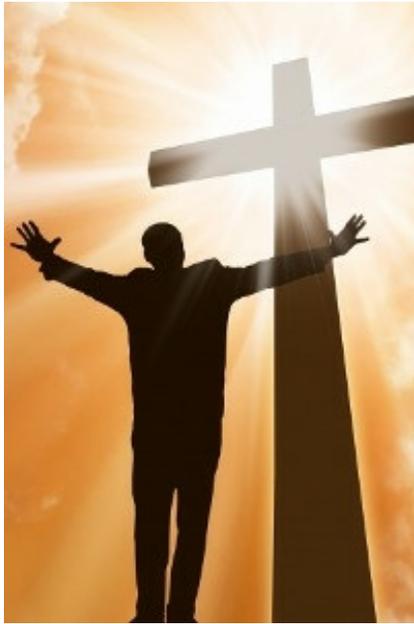
When God became man and came into the world, he arrived in the humblest, messiest of circumstances. This Advent, we can allow him into our world to bless our messes and open our hearts.

Even if we're still not done shopping, wrapping, packing, baking and decorating yet.

Especially if we're still not done shopping, wrapping, packing, baking and decorating.

This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2013/12/21/bless-this-mess/>
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Are you saved? [at Convert Journal]



Have you ever been asked if you are saved? Maybe you have even asked this question of others.

The question says a lot about the inquirer – all good. They are a Christian who knows Jesus Christ and accepts Him as their Lord and Savior. They summon the courage to ask this question, one which in today’s world can easily get them labeled as a “religious kook.” They do that because they care about the eternal salvation of others (i.e. love their neighbor) and want to share the Good News of faith with them that they too may be transformed. May God bless them and make the mustard seeds they sow fruitful!

We learn from Holy Scripture and are taught by the Church of the new covenant in Christ, offered through His merits alone: by His passion and death for us on the cross. Only through His most Precious Blood are we redeemed of our sins. All are redeemed but all are not saved (the heresy of [universalism](#)). Salvation is gained by uniting ourselves with Christ.

Our evangelizing friend’s beliefs are true in many important ways, but in asking this question we know that they are wrong in at least one very, very important area: the moment of salvation. Those such as our friend believe in a non-biblical doctrine commonly described as “once saved, always saved” (OSAS). They believe that salvation offered by Christ may be accepted and irreversibly gained through a one-time act. This act is accomplished by a sinner’s prayer when the penitent sincerely accepts Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior. The wording varies, but one example is:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name. Amen.

These are wonderful prayers. Praying thus sincerely one-time, with all of your mind, will and heart, does *not* lock-in salvation – unless perhaps you die immediately afterward. You are on the right track if you live the sinner’s prayer every day.

OSAS is a product of the Protestant revolution, developing well after the initial schisms (1,500 years after Christ). For the most part, it is a modern invention of the last hundred years or so (almost 2,000 years after Christ). It is a dangerous heresy. It takes final judgment away from Christ and makes salvation an act of man (however sincere). Dying in a state of grace (i.e. in friendship with God), of which we know not the hour ([Mark 13:32](#)) is no longer imperative. Our on-going conversion to full unity with Christ (working out our salvation with fear and trembling; [Philippians 2:12](#)) is no longer a concern.

There is no irreversible moment of salvation until Christ, the most merciful and just judge, meets us upon our death. Then and only then will the wheat be separated from the chaf ([Matthew 3:12](#)), with the sheep then set on his right and goats on his left ([Matthew 25:31-45](#); some calling-out “Lord, Lord” – [Matthew 7:21-23](#)).

How do we respond as faithful Catholics to this question? In truth... “I am already saved ([Romans 8:24](#), [Ephesians 2:5-8](#)), but I’m also being saved ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#), [2 Corinthians 2:15](#), [Philippians 2:12](#)), and I have the hope that I will be saved ([Romans 5:9-10](#), [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](#)). Like the apostle Paul I am working out my salvation in fear and trembling ([Philippians 2:12](#)), with hopeful confidence in the promises of Christ ([Romans 5:2](#), [2 Timothy 2:11-13](#)).”

Catholic Answers has two excellent articles for your further reading:

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2013/12/are-you-saved/>
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Christmas Perspective [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]

I don't know what it is,

maybe I'm too serious or something.

I think I'm in balance.

Even though, sometimes it's hard.

I try to just be so very **Thankful** for all we have and

all the Lord has given us.

I really think when we really are **thankful**, it is rarely for material things.

I don't like complainers.

There, I said it.

Funny how something I dislike so much is one of my struggles.

(Ask my husband)

Oh, we are always a work in progress, right?

It seems this time of year,

everywhere I look people are showing what they are

getting for their kids and families.

And I get a little jealous.

And I complain.

Even my kids look

and see other children more fortunate than themselves

and I see those feelings

come out.

And I think they have no needs.

They have Faith, they are well taken care of.

They shouldn't have a want in the world.

I wish we had more money

I wish we could get the kids more

I wish...

Funny thing is,

that what we have, is what I call

a "modest" Christmas,

is extravagant to many others.

There is always someone less fortunate than us.

There are always OPPORTUNITIES

to be Christ to others

to appreciate what WE have

to LOVE others

to be HAPPY for others

to PRAY for others,

BOTH the MORE fortunate and the LESS fortunate.

This past week alone,

I belong to a Catholic Homeschooling online group (it's national)

and one woman has a 3 year old that is battling a brain tumor and in her final days.

I have a 2 and 4 year old.

I cannot even imagine what this mother is going through,

even typing this, my eyes well up with tears and I get a lump in my throat.

Thank you God for healthy kids.

Please bless this family struggling, with their last moments with their precious daughter. Lift them up, give them the strength to continue to grow closer to you.

saw her baby on an ultrasound a couple weeks ago, healthy and strong,

went back in for another ultrasound, a week later,

to find her sweet little boy had died.

at 19 weeks.

Right before Christmas.

It brings me back to when we had our 20 week ultrasound with Little Red and how devastated I was because I wouldn't be able to nurse him.

Thank you God for allowing me to pump breastmilk for my baby and feed him with a special bottle.

Thank you God for healthy children.

Please bless Marijanna and her family, as they grieve the loss of their child

I have to stop to cry for her, with her, to share in her pain in some small, minute way.

Another homeschooling family just had their 7th child last week, they had to move 4 days after his birth, they cannot afford a new vehicle to go anywhere together as a family, the mother is overwhelmed with all she needs to do for her family and they only have enough money for food, no presents this year.

Thank you God for this huge van, I call "The Beast", we are all able to go places as a family.

We have enough money for gifts for our children

(gifts they really don't need)

**Please bless this family, lift them up,
give them hope, help them to find You in unexpected places.**

In the hustle and bustle of Christmas preparations
and hurrying and scurrying to get everything done,
Let us not forget to pray for others.

For the lonely
The mourning
The struggling
The depressed

It's all perspective, we may think we are struggling,
but are we really?

May we all find that because of the birth of Jesus,
because he has come to save us,
we are all one body.
We are all connected
We all need to pray for one another.

And let us be **Thankful**

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2013/12/christmas-perspective.html>
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Anchored to The Lord [at Sacred Sharings For The Soul]

"As a vessel that has no anchor is tossed about by the wind, so our mind, when not anchored to Faith, is continually agitated by the wind of human opinions and doctrines." (St. Gregory the Great)

In order for us to not be tossed about by the wind of human opinions and doctrines we are invited to seek the will of our Heavenly Father. We must desire to be anchored to Him in faith. It is an act of our own will to desire this and it is also a struggle that we will encounter daily as we remain in the face of human opinions and doctrines. To remain anchored to the Lord in faith demands of us a continual return to the Father despite the trials and tribulations that we face as we journey through our daily responsibilities and tasks.

The Lord is unchanging, He is steadfast, and He awaits us always with an immeasurable amount of love. Being anchored to our Lord enables us to live amidst these trials with peace and virtue. Living our lives of faith within the world faces us with many challenges and persecutions. We can often be blown about by the winds of various circumstances. We will encounter agitations and many emotions. We are human. By faith we recognize that Our home is not here and we can learn from the witness of St. Paul through his own experience of the constant thorn in His side ...

"Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; For whenever I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12: 7-11)

These 'thorns' do not go away. Faith in the Lord does not free us from the challenges of our earthen journey. It is not a quick fix solution; but, through faith and the continual anchoring to our Lord we, like St. Paul, can be thankful for the thorns in our lives. We can see the winds of human opinions and doctrines as an invitation to rest more fully in Christ. We can come to recognize that God's 'grace is sufficient' for us and that it is all we need to endure all things. Let us strive each day to remain anchored to the Lord with great faith. (CC)

Year-end socio-political commentary [at Catholic Deacon]

It is true that right now there are a lot of things I am ignoring, rather than thinking about and formulating posts on. This year that even includes the wonderful "O Antiphons." To ignore, of course, implies making a deliberate choice.

I have mostly ignored the furor over the recent statements made by Phil Robertson, of the

Duck Dynasty

program, in a

[GQ interview](#)

concerning homosexuality, which, as far as I can tell, amounted to no more than paraphrasing a passage from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

[\(6:9-10\)](#)

, as well as a crude and anatomically graphic take on the natural law. While it may shock many cultural elites, the views Robertson expressed are still shared by quite a few people, the vast majority of whom, like Robertson, would never countenance, let alone encourage or engage in, acts of violence or less-than-human treatment of people who identify as homosexual. Since I have never viewed even one episode of the reality show, I don't really care to comment extensively because I think that the whole fake genre of "reality" television contributes as much to our collective cultural demise as anything else to which I can point.

In two separate rulings (see

[here](#)

and

[here](#)

) judges declared Utah laws, including one amendment to our state constitution, enacted after it passed overwhelmingly on a ballot initiative, unconstitutional. The amendment defines marriage as being exclusively between one man and one woman. U.S. District Judge Robert Shelby ruled that the amendment violates the due process and equal protection clauses of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Of course, even legally, let alone philosophically, this is laughable, but such is the soft, judicial tyranny we experience now in these United States. As a result of Shelby's ruling, which is culturally obtuse and socially irresponsible, and despite the State's explicitly expressed

decision to seek an injunction and to appeal the ruling, just yesterday

[Salt Lake County](#)

started issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Of course there are human rights that cannot be overruled by the will of the majority, but marriage is not among those rights. This brings us to truth and love. In the person of Christ Jesus we have Truth as Love.

Trying to live this tension is the only way of squaring Pope Francis' plea made

[in a letter](#)

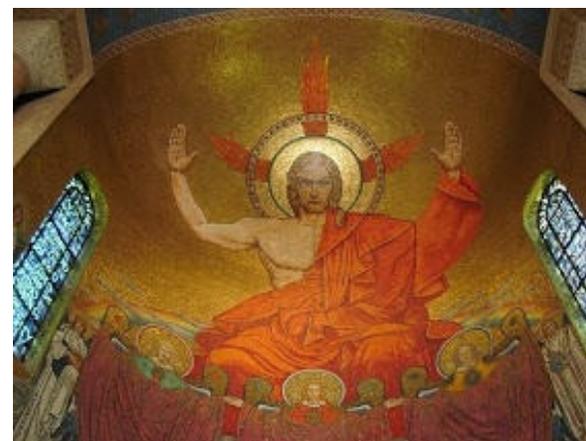
, dated 9 July 2010, that he sent to four different Carmelite convents while he served as archbishop of Buenos Aires, as Argentina's Congress was about to enact a federal law granting legal recognition to same-sex relationships, according these unions equal status with marriage, in which he wrote, "The identity of the family, and its survival, are in jeopardy here: father, mother, and children. The life of so many children who will be discriminated beforehand due to the lack of human maturity that God willed them to have with a father and a mother is in jeopardy. A clear rejection of the law of God, engraved in our hearts, is in jeopardy," with his highly-publicized response to

[a letter](#)

written him by

Kairos

, a group of Florence-based Catholics who are homosexual, after he became Pope.



Christ seated in Judgment on the apse wall of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC

I was somewhat gratified to read a piece by Brandon Ambrosino, a man who is homosexual,

written recently for

The Atlantic

:

["Being Against Gay Marriage Doesn't Make You a Homophobe."](#)

I appreciate that at least some people who disagree with me think that my views ought to at least be tolerated. Since I brought up the topic of tolerance, Brian Doherty, in his post

["Of Ducks and Gays and Tolerance,"](#)

on reason.com's

[Hit and Run blog](#)

, notes something we all need to bear in mind: "Too often people forget that the idea of tolerance presumes that there is something objectionable that must be tolerated. Toleration is not the same thing as acceptance, yet in the name of the former, many people demand the latter."

Regarding all of this, let's allow Father Paul Check, the Executive Director of

[Courage International](#)

, to keep us in check, lest we go over the edge. He does just that

[here](#)

. Lest I grow too dialectical, I also need to keep in mind something written recently about God's law, by a blogger from whose posts (this blog linked me to a great

) I increasingly benefit:

["Sweeter than honey."](#)

Among other important reminders, Advent keeps me mindful that all of us, myself, as well as those who are human judges, will someday be judged by the Judge. As a human being you can't be alive and awake more than perhaps five minutes without having to make a judgment, unless you are a complete skeptic, committed to a form of moral pyrrhonism, which is utter nonsense. While I do not look to the State to rule on the precepts of divine law, it is important for it not to be blatantly violated. Such violations, which in some instances, as with the HHS mandate, are turning into attempted coercion, are always unjust. Besides, here in the United States, our constitutional order is highly dependent on the natural law, which order is imperiled every time such an untethered ruling is made, not to mention our union rendered more imperfect and increasingly perilous by the

repeated overturning of the express will of the people.

In the end, all of this is nothing more than a provocation, in the literal sense of the word, meaning that it calls on Christians to live our callings in a more conscientious and faithful manner. It's easy to get hung up on the perceived decadence of any age, but as the Talking Heads sang, it's the

at least since the fall. This is true whether our calling is to celibacy or to marriage, both of which fly in the face of the Orwellian-named "sexual liberation." On my view, the deleterious and enslaving effects of this so-called "liberation" can be empirically verified. "Sexual liberation" is perhaps the most enslaving force operative in the wealthy, increasingly decadent, West today, which virus is spread

via

the explosion in technology at the disposal of the mass media, turning this into a flash point between the West and more traditional cultures.

Jesus came into the world to offer us true liberation, which, not ironically, is realized through obedience. As Bob Dylan sang,

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2013/12/year-end-socio-political-commentary.html>

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Why? [at Busy Catholic Moms]

Why? We, as parents, hear this question all the time – sometimes too often. Why can't I walk on the ice? Why are cats fluffy? Why can't I play outside by myself? Why does it snow? Why can't I have another snack? Why do I have to be nice to my sister? Usually, we have an answer for most why's – even if we make up parts we aren't sure of!

But sometimes children ask poignant “why” questions that make our hearts ache. Why did Joey move away? Why did Prince have to die? Why did my friend's sister get sick? Why was Sally mean to me today? And with these questions, we realize something. As much as we want to protect our children's hearts and keep them from being broken, we can't. In the same way, we also don't always have the answer to those big “why” questions because we are struggling with the answers ourselves.

We ask God those same questions, but perhaps on a deeper level. Why does life have to involve struggles? Why doesn't God just tell me what he wants me to do? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do people suffer?

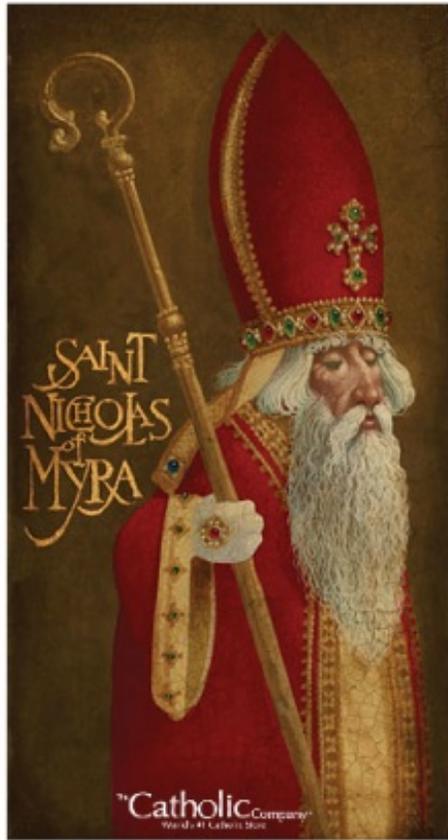
On some deep theological level, we know the answers to these questions. When sin was first brought into the world by Adam and Eve, humanity was separated from God. We no longer walk with Him in the Garden of Eden; rather, we struggle on the rocky path through life. Sin entering the world has brought with it disease, suffering, tragedy, injustice and death. We are blessed through our salvation by Christ to know that this suffering is not eternal, but while we are on this earth, the consequences of sin are evident in the bad things that happen around us and to us.

So how do we answer these “why” questions for our children, as well as for ourselves? The answer is in the Love Letter that God has written to each of us – the Bible. “All things work for good for those who love God.” Romans 8:28.

The seemingly bad things in our lives, in our world, will always be worked for good in the hands of the Lord. We may not understand the why right away, but perhaps years later, we can look back at a tragedy or trial and see how it shaped our lives and those of our family. And with every sadness in our lives, God draws us ever closer to Him. It is His love that is the “why.” He wants to shower us with more graces and blessings. He wants us to have a closer relationship with Him.

So when our children ask us those difficult “why” questions, we can tell our children that God has a plan for us. He was holding us tight before our sadness even occurred and He pulls us even closer in His love with each tear that falls, all the time leading us the way that He wants us to go.

I never believed in Santa [at ChicagoNow]



O good St. Nicholas, you who are the joy of the children, put in my heart the spirit of childhood, which the gospel speaks, and teach me to seed happiness around me.

You, whose feast prepares us for Christmas, open my faith to the mystery of God made man. You good bishop and shepherd, help me to find my place in the Church and inspire the Church to be faithful to the gospel.

O good Saint Nicholas, patron of children, sailors and the helpless, watch over those who pray to Jesus, your Lord and theirs, as well as over those who humble themselves before you.

Bring us all in reverence to the Holy Child of Bethlehem, where true joy and peace are found. Amen.

Image from The Catholic Company

I never believed in Santa. Ever. I have no memory of believing in Santa and that's because (according to my parents) I discovered them putting Christmas presents under the tree at the age of three.



Spano Family Christmas Tree

My parents saw no need to lie about what they were doing and so I never had the excitement of waking up Christmas morning and discovering presents. Christmas was kind of boring. I usually got my gifts Christmas Eve and I always knew what I was getting.

It's funny because I remember many Christmas Eves lying in bed, hoping that in the morning there would be presents. I don't know why. I guess one always has hope.

Of course, this led to issues later on. In kindergarten I told everyone there was no Santa and got into big trouble! I was like, "What? Your parents put the presents under the tree!" Yep, I caused a lot of tears in those early years.

When my children were growing up, we celebrated St. Nicholas' Feast day, December 6. Our middle child bears his name. Since they all went to Catholic school, they would put their shoes out in the morning and later in the afternoon they would be filled with candy. To this day, I put their Christmas stockings out the evening of the 5th and they are all adults.

A few years ago, I forgot. My daughter freaked out. Our Nick was away at college so I told her St. Nicholas doesn't come unless Nick is with us. She was old enough to "know better," but that was the only time I ever forgot. The tradition still means something to her.



The real St. Nicholas

I never told our children there was no Santa. They eventually let go of the fantasy. My daughter took it the hardest. The boys were more practical about it.

We still get up early Christmas morning. Not as early as when they were little and it's our daughter who goes around and wakes everyone up.

I have to admit that I get excited. I wait till everyone is settled in for the night on Christmas Eve and I put the presents under the tree. When I go to bed, I have a hard time sleeping. I'm excited.

I never believed in Santa as a child, but after all those years of unbelief, I still have hope!

This contribution is available at <http://www.chicagonow.com/being-catholic-really/2013/12/i-never-believed-in-santa/>

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It's Not About the Baby

When you think of Christmas Day, the image that comes to mind likely is a placid, peaceful baby Jesus in the manger and Mary and Joseph praying, perhaps the shepherds and some livestock nearby, the star overhead.

And if that is as far as you go with your vision of Christmas, you're missing the point.

Father Ramel, a missionary priest and pastor of a neighboring parish, rocked my world today at our final Simbang Gabi 5 a.m. Mass. Enough already with focusing on the infant, he in essence said, because there's something bigger, something fiercer to remember.

"Behind the sweet baby, there is a passionate God," he said. "This is not about a passive,



seductive baby... this is about a driving force on God's part to be with us." Father Ramel talked of God's "plain, unadulterated raw passion" for us, his people, and his overwhelming desire to be with us, regardless of how imperfect and flawed we may be. "He loves us, and the object of all love is reunion," he said, and that, more than a lovely infant, is what Christmas is about.

That's not to say we ignored the infant, of course. Most of us lined up to kiss images of the baby Jesus before the sending forth, reminiscent of the way we venerate the cross on Good Friday. And then, it was one last time for "Ang Pasko Ay Sumapit/Christmas Is Coming" (this will give you an idea of how it sounds, but we're much louder and a bit more uptempo when we sing it), one last gathering for breakfast, and a visit by Santa.

As I left for work, I thought of my Advent takeaways. At the top of the list is spending more time meditating over Scripture instead of reading it with a lick and a promise. Today's homily and another during Simbang Gabi about [Joseph](#) painted scenes and raised possibilities I'd never considered. I'll never look at a nativity scene the same way again. And for that gift and so much more, I'll be getting up at 4 a.m. for nine days again next December for this joy of a novena.

Rediscovering God's love at a school Christmas concert

When John and I went to Leo's Christmas concert last week, I was thrilled that our kindergartener sang, did most of the accompanying hand motions, and that he didn't seem anxious about being on stage.

Leo and his classmates sang, “

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2013/12/16/rediscovering-gods-love-at-a-school-christmas-concert>
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Falling down, falling down and getting up [at Making It In Vermont]

It is the eve of a new year and I am thinking tonight of how imperfect I am, of how often I fail at being the person I want to be, and just how hard life in the every day living often is.

We had a harrowing trip back from Massachusetts visiting family this past weekend. Making a semi educated guess that the roads would be travelling we left late afternoon Sunday and pretty quickly got mixed up in some messy roads in New Hampshire. Just when we thought things were getting better, we would enter into scary road territory again. It was sleet, snow, and freezing rain the whole way. The worst was when a car had spun out ahead of us as we were ascending a steep hill on the highway. We had to slow down so as not to hit this car and lost our traction. We were unable to get up the hill. After a 1/2 hour of trying and a state trooper helping us get off to the side a tow truck came by and asked us if we needed a lift (he couldn't find the car he was supposed to help). So we took a ride up on a flatbed to the next exit and then drove a ways more to a hotel and called it a night.

It was scary. I wanted so badly to not have fear, for my faith to be enough. Strangely it was when things were most perilous when we were stuck in the middle of the highway that I felt most calm, even amidst the kids having a ginormous screaming fight in the back seat.

I prayed the whole trip, but in the end I pushed Kevin to let us stay at a hotel, my heart just couldn't handle any more. Maybe the rest of the way would be better, maybe we really were through the worst of it, maybe...

Sometimes we are just pushed to our limits and we snap, other times we are given the grace to keep on. I don't know why in one moment I have the strength and in the next I don't.

I do know though that there is no eternal "fail" in this life, no point of giving up. There is only try and try again.

I think these days more and more about the Catholic sacrament of [Reconciliation](#). It is there and no where else in my life that I can fully make amends, be cleared of my failings and get back up for the second, third, fourth... etc. time and try again. The more I account for the places in my life I struggle with the more compassion I have for each one of us.

I watched the whole of "It's a Wonderful Life" today, for the 3rd time in my life. The first and second times were [last year](#). I think it is fast becoming my favorite film. Well there were all these moments in the film where people were not their best selves. Mr. Gower, the drug store owner who hits George when he thinks he didn't make a delivery, George at the end of his rope short with his kids and ready to take his own life and lashing out at Zuzu's teacher for letting her walk

home with her coat open, the man who wanted his full \$200 from the Savings and Loan instead of a smaller amount when there was a run on the bank.

There was an understanding in the film that people acted in certain poor ways under pressure, but were not essentially bad people. George Bailey who was widely hailed as a great and giving guy found his breaking point too when a huge sum of money is missing from the Saving and Loans' accounts and there is a very good chance he could go to jail for it.

We are NOT perfect people.

Instead of resolutions this year, I think I'd like reconciliations. I'll try for my best and when I inevitably fall, I'll ask for forgiveness from myself, anyone else involved, and God, and then get back up to try again.

Yeah it's messy and not clear cut, but it's life, and the best way I know how to live it.

Wishing y'all a Happy New Year.

Love,

~Lisa

This contribution is available at <http://www.makingitinvermont.com/2013/12/falling-down-falling-down-and-getting-up/>

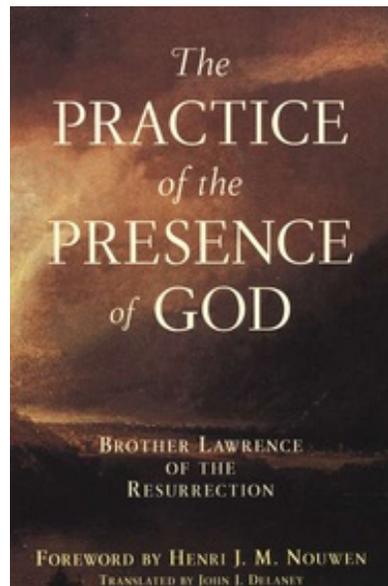
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2014, Moment by Moment [at Single Catholic Girl]

It's that time of the year again, the last day of the year. A time for us to reflect, look back upon this past year of our lives and all it contained. The joys, the sorrows, the mishaps, the successes. The births and the deaths. It's a time to reevaluate our lives. It's also a time to look ahead and prepare for the next year.

Each passing year seems to go by faster, the older you get. I'm in my mid 30's and this past year went by like a blink of an eye. I recall the days back in the 80's when time was a bit more still. Summers lasted, well, literally months. A day felt like a week while now a week feels like a day. Time just seems to pass by more swiftly as we get older and have more responsibilities.



There is a spiritual classic out there written by Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. It's widely known, enjoyed by both Catholic and Protestant Christians. Brother Lawrence shares with us the much needed practice of the present moment and finding God there. With our Tweeting, Facebooking, Snapchatting way of life, our distractions have caused us to become [less connected](#), less attuned to, well, life.

Life is about living. Truly experiencing. When was the last time your felt truly alive while scrolling through your FB feed or playing a video game?

Think about the moments this past year when you did feel truly alive.

- offering advice to a friend through a much needed phone call
- in the chapel, alone with Jesus in the Eucharist

- [holding the hand of my dying cousin](#)
- my fiancé whispering in my ear that he loves me
- catching a sunrise on Lake Superior
- laughing until it hurt with my Aunt and nieces at the sledding hill
- hearing my father tell me ‘thank you’ for something I did for him years ago
- sharing my faith with my college students during a Scripture discussion

The list can go on. Write your own list. What does it contain? What made you feel alive this past year? Were you present to that moment? Did you meet God there?

Whatever this past year has brought you and whatever this next year brings, just remember that you are not alone in it. Find yourself in the present moment. Practice the present moment. Find Jesus there. Find peace there. Put away the distractions, spend time with our Lord and learn to find Jesus and peace in the other person in the room with you, whether it be your co-worker, the clerk at the store, your 2-year-old child or your dying grandmother. Be with them in the moment and not only will you create moments that will last a bit longer than a blink of an eye, you will find the presence of God.

This contribution is available at <http://singlecatholicgirl.com/thoughts/2014/>
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My Mother Unexpectedly Passed Away Today: Initial Reflections [at TASTE and SEE]

My mother unexpectedly passed away today. Please keep her in your prayers. Yvette Laplante.

I will miss her dearly. I am still grappling with all the feelings and thoughts that are coming to the surface.

"What? Mom died? She can't have died. She was supposed to be here for another ten years, at least. 75 is too young to die." "Mom, you can't be gone. I want to hug you one more time. I want to tell you I love you... Oh my gosh, did I tell you I love you at Thanksgiving?" "I guess that leaves the rest of us, us six children and seven grandchildren. Well, Mom, I'm not ready to be in charge. I want you here, with us. What could God have possibly been thinking?"

I know I'm being a bit selfish, but I can't seem to be anything but selfish right now. It's too painful. It hurts too much. I just want my mother back.

"Mom, I am so glad you got to retire and enjoy your life in an unstressed manner. You of all people deserved that. It was such a grace to see you happy and relaxed. Thanks for giving that to me, and more importantly, thanks for giving it to yourself." "You were supposed to be with us to celebrate Christmas, remember? We're doing a Yankee Swap."

My mother was a lapsed Catholic. It is with the virtue of hope that I pray for the salvation of her soul. I hope you will pray for her too.

"Our Lady of Sorrows, as you wept for your Son Jesus on the Cross, please weep for my mother so that your tears transform her Judgment Day into one of Heaven. Please be with her as she travels from this world to the next."

In JMJ+,

Kathleen

... I love you, Mom.

images - http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/andre/images/t_sorrows.jpg<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-9TKzi33cAeo/UfPHuP7epAI/AAAAAAAAA4A/S7Ze9AdVsRo/s72-c/moms.jpg>

This contribution is available at <http://www.tasteandsee2.blogspot.com/2013/12/my-mother-unexpectedly-passed-away.html>
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How Much Time Do I Have Left? [at MCCatholic - Making Scripture Known]

How Much Time Do I Have Left?

Luke 13:1-9

We have come to the fourth Sunday of Advent. The Lord's coming is near. The Advent season has taught us to be hopeful and ready to meet the Lord when he comes. But what if he calls us to himself before he returns?

The Scripture listed above is not one of the Mass readings for this season of Advent. However, I believe it is appropriate as we consider being ready for the Lord's coming. The Scripture in St. Luke reads as follows:

“There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Silo'am fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

A young man from Japan, who was not a Christian, was given a New Testament to read and after reading it made this statement: “I just read a book about a man who was going about doing good. After reading it, I am amazed at how satisfied I have become with myself for just going about.”

I don't know about you, but many times I wonder, “How much time do I have left?” As I grow older and especially with the heart trouble that I have experienced over the past several years I wonder, “How much time do I have left?”

When Angie and I moved into our house in April of 1995, there were a couple of small trees on the lot, one in the front yard and one in the back yard. The first year the tree in the back yard had some leaves on it. The second year it had only a few leaves. The next year it had none. I told Angie that I was going to cut that tree down and put something else in. Angie said, “No you aren't. You are going to leave it up another year.” Well, the next year came and went and no leaves. I said I was going to cut it down. Angie said, “No, leave it in just one more year.” I did and no leaves appeared. I cut it down.

When I read this passage in Luke's Gospel, I thought of that tree in the backyard. Every time I said I was going to cut it down' Angie always reminded me of this parable. And I got to thinking – I wonder if that tree ever wondered, "How much time do I have left before Mark finally has enough of my not bearing any leaves and comes out here and cuts me down?"

I don't know about you, but many times I wonder, "How much time do I have left?"

The parable in verses 6-9 is preceded by verses 1-5 which deal with the subject "repent or perish." Some folks had come to Jesus to tell him that some of Pilate's men had taken some blood of some Galileans and had mixed it on the altar with the blood of their own sacrifices. In other words, the Galileans had committed a sacrilegious act. The people wanted to know what kind of terrible punishment was going to come down upon them for doing so.

So, Jesus addresses the subject of repentance. He doesn't even answer their question but simply tells the inquirers, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." In other words, worry about your own sinful condition and not about what someone else is doing and how bad their punishment will be.

Then, Jesus jumps right into another situation. He brings up the subject of an accident in which 18 people were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them. From the way Jesus phrases the incident, it was an accident. Yet the people looked upon it as though it was an act of judgment because of some terrible sin the people had committed. In other words, God gathered those 18 bad people together on that particular day, caused the tower to fall on them, and killed them as an act of punishment for their sins.

Jesus basically says, "Wait a minute. Do you mean to tell me that you think that those people were any worse than all of the other people in Jerusalem and so God judged them by dropping the tower on their heads? Let me tell you something, unless you repent of your sins you are also going to perish."

I don't know about you, but many times I wonder, "How much time do I have left?"

As the Japanese fellow said after reading the New Testament, "I am amazed at how satisfied I have become with myself for just going about."

Having spoken about the need to repent or perish, Jesus then tells the parable in verses 6-9. After hearing the parable, the question that must be asked by each one of us as we look at the parable as though looking at ourselves in a mirror is this: I wonder how much time I have left? How much time do I have left to bear fruit for Christ?

As Christians we are planted in the vineyard to bear fruit, not hold up the fruit producing vines. We are vines, not plant stakes. Here is an interesting question – Are you a fruit producing vine or a plant stake?

Picture if you will our blessed Lord Christ sitting on the Throne with his eyes roving to and fro about the earth. His eyes land upon you. He inspects you, your life, your spirituality, your devotion to him, your witness for him, your fruit. Do you wonder what he says? What if you could say to him, “How much time do I have left?” Would his answer really make a difference in your life?

What if the Lord said to you or to me, “You have 15 minutes left”, or, “You have 20 days left”, or, “You have 5 years left.” What would you or I do? Would we bear fruit? Would we waste time? I wonder if we knew that we had a longer period of time if we would procrastinate until the last moment? Perhaps that is why we do not know the day and hour of our death or the day and hour of the Lord’s coming, so that we will be working to bear fruit now. So that we will be repentant now. Advent teaches us to be ready, to be on the alert, to be repentant, and to continue carrying out the Great Commission until we see his blessed face.

We don’t have to be like Billy Graham and preach to millions to bear fruit. We do not have to be the Pope over millions of Christians to bear fruit. We don’t have to write volumes of commentaries on the Bible to bear fruit. We don’t have to have a seminary degree or PhD to bear fruit. You and I can bear fruit by writing a note of encouragement to someone; by praying daily for others; by growing in our knowledge of the Bible and the teachings of the Church; by sharing the Gospel of Jesus with another person; by offering the gift of mercy to someone in need; by helping someone financially; by doing random acts of kindness for others; or, in any number of other ways in which you and I are living examples of the person of Jesus to someone.

I don’t know about you, but many times I wonder, “How much time do I have left?”

This Gospel passage is most appropriate for us during this season of Advent as we contemplate changes that must be made in our lives as we await the coming of our Lord. Repent. Make today a turning point in your life. Resolve that from this day forward you will redeem the time while awaiting the coming of the Lord of Glory.

“How much time do I have left?” The answer is that we do not need to be concerned about how much time we have left, but rather, **how are we using the time we have been given?**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, +Amen.

This contribution is available at <http://mccatholic.com/2013/12/20/how-much-time-do-i-have-left/>
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Christmas tide: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph [at From the Pulpit of My Life]



Close up of my parish's Nativity Scene

On Christmas Eve figurines representing Mary, Joseph, and the Infant Jesus, lying in a manger, replaced the Advent wreath in our church. A cow, a donkey, and some sheep surround the Holy Family. Shepherds, who hastened to Bethlehem, stand or kneel in adoration and wonder, for they had heard angelic voices announce the Good News: a Savior has been born! It is a scene of joy and hope and peace.

On this feast day of the Holy Family we tend to romanticize the Nativity scene. Mary was sinless, Joseph was just, and Jesus was the very Son of God. But was their life so very different from ours? In the externals, yes, but Jesus is Emmanuel, “God-with-us,” the Incarnate Word, God who took on human flesh. He’s one of us and so were his parents.



Holy Family Icon of Flight into Egypt at Abu Serga Coptic Church

Today’s gospel shows clearly that the serene Nativity scene changed dramatically when the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt to save Jesus' life. They became refugees in a foreign land. Many people in today’s world can relate to their dilemma. We know little about how Jesus, Mary, and

Joseph lived when they were in Egypt, but refugees tend to have many hardships, to put it mildly.



Traditional image of Holy Family in Nazareth

When Herod died the Holy Family safely returned to Israel and settled in Galilee in the town of Nazareth. There they lived a humble, ordinary life. Scripture is mainly silent about how Jesus and his parents lived. However, we know for sure Jesus grew in wisdom, age and grace and Mary treasured all that happened in her heart.



Jesus growing in wisdom under the guardianship of St. Joseph

Every week Luis (Chito) Cardinal Tagle, the Archbishop of Manila, records reflections about the Sunday Gospel. For this feast of the Holy Family he spoke about growth in holiness in the context of family life. Integral to this is children honoring their parents and parents caring for their children motivated by love. In particular, both parents and children show honor by seeking the Will of God and acting on the Will of God. You might enjoy listening to Cardinal Tagle's reflection.

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Advent, Baptism and Holiness [at Veritas Lux Mea]

Advent is the Season in which we prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our preparation for Christmas, in celebration of His First Advent, is a reminder for us to prepare ourselves also for His Second Advent, when He comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Through the Gospel Reading for today (Second Sunday of Advent, Year A), we are being reminded of this in a very interesting way. The Gospel Reading (Matt 3:1-12) ends with John the Baptist's words:

“I indeed baptize you in water unto penance, but he that shall come after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire.

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

By selecting this reading for today, the Church is calling us to prepare for the coming of the Lord in a special way as we remember our baptism. Coincidentally, over the past few weeks, I have been reading and re-reading Romans 6:1-14 as part of my own personal Penance following Confession; as a constant reminder to myself of the kind of holiness that I am called to by virtue of my baptism:

- 1 What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*
- 2 God forbid! For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?*
- 3 Know you not that all we who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in his death?*
- 4 For we are buried together with him by baptism into death: that, as Christ is risen from*

the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer.

7 For he that is dead is justified from sin.

8 Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ.

9 Knowing that Christ, rising again from the dead, dieth now no more. Death shall no more have dominion over him.

10 For in that he died to sin, he died once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

11 So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof.

Now, this is not a holiness that we can achieve in our own strength. Rather, it is something that comes about through God's grace...and as we willingly co-operate with that grace. And this is why I think St. Paul sought to remind the Romans of the call to holiness in the context of baptism – because baptism is ALL about grace.

Baptism is not about what WE do...rather, it is about what God does to us. And the baptism of little infants, by virtue of the fact that they cannot accomplish anything for themselves, is a considerable testimony of the fact that salvation comes by grace alone.

Interestingly, in my days as a Baptist, I believed that baptism was nothing more than a step of obedience in imitating Jesus Christ – nothing more than a visible statement to others that I had chosen to follow Jesus. I certainly disagreed with the Catholic “notion” that baptism conferred any grace. I believed that only those who had made a credible profession of faith should be baptised, and that the only acceptable form of baptism was by immersion.

My belief of “immersion-only” baptism was primarily based on Rom 6:3-4 i.e. immersion was the only mode of baptism that adequately portrays the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus by the believer going under the water (death and burial) and rising up from the water (resurrection).

The ironic thing was that I was so absorbed in my preconceived proof-texting that I completely missed what St. Paul was actually trying to say...

Couched within the principles of life and death, St. Paul's argument is that it is precisely through the means of baptism that we die to sin and are raised to new life (i.e. what the Church calls “baptismal regeneration”). St. Paul's clear teaching is that it is through baptism that we are united to Christ's death on the Cross; through baptism, we are buried with Him; and through baptism we are raised to newness of life in Him.

It is in this context of being united to Christ through baptism that St. Paul can say that just as Christ died for sin once and for all and now lives unto God (v10); so too we must consider ourselves

dead to sin and alive to God in Christ (v11). And because baptism has made us new creatures in Christ, the sin that has tainted the old creation should no longer have control over us (v12). Instead, we are called, by virtue of our baptism, to live in, through, and for God – knowing that oneday Christ will fully complete the work of the new creation that He has begun in us (Rom 6:21).

In this sense, our baptism is eschatological – through baptism we were made new creatures in Christ, but this work will not be fully completed until we attain the Beatific Vision. St. John, the beloved disciple, put it this way:

“Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God: and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when he shall appear we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is.” (1 Jn 3:2)

So, as we continue through the Season of Advent, may we be reminded of the gift of God’s grace bestowed upon us in our baptism; and may we never cease to storm the gates of heaven with prayers for God’s continued grace in our lives...so that we can be prepared to greet our Lord, not only when we celebrate His arrival at Christmas, but also when He calls us home to eternity.

This contribution is available at <http://justingridveritasluxmea.blogspot.com.au/2013/12/advent-baptism-and-holiness.html>
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Once a Year [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. . . . Your word have I treasured in my heart that I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:9,11)

As I read the psalm, the Holy Spirit stopped me and altered the words of the first phrase in my mind – “How can an *old man* keep his way pure?”

The answer, of course, remains the same: By keeping it according to His word.

I am no longer a young man. I can start collecting social security checks at any time now. And over the years I’ve often wondered what comes over a man or woman who turns away from the faith they’d known, lived, loved and proclaimed to others. It never happened overnight. It has always occurred by degrees. Step by step, until the change was complete.

Solomon is a classic example. He tells his story in Ecclesiastes. It’s an easy read. Twelve short chapters. You can finish it in one sitting. At the beginning of Solomon’s reign, God promised him he’d be the wisest man to ever live (1 Kings 3:5-15) – which in and of itself is good reason to read the book. What might this man of God have to say to anyone in the 21st century?

Quite a bit, actually. Especially when you know his background. You can read it in the early chapters of 1 Kings, especially chapters 3 and 8. But by chapter 11, something dramatic has happened to the man who once enjoyed an intimate relationship with his Creator. By chapter 11 Solomon had married numerous wives who, we are told, “turned his heart away” from the faith he once loved. Astonishingly, this ‘wise’ king even permitted his wives to sacrifice to their gods – perhaps even human sacrifice, as was often done to Molech, the god of the Sidonians (1 Kings 11:4-8).

Many bible scholars tell us Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes toward the end of his life. They believe that the case especially because of what he writes in the first two chapters of the book. The king had it all. Wealth. Wisdom. Power. Possessions. And he had more women than any man could want (2:8; 1 Kings 11:3).

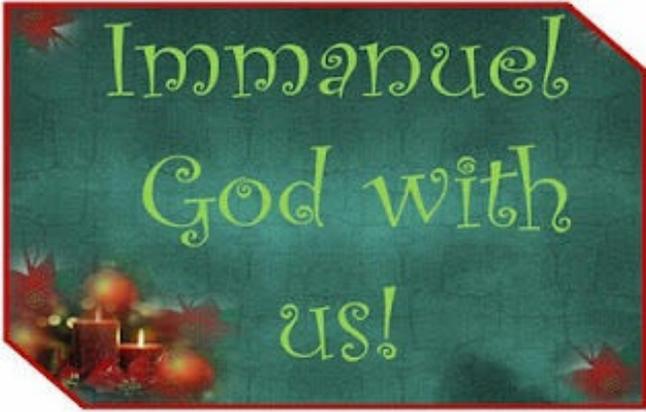
But not until the end of his life did he realize the true value of it all. A puff of air, he called it. Futility of futilities. Only at the end of the book – in chapter 12 – does he warn the reader of what he knew at the beginning of his reign but rejected in favor of the proverbial wine, women, and song: *Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them” [And] the conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.* (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13-14).

How can an old man keep his way pure? I believe the Holy Spirit changed how I read that verse in Psalm 119 to nudge me, that I not forget Whose I am and to Whom I belong. I believe He nudged me to remain ever vigilant to treasure His word in my heart, that I might not sin against Him.

Fire safety experts recommend changing the batteries in home smoke detectors at least once a year. I think that is a good principle to follow for our spiritual safety. I recommend Christians read Ecclesiastes at least once a year. Maybe at the same time we change the smoke detector batteries. We need the periodic reminder how easy it is to slip into sin, to compromise our walk with the Savior, to lose our intimacy with our Creator. And we need the reminder that everything we have and everything we do – *everything* – if not done for Christ, will be on our last day nothing more than futility of futilities.

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2013/12/once-year.html>
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Christmas Gift Exchange [at JOY Alive in our hearts]



Our God Immanuel comes among us. He has given us his Divinity in the Incarnation to glorify our humanity. He comes as our Savior and King, offering his whole self as a gift to us. He wants to exchange Christmas gifts with us. What do we have to offer him?

He wants us to give him our humanity, our hearts and all that is in them. He wants the gift of sharing our joyful family celebrations, of loving our children, enjoying the love of our brothers and sisters in the Lord, as we worship, serve and play together.

He also wants the gift of all our sorrows, the bitterness of past hurts, the anxiety over the future, the disappointment in a difficult relationship. He wants us to give him all that is hidden in our heart in exchange for his presence in every circumstance, relationship and celebration.

He wants to love away our sorrows and heal our hurts, if we will only give him everything in our hearts. In exchange he wants to come into our hearts and bring us the joy of Christmas, the joy of Christ born among us, alive within us and living through us.

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The Desolation of Jackson [at One Arrow Alone]

‘You don’t normally think of Dr. Rozema as fierce,’ said the husband of the aforementioned Nebraskan couple, ‘but...’

I don’t normally think of Dr. Rozema as fierce. He is a patient, smiling man, always trying to get his students to understand why philosophical questions are asked and what happens between the asking of the question and the giving of the answer. But rumour has it that he was seen fierce on one occasion: while publicly debating the merits of the

Lord of the Rings

movies with the English department.

After seeing

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug

for the first time, I could understand why. I have now seen it two times (due to circumstances) and the initial disappointment has lessened. Yes, it is a visually superb movie. Yes, the dragon is very satisfying. Yes, some parts are hilarious (though usually not very Tolkienesque). And the use of Elvish and Black Speech was very nice, I thought. (Although they should really have made more of an attempt to pronounce Thráin and Dáin correctly.)

Nonetheless, the movie is just not the book. I know that movies and books are two different genres, but it seems to me that the makers of the movie have simply failed to grasp or capture some essential elements of Middle-earth. Like the following (in no particular order):

1) The Free Kingdoms are worth fighting for. In

The Hobbit

, places like Rivendell and especially the Halls of Mirkwood appear as semi-deserted military bases. They are decors for action scenes, not places with their own vibrant life. True, there are references to a Feast of Starlight going on while the Dwarves are imprisoned at Mirkwood, but nothing is shown of this feast. Beorn, too, is not a jovial bear fellow (in the etymological sense of the word ‘jovial’), but a tortured skinchanger. Laughter appears as something incidental in Jackson’s Middle-earth.

2) Heroes are vulnerable, not demi-gods who remain completely unscathed while torrents of fire rage about them, or while they are sailing down a river of molten gold. Oh, and talking of demi-gods: the contest between high powers is intellectual, not an exchange of conjurors’ tricks.

Compare the battle of Gandalf and Sauron, as depicted by Jackson, with that of Finrod and Sauron, as poetically described in

The Silmarillion

3) Fate, and something more elusive, governs the course of history. In Tolkien's Middle-earth, the intention of the Creator and of other higher powers remains firmly between brackets. The Dwarf-king's inference that the possession of the Arkenstone betokens a 'divine right to rule' (as the first movie says) runs counter to the Free Peoples' reserve in speaking too freely of the One's intentions.

4) Beauty, not power, is the prime mover of events in Middle-earth. In the book, Thorin's longing for the Arkenstone is a natural Dwarvish response to the gem's beauty. This response is a fundamental recognition that can be shared by other races: in

The Lord of the Rings

, Gimli takes a rather airy Legolas into the Caves of Aglarond, and the Elf comes out unexpectedly impressed by the halls of stone. In the movie, however, Thorin's desire for the Arkenstone is mostly extrinsic: he wants it to bolster his claim to lordship.

5) Elven-lords, even those less wise, are not vampires. They do not sinuously coil around their captives or show off their plastic surgery. Nor is heartless elegance an Elvish trait; there are Elven-lords who become rather heartless, but they are not very elegant (Thingol Grey mantle). Moreover, they would never promise a captive freedom, then decapitate him and resort to equivocation in order to justify themselves.

6) Vice and insanity are two different things. Thorin Oakenshield is arguably too attached to the treasure beneath the Mountain, the Arkenstone in particular, but that does not mean he would force a frightened Hobbit at swordpoint to go back to a waking dragon. In the book, even when Bilbo gives the Arkenstone to Thorin's enemies, Thorin does not lose his mind (though he is understandably enraged).

(Edit: While we're on the subject of vice, I should add something that I forgot earlier, but that did bother me a lot in the movie. This is the degree to which Bilbo is affected by the Ring in

The Hobbit

. He fights for it like mad, and takes it out to look at it addictively. For some reason, Smaug senses that Bilbo has the Ring; he mentions the word 'precious', at which point the Eye of Sauron flashes on the screen and Bilbo takes off the Ring. If all this could happen in a year, how is it credible that Bilbo keeps the Ring for decades and still remains the same? Not to mention that the movie rather

detracts from the theme of Hobbit innocence.)

7) The seventh judgment is the climax and summation of all dooms: Tauriel. Tauriel feels like a character that could have been invented by a teenager writing LotR fan fiction. An attractive, invincible warrior, a self-made she-Elf who attracts the prince's attention but develops an independent interest in someone from another race, and runs across wild country to save her newfound beloved – I mean, really? Really?

There is no romantic interest whatsoever between Tolkien's Dwarves and Elves. None. In rare circumstances, however, something different blossoms between them: a seed of mutual reverence. To indicate the chasm that ultimately yawns between Tolkien and Peter Jackson's gang, consider the difference between the following dialogues, and contemplate the Tree that has died and the Jewel that has been lost:

Jackson:

(

Fili is searched by an Elvish guard and relieved of his last knife

)

Kili: 'Aren't you going to search me? I could have anything down my pants.'

Tauriel: 'Or nothing.' (

Locks the door

)

Tolkien:

(

Galadriel is giving parting gifts to the Company

)

'And what gift would a Dwarf ask of the Elves?' said Galadriel, turning to Gimli.

'None, Lady,' said Gimli. 'It is enough for me to have seen the Lady of the Galadhrim, and to have heard her gentle words.'

'Hear all ye Elves!' she cried to those about her. 'Let none say again that Dwarves are grasping and ungracious! Yet surely, Gimli son of Glóin, you desire something that I could give? Name it, I

bid you! You shall not be the only guest without a gift.’

‘There is nothing, Lady Galadriel,’ said Gimli, bowing low and stammering. ‘Nothing, unless it might be – unless it is permitted to ask, nay, to name a single strand of your hair, which surpasses the gold of the earth as the stars surpass the gems of the mine. I do not ask for such a gift. But you commanded me to name my desire.’

The Elves stirred and murmured with astonishment, and Celeborn gazed at the Dwarf in wonder, but the Lady smiled. ‘It is said that the skill of the Dwarves is in their hands rather than in their tongues,’ she said; ‘yet that is not true of Gimli. For none have ever made to me a request so bold and yet so courteous. And how shall I refuse, since I commanded him to speak? But tell me, what would you do with such a gift?’

‘Treasure it, Lady,’ he answered, ‘in memory of your words to me at our first meeting. And if ever I return to the smithies of my home, it shall be set in imperishable crystal to be an heirloom of my house, and a pledge of good will between the Mountain and the Wood until the end of days.’

Then the Lady unbraided one of her long tresses, and cut off three golden hairs, and laid them in Gimli’s hand. ‘These words shall go with the gift,’ she said. ‘I do not foretell, for all foretelling is now vain: on the one hand lies darkness, and on the other only hope. But if hope should not fail, then I say to you, Gimli son of Glóin, that your hands shall flow with gold, and yet over you gold shall have no dominion.’

(

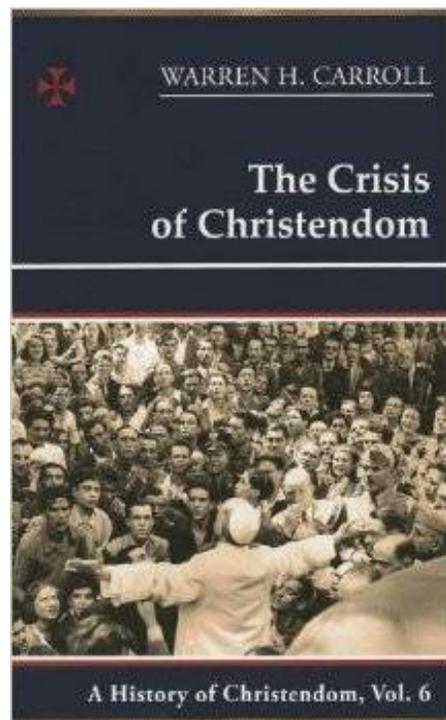
The Lord of the Rings

, Book II, Ch. VIII)

This contribution is available at <http://turgonian.blogspot.nl/2013/12/the-desolation-of-jackson.html>
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Review: The Crisis of Christendom by Warren H. Carroll [at Quidquid Est, Est!]



This is something new for Quidquid Est, Est. Book Reviews. As mentioned, I will be reviewing books, some old and some new, that might be of interest for readers of this blog. They will have their own special category and will be (generally speaking) unrelated to other posts prior to or succeeding them.

And it is my honor to review, for the inaugural Book Review, a work that I have been awaiting probably more than any other person on Earth. The book is the sixth volume in the late Warren H. Carroll's *History of Christendom* series, *The Crisis of Christendom* (published this year by Christendom Press). To give you an idea of how long the wait has been for this particular volume, the fifth book of the series, *The Revolution Against Christendom*, came out in 2005. The author, an esteemed Catholic historian known worldwide for his devout recounting of key events in Christian history and his role as founder and first president of Christendom College in Front Royal, Virginia (my alma mater), died in 2011. At the time of his death, news releases from Christendom College assured fans of the series that the volume was near completion, and that its publication would be in June 2012.

June 2012 came and went, and it seemed for a year the publication date of the book pushed forward a month at a time. I was going crazy.

But I have it now (it came out in July 2013), and have read it, and can say with confidence that it was well worth the wait.

The book contains a Forward written by Carroll's widow, Anne Carroll, who is the co-author of the last two volumes of Carroll's history. She notes that the volume covers the years between 1815 and 2010, a time of immense historical events. Mrs. Carroll notes, "It is not possible to cover these years with the thoroughness of most of his [Warren Carroll's] earlier volumes. But Dr. Carroll had selected the topics he wanted to cover, out of all the events that could have been discussed, and it is those topics that are presented here" (p. ix). As a result, the structure of this volume differs from earlier volumes. Whereas the chapters in Volumes I-V covered several events within a set time frame, often switching from one topic to another without clear delineation, Volume VI includes subtopic headings, helping the reader know the main focus of that section. It is a welcome addition which adds to the book's value as a reference text.

Volume VI opens where Volume V closed, in Europe following the final defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte. It traces the historical attempts to reunite and restore a broken Europe from the ashes of Napoleonic conquest. The major historical players are discussed, kings and queens from throughout Europe. Carroll then discusses the seeds of a new revolution in the writings of Karl Marx. Later chapters in the volume will examine in great detail one of Carroll's favorite historical topics: Communism. The birth of Communism is documented, and rightly so. Carroll, however, does not leave the story dark, for great light shone in Europe during the 19th century, namely visitations of Mary (during what Carroll calls the "Marian Century"), the pontificate of Bl. Pope Pius IX, and the climactic meetings of the First Vatican Council.

Also discussed are the trials and victories of the New World, especially in the United States of America. Carroll devotes an entire chapter to the abolition of slavery in the USA, including a brief examination of the American Civil War (1861-1865). Carroll also devotes space to examining the results of the Industrial Revolution in America and Europe, deflating the belief in a "Gilded Age" in late 19th-century America.

Then the story of Christendom turns dark again. The chapter appropriately entitled "The Ditches of Death" recounts the horrors of World War I, while several chapters (from "The Ultimate Revolution" through "The Last Crusade") recount the takeover of Communism in Russia and throughout Eastern Europe, the spread of eugenics in Europe and America, and the beginnings of Fascism in Germany and Italy. The main focus of Volume VI is the evils of these totalitarian governments, the history-makers who guided those evils, and those brave men and women who fought valiantly against them. Carroll adapts much of the material dealing with the 20th century from three of his earlier works: his first book, *1917: Red Banner, White Mantle*; his book-length study of the Spanish Civil War, *The Last Crusade*; and his monumental work, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Revolution*, which presents a penetrating investigation of international Communism from its beginnings to its fall in the early 1990s. This current Volume borrows heavily from those works. Many of the same players appear here. Vladimir Lenin, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot appear as mankind's enemies, those who made the world-wide revolution, villains worse than any Disney monster. Winston Churchill, Bl. Karl of Austria, Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, and Ronald Reagan stand as those who defied their totalitarian adversaries, heroes to their dying days.

And as with all volumes of Carroll's History, the popes play a central role in the fight for the Church. Already mentioned was Bl. Pope Pius IX. His successors Leo XIII, St. Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XII, Bl. John XXIII, Paul VI, and Bl. John Paul II each play an important part in the history of Christendom. The key to interpreting the course of the 20th century, Carroll holds, is a vision granted to Pope Leo XIII. In the vision, God allowed Satan to unleash his worst upon the world for one century, a century which Satan could claim as his own. The vision went on to show that Satan chose the 20th century as his century. Carroll uses this vision as a constant refrain throughout this Volume to help explain how men committed the evils that occurred during the past century. The heroic popes mentioned above all stood against such evil.

Carroll also includes the stories of heroic saints, especially martyrs who stood against the evils of Communism and Fascism and the holy visionaries of Mary. Saints form an essential part of any study of Catholic history, as Carroll notes in one of the appendices to the Volume. Also featured is a detailed chapter on the Second Vatican Council and the heresy of Modernism, both of which are greatly misunderstood in the Church today.

Carroll concludes the book with a chapter devoted to the dignity of the human person, a fitting end as both Communism and Fascism attacked this dignity, as did all socially abusive movements in the 20th century, such as the anti-worker laws, the eugenics movement, and, of course, the abortion movement. There is no happy conclusion to this Volume, as much work is needed in the fight to save Christendom. Carroll hoped that, in the words of his widow, "each reader of this volume would work to build the culture of life in whatever sphere he can" (p. xi).

This Volume features something unique in the canon of Warren H. Carroll works: Appendices. There are four appendices at the end of this book, each one echoing, in a sense, Carroll's hope for this Volume. The first, "Mission," is an autobiographical memoir discussing Carroll's life prior to his founding Christendom College, in particular his education and his conversion to the Catholic Faith. It is enlightening because it provides readers with an introspective look as to how God worked in Carroll's life to bring him home, in particular the role his wife Anne played in his conversion. It is also a brief first-hand account of some key moments in 20th century intellectual and cultural history, such as the conservative movement in the mid-20th century and the work of *Triumph* magazine (a late-20th century Catholic magazine that had a major impact on Carroll and other Catholic intellectuals during that era).

The second, "Principles for Writing Catholic History," provides six principles for Catholic historians writing today. Most are logical: 'Accepting and Hailing the Supernatural' (a favorite topic of Carroll's, as noted in this essay), 'Seeing All History as Religious and/or Political' (again, a favorite position of Carroll's is that history is made by men and women, not social/economic forces), 'Acknowledging that the Popes Act in History' (not only that, but the biographies of popes are often good sources for contemporary historical research, especially the multi-volume histories of Horace Mann and Ludwig Von Pastor), 'Seeing the Impact of the Saints' (holiness attracts, as one professor of mine would say, and thus holy people have an important historical impact), 'Eliminating Bias' (historians should not always write history like

hagiography), and ‘The Legacy of *Triumph Magazine*’ (which Carroll, a former contributor to the magazine, says holds that “the teachings of the Catholic Church alone can explain modern history and culture” [p. 822]).

The third appendix is “Having Done All, To Stand: The Epic of Malta,” a printed version of a lecture Carroll had given at Christendom College several years ago (I was there; it was my first time meeting him). The essay chronicles the island of Malta’s stand against Turks, Napoleon, and Hitler. There is passion in Carroll’s chronicle of Malta’s epic history, a passion rarely seen in historical works today.

The fourth appendix is the most unique, an unfinished poem of Carroll’s entitled “The Ballad of the Reconquista: Pelayo at Covadonga.” It is an epic-style poem reminiscent of G. K. Chesterton’s *The Ballad of the White Horse*. Here is another way of teaching history, one ancient, yet ever new: through poetry. I had never read or heard Carroll’s poetry before; after reading this incomplete poem, I wish there was more of it.

The feature of the Volume that struck me the most was how personal Carroll made it. Other volumes in the series provide digressions and comments by Carroll in the footnotes of the work, though these comments are usually in the third person (i.e., “the author’s work”) rather than first person (i.e., “my work”). In Volume VI, not only are references to Carroll’s previous works referred to as “my/mine,” but other comments by Carroll in the text of the history, not in the footnotes, are in first person. This gives the reflections a more personal aspect, as if Carroll is speaking directly to readers about something close to his heart. It is good to hear from him again.

Above all, this is a labor of love, the result of over thirty years of historical study and research, the fruit of a lifetime of conversion and conversation. This is more than a volume of history. It is more than the story of men and women in the “accursed twentieth century,” as Carroll refers to the past century. It is Carroll’s final work, and it is his lasting literary legacy.



For More Information:

The Crisis of Christendom is available from [Christendom Press](#) and from [Amazon](#).

[Press Release](#) from Christendom College concerning the book's publication.

A [short biography](#) of Carroll from the Christendom College website.

This contribution is available at <http://guidquidestest.wordpress.com/2013/12/15/review-the-crisis-of-christendom-by-warren-h-carroll/>
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Evangelizing Through Fiction [at String of Pearls]

I'm a little embarrassed about how much I've been using this blog and my Facebook pages lately to push, push, push

Finding Grace

, because I can't think of anything I dislike more than calling attention to myself. Yet I feel I must make an effort to market/promote it to the best of my ability. It took attending the Catholic Writers Guild Live conference in New Jersey this past summer to convince me that it's

okay

to want people to read my book--in fact, it's okay to

encourage

them to read it. Because it's not about me at all; it's about sharing a message. It's about using fiction as a form of evangelization. That is truly what I set out to do with this book back in August of 2007, when I first sat down to write it. I wanted it to be entertaining, humorous, and sweet; but most importantly, I wanted it to be a tool to combat the poison being peddled as literature in this secularized age--I wanted it to unabashedly show the joy and beauty of a life lived according to God's will and His laws.

But here's the kicker: what I didn't bank on was that if I wanted

anyone

to read it and be positively affected by it, I would have to try (and I mean try

hard

) to "sell" it. That's been the tough part for me.

My baby sister has an easier time selling my book than I do (she even saw to it that the library of the public school where she works got a copy and put it on display), so I'm going to shamelessly use her here as a promotion tool.



Isn't she gorgeous? I told her that ad agencies use beautiful women to sell things all the time--so I thought maybe I ought to do the same!

Many people wouldn't in a million years read religious non-fiction books, because they find them too dry and boring. But they

will

read a novel with a good story in it, because they enjoy that so much more. And that's where a Catholic author can use the medium of fiction to quietly evangelize: through the actions of characters that a reader comes to know and love, an author can inspire that reader to change his life, to be a better person, to seek the Truth. I hope--I pray!--that that is what I accomplished with my humble little novel, and that even one soul will be edified by it. I would rather please the Man Upstairs than be successful by the world's standards.

There are very few authors--of fiction in general and Catholic fiction in particular--who are going to become household names or see their works adapted to the big screen. I read somewhere that the odds of being a "successful" author are roughly the same as winning the lottery on a \$1 ticket: about 1 in 1,270,000. (I have no idea if that's an accurate figure, but it sounds about right.) I suppose if I'd been willing to sell out and write a book filled with sexual perversity, vampires, or zombies,

Finding Grace

might have a shot at becoming "successful." As it is, it's currently ranked at about #600,000 on Amazon--which is a pretty far cry from the #1 spot! A bestseller it is not. But I believe in this book anyway. I believe that it can do some good in the world. I believe that a high school girl being fed the falsehoods taught in sex ed classes (where the word "safe" is used in a way that is so incredibly misleading) might actually be inspired by the hard lessons learned by some of

FG

's characters to make different choices than the world would have her make. I believe that she could be inspired to imitate my sweet, self-effacing little heroine, Grace Kelly--who might be unsure of herself in many ways, but is very sure that with the help of the saints, she can become one herself.

Okay, 'nuff said. I'll just end here by letting you know that the

[Kindle version of *Finding Grace*](#)

has been reduced from \$7.99 to \$4.99--just in time for Christmas gift-giving.

Thanks for your patience, dear readers!

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2013/12/evangelizing-through-fiction.html>
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Forgiveness and the Lord's Prayer [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

Of course, I could have written the title of this post the other way, but forgiveness seems to be the main lesson God is trying to get through my thick, red-haired head these days.

Without any kind of a prayer life, how can we accomplish the least of the tasks in our daily lives, much less forgiveness of another. Reflecting on the Lord's Prayer, I am completely in awe at how perfectly the words are, I know, consider the author. Jesus taught the apostles this prayer which covers all bases in a very short and simple way. But it also puts us to task in a very blunt and severe way in the forgiveness department; He will forgive us,

AS

we forgive others around us...ouch!

"As"

Now, we all remember the Clinton days when he fought the infidelity accusations with an idiotic argument on the meaning of the word "is". He wanted to escape the reality of his marital sinfulness with a present/past tense wording. How truly petty and evil could you get? A lie is a lie and the truth is the truth...past, present, or in the future. His intentions, responsibility, and actions were the true evidence of the sin he committed and continued to commit in his lies to his family, himself, and the entire world! No single word, in his case, could ever clear him of his mortal sin.

OK, so on to the word "

as

" in the prayer of our Lord: "and forgive us our trespasses,

AS

we forgive those who trespass against us."

Now, has a single word ever struck such a difficult...near impossible note? Our God and Creator forgives us

AS

only He can in His inconceivable nature, but we must follow His lead with each other. Forgiving

each other is the charitable thing to do in all cases of human interaction...

AS

our heavenly father offers the forgiveness to us. In some cases, this is easy to offer and feel good about; has there been a time or a case that this is true? It truly feels good to let these feelings go and clear the slate for a new beginning. But there are those certain instances that forgiveness is much more trying. Forgiveness is not an emotion, it is a gift and a decision made each and every day to forgive and let go of anger, disappointment, and resentment. If extended, and received, it is a blessings AS we know it in God's loving forgiveness.

Jesus intentionally made this little, tiny word carry a heavy responsibility to the world. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2842 talks about how it "is not unique in Jesus' teaching: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (Mt 5:48; Lk6:36;Jn13:34)

Love thy neighbor AS thyself, treat your brother AS you would be treated, we can't ignore this word...really. How can we ask for forgiveness if we are unable to forgive another? How can we ask for something we are unwilling to give? How can ignore our heavenly Father's request? It's not a suggestion, it's not a favor, it's not something intended to be selective either. God wants us to do as He asks all the time!

A new year a fast approaching, and though I am not a resolution maker, I am going to work on being a better forgiver-er in 2014 with lots of prayer and conversations with our Lord along the way.

How about you?

This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2013/12/forgiveness-and-lords-prayer.html>

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A lost identity [at Kitchen table chats]

I love my computer. I love the ease with which I can compose and correct. I love the ability to share my work with the touch of a button. So I have absolutely no nostalgia about the old typewriter. What I do miss, is hand-written communication. Every now and then I open a book and I will see a note in the front written by my mother. Even before I see the signature I know it is from my mother. Those particular loops and and lines are part of her identity. It has been almost three years since she died so the sight of her handwriting is what I have left now that I no longer hear her voice.

A recent such event got me to thinking about my own handwriting. I have very nice handwriting. I have made a great effort to avoid having "doctor's handwriting". Back when we were a military family on the move every couple of years and I was still practicing medicine I would be the new doc in town on a rather frequent basis. Inevitably, the office or clinic where I worked would get a phone call from a local pharmacist to confirm my existence. There would be some question because of my handwriting. Neat and legible handwriting always threw the pharmacists for a loop and they would want to make sure the prescription was not a forgery.

Over the years I have filled out recipe cards in my own unique script. I had visions that my children or grandchildren would someday look at these cards as they prepared our favorite family recipes. I am now realizing that it is much more likely that my offspring will be looking at their computers, iPads, or phones when they cook. Instead of looking at my own loops and lines they will be looking at "Ariel" or "Times New Roman".

I have conflicted feelings about this. I use the Chrome app "tsp." to organize and collect my recipes. Even many of those that I have lovingly transcribed into my recipe book can be found online since I gathered them from my favorite magazines. I can use tags to organize a given recipe into multiple categories. I can share these recipes with friends and family in an instant. This system is immensely more practical than my collection of cards in plastic sleeves held together in a three-ring binder. That three-ring binder was transported from duty station to duty station in our car and never entrusted to the movers since I could not risk losing my kitchen brain trust. Now the recipes are indelibly etched in the internet cloud and impervious to spills and splatters.

So the rational part of my brain celebrates this technological progress. It is a good thing. But my emotional self longs for the warmth of ink on paper. I suppose since the kids are not being taught cursive in school anymore, future generations would have trouble reading my handwriting no matter how neat and pretty it is. And I accept that I will only rarely see the products of their hands since most of our communications is now via email and texts. But in the process of this technological revolution they have lost a part of me and I have lost a part of them. I find that sad.

The Healing Glow Of The Christmas Tree [at Peace Garden Mama]

The Christmas tree has always been

a beautiful symbol to me, something to look forward to and to delight in. But I don't think I've ever enjoyed it as much as I have this year.



For one thing, I decided to go simple this year with Christmas decorating. Rather than spread them throughout the house, I contained them in one room -- which I then dubbed "The Christmas room." In this way I've been able to capture the spirit and feeling of Christmas without creating an exorbitant amount of work when it's time to put everything away.

The most logical room for this seemed my office -- a place where a Christmas tree could easily fit, and where I could spend time adding special touches and savoring what I have always particularly loved. I'm also the night owl of the family, and since this is where I spend the majority of my night-time sessions, it felt right.

Around this time last year

, my office was just being put together. I didn't know it then, but my father would die soon, and during the aftermath of his death, my office would offer safe harbor for me, a place to rest and heal surrounded by the comfort of books (a passion I shared with my father), an electric fireplace to warm my feet and a comfy couch on which to sit and ruminate, read and write.

I didn't know that I'd need that healing so much now, but as much as I tried to avoid the pre-Christmas rush, it happened anyway. It just does. The preparations need to happen in order to set things up for the memorable, meaningful times with family that Christmas does best. We women in

particular take this on as a gift for others, but it can make for some weary moments, too.

So in my exhausted state, I've slept by the glow of this tree for the past several nights, letting myself be lulled under by its gentle beauty. The tree has put me in an absolutely peaceful state at the end of some of the most frenzied of days, calming my heart, sending healing vibes. It has been pure bliss.

There's talk from the secular world that we Christians have stolen this pagan tradition, and how dare we claim it as a religious symbol. It reminds me of younger years when, as a little sister, I would copy my older sister on things she liked, and naturally she would get a little miffed, but I couldn't understand why she failed to see I was copying her because I loved her ideas. Shouldn't she feel, instead, pleased?

To me, the Christmas tree

is most certainly a religious symbol, and a symbol always represents something larger, deeper than what you see on the surface. If we were to worship the Christmas tree, that would be wrong. But that's not what's going on here. Certainly not in my heart.

What's going on is that each ornament has meaning. Some are handmade by our kids. Some were given by friends. Some were on my grandmother's tree years ago, and she gave them to me to use for my own tree, like the one below, one of my favorites. Each is beautiful in its own way, a fleeting reminder of Christmases past and all that are to come; and in that way, also representative of the life we've lived so far and what's around the bend.



To me, the Christmas tree means family, love, beauty, peace, and the hope Christ offers and comes to remind us of and lead us toward. That's not pagan, it is promise - something to live by, sleep near and die to self to have.

A very merry Christmas to you and yours!

What does the Christmas tree evoke for you?

Catholic Doctrine all makes sense - the Mass [at Pray!]

Catholic Doctrine all makes sense. It just makes sense.

Consider the Mass. The Catholic Church teaches it is a mortal sin to miss the Mass (

[CCC #2180 and 2181](#)

). Why is that?

St. Paul also explains it very well in Hebrews 10:25-31:

Hebrews 10:25-31

King James Version (KJV)

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. 26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. 28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF MASS

A Step-by-Step Analysis of the Mass



DR. SCOTT HAHN

"Your whys and wherefores will be answered!"
Julie - Lowes
Island, VA



LIGHTHOUSE
CATHOLIC MEDIA

Read it carefully, because it just makes sense. These words bring it home to me.

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

God sacrificed His Son for us upon the Cross. And all that He asks is that we remember Him once a week for an hour. But how many people would rather watch a football game or attend a party?

If a person isn't grateful enough nor love Jesus enough to go to Mass at a minimum of one hour a week, that person is making a mockery of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the Cross. How then should God respond to that person? Read verse 31: **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

It makes perfect sense. Catholic Doctrine just makes sense.

This contribution is available at <http://washedsanctifiedandjustified.blogspot.com/2014/01/catholic-doctrine-all-makes-sense-mass.html>

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Prophecy, Reality and the Done Deal [at Naru Hodo]

Under the category: Scriptures that Blow me Away

I was listening to the Seraphic Fire recording of Handel's

Messiah

today. Any average time I listen to the Messiah I am bound to be captivated by some Scripture or another from it, as I have written about on

[previous occasions](#)

. But this time, it was a completely new aspect that grabbed me and, to be honest, made me heave joyful but surprising sobs that I didn't completely understand.

It was the words of the very first definitive proclamation of the birth of the Savior as having happened.

And they are recorded in the book of the prophet Isaiah, and were penned some handful of centuries before Christ.

For unto us a child is born
Unto us a son is given
And the government shall be upon his shoulders
And his name shall be called
Wonderful, Counselor
The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father
The Prince of Peace

I heard this with completely new ears today. Imagine it. The prophet proclaims that something has happened, already. One who is called God has been born a child. This sent my mind and spirit tumbling in a sort of timeless free fall where faith is the only solid foundation. When the prophet wrote these words, were they true? Were they fact? Jesus Christ was born something like 500-700 years later, depending on how you date Isaiah. But the prophet did more than see the future. He saw the heart of God. He heard the promise of God, uttered in the moment of the eternal gift of salvation.

Then I imagined people who read Isaiah's words when the ink was still fresh.

Ok, buster, where's this child? Nice poetry, but I don't see God ruling us. Why don't you go off

in your little religious corner and daydream some more.

Maybe people did have an understanding and appreciation of the prophets and prophecy back then. But then I remember what Jesus said about how all the prophets endured persecution. So, maybe my guess is fairly accurate.

I think perhaps my sobs today were because I was rejoicing with the prophet that His words were vindicated by the concrete event of history that was the birth of Jesus Christ of the Virgin Mary. But it was more than that, too, for even the concrete event -- the truth of it -- can only truly be seen and known by faith. I was sobbing because I realized I was standing in the same faith that the prophet had. He saw by faith something that was yet to be. I saw by faith something that had happened. And yet in each case, the Reality of the One promised was present, right now, by faith.

And if He is present right now by faith to me, then that means that all those things that I long for, pray for, sacrifice for, everything that actually originates in His heart and somehow makes its way into mine, all those things are completely fulfilled in Him, too. Right now. Done deal.

Just like the child spoken of centuries before He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin.

And I live to pray into being that which already is. Whoa. Was that mystery-induced dizziness that just struck me?

This contribution is available at <http://www.lift-up-your-hearts.blogspot.com/2013/12/prophecy-reality-and-done-deal.html>

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I am “gay” and I agree with Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty

If free speech and equal rights actually do exist, then I would hope that people will not try to silence what I am about to say.

It goes like this: **I am “gay” and I agree 100% with Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty.**

He has my support, and more importantly he has my prayers. Every single person (including myself) out there needs to further wake up to the magnitude of what is happening, and realize that “a prayer is worth more than a posting”, and that we need to pray first and foremost before anything else. Pray for what? Pray that people will wake the heck up, and see that they are being lied to and that there is more to the story...but I am not talking about Duck Dynasty or Phil Robertson, I am talking about the topic of homosexuality.

In short, the culture of this day tries to have it both ways. They promote the idea that “I define me”, which is fine – it is accurate to say we can choose to embrace any particular identity. However, the culture also promotes the idea that just because you experience a certain type of attractions, you must self-identify in a particular way (if you want to be honest with yourself, that is). The culture closes the door on people even being able to become aware that the attractions we experience are not the same thing as the identities we choose to embrace. That is, the culture of this day lies to us by not differentiating *our non-specifically chosen sexual attractions*, from the *specific choice* that we make when we embrace an identity as our own. One more time, because it is THAT important, the culture says that “being gay” (or “being straight”) is “who you are”, when in reality, it is not who you are, ***unless you make it who you are***, by specifically choosing to wholeheartedly self-identify and define yourself in that way.

What does this all boil down to? **The matter of elevating the conversation.**

Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty spoke about homosexual behaviour, but is there a bigger question to look at?

When Pope Francis talked about not judging gay people, it seemed as though it was the first time the media was exposed to the idea that the *attractions we experience* are not the same thing as *the way we specifically choose to self-identify and define ourselves*. Whether Catholic or Christian non-Catholic such as Phil Robertson, as Christians we are taught to self-identify not according to any single facet of our being, whether it be sexuality or otherwise. Why? The reason is simple... **we are more that our sexualities.**

This short video will help explain what that means a little better...(more article below the video)

A Matter of Identity

To self-identify and define ourselves according to our sexualities is not a way in which we can reflect the fullness of who we are. To self-identify according to one facet of our beings (in this case, our sexualities) is to self-identify in a reductionist fashion – we reduce ourselves and our sense of purpose to be tied to our reductionist self-concept. Rather than self-identifying and defining ourselves according to one facet of our beings, or *less than the fullness of our beings* (in this case our sexualities), we as Christians are called to self-identify and define ourselves first and foremost according to *the fullness of our beings* – as persons – persons who are equal in dignity and worth in the eyes of God. That is, we are called to self-identify and to identify others not according to our sexualities, but rather as *persons* – persons who are all beloved children of God (regardless of one’s attractions or the life-journey one has taken thus far).

God’s love is for all persons, and this is a truth I discovered in the Catholic Church – in the last place the world taught that I should even look! Amidst a world that was telling me that the Catholic Church could never love someone like me, it was in there that I found the greatest love. It was in there that I was invited to uninhibitedly pursue a greater degree of truth about myself. I never received that invitation from anywhere outside the Church. With people loving me enough to walk with me on my journey, I came to realize on my own terms that serving Christ meant to be open to the virtue of chastity (different than celibacy). I came to further understand that, as the virtue of chastity is a Christian virtue, all true Christians should have zero problem with affirming people into growing further in the virtue of chastity. This matters because the whole mess of today has less to do with “who is gay”, “who is straight”, or what anyone thinks about that, and more to do with who upholds the idea that we should be open to growing in the virtue of chastity? That is where we should concentrate our energy. That is why I stand in support of Phil Robertson – even if he doesn’t stand for the virtue of chastity in all areas, he also doesn’t pander to the drones of the world who have bought the idea that one can uphold the virtue of chastity while self-identifying according to their sexuality, or while pursuing sexual acts (fantasy or physical) that are designed for mere gratification (even if it is mutually agreed-upon objectification).

Our Voices Have Been Silenced

Anyway, when I say “I’m gay”, I begrudgingly use that word knowing full well that people will think that I am someone who might be marching in a gay pride parade, and who is saying “being gay is who I am, and I want the world to know, so I can feel good about myself.” However, I will not be doing that – not for any reason of shame (I harbor no shame or guilt), but rather because I simply specifically choose to not self-identify and define myself in that way. Persons and groups who will try to silence persons like us will inform the public that we are the ones who are being dishonest with ourselves (dishonest about what, I don’t know, because we are perfectly honest with ourselves about the existence of our attractions). The fact of the matter is, doing that is the best strategy the entire pro-gay movement has, because if people like me were actually given a voice or were taken seriously, we would blow the lid off of the lies they are promoting.

Thankfully, more and more people are “coming out” of “coming out”. In other words, more and more people are sick of being lied to. I know I am.

Pray, Pray, Pray

The fact of the matter is that we all have room to learn on this topic – correction: we all have *lots* to learn. However, unless we start asking bigger questions, we will remain entrenched in cyclical arguments with each other that will get us nowhere. Wait a minute – that is actually not entirely true. It is true that we will not get anywhere positive, but we will certainly earn a deficit. Why? Because engaging in that cycle immobilizes the good people of the world in arguments that will be relatively fruitless (relying on ourselves rather than trusting God). I would invite all people of the Christian world to enter fervent prayer (for hearts to be opened to growing in understanding of this topic), and I also invite everyone to elevate the conversation by using clarified language. Think about it – not clarifying our use of language leads to ambiguity in communication. Do we not owe it to ourselves to clarify our speech if we have any regard to truth and pursuing greater self-honesty? I think we do, and thus I think clarifying the way in which we speak is an absolute necessity – especially in this time and age. Further, clarifying how we speak about this shines a light on the falsehood that is promoted by our culture that just because I *experience* x, that means I *am* x (this falsehood is of course the cornerstone of the movement itself).

Square Watermelons?



Imposing parameters...

With that, I invite you to into a learning journey; an uninhibited learning journey, where you are free to peruse all sources, not just the kinds that might “suit my motives”. I invite you into this knowing full well that this invitation will not be given by “the other guys”. It cannot be given by the other guys, because uninhibited questioning, leads to the discovery of the unanswerable questions...and with regards to homosexuality and the social movement that is sweeping the globe. It does not take long to reveal the ugly truth – the truth that identity embraced means a heck of a lot more to the movement than simply being honest about the existence of one’s attractions. We know this already on account of the insistence that our young people embrace the gay “identity” as “who they are”, so they can grow into this type of identity.



...Makes a difference!

However, to embrace an identity is far beyond the matter of simply being honest with oneself about the existence of one's attractions. Furthermore, to embrace a reductionist identity is to place limiting parameters on yourself and your self-concept. At this point I am always reminded of those "square" watermelons that are on those "Meanwhile in Japan" memes. Really, they are just watermelons that have grown into the parameters that have been placed around them. Embracing any form of identity has a similar effect. The watermelon becomes a square watermelon once those parameters are put in place. Likewise, we grow into the parameters we place onto ourselves, every time we wholeheartedly embrace any type of identity as our own.

Imposing Shame onto Christians

Regardless, along your learning journey, I just hope that you will include more than one point of view and will fairly evaluate other sources, despite the public push to have one voice speak for all of us. Clearly nowhere else in life is like that, and neither is this. Yet it is strange how the world invites questioning at all levels, except for this. Hmm... I trust you will be able to draw your own conclusions about that – but mine are that there is a serious investment in having people self-identify according to their sexuality. We know today, that the targeting is due to the reality that the Catholic Church (and many other Christian Churches at the moment) will never affirm people into becoming invested in those sorts of identities. This movement has been masterfully designed to draw people away from the Catholic Church and Christianity in general, and of course to impose shame on young people on account of their faith association. It is actually quite genius – the culture has found a way to shame children for being Catholic, and then turn against them against the faith of their family... and it is working. However, this tactic is a house of cards that today is starting to collapse **because of people like you** who have started to ask questions, instead of simply blindly accepting the message of our culture today. You deserve more than to be indoctrinated – but the culture of this day apparently begs to differ.

Haters Gonna Hate

It should be of no surprise that I won't share my name here. There will be backlash because there always is, anytime something counter-cultural is introduced that shines a light on the falsehoods

being presented as truths. But know this: I, and persons like me, are among you, and we have been silenced. We have been threatened with intimidation tactics to keep our mouths shut. That by the way, is what tolerance they speak of, actually looks like. Our stories are greeted with protest, and the message is effectively sent (amongst the crowds of people who think they are doing a good thing) that **what we have to say is not welcome**. In other words, people rally around the idea that only *they* can be heard, and it is done in the name of free speech and equality. Sounds like equality alright – equality for people who are illogical and one-sided. However, we know that what we have to say – if we present it with true humility as an invitation to grow in deeper understanding of what is really going on, *we can turn this world on its head*. Be it known I speak this without intending an anti-activist approach or *revolution, but rather with an illumination into the hearts of humankind, provided by God., in His time*.

Will you stand up for equality and share our voices? We hope you do.

I don't even have to convince you who is telling you the truth and who is lying to you. I respect you enough to invite you to ask questions, while the "other guys" will not. There are a series of questions below that any person should not be threatened by...yet I know they are not well-received by the world at large. The point is: Ask questions about what is being taught, and you will know who is being threatened by those questions. How? They will steer you away from those questions, or out rightly attack you in some form or fashion. Where questions are unwelcome and where the uninhibited pursuit of truth is unwelcome, let that be a red flag to you. Regardless of whether your are ready to start this journey or not, what you and I both must acknowledge at this point in time is that "that which is not-specifically chosen" needs to be considered distinct from "that which is specifically chosen", and thus attractions need to be considered distinct from the identities we choose to embrace. I invite you to consider who upholds that truth and who does not. Furthermore, once again I invite you to see how that invitation will not be given by all sides.

Summary

Phil Robertson, I am "gay" (describing my attractions), and you have my support 100%. Here is why:

Unchaste sexual sin (in whatever form – including opposite sex), is sin, and it is destructive to family, individuals, and to our hearts and souls. We have to look beyond the short-sightedness of our day, to see that the openness to grow in the virtue of chastity provides the foundation for the greatest probability of having healthy, stable parents, which in turn is better off for the children (secular studies support this all the way to the bank). And the better off the children, the better off our world will be. Forget the focus on toys this Christmas, rather make your priority being fully present and "in the room" when with your children. All the distractions of our world will never replace the stability of a home, **but stability of the home starts with and is amplified by the desire to be chaste**. The thing is, the desire to be chaste will draw a person to eventually not want

to live in an unchaste way anymore. You can try, but once you realize you are trying to satisfy longings that are diametrically opposed to one another, the fantasy comes crashin' down.

This is why what Phil Robertson brought up is so important – it is a chance to discuss the greater question of the **openness to the virtue of chastity**. Persons pursuing same-sex relationships and engaging in homosexual unchaste activity, just as persons engaging in opposite-sex relationship and heterosexual unchaste activity, are all guilty of the same sin – *the closedness to the virtue of chastity*. So, even though the world want's you to think this is a “gay thing” and that “gay people” are being attacked, don't fall for it. It's an *everyone* thing. The reality is the authentic Christian Churches “punish” *all* people in the same way, with the invitation to pursue a life of self-mastery (chastity) in all areas of life. The only way I can see it being a “punishment” is if I went back in time to my old life, where I was one of those people who self-identified and defined myself according to my sexuality. I was invested in that identity, just as how so many others are of this day. But because I was invested in that identity, so much so as to define “who I was” according to my sexuality, I could not conceive of the idea that chaste living could be anything less than a cruel punishment. Today I see it as just the opposite, but God first had to open my heart to receive the desire to be chaste – and it has brought inner peace and joy beyond what I ever before knew was possible!

See, like Phil Robertson, I too turned to Christ, and he received me where I was in life – in a state where I thought not even He could love me (Christ, not Phil). And He (Christ again) has given me the desire to grow in that virtue. I understand first-hand that you cannot simply “talk with someone” and change their mind about chastity – rather you have to rely on God, which means to pray for His graces to do what He is calling you to do in His time. Phil stood up for what he believes in, and he has taken the fall without denying Christ. I hope that I might have that much courage if I were in his shoes, when facing the “tolerance” of our world today. However, at least people are starting to ask questions, and his losses will not be in vain but will rather act towards the journey to greater truth for many people – maybe even you. For that reason I repeat again: despite the attractions I have been permitted by God, Phil Robertson, I am with you 100%, and ***GOD BLESS YOU and GOD BLESS AMERICA!***

- Your Brother in Christ

This contribution is available at <http://www.pursuitoftruth.ca/2013/12/19/i-am-gay-and-i-agree-with-phil-robertson/>
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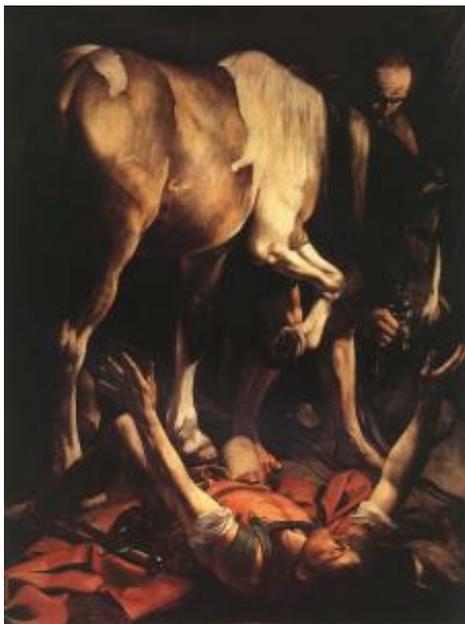
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Same-sex Marriage and the Redefinition of the Greek: Malakoi and Arsenokoitai [at Quartermaster of the Barque]

Same-sex marriage is a new creation out of the last several generations of post-modern social life. There are countless arguments, both for and against. The question of homosexual persons who wish to enter into lifelong committed partnerships appears to provide a moral framework for a Christian structure of same-sex relationships, but it denies (and ignores) the most essential component of the problem – the objective morality of sexual activity outside marriage. And in seeking to answer this question in the affirmative so that a Christian same-sex marriage ethic can be found to exist, good scholarship is replaced with a subjective and unsound approach to Scripture.

I recently read a book entitled *The Children are Free: Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-sex Relationship*, by Rev. Jeff Miner and John Tyler Connoley (Found Pearl Press, 2008). Both authors identify themselves as gay men in committed relationships, and moreover, they are styled as ministers and religious thinkers within a particular Christian denomination (the Metropolitan Community Church).

While the book does not confine itself to a single argument, I've summarized the best and most convincing one as follows: St. Paul's proscription of homosexuality (based upon 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) is really a mistranslation of two words in the Greek text, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, and these two words actually do not refer to a loving, committed relationship between two persons of the same sex. The authors argue that in using these words, St. Paul actually meant homosexual *rape*, and not committed, consenting, homosexual monogamy.



“Do not be deceived....” St. Paul is actively warning the Christians in Corinth to beware of certain forms of behavior. He's telling them that if they do the things he lists, there are very grave consequences. “Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom

of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolators nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor sodomites nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God”. (NAB).

The NAB footnote for this verse states that “The Greek word translated as boy prostitutes may refer to catamites, *i.e.*, boys or young men who were kept for purposes of prostitution, a practice not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world. In Greek mythology this was the function of Ganymede, the ‘cupbearer of the gods,’ whose Latin name was Catamitus. [My note: Consider the KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon: *Malakos*: 1. soft, soft to the touch 2. metaph. in bad sense -- a. effeminate --- 1. of a catamite --- 2. of a boy kept for homosexual relations with a man --- 3. of a male who submits his body for unnatural lewdness --- 4. of a male prostitute.] The term translated Sodomites (*arsenokoitai*) refers to adult males who indulged in homosexual practices with such boys.”

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Greek states that *arsenokoi* (translated in NAB as sodomite) actually consists of two words: *arsen* (male/man) and *koite* (bed, marriage bed, repeated (immoral) sexual intercourse. From *keimai* – a couch, bed, chambering, cohabitation).

Fornicator in Greek is *pornos*. According to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Greek it means a male prostitute, a debauchee (libertine), fornicator, whoremonger. According to the NAS Exhaustive Concordance of the Greek it is used to describe fornicators and/or immoral people. We commonly define fornication as sex among the unmarried.

The list also includes idolators (idol worshippers), adulterers (Greek word *moichos*: a paramour — a married person who has sex with someone other than their spouse), *malokai*, *arsenokoitai*, thieves (*pleonektes*: holding, eager for gain, avaricious, defrauder, covetous), the greedy, drunkards, slanderers (*loidoros*: a blackguard, railer, reviler – those who bear false witness against others, liars), and robbers (*harpax*: rapacious, an extortioner).

For the sake of argument, let’s assume the authors’ premise that over the past two millennia the Church actively perpetuated a false translation of the words *malokai* and *arsenokoitai*, thus buttressing the prohibition of homosexual activity when in fact these words more appropriately describe something akin to “male-to-male rape”.

The problem with this is that if one reads the “traditional” meanings for *malokai* and *arsenokoitai* (*i.e.* homosexuality, sodomy, etc.) then St. Paul has set forth a list of predominately non-violent forms of sin, prevalent at the time (and to some extent, somewhat acceptable among the non-Jewish Corinthian population) which actively threatened the good of the Christian community.

The only other item which contains in its definition something that approaches violent crime is the word *robber*, Greek *harpax*, which can be understood to include rapacious or taking by force, but again, the emphasis is on the taking not the use of force. *Harpax* can be used to describe conduct requiring no violence at all, since the object is to obtain something that someone is not entitled to take, the use of force being secondary to the object.

However, if one adopts *malokai* and *arsenokoitai* as referring to male-to-male rape, then the list is suddenly out of proportion with the other things St. Paul is talking about. Perhaps if St. Paul had stated: “Do not be deceived; neither murderers nor wife-beaters nor molesters.... (nor men who rape men)” then the argument advanced by the authors would be convincing. Instead, by arguing for a different interpretation of these two words (for which there is no direct English translation) St. Paul’s admonition suddenly loses its context and importance.

We can also examine the context of *arsenokoitai* in other passages of scripture. In 1 Timothy 1:9-10, St. Paul states: “...with the understanding that law is meant not for a righteous person but for the lawless and unruly, the godless and sinful, the unholy and profane, those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, the unchaste, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is opposed to sound teaching.”

In this passage, St. Paul employs *arsenokoitais* for the modern *sodomites* translation and sets forth some very violent crimes in this group along with some non-violent crimes as well. Although the use of *arsenokoitais* might fare better being interpreted as male-to-male rape here, it is not without difficulty that such an interpretation could be adopted. Why? Because again, St. Paul precedes *arsenokoitais* with *pornos* (fornicators/the unchaste). As a result, the interpretation of *arsenokoitais* as meaning male-to-male rape requires us to draw the inference that same-sex activity is only “opposed to sound teaching” when it occurs under the context of rape but that opposite-sex activity is always illicit if it occurs when one is unmarried.

This argument becomes even less likely if we read Romans 1:16-28:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous by faith will live.” The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness. For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened. While claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man or of birds or of four-legged animals or of snakes. Therefore, God handed them over to impurity through the lusts of their hearts for the mutual degradation of their bodies. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshiped the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Therefore, God handed them over to degrading passions. Their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the males likewise gave up natural relations with females and burned with lust for one another. Males did shameful things with males and thus received in their own persons the due penalty for their perversity. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God handed them over to their undiscerning mind to do what is improper.”

This passage is absent the *arsenokoitais* term, but what remains is reference to consensual sexual relations among members of the same sex which is not treated by St. Paul as positive.



Numerous early Church Fathers, most (if not all) of whom were native Greek speakers, never had a problem recognizing that these passages refer to homosexual activity and not male rape. Consider St. John Chrysostom's Homily 16: "What sayest thou? When discoursing about covetous persons, have you in upon us so vast a crowd of lawless men? 'Yes,' says he, 'but in doing this, I am not confusing my discourse, but going on in regular order.' For when discoursing about the unclean he made mention of all together; so again, on mentioning the covetous he brings forward all, thus making his rebukes familiar to those who have such things on their conscience. For the continual mention of the punishment laid up for others makes the reproof easy to be received, when it comes to conflict with our own sins."

Even without Tradition or magisterial teaching, I think that Scripture remains extremely clear on this point. The fact that various Christian denominations have given way to cultural pressure (which has led to manifold errancies in other theological and doctrinal areas) cannot change the intended meaning of St. Paul, or for that matter, Jesus Christ. If Protestant churches have been illuminated by truth on this one point (*i.e.* whether or not there is any sinfulness in homosexual activity among two committed persons), must we also admit the possibility that likewise, the Church's teachings on abortion, contraception, sex outside marriage, *etc.*, are also incorrect? Scripture can always be reinterpreted, whereas truth is truth.

I am reminded of the Bread of Life discourse in John. "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"... "Jesus then said to the Twelve, 'Do you also want to leave?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'" There can be no doubt that these hard sayings have resulted in an exodus away from the Catholic Church and created a substantial market for the various "pick-and-choose" flavors of Christian Protestantism. But this exodus is not in favor of Truth. To quote St. Paul, such an exodus exchanges the truth of God for a lie and reveres and worships the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Ironically, at the end of their book, the authors invoke the Gospels again, asking the reader to consider whether "By their fruits you will know them..." The authors assume that if we simply

look to the “fruits” of their Christian discipleship, we will be convinced that their position that God blesses relationships of same-sex individuals living together in lifelong committed partnerships is correct, moral, good, and holy.

Although the Metropolitan Community Church to which the authors belong does not advance “official” positions on issues outside its embrace of “the basic doctrines of Christianity”, and beyond the “basics”, the MCC leaves “it to each individual to work out the details of his or her faith”, a large number of its clergy have publicly declared support for “A faith-based commitment to sexual reproductive rights, including access to... abortion.” While this is a small part of any church’s social justice framework, it exemplifies a belief system awash in its own relativism — a belief system that has abandoned its moral voice because of inconsistency and error (and utterly ignores the entire point of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans).

In reading another book on this topic, I came across an interesting question: “Is having a close relationship to a brother exactly the same as having a close relationship to a sister? Is having a close relationship to an aunt exactly the same as having a close relationship to an uncle? What about grandfather and grandmother? Mother and father? Son and daughter? Is having a close friend who is a guy the same as having a close friend who is a girl?” This author goes on to conclude that a marital relationship differs from a deep and intimate father-son or mother-daughter relationship, just as various forms of homosexual relationship differ from traditional marriage. As much as the committed same-sex couple might long for equivalence with traditional marriage, it is not the same, and this is so not simply because the relationship is composed of two people of the same gender.

Rather, it is because sacramental marriage is truly a form of the sacred. A sexual relationship between two people of the same sex can never be understood in terms of complementarity, because two males and two females are not complementary to one another. The best that can be achieved is mutuality among the partners, which only exalts femininity or masculinity to the exclusion of the other half of human sexual existence. According to Russian philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev, this leads to profound loneliness because in the inner core of our being we “know” that a man or a woman biologically is not completely human: each of us lacks either the masculine or the feminine qualities and virtues to make us whole and fully human.

The expression of the “gift” found in a sacramental marriage is redundant and gratuitous among same-sex partners because each partner is offering something that they already inherently (and totally) possess in themselves. Thus, there is no unitive, procreative, spiritual complementarity; there is no single act that creates the union of two into “one flesh” — there is only a succession of individual actions that occur over the course of same-sex activity, none of which edify the natural order or fulfill any aspect of God’s creative goodness. These hallmarks of sacramental marriage — which go far beyond the parameters of “one man and one woman” — do not exist nor have the possibility of existence within a same-sex relationship, however respectful, loving, and mutual the same-sex relationship appears.

None of this dispels one’s desire or lessens the burden that one experiences in foregoing an

intimate relationship with another person. It certainly does not change our innate desire to experience a closeness with someone, to share ourselves, to be vulnerable (and accepted in our vulnerability), and to be loved and loved in return. But in staking out our identity (even something as integral to our sexual identity) we cannot base our identity purely on our own inclination and feelings. We must be capable of observing the objective moral good of our actions, especially actions which impact upon the emotional and spiritual good of someone else.

The Catholic Church is concerned, first and foremost, with the salvation of souls and the care of all people. Salvation history demonstrates that our original creation in the image and likeness of God was clouded by the introduction of inclination to sin. Thus, as much as God still declares the goodness of His creation, we are only traveling along the way to perfection, and this perfection is only achieved by accepting our capacity for transformation through Christ. This isn't just true for the various lesser aspects of ourselves; rather, Christ casts light on the totality of what and who we are — our entire identity — illuminating and amplifying our goodness, and clearing out the darkness. Telling Jesus, “No thank you, I'm just fine the way you created me” (in any aspect of our life) cuts off the transformative work that is possible and necessary for the fulfillment of His purposes.

To say that the Church does not allow the homosexual person happiness or insists upon a fit which is impossible or untenable, is essentially a denial of the actual, concrete, and supreme Grace that is part of the promise of the Gospel. While one may argue that chastity provides no relief for one's natural desires, it is true that redemptive grace supplies us with the (sometimes supernatural) ability to do what Christ asks of us, according to His promise. To reduce grace down to something that is incapable of bringing about transformation in our lives is to dismiss salvation itself.

This contribution is available at <http://qmbarque.com/2013/12/16/same-sex-marriage-and-the-redefinition-of-the-greek-malakoi-and-arsenokoitai/>
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The Precious Womb [at Living the Faith]

What is to be compared with the Womb
That adorned the Word incarnate
Plated with Precious Gold
Kindled with the Fire of the Spirit

The Bread of Heaven Lie flat
Breathing deep within the Flesh
Housed in the olives of a Virgin
Waiting to flourish the World

Rivers of Joy is in the Ocean of Flesh
Streaming forth to be released in
Order to flood the World with Blessings
From the Clouds of heavens

God's Holy Promise in the words
Of the Prophets of Old stands
In Awesome Fulfillment in the
in the Precious Womb of a Maiden

Let Praises ever Sing on
The Lips of Mortal Men in Honor
Of the Womb that our Savior
Find its resting Place in the World

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Pondering Tidbits of Truth - December 5, 2003 [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.

Father Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.

“The secondary purpose of the grace which the priest receives at ordination is the sanctification of the faithful. If the priest has the care of souls, he has a special obligation to strive for holiness of life because of his duty toward the Mystical Body of Christ. In no other way will he be able to sanctify the souls committed to his charge or avoid the dangers of the world which are not to be found in a monastery. (Cf. St. Thomas, loc. cit.)

The priest must be a man of prayer, mortified and humble. His wisdom and prudence must be supernatural, and his intention must always be upright and pure. He must possess that strength of will which is born of great charity and zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He should never revolt against adversity, and in all his work he should have Christ's interest at heart, not his own. (Cf. Phil. 2:21.) ‘For we are the good odour of Christ unto God, . . .the odour of life unto life.’ (2 Cor. 2:15-16). ‘Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.’ (2 Cor. 4:10). That is to say, the priest must share not only in the priesthood of Christ but also in His state of victim to the degree determined by the Will of God for the saving of the souls committed to his care.”

(From *The Priest In Union With Christ*)

Frank Moriss

“The Sunday Christian is no real Christian at all. The Christian vocation is a seven-days-a-week, 365-days-a-year one. The men and women of God's People are called to do whatever they can do

in service to Christ and His Church. Marking their labors with the highest virtues their faith inspires, they carry Christ wherever they go, including the marketplace of everyday life which is the special realm of the laity. It is impossible truly to keep God's day holy if one does not attempt to sanctify the weekdays which belong to the world and its cares.”

(From *Heralds of Christ in the Marketplace*)

Rev. M. Raymond, O.C.S.O.

“We moderns shrink from pain; we shun all that can afflict body or mind. We have forgotten that we were saved by the Body's agony and the Mind's torture. We have forgotten that the problem of evil was solved by ropes, whips, and thorns, nails that were pounded through the flesh of God and by three hours of anguish such as no other human has or ever will know. We have forgotten that pain has a sacred purpose; that all suffering can be and should be sublimated into Sacrifice - His Sacrifice. We have forgotten that we are Christians — members of a Body whose Head is thorn-crowned! We have forgotten that since there is sin, there must be suffering that will atone.”

(From *God, A Woman, and the Way*)

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2013/12/pondering-tidbits-of-truth-december-5.html>
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Snapchat and all that [at makingthetrek]

I had a few different friends post a recent article on Snapchat and the dangers it poses; you can read the article [HERE](#). I also saw a recent similar article on [Catholicmom](#). (The actual article escapes me, but they regularly have great updated “app” articles to keep me in the loop and are my GO-TO source on all apps and tech stuff). Articles such as these wake me in the middle of the night filled with fear, anxiety and dread. Paralyzing dread and all-kinds of wild, fear-based planning to keep my children cocooned and protected from every hidden danger ever known or unknown. Makes for a super restful sleep. Not.



However, we must LIVE our life. Pray without ceasing and learn from our mistakes and move on to live another day. We must teach our children to do the same thing. No easy task in this day and age of insta-everything with no youthful mistake or regret left undocumented (to which I say daily “Thank you, JESUS, that we did not have the internet when WE were growing up”).

In this techno age there will always be a Snapchat. As soon as we parents catch on and log in, there’s a new app that’s hot and drawing the kids in by droves. We can uninstall, remove tech devices, forbid cable, internet usage, friends, etc, etc, etc. To what extent though? What choices are we left with? We have to do something and whatever we do will have a result, good, bad or ugly. We, as parents, can choose avoidance or we can face it head on. Don’t hide your head in the sand; choose to put on your gear and prepare for battle: protect your children through education and preparation. Agree or disagree or take it with a grain of salt, here’s our approach:

Lead by example. Kids learn by mimicking us. I only need to listen in on a disagreement between kids to hear how I REALLY need to work on my intonation and patience with them. It ain’t pretty. Same goes for tech stuff. If your face is constantly on your phone and every text, status update and ‘Gram is a lead-in for most conversations it might be time to step back. Let me introduce you to the “silent” feature on your phone and/or removing social apps or scaling back. Phone free dinners are mandatory in our house and so is participation in daily “highs and lows”. Sometimes it’s all we can do to get through dinner without a free for all, but expectations are there and are

observed.

Knowledge is power and as parents we are called (like it or not) to be abreast of this technology, so dig in and find a few websites to regularly check in and learn about apps and how to navigate them. And for the love of Pete, find a spot to put down all your usernames and passwords, because these apps are like rabbits...the more there are...the more there are.



Knowledge is
Power

Communication is key. Regular conversations about life, plugged and un-plugged are key. We don't home school (and I applaud ALL who can and do) and as a result our kids are privy to a WIDE variety of people, lifestyles and situations in their public schools, friendships and extracurricular activities. Much is cringe-worthy and the teach-able moments are never-ending, however, my personal approach continues to evolve from lecture giver to observer and navigational assistant in managing these moments. A constant work in progress, I assure you. (Hubby is often far more about keeping it simple in explanations: truthful but short and sweet). It's getting easier for me though and when our 10yo daughter is trying to explain the friendship she has with a sweet boy as a "friend with advantages", I quickly correct her to the correct phrase of "friends with benefits" and explain that since that means a friend who you have sex with and no special relationship and that is ABSOLUTELY NOT the way to describe THIS friendship, she is at once shocked and understands that sometimes we all need clarification. (In truth, this boy is a friend, who happens to be a boy, that she can talk with like her girlfriends and at 10 it's such a unique phenomenon she isn't sure how to classify him. I let her know that "friend" is purely acceptable and applicable.) Would you not be so blunt? Perhaps not. However, I am all about honesty and saying it like it is; beating around the bush is just crap.

Participation and being present. I personally struggle with this in our daily busy-ness. We both work full-time, our kids are in school all day, our oldest works, we have a variety of kid activities, church, etc. It's busy, from morning coffee to passing out after evening prayers. The importance of chatting about our day (mentioned above during dinner) and addressing any concerns or just planning out dreams and enjoying newfound passions are crucial to a kid's security and growth. It doesn't take a whole evening, but a few FOCUSED minutes on a kid speaks volumes for days. You don't need to look much further than any number of crash and burn famous kid moments (or maybe even some you know personally) to see the link between parent and kiddo is nonexistent or shaky at best.

After a long-story-short, my summary is this:

1. Set the example. Modify Ghandi's quote to fit your family and "BE the change you want to see in your children/marriage/family".

2. Stay informed. Be aware. Learn the trends. If we are all about it, it loses its luster and excitement and the shock/thrill loses its power.
3. Talk. Talk. Talk. And then talk some more. Communication is key in marriage, parenting and life and it is CONSTANT.
4. Be present. Listen. Ask. Listen. Learn.

Bottom line is, they are kids. They are navigating childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. They will screw up 1000 times over and they need us present to help them untangle those unfortunate moments of growing up. We can hope they will avoid the bullying, sexting and variety of other fears we know lurk daily and we will do the best we can to protect them. At the end of the day, the education we can provide for them in the school of life is the best chance they have.

Isaiah 41:10

*‘Do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,
Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’*

This contribution is available at <http://makingthetrek.wordpress.com/2014/01/01/snapchat-and-all-that/>
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Living Life WITHOUT God [at {In}Complete Catholic]

I have some family members, who do believe in God but has never attended any church of any kind. I feel so sad for them. They do not know what they are missing.....they do know they are missing something but can't see the one thing that could turn their lives around!!! One of my family members will not stop talking about the tragedy that happened to them. They go on and on and on about it. I've tried to listen many times but that fact of the matter is they need to deal with it, work through, and forgive. They choose not to do any of that instead they are angry, unhappy, and take their frustration out on everyone. I did ask this person if they liked being angry all the time they said NO, but they still hang on to it. I for one don't need to hear the horrible details over and over. I asked them if they ever considered forgiving that person and letting it go.....of course I already knew the answer to that a resounding NO. I told them that they needed to do this and they would feel better about everything. I also told them to pray about it and that got them to laugh about it. WOW! There must be a payoff in hanging on to this for so long. They don't want to let it go they have let this one thing, this tragedy shape their entire life. How sad. I pray that one day they will be free of this bondage that they have let spiral completely out of control. Part of the problem is this person is in the midst of several enablers which just feeds the fire. I can't imagine letting the evil one win on a daily basis but that is exactly what is happening. I do know for a fact that these particular family members rely on horoscopes to tell them what their day, week, year is going to be like. They dabble a bit in "white witchcraft" they have claimed they are Wicans, and they conjurer up the dead to speak to them. They invite Satan into their lives and then wonder why things turn out the way the do.....I want to scream at them and tell them that they need to wake up and smell the coffee, they are not going to get anywhere until they stop inviting Satan in and turn their hearts to God.

I guess all I can do it pray for them...and I do but I just have a problem being around that kind of thing. I love my family members, but they are a little off their rocker. If only they could see the light. I do encourage them to go to church I don't even care if it's the Catholic church or a Protestant church just so they go and get fed the word of God! As I see it they are searching for something but they need to look in a different direction. Quit playing the "victim card" all the time. Count what blessing you have....pray often, and turn your head, hearts, and ears to the only One that can change your life.

This contribution is available at <http://incomplet catholic.blogspot.com/2013/12/living-life-without-god.html>
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6 Boring, Unoriginal, but Absolutely Essential New Year's Resolutions [at Aleteia: The news of the world from a Catholic perspective]

Your old pal 2013 is almost gone (good riddance!); bring on 2014! We are *mere hours*

from a new year: a chance for a fresh start, when you can turn over a new leaf, put on a new coat of paint, brew a new pot of coffee, upgrade to a new phone. If 2013 had problems, take heart: you have overcome 2013 (or at least survived it). Next year is going to be better!

But hold on there, turbo. Things don't just get better on their own. No, no, you need to be intentional. You need to be organized. You need a good old fashioned *New Year's Resolution*

Now, you could try that new diet fad, or renew that gym membership you never used in 2013. But that's so 2013. You need something more appropriate for 2014 - you need something radical. And I just so happen to know of six New Year's Resolutions that are so powerful, so revolutionary, that if you successfully implemented just one of them, you'd change your life. Implement all six, and your friends won't recognize you anymore. So put on your seatbelt, set down your phone, drive to where you're going, park the car, and then pick your phone back up (don't look at your phone while you're driving!): here they are, in the order that I wrote them: **1) Pray**

: The Bible tells us to “

[pray without ceasing](#)

.” Are you doing that, yet? If not, you have room for improvement.

With prayer, we have the opportunity to commune directly with the Almighty God of the Universe, the Creator of Everything, the One Who Is, Love Itself. He is also our Father who wants to hear our needs and wants to help us. Don't know where to start? Jesus had [good advice](#)

2) Read the Scriptures, Church Fathers, and the Catechism

: The Bible is the Word of God, or, as the Catechism

[puts it](#)

, “the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.” Read that a

second time. Now let that sink in. Why we should read the Bible should be self-evident.

The [Church Fathers](#)

are not the Word of God, but they are important since they bear witness to the faith of the early Church. You'll be inspired in their love of God, be amazed at the continuity of the Church over such a long period of time, and deepen your knowledge of the faith. (

Warning for Protestant Christians: reading the Church fathers may lead you to the Catholic faith

.)

The [Catechism](#)

is an authoritative summary of the Church's faith. Want to know where the Church stands on just about any issue? You'll probably find it there.

3) Evangelize

: There are only two possible final outcomes for every human soul: eternity in heaven with God, or eternity in hell. Jesus is our only hope for gaining the former and avoiding the latter. And I mean our

only

hope. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus (

[John 14.6](#)

). There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we are to be saved (

[Acts 4.12](#)

).

If God has been so loving as to show us the way of salvation, our love for others should naturally compel us to share the Good News with them. Also, Jesus [commanded](#)

us to evangelize.

4) Avoid Sin, Cultivate the Virtues

: One might say that this sounds simpler than it really is, but actually it really is this simple. God

has provided us the grace we need from Christ in the Sacraments. Our consciences can give us a pretty good idea of what's right and wrong. The Church can give us guidance in those areas that are hazy or controversial. Then we just have to... decide to avoid sin and to cultivate the virtues. There's no other secret.

5) Serve

: The unborn need saving, the starving need food, and the weak need protection. Whose job is it to do these things? Your job. Our job. Everyone's job. Whether we serve those in need will determine

[whether or not we go to heaven](#)

6) Go to Mass

: At Mass, we join with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to learn from the holy Word of God, we get to unite ourselves with the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ which is mysteriously made present, and then we receive Christ himself, consummating our eternal bond of love. There's nothing we can do that's more important than Mass.

This contribution is available at <http://www.aleteia.org/en/lifestyle/article/6-boring-unoriginal-but-extremely-important-new-years-resolutions-4980743784628224>

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When Children Became People [at Sky View]



When God became a child he not only redeemed the human race, he revealed the true dignity of children. To be sure, the Christ-child in swaddling clothes did more to advance the cause of children than most historians and sociologists care to admit. By entering into human childhood with his divinity fully intact- and experiencing all of the joys and challenges of childhood –he became their advocate. And during his public ministry, when our Lord said “let the children come to me” and then bade his disciples to become like children, he, at the same time, reminded the world that children are people too; that they were admirable qualities in children that all should aspire to.

You might think this is a no-brainer: “Yea, children are people; so what?” But we forget what the coming of Christ meant to the status of children. You see, in the ancient world children were considered to be property; something to used and dispose of at will. For this reason, they lived in an atmosphere of sexual abuse and violence. Indeed, the unbaptized world, by and large, was not child-friendly at all. And if you take a look around you, you may notice that the post-Christian world is really not that different; that children are dehumanized in much the same way with the practice of abortion, the growing acceptance of infanticide, and often reported incidents of sexual abuse among minors in the media.

If we but consult the past, we can anticipate the future. And what does the past tell us? Before Christ, children were not people; at least in the eyes of the world. In his book,

When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity

, author O.M. Bakke draws our attention to just how callous adults were toward children. Indeed, an appalling indifference was quite prevalent in the most civilized parts of the ancient world. In fact, there were very few legal and social protections for children.

For instance, the father of the house was the arbiter of whether his children lived or died; whether they were cared for or abused; and whether they were kept or sold. Bakke adds, “Children and slaves were the father’s property, just material objects. To a very large extent, he could treat his

wife, his children, and other household members as he pleased, without any fear of legal consequences.” This, of course, gave sanction to violence against children and sexual exploitation.

Lloyd de Mause, a source referenced in the same book, reminds us that what we call “abuse” in our day was mainstream phenomenon in the antiquity. He said, “[T]he child in antiquity lived his earliest years in an atmosphere of sexual abuse. Growing up in Greece and Rome often included being used sexually by older men.” In ancient Greece, home of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, man-boy sexual relationships (this was called

ephobe

love) were far from being taboo or considered “abusive,” rather, it was a social rite of passage in Greece.

Kenneth Dover, author of a book on homosexuality in ancient Greece, gives us four key insights about this socially accepted man-boy relationship:

(1) that most homosexual activity among free urban citizens in Greece took the form of pederastic relationships between adult men and boys aged twelve years and over; (2) that such relationships were considered normal and natural; (3) that neither ethics nor legislation forbade or penalized this form of sexual activity...(4) that this form of homosexual activity was seen as noble, as a natural part of growing into adulthood....”

This coldness towards children on the part of adults-

and even parents

-in the ancient world derived, at least in part, from the high mortality of rate among children. Approximately 50 percent of children in the ancient world died before the age of ten. With this probability, parents often expected at least some of children to die in the early years. Such an expectation fostered in parents a kind of detachment from their children. Sadly, in pagan antiquity there was no religious belief to offset this unfortunate development.

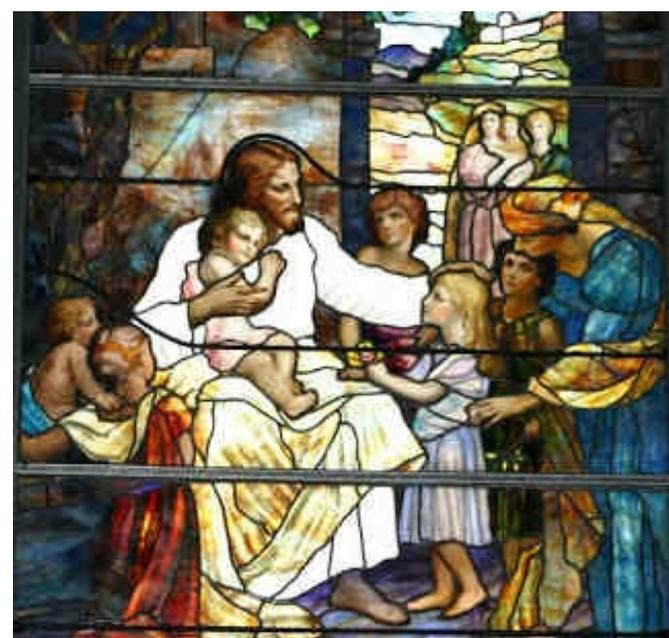
The fact is that children were seen as a liability because of their vulnerability and their inability to reason. As Bakke argues, “Children were not only considered to be weak in the sense that they lacked logos [i.e. the ability to reason]. The Romans held that they were physically weak, particularly vulnerable, and exposed to sickness.”

For this reason it was not uncommon for people to see children as a sacrifice, a burden and a mouth to be feed. Even the widely known Roman philosopher, Cicero, exhibited an appalling indifference towards the death of his granddaughter. He even referred to her as a “thing.”

Naturally, this indifference towards children led to the common practice of abortions, infanticide and “baby exposure” (i.e. literally, throwing babies away...taking them out to the garbage).

Without blinking an eye, another Roman philosopher by the name of Seneca justified the killing of post-born babies under the guise of “reason.” He said, “We drown even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal. Yet it is not anger, but reason that separates the harmful from the sound.”

Sure enough, archeologist Lawrence E. Stager and his colleagues saw evidence of this practice about two thousand years later in one of his excavations in Italy. He said they made “a gruesome discovery in the sewer that ran under the bathhouse...the sewer had been clogged with refuse sometime in the sixth century A.D. when we excavated and dry-sieved the desiccated sewage, we found [the] bones...of nearly 100 little babies apparently murdered and thrown into the sewer.”



With this historical context in mind, we can better appreciate what Jesus Christ means to the dignity of children. He took their lot in this world and retrieved it from the sewer. How often have we heard the words spoken by the angel Gabriel to the St. Zachariah (Lk 1:17) in the Temple that the Messiah will “turn the hearts of fathers toward children”?

The promise that fathers would turn their hearts toward their children upon the arrival of the Christ is taken from the book of Malachi. And have we ever asked ourselves what that passage means? It would stand to reason that father’s hearts were not turned toward their children; that somehow their hearts were not in the right place; that their hearts had grown cold toward them in the absence of grace. But when father's hearts turn away from children, society follows suit.

Unfortunately, ancient pagans chose to focus on the limitations of children, thus casting them as a liability to society when in fact they were the very opposite:

the future of society and a blessing from God

! What was overlooked was that the more children there were the more hands existed to assist with labor, the more minds there were to invent and the more souls there were to love.

In contrast to the ancient pagans, the early Christians revolutionized the way the world looked at

children. Scripture reminded the people of God that children were heaven's blessing; that from conception to natural death children they are, as Pope Pius XI would say, a "true microcosm, a world in miniature with a value far surpassing that of the vast inanimate cosmos." Just as the slave was equal to his master at the foot of the altar, so too children were endowed with equal dignity to their parents. After all, they were created by God, for God and in the likeness of God just as their parents were. This is biblical truth is the basis and surest guarantee for human rights and the dignity of life.

What is more, the early Christians saw to it that all who would aspire to follow Christ had to become like little children; this, in order to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, all that was noble about children, such as their innocence, unquestioning faith and simplicity, were raised high for the world to see. And in so doing, men and women learned to see children as people; something that was quite foreign to the ancient pagans.

The crèche, or any Nativity display for that matter, takes on great symbolic value in our day. After knowing how children were treated in the unbaptized world, the following words from the prophet Isaiah will never sound the same to me: "For a child is born to us, a son is given us."

The views and opinions expressed in this post are my own
and not necessarily reflective of
any organization I works for.

This contribution is available at <http://catholic-skyview-tremblay.blogspot.com/2013/12/a-child-is-born-to-us-when-children.html>
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A Pattern for my Pebbles [at The Breadbox Letters]



In honor of today's feast, I am re-posting the following from our archives:

In the third century, Tertullian wrote that the blood of the martyrs is seed for the Church. It was seed that God planted from the beginning. St. Paul endured imprisonments, beatings, stoning; St. John was exiled on the island of Patmos; St. Peter was allegedly crucified upside down.

It all began with Stephen.

"Those who listened to (Stephen's) words were stung to the heart; they ground their teeth in anger at him. Stephen meanwhile, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to the sky above and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. 'Look!' he exclaimed, 'I see an opening in the sky, and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand.' The onlookers were shouting aloud, holding their hands over their ears as they did so. Then they rushed at him as one man, dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses meanwhile were piling their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. As Stephen was being stoned he could be heard saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' He fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And with that he died." (Acts 7:54-60)

Surely his acute view of reality buffered Stephen's agony as stones were hurled at him. He was given grace appropriate to the situation, just at the moment he needed it.

I like to remember this. When I face a trial, God is there. He gives me just the glimpse of Him that I need, exactly when I need it. I know this through faith, and I know it from experience. God stands ready with what I need.

I have never been pelted with physical stones, but I've endured a few pebbles. Smirks and snubs for living and speaking the truth of God. I like to remember that Jesus told us to expect nothing

less.

"You will be hated by all on account of Me." (Matthew 10:22).

I pray to remember the example of Stephen. What a grace that the words of this first Christian martyr were written down: leaving, in effect, a pattern for all who would come after him. He looked at God, not at the situation. He prayed. He forgave. And his actions were witnessed by one who would turn, in time, to God.

Stephen's pattern for dealing with stones is just as much a pattern for the pebbles.

Look to God.Pray.Forgive.

And God stands ready with what we need.

Painting: Giorgio Vasari, Martyrdom of St Stephen

This contribution is available at <http://thebreadboxletters.blogspot.com/2013/12/a-pattern-for-my-pebbles.html>
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Don't Stop Believin' -- the Magic of Christmas [at Mercy Me!]

We all know Christmas is about an innocent baby born in a manger. But for me, what embodies the spirit of the season this year has to do with a 49-year-old man who will be getting out of prison this week.

I know that doesn't make you all warm and fuzzy the way your footed pajamas and hot cocoa by the fire does.

I get that.

The birth of our Savior is the greatest story ever told, not to mention it has baby lambs in it too. There's no way I can compete with that.

Certainly, the man in prison is no Christ-child.

He is an addict.

He is an ordinary Joe. Well, kind of anyway.

What I mean by ordinary is he made a mistake, and how much more ordinary can you get than making mistakes – it seems to be at the essence of our humanity.

I guess what is unique about his mistake, unlike so many of mine, is it landed him in prison.

Thirteen years ago Joe was arrested for buying cocaine for personal use, and was charged and sentenced as a trafficker. His punishment was 20 years with no chance of parole.

Kind of harsh.

The world is full of addicts though. It seems everyone's addicted to something — drugs, fame, possessions, power and oh, how I could go on. So, Joe is kind of ordinary that way.

Joe is one of six boys whose family grew up next door to a dear friend of mine. Their moms were best friends for 40 years. Even the way my friend described her childhood, that Joe was so much a part of, was kind of ordinary. They carpooled together, teased each other, and played with all the other kids until way past dark.

When he was arrested and given such a severe sentence, my friend said all she heard everyone say was “what a shame.” Two years later, when talking about their beloved friend Joe, old friends would still say “what a shame.” Six years later... “what a shame.”

I guess she got tired of the hopeless sentiment and decided to do something about it.

Joe had already made appeals all the way to the Florida Supreme Court. Each one was denied. The only hope he had was clemency from the Governor to commute the duration of the sentence, which was basically the equivalent of a snowball's chance in hell.

My friend and his brothers took that chance.

So I guess that's when the ordinary became extraordinary.

She had worked tirelessly on trying to get him out of prison since 2006.

When I say tirelessly, I assure you she was tired.

She has three kids and didn't have time to dedicate driving six hours round trip in a day to meet with clemency aides. But she did.

Several times.

Perhaps as remarkable, she had another friend who had no ties to this family working just as diligently on the case.

As the years passed I saw how much time, effort and prayer, that she and the others involved put into the effort to get Joe out of prison.

Finally after six years, Joe was granted a clemency hearing. Sadly, Joe's mom passed away less than a month before it would be held. After learning of her death from a prison guard, Joe was not allowed to attend her funeral.

The tragedies of it all, hardly made me think of the word *believe*.

Yet when his hearing was finally held, I was visiting New York City where over the Macy's on 34th Street was a huge sign in brilliant white lights that said just that word.

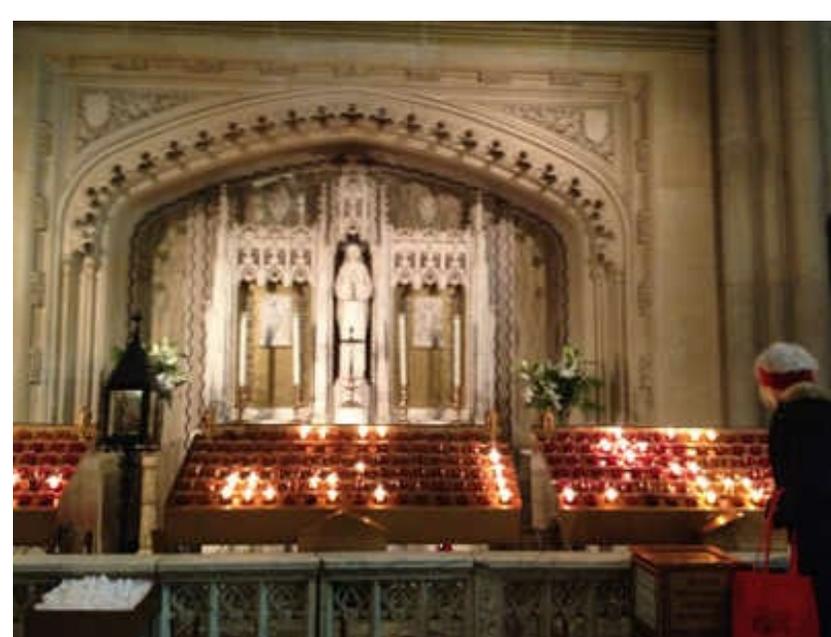
Believe.



Earlier that morning, I was rushing to get dressed. We were going to meet another couple that traveled with us for breakfast, and then a day of...well, *everything*. We were in New York City, after all.

At 7:39 a.m. I received a text from my friend back in Florida with the novena prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe. I was just one of the many prayer warriors she had commissioned to pray on behalf of Joe. His clemency hearing happened to be on the feast day of our Lady of Guadalupe, and it was the last day of our novena.

I told my husband that I wanted to go by St. Patrick's Cathedral and light a candle for Joe, his family, my friend, and all of the other people who worked so hard to get to this point and yes, for his mama too.



While I was putting on my umpteenth layer of clothing for the *clearly we-are-not-in-Florida-anymore cold*, my husband pulls out his Ipad.

The clemency hearing was going to be broadcast on one of those boring government channels that no one watches, and my husband (who is clearly not boring) knew where to find it!

Suddenly, I was nervous.

The night before I left for New York, I saw my friend and she was anxious about the upcoming hearing. I told her she had to have faith – she had to *believe*. I told her that this was about so many more people than Joe. God had a plan for each person that had been affected. However it ended up would be just another part of His plan.

We all talk about letting go and trusting God, but it's scary as hell when you have to do it. She had done her diligence. I had no doubts about that. Truly, it was time to let it go.

Still, I was scared for her. I knew the chances were slim. This Governor had never commuted a sentence before.

As the clemency hearing played out in real time, I intermittently watched and walked away. I was anxious. I couldn't imagine the pressure they were all feeling. For the first time ever, I thought how hope is a terrible thing.

I didn't want to believe. Believing was causing me to pace and cry and fix my eye make up all over again. Believing caused a pit in my stomach that wouldn't have been there if I could just walk away.

I listened to Joe's good friend tell the Clemency Board and the Governor about how he visited him in prison and brought his children along on many of those visits. He spoke of the time his daughter was asked to choose the catholic she admired most and she chose Joe – the prisoner.

Apparently she saw Joe embody Christ, not a cocaine addict.

One of Joe's brothers spoke of how his parents never regretted the time they spent visiting him in prison, sometimes driving as long as 10 hours to see him. He also read a letter from Joe accepting responsibility for his crime and its consequences. He asked for mercy.

Mercy. That is the word Joe used, if you can *believe*.

My eyes pooled again when my friend's 80-year-old mother spoke, after her 8-hour commute to the Florida Capital, about the little boy of her best friend. I couldn't think of a more beautiful way to honor the legacy of their friendship than speaking with a mother's love on behalf of the friend she had just buried.

She said Joe was a good man who gave in to the temptation of drugs. She testified that indeed he has a good network of friends and family who will support his transition out of prison, but that his mother has an even greater network of friends both on earth and in heaven that would make sure he stays on the right path.

I didn't think there was much that the Governor could say about that.

The last speaker on Joe's behalf was the woman who became familiar with the case through my friend. I am just going to quote her because there is no way I could say it better.

“As I understand it, clemency is mercy or favor or grace, and a relief from a just penalty. I am reminded of that definition during Advent as we approach the commemoration of the birth of Christ.”



So, I thought some about the birth of the baby in the manger and all the years and generations of believers who have come and gone since then; all those who brought petitions, pleas and pardon before Him since that momentous night in the stable – THIS was just one more in a flurry of billions which He has heard.

But He heard.

The Governor did what he had never done before. He granted clemency to this man who made a bad a choice, and paid the price for 13 years for that choice. This man, who had lost so much more than his freedom behind bars, will be set free

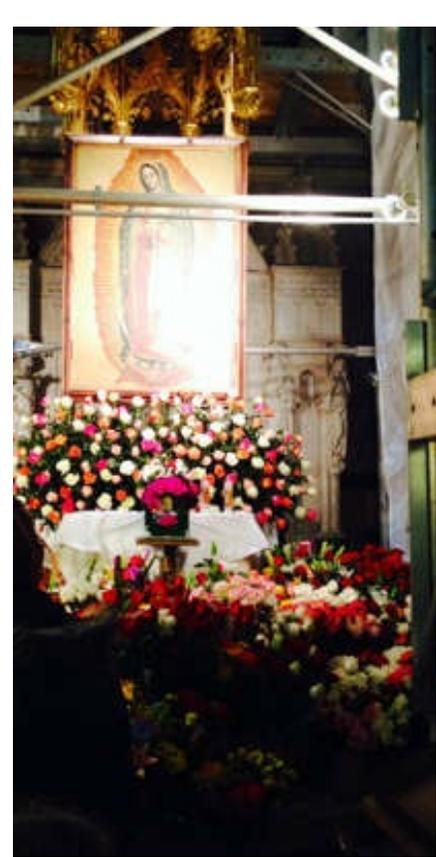
Joe will be given a second chance – just in time for Christmas.

Extraordinary.

After turning off the live broadcast, we went to a crowded bagel joint for breakfast and I kept crying tears of joy, gratitude and humility from the goodness of it all. And, the beautiful thing about crying in New York, is no one tries to hug you or ask if you are okay. They just leave you alone to cry salty tears over your toasted bagel with salmon spread.

This just made me love New York all the more.

I went to St. Patrick's Cathedral and like an eager child, I lit a candle at the first altar I could, just besotted with gratitude. Afterward, I visited the many altars at the beautiful cathedral including the one to our Lady of Guadalupe which was covered in flowers and surrounded by people who had come to honor her feast day.



It was a beautiful sight and how grateful I was to have prayed for her intercession on behalf of this man. The power of prayer is as strong as ever, reminding me that even though I may just be a speck on this universe, I am a speck who God thinks is quite special.

That night I had yet another religious experience – rock and roll.

No, not the Elvis kind –the eighties kind. You know Guns N' Roses, Whitesnake and Quiet Riot.

We went to see *Rock of Ages*, the musical where they glorify 80s rock music.

It was almost impossible for me to sit in my seat as the talented cast belted out songs from the decade of my youth. It was both hilarious and irreverent. I enjoyed every single minute of it.



The final song of the production embodied not only the spirit of Christmas, but that of faith.

It was the song by Journey – *Don't stop believin'*.

As it filled the theater, with its pleas to *hold on to that feeling*, I was on my feet and celebrating that feeling of faith that had been renewed in me.

It's easy to stop believing.

One day you realize there is no Santa Claus. There are no talking snowmen or elves or reindeer.

That magic is gone, and we think that it is okay because it's childish and silly and there is no room for that in our grown up, real world lives.

But it's in our adult lives that faith is paramount.

We have to keep believing even when the odds are against us. We have to stay soft and open to the gifts that await. Gifts that have nothing to do with Macy's, despite the brilliant sign it boasts this time of year.

This Christmas, for the first in such long time, I can say that I *believe*.

While I have never lost faith in that baby boy born in a manger with the sweet lambs nearby, I did somehow lose the magic of this time of year which has nothing to do with lists and everything to do with faith in the people in my life.

The people who stand by you at your darkest hour, who petition for you, who forgive you, who believe you are worth a second try, who get what it's like to emulate the life of Christ no matter the time of year, those are the people who make the season magic, merry and bright.

So if you have not found that magic yet, don't stop believing. I promise it's out there.

And if you are fortunate to already *believe*, find a way, no matter what life throws at you, to hold on to that feeling.

Each of you who have taken the time to read, comment and share have added to the magic of my year. May your faith in God, goodness and mankind spread with each kindness you share, so that others may *believe*. Merry Christmas to you!

Categories: [catholic](#), [God](#), [inspiration](#), [religious](#), [spiritual](#), [Uncategorized](#) | Tags: [believe](#), [catholic](#), [Christmas](#), [community](#), [Faith](#), [friendship](#), [God](#), [holiday](#), [hope](#), [life](#), [New York City](#), [Our Lady of Guadalupe](#), [prayer](#), [Prison](#) | [Permalink](#).

I am using my 40th birthday as an impetus to embark on mid-life mission to perform spiritual and corporal works of mercy— that unlike aging promise to defy gravity.

This contribution is available at <http://mercyme40.wordpress.com/2013/12/19/dont-stop-believin-the-magic-of-christmas/>

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The Scandal of Pope Francis [at Doubting Thomist Art & Faith]

With Pope Francis being awarded Time's "Person of the Year", I thought I'd reflect on just

who

won that award. You see, there are, in fact,

three

Pope Francis!

Back in the 14th Century was a period of Church History known as the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy, followed by the Western Schism. The pope, due to certain political circumstances, had fled Rome and settled in Avignon, France. Unfortunately, successive popes became more and more influenced by the political intrigues of the French Monarchy, until they were no more than puppets of the kings of France. Through the tireless work of such saints as St. Catherine of Siena, the Pope was finally persuaded to move back to the Holy See and rule again from Rome. The French Cardinals were none too pleased by this, and set up a second conclave to elect a French pope to reign from Avignon (it didn't help that the rightful claimant of the See of Peter had become a paranoid, crotchety, and maniacal sort of fellow that nobody liked at all!); and the two popes excommunicated each other. While the world was trying to figure out whether the Roman Pope or the French Pope was really the real pope, a third pope stepped up and excommunicated them both! Of course, throughout this whole debacle, there was only one true Pope, and two "antipopes", but for a while, it was very hard to tell which was which.

Today, on a far less extreme scale, politically-speaking, there is a similar dynamic. While there aren't three different people claiming to be the pope, since the election of Pope Francis, there are three different versions of who the pope is, being claimed by various groups of people. This was put in crystal clear perspective for me recently by none other than the late, great G.K. Chesterton, who wrote a story seventy-seven years ago that captures the scandal perfectly.

((Warning: Spoilers!))

In the final volume of the Father Brown stories,

The Scandal of Father Brown

, the first and eponymous story tells about how Father Brown got involved in a scandalous affair in which a woman had left her husband for a famous poet. A newshound had happened to follow the trio to a trysting-place in Mexico where Father Brown happened to be. The newspaperman saw Father Brown give his hotel room to the woman in order that she could escape and run off with the

handsome gentleman while the aging other man tried vainly to keep the handsome man out of the hotel. The newspaperman assumed the aging, portly fellow was the woman's husband, and the dashing handsome man was the romantic poet. When he saw that Father Brown had aided the woman in uniting with the man outside the hotel, he assumed that Father Brown was not only condoning, but aiding in adultery, and reported it immediately to the newspaper back home, and so the story went out about the scandalous priest who defied the Church to aid in this horrible sin. In fact, the handsome fellow turned out to be the husband, and the portly fellow was the poet, and the husband had come to win back his wife, who had grown bored herself of the poet's company (because poets themselves are not nearly as romantic as their poetry, after all). And while the jealous poet tried to keep the husband out, Father Brown helped the wife climb out his window into her husband's waiting arms. The chagrined newspaperman contacted the paper immediately upon hearing the truth, but the damage had already been done. Chesterton ends the story thus:

Not much more than half an hour had passed, between the time when Rock [the journalist] had telephoned to say the priest was helping the poet to run away with the lady, and the time when he telephoned to say that the priest had prevented the poet from doing precisely the same thing. But in that short interval of time was born and enlarged and scattered upon the winds the Scandal of Father Brown. The truth is still half an hour behind the slander; and nobody can be certain when or where it will catch up with it. The garrulity of pressmen and the eagerness of enemies had spread the first story through the city, even before it appeared in the first printed version. It was instantly corrected and contradicted by Rock himself, in a second message stating how the story had really ended; but it was by no means certain that the first story was killed. A positively incredible number of people seemed to have read the first issue of the paper and not the second. Again and again, in every corner of the world, like a flame bursting from blackened ashes, there would appear the old tale of the Brown Scandal, or Priest Ruins Potter Home. Tireless apologists of the priest's party watched for it, and patiently tagged after it with contradictions and exposures and letters of protest. Sometimes the letters were published in the papers; and sometimes they were not. But still nobody knew how many people had heard the story without hearing the contradiction. It was possible to find whole blocks of blameless and innocent people who thought the Mexican Scandal was an ordinary recorded historical incident like the Gunpowder Plot. Then somebody would enlighten these simple people, only to discover that the old story had started afresh among a few quite educated people, who would seem the last people on earth to be duped by it. And so the two Father Browns chase each other round the world for ever; the first a shameless criminal fleeing from justice; the second a martyr broken by slander, in a halo of rehabilitation. But neither of them is very like the real Father Brown, who is not broken at all; but goes stumping with his stout umbrella through life, liking most of the people in it; accepting the world as his companion, but never as his judge. ("The Scandal of Father Brown", *The Scandal of Father Brown*, G.K. Chesterton, pp. 22-23)

So today, we have the Media reporting (woefully inaccurately) the words of Pope Francis. His award in the Times was predicated upon their strange notion that he is going to overturn centuries

of Catholic teaching in order to make things like abortion and gay marriage acceptable. Liberal people in the Church who desire such changes are eating it up and lauding the Pope for being so "new" and "different". Reactionary traditionalist Catholics are deploring the Pope's image as though the image is the reality, and using it as an excuse to support their conspiratorial notions that drive them further out of the Church itself. Meanwhile, faithful Catholics chase after these erroneous stories, filling comboxes and posting Facebook statuses about "what the pope really meant", and they themselves, fatigued by their perceived need for constant vigilance, begin to wish the Pope would, in fact, just be more "Pope-like". In all of this, Pope Francis is compared and contrasted with Pope Benedict, pitting the one against the other as though some seismic shift in the Church has actually occurred. Round and round this dance goes, like a dog chasing its tail.

And yet, like the "real" Father Brown, there is a real Pope Francis, a man who is who he is and does what he does, without any very great concern about what the world thinks of him. He is a man who is very obviously much more concerned with what Jesus thinks of him. Whether one thinks such an attitude is right for the most visible religious figure on earth to have, the fact remains that Pope Francis will continue to go "stumping with his stout umbrella through life, liking most of the people in it; accepting the world as his companion, but never as his judge."

To my mind, that is the real lesson that the Pope is teaching the world, and especially us Catholics. The Church isn't going to radically change. In fact, many places throughout the world are experiencing "The Francis Effect", with people returning to the Church (in particular the Sacrament of Confession) in large numbers precisely because of the witness of this Pope. The Media is going to spin its own agenda, and yes, we need to always be prepared to give a defence of the hope that we have as Christians (cf. 1 Peter 3:15), but we have that hope precisely because Jesus has promised that the Gates of Hell

will not

prevail against His Church!

The Church survived the Western Schism, and every other scandal before that and since. It will survive Pope Francis being named Person of the Year! And let's be honest:

he deserves it

; even if not for the reasons Time gave it to him.

So keep calm and Catholic on!

This contribution is available at <http://doubting-thomist.blogspot.ca/2013/12/the-scandal-of-pope-francis.html>
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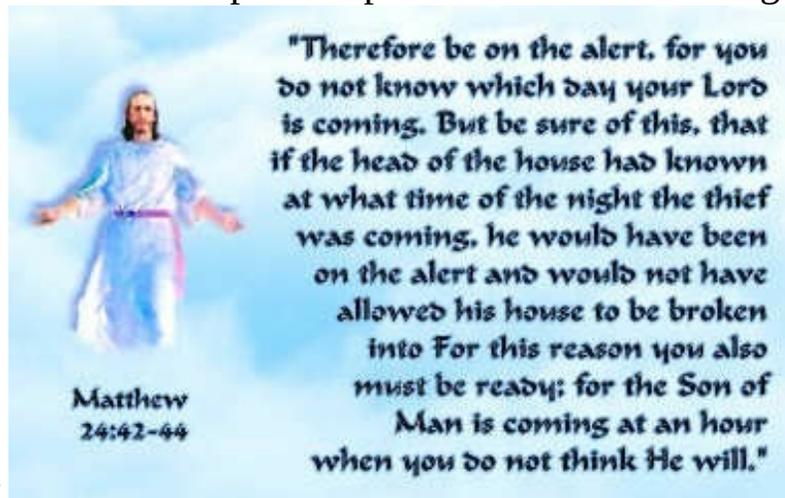
Be Ready for the Unexpected [at The Wayward Catholic]

December 1, 2013

[Paul Roy Faith](#), [Reflections](#) [Leave a comment](#)

Today in the Catholic Church is the first Sunday of Advent, which is also the beginning of the liturgical year. Advent means basically the two comings of Jesus, his birth and when he comes again at the end of time. Today's Gospel reading is Matthew 24: 37 – 44 where Jesus tells us how we must be ready for the second coming, the end of the world.

He relates how in Noah's time no one knew the end was coming, they danced and laughed and sinned without a care in the world, and the next thing they knew, it was all over, they were washed away in the flood. Like those in Noah's time, we also will not know when this will happen and Jesus warns us to be ready. He uses the example of a person who knows a burglar is coming but



doesn't stay awake to be ready.

How do you look at this passage? Do you take this to mean you need to live as much as you can to get as much done in your life as you can before the end? Do you think it means it is time to party and enjoy yourself? Or do you take it to mean, just be ready to go by making peace with the Lord? Wouldn't this be a good time to simplify your life as Jesus suggests we do, when he asks us to give up all our possessions to follow him? How about when he tells us not to store up our treasures in barns like the wealthy farmer did? (Luke 12:16)

Although many have tried to predict the end of time, we don't know the "time or the hour." We should be prepared at all times to be called before God.

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day

Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. – Mt 24: 37 – 44

Be ready for the unexpected. Be like Noah and start walking up the ramp to the ark.

This contribution is available at http://thewaywardcatholic.com/2013/12/01/be_ready_for_the_unexpected/
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Regarding the Modalities of Prayer [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

Prayer and the Word are the two essential elements for spiritual growth in the New Year. In that regard, I present the following article on prayer that I pray will incite my readers to go deeper into the Word of God and prayer.

Your brother in Christ ... Bartimaeus

Regarding the Modalities of Prayer

(excerpted from “Thy Kingdom Come” a book on the personal reflections of Jorge Madrid Sr., Posted with the author’s assent)

The Essence of Prayer is in Personal Dialog with God

Why Prayer is Essential

Prayer is the most essential component of a Christian’s spiritual life after conversion because it is prayer that enables a personal communion and dialogue with the Divine Mystery and from that interaction we derive the spiritual energy needed to grow spiritually. No relationship can function or grow without a person-to-person interaction or dialogue. This is especially true of the relationship we have to the Father through Jesus His son. However, because of our own limited understanding and experience of what is meant by “prayer”, we limit the capacity of our prayer life and correspondingly our capacity to develop the intimate personal relationship the Lord desires of us.

Although the religious environment in which we are raised provides us with our initial exposure and training in prayer, it also tends to limit us because the teaching of prayer is constrained by the cultural and self-imposed limitations on the teachers themselves, be they parents or ministers. The limitations are understandable from the standpoint that we all are conditioned by our culture to specific worldviews regarding the human experience and how we are to relate to God. Our religious conditioning is no exception. If we are exposed only to verbal prayer in our families and churches to the detriment of non-verbal or silent modes of prayer then breaking out of that conditioning will require some degree of prayer and effort on our part and some competent direction on the part of our pastors. One of the reasons silent or mental prayer (contemplation or meditation) is not emphasized in some bible-oriented religious traditions is that there is not a clear example of this type of prayer in the scriptures. Since we are not given any insight as to how Jesus prayed when he went off to be alone with the Father we only assume that he prayed verbally in the same manner as he prayed in public or with his disciples,

Prayer and its Modalities

It is clear from scripture, however, that there are different modes of prayer, depending on the nature of the circumstances which impel our prayer. Communal or group prayers by their very nature need to be verbal while personal prayers are not limited to the verbal mode. We are so conditioned by our communal prayers that we think the Lord can hear us only if we express ourselves in words. Just as when we use words there is a distinction between our prayers of petition, intercession, thanksgiving, praise, dedication so also our intimate prayers when we focus only on our relationship with the Father have distinct modes of silent expression. Jesus said that this latter type of prayer (meditation) we are to do in our “closets” in private. I think we may safely assume that since God knows our hearts intimately this type of prayer need not be verbal at all. In fact, as we grow in our intimate relationship with the Lord, words may actually get in the way and a silent contemplation or meditation provides a more ample channel of communication between our spirits and the Lord of Glory. For this reason when we pray it is best to have separate times for our verbal prayers and our more intimate personal dialogues with the Lord (yes, we can have dialogues with Him, especially in times of silent prayer)

Another of the limiting concepts we have of prayer is that we incorrectly assume that its main intent is for us to communicate our needs to the Father so that he can intervene to help us in our time of need. Without diminishing the importance and validity of that type of prayer, we must understand that the Lord already knows our needs. While Jesus has told us to “ask and you will receive”, what the Father primarily yearns for is a personal relationship with us from which our worship will spring. Our dilemma is that, even when we are aware of this, we find it difficult to enter into intimate one-on-one prayer with the Lord because, as soon as we enter into prayer, our mind begins to bring up our list of needs that has been constantly running through our minds.

This reaction on our part, reminds me of our little granddaughter who lives with her parents in a city very distant from us. We usually phone them each week to see how they are and to share briefly in the events in their lives. On one occasion my wife them called to discuss arrangements we were making to visit them. Suddenly, our daughter interrupted what she was telling my wife to announce that our three year old granddaughter wanted to speak with her. My wife immediately greeted our grand daughter and began to tell her about how excited we were in anticipation of our visit. The three year old responded with a stream of excited baby-talk which Laura could hardly understand. When she asked our daughter what she was so excited about, she told her that our grand daughter was trying to tell grandma what she wanted for her next birthday. Our proposed visit was not so much the cusp of her excitement as was the gift she wanted to receive.

For us as grandparents we were thrilled that our granddaughter was aware that grandma and grandpa were the source of some of her most beloved gifts. We in turn are blessed in giving her the gifts she desires because it enhances our relationship with her. We know that when the emotion of the moment passes, the intangible bond of relationship will have been enhanced and strengthened so that as she grows she will relate to us in terms of her relationship and not for what she can receive from us.

What Our Initial Approach to Prayer Should Be Like

The Lord similarly, loves to listen and respond to our prayers for His help in our lives, but his ultimate desire is that as we grow spiritually we will begin to relate to Him personally for who He is and not just for the answered prayers and gifts he continuously provides. We need to value His person more for who He is than for what He provides.

What we need to do when entering our intimate prayer state is to begin with praise and worship, preferably praying in the spirit, then after spending a quiet time meditating on His Person and His Presence, we quietly slip into quality time with our Father sometimes without even uttering a vocal prayer but merely contemplating the beauty of the Lord! Then, just as Jesus said, *“Seek to give yourself totally to the Father so that His will may be manifested in you and through you; and all the things that you thought were so important will be added unto you without your even asking”* [\[1\]](#).

Of course, there will always be needs or circumstances where we need to ask the Father to come to our assistance. However we will find that our prayers of petition come more naturally if we come before Him from the position of our on-going relationship rather than from a “what’s-in-it-for-me” approach. In fact you will find that as your dialogue with our Heavenly Parent improves He will ask you or suggest the things for which you should pray. It is from this standpoint that we should approach experimenting with the various modalities of prayer. As our intimacy with the Lord grows we will also come to understand more clearly His will for us. This in turn will help us when we pray in intercession or petition because now when we pray we will be praying in HIS will. His Word tells us in general His will for us but it is through intimacy with Him that He reveals His will for specific circumstances in our lives.

My Witness Regarding Prayer

I must admit, for most of my life I was not a praying person so the Holy Spirit really had to work on me regarding prayer. Even now I consider myself only a raw novice when it comes to prayer. Prior to the point of my spiritual revitalization, the term “prayer” only meant to me repeating a scripted or memorized prayer and directing it heavenward. Although, I was aware of other forms of prayer, I had never had the incitement to attempt anything beyond the routine prayers that I recited at either liturgical functions or at desperate moments in my life.

But when I received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit all of this changed. Suddenly I became so hungry for God and His Word I literally “devoured” the scriptures for almost a year. At the same time my prayer life was jump-started by God’s grace so that the mere recitation of scripted or memorized prayers no longer satisfied the thirst I had for intimacy with My Father in Heaven. Once I had tasted of the Lord, I could not find enough ways to satisfy my thirst for Him and His Presence.

It was only after my spiritual awareness was activated that I began to see that prayer is not so much what you do, or say or think but a giving of our very self to God through our spirits. That means that by investing all that we do with a spiritual motive everything in our lives can be turned into prayer and so the modalities and depth of prayer may be as varying as the colors of the

rainbow. In this way every prayer no matter how simple is heard by God as long as it is the sincere, humble, and loving cry of our hearts (spirits) as we approach the Lord's throne truly seeking His Face.

Entering Into Intimate Prayer and Moving in the Distinct Modalities

If one wishes to progress in intimate one-on-one prayer there is one key principle to remember: purity of motive. Jesus in giving his disciples the principles of the Kingdom said, "*Blessed are the pure in spirit*[\[2\]](#) *for they shall see God*"[\[3\]](#). For me this meant that the primary driving motive for intimate prayer must first be a sincere desire to Glorify God by unreservedly giving myself totally to Him, especially during our times of intimate communion. I found that when I came to Him in this type of prayer with tainted or ulterior motives, my time with Him was not spiritually satisfying.

We should not enter our intimate prayer time motivated by what we expect to gain from prayer, even spiritually. If we enter prayer merely to enhance our spiritual experiences, we are attempting to come before the throne of God with tainted motives. When we come before the Deity, we come as we are: broken, repentant sinners washed in the Blood of Jesus with no merit of our own, only our desire to "*present (y)our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is (y)our spiritual worship*"[\[4\]](#)

If one keeps this principle in mind, the modality of prayer, although important in itself, is secondary. The modality of the moment should be the one with which the Holy Spirit is leading you to enter at a particular time and place. If you follow the Spirit's leading you will be in the will of God and if your motives are pure you will enter before His Throne. Notice that I use the term "modality" rather than "method". This is because, although methods of prayer can be helpful at first, they can quickly become a hindrance because we become bound to them out of habit and thus lose the freedom to respond to the Spirit as He would lead us. The Holy Spirit does not minister to us with regard to any method to which we might resort. Rather he ministers to us out of our freedom, our willingness to move wherever and however He is leading us. The term "Modality" speaks more of an entry approach to prayer which leaves us free to move in any direction the Spirit chooses.

The modality of prayer we choose is something we as humans need to get ourselves out of our "selves" and flowing into our "spirits". Thus the modality we use is usually relative to the circumstances out of which our prayer arises. However, once the "pump" of our spirits have been primed to the flow of the Holy Spirit we need to let our prayer be guided by Him and not by any particular "method" of prayer.

As I have mentioned before, silent contemplation before the Presence is itself a prayer and almost certainly the purest form of prayer. But such a modality of prayer comes as a gift from God and usually comes only after we have nurtured our relationship with Him in the various modalities of prayer we have been introduced to through our religious upbringing, namely the various forms of mental and vocal prayer. Being a novice at prayer I certainly am not qualified to comment on such

modes of prayer as : Centering Prayer, Lectio Divinae, The Labyrinth, or The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. There are many excellent references regarding these which I will not mention here because they are so numerous. I have listed some of them in the bibliography.

My intent in the next section is merely to reflect on some of my experiences with personal modalities of prayer that had a lasting impact on my own prayer life. I hope, through this testimony, to show how the Holy Spirit working through our yielded human spirit, melds and blends the various modes of our prayers, however simple, into a harmonious spiritual symphony before the Lord. A spiritual symphony that produces fruit to His Glory! Praised be His Holy Name!

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(Note by Bartimaeus: the section referred to by the author will be presented in another posting on this website. Please consider this as merely an introduction explaining what the author considers as “the Modalities of Prayer”)

[1] My own paraphrase of the citation from Matthew 6:33

[2] All of man’s motives flow from his spirit

This contribution is available at <http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2013/12/28/%c2%a7-regarding-the-modalities-of-prayer/>

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To Veil or Not to Veil [at A Catholic Newbie]

The Advent Veiling Linkup Project #veilproject



Life of a Catholic Librarian

Filling My Prayer Closet

En's Estuary

Yael

To tell you the truth, this is a question that never even crossed my mind as a possibility until I stumbled upon Cristina's [Filling My Prayer Closet blog post](#) where she wrote about her decision to wear a veil to Mass during Advent. On first read, I was like what???? My mind automatically turned to women wearing veils because they have to, because they must hide their bodies and because they are inferior to men. Not a good veil association :).

But I stopped and checked my heart and looked the picture of her in her veil. It was beautiful and offered a deeper adoration of God, something I desire. I wanted to wear one...

When I thought about it more, I realized that most every picture of Mary portrays her wearing a beautiful veil (in fact, on my blog she's wearing a blue one!). Why would I not want to imitate Mary? If it's good enough for the Mother of God, well then certainly it's good enough for me.

I spent a while perusing [Liturgical Time's Veil Shop on Etsy](#), admiring the veils and thinking about which I would choose. But when I thought of myself at mass wearing the veil, it made me very uncomfortable. Not really because of the negative association (because after all I would be CHOOSING to wear the veil), but because I feel like people might see it as an attempt to draw attention to myself, which is not at all what I want to do. I want to be modest, unnoticed, adoring, simple. Would this call too much attention?

My other concern is that certain members of my family feel I am a bit too "fanatical" about Catholicism :). I walk a fine line of adding to my activities a little at a time, so it's not too much at once. I'm afraid this might be a bit too dramatic.

I have thought about it and prayed about it, and while my heart wants to wear a veil, my head just isn't sure. I finally came up with an idea to wear a veil on Christmas Eve. It seems like a proper time to honor the Blessed Mother on the eve of the day that she delivered our Lord and a reasonable way to "dress up" for Christmas mass. It might be less noticed by all parties and I could see how I liked it.

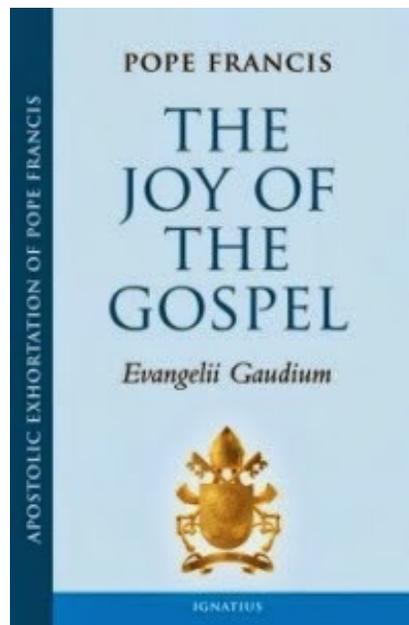
What do you think? Would you consider wearing a veil? Be sure to visit [Life of a Catholic Librarian](#) and [Filling My Prayer Closet](#), who are both challenging women to consider wearing a veil for Advent as part of their Advent Veiling Project. They are also giving away five different veils throughout Advent. If I win one, I just might consider that a sign from the Blessed Mother that

she wants me to “veil.”

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/to-veil-or-not-to-veil/>
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The Joy of the Gospel [at The Alternate Path]



Let us renew our confidence in preaching, based on the conviction that it is God who seeks to reach out to others through the preacher, and that he displays his power through human words. (EG, 136)

Pope Francis calls preachers of the Word to a sacred remembering of the power of preaching. Throughout Scripture we find, time and time again, God choosing to work with human beings in all of our limits to proclaim his plan and his grace. From Moses through the Old Testament prophets to John the Baptist to the apostles and to the great missionary Paul – there is a need that the Word of God be proclaimed and the need continues in our day! People need to encounter the Word of God in all its richness and challenging beauty!

I find it interesting that Pope Francis, after making this bold and challenging proclamation, then moves to the almost seemingly mundane character of dialogue and conversation as the foundation of preaching.

It is worth remembering that “the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his people, a dialogue in which the great deeds of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the covenant are continually restated”. The homily has special importance due to its eucharistic context: it surpasses all forms of catechesis as the supreme moment in the dialogue between God and his people which lead up to sacramental communion. The homily takes up once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people. The preacher must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren. (EG, 137)

To help unpack this move toward dialogue and conversation I would like to quote in length a section out of Fr. Robert Barron's book, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism*.

At one point in his book, Fr. Barron is exploring intersubjectivity as a component of true knowledge.

For the Christian, authentic knowledge comes not through isolation or objectification but rather through something like love. Therefore it should not be surprising that the fullness of knowing would occur through an intersubjective process, with knowers, as it were, participating in one another as each participates in the thing to be known. If, as the Johannine prologue implies, the ground of being is a conversation between two divine speakers, it seems only reasonable that the search for intelligibility here below takes place in the context of steady and loving conversation.

In a lyrical and compelling section of "Truth and Method," Hans-Georg Gadamer reminds us that a healthy conversation is something like a game. As two players surrender to the movement and rules of the game of tennis, they are carried away beyond themselves in such a way that the game is playing them much more than they are playing it. In a similar way, when two or more interlocutors enter into the rhythm of an intellectual exchange, respectful of its rules and of one another, they are quite often carried beyond their individual concerns and questions and taken somewhere they had not anticipated, the conversation having played them. The fundamental requirement for this sort of shared self-transcendence is a moral one: each conversationalist has to surrender her need to dominate the play for her purposes; each must efface herself, not only before the others but, more importantly, before the transcendent goal that they all seek. To have a conversation is humbly to accept the possibility that one's take on things might be challenged or corrected, that the other's perspective might be more relatively right than one's own.

Holding these thoughts with those of Pope Francis we can see that preaching has as its true basis the very common and universal reality of honest conversation and dialogue rather than the latest and currently trendy fad, philosophy or method. Rather than belittling the preaching task these depth explorations of conversation and dialogue show forth the true richness of understanding afforded this important and critical task!

*The homily takes up once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people. The preacher of the Word, along with the people of God, is himself caught up in this ongoing conversation between the Lord and his people yet he has a truly unique and important role to play. The preacher must allow himself to be caught up in the game and must constantly fight against the temptation to *dominate the play* for his purposes. This is a renunciation and an asceticism that every preacher must develop in his life. If a homily is too self-referential then it has missed the mark and probably most of the people of God have already tuned out. To make use of the above analogy – a person cannot play a good and rousing game of tennis if he is more concerned about how he looks rather than the game! To preach is to enter into the great game of*

the dialogue between our risen Lord and his people!

The proper progress of the dialogue though is dependent upon respect of the rules given. Here are a few that I find present and have sparked for me in the thoughts quoted above.

Fundamentally, the dialogue is Christ's and not my own. If my preaching is to mean anything then somehow Christ must speak through my words to the heart of those who are gathered. This means that I must learn how to get out of the way and not try to *dominate the play* for my own agenda or emotional needs. My experience has taught me that this is not as easy to do as one might think but *it is essential*.

For my preaching to be effective I must be in dialogue with Christ myself and I must be in dialogue with the community of the Church. The preacher must know Christ and allow himself to be known by Christ fully. *The preacher must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren.* In order to know his community, the preacher must be with his community. He must have the "smell of his sheep" on him as Pope Francis has famously said. When the community is not known there is always the danger of preaching at people rather than continuing the great dialogue that the Lord has begun. Would it not be an extremely sad thing for a preacher to come before the gates of heaven only to there be brought to the realization that his preaching was more of an interruption and distraction to our Lord's great dialogue with his people rather than an assistance?

If authentic preaching has as part of its basis knowledge of the community then homily preparation is just as much about visiting the homebound, celebrating with families, serving the poor and weeping with those who mourn as it is about studying the Scriptures and reflecting on Biblical commentaries. The preacher who shuts himself away in a rectory or a parish office is stunting his preaching potential and doing a great disservice to his community. Christ dwells in the midst of his people, especially the poor. Whenever and wherever Christ is encountered deeper understanding of Sacred Scripture is gained.

The homily is the ultimate moment of catechesis but it is not just catechesis. Scriptural studies and commentaries can provide good and worthy insights for preaching but preaching should not just become a lecture on Scripture or the faith. There are appropriate moments for that (i.e. Bible Studies or Faith formation) but it is not the homily. The homily is not meant to give facts about Jesus or his time or a period in Israel's history; the homily is meant to help people encounter Christ, right now in their lives!

Another rule – the preacher must learn how to allow the dialogue to carry him! *As two players surrender to the movement and rules of the game of tennis, they are quite often carried beyond their individual concerns and questions and taken somewhere they had not anticipated, the conversation having played them.* In humble prayer, the preacher must first encounter the Word and let the Word speak to him, once something sparks then the preacher must let the Word carry him to where it wants him to go. Again, this gets into not trying to dominate the conversation. We

need to trust that the Word of God is indeed active and alive and we need to trust that the Word will take us to what the community needs to hear. I believe that it is the author Annie Dillard who once reflected that if you want to learn where a bee hive is (and hence find the honey) then you must first learn how to follow bees. The preacher must learn how to be guided by what sparks for him from God's holy Word. The preacher must learn how to follow bees.

Some thoughts for consideration as this ongoing reflection on the importance of preaching to the great task of evangelization continues...

This contribution is available at <http://thealternatepath.blogspot.com/2013/12/notes-on-preaching-2-joy-of-gospel.html>
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Angelic Children and "Hedge-Priests" [at V for Victory!]



Msgr. Robert Hugh Benson (1871-1914)

Some of the most worthwhile literature, both fiction and non-fiction, is that which leads us to other worthwhile literature. I came upon something interesting today while re-reading Hillaire Belloc's absorbing *Characters of the Reformation*. In his chapter on Elizabeth I of England, Belloc mentions a pamphlet by "Hugh Benson." This did not mean much to me when I first read this chapter a few years ago; but now that I know who Robert Hugh Benson was, this reference caught my attention. Robert Hugh Benson was an Anglican priest who entered the Catholic Church in 1903 and was ordained to the Catholic priesthood the following year. He was also a celebrated author: his excellent novel, *Lord of the World* (1907) is a fictionalized account of the coming of Antichrist.

The [Benson pamphlet](#) in question, published in 1906, compares and contrasts the death of Mary Tudor with that of her sister, Elizabeth, half a century later. It is shocking, at least to anyone brought up on the mythology of "Bloody Mary" and "Good Queen Bess," and sobering, and provides much food for meditation.

The Death-Beds of "Bloody Mary" and "Good Queen Bess"

By Robert Hugh Benson, M.A.

" 'BLOODY MARY,' a sour, bigoted heartless, superstitious woman, reigned five years, and failed in everything which she attemptcd. She burned in Smithfield hundreds of sincere godly persons; she went down to her grave, hated by her husband, despised by her servants, loathed her her people, and condemned by God. 'Good Queen Bess' followed her, a generous, stout-hearted strong-minded woman, characteristically English; and reigned forty-five years. Under her wise and beneficent rule her people prospered she was tolerant in religion and severe only to traitors; she went down to her grave after a reign of unparalleled magnificence and success, a virgin queen, secure in the loyalty of her subjects, loved by her friends, in favour with God and man. "

So we can imagine some modern Englishman summing up the reigns of these two half-sisters who ruled England successively in the sixteenth century -- an Englishman better acquainted with history-books than with history, and in love with ideas rather than facts. It is interesting, therefore, to pursue our investigations a little further, and to learn in what spirit each of these two queens met her end, what was the account given by those about them, what were the small incidents, comments, and ideas that surrounded the moments which for each of them were the most significant of their lives. Death, after all, reveals what life cannot; for at death we take not only a review of our past, but a look into the future, and the temper of mind with which we regard eternity is of considerable importance as illustrating our view of the past. At death too, if at any time, we see ourselves as we are, and display our true characters. There is no use in keeping up a pose any longer. We drop the mask, and show our real faces.

We should expect, then, if we took the view of the ordinary Englishman, that Mary Tudor would die a prey to superstition and terror; the memory of her past and the prospect of her future would surely display her as overwhelmed with gloom and remorse, terrified at the thought of meeting God, a piteous spectacle of one who had ruled by fear and was now ruled by it. Elizabeth, on the other hand, dying full of honour and years, would present an edifying spectacle of a true Christian who could look back upon a brilliant and successful past, a reign of peace and clemency, of a life unspotted with superstition and unblameable in its religion; and, forward to the reward of her labours and the enjoyment of heaven. There will be no mummery or darkness round her bed, as round her sister's.

Let us turn then to history and see how far our expectations are justified by it.

Our first extract will be from Clifford's Life of Jane Dormer. This lady was one of Mary's greatest

friends, a woman of extreme simplicity and beauty of character, who, after refusing many other offers, finally married the Duke de Feria, after her mistress' death. She was in Mary's service during all the years of her reign, and was actually with her when she died.

The Death-bed of "Bloody Mary."

"When it chanced that Jane was not well, as that she could not well attend upon the Queen, it is strange, the care and regard her Majesty had of her, more like a mother or sister, than her Queen and mistress. As in the last days of this blessed Queen, she being at Hampton Court and to remove to London, Jane having some indisposition, her Majesty would not suffer her to go in the barge by water, but sent her by land, in her own litter, and her physician to attend her. And, being come to London, the first that she risked for was Jane Dormer, who met her at the stairfoot and told her that she was reasonably well.

"The Queen answered, 'So am not I,' -- being about the end of August, 1558. So took her chamber and never came abroad again. . . .

"It pleased Almighty God that this sickness was her last, increasing daily, until it brought her to a better life. Her sickness was such as made the whole realm to mourn, yet passed by her with most Christian patience. She comforted those of them that grieved about her, she told them what good dreams she had, seeing many little children, like angels, play before her, singing pleasing notes, giving her more than earthly comfort, and thus persuaded all ever to have the holy fear of God before their eyes, which would free them from all evil, and be a curb to all temptations. She asked them to think that whatsoever came to them was by God's permission, and ever to have confidence that He would in mercy turn all to the best."

[Life of Jane Dormer; sometime Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen, afterwards Duchess of Feria; by Clifford, quoted by Miss Stone.]

Cardinal Pole, who was ill at the same time as the Queen, and who died a few hours after her, thus writes to Philip a few days before her death:

"During her malady, the Queen did not fail to take the greatest care of herself, following the advice of her physicians" (quoted by Miss Stone) and Monsignor Priuli, the Cardinal's friend and secretary, thus writes of the illness and death of them both: --

"During their illness they confessed themselves repeatedly, and communicated most devoutly, and, two days before their end, they each received Extreme Unction; after which it seemed as if they rallied, and were much comforted, according to the fruit of that holy medicine."

One of the things about which Mary was most anxious, was the future of England. It must be remembered that, at that time in English history, a sovereign had a great deal of influence in the appointment of a successor. Perhaps it is not possible to say that Mary could have prevented Elizabeth's succession, but, if she had been the spiteful and revengeful woman that her enemies suppose, she could at least have given Elizabeth a great deal of trouble, by bequeathing the crown to her husband or to some other Catholic claimant. But she was simple enough to trust Elizabeth's word, and to believe that when that lady promised solemnly to preserve the Catholic faith, she meant what she said. After all, Elizabeth had been regular in hearing two Masses a day for at least a year or two; she had protested her orthodoxy even with tears, again and again, and Mary preferred to trust her sister, and to bequeath the crown to her rather than to treat her as one in whom it was impossible to put any confidence. Here is Clifford's account of the matter: --

"Queen Mary in her last sickness sent Commissioners to examine her [Elizabeth] about religion, to whom she answered, 'Is it not possible that the Queen will be persuaded I am a Catholic, having so often protested it?' and thereupon did swear and vow that she was a Catholic. This is confirmed by the Duke of Feria's letter to the King, who in this sickness of the Queen visited the Lady Elizabeth. He certified him that she did profess the Catholic Religion, and believed the Real Presence, and was not like to make any alteration for the principal points of religion." [Life of Jane Dormer, quoted by Miss Stone.] Elizabeth, as we know now, kept her word just long enough to secure her succession; she was crowned with Catholic rites by a Catholic bishop, and then immediately set to work to break her promise. She began by striking at the very heart of the Religion she had sworn to preserve, by her action in forbidding the Elevation of the Host at Mass, and so proceeded to re-establish the "Reformation principles" which she had explicitly abjured. Here is the account which Mr. David Morris B.A. , an historian of strong Protestant views gives of her energy: --

"Thus the Reformation was again the law of England and the work of Pole and Mary faded away. 'The nuns and monks were scattered once more, the crucifixes came down from the roodlofts

the Maries and Johns from their niches, and in Smithfield Market, at the cross-ways and street-corners, blazed into bonfires, as in the old days of Cromwell.' . . . These changes were not carried out without much opposition. . . . All the bishops, excepting the Bishop of Llandaff, refused the oath of supremacy, and were consequently deprived of their sees."

It was in this manner that Elizabeth observed her promise made to her sister. However, this is by the way; we must return to our subject.

Of the final scene of Mary's life we have a tolerably detailed account, taken down from the relation of Jane Dormer herself, who was one of the few friends who remained with Mary to the end. Most of her other attendants had already made their way to Hatfield, to pay their court to the Princess who would presently be in power. This account is an interesting comment on the way in which Mary's religion was a support to her in the crisis, and forms an agreeable comparison with the same element in her sister's death nearly fifty years later. Of course Mary's devotion in no way proves the truth of her faith it is only an evidence of her absolute and serene sincerity.

"That morning hearing Mass, which was celebrated in her chamber, she being at the last point (for no day passed in her life that she heard not Mass), and although sick to death, she heard it with good attention, zeal, and devotion, as she answered in every part with him who served the Priest, such yet was the quickness of her senses and memory. And when the priest came to that part to say, '*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,*' she answered plainly and distinctly to every one, '*Miserere nobis, Miserere nobis, Dona nobis pacem.*'"

"Afterwards, seeming to meditate something with herself, when the Priest took the Sacred Host to consume it, she adored it with her voice and countenance, presently closed her eyes and rendered her blessed soul to God. This the Duchess [Jane Dormer] hath related to me, the tears pouring from her eyes, that the last thing which the Queen saw in this world was her Saviour and Redeemer in the Sacramental Species, no doubt to behold Him presently after in His glorious Body in heaven. A blessed and glorious passage, '*Anima mea cum anima ejus.*'" [From Life of Jane Dormer, quoted by Miss Stone.]

Mary thought it her duty also, in common with most Christian people, to make some provision for the disposal of her body and her goods after her death -- again offering a comparison with Elizabeth's action. She had already impoverished herself with efforts to restore to the service of

God what her father had taken "to his own use"; and on her death-bed she made further dispositions in the same direction. In her will and codicil, every page of which she signed painfully with her own hand, she bequeaths her soul to the mercy of Almighty God, and to the "good prayers and help of the most pure and blessed Virgin St. Mary, and of all the Holy Company of heaven"; and her body to be buried at the discretion of her executors. She leaves large sums to the poor, to the Religious Houses which she had re-founded, to the poor scholars at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and to Hospitals, especially to one for disabled soldiers; she also leaves legacies to her ladies and her servants, as well as to her husband and executors. This will was entirely disregarded by Elizabeth, and lay, as Miss Stone remarks, in obscurity for over three hundred years.

So far, then, we are agreeably surprised. There is no terror of the future, or agonised remorse there is repentance, of course, and confession of sin and shortcomings, but that is scarcely to Mary's reproach. There is tranquil confidence in religion and the mercy of God; she encourages her friends, makes her will, trusts her sister, and gives up her soul during what was to her, throughout her life, the most sacred and holy action of the day. Whether or not her religion was true is not our affair now; we are only concerned with the way in which it was her support during her last moments, and even if we are not satisfied as to its objective truth, we can at least be satisfied with its power to uphold one who believed in it with all her heart. In this sense, if in no other, we can say, with Jane Dormer, "A blessed and glorious passage! May my soul be with hers!"

We turn now to

The Death-bed of "Good Queen Bess";

and, if we happen to be of the religion of that lady, and an admirer of her character and achievements, we shall expect to find her last moments marked with the same kind of incidents and aspirations as those of her superstitious sister. If a false religion can give peace and serenity, a true religion can do no less; in fact we might reasonably expect it to do a good deal more, considering the conspicuous advantages that it gave to Elizabeth, at any rate from a worldly point of view. We should expect, also, that a religion which claimed to be an improvement upon Popery should at any rate be free from superstition -- at least in the case of such a professor as the common-sense Elizabeth. Whether that was so or not we shall hear from Elizabeth's companions.

We begin with an extract from the account given by Lady Southwell, one of the women in attendance on her a few weeks before her death: --

"Her Majesty being in very good health one day, Sir John Stanhope, Vice-Chamberlain, came and presented her Majesty with a piece of gold of the bigness of an angel, full of characters which he said an old woman in Wales had bequeathed to her on her death-bed and thereupon he discoursed how the said testatrix, by virtue of the piece of gold, lived to the age of 120 years, and in that age, having all her body withered and consumed, and wanting Nature to nourish her, she died, commanding the said piece of gold to be carefully sent to her Majesty, alleging, further, that as long as she wore it on her body she could not die.

"The Queen in confidence took the said gold and hung it about her neck . . .

" Though she became not suddenly sick, yet she daily decreased of her rest and feeding, and within fifteen days she fell downright ill, and the cause being wondered at by my Lady Scrope, with whom she was very private and confidant, being her near kinswoman, her Majesty told her (commanding her to conceal the same), 'that she saw one night her own body exceedingly lean and fearful in a light of fire.' This vision was at Whitehall, a little before she departed for Richmond, and was testified by another lady, who was one of the nearest about her person, of whom the Queen demanded 'Whether she was not wont to see sights in the night?' telling her of the bright flame she had seen. . . .

Afterwards, in the melancholy of her sickness she desired to see a true looking -- glass, which in twenty years before she had not seen, but only such a one as on purpose was made to deceive her sight, which true looking-glass being brought her, she presently fell exclaiming at all those flatterers which had so much commended her, and they durst not after come into her presence. [LADY SOUTHWELL, quoted by Miss Strickland.]

While Mary sees heavenly children playing and singing about her bed, Elizabeth sees her own body exceedingly lean and fearful in a light of fire, and examines her looking-glass to see if she were really as beautiful as her courtiers declared. But to continue; Sir Robert Carey writes: --

"When I came to Court I found the Queen ill-disposed, and she kept her inner lodging; yet she,

hearing of my arrival, sent for me. I found her in one of her withdrawing chambers, sitting low upon her cushions. She called me to her, I kissed her hand, and told her it was my chiefest happiness to see her in safety and in health, which I wished might long continue. She took me by the hand and wrung it hard and said, 'No, Robin, I am not well,' and then discoursed with me of her indisposition, and that her heart had been sad and heavy for ten or twelve days, and in her discourse she fetched not so few as forty or fifty great sighs. I used the best words I could to persuade her from this melancholy humour, but I found by her it was too deeply rooted in her heart, and hardly to be removed . . . From that day forwards she grew worse and worse. She remained upon her cushions four days and nights at the least. All about could not persuade her either to take any sustenance or go to bed." [SIR ROBERT CAREY.]

And again, the French Ambassador writes to his master: -- [March 19.]

"(The) Queen Elizabeth (hath) been very much indisposed for the last fourteen days, having scarcely slept at all during that period, and eaten much less than usual, being seized with such a restlessness that, though she had no decided fever, she felt a great heat in her stomach and a continual thirst, which obliged her every moment to take something to abate it. Some ascribed her disorder to her uneasiness with regard to Lady Arabella Stuart; others to her having been obliged by her Council to grant a pardon to her Irish rebel, Tyrone. Many were of opinion that her distress of mind was caused by the death of Essex; but all agreed that before her illness became serious, she discovered an unusual melancholy, both in her countenance and manner.

[March 22.]

"The Queen of England had been somewhat better the day before, but was that day worse, and so full of chagrin and so weary of life that, notwithstanding all the entreaties of her councillors and physicians for her to take the proper medicine and means necessary for her relief, she refused everything." [DE BEAUMONT, quoted by Miss S.]

"Bloody Mary," then, lies in bed, hearing Mass each morning, receiving the sacraments with devotion and serenity, looking back indeed on a short life that had apparently failed, but to an eternal future which seemed full of hope: "Good Queen Bess," in the midst of honours and success, after a long and magnificent reign, does not sleep; she lies on cushions it is suggested by her friends that her melancholy may arise from having been compelled to pardon her enemy; and there

is no word as yet, of religion. It can scarcely, surely, be the past which she regrets! Has she not prospered in all to which she has I put her hand? Can it be death, judgement, and eternity of which she is afraid? And, if so, is it possible that the religion for which she has sacrificed her plighted word, has no comfort for her now?

Her visions, too! Her own body, "exceedingly lean and fearful in a light of fire," -- is that a mere superstition with nothing to justify it, or is it something worse?

Her own kinsman adds another terrible detail or two; let us hear them in Miss Strickland's words:-

"The [Lord] Admiral [Howard] came and knelt beside her where she sat among her cushions sullen and unresigned; he kissed her hands, and with tears implored her to take a little nourishment. After much ado he prevailed so far, that she received a little broth from his hands, he feeding her with a spoon. But when he urged her to go to bed, she angrily refused, and then in wild and wandering words hinted of phantasma that had troubled her midnight couch.

" 'If he were in the habit of seeing such things in his bed,' she said, as she did when in hers, he would not persuade her to go there' . . .

"When Cecil and his colleagues were gone, the Queen, shaking her head piteously, said to her brave kinsman --

" 'My lord, I am tied with a chain of iron about my neck.' The Lord Admiral reminded her of her wonted courage, but she replied, desponding:

" 'I am tied, I am tied; and the case is altered with me.' "

[MISS STRICKLAND.]

She was carried to bed soon, but again left it. The French Ambassador continues: --

"The Queen continued to grow worse, and appeared in a manner insensible, not speaking above once in two or three hours, and at last remained silent for four and twenty, holding her finger almost continually in her mouth, with her rayless eyes open and fixed on the round, where she sat on cushions, without rising or resting herself, and was greatly emaciated by her long watching and This morning the Queen's Music (i.e. the choir) has gone to her. I believe she means to die as gaily as she has lived. . . ."

[DE BEAUMONT.]

"The Queen hastens to her end, and is given up by all her physicians. They have put her to bed almost by force, after she had sat on cushions for ten days, and has rested barely an hour each day in her clothes."

[DE BEAUMONT.]

About this time Lady Southwell adds a significant story: --

"The two ladies-in-waiting discovered the queen of hearts with a nail of iron knocked through the forehead, and thus fastened to the bottom of her Majesty's chair; they durst not pull it out, remembering that the like thing was used to the old Countess of Sussex, and afterwards proved a witchcraft, for which certain persons were hanged."

[LADY SOUTHWELL, quoted by Miss S.]

Let Miss Strickland continue: --

"Lady Guildford then in waiting on the Queen, and leaving her in an almost breathless sleep in her privy chamber, went out to take a little air, and met her Majesty, as she thought, three or four chambers off. Alarmed at the thought of being discovered in the act of leaving the royal patient alone, she hurried forward in some trepidation in order to excuse herself, when the apparition vanished away. Lady Guildford returned, terrified, to the chamber; but there lay Queen Elizabeth, still in the same lethargic motionless slumber in which she had left her."

It is really rather appalling, -- this atmosphere of superstitious fear that lay round the Queen. Whether Lady Guildford was mistaken, or whether that uneasy spirit in some manner manifested itself in the gloom of the gallery, it is impossible to know. But at least we know the mood in which the Court found itself -- this Court which dared not run from this dreadful old woman as its predecessor had run from her sister, to pay homage to the rising sun.

As regards her attitude to her own Church ministers we have the following significant facts. "When she was near her end," writes Miss Strickland, "the Council sent to her the Archbishop of Canterbury and other prelates, at the sight of whom she was much offended, cholericly rating them, 'bidding them be packing,' saying 'she was no atheist, but she knew full well they were but hedge-priests.' "

Did she think then, one wonders, of men who were not "hedge-priests" of her making, but of a Church which claims to rule, not to be ruled by princes: a Church, too, to which she had promised allegiance and with whose rites she had been crowned -- men who under her orders had suffered a death, compared with which the "fires of Smithfield" were mercy itself, for no other crime than that of ministering to the souls of men the Word and Sacraments that were still all but universal in Christendom? Mary had, indeed, burned men for heresy, according to the laws of the realm; it had been left for tolerant Elizabeth, the champion of Private Judgement, to strip and disembowel living priests and laymen for the crime of allowing their Private Judgement to differ from her own. One cannot help wondering whether she now remembered Campion, Briant, Sherwin, and the rest -- and the rack, and the rope, and the butcher's knife, and cauldron; whether the thought crossed her mind that perhaps such men as these might have had a message to her soul that others could not have.

However, it was too late, and as death became imminent, even "hedge-priests" were better than none at all. At least they might soothe her for a few minutes, even if they could no more.

"About six at night," writes Sir Robert Carey, "she made signs for the Archbishop and her chaplains to come to her. . . . Her Majesty lay upon her back, with one hand in the bed, and the other without. The Bishop kneeled by her and examined her first of her faith, and she so punctually observed all his several questions, by lifting up her eyes and holding up her hand, as it was a comfort to all beholders. Then the good man told her plainly what she was, and what she was to come to; and though she had been long a great Queen here upon earth, yet shortly she was to yield an account of her stewardship to the King of kings. After this he began to pray, and all that were by did answer him. . . . The Queen made a sign with her hand. My sister Scrope, knowing the meaning, told the Bishop the Queen desired he would pray still. He did so for a long half-hour after, and then thought to leave her. The second time she made sign to have him continue in prayer. He did so for half an hour more, with earnest cries to God for her soul's health, which he uttered with that fervency of spirit as the Queen to all our sight much rejoiced thereat, and gave testimony to us all of her Christian and comfortable end."

For even such dumb signs as these, interpreted by Carey's charity, I suppose all sincere Christians must be thankful, but they are all the reassurance we can get.

There is no word of repentance or of her desire for God's pardon; there is no suggestion apparently from her or from any other that it would be at least seemly for a dying woman to receive what she would have called "the most comfortable sacrament of Christ's body and blood." No; the "hedge-priests" prayed long and loud by the bed; the Queen made occasional signs for them to continue; and the bystanders rejoiced at such a "Christian and comfortable end." That, then, was what the "Reformed Religion," the "glorious light" of which Henry VIII of matrimonial memory was the dawn and Virgin Elizabeth the full-orbed day -- this was all that it could do for her: and, at three o'clock in the morning, "Good Queen Bess" died and appeared before God.

As regards her care for the future and the disposition of her property, we read in Nichols's Progresses that "she made no will, neither gave anything away; so that they which come after find a well-furnished jewel-house, and a rich wardrobe of more than 2,000 gowns, with all things else answerable," -- which must have been a great satisfaction to all concerned.

But all this proves nothing?

Oh, no! it proves nothing!

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY, LONDON.

May, 1906.

This contribution is available at <http://v-forvictory.blogspot.com/2013/12/angelic-children-and-hedge-priests.html>

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On a Friday morning

Almost a year ago, on a Friday morning, I checked Twitter and saw that there were reports of gunshots near a school in western CT. I knew that [my sweetheart](#), who I was planning to see that evening and whose journalistic “beat” is that part of the state, would be speeding over there with his photographer to find out what had happened. For a brief second I thought “well, this is going to foul up my night” and for that naïve, selfish, stupid thought I will be ashamed for the rest of my life.

I kept up with the reporting all day, as he was part of local continuing coverage while national media streamed in to that small town. I refused to believe the reports of mass casualties until they were confirmed later that afternoon. There was no possible way it could be as bad as rumored. And then we learned it was that bad, if not worse.

Later, when the sun was down but it was still not quite night, I drove to a caroling gig. We sang carols for an hour in silly hats at a car dealership while guests reveled as if nothing had happened. On the drive home I put the news’ livestream on my phone so I could hear Robert’s voice. He talked about bodies piled up in classrooms, and I cried, knowing that there was no way that he could have seen that, wishing he hadn’t had to hear about it. I wished a little that I hadn’t had to either.

[My father apparently had the same thought, calling me moments later from CT to make sure Robert hadn’t been too close or seen anything gruesome. Before he asked after Robert, though, just after I answered the phone, he cried out “Where are you??” When I told him, he went on “your brother is right here...” and trailed off, without explaining his primal urge to account for all of his children in a crisis.]

Everything was horrifying that day, even from a distance, and I try in vain to revisit those few quiet moments before the shouting began, when we could sit with grief without [being told that what we were feeling and thinking were wrong](#). Those moments don’t last long anymore.

By the time I got home we were well into the shouting, and even with the distance of a year I’m not ready to be gracious about it. I understand relating tragedies to politics; for better or for worse, politics is one major way our nation creates change. I want to believe that our horror at the unthinkable drive us to argue, that the vitriol has at its root our rage against the dying of the light. But I can’t shake the feeling that some people like the fight, like to be right, and enjoy turning any cultural flashpoint into an opportunity for superiority.

I was not able to see my sweetheart that weekend. I had made food for us ahead of time, but ate it alone. He was supposed to go to a concert of mine, I gave away the ticket. I cried by myself, and cried because I knew he was processing this madness too, and I wanted to be with him.

[On Monday I had the worst Crohn's flare of my life. I threw up for 18 hours. I worried I'd have to go to the hospital for dehydration.]

I wish that telling my story made a difference. I wish that my grief and shock could honor people. I wish I didn't feel like writing out my experience is just as self-satisfying as sending one of the pallets of teddy bears that still fill warehouses all over CT.

When six months had passed, I couldn't believe it had only been that long. Some news – even that which doesn't touch us personally – shakes our worlds so much that it is hard to remember there was anything before the bottom fell out.



Maybe that's why we tell these stories of where we were and how we felt, to remind ourselves that there was a time before the brokenness. Maybe that's our futile way of trying to redeem the evil, by remembering that there is something we learned that day, something that changed us, and that maybe even made us more human.

As hard as we try, there is still an ice cold core of inscrutable evil inside the layers of warmth with which we have surrounded this tragedy. There are those who have lost loved ones, and for them this evil, that day, can never be redeemed. I don't know if our words honor them. I don't know what can.

The one thing I am convinced of is that confusion is the one appropriate response to an event that so violates our understanding of how the world is supposed to work. I wrote that evening and I write now because I am still bewildered, and because I hold out hope that even on our darkest days there is at least the promise of light.

By Paolo Costa Baldi (Own work) [[CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) or [GFDL](#)], [via Wikimedia Commons](#)

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Fulfillment [at warriorsworlddad]

With regularity the topic of love, especially God's Love for us, comes up in our C.C.D. class. My wife and I co-teach the seventh and eighth grades in a combined class. We stress that Love is a decision not a feeling. In doing so we try to combat what the media portrays as love. The kids are at the gateway of leaving behind childhood and taking their first steps toward being adults. As such we feel it is vital to arm them with a true meaning of what Love is as opposed to all the false mimics of the world.



As a husband and a father I also know that Love can be a feeling. I am blessed with a wonderful wife. We recently celebrated thirty years of marriage. We have eight children on Earth and one already in God's hands (we call her Kateri, she was lost very early in the pregnancy). My wife and children give me all I need for Joy and Fulfillment despite the world doing its best to bring despair and fear.

For years I heard that I had to love God more than my wife and my children and even more than myself. Loving God more than myself was not too big a deal, sometimes I got really down on myself. But once I got married I was the happiest man in the world. Before the wedding people asked if I was nervous. My response was, "NO – I'm doing what I want to do most in the world!" Later holding our first child, a daughter, in my arms I was lifted so high with joy and a sense of fulfillment that I doubted it was possible to feel happier. That feeling may have lessened a bit with the other children but not by much.

When my kids ran up to me and hugged me when I came home, Love was a feeling. At those times my joy with my wife and kids was so profound, that I could not honestly say that I loved God more than them. This did bother me for years but it was a fact. In prayer I would talk to God about it and admit it to Him. Why lie, He knows everything!

During Advent years ago I was able to sit in church in the evening all alone. The church was dark

except for the small light on the crèche. I knelt in the front row directly in front of the crèche and just stared at the scene. A sense of peace enveloped me and that peace filled me with the joy I received from my wife and children. My mind raced, Thank You Jesus for coming to save me. Thank You for COMING TO SAVE MY WIFE AND KIDS!

Inside my mind the lights came on.

I had every reason to love God more than my wife and kids because He saved them in a way I could never do.

In the past three months we have been to three funerals of friends and relatives. The past year would add another three if we count the funerals that have touched close friends and colleagues. Such things happen in life and of course you think about the inevitable for you and your family. Saint Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” I pray that someday my wife, children and I will all rest together in God. Contemplating on that thought brings peace and fulfillment. My wife and children will be totally safe, that is all I want. I will be totally safe. Thank You God! The possibility of losing my wife and kids before I die is too much to think about until I concentrate on their Hope, which is Jesus who said, “I go to prepare a place for you.”

So Love can be a feeling that is best described for me as fulfillment of my deepest desire, which is grounded in the Hope of Jesus and His promise. That desire is to share eternal peace with my family and friends in heaven with God.

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Pro-life witness in Argentina a few days ago: the toughness of nonviolence [at Leaven For The Loaf]

I was a kid when protests against the Vietnam War were in the news practically daily. An image sticks in my mind of a photo from back then: a young woman walking in front of a line of armed soldiers or National Guardsmen or riot police (all looked the same to me at that age), putting a flower into each gun barrel. It's odd, what one sees at age ten on the news, persisting in memory to this day.

No one was pointing a gun at the young woman, so her silent statement for peace cost her nothing. Her statement was worthwhile, but she wasn't at risk when she made it. I realize now the armed men in the photo were probably her age, scared to death themselves, under orders not to respond to provocation from demonstrators whose methods might have been more forceful than the young woman's.

Both sides chose nonviolence that day. Among the long list of things I've learned since age ten: nonviolence is a *choice*. It's not a feeling – that would be simple passivity. It's not necessarily pacifism, for one may embrace nonviolence while recognizing the right to self-defense. Nonviolence is a choice, and practicing it requires discipline and preparation.

Pro-life men in Argentina assaulted by abortion promoters

Some men from Argentina showed me nonviolence in action last weekend. They were praying outside the cathedral in their town, which was under threats of vandalism from abortion advocates gathered nearby for a conference. The abortion advocates confronted the men, who continued to pray. The men were then assaulted. The abortion demonstrators sprayed paint onto the men's crotches and faces, scrawled swastikas on the men, and pushed their breasts against the men's faces. The men refused to respond in kind, remaining steadfast in prayer. The demonstrators failed to get into the cathedral, where 700 people were at prayer.

A video of the incident is [here along with an article from LifeSiteNews.com](#). It isn't pretty, but you ought to watch it to understand what abortion advocates were willing to do that day.



photo from LifeSiteNews.com of men in prayer outside cathedral in San Juan, Argentina, after assault by abortion advocates

Spray paint, swastikas, unwelcome physical contact: violence? You bet it is. Imagine if the people at prayer were women, and the demonstrators were men. Everyone would recognize the violence fast enough in that case.

Now imagine what could have ensued if the men had fought back. Surely some of them wanted to. *Get away. Stop profaning my church and mocking my faith. Stop killing children.* Such thoughts must have crossed some minds, I think. The provocation was unmistakable and probably nearly irresistible. And yet each man there – without exception, if news reports are accurate – decided to respond to violence with peace and prayer.

Would I have had the self-discipline to do that? I'd like to think so. But really, what would I have done? Every fiber of my being would have wanted to push back and scream. Not doing so would require not only an act of will but also practice and study. I need to develop self-discipline as I'd develop a muscle. It would be silly for me to expect it to come through for me if I never worked it out.

You've got to be tough to be peaceful

The Argentinean men may have been strangers to one another until that day, for all I know. If so, more power to them. Preparing as a group for nonviolent action is a much less daunting project

than going it alone.

Martin Luther King, Jr. knew about the value of unity and organization to nonviolent public witness. Add his [*Stride Toward Freedom: the Montgomery Story*](#) to your Basic Books list. It's about the 1955-56 boycott of public buses in Montgomery, Alabama, in an effort to break segregation. Public officials went so far as to put an injunction on carpools, which people were using as a device to avoid using the buses. Ultimately, the boycott worked, and segregation of the buses was declared unconstitutional. The boycott had to last a year in order to prevail, though. Impatience and violence would have undermined the effort. In his book, King outlined some aspects of nonviolence that were critical to the Montgomery effort.

- Nonviolent resistance isn't for cowards. It is passive physically, but strongly active spiritually. King pointed out that the weekly mass meetings associated with the boycott always included prayer, and that ministers took the lead exhorting participants to Christian love and nonviolence.
- Nonviolence does not seek to defeat or humiliate an opponent, but rather to win friendship and understanding.
- Nonviolence is directed against the forces of evil rather than the persons *doing* evil.
- Willingness to accept suffering without retaliation is crucial. King frequently repeated the theme that unearned suffering is redemptive.
- Have faith in the future and in God's Providence; "the universe is on the side of justice."
- Avoid not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. Motivation must be love, not hate.

All those things ring true where the right to life is concerned, except that the last item – avoiding internal "violence of spirit" – gives me pause. Abortion kills children. The abortion industry fights to prevent accountability for outcomes to women's health. It wants my money. It has destroyed my confidence in the medical arts, as I see abortion apologists at the state house fight conscience protections for health care professionals who choose not to participate in abortion.

Makes me mad, all that. I can't pretend to view the landscape with satisfaction. There is real urgency to the call to build a culture of life. To do so with conviction and persuasiveness, without giving way to anger – the "violence of spirit" of which Dr. King wrote – is a challenge I'll probably have to face every day of my life.

Strategy or tactic?

Pope Benedict XVI in 2007: "It is thus understood that nonviolence, for Christians, is not a mere tactical behavior but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God's love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone."

An attitude, not a tactic. The same attitude held by the men on the steps of the cathedral in Argentina. An awesome challenge to me, really, and to all of us.

Speaking of attitude, I treasure a letter I received in 1996 from Pastor Bob Mears in New Hampshire, may he rest in peace. A man had been convicted back then of murdering two abortion facility workers in the Boston area, and a few activists in our area were being careful not to make any public comment about the convicted man, even to condemn his actions. “Not our issue,” said these people. They were totally wrong and I said so. So did Pastor Mears, in much more articulate fashion. I wrote to him to thank him for his outspokenness. He replied with this note.

Dear Mrs. Kolb, Thanks for your note of 6/24. I believe the issue of violence is crucial. We are Christians first and Americans second. For us the example and teaching of Jesus are decisive. Can you imagine Him wielding an attack weapon like Rambo? He calls us to take up the cross, not the sword. It’s a much more effective weapon because you don’t have to lay down the truth and justice when you use it. Blessings to you – Bob Mears

This entry was posted in [prolife](#) and tagged [Argentina](#), [LifeSiteNews.com](#), [Martin Luther King](#), [Montgomery bus boycott](#), [nonviolence](#), [Pastor Bob Mears](#), [Pro-life movement](#) on [December 5, 2013](#) by [Leaven for the Loaf](#).

This contribution is available at <http://leavenforthe loaf.com/2013/12/05/pro-life-witness-in-argentina-a-few-days-ago-the-toughness-of-nonviolence/>
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God Is With Us [at Justin's Corner]

by Justin Soutar

December 31, 2013

The end of 2013 is now upon us. Two thousand nine years have elapsed since our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary in a stable cave in Bethlehem, in the land of Israel. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting” (John 3:16). The entrance of the eternal and all-powerful Son of God into our sinful world in the form of a tiny little baby was such a profoundly transformative historical event that it split in two the way we reckon time: All the years leading up to Christ’s birth are denominated B. C. (Before Christ), while the years following His birth are designated A. D. (Anno Domini, the Year of our Lord). From the time of the original sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the people of Israel waited four thousand years for the coming of the Messiah who would save them from their sins and reconcile them with God. All the righteous people who lived and died in those millennia preceding Christ couldn’t go to Heaven but had to wait in Sheol, “the abode of the dead,” until Christ by His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension liberated the captives and opened the gates of Heaven. Christ’s coming to earth some two thousand years ago changed the world forever, bringing light to those in darkness and hope to those in despair. Through His Church, Christ offers all men and women forgiveness of their sins and restoration of the greatest gift any human being could ever possess: the gift of sanctifying grace, the gift Adam and Eve lost by sin, which gives us a share in God’s own Trinitarian life, makes us His sons and daughters, and entitles us to share in the unimaginable happiness of Heaven for all eternity after our death. Wow! That is something to rejoice about. That is the Good News of the Gospel that we as Christians are called to share with everyone on this earth. God indeed loves us more than we can ever imagine in our little finite human minds. We believe in His love, and we hope in His love. Faith, hope and love go together. But “the greatest of these is love.”

Now, the fact that we acknowledge and believe all this to be true does not allow us to ignore or gloss over the realities of sin, suffering, evil, and death that continue to afflict our world. Christ’s descent to earth two thousand years ago did not magically dispel these tragic realities that have marked and continue to mark human history. Rather, his Incarnation was just the beginning of God’s definitive triumph over sin and death that will be completed at the end of the world, when Christ will return in glory to judge all mankind and when God will create new heavens and a new earth. The continuing and even worsening presence of sin and evil, suffering and death in our world is a mysterious part of God’s master plan for human history. Not that God originally willed or made any of these negative realities, but in the unfathomable designs of his Providence, God is allowing them for His own reasons that we human beings, constrained by our finite minds and short lifetimes, cannot fully understand or appreciate. Our faith tells us that God holds all of His creation in His hands at every moment and that He governs it through His Providence, so we have

to trust that He knows what He is about. Our faith also tells us that God brings good out of evil, and that this is the reason why He allows evil in the first place. The worst evil He ever permitted—the murder of His own Son on a cross—led to the greatest good possible, our salvation from sin and reconciliation with God. If God allowed his own perfectly holy and innocent Son to suffer such a cruel fate, can we sinners who follow Him reasonably expect to have a carefree and easy life? No. On the contrary, Jesus said that if anyone wishes to come after Him, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him. Being a Christian is not easy; it's not a joyride. Not as long as we live on this earth. But as Saint Paul reminds us, the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come. Even a life full of pain and suffering for more than 100 years would be a small price to pay for the eternal happiness of Heaven. Christ the Son of God did not come to earth to free us from suffering; rather, he came to share in our humanity, in our human experiences and sufferings and miseries, to show us how to suffer well, and to illuminate our sufferings with the comfort of His loving presence in our lives. Through his heroic self-sacrifice for our sins out of love for us, Christ has given us the opportunity to freely and spiritually unite our own sufferings with his, thus giving them a redemptive value and Christian meaning for our own greater good and that of our fellow brothers and sisters. In some mysterious way, it is precisely when God seems to be at His weakest by permitting terrible evils that His almighty power is most gloriously manifest. So while sin and all its accompanying dark realities remain present in our world, God is with us. He has entered into our history and profoundly and irrevocably altered its course. Troubled and threatened as it is, our world today is a brighter and happier place than it would otherwise have been because the quiet and peaceful light of the Son of God made Man has entered it and continued to illuminate it ever since that first Christmas more than twenty centuries ago.

Through the joys and surprises, successes and failures, sorrows and vicissitudes of this past year, God's mysterious wisdom and Providence were remarkably evident. The historic resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the unforeseen election of Pope Francis were two of the most surprising and joyful events of the year, respectively. I was sad to see Pope Benedict go and unsure at first about Pope Francis, but now I see God's hand in these events. God inspired Pope Benedict, who served His Church humbly and well, to resign a very demanding position because of his ailing health, in order to allow for the election of a new and different kind of Pope from Latin America who would reacquaint a Church in need of reform and a world in need of God with the joy and simplicity of the Gospel message. If Benedict had not resigned, Pope Francis could not have brought together three million young people for World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro. Nor could he have inspired Pope Francis to summon the whole Church and the world to pray and fast for peace, thus averting what could have been a disastrous U.S. war with Syria. Nor could God have used him to wake up the Church and the world to that terrible evil that has come to plague our modern globalized society, namely, the globalization of indifference, our callousness and lack of concern for our suffering brothers and sisters all around the world, symbolized by the repeated tragedy of impoverished African migrants shipwrecked and drowned at Lampedusa. Although it did not anticipate his election, the world has come to love Pope Francis. God is obviously using him in a big way, as we never could have expected back in February when Pope Benedict made his stunning announcement. And, to top it all off, Benedict XVI continues to serve the Church,

including his successor Pope Francis, through his prayers, writings, and friendship. The ways of God are marvelous indeed!

Of course, we cannot overlook the fact that many bad things happened this year also. Several more states and additional foreign countries legalized homosexual “marriage,” which is against nature and nature’s God. Abortion, hunger, violence, and war claimed millions of innocent lives. Violence destroyed lives and valuable property in Egypt, Syria, Sudan and elsewhere, while millions of people in the Middle East and Africa are living in refugee camps, largely forgotten by most of us. The tiny Christian community in the Holy Land dwindled further as Christians continued their steady exodus, while continued injustice and terrorist violence driven by religious fundamentalism (both Jewish and Muslim) kept the Israeli-Palestinian conflict boiling hotter than ever. Droughts, floods, storms, mudslides and famines affected many parts of the globe. Poverty, disease, and corruption continued to affect most nations of Africa, while the global gap between rich and poor is wider than ever before.

And here in the United States, despite strong leadership from our Catholic bishops and the prayers and action of millions of Americans, our predominantly immoral and corrupt federal government has stubbornly refused to significantly amend or withdraw its immoral, unjust and unconstitutional anti-life mandate, which is set to begin being enforced tomorrow. I have a feeling that, once our government attempts to enforce this illegitimate law, our country may never be the same. But regardless of the terrible consequences such enforcement will bring, we must not give up the fight for the natural law, for our religious liberties, or for our moral conscience rights. We must continue fighting until this unconscionable law is repealed and our God-given human rights are once again officially recognized and respected in law.

As followers of Christ, we are a people of hope. However, Christian hope is not simply blind optimism in the face of difficult situations. Nor is Christian hope dependent upon changing circumstances and temporal realities. Rather, our hope is in God. God is with us. He, the same God who became man out of love for us, who accompanies us in our earthly lives, is the all-powerful and wise God who directs the course of history toward its ultimate end, which is His glory. God’s Kingdom will ultimately be triumphant over the powers of darkness, and we who serve Him faithfully on earth will reign with Him forever in Heaven.

In conclusion, the following lines from an old song ring even truer today than when they were first penned:

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And mild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Then in despair I bowed my head,
“There is no peace on earth,” I said;
For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep.
The wrong will fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.”

Wishing you a blessed New Year.

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Woman [at A Catholic Heart For Home]

*"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called **Woman**, for out of man this one was taken."*

Gen 2:23 (emphasis mine).

Adam did not cry in lament on meeting woman. He cried out in joy, "this at last". At last after all his searching. At last after all his waiting. At last....

I've heard the various jokes of "woe-to-man" and everything else that today's man throws out to share his feelings about women. Thankfully the first man did not think that way, neither does every man of today.

In God's eternal plan, woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root.

Mulieris Dignitatem 29

Women are not an after thought in God's plan. We weren't an "oh shucks" man needs someone to keep him company. We were created out of love and for love. We were created to be desired, cherished and respected.

We were created with a heart, mind and a soul, not just a body. To be desired as a whole. To be cherished as a whole. To be respected as a whole.

A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love she gives in return.

Mulieris Dignitatem 29

Women are created in the image and likeness of God. Women were created to be fruitful, life giving, life empowering, life changing. Mother Theresa, Therese de Lisieux, Mary Magdalene, Elizabeth, Eve, Our Blessed Mother.

The life of one woman weaves into the lives of others, touching others, enriching the lives of others. When Adam cried out his delight, his joy at meeting woman it was not just for Eve but for every woman who comes after in the voice of every man who recognizes, accepts and delights in the dignity of a woman.

Spiritual insight into God, or our own life, or the universe and God's creation, or into life itself is a gift from God... thanks be to God who is so great and yet so close to us and so kind and considerate as to care for each of us, though we are so many....

Life is awesome and it's normal for human beings to at times feel overwhelmed, especially when we are young because there is so much we have yet to discover and begin to understand, but even in middle age or old age, as the "scenery" of our life changes, we can feel disoriented and lost with the impression we may have to start all over again. This can appear as though we might be "losing our faith" but often it is simply that a more naive form of faith needs to "die" in order to make room for a more mature and robust faith that takes into account the complex realities of life and the many levels of our own inner complexity and human frailty....

I rejoice with all believers and fellow pilgrims and thank God for the way in which He let us know that He is there and loves us. The "

withdrawal pains

" or troubling doubts we may feel after having "religious experiences" or moments of "grace" when we felt "close to God" or as if all was "right with the world" or that "we were in the right place or exactly where we were meant to be"... all such experiences help us understand why God does not generally "show Himself" to us yet... we are not ready to experience the great intensity of his dynamic presence and love... so we have the gift of time and life on Earth as a time of preparation, and all of life - both the good and the bad - are used by God to help us grow, be stretched, deepen, and widen our spirit and bring our flesh to serve our spirit and of course God and our neighbor. Pope Francis talks much about all these things.

We have to be careful about what we see and hear on TV these days... there are so many programs and episodes that present themselves as scientific research and discovery when in fact they employ a "little science" in order to camouflage flagrant theories which fail to take into account overwhelming quantities of evidence that quite frankly shows their theories are unfounded.

Take for example St Paul. I have seen TV episodes claiming that St Paul exerted undue influence on the early Church and in effect started a new religion that was not and is not in accord with Jesus' intentions. This is the voice of those who set themselves up as critics and naysayers against the Roman Catholic Church and Tradition. There is nothing further from the truth. It is clear from the Acts of the Apostles that Jesus knew exactly what He was doing when He chose Saul and through the grace of conversion made him into Paul.

It does seem as though Paul exercised an overly predominant influence on the early Church and could seem "over represented" in the New Testament... take Paul away and you only have the Gospels, Acts, the other pastoral letters, and Revelation left. It is true that Paul formulated much of the theology that has allowed the Church to deepen her understanding of much of what Jesus said

and did.

That is the whole point though, that Paul invented nothing but only reflected deeply on what Jesus said, did, was, and is, and Jesus used then and uses now Paul to bring us closer to Himself. No, the thought that Paul started his own religion is quite wrong, and you are wise to recognize this as a doubt, even a temptation.

Remember dear Reader when you consider your own doubts or confusion on these matters how Satan treated Jesus. First he tried to seduce his human instincts with appeals to our human appetites and wants. When that failed he left Him alone until a later time, which was in the Garden of Gethsemane, at which time he unleashed all the fury he could muster through the instruments of the authorities and soldiers and even bystanders, who all mocked Him....

We cannot expect better treatment from demons than Jesus got. First they appeal to our human weaknesses and passions. When that fails they try the use of power, either supernatural power or material power through natural disturbances or through people. The "storms" we experience in life and in our spirit are not likely the effect of God or his angels but rather the rebellious angels or demons. Why do I think this?

You have only to read the Book of Job to see how God has shown us the true nature of his love and the true nature of Satan and his followers. They are out to "get us" but God takes our part. The Word of God tells us that God never tempts us nor intimidates us nor accuses us. In

[Revelation 12:10](#)

God makes it clear through John's words that those who accuse the children of God and denounce them before God are Satan and his demon rebellious angels.

God in his kindness, mercy, and respect for the freedom of his intelligent creatures continues to allow even the demons certain freedom, as we can see in the Book of Job, but He imposes limits on what they can do, and all of this just becomes part of God's plan to allow his children the opportunity to have the joy and satisfaction of sharing in Jesus' victory by choosing to resist and fight as Jesus did.

The battle line runs right down the middle of the human heart, which God says in

[Jeremiah 17:1](#)

is very tortuous and convoluted... we cannot trust our own heart and must certainly not follow it. However, our heart is an important part of us and so we need to pay attention to it, to notice its movements and moods, and learn what our heart is telling us at any given moment about what is happening within us and outside us and in others and how we are reacting to that. Being aware of all these things helps us to understand the situation and to judge what to do in light of God's Word and will.

We need to verify our understanding against God's Word and

guide

our judgment and actions and words in accord with God's holy will, which means

guiding

our heart,

not

following it. We can see, often in retrospect looking back, how God has guided and protected us from following our heart... Even in the face of terrible dark times and awful temptations to go so far as to take our own life, we have not taken our life but are accepting to struggle through it all, to live as fully as we can, by God's grace and in accord with his love and will.

This is the human life of faith in God through Jesus about which St Paul spoke and wrote so eloquently and profoundly precisely because he accepted to live life fully, to follow Jesus with all his might, and to desire one thing alone, to allow Jesus to live in him and "reproduce" his life within Paul.

It is the greatest grace of God that He offers to do the same in each of us.... Peace to you dear Reader and to your family, colleagues, friends, enemies, and loved ones....

This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2013/12/god-guides-us-through-storm-of-life-and.html>

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My Patron Saint for 2014: Elizabeth Ann Seton [at The Koala Bear Writer]

January 4, 2014 By [Bonnie Way](#) [1 Comment](#)

January seems to be a time when most of us look forward to the New Year and set some goals or resolutions. This year is going to be better than last year, we promise ourselves. Some people [choose one word](#) to focus on during the year. This week, I came across this at Conversion Diary and loved the idea of picking a patron saint for the year.

My patron saint for 2014 is Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. I'd heard her name, of course, but other than that I knew little about her (something about schools in the Eastern United States). Today is her Feast Day, so it seemed like a good day to learn more about her.

Like me, Elizabeth was a prolific reader. She was born in 1774 and had a simple, quiet childhood in New York, despite her high society background. Her parents were Anglican, although her mother died when she was only three. She had two sisters and several stepsiblings.

At age twenty, she married the love of her life, William Seton. She and her sister-in-law Rebecca Seton became best friends and did missions of mercy around the city. When her father-in-law died in 1798, however, she and her husband assumed care for his seven younger siblings and the family business. Then Elizabeth lost her own father in 1801. William and Elizabeth faced financial difficulties and eventually filed for bankruptcy. In 1803, they sailed for Italy with only their eldest daughter, leaving four children in America with Rebecca, in an attempt to cure William's tuberculosis. Unfortunately, William died just after Christmas that year.

Like me again, when Elizabeth found herself in a strange place, far from those she loved, she turned to God. In Italy, she discovered the Catholic Church. The Eucharist was a strong force in leading her to the Catholic Church, just as it was for me. She also found comfort in accepting the Virgin Mary as her own mother. She remained in Italy until 1804 because of her own poor health and then her daughter's. Shortly after her return, her sister-in-law Rebecca died.

Facing loss again, Elizabeth prayed, "If I am right, Thy grace impart still in the right to stay. If I am wrong, oh, teach my heart to find the better way." In 1805, she joined the Church, despite the fact that doing so alienated her from many Protestant relatives who would have helped her and her family during their time of need (for her husband's fortune was mostly depleted).

Elizabeth for a time ran a boarding house for boys at a Protestant school. She was reunited with her sister-in-law Cecilia Seton, who became a Catholic as well. Then Elizabeth's boarding school failed. She contemplated entering a convent in Canada, where her teaching could support her

daughters (since her sons were already supported in school by the Filicchis, her friends from Italy who had influenced her conversion). Instead, with the support of a priest in Baltimore, she opened a school there and took on the life of a religious, with a costume fashioned after that of nuns in Italy.

Elizabeth's school was the first free Catholic school in America. She was joined there by her sisters-in-law Cecilia and Harriet. In 1809, she said her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and became known as Mother Seton. Her Sisterhood was ratified in 1812, based upon the Rule St. Vincent de Paul wrote for his Daughters of Charity in France; in 1813, eighteen sisters made their vows with Mother Seton.

Unfortunately, during the next few years, Elizabeth lost her daughters Anna and Rebecca. She also suffered from tuberculosis. In 1821, she died. She was canonized on September 14 in 1975, the first native-born citizen of the United States to be canonized by the Catholic Church.

This contribution is available at <http://www.thekoalabearwriter.com/elizabeth-ann-seton/>
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But it's only for children right? [at Linen on the Hedgerow]

A priest friend told me of how, on one occasion when he was preparing a man, brought up without any knowledge of God or the Catholic Faith, for reception into the Church, he felt it his duty to inform the catechumen about the Novus Ordo.

He gave an outline of the background to the new Mass and recommended (in the spirit of fair play and even handedness, that the man should attend a NO Mass to witness the full choice offered by HMC at first hand).

When he met up with the man some days later he asked him what he thought of the OF Mass.

He received the reply: "Well, it was OK, but it's only for children right?"

I was reminded of these immortal words when I attended a Novus Ordo Mass on Christmas morning.

My attendance was based on the twin facts that no EF Mass was available and that it was vital that my two grandchildren would be able to attend Mass and visit the crib on this important day.

I will not stoop to churlishness by describing the ordeal and, besides, I know that many of you suffered far more patiently than me on Christmas morning with similar experiences.

But, I had to reflect on just how the two Masses are so different; so far apart.

Sadly, I left feeling that there can be no reconciliation without either A) a miracle or, B) a very strong concerted steer from Rome and the Bishops to actually impose a Latin Mass every Sunday.

But, even plan B) would not work as the celebrant on Christmas Day, was completely unfit for purpose.

I do not mean that he was wilfully bad, just lacking in what the army used to call 'moral fibre' except that, in this case it would be 'lacking in spiritual fibre'.

No one, priest included, paid the slightest bit of attention, let alone, respect, for the tabernacle housing the Blessed Sacrament. Furthermore, the celebrant was totally focused, as was the

congregation

audience on the performance (that included an eleven girl altar server singing a solo mindless sort of hymn in rather a tuneless Kermit the Frog voice when he sang 'Halfway up the Stair'.

It would take 12 months solitary in an SSPX community before this priest would even begin to

understand what a real Mass is all about.

Perhaps the man receiving instruction was right, the Novus Ordo Mass

is

only for children, and very young ones at that.

This contribution is available at <http://linenonthehedgerow.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/but-its-only-for-children-right.html>

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An Epitaph of Trust [at Dolce Domum]

The other night I was reading *Kristin Lavransdatter* and came to the part of the story where Kristin's father, Lavrans Bjørgulfson, begins to say his goodbyes to his family. Aged 52, he has begun to suffer from very poor health and having outlived his father and grandfather he knows the end is near. Throughout the book I've pictured this man of Norway circa 1300 as a cross between King Fergus (the father of Merida) in Disney's *Brave*, and King Theoden from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* movies. While riding through the countryside with his eldest daughter they share many things. He had strongly considered life in a monastery when he was younger, but his father bought him armor and the weapons of war (in those days they were fighting the Danes) and he chose to follow his father's wishes.

In the excerpt I quote below, Lavrans speaks of something I think most of us do: look back. We look back when we find ourselves in a bind, or we perceive events have conspired against us. We reflect upon the choices we've made and the roads not taken.

"But I chose this world myself, and whenever things went against me, I tried to tell myself that it would be unmanly to complain about the fate I had chosen. For I've realized more and more with each year that I've lived: There is no worthier work for the person who has been graced with the ability to see even a small part of God's mercy than to serve Him and to keep vigil and to pray for those people whose sight is still clouded by the shadow of worldly matters. And yet I must tell you, my Kristin, that it would be hard for me to sacrifice, for the sake of God, that life which I have lived on my estates with its care of temporal things and its worldly joys, with your mother at my side and with all of you children. So a man must learn to accept, when he produces offspring from his own body, that his heart will burn if he loses them or if the world goes against them. God, who gave them souls, is the one who owns them—not I." ~Kristin Lavransdatter, Book II: The Wife. Part II: Husaby. p.542.

There are a lot of things left undone in my life if seen through the eyes of a teenaged me. I was going to

- pitch the Red Sox to their first World Series title since 1918
- play drums and go on tour with my band
- travel throughout this country and perhaps Europe as well
- be a successful business owner and make my first million by the age of 35
- be a husband and father
- be a college professor, author and lecturer and live a life of relative quiet except for the noise of inquisitive students in the classroom
- live life as a religious, perhaps a priest, more likely a monk, spending my days in service to God and without the burdens of the rat race that is modern life. Of course I wasn't Catholic at the time, but I still leaned this way

- publish a book (or books)



I did become a husband and father, and there is still time for me to do most of the rest. Though I never pitched at Fenway, I can still see a game there (and they've won three World Series over the last decade). I've travelled throughout America and still plan to tackle Europe. I've been a small-time business owner, and while I failed to make my first million by the age of 35 the world didn't end.

And on and on it goes.

Thank God for those swings and misses.

What I got be is a parent. The hardest, most difficult, time-consuming, frightening and rewarding profession or vocation known to man or woman. Along the way I've

- watched my oldest with pride on the ballfield, classroom, or interacting with peers, adults and children. If all goes according to his plans around this time next year I'll be watching him graduate from basic training as a full-fledged member of the US Marine Corps. I'll warn you now...I suspect my pride on that day will be stupidly-ridiculously off the charts.
- worried round the clock as my second son struggled to survive his first weeks of infancy in the NICU as some still unknown malady caused him seizures and fevers that could have killed him. I've watched him grow into a sensitive soul, follow his big brothers success on the ballfield and this year begin to tackle reading with gusto.
- melted into goo while having tea parties with my imaginative story-telling daughter, shared our first dance to "You Shook Me All Night Long" by AC/DC between innings at her big brother's baseball game, and soaked in every hug, fist bump, and minute spent with her on my lap watching a movie.
- made too many mistakes to mention. Forgiven myself for most. Prayed for my children to forgive the rest.

With luck, and God's grace, I'll be around to watch them continue to grow into their own persons, leave the safety of their parental nest, and perhaps share their lives with spouses and children of their own.

I think that's why the passage from *Kristin Lavransdatter* stood out to me. The more I think about it the more I lean towards having it written as part of my eventual obituary. I've been struggling more than I've let on with the reality of my first child leaving the next soon, and with the fact that the choices he is making for his future and his life are not those that I would have him make. In fact he is making choices that delve into the world of the unknown for me and truthfully ones that I lacked the courage to make when I was his age. And so I've had to re-learn to trust. Trust God (more) and trust my son as he begins to make his way into the world.

It's not easy. [As Barb Lishko recently wrote](#) I've had to remind myself that

...this life is only the journey, but the journey that spans our lifetime and directs where we will end up for eternity. This is the proving grounds, the testing and the purifying of our souls to ready us for eternal joy and infinite love poured out from God.

Everything in this life is an opportunity to stretch our hearts to prepare them for more. More what? More of God's love in heaven.

Along this journey I do afford myself a few peeks back at what might have been. It is near the end of this life that I am most looking forward to looking back at what was. I chose this life, or at least the bulk of it. I accept the sacrifices made and pray for the strength to endure those to come.

A few weeks ago I purchased a small wooden plaque carved with these words from Proverbs 3:5-6 and set it atop our piano:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

After all God, who gave them souls, is the one who owns them—not I.

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Ready, Set, Go! [at A Still Small Voice]

The second reading for the Third Sunday of Advent:

“Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”

At Mass, the Deacon brought to my attention an excellent point... In the Second Reading, James is telling everyone to be patient until the coming of the Lord. Be patient. These people were ready, they were waiting on the Second Coming of Our Lord, so much so, that James told them to be patient. *(In a way (to me) that is beautiful - the longing and the desire of Christ's people for His Second Coming.)*

There's a difference between then and now. Then, they had to be told to be patient, the Lord will come in due time; and now, here we are, not particularly anticipating this Second Coming of Christ, much less giving it any thought.

I started thinking to myself, “What if after Mass, after lunch, after I go Christmas shopping, this Second Coming comes? What would I say to Jesus?” In all honesty, this is what I replied to myself (to Jesus), “Oh, not right now.. Not today, I'm not ready yet.”

What?! Here I am, telling the Man who sacrificed His whole being for me, the Man who is constantly pursuing me, that He needs to wait, because I'm not ready for Him. And yet, He loves me. And yet, He smiles at me.

The sad thing is, even though I realized this, it's still true. I'm not ready. I could say that a year ago I was ready, but somewhere between then and now, I've lapsed and I've hit the pause button.

My heart is longing to be ready.

So I'm ready to be ready - to hit play. I want to set my goals for holiness and I want to go and BECOME all the Christ desires for me.

I wish not to scare anyone, but to inform you that the countdown has been started for the love and desire He has for His people. You are not excluded from this, and neither am I, rather Jesus longs so desperately for all to see and experience in His splendor.

I challenge all, as I did myself today, - To be **ready**, to **set** your goals for holiness, and to **go** and become who Christ created you to be.

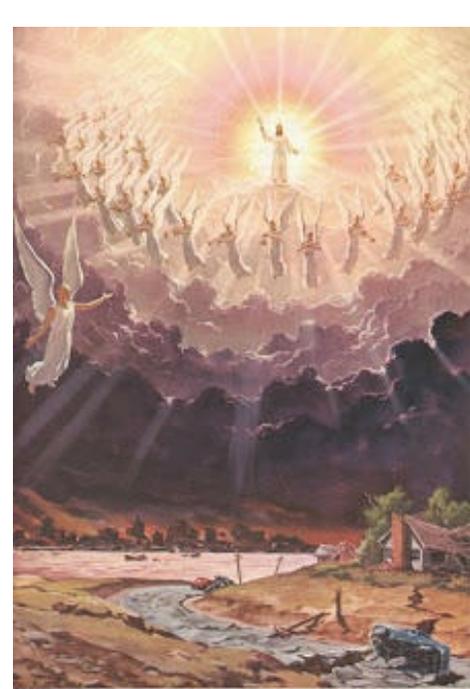
God bless. :)

*“Lord, strengthen my trust in Your word and my hope in the saving power of Your Kingdom.
Free me from everything that would hold me back from pursuing your kingdom
and your will for my life.”*

Amen

“Strengthen the hand that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak,
say to those whose hearts are frighten: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God,
he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you.
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared;
then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.”

-Isaiah 35:3-6



This contribution is available at <http://zoejumonville.blogspot.com/2013/12/ready-set-go.html>
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The Elderly Who Are Isolated and Abandoned [at 8 Kids And A Business]

Posted at [Catholic Insight](#)



As I walked through the lobby of the assisted living facility, I saw him again – the elderly gentleman whom I had greeted three hours earlier. Had he been there all morning? I wondered.

I was on patient rounds in the building that day, visiting the residents that staff had identified as needing to be seen. It was a busy morning as usual but the elderly gentleman was not on my list.

When I first arrived, I greeted him quickly but my mind was focused on my work. Now I was back in the lobby and I stopped in surprise when I saw him staring longingly out the big picture window.

I slowed down my stride and went to him. We exchanged greetings and talked about the weather. He seemed lonely and all of a sudden my schedule wasn't so pressing. Pulling up a chair, I spent some time with him, mostly listening while he reminisced, recalling memories of people, events and times gone by.

“Have you been sitting here all morning?” I asked.

He explained that he didn't like to sit alone in his unit. He liked to be around activity. His loneliness was so palpable that it hurt.

Unfortunately, this gentleman is not unlike many elderly people who live with a great sense of loneliness and of being forgotten. They have experienced many losses: friends, family, spouses, health, independence. The feeling of being alone is more acute in times of traditional family holidays and may cause depression. The Advent and Christmas seasons with their focus on relationships is an especially difficult time. It's not the seasons themselves that are the cause but the memories of happier times often associated with family and friends.

Even seniors who have family support may succumb to the “holiday blues” or full-blown depression. Being surrounded by family during these times may actually intensify feelings of sadness due to the memories of deceased loved ones. As well, they may be reminded of things they can’t do anymore or memories of regret.

It’s important to be able to recognize the symptoms of depression which include the following: irritability, sadness, feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, loss of interest in daily activities, loss of appetite, increased fatigue, lack of personal grooming and hygiene, suicidal thoughts. We can very easily get caught up in our own lives, but for the sake of our senior family members, we ought to be vigilant of their mood, especially during family-centered times of the year.

We are a relational people. God made us to be in relationship, to share our lives with others, to support, console, validate and love each other. That doesn’t stop at a certain age. On the contrary, in the later stages of life when our bodies and maybe our minds slow down and when we experience the loss of loved ones, our growing dependence on other people means that our relationships take on a different but equally necessary meaning.

In his 1999 *Letter to the Elderly*, Blessed Pope John-Paul II, wrote that “[e]lderly people help us to see human affairs with greater wisdom, because life’s vicissitudes have brought them knowledge and maturity. They are guardians of our collective memory.... To exclude the elderly is in a sense to deny the past, in which the present is firmly rooted, in the name of a modernity without memory.”

During a November, 2012 visit to a residence for the elderly in Rome, *Catholic News Service* reported that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI warned that “the quality of a society or civilization can be judged by how it treats the elderly.” He went on to say that “[o]ne who makes room for the elderly makes room for life.... One who welcomes the elderly welcomes life.”

In the book, “On Heaven and Earth: Pope Francis on Faith, Family and the Church in the 21st Century,” then-Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio spoke of his concern for the elderly: “There are those who abandon those that fed them, who educated them, who wiped their bottoms.... It hurts me; it makes me weep inside.”

Three popes of modern times have highlighted the plight of many of our elderly brothers and sisters. With a steady worldwide increase in the number of elderly people, this problem will continue to grow.

Having a compassionate heart means meeting people in their particular situation in life and ministering to them there. What can you do to spread the love of God and to bring His message of hope and love to the elderly who are forgotten, lonely, and isolated?

What Was Bilbo's Dark Night of the Soul?



To continue the theme of light and darkness, this week we will consider another aspect of Advent that may not be readily perceptible:

the dark night of the soul

.

Dark Night

As already noted in a

[previous article](#)

, Advent coincides with the darkest time of the year. This physical darkness also corresponds to what Saint John of the Cross coined as the

dark night of the soul

. Contrary to what many might believe to be the dark night, what Saint John of the Cross is actually referring to is a spiritual

detachment from all consolation in this world

.

What this entails is God stepping back for a time, allowing a soul to be purified of all worldly attachments; teaching the soul to cling tightly to God instead of earthly pleasures. This period of time is often very difficult and it can appear that God is distant. Yet God is close by, looking upon us as a loving Father watches his child ride his training wheel free bike down the driveway. Similar to that image of the Father, He encourages us to plunge ourselves into the darkness of detachment in order that we may truly see the Light of Christ. We must be detached from the training wheels of worldly attachments in order to fly free.

Saint John of the Cross teaches that we must make room for the burning love of God and to do that, we must be detached from our comforts in this world.

God can only fully breath life into a soul who has become empty

. Just like a cup can not be filled with water unless it is first cleaned of all dirt, so a soul must undergo a spiritual cleansing to be receptive to God. Consequently, every soul who desires to be in total union with God must experience a

dark night

Fast before you Feast

Another way to express this reality is the age-old maxim "Fast before you Feast." The Church recognizes the importance of fasting, detaching ourselves from bodily pleasures before celebrating with great joy the many feasts during the year. That is why there exist periods of penance before each major feast: Lent before Easter and Advent before Christmas. The period of fasting is meant to prepare the soul for the great solemnity and is an image of own lives, realizing that we must be purged of our attachment to this earth before we can truly enjoy the beauties and glories of Heaven.

Frodo's Dark Night

J.R.R. Tolkien knew this truth very well and found its expression in the life of both the characters Frodo and Bilbo. First off, Frodo experiences a great and tortuous

dark night

, where he is deprived of every physical pleasure. He traverses through the land of Mordor with little hope that he will ever return to the Shire and is

forced to give up the very few possessions he had

. Not only is his priceless mithril coat of armor taken away, but even his most prized possession, the Ring.

After this final moment of being stripped from his last attachment (the Ring), by the greed of the creature Gollum; Frodo realizes his weakness and knows that he could have never done what Gollum accomplished. Frodo is then seen to be "pale and worn, and yet himself again; and in his eyes there was peace now, neither strain of will, nor madness, nor any fear.

His burden was taken away

" (pg. 926).

Then, after being further detached from the Shire, Frodo was able to let go of Middle-Earth and sail off

Into the West

, to the undying lands until the end of his days.



Bilbo's Dark Night

Bilbo also knew this

dark night

, though in a less dramatic fashion. He, like Frodo, was led away from his home,

forced to give up the many comforts of hobbit life.

Being on an adventure far away from home with a company of dwarves was not Bilbo's idea of a

good time and he continually had to be detached from the simple pleasures of being a hobbit. Not only did he desire the food of home, but also the safety and comfort of his hobbit hole.

Yet, this period of detachment that Bilbo underwent proved to be meritorious. At the end of a long journey, Bilbo reaches the Lonely Mountain with the dwarves and is able to resist what has been called the "dragon sickness."

This excessive greed and desire for material wealth possessed not only the dragon, but also the dwarves.

They become enamored by the treasure they saw and it possessed them in a way that created many problems for them and for those in the surrounding area. However, Bilbo stood firm and did not succumb to the temptation that was before him. He was detached from the pleasures of this world and had the strength to withstand the assaults of the darkness that often seeps into men's hearts.

Therefore, this Advent, let us realize that we must all go through a

dark night of the soul

and become detached from the many comforts of this world. In the end,

Heaven is our destination and in order to get there we must not be weighed down by being attached to the treasures and comforts we build up on earth.*This is an updated and edited version of a post that was first published on my previous blog*

Into the West.

This contribution is available at <http://www.philipkosloski.com/2012/12/what-was-bilbos-dark-night-of-soul.html>
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The Expectation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Historically, in the Liturgical Calendar, December 18 (Wednesday 2013) is the *Expectation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Although this feast is not in the current calendar, nearly the entire Latin Church still celebrates it. It's the feast anticipating the coming of the Redeemer. It is very popular in the Spanish Church. To read more about it, visit the [Catholic Encyclopedia – New Advent](#).



Trying to understand what the Blessed Virgin Mary was feeling one week before giving birth to Jesus is difficult since nothing about her thoughts are revealed to us in the Sacred Scriptures. At this point, it's purely a speculative assessment. We know what Luke 2 tells us, however, we don't know much more than this revelation.

Was it difficult on Mary to be away from her family and *her mother* during this time? Even though the birth of Jesus was miraculous, as was his conception, what was Mary feeling? Did she know what was to occur?

Knowing what we do know about the Blessed Virgin Mary, her own Immaculate Conception, and the Annunciation tells me that she completely put her *trust* in God, just as she had done nine months prior. Mary is the great sign of perfect *faith* and *joy* for us, all the time, but especially during the Third Week of Advent (Gaudete Sunday). She is not only the God-Bearer (*Theotokos*), but she is now our Mother and Advocate. Just as she brought forth Jesus into the world, she longs to bring us closer to Him today.

We may not know what Mary was feeling one week before the birth of Christ, but below are ten quotes from mothers sharing what they were feeling one week prior to having their child -

“The anticipation of our baby is unreal. I cannot believe how this little life is growing and will be

part of our family in less than a week. The fear. Why fear? Fear of the unknown. Fear of the hurt and pain our little one will face one day in his or her life. Yet joy overwhelms my soul. The unbelievable joy that comes of a life created by our Creator. What a gift. A true gift. I know it will come with some pain but the offering of the pain will not be without gain. I cannot wait to introduce this amazing gift of our God to our other 4 children. We cannot wait and are preparing the day he or she blesses our family.” – Erika

“I was anxious, excited and little afraid – with my first child because I didn’t know what to expect and with my second child because I did. Both deliveries were very different but they brought me a precious angel each time.” – Joyce

“One week before I gave birth to my daughter, I was feeling super excited to hold this little person who had been growing inside of me for 10 months. I was thrilled to hear her little cry, smell her, and to see her beautiful face. Also, I was feeling nervous for the labor and delivery part especially because I had her stories from so many other women. I just felt that I wanted to be the best Mommy to my baby girl who I had already fallen in love with.” – Carla

“I felt an anticipation, excitement, and joy to come face to face with my child. I was nervous and getting ready. I found myself decorating, cleaning, and trying to keep myself busy, not out of boredom, but because the overwhelming feeling that I would meet my child so soon. Time couldn’t pass fast enough.” – Melanie

“The week before giving birth I was very impatient and eager to meet my little one. There was a desire to have everything prepared, such as our home and car. I was a little nervous about the pain of labor and delivery since I didn’t have any drugs. During that week I reflected on how different my life would be after having this child, especially my prayer life, sleep and convenience.” – Genae



“I felt the anticipation of longing to meet my new son, along with fear of the unknown if I’d be a worthy mom. Also thankful for the gift God gave me!” – Dena

“A week before giving birth there’s an overwhelming sense of excitement coupled with the sensation of wanting to literally pop. You can’t imagine getting any larger than you already are and no position is comfortable. Despite the discomfort, which dominates nearly every thought, you can’t wait to hold, cuddle and meet face to face that sweet baby boy or girl that you’ve been day dreaming about for nine (nearly 10) months.” – Amanda

“Today is my daughter’s 26 the birthday...perfect timing. I was going to have her natural; the first one was C-section. That part was little intimidating. The rest was pure excitement and anticipation. I wanted a little girl so much. I couldn’t wait to hold her.” – Marie

“I was filled with anticipation, anxiety, fear and hope. I prayed a lot for the grace to know what I was suppose to do to care for a baby. I feared the birthing process and what that meant for me physically. I was anxious that I was always forgetting something that I needed to do before he arrived. I found myself tearful a lot that week, especially every time I thought of the gift that God was entrusting to us. The time was about to arrive when I would embark on a new layer of my vocation as a married woman...motherhood.” – Christine

“With our son, anticipation (he was born on his due date) I think I was pretty oblivious to how it was all going to unfold. More so with our daughter (she was born two weeks after her due date) anticipation was high, fearful (I now knew what labor pains were like!). We didn’t know what the sex of either was going to be so definitely... ‘in waiting’.” – Kathy

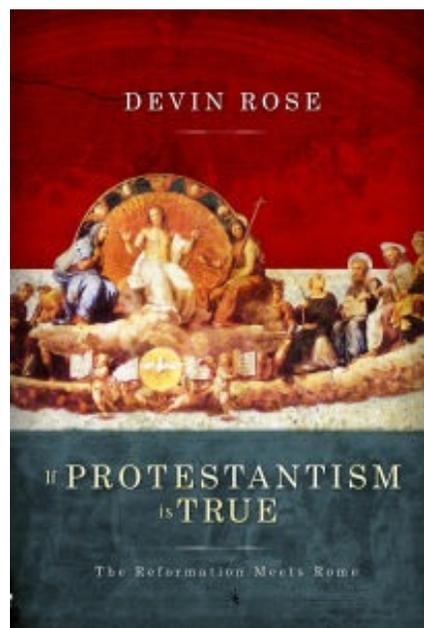
Motherhood is so important. Thanks to the women above for hearing the call to be Mommies.

If you are Mom and would like to share your experience of what you were feeling one week before giving birth, please do so in the comment box.

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2013/12/16/mondays-with-mary-the-expectation-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary/>
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How "If Protestantism is True" Turned Me Catholic [at Catholic Cravings]



I eyed the book suspiciously.

It was [If Protestantism is True](#) by Devin Rose.

It was a book of Catholic apologetics. I'd never read one before. I thought I at least Catholicism the courtesy of reading one lousy book. Plus, it was about history, was only three bucks, and (most importantly) had my favourite painting, Raphael's *Disputation of the Blessed Sacrament* on the front cover. No fan of Raphael could be all that bad, right?

Yeah...

As soon as I started reading, I was fuming. I remember pacing around the living room, informing my bewildered parents that some people were soooo stupid. To this day, my copy is still peppered with angry comments and passive-aggressive highlighting.

But [If Protestantism is True](#) really got me thinking. **I highlighted a lot of passages that it turned out were the seeds for later realizations.** Passages...

About authority in the Church:

“At what point did the councils stop being authoritative?”

About the visible Church, schisms, and sacramentality:

“A body is both visible and alive.”

And about the limits of *sola Scriptura*:

“It might also come as a shock to Protestants that Luther, claiming *sola Scriptura*, believed a Christian man could marry multiple women (polygamy)”

But I also made a fair few critical/snarky notes on the notes:

About the statement that the fact of the papacy acts as evidence for Christ’s intentions:

“No it doesn’t!”

About Tradition:

“Why is the Bible seen as so mysterious?? Ugh!!!”

About the errors and personal failings of the Reformers:

“So? 1) completely ok with this, 2) misunderstands Protestantism”

And about more criticisms of Luther:

“So hypocritical! Like priests are faultless!”

At one point, when Devin was making a point about priestly celibacy. On my kindle, I’ve typed “wow...” **For the life of me, I can’t remember if that was a “wow...” or derision or a “wow...” of realisation. That was how life-changing this book was, my beliefs were actually beginning to change as I was reading.**

And I didn’t like it at all.

The problem was that Devin dealt with history and I knew this history. That meant I knew that while it was skewed to a Catholic perspective, it was fundamentally correct. But I’d never seen anyone piece it together like that. Once you see something like that, it’s not easy to unsee.



In retrospect, it's amusing to see me slowly being squeezed between a rock and hard place.

On the one hand, I couldn't write off 1,000 — 1,500 years of Christian history. I definitely wasn't comfortable with a narrative of Great Apostasy.

Theologically, I believed the Holy Spirit guarded His temple, the Church, although I was very vague on the details.

Historically, I knew from my own studies that these patristic and medieval guys were Christian. No one can read St Anselm of Canterbury, St Bernard of Clairvaux, or the late medieval mystics and still believe the myth of the Great Apostasy.

On the other hand, if these early and medieval Christians were definitely Christians then the Reformation — and by Reformation I mean revolutionary schism-esque splitting off — was suddenly a whole lot less necessary.

If this was the way things had been for centuries, why couldn't we stick together and work it out together? If a Reformation/Revolution was necessary in 1517, it would also have been necessary in 1017 — or 517. Was everyone so blind to Christian truth for over a millennium?

Either the Protestant Reformation was truly necessary — and thus Christendom had been apostate for centuries, or it wasn't and the central tenets of Protestantism were false.

That's not a pretty choice.

But Devin presents it again and again, with example after example, pushing you to think through the logical implications of your Protestant beliefs.

There are lots of thorny dilemmas in this fantastic book. My favourite, though, is this one:

If Protestantism is true, then the Catholic Church has continually invented false, man-made doctrines, in which no Christian should have to believe, and has done so for centuries. Yet Protestants agree with the Church's decisions on the fundamental doctrines about the nature of God and the New Testament canon of Scripture. On these matters—settled centuries after Christ died and rose—Protestants accede willingly and make no claim that they were novelties. So what criteria do Protestants use to determine which decisions of the Church had divine origin and which were man-made.

When I first read [If Protestantism is True](#), I hated it with all the fiery passion and elitist lit-hist snobbery I could muster. Six months later I was Catholic.

I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions from that.

If you haven't read it, you really should — today! [Mr Rose has just announced that he is pulling the plug on the book](#) in preparation of his new book, *The Protestant's Dilemma*, published by Catholic

Answers. I'm massively excited about it!

+JMJ+

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholiccravings.com/2013/12/10/protestantism-true-turned-catholic/>
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Running to find Jesus [at Eating Slowly]

When I run, I pray the Rosary. I realized not long ago that many of the mysteries involve someone running, or at least traveling from one place to another. In the second joyful mystery, Mary goes “to the hill country in haste...and greet[s] Elizabeth (Lk 1:39-40).” When Jesus rises from the dead, Mary Magdalene runs from the tomb to the upper room to tell the disciples that He is alive. And what do Peter and John do? They run to the tomb. When Jesus is taken into Heaven, he travels with his disciples to the top of a mountain, (granted, probably walking, but it helps to recall that one when I’m running uphill), and I’m sure the wedding guests in Cana had to travel some distance to attend.



So it’s the Monday before Thanksgiving. It’s freezing cold outside and I’m running, trying to concentrate on the Joyful Mysteries as I put one foot in front of the other. I’m only running three miles and I’m nearing the end. (A three-mile run is just about the right distance to pray one set of mysteries, including the opening and closing prayers. If I’m slow, I throw in a couple of extra Our Fathers and Hail Marys for the Pope’s intentions.) I’m praying the fifth mystery, the Finding of Jesus in the Temple. I’m thinking about how Mary and Joseph, upon realizing Jesus isn’t in the caravan traveling away from Jerusalem, that they immediately turn back to find him. They must have been frantic with worry, and I imagine they journeyed at a pretty fast clip. They had one purpose: to get their son back into the safety of their care.



Then I remember the parable of the Good Shepherd, and how when one sheep is lost, he leaves the other ninety-nine behind to go find it. I realize that Mary and Joseph, as the parents of the Shepherd, are doing exactly what He does for us: they leave their friends and family and set out to find their lost boy—and of course, they learn that He was never lost in the first place. I imagine that there must have been much celebration in Nazareth when they returned safely.



I run for a lot of reasons, one of which is so that I can participate in 5K and 10K races. (Is there a half marathon in my future? We'll see.) When I cross the finish line I'm greeted with cheers and shouts of "Great Job!" from people I've never met. Afterward I join the crowd of runners who have finished before me, and cheer for those who are still coming in. (It doesn't take long, because there aren't many runners behind me. Ha.) There is much celebration at the end of a race for everyone who has persevered and returned safely from the journey. And sometimes I need to remind myself that the most important person waiting at the finish line is Jesus.

This contribution is available at <http://eatingslowly.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/running-to-find-jesus/>
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Fiat and The Family [at and these Thy gifts]

An entry for Filipinos for Life's December Blogging Event, **What Child is This? Bearing Children as the World's Salvation**



Christmas season is the perfect time to discuss the bearing of children. That today is the Feast of the Holy Family makes it particularly appropriate.

In [Three To Get Married](#), Archbishop Fulton Sheen says:

It takes three to make Love in Heaven—
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It takes three for Heaven to make love to earth—
God, Man, and Mary, through whom God became Man.

It takes three to make love in the Holy Family—
Mary, and Joseph, and the consummation of their love, Jesus.

It takes three to make love in hearts—
The Lover, the Beloved, and Love.

You can see how the phrase “making love” then takes on a new dimension when viewed in light of God’s mandate. In our society today we throw this phrase around and render it meaningless: making love = sex, and vice versa. And sex according to the world is but a recreational activity, a physical need, a stress reliever, an animal instinct — and those are just the milder terms I’ve seen used.

If we are to recognize that sex is God’s gift, however, then every instance of the marital act, **as God designed it**, becomes an essential part of every married person’s salvation. God means for it to be free, total, fruitful, and faithful. It is unitive and procreative, because the marital embrace is not simply a communion of bodies and minds, but a communion of souls. Making love with our spouses according to God’s design becomes our personal annunciation. Every instance, blessed

and open to life, becomes sacred, because that is when we give our personal Fiat: we say YES to God as much as we say YES to our spouse, and YES to the possibility of new life. Life, a newly created soul, is God's greatest gift to us. In keeping ourselves open to life, every man becomes another Joseph who says, YES, LORD, I am ready to take on the responsibility of fathering a child. I say yes to whatever it takes, to bring up this new soul, to work for him, to house her, to clothe him, to protect her, to defend him, to teach her. Every woman becomes another Mary who says, YES, LORD, to this new body planted to grow within my own, this new soul to grow as my own soul grows ever closer to You. This is how, as man and woman bound together in Matrimony, we truly participate in this work of salvation. That's why being unequivocally pro-life in our own homes, in our marriages, in our families, is a non-negotiable.

Bearing a child, as the Holy Family demonstrated, did not end with Mary giving birth. The proper raising of children is a lifetime commitment. While we have the responsibility to see to our children's physical, mental and emotional well-being, more important than any of those is their spiritual well-being. Every child we bear is another FIAT to life. Continuing to emulate Joseph and Mary, we see that each child is called to be another Christ, and how we raise him/her necessarily becomes reflective of that. Our job as parents is to teach them how to give that wholehearted Fiat as well when their time comes.

Our FIAT then, collectively and individually, enables us to follow in the Holy Family's footsteps, and to see our role in salvation history, crystal clear and staring us in the face. We not only grow bodies, we grow souls. The unique crosses that we carry, big and small, often come to us via the family, but likewise, we fill our lives with big and small "fiats", and as we do so, mold our hearts and our wills to His will. It is not an easy trek by any means, but there is no more worthwhile goal than getting each other to heaven so we can enjoy His as well as each other's company there. It is thus foolish and pointless to wish or expect married and family life to be a bed of roses, especially when we already know that the crown of thorns comes before the crown of glory, and that salvation passes by way of the family.

Additional suggested reading:

[Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization](#)
[The Family, Gift and Commitment, Hope for Humanity](#)
[Gratissimam Sane](#)

This contribution is available at <http://www.andthesethygifts.com/2013/12/29/flat-and-the-family/>
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The Broken Christmas [at All This And Heaven]

The season began with a late start and the Christmas boxes being gingerly guided down the stairs. Not gingerly enough, as several of our nativity sets broke. I have not even taken inventory, the kids advised that it might make me too upset. We have sets from all over the world or at least we did. . . And that is how the season of the broken Christmas began. A broken dish here, a broken ornament there all brought us to Christmas eve with a rush to get out the door for Midnight Mass. The kitchen was hot from the cookie baking and the outside was super cold. I tried to find the twin's dolls to let them hold during Mass. (Something I never do but I worried that Mass would be long with lots of singing and they were super tired.) When I got to their crib I saw that their crib was a mess with several old bottles still sitting there, empty. This set me off in ways I am ashamed to admit. I had been so busy shopping, wrapping and organizing Christmas all while I was expecting the kids to step up to the plate and take care of other things.



I was incredibly angry to realize that the twins had not been cared for to my expectations. I grabbed the empty bottles all 6 of them and stormed into the kitchen throwing them into the sink that was full of dishes. The bottles bounced up hitting the window. The glass shattered everywhere. Oh Crap, we were all already late for church. I did it again. I let the stress of the season that I put on myself come to head and I blew up and continued to blow up half the ride to church. We got to the parking lot and I was still mad. I wasn't ready to apologize. I was still so mad. I felt the kids should be apologizing to me even though I was the one that lost my temper. Before opening the door we all prayed an Our Father, a Hail Mary and an Act of Contrition. Then we walked in, but I admit I was still full of anger. We were greeted as we walked into Mass and asked if our family would carry in the baby Jesus. I volunteered the younger children but planned to keep the twins in our pew.



During the Mass we call to mind our sins and ask forgiveness, I said those prayers with my all of heart. I felt God's love and forgiveness overwhelm me. Jason had cleaned up the glass outside and when we arrived at home he taped the window. I felt so blessed to be married to a man that cares for me and cleans up for me even when I loose it. I share this because I have posted a few posts of how great our Christmas was, and it really was. I don't want anyone to think that our life is always perfect, just because that is what I post. It is hard to admit how flawed I am and how flawed we are as a family. Ironically as we left Mass I was wished a Merry Christmas from a friend in the parish and then her next statement is one that I hear at least one time every day, "Your family is so wonderful, you know you should write a book!" I responded that some day I would but I laughed to myself knowing how we get to the great moments by way of the crazy moments. I think that there is a lesson in that. The trick is what we do with those crazy moments. If we turn them back to Christ, if we say sorry and we try, He will find a way to make good come from those moments. Now the real hard part of becoming Christ like to being a Christian is to be Christ to those around me. Can I offer forgiveness and love others the way Christ does with me?



The breaking continued all throughout Christmas day. We lost crystal glasses and all of my glass cups. I prefer to drink from glass and apparently so do the kids. Even if they have been told not to use them, they still do. I can't blame the kids, as I said I understand that they prefer the glass.



The biggest disappointment and test of my new resolve came with the Christmas dishes. When J and I first got married my mom started giving me Spode Christmas Tree dishes. After about 5 years I had quit the collection. After moving to Houston this collection has been the only thing we use during the holidays, starting with Thanksgiving. We had just enough for our growing family as well. I had several serving platters, trays and I even had several knives and serving spoons with the Spode handles. I also had coffee mugs and water glasses and, and, and. The favorite part of this collection was the number of dinner plates we had collected. We knew that with 20 dinner plates we can all eat and serve a few friends. We were down to 17 from 20 over the past few years because we let the little ones use the good plates too, it is their Christmas as much as it is mine. This has been our attitude all along, we know we might loose a piece or two each season but that means we are using the dishes.



Then the incident happened. We had made the decision to serve the meal buffet style because of the "over-crowded" table. Princess was bringing the stack of plates into the breakfast table where we would be setting up the food. Sadly the stack of 17 plates was set on top of a puddle of water that was unable to be seen. The plates "hydroplaned" off the table smashing into the bench and the floor. Goobers was sitting next to it watching the plates "move all by themselves" and her reaction was too slow. I heard the crash from the other room and considering it was the "broken" Christmas I could only imagine what I would find when I got to the room. In our house when something breaks you need to yell, "stay out" if there is glass on the floor, "help" if you need help and "I'm OK" so that the sound alone doesn't cause heart attacks throughout the house. Nothing was said, so one by one each person ran into the room to see if everyone was ok. As each child saw the stack of plates on the floor they were dumbfounded.



When I got to the room I saw a mess on the floor and a roomful of kiddos with their hands over their mouths and eyes wide open. I let out a little giggle and said, "I guess this really is a 'broken' Christmas." I then asked them to clean up the mess and to be careful. Seeing mom act calmly meant they could all react now. What I heard made me so thankful for this crazy season in which everything seemed to break. "Oh I planned to use those dishes with my kids", "I guess we will need more sooner than later", and "We planned to use those dishes when all of our families get together for Christmases, Mom we are going to need to buy more plates." They are planning to continue to spend their Christmases together. That warmed my heart and I will find a way to buy more plates as the years go by. Considering each child except Bear want a large family I was going to need to invest in more plates anyway. In the end we have 12 plates left, two are chipped.



I learned so much this broken year. I am so thankful that the dishes and the windows are what is broken. Our family is not broken. That is the best news, really the only news that matters. We work hard for our time together and we are glad that isn't broken. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for letting us celebrate your generosity with each other. Sometimes this broken world feels very much like heaven. It is moments like these that I appreciate the name of this blog. I feel so blessed that God has given me all this, plus the opportunity of heaven too.

This contribution is available at <http://allthisandheaven.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-broken-christmas.html>
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After creating my [list of Catholic saints](#) that I wanted us to study in our homeschool this year, I took a look at the resources we had available.



In our home library, we have lots of books of Catholic saints, both for adults and children. I'll share some of my favorites, as well as ones that are on my wish list.

Catholic Saints Books For Kids

I love this book from Amy Welborn, so much we also bought the [Loyola Kids Book of Heros](#), too. She writes the history of the saints in easy to understand stories, great for kids and an added resource for moms!

I was lucky to find this book at a local used bookstore, wrapped it up and put it under the tree.

This was one of our first resources that we used in our homeschool. I love the beautiful illustrations, but prefer the stories in the Amy Welborn books.

In this book, you'll find over 100 saints, arranged by era (Renaissance, Modern Times, etc).

Ever played Where's Waldo? Imagine that, only with pictures of Catholic saints! This looks like fun!

This book of over 60 most popular Catholic saints, is arranged by the saint's feast date.

This book covers 16 saints, telling their stories as legends, without focusing on dates.

We also have books for specific saints like [St Nicholas](#) and [Blessed Juan Diego](#).

Catholic Saints Books for Moms

Part of what I love about our rich history of Catholic saints is knowing that they often faced the same trials and issues that affect us today.

This book points to specific saints to lean on in times of suffering, anxiety or feeling like a failure.

In this resource, Pope Benedict explores and explains the contributions of 17 Catholic saints to our Church.

[Sisterhood of Saints: Daily Guidance and Inspiration](#)

In this daily devotional, we explore a diverse listing of female Catholic saints, learning how to be better disciples of Christ.

Ever think that the saints are nothing like you? This book reminds us that saints are women just like us – married, single, divorced and more.

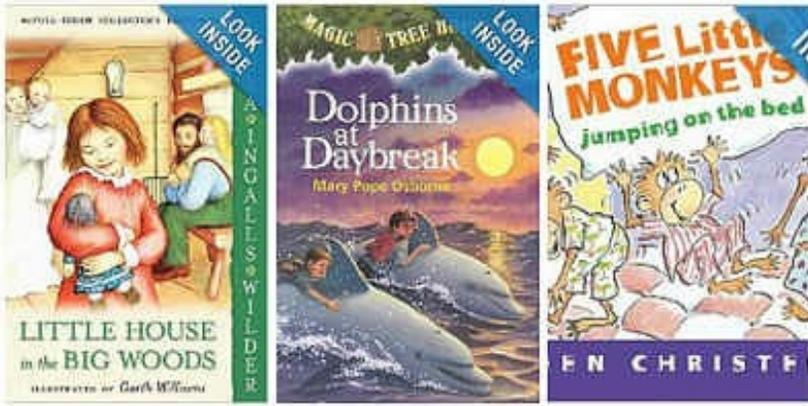
My edition of this book is tattered and dog eared, with notes in the margins and highlighted passages throughout.

Lisa Hendey takes 52 saints and explores them as they relate to our vocation as mothers.

I know this book is geared for teens, but I like the writing style of Colleen Swaim. These stories will inspire Catholics of all ages to live their faith to the fullest.

This beautiful story explores six female saints who deeply influenced the author's life.

Do you have a favorite resource for Catholic saints books? I'd love to hear your ideas.



Books we read today:

- Rachel: Chapter 5 in [Little House in the Big Woods](#)
- The Boys: listened to [Magic Tree House: Dolphins at Daybreak](#)
- Maeve: [Five Little Monkeys](#)

This contribution is available at <http://thekennedyadventures.com/catholic-saints-books-for-kids-30-days-of-reading-with-my-kids/>
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The Destructive Forces of Divorce [at Bible Belt Catholic]



Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal Son

On the Feast of the Holy Family, we see a picture of God's plan for us. Our human ecology, designed by God, was that we each grow up and become nurtured by a loving mother and father. It is how human beings thrive. The parents of Jesus, especially St. Joseph, show the protection and security needed for a child to really flourish.

In our days, this security is threatened by the lack of appreciation for the indissolubility of marriage. We're talking about divorce. "Divorce," says Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight and President of the JPPII Institute for Marriage and Family, "not only shatters the lives of the two spouses but also forces children to pay the consequences of their parents' actions" (*A Civilization of Love*, 75). Apart from abuse, which is unacceptable, divorce is irrational. It doesn't make the man and woman happier and the children always lose. We are left with adults and children who need to know first-hand the experience of Jesus in the Holy Family, but cannot. Elizabeth

Marquardt, an expert on divorce and herself a child of divorced parents speaks to the pain of these children:

This is the truth about us: Some of us, many more than those from intact families, struggle with serious problems. Our parents' divorce is linked to our higher rates of depression, suicidal attempts and thoughts, health problems, childhood sexual abuse, school dropout, failure to attend college, arrests, addiction, [unwed] pregnancy, and more. Some of us were practically abandoned to raise ourselves in the wake of our parents' divorce and turned to drugs or alcohol or thrill seeking to numb our pain. Some of us were abused by new adults who came into the house when one of our parents left. Some of us continue to struggle with the scars left from our parents' divorce: we have a harder time finishing school, getting and keeping jobs, maintaining relationships, and having lasting marriages. We end up living on the margins, struggling with our pain, while our friends and neighbors move on with their lives (ibid.).

The reality of pain is obvious. The Good news is that Jesus enters into our pain and wants to restore us to His original plan for us. He offers us that love of the Father that forgives and then allows us to love. It's true: whatever we do not let God transform, we will transmit. My own life was affected by divorce. When I was 22 my parents decided to divorce. I was in Rome still studying to be a priest, and we had to Skype to talk about what was happening. I was furious with both of them and of course wanted to solve the problem. But I couldn't. I questioned a lot of my childhood and my two younger brothers who were still at home still struggle with many of the things that Marquardt mentioned.

My healing came primarily through forgiving. In another story that mirrors the Holy Family, Jesus tells us of the benevolent Father and His two sons. Rembrandt, the great Dutch artist, made a fascinating portrait of this story, calling it "The Return of the Prodigal Son." We see the Son healed and restored to his original dignity as Son by his return to family values and relationships that he had cut. We see the Father also saved through his forgiving of his Son. The power of forgiveness is mysterious but real.

In any family, we must avoid what leads us to separation and division. Texts, messages, cold shoulders, infidelity, jealousy, irresponsibility with work and money, not taking time to spend with family. These all lead to divorce. Cut them out now, forgive. For those who suffer from divorce, you are not alone. The Church has many people and ways to encounter the Loving Father and we are here to lead you back to the Father's house. May our families and the family of the Church be

as loving and welcoming as the Holy Family, eager to protect and heal all of its children.

This contribution is available at <http://bible-belt-catholic.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-destructive-forces-of-divorce.html>

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