

NewEvangelists.org

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February 2014

- [New Evangelists Monthly - February 2014](#)

New Evangelists Monthly - February 2014

- [Forward](#)
...about this eBook
- [Are You A Priority or Just An Option?](#)
The Veil of Chastity by Cindy Hurla
- [What are Relics and Why do Catholics Honor them?](#)
A Catholic Life by Matthew P
- [Same belief, different perspective](#)
This Captivating Love by Hilary Gorman
- [Common Ground? A Personal Relationship with Christ](#)
Forget The Roads by Renee Lin
- [The Problem with Tolerance](#)
A Dreamer's Wife by Stefanie Shick
- [Thoughts on men and their emotions](#)
by Arleen Spenceley
- [Planting the Seeds of Faith in Our Children](#)
Splendor in the Home by Christine Smith
- [The False Martyr Complex](#)
joy of nine9 by Melanie Jean Juneau
- [The Benedictine Oblate and Christian Perfection](#)
Suffering With Joy by Barbara Schoeneberger
- [Hadley's Legs](#)
Smaller Manhattans by Christian LeBlanc
- [The Hidden Side to the Theology of the Body](#)
For Such a Time as This by Esther Rich
- [The Mission of Motherhood](#)
Raising Angels by Amy Parris
- [Why do you have inordinate attachments?](#)
Contemplative Homeschool by Connie Rossini
- [14 More Reasons Why You Should Become a FOCUS Missionary in 2014](#)
Prayers From Therese by Jane Voelker
- [Pope Francis on Cover of Rolling Stone Magazine - The Cool Pope](#)
JESUSCARITASEST.ORG by Miriam Westen
- [Dearly Loved](#)
Footprints on My Heart by Sarah Maurer

- [**Do You Trust?**](#)
Sacred Sharings For The Soul by Celeste Ciarallo
- [**It's Been a Long Ride**](#)
One Arrow Alone by Eli Stok
- [**Disciples of the Lamb of God -- Sam-I-am**](#)
Kitchen table chats by Denise Hunnell
- [**The "Yes" God wants from us**](#)
JOY Alive in our hearts by Nancy Ward
- [**The Homilies of Father J. Michael Venditti**](#)
Byzantine Catholic Priest by Fr. Michael Venditti
- [**The Call \(Come, My Way\)**](#)
~ Breviary Hymns ~ by Kevin Shaw
- [**My Very Own Frankenstein Monster**](#)
The Contemplative Catholic Convert by Rich Maffeo
- [**Dear Father: What I Don't Want At My Funeral**](#)
8 Kids And A Business by Terry McDermott
- [**Bringing Christ, A Light to All People Who Experience Same Sex Attraction**](#)
Christ's Faithful Witness by Lawrence and Susan Fox
- [**Theme of 2014: Work and Pray**](#)
Revolution of Love Blog by Bobbi
- [**Removing Life Support - 8 Reasons the Munoz Decision Was Wrong**](#)
Designs by Birgit by Birgit Jones
- [**This Cloud of Witnesses**](#)
The Breadbox Letters by Nancy Shuman
- [**How this simple question turned me Catholic**](#)
The Orant by Billy Kangas
- [**I Want to Remember More than Evil**](#)
Catholic How by Br. Matt Janeczko
- [**Holy Is His Name performed by Melissa Maricich**](#)
About the Rosary by Godwin Adadzie
- [**Once a Mother, Always a Mother**](#)
String of Pearls by Laura Pearl
- [**Blog Tour: 99 Stories from the Bible**](#)
This That and the Other Thing by Ruth Curcuru
- [**Pope Francis and Notre Dame: "Thou shalt not, or Thou SHALL"**](#)
The Lady in the Pew by Kelly Thatcher

- [**Playing Ball**](#)
Busy Catholic Moms by Shannon Vandaveer
- [**Valuing Life's Interruptions**](#)
bukas palad by Fr. Adrian Danker
- [**Extreme Mothering**](#)
CF Family by Allison Howell
- [**Woman created "for her own sake"**](#)
Catholic Deacon by Deacon Scott Dodge
- [**Surrendering to Suffering**](#)
CatholicMom.com by Katie O'Keefe
- [**A Tiny Doubting Thomas**](#)
Peace Garden Mama by Roxane Salonen
- [**Do You Know The Precepts of The Church?**](#)
Lord, Make Me a Saint by Jamie Jo
- [**I'm a Feminist**](#)
Walk By Faith by Bettendorf
- [**Set A Fire**](#)
Dancing in the Rain by Kathryn Cooper
- [**Making sense of hurts: PEACE**](#)
The Holloways - North by Ruth Anne Holloway
- [**Burying St. Joseph**](#)
Working to be Worthy by Liana Eisenman-Wolford
- [**Fifty Shades of Gray...if not more!**](#)
A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars by Ebeth Weidner
- [**Gentle Women**](#)
Children's Rosary by Blythe Kaufman
- [**Setting successful goals**](#)
crucesignatiblog by Christina Sawchuk
- [**Catholic Doctrine all makes sense - prayer to Mary**](#)
Washed, Sanctified and Justified by De Maria
- [**Pope Francis and the Media**](#)
by Mariella Hunt
- [**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ in Ukraine: URGENT**](#)
Pursuit of Truth Ministries by Hudson Byblow
- [**Red Shoes**](#)
Convert Journal by George Sipe

- **[From Precious Moments to Ignatius Press](#)**
Single Catholic Girl by Molly
- **[Worship as a Modality of Prayer](#)**
Bartimaeus' Quiet Place by Bartimaeus Timeo
- **[I Am More Than My Desire](#)**
Can We Cana? by Karee Santos
- **[Young marriage: Another daughter engaged!](#)**
Little Catholic Bubble by Leila Miller
- **[A movie worth the effort: Gimme Shelter](#)**
Leaven For The Loaf by Ellen Kolb
- **[Spiritual Combat](#)**
From the Pulpit of My Life by Ruth Ann Pilney
- **[When You Were Under the Fig Tree](#)**
MCCatholic - Making Scripture Known by Mark Camp
- **[A few of the many reasons we love our Catholic school](#)**
Catholic Review by Rita Buettner
- **[She left Samuel there](#)**
Journey to Wisdom by Heidi Knofczynski
- **[The Importance of Secular Learning](#)**
by Tom Perna
- **[The Silent Preacher](#)**
Living the Faith by Michael Ogundele
- **[Proving It](#)**
Martin Family Moments by Colleen Martin
- **[Sexual abuse by clergy the tip of the iceberg](#)**
In the Breaking of the Bread by Fr. Gilles Surprenant
- **[Getting "ready" for Baby](#)**
Little House in Chicago by Tess Civantos
- **[7 Ways to Help Foster Children in Your Area](#)**
Garden of Holiness by Christie Martin
- **[Whose Responsibility is My Happiness?](#)**
Naru Hodo by Marie
- **[In the Quiet](#)**
The Wayward Catholic by Paul Roy
- **[My Patron Saint for 2014: Elizabeth Ann Seton](#)**
The Koala Bear Writer by Bonnie Way
- **[The Memorare](#)**

mommynovenas by Lora Goulet

- [**Conversion: An Enigma to Paganism and Secularism**](#)
Sky View by Joe Tremblay
- [**An Ordeal**](#)
Doubting Thomist Art & Faith by Gregory Watson
- [**Christian Community: Part 1**](#)
Blissful Thinking by Danielle Kuboushek
- [**Month of the Holy Name of Jesus**](#)
Happy Little Homemaker by Jen Steed
- [**Happy New Year 2014. Your Name is....**](#)
Em's Estuary by Emily Davis
- [**Forty-Plus Years of Legal Mass Murder**](#)
Justin's Corner by Justin
- [**Neil deGrasse Tyson: religion and science**](#)
Christopher's Apologies by Christopher Smith
- [**Incredible Things Planned for Us**](#)
The Road Home by Rebecca Royse

Forward

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

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

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Are You A Priority or Just An Option? [at The Veil of Chastity]

As you enter into the New Year, put your heart in the hands of our Lord. Forgive yourselves for the questionable decisions you have made in the past. And, if you are currently in a relationship, ask yourself this question:

Am I a priority in his life or just an option?

Trial and Error

I just received an email from a girl who paid me a compliment which made me chuckle a bit. She said, “*I never learned all these gems you **seem to know intuitively** when it comes to with dealing with men and finding the one.*”

Oh boy, there is nothing intuitive about the “gems” that I share on this blog. Each and every gem has been obtained by trial and error. Mostly error. 😊 I am sharing them with you not because I believe that you will avoid the heartache that these errors bring on, but instead so that you will be able to connect the dots and self-correct when you do err.

If I have painted a picture here of my dating life that makes it seem that this was all “intuitive” (which means “known automatically”), then I owe you an apology. Out of all the letters I receive from you, my readers, there has been nothing that surprises me. I share anecdotes in these private correspondences which I don’t share publicly on the blog because they are sort of embarrassing! I hope my responses ooze with compassion as well as the message that you are completely *normal* in your desire to be loved. And, that your ‘errors’ are nothing new.

So, back to the question: *Am I a priority in his life or just an option?*



Me at 25 in need of Gems

5 Years ~ Ugh

Let me begin by telling a story. I didn’t even include this particular aspect of my life in [my book](#)

because it represents to me such foolishness on my part. I still look back and wonder why I stayed in this relationship as long as I did. The only thing I can come up with was that I did not have any other options. Or so I thought. Who knows how my life would have transpired had I asked myself the above question and then *acted* on the wisdom the answer would have revealed.

I cringe as I type but here it goes. I started dating a guy when I was 25. Let's call him John. The final breakup happened when I was almost 30. There were approximately 5 break ups that happened in those 5 years. Now, keep in mind that I was away from my faith and I was not living a [Sacramental life in Christ](#). I was seeking God, but on my own terms. I had a couple of control issues that I was working through which started in college and lingered through my 20's. Staying in the relationship with John only *deepened* the crevices where these control issues ran through my head and my heart.

The break up pattern looked like this: He chased me. I agreed to reconcile. He treated me like an option. I would get mad. I would break up. He contacted me and used his charm to convince me to give it another try. Wash, rinse, repeat.

He Loved Me, [But Not Enough](#)

We met in college when we were both dating other people. His break up and my break up happened around the same time and presto, we began to date. He was living about an hour away and back then long distance phone calls cost money. I felt special that he would call me but it did not feel like he called me often enough.

We would also see each other on the weekends. But, not every weekend. Interestingly, I knew his family really well but he had only met my family a couple of times. His family lived in the same town as I did so it was convenient to include me in that aspect of his life. But, there were times when he would visit his family and not even let me know he was in town. Ouch. Time to break up.

I Was Not A Priority

My commitment to Chastity was severely tested. But, it was also a very effective litmus test. I knew deep down that marriage was the only thing that could justify such an intimate act. I knew that if I had shared that with him and he had not married me in the end, there would be hell to pay. Mostly towards myself.

During this time, I watch others meet and marry. I could see a marked difference. I could see that I was being treated as an option and not a priority. And, it made me mad. So, I would point this out to John. He would act hurt/confused that what he was offering me was not enough. But I knew that he knew I was right.

There were all sorts of excuses: the distance, his job, his career, his immaturity. Looking back, he was kind of immature but it is interesting that the girl he dated after me somehow cured this

immaturity. He made her a priority and he married her.

My Gems

This unhealthy relationship really did a number on me. I continued to date other guys after John but it took several years for the [Lord to heal me](#). I don't blame John. I blame myself.

But, the errors resulted in **gems**. After John, I could easily spot when I was being treated as just an option by the guys I was dating. I was able to connect the dots and self-correct.

It was not until I [met Gregg](#) that I realized what being made a priority looks and feels like. There were no excuses. There were no disappointments. Each potential opportunity to spend time together was capitalized upon. And, these opportunities required a plane and taking leave from work. There was nothing convenient about that.

Gregg never tired of calling me. He loved talking to me on the phone because he loved my voice. I met his family and he met mine. I met his friends and he met mine. He was proud to have me as his girlfriend. He displayed the maturity required to move things toward marriage. He sacrificed his life to join it to mine.

So, I encourage you to ask yourself this question about your current relationship: Are you a priority or just an option? If you are just an option, break up and don't look back. Don't delay your opportunity to be treated like a priority by the right man. Don't tie up your heart on a man who could take you or leave you. Keep your heart free so that the Lord can move in your life and so that you can follow His will. Keep your emotions holy so as to not deepen the crevices of anger, mistrust, self-blame and disappointment.

Allow Him to turn your errors into Gems!

God love you and bless you!

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2014/01/06/are-you-a-priority-or-just-an-option/>
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What are Relics and Why do Catholics Honor them? [at A Catholic Life]



The veneration of relics is a practice that precedes Christianity and has its origin in Judaism. In the 2nd Book of Kings (cf. 13:21) we read the account of a corpse being thrown "into the grave of Elisha". Upon contact with the prophet Elisha's remains, the corpse resuscitated to life. Holy objects (such as Aaron's staff, the Ten Commandments, and manna from the desert) were both revered, and preserved in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:10).

The Church has adopted the veneration of sacred objects from Judaism. Many miracles have been worked in the Church's history through these sacred objects. Tradition tells us that Saint Helena, Constantine's mother, discerned which of the three crosses found on the hill of Calvary was the True Cross, upon which our Savior died for us, by placing a sick child on them and then he was restored to health when he made contact with the True one.

Listed in the pre-1962 Missal is an often unknown feast - that of The Sacred Relics for November 5th of each year. This Mass was a "Mass in Some Places" and was not universally celebrated. The great liturgical Dom Prosper Guéranger recounts the spirituality for this feast. The following is excerpted from Dom Prosper Guéranger's entry in *The Liturgical Year* in Volume XV of the 1983 Marian House edition of the English translation by the Benedictines of Stanbrook.

"Had we angels' eyes, we should see the earth as a vast field sown with seed for the resurrection. The death of Abel opened the first furrow, and, ever since, the sowing has gone on unceasingly the wide world over. This land of labour and of suffering, what treasures it already holds laid up in its bosom! And what a harvest for heaven, when the Sun of justice, suddenly darting forth His rays, shall cause to spring up as suddenly from the soil the elect ears ripe for glory! No wonder that the Church herself blesses and superintends the laying of the precious grain in the earth."

"But the Church is not content to be always sowing. Sometimes, as though impatient of delay, she raises from the ground the chosen seed she had sown therein. Her infallible discernment preserves her from error; and, disengaging from the soil the immortal germ, she forestalls the

glory of the future. She encloses the treasure in gold or precious stuffs, carries it in triumph, invites the multitudes to come and reverence it; or she raises new temples to the name of the blessed ones, and assigns him the highest honour of reposing under the altar, whereon she offers to God the tremendous Sacrifice."

Yet this is not the only case of relics being celebrated by the Church. Each year the Church traditionally celebrated on August 5th the Feast of the Finding of the Relics of St. Stephen the First Martyr.

The second festival in honor of the holy protomartyr St. Stephen was instituted by the Church on the occasion of the discovery of his precious remains. His body lay long concealed, under the ruins of an old tomb, in a place twenty miles from Jerusalem, called Caphargamala, where stood a church which was served by a venerable priest named Lucian. In the year 415, on Friday, the 3d of December, about nine o'clock at night, Lucian was sleeping in his bed in the baptistery, where he commonly lay in order to guard the sacred vessels of the church. Being half awake, he saw a tall, comely old man of a venerable aspect, who approached him, and, calling him thrice by his name, bid him go to Jerusalem and tell Bishop John to come and open the tombs in which his remains and those of certain other servants of Christ lay, that through their means God might open to many the gates of His clemency.

This vision was repeated twice. After the second time, Lucian went to Jerusalem and laid the whole affair before Bishop John, who bade him go and search for the relics, which, the Bishop concluded, would be found under a heap of small stones which lay in a field near his church. In digging up the earth here, three coffins or chests were found. Lucian sent immediately to acquaint Bishop John with this. He was then at the Council of Diospolis, and, taking along with him Eutonium, Bishop of Sebaste, and Eleutherius, Bishop of Jericho, came to the place. Upon the opening of St. Stephen's coffin the earth shook, and there came out of the coffin such an agreeable odor that no one remembered to have ever smelled anything like it.

Sometimes relics are transferred from one location to another with great solemnity when a saint is canonized. In the United States, this recently

[occurred with the transfer of the relics for Mother Guerin](#)

Relics are important and the source of Pilgrimage.

The Holy Relics of Aachen Germany are exposed only for 10 days once every 7 years. Few places rank beside Aachen in the history of Christian Europe. Aachen's Cathedral was built in 790-800 AD as the palace chapel of Charlemagne, King of the Franks and Holy Roman Emperor (born 742; died 814). Charlemagne was given his final resting place in this cathedral, which was the most distinguished sanctuary in his realm. For nearly 600 years, from 936 to 1531, kings were

enthroned on Charlemagne's throne, after having been anointed and crowned at the main altar.

During the Middle Ages, Aachen became one of Christendom's most important places of pilgrimage, on a par with Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela. The Aachen pilgrimage, which has been taking place every seven years ever since 1349, is devoted to worshipping the four Holy Relics collected by Blessed Charlemagne:

- the cloak of Our Lady
- the swaddling clothes of the Infant Jesus
- the loin clothes worn by Our Lord during His Crucifixion
- and the cloth where the head of St. John the Baptist was placed after his beheading

These Holy Relics will be officially taken out of the 13th century reliquary and ritually displayed between June 20-30, 2014.

[Click here for more information](#)

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As relics are important, The Church has systematized these sacred objects into classes. A First Class relic is any corporeal remain. A Second Class relic is any object that belonged to the Saint. And a third class relic is an object (e.g. Rosary, piece of cloth, holy card, etc) that has touched a first or a second class relic.

An example of first and second class relics may be found at the Shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia. At this shrine is preserved the incorruptible body of St. John Neumann under the altar in a glass case. It is truly a miracle that some saints' bodies do not decay even after hundreds of years and without embalming as a testament to God and to the authenticity of the Catholic Church. The saint's body is the first class relic while the museum of artifacts of items used and owned by St. John are 2nd class relics.

[You may see a complete listing of photos by clicking here](#)

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[For more information on relics and incorruptible saints, see Regina Magazine.](#)

This contribution is available at <http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/2014/01/what-are-relics-and-why-do-catholics.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

Same belief, different perspective [at This Captivating Love]

It's that time of year... people all over the country are flocking to D.C. for the March for Life. And more are heading to their state capitols for the same reason: to stand up for the innocent, the unborn, and to give them a voice.

Before I get too far into this I feel like I should preface with something. I AM Pro-Life, and always have been. I just see things differently than I have in the past. Life happens and sometimes are experiences give us better insight to the depth of our beliefs.

Without a doubt, I believe that life begins at conception. And anything that prevents that little life from happening is ultimately murder. That might sound pretty drastic but that's because it truly is. Even a young child could tell you that taking a life is equivalent to killing. It is black and white... there are no grey areas.

Many people believe there ARE grey areas though. That in certain instances, maybe it is ok to take away that life. I'm not just talking about a 16 year old that accidentally got knocked up but actually really intelligent people with doctorates believe this. They are wrong. Again, there is no grey area.

The difference between how I feel about being pro-life now and how I felt about it last year is that I can relate to those people that see the grey. I now know what it is like to be pregnant and it not be exactly what you thought. My pregnancy was planned but the chromosomal abnormalities were not. I know what it feels like to worry and wonder about how this child will change your life. I know the fear that you won't be able to take care of the child well enough. I know the anxiety over the uncertain future. And I know what it's like to hear people tell you that the easiest thing would be to end it. And for that split second to think, "Yes. It would be easier." It was never really an option for me, but I still hated myself for that second of weakness.

But here is what I know that the people that see grey don't know. Taking the life of my sick child would not have been easier. I still lost my daughter but my conscious is clear because I know that I loved her for every second of her short life... even in my weak moments. I know that that little life

ending doesn't really make anything go away. None of it really ends. I know that every life has a purpose even if it never takes a breath. Anna had a great purpose and I am convinced she converted more hearts than I ever will be able to. I know that life matters. I know that no diagnosis can define a person or put a barrier between a mother or father and their child. I know this.

I also know that love is a funny this. It creeps in and takes over you. Even when the life is gone, love lives on.

Sorry to be cheesy... And I know that kind of rhymes. I stole it from a song sort of because I'm not cool enough to come up with something original. This song is actually about a woman that lost her husband but the theme still works. And if you actually listen to the song do yourself a favor and grab a box of Kleenexes. You are going to need them, I promise.

Ok... I got off topic. My point is, my position has not changed. If anything I am even more rooted in my beliefs in the Pro-Life movement. But I have a place in my heart for those who felt the panic and the worry and fear. Even if they made the wrong choice. I think we need to remember that some of these women felt like they had no way out of their situation. Trapped. And we need to love them through it all. Because I'd be willing to bet that maybe they didn't know they loved their child... but the love for them still lives on.

Seriously.... listen to the song :)

This contribution is available at <http://thiscaptivatinglove.blogspot.com/2014/01/same-belief-different-perspective.html>
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Common Ground? A Personal Relationship with Christ [at Forget The Roads]



Christ embracing St. Bernard

Do Evangelical Protestants and Catholics agree on the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? This concept forms the basis of all that Evangelicals say and do. Unless a person enters into a personal relationship with God, that person cannot be saved – Evangelicals are convinced of that. And that’s why they’re so worried about Catholics, because they’re sure that Catholicism is about ritual and working one’s way to Heaven. Believing that the concept of a God with Whom one can have a personal relationship is utterly foreign to Catholicism, they are eager, and indeed they are even taught in many Evangelical churches to seek out Catholics with an eye towards leading them out of the Church. They have been told that inside the Catholic religious system there is simply no place for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Is there common ground between Evangelicals and Catholics on the subject of the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus? *Catholics have always advocated this kind of personal relationship!* Rather than argue this point, I’m going to let a few Catholics speak for themselves:

“O Jesus, draw my heart within Thy Breast,

That it may be by Thee alone possessed.

O Love, in that sweet pain it would find rest,

In that entrancing sorrow would be blest,

And lose itself in joy upon Thy Breast.”

St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

For yourselves, be strengthened in the Lord Jesus Christ, and may He dwell always in your hearts. For a heart empty of Christ is like a husk empty of grain: borne away on the winds, blown this way and that by temptation; whereas the grain of corn, even though the wind blow, will not be carried away by it, since it has weight, and in the same way the heart in which Christ dwells is made firm, so that though temptation beat down on it and buffet it, still it will not be swept hither and thither or be blown away. Say then, and say in your hearts: Let others cling to whom they will, as for me, it is good for me to cling to my God (Ps 73:28); and again: My soul hath clung close to Thee (Ps 63:8).” **Bl. Jordan of Saxony (1190-1237)**

“Dear God, what can I give to come to possess You? ... O Lord, I already know Your answer. ‘Give me yourself,’ You say, ‘and I will give you Myself. Give Me your mind and you will have Me in your mind. Keep all your possessions, but only give Me your soul. I have heard enough of your words; I do not need your works; only give Me yourself, forever.” **St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231)**

“Pierce, O most Sweet Lord Jesus, my inmost soul with the most joyous and healthful wound of Thy love, with true, serene, and most holy apostolic charity, that my soul may ever languish and melt with love and longing for Thee, that it may yearn for Thee and faint for Thy courts, and long to be dissolved and to be with Thee.” **St. Bonaventure (1221-1274)**

“O Sacred Heart of Jesus, fountain of eternal life, Your Heart is a glowing furnace of Love. You are my refuge and my sanctuary. O my adorable and loving Savior, consume my heart with the burning fire with which Yours is aflamed. Pour down on my soul those graces which flow from Your love. Let my heart be united with Yours. Let my will be conformed to Yours in all things. May Your Will be the rule of all my desires and actions. Amen.” **St. Gertrude the Great (1256-1302)**

“If, Lord, Thy love for me is strong

As this which binds me unto thee,

What holds me from thee Lord so long,

What holds thee Lord so long from me?

O soul, what then desirest thou?

Lord, I would see thee, who thus choose thee.

What fears can yet assail thee now?

All that I fear is but lose thee.

Love's whole possession I entreat,

Lord, make my soul thine own abode,

And I will build a nest so sweet

It may not be too poor for God.

A soul in God hidden from sin,

What more desires for thee remain,

Save but to love again,

And all on flame with love within,

Love on, and turn to love again.”

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

“Ah Jesus! Who will give me the grace to be one spirit with thee! At last, Lord, rejecting the multiplicity of creatures, I desire thine only unity! O God, thou art the only one and only unity necessary for my soul! Alas! dear love of my heart, unite my poor one soul, to thy one singular goodness! Ah! thou art wholly mine, when shall I be wholly thine? The adamant draws and unites iron unto it; O Lord, my lover, be my draw-heart, clasp, press and unite my heart for ever unto thy fatherly breast! Ah! since I am made for thee, why am I not in thee? Swallow up, as a single drop, this spirit which thou hast bestowed upon me, into the sea of thy goodness from whence it proceeds. Ah Lord! seeing that thy heart loves me, why does it not force me to itself, since I truly will it? Draw me, and I will run after thy drawings, to cast myself into thy fatherly arms, to leave them no more for ever and ever. Amen..” **St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622)**

“Oh Jesus, my Love, may my heart be consumed in loving You; make me humble and holy; give me childlike simplicity; transform me into Your holy love. O Jesus, life of my life, joy of my soul, God of my heart, accept my heart as an altar, on which I will sacrifice to You the gold of ardent charity, the incense of continual, humble and fervent prayer, and the myrrh of constant sacrifices!”

St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1775)

“If you desire to delight the loving heart of your God, be careful to speak to Him as often as you are able, and with the fullest confidence that He will not disdain to answer and speak with you in return. He does not, indeed, make Himself heard in any voice that reaches your ears, but in a voice that your heart can well perceive, when you withdraw from converse with creatures, to occupy yourself in conversing with your God alone: ‘I will lead her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart.’ He will then speak to you by such inspirations, such interior lights, such manifestations of His goodness, such sweet touches in your heart, such tokens of forgiveness, such experience of peace, such hopes of heaven, such rejoicings within you, such sweetness of His grace, such loving and close embraces, – in a word, such voices of love, as are well understood by those souls whom He loves and who seek for nothing but Himself alone.” **St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696- 1787)**

“He welcomes you at any hour of the day or night. His Love never knows rest. He is always most gentle towards you. When you visit Him, He forgets your sins and speaks only of His joy, His tenderness, and His Love. By the reception He gives to you, one would think He has need of you to make Him happy.” **St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868)**

Dear Lord, help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go.

Flood my soul with Thy spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine.

Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me but only Thee, O Lord!

Stay with me, and then I shall begin to shine as Thou shinest; so to shine as to be a light to others.

The light O Lord will be all from Thee; none of it will be mine;

It will be Thou, shining on others through me.

Let me thus praise Thee in the way Thou dost love best, by shining on those around me.

Let me preach Thee without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to Thee!

Bl. John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

“How sweet it was, the first kiss of Jesus to my soul! Yes, it was a kiss of Love. I felt I was loved, and I too said: ‘I love Thee, I give myself to Thee forever!’ Jesus asked nothing of me, demanded

no sacrifice. Already for a long time past, He and the little Therese had watched and understood one another...” **St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897)**

“Oh Jesus, what would have become of me, if you had not drawn me to You?.....I am Yours, Oh Jesus! ..Jesus I love Thee! Open Your heart to me; I wish to place all of my affections there. I open mine to You!” **St. Gemma Galgani (1878-1903)**

“It is with simplicity and love, with faith and trust that I will always come to You, O Jesus! I will share everything with You, as a child with its loving mother, my joys and sorrows – in a word, everything.” **St. Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938)**

“I follow Christ: Jesus is my God, Jesus is my Spouse, Jesus is my Life, Jesus is my only Love, Jesus is my All in All, Jesus is my Everything. Because of this, I am never afraid.” **Bl. Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)**

“It is necessary to awaken again in believers a full relationship with Christ, mankind’s only Savior. Only from a personal relationship with Jesus can an effective evangelization develop.” **Bl. John Paul II (1920-2005)**

“Our knowledge of Jesus is in need above all of a living experience: Another person’s testimony is certainly important, as in general the whole of our Christian life begins with the proclamation that comes to us from one or several witnesses. But we ourselves must be personally involved in an intimate and profound relationship with Jesus.” **Pope Benedict XVI (1927-)**

“What is the place of Jesus Christ in my priestly life? Is it a living relationship, from the disciple to the Master, from brother to brother, from the poor man to God, or is it a somewhat artificial relationship... that does not come from the heart? ...Even if you lose everything in life, don’t lose this relationship with Jesus Christ! This is your victory. Go forward with this!” **Pope Francis (1936-)**

I rest my case.

On the memorial of St. Wulfstan

Deo omnis gloria!

This contribution is available at <http://forgettheroads.com/2014/01/19/common-ground-a-personal-relationship-with-christ/>
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The Problem with Tolerance [at A Dreamer's Wife]



Driving to work a few months ago, I noticed a purple bumper sticker that I hadn't seen before that stated "Tolerate: Believe In It." It was similar to the "Coexist" bumper stickers I've seen numerous times. The first thing that came to mind when I saw this was "emptiness." Believe in *IT*? Huh?

Alright, alright. I know what people are getting at when they say "tolerance" – they mean acceptance. The first definition of tolerance, according to Merriam-Webster, is the "willingness to accept feelings, habits, or beliefs that are different from your own." While this sounds like a decent and respectful idea, and everyone certainly deserves respect, it falls short. Here's why:

1. Tolerance does not seek truth.

First of all, tolerance sounds to me a lot like "relativism," defined as "the belief that different things are true, right, etc., for different people or at different times." (Thanks, again, Merriam-Webster.) This is a big reason why the concept of tolerance leaves me empty. It signifies that there is no real truth; that "tolerance" is supposed to be some supreme social ideal that we are to bow down to so no one's feelings are hurt. Catholic speaker and author, Matthew Kelly states, "A world without truth is a world without joy or meaning."

Whoa! That's a pretty powerful and wise statement. You can't have joy or meaning in this life without truth! It's not possible! Truth is the key to a meaningful and joy-filled life. Tolerance is not the path to truth, and, therefore, does not lead to true joy and meaning. Clearly, relativism and tolerance is a dead-end street to seeking purpose in one's life.

2. Tolerance is isolating.

Contrary to popular belief, tolerance does not build community. Tolerance is lazy and selfish. It doesn't really have concern for others, it just wants everybody to get along. *You stay where you are and I'll stay here and we'll just do our thing. Cool?*

Tolerance is also defined by Merriam-Webster as “the ability to accept, experience, or survive something harmful or unpleasant.” After reading that, how does tolerance still sound like something that makes a successful society? I tolerate an itchy sweater or a long wait at the doctor’s office, we shouldn’t have to tolerate people. Yes, personalities and ideals clash, but we are called to recognize the dignity in each person, no matter how hard it may be at times.

3. Tolerance is not love.

What’s missing from this tolerance picture, is LOVE! Love trumps tolerance – no contest. Let’s be real: Would you rather be tolerated or loved?

Love requires sacrifice, listening, care, respect, honesty. Love wants others to get to Heaven. Love puts others first and seeks truth. Love makes the impossible possible. Love does not have limits.

Many of us know the popular words in 1 Corinthians: 4-7 (NAB), but they are worth repeating here:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrong-doing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

One thing that love does not require, though, is that we agree with one another. Somehow this absurd lie has been perpetuated that to really love someone and want what’s best for them, you have to let them do whatever they want – *and encourage it*. To quote a recent tweet by Rick Warren, “It’s nonsense that you must agree with people to #love them. I often disagree with people I deeply love. I married one!”

And still, even while reading about the beauty of love, there are those who are fuming that I am dogging the false ideal of tolerance. How dare I have the gall to bring God, faith, and the Bible into this “debate”! **But I say, how can I not, when the best *this world can offer is tolerance, because the world denies God, and thus rejects love? There is no love without God.*** And this is precisely why there is a huge problem in our culture in this day and time. So many are settling for humanism over Christianity, this world over the next, relativism and tolerance over truth and love.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let’s stand united in truth. Let’s continue to grow in love and live by the golden rule. Let’s choose joy and live with purpose each day. Let’s build each other up and use the gifts God has given each of us. Let’s embrace God’s grace and shine His light!

A life without truth, joy, community, and love is... empty. And I have a problem with that.

BELOVED, LET US LOVE ONE
ANOTHER, FOR LOVE IS FROM
GOD, AND WHOEVER LOVES
HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD AND
KNOWS GOD. ANYONE WHO
DOES NOT LOVE DOES NOT
KNOW GOD, BECAUSE GOD IS
LOVE. 1 JOHN 4:7-8



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| [Contents](#) |

Thoughts on men and their emotions

Last month, a fellow blogger asked me what I -- as a woman -- think it means to be a man. So in a comment on his blog, I wrote the following:

I could write a whole post (and perhaps I will after I finish my book!). But here's what comes to mind at first:

*A man uses words to communicate. He does what he says he's going to do. **He understands emotion to be a human thing, not a woman thing, and expresses his own. If he was raised not to express emotion, he makes an effort as an adult to unlearn what he learned (even if with the help of a licensed therapist).** He has integrity, which means he doesn't do stuff (or makes a concerted effort to avoid doing stuff) in private that doesn't align with his public image. He practices chastity and knows love is a choice as opposed to a feeling.*

Another of the blogger's readers left a comment regarding mine:

Actually, in this, you're buying into the mindset that tries to turn men into hairy women.

*No one *teaches* men to "not express emotion" -- it is a natural result of being in control of yourself, which is the masculine ideal. Furthermore, **no one, needs, nor even wants, "men" who wear their emotions on their sleeves, least of all women** [sic].*

***When it comes to emotions, the world was better off when women worked to emulate what comes naturally to men, by keeping a lid on theirs. Instead, most "women" these days mentally junior-high school girls** [sic] ... as are far too many so-called men.*

These are my thoughts on that:

- To my readers who are men: **IGNORE HIM.** You are not a hairy woman if you express emotion. You are a person who functions. **A "masculine ideal" that doesn't let you be who you are or feel what you feel is a crock of you know dang well what.** Reject it.
- No one needs men who wear emotions on their sleeves? Reminder: Jesus wept.
- Words like the ones written by that reader are the reason an 11-year-old boy I once met is

more likely to put his fist through a wall than to cry when he's upset. By telling boys "crying is for wimps," you don't encourage strength. You set them up to be alarmed by feelings when feelings arise (and they will). You discourage the development of their abilities to manage emotion, because **you can't learn to manage what you aren't allowed to experience.**

- Emotion is human. The moment you call expression of it weak, it becomes strong: evidence of a willingness to go against the grain -- a grain manufactured by people like the guy who wrote the comment. (A willingness, which, for the record, is totally attractive.)
- Women don't *want* men who express emotion? **First, men can't tell women what women want. Stop it.** Second, if I wind up with a guy who cries when he proposes or commits on an altar to intertwining his entire life with mine, or when our kids are born or our pets and loved ones die, or the Fresh Prince rerun we're watching happens to be particularly heart wrenching, GOOD. I'll cry with him.
- The writer posits that men aren't supposed to express emotion because not expressing emotion is "*a natural result of being in control of yourself, which is the masculine ideal.*" It is good, regardless of gender, to be in control of yourself. **And it is normal to have emotions. But it is flawed to imply it is a loss of self-control to express them.**
- Perhaps the people who have lost control of self are not the ones who express emotion, but the ones who don't. **Who is in control when what you will or won't do is based on what other people think of you?**

This contribution is available at <http://www.arleenspenceley.com/2014/01/thoughts-on-men-and-their-emotions.html>

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Planting the Seeds of Faith in Our Children [at Splendor in the Home]



For months now, Stella has screamed her head off during every bath. The other day, dreading the impending bath that she needed, I asked my son, "Sly, what should we do to help Stella enjoy baths more?" I was expecting him to suggest something like singing to her, or giving her a certain toy to play with....but without hesitation, he responded, "We should pray for her."

Wow. Yeah. Tom and I looked at each other: "

why didn't we think of that?

" I'm always the person who goes on and on to a friend about some problem I'm having, then ask them for advice only to hear, "well, have you prayed about it?". Errrr....no, actually. Oops. So Sly definitely didn't learn this from me.

Instead, these days it seems that I've been learning so much about holiness from Sly, and his childlike surety in God. He wants - and expects - to be a Saint with so much more certainty and trust than I can muster.

I've realized that my role in my children's faith formation is perhaps not as important as I thought. Don't get me wrong - as the parents, Tom and I are responsible for being the primary teachers of the Faith for our kids. We are charged with an enormously important task, with repercussions that extend to eternity. But ultimately, our job is just to plant the seeds. To provide the environment, the experiences, the teachings that will prepare our children's hearts for God. But it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately "waters" those seeds, and makes them grow. At only three-and-a-half, Sly has amazed me with some of the things he has come to understand about God. Things I never had a chance to explain. There's only one way those thoughts could have come to him, and that is

through grace which neither he nor we have merited.

As parents, we lay the groundwork and we help support our children's increasing knowledge of God as it grows and meets challenges. But it is God alone who gives the grace of faith. God who enters in to their opened hearts and minds and begins a relationship with them.

This contribution is available at <http://ourordinarylifeextraordinary.blogspot.com/2014/01/planting-seeds-of-faith-in-our-children.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

The False Martyr Complex [at joy of nine9]



I have a real life incident seared into my memory that has become a symbol for a common type of piety that I call a false martyr complex. A dear friend stood in a communion line, head bowed, shoulders slumped, one arm across her chest with her hand clenched as she struck her heart. At first appearances she was a picture of perfect piety, a soul in torment, burdened by her sin, suffering in reparation. Yet, she had stood like this for years if not decades with little change. As I stood in the opposite line, I did something spontaneous and rather shocking; I bent my knees, leaned over, caught her eye, smiled and waved! My child like behaviour actually worked momentarily. She straightened up, smiled, with twinkling eyes and snapped out of her false, martyr complex for a few minutes at least, nearly laughing out loud in



church.

My friend was not as holy as she appeared to be, even though she lived a devout, disciplined, ascetic lifestyle. Her life was a daily round of mass, rosaries, Eucharistic Adoration and frequent confession. Unwittingly, she fell into a trap that all of us fall into as we try to become devoted disciples of Jesus. It was a religion that in the end focused on herself, her actions, her devotions and effort. She was at the front and centre, not God.

To make that 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.

PART OF THE MASS

**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 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 help, only a sick man grasps the truth that he needs to be healed.



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.

“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/2014/01/07/the-false-martyr-complex/>
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| [Contents](#) |

The Benedictine Oblate and Christian Perfection [at Suffering With Joy]

January 24, 2014



Clear Creek Abbey Solemn Monastic Profession, 9/7/13, used with permission of the Abbot

Poverty, chastity, and obedience are called the [three evangelical counsels](#), the counsels Jesus recommends in the Gospel for those who desire to do more than the minimum to get to heaven, and to aim at Christian perfection (Mt. 19:16-22). By Christian perfection we mean that extremely elusive condition of perfect charity, love of God and love of neighbor, that we will enjoy for all eternity and which we seek, by the grace of God, to reach in this life, sinners that we are. In fact, if we don't work at it consistently and generously in this life, God will have a lot of polishing to do on us before He admits us to heaven when we die.

The vast majority of religious communities of priests, brothers, and nuns take these three as vows when they make their commitment to belong to their community forever. Through practicing these vows they witness to the world a higher reality. They declare through all of what the counsels imply that there is indeed something more enduring than this world. As laity, we can practice these counsels according to our state in life, too. The more we desire to reach Christian perfection out of love of Jesus, the more we can look to these three counsels to guide us in our daily choices.

The Benedictine difference

St. Benedict did something different in his Holy Rule, though, that expresses the evangelical counsels in a different way. Benedictines are known for their charism of work and prayer (sacred liturgy), of hospitality, of peace, and of keeping in mind "that in all things God may be glorified". What most people don't know unless they have looked into it is that Benedictines don't take vows of poverty and chastity, although much of the rule makes specific demands for a life of poverty. The Benedictine professes instead the vows of *stability, reformation of life (conversion of*

morals), and *obedience*. Poverty, chastity and more are implied in these vows.

The layperson who is attracted to Benedictine spirituality as I am, finds great peace in these three vows. Stability is what keeps us from constantly falling for the temptation to fantasize that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence in every aspect of our lives – marriage, our commitment to the Church, the living of our Baptismal promises, the spiritual life, our focus on Jesus. Regarding our Oblation to a particular monastery, we are “adopted” into that particular family of monks. We share in their spiritual benefits and they in ours. We do not wander around joining other religious orders as Tertiaries, although we may find much value and fruitfulness in our spiritual lives by applying certain of their charisms to ourselves. In fact, we cannot be both Oblates of a Benedictine monastery and Tertiaries of another religious family such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, etc. The other orders have similar rules. This stability allows us to focus on living the Rule without distraction, and it is why a person who desires to be an Oblate must complete a certain amount of time as a novice before making a formal oblation to a particular monastery. The monks have to agree to accept us into their monastic family as someone committed to living our lives in accordance with the Rule and doing what we can for the benefit of the house.

Conversion of morals (I really like that phrase – it makes me think hard about what I’m doing, activities I engage in) or reformation of life is a beautiful way to describe how we daily come closer to Christ. Jesus is the center of our life, the predominant figure by which we measure our actions. G.A. Simon writes:

The one who tends to perfection, indeed, **renounces all that is not God**; all of that is to be dead for him; at least, he must strive to make it so. He mortifies the flesh, the love of pleasures, the love of riches, the love of honors, the attachment to his own will – **that the Lord Jesus may be the sole Master in him**. Is not that, moreover, what our Savior has demanded of us: “Let him who will be My disciple carry his cross and follow Me”? St. Benedict wanted only to implement the Gospel; and by following in the footsteps of the holy Patriarch we are but following Christ with him, carrying our cross.

The Oblate profession

The world has always been topsy-turvy, at enmity with God. It seems, though, that today’s world has removed all bars to every manner of depravity and evil. Lies, subterfuges, and attacks on the Body of Christ seem more venomous than ever before and affect everyone on the planet. Shame no longer deters what others want to parade in front of us, whether it be evil deeds against a neighbor or self-indulgence of all kinds. I, for one, need the stability of the Benedictine Rule, the constant reminder of conversion of morals and of obedience to the will of God. I need that sense of belonging to the monastery family, knowing that I am part of something bigger than I am that glorifies God.

The day we become Oblates we have taken a huge step forward in our quest for holiness. We have pledged ourselves to pursue Christian perfection in the company of our monastic family using the efficacious means the Church provides us. First and foremost is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and

all the other sacraments. Then we have the Divine Office and [Lectio Divina](#). We have the corporal and spiritual works of mercy that we perform out of the love of God. We have numerous approved devotions designed to develop our relationship with our Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and all the saints and angels populating heaven.

The day we turn away from these means is the day we cease to advance and begin to go backwards. We turn away from God and turn back to creatures who can give us nothing of lasting value. But in professing our oblation we pray in full confidence that this will not happen:

Uphold me, O Lord, according to Thy word, and I shall live: and let me not be confounded in my hope (derived from Ps. 118:116).

G.A. Simon writes this about the Oblate profession:

By our Oblation, indeed, we give ourselves to God, **we give Him the whole nothing that we are**. *Suscipe me Domine* [Uphold me, O Lord].... We give ourselves to Him with complete confidence...*non confundas me* [let me not be confounded, that is, let me not end up in hell]. For He has made promises to us...*secundum eloquium tuum* [according to Thy word]. In return He will give us His life, *et vivam*; His life, that is to say His grace, that is to say finally Himself living in us. May we never recant, never take ourselves back. We should then lose all, we should lose ourselves and we should lose the Infinite; we should lose God.

Anyone who wishes to do that “something more” that the young man in the Gospel sought and then turned away from because he was too attached to earthly things, can find it through associating with one of the religious communities of the Church. Through discernment God will lead you to the place that’s right for you.

[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/2014/01/24/the-benedictine-oblate-and-christian-perfection/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Hadley's Legs [at Smaller Mannhattans]



these precious days I spend with you

I read a lot of Hemingway in my teens and twenties. Purely by coincidence, the last thing I read was also the last thing he wrote:

A Moveable Feast,

a patchwork of memories from his years in Europe between the wars. It's not as well-regarded as his other stuff, but I liked the sense of affectionate retrospection; regret; and sadness for things lost. And I was moved by the elegaic notion of Hemingway, now an old man, writing this book as a prelude to letting go of life. The book doesn't make that point explicitly; but it's the same gentle, if reluctant, acceptance of death expressed in these verses by Hermann Hesse, later

[set to music](#)

by Richard Strauss:

September

The garden is in mourning.

Cool rain seeps into the flowers.

Summertime shudders,

quietly awaiting his end.

Golden leaf after leaf falls

from the tall acacia tree.

Summer smiles, astonished and feeble,

at his dying dream of a garden.

For just a while he tarries

beside the roses, yearning for repose.

Slowly he closes

his weary eyes.

Speaking of men and mortality, Rembrandt likewise regards his own flawed life in this final self portrait:



feeling a lot like Hemingway at the end

So men grow old, and reflect, and regret; and appreciate.

Getting back to Hemingway, the thing he best remembered from his Paris days wasn't the cafes, or F. Scott Fitzgerald, or Gertrude Stein; what he remembered best was his first wife, Hadley. I wasn't married when I read

A Moveable Feast,

but I was beguiled by Hemingway's spare yet winsome depiction of their life together with their little son Bumby. And from then on I longed for a wife like Hadley, someone who made life wondrous in a quotidian sort of way. Now Hemingway has a direct, even flat, way of writing; and was never florid in his descriptions. So when it came to Hadley, it's through this quote about skiing that I imagine her: "..she had beautiful, wonderfully strong legs, and fine control of her skis, and she did not fall."

A few years later I married my very own Hadley. One day we were hiking up Table Rock in nearby Pickens County, my wife was in front. As I watched her shapely calves flex at each steep step, I imagined Hemingway's Hadley hiking up the mountains in Austria, and saw those same "beautiful, wonderfully strong legs" on Janet. Since that epiphany on Table Rock, I like to tease Janet about having beautiful strong legs like Hadley's; and how like Hemingway, I was smart to pursue a woman a bit older than me. One of her ripostes is that she doesn't mind having Hadley's legs as long as she doesn't have Hadley's husband.

My life's about three-fourths done; now I anticipate death. I too reflect and appreciate. Unlike Paul Anka, I have a thousand regrets. But marrying my wife isn't among them.

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| [Contents](#) |

The Hidden Side to the Theology of the Body [at For Such a Time as This]

I have a confession to make. As the Catholic stereotypes go, I'm a bit of a ToB nerd. To those that know me well this, I'm sure, comes as no surprise. I'm far from being an expert, but what I do know is that I weirdly love spending hours on end devouring page after page on it.

The first thing you think of when you hear the phrase 'theology of the body' is sex, right? So... what if I told you the reason I love ToB has ***absolutely nothing to do with sex?!***



The theology of the body is something which is conceptually all too often confined to the bedroom, but which actually applies to **every aspect of our lives!** For example, I recently read about its implications for our work lives and the fact that fewer careers nowadays involve the fruits of physical labour. Thinking about this, I realised that it was true – I feel most alive and in tune with God when I've been to the gym or, better still, out for a run in the open air, not when I'm watching TV or sitting at my desk writing an essay. That's because God created us *body, mind* and *soul*, and so when we're not exercising all three in harmony we lack fulfilment.

What's more, it shows that men and women are fundamentally different but that's deliberate, and so as women we shouldn't be extending our quest for equality to the point where we're fighting to *be* men! I absolutely love being able to give out the Eucharist – the ineffable privilege of physically holding the body and blood of my Lord, and being able to share that with my brothers and sisters in Christ. But one of the most amazing things about it is that in the same sacred act, men and women can represent entirely different things.

As a female, being a Eucharistic Minister means exercising my feminine receptivity by *embracing the gift of Jesus* in my own two hands, and serving others by way of offering them the same opportunity. Yet when I see men step up to the alter to give out communion, I see them ‘stepping up’ in other ways too. I see them humbling themselves in order to provide for the congregation as they provide for their families. One action. Two equally beautiful symbolisations.

And so the real reason I love ToB...

After years of being afflicted with a deep *hatred* of my body – which I know the majority of women will identify with – it was so refreshing to discover that it’s possible to stand against that in the name of Jesus! God created us exactly how we are, and he ‘was pleased with what He saw’ (Genesis 1:12). He looks at us and He doesn’t just think ‘hmm, I did an alright job’, He is actively *pleased!* We define ourselves by earthly standards and so are faced with nothing but flaws, but God’s standards aren’t earthly standards. **By God’s standards we are perfect.**

‘God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; **male and female He created them.**’ (Genesis 1:27). That was no mistake! Sometimes it’s hard to be a woman. Sometimes we resent the very things which make us feminine.

But, beautiful women, **YOUR FEMININITY WAS NOT A MISTAKE!**

Once we have the gift of this knowledge we can begin to fight back against the enemy, who truly *hates* what God has made and so wants to make us feel the same way. It is this knowledge that will allow us to see the beauty of God’s creation in our own flesh, understand that our bodies have as much purpose as our minds and our souls, and live out that purpose in all three aspects of our being.

So from today, I encourage you to start each day by looking in the mirror and reminding yourself that you are ‘fearfully and wonderfully made!’, and before long, the belief will set in.

This contribution is available at <http://forthisverymoment.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/the-hidden-side-to-theology-of-body.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

The Mission of Motherhood [at Raising Angels]

Today was one of those days. Felicity is experiencing a bit of a growth spurt and she went from 3-5 hour eating intervals to every two hours last night. In other words, I got no sleep.

When the alarm went off, I couldn't move. No sleep at this, ahem, later in life stage, is no joke. The brain already works in slow motion between the hormones and my age but when you add no sleep to the equation, a simple task like getting out of bed - yeah, that's not happening.

This is the kind of day when I stay in my pj's so that as soon as this sweet baby goes down for her morning nap, I can go with her.

However, like most plans with a baby, it didn't happen as planned. When nap time came, the only one ready for sleep was me. What ensued was a moment of panic. If she doesn't sleep now, I won't get a nap before Max gets home. After that, the big kids will get home, I'll need to get dinner ready, go to the game, come home, get everyone to bed, and then it will start all over again.

And just like that, life seems insurmountable.

She did, of course, eventually tucker out. Luckily, because of the weather, Nelson was working from home. I jumped into bed and prayed sleep would come quickly and multiply in the 45 minutes before Max arrived. I awoke to the big kids coming home at three. When I checked my phone for the time I saw the message from Nelson that he had taken Max to work with him so I could sleep.

Ah, it's amazing what a few hours of sleep can do for a bit of perspective.

I'm going to admit that I'm struggling just a bit with this whole having a newborn changes your life thing. I had forgotten how much time it takes to care for a baby. Somehow I thought that once the challenging pregnancy was over, life would get back to normal.

That thought pattern has been my problem. I tend to not give myself much of a break. Napping while a newborn sleeps? Ain't nobody got time for that. That's time for laundry, cleaning, writing thank you cards, and maybe, every once in awhile, taking an actual shower. I'm supposed to be supermom. I can pop this baby out and go seamlessly back into my super busy life.

Late nights, early mornings, and many hours in between to sit and feed a baby are not exactly conducive for leading an otherwise busy life. We're not even talking about the time spent changing diapers (and clothes), bathing, or keeping up with the amount of laundry such a little thing can produce.

My theory is that God makes mothers forget all the hard parts of pregnancy and newborn care so that we continue to perpetuate the human race. He's a smart one.

Tonight I was praying. As of late, I do most of the talking in my prayer times because if I get quiet and still before the Lord, I'm out before He gets a word in edgewise. Tonight though, I wanted to hear something from Him...anything.

What I heard was "This is your mission." That was it, but it was all I needed. You see, I've been on many a mission trip and I know exactly what He means. When you're on a mission, you are singular in purpose. There are always many, many things you

could

be doing, but you don't consider those because they are not the task at hand. Life goes on without you but you don't care or think about it much because you're doing what you're called to do. It's work that is important because it's yours.

Motherhood is like that. Because it's been awhile since I've experienced this part of the work, I needed to be reminded that the mission is still the same, the tasks have just changed. Life with an infant is very different than life with a 13, 10, 9 and 5 year old. It's wonderful for sure, but different...very different. Once I accept that, this part will get easier. I should remember that infancy is fleeting and things won't always be this hard, I mean, different.

Regardless of what anyone else is doing, my mission is caring for these sweet souls and right now one of those souls just needs more care than the others. If I put up some blinders to what everyone else around me is doing and just live in the moment - my moment, I will not only do it better, I'll appreciate it more. I won't always be in a state of being so needed. As a good friend reminded me tonight, the days are long, but the years are short.

Max is so big, I have to wake him up when he falls asleep on the couch because I have a hard time carrying him up the stairs. Two months ago, he was my baby. Last night, as I carried Felicity up the stairs, I caught a glimpse of her bouncy chair sitting beside the dining room table where she had "joined" us for dinner and I almost wept. There it was - the perfect picture of how different life is, and, how wonderful. Just like that a new member has come into our lives and become one of the family. What a great blessing. What a sweet soul.

So if I don't answer when you call, or text, or ring the doorbell it's not because I'm ignoring you. It's probably because I'm feeding, burping, changing, rocking, bathing or talking to the baby. Babies take a lot of time but in no time at all are no longer babies and I don't want to miss one minute of it.

This contribution is available at <http://raisingangels.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-mission-of-motherhood.html>
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Why do you have inordinate attachments? [at Contemplative Homeschool]



The Golden Calf by Tissot (photo credit: Wikimedia Commons).

Have you discerned [what you are too attached to](#)? Are you ready to begin working on those inordinate attachments? Let's take the first step together, by looking at the reasons we are attached to things other than God.

Why am I doing this?

This week I sent family members a copy of the family tree I created for my dad. Genealogy is a favorite hobby of mine. One relative emailed back that he was too bored with it even to finish the first page. "Can you explain to me why this interests you?" he asked. "I just don't get it."

We emailed back and forth a bit as I told him how I loved family *and* history. I still don't think my answers satisfied him.

I would not have written about this, except that the genealogy bug hit me again. *It's been a while since I've looked at my mom's family, I thought. I'll just do a quick search to see if there's anything new.* Before long, I had spent all the time I should have been writing my book (and more) researching my ancestors. I began asking myself the same question. *Why am I doing this? What am I really getting out of it?*

We were made for eternal beatitude

God has loved us from all eternity. He made us for love and joy. “He has placed eternity in the hearts of men,” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We fear annihilation. We desire eternal beatitude.

When I find a family connection I have been looking for for a long time, I feel like a detective who has solved a case. I feel exhilarated and fulfilled. A moment later, that feeling is gone. I seek a new challenge. What if I can go back one generation more? And then another, and another... Genealogy is a hobby that has no ending point. It's not like a game that is over when time runs out. I don't want to stop.

So, I'm writing my blog post late at night, instead of in the afternoon when I should have been doing it. Why?

We humans confound pleasure and joy, especially in wealthy cultures like ours. Used to having everything we want, we search for the thing that will give us a new thrill. When we find it, we want to experience it over and over. I think we're trying to satisfy our desire for the eternal, but with temporal things. The thrill, the pleasure, always goes away. We hope to sustain it by repeating the experience.

Is this really making me happy?

When I spend too much time on the computer, I don't get my housework done. My house is a mess. I feel guilty. I complain. I yell at my kids to clean up their messes.

Or, I keep telling J (age 2) that I'll read to him in a few minutes. Sometimes, that few minutes never comes to an end. I get jumpy when the boys call me. They're interrupting my project. And I yell at them again.

All this, for the pursuit of something that cannot give me lasting happiness!

Inordinate attachments are little idols

When I seek happiness in anything other than God, I make it an idol.

That doesn't mean we can't have any pleasures in life. It doesn't mean our hobbies are sinful. We are Catholics, not Puritans. We believe that God's creation retains its goodness even after the Fall. But creation is broken. We have “detached it” from God. We need to let God detach us from it.

Everything good in life should bring us closer to God. It should point toward our Creator. Whatever gets in the way of my duty harms my soul.

How can I change?

How can I stop seeking fulfillment in things other than God? I'm spending 2014 seeking the answer. I plan to share with you the highlights of my search. I hope you won't think I'm wasting my time. Even if I can't stop talking about it.

Connie Rossini

This contribution is available at <http://contemplativehomeschool.com/2014/01/10/inordinate-attachments/>
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| [Contents](#) |

14 More Reasons Why You Should Become a FOCUS Missionary in 2014 [at Prayers From Therese]

So, you may have seen [Chris's post](#) floating around the web with 14 *pretty darn fantastic* reasons why you should become a FOCUS missionary in 2014. Since there is a plethora of reasons—way more than 14—why you should become a FOCUS missionary, I thought I could offer 14 more* because, why not?

Now, I know what some of you skeptics are thinking: *Chris is a missionary; you are too, Jane. You've both already "drank the FOCUS juice" so to speak so you obviously just want to brainwash us into thinking we should be missionaries (just like every other missionary I know who's trying to convince me to join FOCUS staff).*

Well, of course in true Jane-fashion, I have a response to that: *First, get over yourself. (Just kidding...)* *Second, would you want a list from an engineer of reasons why you should become a cosmetologist? No, that's silly. You'd want a list of why you should become a cosmetologist...from a cosmetologist. So, here's your list of why to be a missionary...from a missionary. Finally, I officially declare you ought not listen to those people who **haven't ever been a missionary** tell you that us missionaries are crazy and you should never be a missionary...* 😊

Without further ado I present:

14 More Reasons Why You Should Become a FOCUS Missionary in 2014

1. Say “good-bye” to that awkward mold you’ve been placed into and skip town.

It became known at my last job that I was one of the best people to go to when the copy machine broke or you needed to figure out how something logistically could work. Maybe I don't always want to press buttons on the copy machine until it starts working—you could do that too, you know! Also, I was the “one who hates hugs.” (Because I *used to* hate hugs.) How do you convince everyone who's worked with you for a couple years that you don't actually hate hugs that much anymore? Answer: You don't. You pack your bags and skip town to a new exotic locale.

2. It's the best job ever.

I can't tell you enough times that being a missionary is the. best. job. ever. I give you “Exhibit A” from a tweet I tweeted a couple weeks ago. All the comments underneath are from, you guessed it, other missionaries who agree with me!



3. MPD (a.k.a. Mission Partner Development...a.k.a. fundraising your salary) isn't *that* bad. In fact it's pretty enjoyable.

A lot of people are held back from missionary work because the thought of fundraising your salary is too daunting. Yesterday a couple of Sisters from the [School Sisters of Christ the King](#) were visiting campus and asked what the most surprising part of being a missionary has been. My reply was, "Fundraising. It's crazy how easy it ended up being." I went on to discuss that, yes, I did have to work hard, but the Lord totally provided (surprise there, He did it again)! It's also a *huge* blessing and joy to share the mission of FOCUS with friends and family. All this talk about fundraising leads me to point 4...

4. Want a raise? Okay, get one.**

So you *can't possibly* be a missionary because you have a boatload of school loans and could never pay them back. Or, you couldn't do it because you're just graduating and already married with a baby on the way. If you need to raise an extra \$1000 a month for all your ridiculously huge student loans, then you can! Just go out and find more people to share the mission with and ask them to join your support team. (I dare you to find me another job that allows that. Imagine walking into your bosses office at your first "grown-up" job and asking for a raise right off the bat so you can afford your school loans.)

5. Attain mad-crazy skillz for future employment.

I give you some questions from the future (your first job interview after your time with FOCUS):
1) So, tell me about when you've had to be self-motivated in your work. –Oh, if I wanted to get paid I had to find people to support me.

2) Do you have any experience in managing people? –Yeah, I had a “discipleship chain” which looked a bit like a family tree that I was in charge of—I had to make sure messages were communicated and making sure everything was copacetic in my “chain.”

3) Okay, do you have any sales experience? –A little...Every week my teammates and I would go out on campus and walk up to random strangers and start conversations and try and get them to accept Jesus as the center of their lives and join a Bible study.

4) Good, how about public speaking? –Yeah, I mean I helped lead a few retreats and every month we had a gathering for everyone who was a student leader on campus and I had the opportunity to speak to a group of 50-100 a few times every year.

Need I go on? I could.

6. Three words: New. Staff. Training.

Before I became a missionary I heard *a lot* of complaints from current missionaries about how much they didn't like summer training. *What on earth were they talking about!?* Sure, it was exhausting and a lot of work. But, it's also the best training for young people in the New Evangelization in the U.S. (or, more probably, the world). And, it's in Florida. There's a waterpark ON CAMPUS. If you live anywhere near me (or, I suppose right now, anywhere in the U.S. besides Florida or the very bottom of the map) the thought of those hurricanes, heat and alligators in the canal behind the dorms is pretty. darn. appealing. right now. I loved summer training and can hardly wait to go back!



Your waterpark awaits!

(Pic from campavemaria.com.)



Here's my "college" (or small group) from New Staff Training!

7. You always have a place to stay.

So there's a missionary from Philadelphia who's serving in Missouri and she came up to North Dakota for a wedding last weekend. When she went to visit some people in Grand Forks, she stayed with the missionaries. Let me tell you... that's not an uncommon occurrence! (It doesn't even matter if you know the missionaries you want to crash with!)

8. The rest of your life can be *totally* purpose driven.

So we're supposed [to make disciples](#) our whole lives. After 2 summers (as well as continued formation and growth throughout 2 school years) of some of *the best* training in the business of Gospel sharing and making disciples you will know what you're doing! You won't have to go Grad School, Law School, the workforce, etc. and be totally lost. You'll know just how to build a Bible study and lead your coworkers/classmates closer to Jesus. It's refreshing knowing what you're doing.***

9. You can pretend you're an expert blogger even though your mom is the only one who reads your blog.

I think it would be cool to have a blog that thousands of people check everyday to see what sort of wisdom you've posted that can inspire them. That's not what this blog is. It's more a way to keep in contact with my family and any mission partners and friends interested. But, sometimes for fun I pretend that's what this is!

10. You get to serve on a team.

You don't go to summer training with hundreds of other missionaries and then get sent off somewhere by yourself to try and be a missionary. Having a team for support is a good thing! FOCUS also has other forms of accountability and encouragement—for example, everyone on staff has a mentor or accountability partner that they talk to every-other-week. So, you're not left alone on this fun, though frequently challenging, mission.



Here's my team. Team fun: Pictures with Santa.

11. Jesus probably wants you to.

Enough said there. How could you say, "No, thanks." to Jesus?

12. Live the adventure. Trust the way.

That's the recruitment slogan for FOCUS. Don't you want an adventure to live? I wanted an adventure, that's why I became a missionary. Last year, a missionary said to me that so many people want to be a missionary (or work for the Church) after graduation because they want to "give back." And, while that's good, the reason people should want to be missionaries is because it's a *great adventure*. Now I know from personal experience, it is!

13. Infinite wedding invites...who doesn't love a good party?

Join FOCUS staff and your friends will grow exponentially. Between ages 24-26 the number of weddings you're invited to grows from only-your-cousins-weddings to your-old-friends-from-high-school and maybe some college friends. You just start getting older so you know more people getting married. But, then you become a missionary. Not only do you meet a ton of people who are also missionaries****, you go to a campus and form close friendships with a bunch of students on campus. Let's just say every day in FOCUS is a day closer to many more epic weddings.

14. There is no juice.

Yeah, can you believe it? There isn't actually any "juice" they make you drink to love the mission of FOCUS. I realized that during our last class at New Staff Training last July. The speaker was talking about staff retention (among other things) and my friend Mary leaned over and wrote, "Where else would we go?" on my notebook. She meant, "We have the best job ever. Why would we leave FOCUS? I can't imagine another place I'd rather work!" So, happily there is no juice, just a bunch of young Catholics *on fire* to share their faith with students all over America!

Now that you've read the list, [head to the website to apply!](#)



*If you read [Chris's list](#) and cross-check you may, admittedly, find some some doubles (or almost doubles). If you think that's a copout because I couldn't come up with 14 unique reasons to become a mish, you're wrong. Challenge me to it and I can give you *plenty* more unique reasons. I just thought some of his reasons were *so legit* they were worth mentioning again.

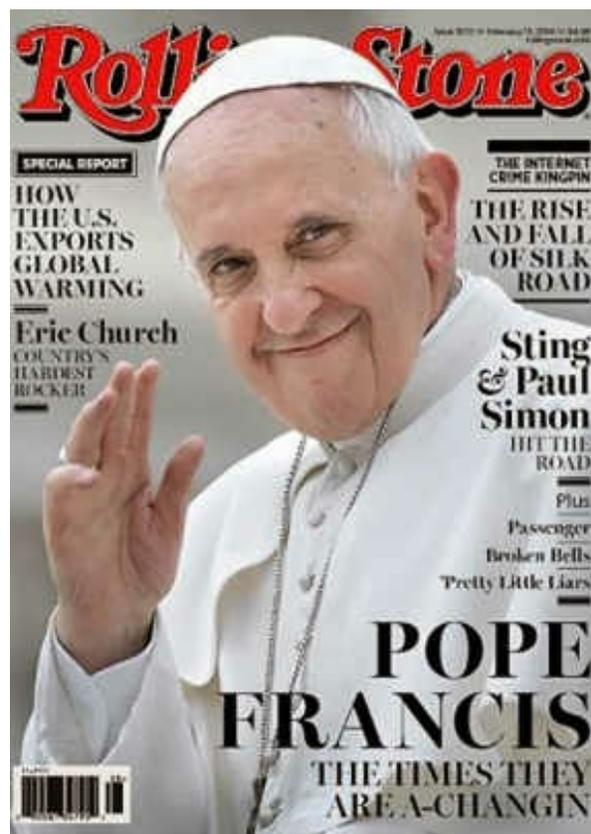
**All the "raise" business is, of course, within reason. There are salary caps and the like. But, FOCUS does a good job of teaching responsibility with money ([Dave Ramsey's Total Money Makeover](#) is actually on the first-year reading list)! I don't mean to imply that FOCUS encourages greediness or selfishness with money...cause, of course, they don't!

***Obviously there will be challenges in navigating a new situation like Med School or your new job. But, let's just say you're better trained than *a large majority* of other young Christians who want to share their faith with their classmates/coworkers.

****Don't worry, if you become a missionary you're not obligated to invite the hundreds of other missionaries to your wedding. But, you will certainly develop close friendships with plenty of other missionaries that you'll *want* to invite to your wedding!

This contribution is available at <http://prayersfromtherese.wordpress.com/2014/01/30/14-more-reasons-why-you-should-become-a-focus-missionary-in-2014/>
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Pope Francis on Cover of Rolling Stone Magazine - The Cool Pope [at JESUSCARITASEST.ORG]



Pope Francis has made the cover of Rolling Stone. He is the first pope to ever be on the cover. Mark Binelli's has written a 7,700-word story which discusses the pope's unusual fame. He writes "Pope Francis: The Times They Are A-Changing" and "Inside the Pope's Gentle Revolution" . Pope Francis has also been featured on Time Magazine and Vanity Fair Italia after the magazines named him "Person of the Year" and "Man of the Year," respectively. The New Yorker also put him on their cover.

<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/pope-francis-the-times-they-are-a-changin-20140128>

UPDATE VATICAN SPOKESMAN COMMENTS ON ARTICLE - FR. FEDERICO

LOMARDI: Vatican Radio REPORT The lengthy cover piece dedicated to Pope Francis in the February 13 edition of the popular Rolling Stone magazine has made its way around the world. The Director of the Press Office of the Holy See, Fr. Federico Lombardi SJ, praises the article's appearance, saying, "[The piece] is a sign of the attention that the novelties of Pope Francis attract from many different quarters."

Fr Lombardi SJ goes on to say, "Unfortunately, the article disqualifies itself, falling into the usual mistake of a superficial journalism, which, in order to shed light on the positive aspects of Pope Francis, thinks it needs to describe the pontificate of Pope Benedict in a negative way, and does so

with a surprising crudeness.” Fr Lombardi SJ adds, “This is not the way to do a good service even to Pope Francis, who knows very well what the Church owes to his predecessor.”

Text from Vatican Radio website

This contribution is available at <http://jceworld.blogspot.ca/2014/01/pope-francis-on-cover-of-rolling-stone.html>

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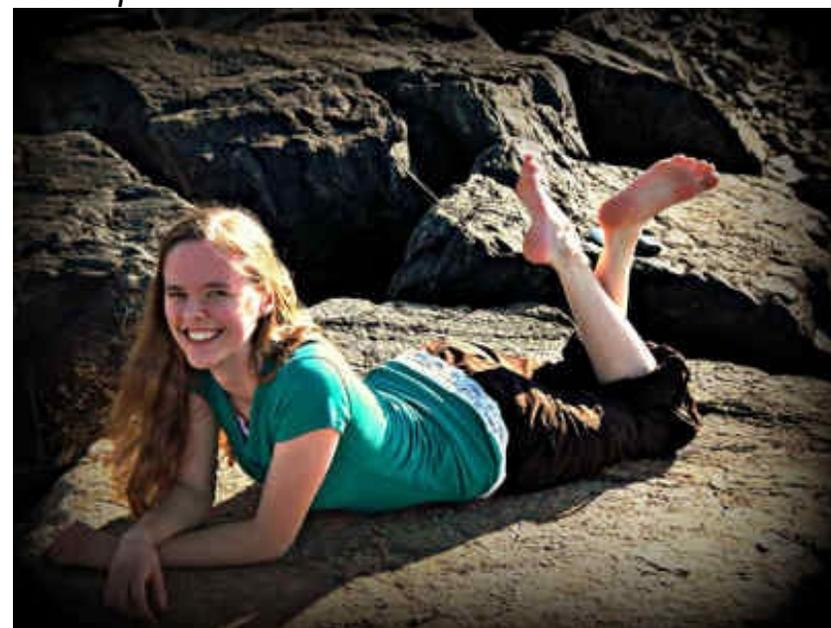
| [Contents](#) |

Dearly Loved [at Footprints on My Heart]

I think dark hair is beautiful. I've always admired my older sisters' hair - though they had blonder hair during their youth, it darkened over time and today their hair is brown. I've always just loved the color of a brunette's hair. They are categorically "lovely" in my mind.

Blondes are lovely too, but in my mind, not so much as brunettes. I've never once dyed my hair and don't ever plan to, but I've always wistfully imagined I could some day have naturally dark hair. Then I, too, would be

beautiful.



Wavy blonde hair? Still something to smile about!

Hold on. Stop the bus. Time out.

When was the last time *true beauty* was determined by the *color of your hair*?

That's what I thought.

It's true though, friends. We all perceive beauty differently. We all perceive ourselves differently. And so great is the temptation to determine our beauty and our worth based on the world's standards.



My BEAUTIFUL Bible Study, Sophomore year. Color coding with each other and the scenery: a complete accident.

But don't you dare.

Don't. you. dare.

let the world define you. The world will throw lots of curve balls your way, confuse you, distort your vision and blind you from seeing the truth.

The truth is...

you are beautiful

.

You are

unique

.

You are

precious

.

You are

sacred

You are worthy.

You are beloved.

You are God's beloved!



That's reason to celebrate!

Being God's beloved does not automatically make you a candidate for religious life, so you can calm down now (although, it might be worth discerning). The dictionary gives us the simple, yet profound definition of beloved:

dearly loved.

Let's put that into the sentence, shall we?

You are God's dearly loved!

God dearly loves you.



What, exactly, is this love that God has for me and you? 1 Corinthians 13 gives us that definition:

>> Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy, it does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Let's consider one more angle and read 1 John 4:7-8:

>> *Beloved*, let us **love** one another, for **love** comes from **God**. Everyone who **loves** has been born of **God** and knows **God**. Whoever does not **love** does not know **God**, because **God is love**.

If we replace "Love" with "God" in the verses from 1 Corinthians, that might, perhaps, give us a **new perspective**

of how much God loves us.



New Perspective.

God created you to be you. God created you for today. Not yesterday -- yesterday has passed away. Not tomorrow -- tomorrow has cares and concerns of its own.

Today is God's gift to you

-- that's why it is called

the present

. What we must discern is what we are called to do in this moment. Right now, I am responding to the call by writing this blog post. In light of that, I suppose you are responding to the call by reading it. Yikes. The moral, though, is that we need not be concerned with what is to happen 6 months, 15 years from now.

It doesn't matter.

What matters is how you discern to respond to God's call

now.

Right here, right now. In this moment.

If you're like me (i.e.

human

) this is a lot easier said than done. We think about things a lot. We worry about our financial situations, wonder if our group of friends is the best, anticipate a new semester, stress out about work, and ponder the future.

We obsess about these things over which we have no control

. But we must remember... anxiety does not come from God.

God brings peace.

Peace in this moment. Peace here and now.

God's presence is peace.



Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,

for he will speak peace to his people,

to his saints, *to those who turn to him in their hearts.*

(cf. Psalm 85:8, Ignatius Press)

~*~*~*~

Conduct me, O Lord, in thy way,

and I will walk in thy truth:

let my heart rejoice *that it may fear thy name.*

(cf. Psalm 85:11, Douay-Rheims)

So, *rejoice*, dear sister in Christ.

Rejoice in the marvelous **gift of beauty - a new day...life...YOU...sunshine...femininity...love...smiles...laughter...books...the ability to read...words...snow...trees...the song of creation...fillintheblank** - he has given you and *praise him*. And never, ever, not in a million years, forget this one thing:

You are dearly loved.

I've been working on this post since the end of October 2013 and was going to wait a few more days before publishing, but it seems I needed a dose of its encouragement today. Praying for

everyone who feels alone, unloved, or unwanted during this cold weather!

Photo credits: all bible study pictures taken by Amy. The pictures of me and the heart in the sand were taken by Mary Rose. The bay & sun was taken on my iPod.

This contribution is available at <http://totus2usmaria.blogspot.com/2014/01/dearly-loved.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Do You Trust? [at Sacred Sharings For The Soul]

By striving to be who we want to be, we may overlook the beauty of who we are presently, and where God has placed us for His purpose. Trust in Him and His plans for you with hope and patience. (CC)



Discernment is ongoing. We are constantly faced with various decisions within our lives. These moments are opportunities presented to us filled with the question "Do you truly trust in our Lord and His loving providence?"

At times it is difficult to answer this question with a confident fullness of heart. We often wrestle with God's will opposed to resting in Him by allowing his plan for us to slowly reveal itself through faith and our surrender. This can result in further confusion and lack of clarity in our lives. This struggle does not make us a horrible Christian, but rather, it affirms our humanity. It affirms our need to continually turn to our Lord in faith, allowing Him to help our moments of 'unbelief'; our moments of doubt and wonder.

Our often inability to accept the will of our Lord is a reflection of our failure to die to self in surrender. We do not die to self in a way that brings about harm, we die to self so that the life and love of our Lord may live in us, enabling us to be who we were called by God to be within this world. Death to self so that Life itself may live in us more fully.

As we are faced with the tensions between flesh and spirit let us continually turn to our Lord in fullness of faith; desiring nothing more than the peace and comfort that He alone provides. Patiently, let us learn to seek Him at all times; believing in His immeasurable love and mercy.

On our way to get 'where we are going' let us not overlook the true beauty of where we are and who we are in Christ. By trusting the plans of our Lord with hope, faith, and patience (*primarily with ourselves*) we can persevere along this journey practicing great virtue. (CC)

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to

me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

This contribution is available at <http://www.sacredsharingsforthesoul.blogspot.ca/2014/01/do-you-trust-bycc.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

It's Been a Long Ride [at One Arrow Alone]

On the 4th, it was ten years ago since I joined the Lord of the Rings Fanatics Plaza. My cousin had made me aware of it; he was an early fan, as appears from the fact that he was still able to take the name 'Denethor II'. I registered on the forum while my family had gone to church and I was left behind to take care of my baby sister. Some of the names I tried were taken, including 'Turgon', so I came up with a variant: Turgonian.

I owe a big debt of gratitude to the Plaza. It stimulated my curiosity, taught me to think in an interdisciplinary way, and awakened an interest in the history of ideas (a preoccupation that helped lead me home to the Catholic Church). Moreover, at the Plaza I was continually encouraged to keep writing poetry, knowing that people would read it and leave a potentially valuable review. Gerontian and Silendra in particular would write in-depth reviews that helped me to improve.

Another Plaza poet was Scea. At her blog [At the Wicket Gate](#), she impresses on her readers that they should not get too complacent or stuck in a comfort zone. There is value, for instance, in travel that is accompanied by 'uncertainty and discomfort'.

Because Saturday seemed to be an entirely free day, I decided to take Scea's advice and do a bit of cycling. Before lunch, I looked up how to go from the seminary to Leiden, then to Alphen aan de Rijn, on to Aalsmeer and back again to the seminary. A trip of approximately 80 km, or 50 miles, through flat country. It was an excellent day, since the weather was mild for January and it wasn't raining.

I had intended to go after lunch, before 2pm. Unfortunately, I got too involved in a game of Battle for Middle-earth, and therefore didn't leave until almost 3.30pm, when the sky was already getting darker. Life Lesson One: don't dawdle; favourable circumstances are not permanent.

Not very far along the way, the rain started and I sought shelter against a wooden shed. Thankfully, it lasted only a few minutes and did not return to trouble me further.

Because of the anniversary, I thought of a poem to post on the Plaza by way of commemoration. What came into my head, I jotted down on my Samsung mobile (the postmodern equivalent of the breast-pocket notebook). The poem automatically took the form of a sonnet; its familiarity makes it easy to write while you're doing something else, such as cycling. I had one line before the rain started:

This womb, this playground of inquiring minds ...

I remember sitting at our garden table in Summer, with a Tolkien book and a college notebook, writing down every question that popped into my mind for discussion on the Plaza. This was before I went to university. My mother said that if I would approach my future studies the same way, I'd be a good student. I never got so involved in my studies, though.

The path to Leiden stretched alongside a canal. Before the trains came, horse-drawn boats would use this passage to ferry between Haarlem and Leiden. To my left was a line of water, with the occasional boathouse or boat. Fields lay to my right. All very flat.

I arrived in Leiden around 4.45pm. When I got to Central Station, it was completely dark. It would have been easy to take the train back to Hillegom and ride home; this would have taken about twenty minutes. But I was not tired yet, only a little hungry, and I had decided to make a longer journey. As Gimli said, 'Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens.' Besides, I only had three lines of my poem.

When I had visited the place in Leiden that holds special memories for me, my road turned east, towards Alphen. One long and curving high road lies between the two towns, a dyke built to contain the Rhine. Somewhere halfway, I got rather tired, slowed down and started huffing and puffing. As Alphen came closer, I regained my motivation and speed.

It felt good when I finally got there (about 6.15pm), and I took a detour into the town to get something to eat. At first it was difficult to find something; all I saw were big shops, closed and dark, that sold cars and furniture and other inedible things. After some more deviations, I finally

hit upon a Subway. Joy! I devoured a tuna sandwich and a bag of chips. Then I asked for a coffee. The girls behind the counter were talking about how dark it was outside, 'as if it's night'. I sat back, stretched my legs, enjoyed the coffee and wrote another stanza for my poem. Halfway there.

But I could not linger forever at this Lothlórien Subway; I had to go on to Aalsmeer. It's a place where I'd never been before and which I knew nothing about, except that a community of Benedictine sisters had recently taken up residence there. Mounting my bike again, I felt a certain soreness in my saddle parts, not having much of a natural cushion there.

I went on and got lost. At least, I could not find my way. Since I knew that part of the path lay between the Aarkanaal and the Zegerplas, however, it seemed safe to follow the signs to Ter Aar and Zegersloot. Later it turned out that this was a roundabout way, but at least the cyclist path ran parallel to the main road; the shortcut might have been a bit dodgy after dark, though no doubt beautiful by day.

At one crossroads, I did not know what to do. Here my breast-pocket notebook became my guide, as I connected to the Internet with my Samsung mobile. It was the first time I used it without WiFi; my brother had disabled the data connection for me to prevent me from accidentally spending a lot of money. To tell you the truth, I was astounded that it worked: there was a sudden awareness that there were all sorts of invisible powers and signals in the air around me. Life Lesson Two: even in solitude, we are never out of the range of the Great Network.

After a few kilometres, I was able to consult a map. It turned out that I had taken the East Canal Road rather than its Western counterpart. I was going north, in the right direction, and the next town would be Papenveer (Papists' Ferry).

Between Papenveer and Kudelstaart, the path veered away from the highway and got very dark. It was nice and quiet and I was able to think of a few more lines for the poem. In Kudelstaart I stopped to write them down. It was very still; I heard only distant airplanes, flowing water and a faint ticking noise. A couple of silent ducks floated on the canal.

The most beautiful part of the Dutch countryside, by the way, are the old houses. They seem to say: 'Here is a broad space to live the good life.' With gardens, fences, little stone steps, pools and a

proper distance from the road, they are a pleasure to behold.

Finally: Aalsmeer! I rode into its shopping centre, brightly lit with Christmas decorations, and out of it again. It was around 10pm; time to go home.

But that was not so easy. For what seemed the longest time, I rode on the Aalsmeerderdijk, with a growing fear that I'd missed the only road that would take me home in a straight line. Finally I came to its end, where the Aalsmeerderdijk became the Leimuiderdijk at a T-intersection. Neither of those was the road I was looking for.

For some moments I was at a profound loss, until my eyes fell on an inobtrusive sign that bore the saving name: the third road of the T-intersection was the Bennebroekerweg I wanted. Excellent! I had no stomach left for a long detour, and thankfully the architect who planned this road had no sense of the beauty of curves. We'll do your 'Five miles meandering with a mazy motion' some other time, Coleridge.

Straight though it was, it was also very long – long enough to finish the poem. I stopped halfway to write the last lines down, pleased with the Milton quote that sounded like a Tolkien allusion. When I got back on the bike, the saddle soreness was more evident. If John Keats could have seen me, he might have remarked that I made sweet moan.

Through Hoofddorp and Zwaanshoek I went, on to Bennebroek – almost home! Vogelenzang ... the last curve ... the last yard ... and thankfully I got home before midnight, around 11.30pm: just in time to post the finished poem on the Plaza. Here it is:

This womb, this playground of inquiring minds,

I found ten years ago: much did it teach

Of dialogue and wordcraft of all kinds,

Applied to lands safely beyond the reach

Of felt perplexity and direct fear.

Wise and good friends I found in these abodes

Gave aid to shape my soul in words, and here

Began some truly unexpected roads.

And on these roads I came on something strange:

Some of the icons vanished into faces,

Revealing greater depth and further range,

Beauty and kindness in the widening spaces.

To Tolkien and the Plaza, friends. Be blessed!

Let's go our ways; our circuit meets full West.

(P.S. The very same night I found my old 'Plaza sister' again on Facebook!)

This contribution is available at <http://turgonian.blogspot.nl/2014/01/its-been-long-ride.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Disciples of the Lamb of God -- Sam-I-am [at Kitchen table chats]

In

[my last post](#)

, I tried to explain how gratitude means understanding that we are unworthy of all our blessings, but God bestows them anyway out of mercy. Our gratitude must be active and an effort to imitate that mercy. We can never shut anyone out of our lives because we deem them to be unworthy.

Pope Francis offers a similar message in

[yesterday's Angelus](#)

:

“What does it mean for the Church, for us today, to be disciples of Jesus, lamb of God?” asked Pope Francis. “It is a good task! As Christians we must replace malice with innocence, force with love, pride with humility, and prestige with service. Being disciples of the Lamb means living not like a besieged citadel, but rather as city set on a mountain, open, welcoming and supportive. It does not mean adopting a closed attitude, but rather proposing the Gospel to all, showing by the witness of our lives that following Jesus makes us freer and more joyful”.

I think this is Pope Francis's papacy in a nutshell. It is all about joy. The New Evangelization is not about beating people over the head with the stick of truth. It is about living the truth so joyfully that others are drawn to it.

One of the books I loved as a child and loved to read to my own children is Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss. In addition to the fun rhymes, this is the book that urges children to try new foods before rejecting them. Sam-I-am proffers green eggs and ham to another character who is adamant that he will not like them. No matter how they are presented--in a box, with a fox, on a train, in the rain--he does not like green eggs and ham. Sam-I-am never offers an alternative. It must be green eggs and ham. He just keeps smiling and looking for a setting that will make the green eggs and ham appealing. Finally the reluctant diner tries them. And guess what? He likes them!

Perhaps we should approach the New evangelization like Sam-I-am. We are to go out and meet others wherever they are and offer the Good News of Christ, Salvation, and the Church. We are not going to change what we are offering. There will be no watering down of doctrine or changing of teaching. But if we have to meet them in a house with a mouse to get them to try it, then that is

what we do. And we will smile as we do it.

We should not judge our evangelization efforts by the immediate results we see. Maybe we will witness an epiphany and a new convert greedily gobbling up every morsel of Church teaching. More likely, we will be completely unaware of any impact of our efforts. We may influence someone to take a small bite. He may be intrigued and set it aside. But he will think about it. And sometime in the future he may again sample it. Instead of a feeding frenzy, his conversion is more like an acquired taste.

We cannot have salvation without the Cross. There is suffering. But we will not win hearts if we have dour faces and exhort others to follow us to the stark prison of Christianity. Pope Francis is telling us to let go of our anger, pride, and malice and live our lives like we really believe the great joy of the Gospel.

This contribution is available at <http://catholic-mom.blogspot.com/2014/01/disciples-of-lamb-of-god-sam-i-am.html>

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| [Contents](#) |



What God wants is for us to say “yes” to him and “no” to everything else. Of the millions of good things available to us, he wants us to have the best. That’s because he loves us so much. He loved us, even while we were yet sinners.

Every one of us doubts that we are loved. After all, each one of us knows who “we” are. It surprises us when someone loves us completely and thoroughly. But the Lord is after us to believe it. He wants us to know that he loves us inside and out.

We can begin by saying “yes” to believing that we are worthy of God’s love. We can say “yes” to believing deep within our being, that God, our Creator and Savior, loves us. We belong to him. He loves and cherishes us. He wants to protect us with his gift of faith and trust in him. Before we can serve him and love him fully we must first say “yes” to letting him love us.

How does he convince us that he loves us? That’s up to us. He’ll do whatever it takes to convince us, but not against our free will. When we can believe it, then we can try it on. Act like he loves us by loving others the same way he love us. By sharing his love we prove to ourselves and to them how much he loves us.

When we know in our hearts that we are precious in his eyes, then we can reject sin and become holy. That’s because God called us to holiness. He wants us to renounce sin and to live holy lives. Only then can we fully grow into the image and likeness of God. When we’re holy that’s when we can get in there and play the full part that he has for us. We can fully become his image and likeness.

Each of us can discover his vision for how he wants to love us through others and others through us. Our culture trains us for instant gratification but we are mistaken if we believe that we can just jump into whatever we want to see happen in our lives. That’s not God’s way. We have to listen for the steps, for the little bitty things that help us move towards his will for us.

He calls each of us to a specific purpose. No part of his work is more important than another part. Each living stone builds up his kingdom. He wants us to say “yes” to him for the unique purpose for which he created us. Don’t worry about anything else. We can’t do everything, nor can we be

everything to everyone. Only God is everything.

The “yes” God wants from us has no hint of wanting or expecting control. The “yes” that God wants is Mary’s “yes” of complete surrender. Many things stand in the way of our wholehearted “yes” to God. Yet no obstacle is stronger than his grace if we allow it to penetrate through all the obstacles and into the depths of our hearts.

The choice is two-sided. What does God want us to say “no” to in our lives so that our “yes’ to him can fulfill his purpose for us?

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| [Contents](#) |

Byzantine Catholic Priest: the Homilies of Father J. Michael Venditti

The Shipwreck of Unorthodox Preaching.

1 Timothy 1:15-17;
Luke 18:35-43.*

The Thirty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost.

Our Venerable Father Xenophon & His Wife, Mary.

Our Holy Father Joseph, Archbishop of Thessalonica.

11:28 AM 1/26/2014 —

The first kind of humility is to hold my brother to be wiser than myself, and in all things to rate him higher than myself, and simply, as that holy man says, to put oneself below everyone. The second kind is to attribute to God all virtuous actions. ...The soul, when it is humbled, begins to bear fruit, and the more fruit it bears, the lowlier it becomes.

That esoteric quote is from an even more esoteric saint of whom I'm sure you've never heard: Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza;** and, yes, it's the same Gaza over which Jews and Palestinians have been fighting for generations, but in the 6th Century it was a Christian place dotted with austere desert monasteries. The quote is from his *Discourse on Humility*, and it came to mind when I sat down to look at today's very brief Apostolic reading from Paul's First Epistle to Timothy.

You might recall me mentioning Timothy back at the beginning of the month, just after Christmas on the Sunday before Theophany. He was Paul's traveling companion during the first missionary journey; they had been arrested and imprisoned together at one point. He was a young man, probably in his early twenties; and, when Paul established the Church in Ephesus, he made

Timothy the bishop there. Because he was so young, the Christians in Ephesus rejected him as their bishop, and Paul wrote an angry Epistle to brow-beat them about it, but he also wrote two short but very beautiful letters of encouragement to Timothy which are also preserved for us in the New Testament, and today's apostolic reading is from the first. Now, you may think it's odd that I would think of a citation from one of the Fathers on humility when considering poor Timothy's situation, but bare with me.

When Paul and Timothy first arrived in Ephesus, they found the Church there in a state of confusion due to unorthodox preaching. At the beginning of the letter, he reminds Timothy, "...as thou fulfillst the charge I gave thee, when I passed on into Macedonia, to stay behind at Ephesus. There were some who needed to be warned against teaching strange doctrines, against occupying their minds with legends and interminable pedigrees, which breed controversy, instead of building up God's house, as the faith does" (1 Tim. 1:3&4). Msgr. Knox, in what you must know by now is my favorite translation of Holy Writ, provides a footnote speculating what some of these strange doctrines might have been; it's not important. What is important is that Paul knew right away that Ephesus needed a new bishop, someone who knew the True Faith, and who could not only preach it with conviction but have the strength of character to silence the heretics that were poisoning the minds of the faithful with whatever these strange doctrines were. In other words, he needed a tough guy he could trust to do the job. Timothy was his best friend. By his association with the Apostle, he certainly knew the faith; as for being tough: he had been in prison with Paul, so Paul knew his character. As loath as he was to part with Timothy, the Ephesians needed him more; so, he leaves Timothy behind and marches on into Macedonia to continue his missionary efforts alone.

Now, during his travels the Apostle made of point of keeping abreast of things. Whenever he would stop in some burgh to change his shoes and preach the Gospel, he would collect his messages, sort of like someone without a smart phone stopping at an Internet cafe to check his e-mail;—if any of you remember what an Internet cafe is—and, whenever he got word that things were not as they should be somewhere, he would shoot back a letter to the place to put them back on the right track; and, that's why we have all these letters by Paul in the New Testament to all these different places; and, one of the e-mails he got was from Timothy telling him that things were not going well back in Ephesus.

One of the difficulties in deciphering St. Paul is that we only have one side of the correspondence. We can only surmise what was said to him by reading his responses to the various Churches as they are recorded for us in the New Testament. When he gets Timothy's e-mail, he fires off a poison pen letter to the Ephesians, as we know; and, we know some of the things Timothy said to him since he addresses them in that Epistle; but, Paul also knows how to read between the lines, and he's getting the sense that Timothy is becoming discouraged and is beginning to doubt himself. Perhaps he was even doubting his own wisdom in making such a young man bishop of such an important Church. He writes his letter to the Ephesians, but he also does something he had never done before: he includes a personal letter to Timothy.

What's remarkable about this letter is how he decides to encourage Timothy. It begins with this exhortation on humility that forms our Apostolic reading today; and, if we didn't know any better, we would make the mistake of presuming that he's dressing down Timothy, trying to let a little air out of the bellows of someone who thought too highly of himself; but, that's not what he's doing. Let me read you a short portion of today's reading as Msgr. Knox translated it:

How true is that saying, and what a welcome it deserves, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I was the worst of all, and yet I was pardoned, so that in me first of all Christ Jesus might give the extreme example of his patience... (1 Tim. 1:15&16).

In other words, here's Timothy, wondering if maybe he's in over his head;—that, in spite of Paul's initial confidence in him, he's really not up to the task—so, Paul draws upon his own history, reminding Timothy that he, too, was considered unfit to be a bishop because he, after all, was once the most violent persecutor of the Church, and what changed all that was a direct infusion of Grace by Jesus Christ. “You think you're not all you should be?” Paul says to Timothy. “I was a lot more incompetent than you are. Compared to what you're going through, Christ's patience with me has been extreme!”

As the chapter comes to a close, just after the last line of our Apostolic reading, he reminds his young friend that Timothy didn't appoint himself bishop of Ephesus, so there's no sin of pride involved here, and that he needs to buck up and do the job, remembering that, so long as we are doing our duty, it is Christ who works through us. And, I believe Msgr. Knox was the first person to ever translate the last line of the chapter literally from the Greek: “Some, through refusing this duty, have made shipwreck of the faith” (1:19). The actual word he uses is Ἐναυάγησαν, a combination of two words: ναυς meaning "ship," and ἄγυμι meaning "to break apart." It's a very earthy expression, not to mention an extremely clever play on words by St. Paul. When we screw something up, sometimes we'll jokingly say, "Boy, that was a real train wreck"; except they didn't have trains in those days, so they called it a shipwreck; but, in the context of the Apostle's discourse, shirking the duty of correcting those who preach heresy results in breaking apart the Bark of Peter, the Ship of the Faith. In other words, if Timothy allows himself to succumb to the temptation that he shouldn't correct those preaching error because he's not up to the job,—not good enough—the result will be a shipwreck in more ways than one.

Which brings us right back to the esoteric wisdom of Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza: the first kind of humility is to see everyone as better than me, and the second is to realize that everything I do that's good is really being done by Christ. Timothy's problem is that he's looking for something in himself to overcome his difficulties, but it's not there. What St. Paul is encouraging him to do is look instead to Christ; only there will he find what he needs. The Desert Father sums it up this way, which is a good way for us to conclude:

A man standing in need of everything from God is ready to make progress. He is always calling on God for fear that God may stop helping him; and so, let his native weakness and powerlessness appear. So through this act of humility he prays, and through his prayer he is made humble. ...the more humble he is, the more he gets from God, and so he advances in his spiritual life through his virtue of humility.



* The Byzantine Liturgy does not provide for Sundays beyond the 32nd Sunday after Pentecost; therefore, when the date of Pascha requires the Pentecostarion after Christmas to be extended beyond that point, the Typicon of the Byzantine Ruthenian Church indicates scriptural texts from previous Sundays, in this case, the 31st Sunday after Pentecost.

** Dorotheos of Gaza (505-565 or 620), also known as Abba Dorotheos, was a monk and abbot. He joined the monastery of Abba Serid (or Abba Sveridus) near Gaza through the influence of his mentors, Barsanuphius and John. Around 540 he founded his own monastery nearby and became abbot there. He wrote instructions for monks of which a considerable number have survived and have been compiled into the *Directions on Spiritual Training*. Abba Dorotheos is recognized as a saint by both the Eastern and Western Churches; his feast day in the Latin Church is June 5th (Extraordinary Form), and in the Byzantine Churches on June 18th (Gregorian calendar).

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| [Contents](#) |

The Call (Come, My Way) [at ~ Breviary Hymns ~]



[The Call \(Come, My Way\)](#)

is a poem by

[George Herbert](#)

(1593–1633). It was published posthumously in 1633 as part of the collection,

The Temple

. None of his poems were published during his lifetime and much of his other writings are believed to have been lost as a result of the English Civil War (1642–1651). Though born of noble parentage, a facility member at Cambridge, and a Member of Parliament; he left these things and chose the life of a humble country clergyman of the Church of England as his vocation. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 39. In 1911, the British composer

[Ralph Vaughan Williams](#)

(1872-1958) published

[Five Mystical Songs](#)

, a setting of five of Herbert's poems from

The Temple

. Written between 1906 and 1911, it was commissioned by the

[Three Choirs Festival](#)

in Worcester, where it debuted in 1911 with Vaughan Williams conducting.

[The Call \(Come, My Way\)](#)

, along with two other of Herbert's poems from

[Five Mystical Songs](#)

:

Easter

, and

Love

are included in the

Hymns and Religious Poems Appendix

of the

[Divine Office](#)

(1974), published by HarperCollins.

Produced by

[Blackfriar Films](#)

THE CALL by George Herbert, 1633 (Public Domain)

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:

Such a Way, as gives us breath:

Such a Truth, as ends all strife:

Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:

Such a Light, as shows a feast:

Such a Feast, as mends in length:

Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:

Such a Joy, as none can move:

Such a Love, as none can part:

Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

This contribution is available at <http://kpshaw.blogspot.com/2014/01/call.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

My Very Own Frankenstein Monster [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

Have you noticed how our culture seems preoccupied with death? Surf the TV most evenings or browse the sci-fi section in online streaming sites. The titles may surprise you. Even some Christians seem preoccupied with restoring life to things that ought to stay dead.

Robert is a good example. He has a bad habit of digging around in graveyards – mostly his. He called me some time ago in a state of depression, "How can God forgive me?" he pleaded. "You don't know what I've done."

That was not the first conversation I'd had with him over the same theme. I've lost count of the times Robert has called for assurance of God's forgiveness. And each time I remind him of Scripture's promises, he responds with his characteristic, "Yes, but."

As he spoke, a mental image of the Frankenstein monster formed as Robert again dug up his past – a past covered by Christ's blood. I watched him piece together one old sin after another, assembling them into a monster that terrorized him and his family.

This time, though, I could not find fault only with my friend's needless despair. With seamless precision, my thoughts propelled me toward my own graveyard where "Yes, but" is etched on several tombstones.

Like Robert, I know Scriptures that assure me of God's forgiveness. So why do I dig around in my past, piecing together my own monster? Why do I permit the creature that Christ put to death be resurrected and wreak havoc on my life and hurt my relationship with God and with others?

I know why. Sometimes I doubt our Father's trustworthiness. I am skeptical that Christ's sacrificial death could cover my despicable sins. So, I revive my past, lifting each sin onto my shoulders as if to say, "Lord, if you really knew what I've done, you would never forgive me."

On the other end of the line, Robert's litany of reasons why God was angry with him gained momentum. With each passing thought, he dug himself deeper into the *Yes, but* pit until I couldn't

take anymore.

"Robert," I interrupted.

He stopped talking and I reminded him again – myself as well – of the promises which stand more sure than Earth itself, of promises more secure than any anchor, of promises that transcend all of our "Yes, buts":

“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). “[Therefore], now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2014/01/my-very-own-frankenstein-monster.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Dear Father: What I Don't Want At My Funeral [at 8 Kids And A Business]

Posted at [Catholic Insight](#)



Painting: An Angel Frees the Souls of Purgatory by Ludovico Carracci. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Dear Father,

About that funeral I attended at your parish: I know you were trying to be nice and consoling and reassuring but can we talk? One day, maybe soon, I'm going to die. If you happen to be the priest celebrating my funeral Mass, then I'm worried.

You know how you let the family deliver a eulogy right after the entrance hymn? I'm not an expert but isn't that kind of strange and wrong? By allowing the eulogy at that time, it seemed like it was part of the Mass when, of course, it wasn't. What really concerns me is that the eulogist said things about heaven and about the soul that just weren't true. If that were my funeral Mass, the eulogist wouldn't have done me any favours because most of the people in that church would now believe that I'm a canonized saint sitting right there beside Jesus. So they won't pray for my sorry soul and I'll be in purgatory for a very long time. Who wants that? I don't. So if you're the priest at my funeral some day, tell my family to give the eulogy anywhere but in the church and remind them that I still need prayers because I'm not in heaven yet.

Which brings me to my next point. Father, you said the deceased's soul is in heaven now. How did you know that? It seems to me that you didn't help that poor soul either. There was a captive audience in the church and not once was the need for prayers for the soul of the deceased

mentioned. They were wrongly reassured that the soul is now in heaven. Really? Do you need a primer on purgatory, Father? Here's what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

“All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven... The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned... This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: ‘Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.’ (*St. Gregory the Great*) From the beginning the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.”

At my funeral, Father, please don't tell them I'm in heaven with all the angels and saints. God willing, I hope to be there one day but first my imperfect soul needs to be refined in the purifying fires of Purgatory so that I can receive and give back perfect love in Heaven. I could be in Purgatory a long time. If you really want to help me, tell everyone to pray for me every day. Most importantly, have them request Masses for me. Trust me, Father, I'm going to need them.

One more thing: Maybe you were just trying to be welcoming and ecumenical but there was no reason to let everyone receive Holy Communion. There was no announcement about how only baptized practicing Catholics in a state of grace (i.e. not in mortal sin) can receive the Holy Eucharist. Communion became a free-for-all. I was sitting at the back of the church so I had a great view. I watched as confused people who obviously didn't know what was happening go and receive Communion. Did they know they were receiving the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of my Lord, your Lord? I'll bet they thought they were just receiving a piece of bread. At my funeral, tell them not to come up to receive Jesus in Holy Communion unless they meet the criteria for worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist. I don't want Jesus abused.

For most of my adult life, I have tried to live from one Holy Mass to the next, looking eagerly to the next time I can receive Jesus in Holy Communion. For me, and I'm sure for you too, the Eucharist is central to our life and the Real Presence of Jesus is what sustains us and helps our faith to grow. Being able to adore Him in the Blessed Sacrament here on Earth is a foretaste of what Heaven will be like.

When I die, maybe people will miss me enough that they will come to the Mass and some of them will cry. That's good. That means I touched lives. But what's most important is that my funeral will be truly Catholic.

Do that for me, Father. Tell them I tried to love God with all my heart but I wasn't perfect so I need to spend time in Purgatory to have my soul purified. Tell them they can help me by praying for me. And tell them about Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and why they can't all come up to receive Him. Be kind but tell them the Truth. One day, God willing, if I'm in Heaven on the day of your

funeral Mass, I'll pray for you and I'll keep praying for you until we are together in Heaven.

Signed, concerned but hopeful.

Painting: An Angel Frees the Souls of Purgatory by Ludovico Carracci. Source: Wikimedia Commons

This contribution is available at <http://8kidsandabusiness.wordpress.com/2014/01/23/dear-father-what-i-dont-want-at-my-funeral/>

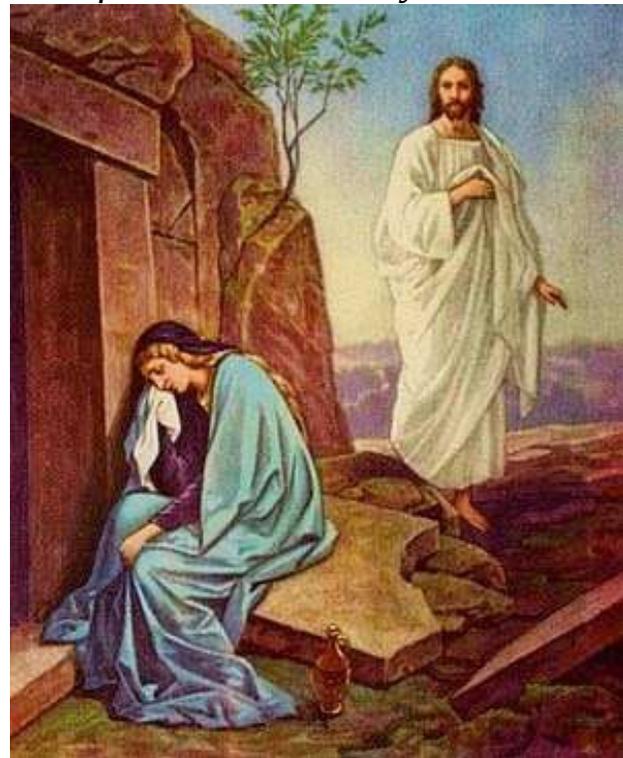
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| [Contents](#) |

Bringing Christ, A Light to All People Who Experience Same Sex Attraction [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Susan Fox

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.” (Isaiah 9:2-4)



“Woman, why are you weeping?” Jesus tenderly asked Mary Magdalene as she stood outside His empty tomb. She had just answered His question, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”

It was the morning of the Resurrection, and it was no accident that the Magdalene, the “sinner” out of whom Jesus cast seven demons, became the first person to encounter Jesus after the Resurrection.

For God had a great plan for the “sinner” from Bethany.

There she was -- at the foot of the cross with the Beloved Disciple John and Jesus’ Mother Mary. It was not reported whether she cried at the cross. Maybe she held back her tears for the sake of His mother.

But she sure as shootin’ wept at the Resurrection! Perhaps it was not surprising either, because St. John identifies Mary as the “sinner” who entered the house of Simon the Pharisee and washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed His feet and anointed them with an expensive ointment.



Marco Lovati, Maria Maddalena in contemplazione del Crocifisso, XVI sec., Palazzo Accademico, Forlivo

About her, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (Mark 14:9)

And so, Jesus Christ made it very clear that the repentant sinner will always be welcome in the Catholic Church, and they will be given a starring role in salvation history.

History repeats itself. We live in the land of gloom.

In our time, an unprecedented rejection of the virtue of chastity and the resulting reverence for the homosexual lifestyle has darkened secular society. Pornography – once reserved to seedy adult bookstores – now is as close as one’s computer or television. Junior High Schools are teaching that anal sex is an “act of love,” while it is really a health hazard. Seventeen U.S. states have legalized pseudo marriage between two persons of the same sex. The state of Oregon found a bakery guilty of discrimination for refusing to put a same-sex couple on a wedding cake. New Mexico put two photographers out of business for refusing to photograph a same-sex commitment service.

Even more disturbing, author Linda Harvey ([Maybe He’s Not Gay](#)) estimates that as much as 40 percent of our population may soon have same-sex experience because the schools are teaching it is a normal expression of sexuality and the government is labeling it a benevolent association equal to marriage. In 1990, American grunge band Nivana prophetically sang, “What else could I say? Everyone is gay.” Who could have imagined Kurt Cobain’s lyrics would have foretold the transformation of our culture?

The Catholic Church teaches that same-sex attractions, while not a committed sin in themselves, are unequivocally a disorder. They draw some people to pursue same-sex relationships, which are intrinsically non-complimentary to one another according to structural design.

Our experience of prior relationships will affect the formation of intimate bonds with others throughout our lives. A child’s first sexual experiment undertaken with a friend of the same sex will impress itself on the child, making it difficult for him to develop a normal relationship and marry a person of the opposite sex. A difficult relationship with a parent of the same sex, an early

introduction to pornography carelessly left around the house by siblings or father, sexual molestation – all of these experiences can leave a child wounded in his sexual identity and vulnerable to seeking love in same-sex relationships. Peter Pan attracts his boys.

Many regret that first step into the world of pornography, homosexuality and yes, the occult.

“San Francisco is a huge Pleasure Island attracting all the lost boys of the world. With a hopeless yearning for love, they are deprived of what innocence they have left, many die, but the pornography, which lures a future generation with the promise of paradise on Earth, continues to churn itself out,” said former gay porn star Joseph Sciambra, who now spends his days on the streets of San Francisco evangelizing the crowd outside an adult book store. He is trying to bring the “lost boys” home to the Catholic Church.



“Sometimes, I can’t stop crying,” he wrote in his book, [Swallowed by Satan](#). From the Malibu Cliffs, He stares broodingly towards the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco: “Souls are extinguished everywhere, as if they were hot embers escaping a raging inferno. I furiously stretch my arms to catch them, but I cannot. They are falling. I pray to Jesus. I ask Our Lady, please help them.”

In front of the Holy Eucharist in a Catholic Church in Canada, another man, who had lived a similar life, laid down curled up in a fetal position, weeping: “I wept for the spikes I drove through His Hands. I wept for the crown of thorns I pressed into His Flesh. And I wept for the souls of those I led astray. I wept with the hope that God could love a sinner like me.”

“He comforted me. In the presence of the Lord of all Creation, the Author of Love, I gave myself to Him, and desired His encompassing embrace.” (www.PursuitofTruth.ca)



Both these men are members of Courage, a worldwide apostolate of the Catholic Church, which ministers to persons experiencing same-sex attractions and their loved ones. In 1980, the late Terence Cardinal Cooke of New York asked Fr. John Harvey to form a spiritual support system so that men and women who experience same sex attraction can find the freedom of interior chastity and live a fully Christian life. Today, they have more than 100 chapters and assist countless people worldwide. They have the endorsement of Pope John Paul II: “Courage is doing the work of God.”

Both men, having experienced the forgiveness of God, have dedicated their lives to helping other people caught in sexual bondage within the context of the authentic teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. As the world sinks into a new “dark” age, these men are on the front lines of the “New Evangelization” of which Pope John Paul II spoke.

Men of Courage, why are you weeping? Do you weep for your brothers still caught in the bonds of sexual addiction? Do you weep for Our Loving God so cruelly offended? These men exemplify and make manifest love of God and love of neighbor in the Roman Catholic Church. The cornerstone of their apostolate is the virtue of joyful chastity. There is hope.

Maybe such an apostolate seems unnecessary to you. Isn’t homosexuality a fuzzy warm little relationship growing into something called a family?

No, it’s not. Read [Swallowed by Satan](#). It is adult men and women living a complete fantasy in a desperate bid to be loved. A woman cuts her hair like a man and tries to act like what she imagines a man would act. She can’t do it. It makes her behavior almost aberrant. It’s the same for a man. He is trying to mimic the male/female sex act in the role of the woman. He is not made for that.

And as they fall deeper and deeper into a sadomasochistic life style in which they are increasingly abused, many actually desire to take their own lives. It was just reported that 52 percent of youth self-identifying by their homosexuality in the United Kingdom have tried to harm themselves, according to a survey conducted by Metro, a pro-homosexual advocacy group. Joseph himself recounts an experience where one of his “dates” held a knife to his throat and announced he was going to kill him. His response? “Go ahead.”

“Consistently, while walking about and stumbling in the world of pornography, a strange numbness overcame me. Instead of sexual freedom making me feel liberated or empowered, I was completely drained, lifeless and imprisoned. The unforgiving corrosive effect of pornography left my body denuded,” Sciambra wrote. He remained in the lifestyle almost to the point of death. When he felt the hot breath of hell, he cried out for God. And he lived.

His Catholic faith -- abandoned for a time -- offered Joseph a haven of safety. And so it was for another Courage member: “The safest place I’ve ever found in the whole world is in the Catholic Church. The Church hasn’t judged me. The Church does not condemn me on account of the attractions I experience. The Church does not single me out as though I must live chaste while “straight” people don’t have to. I’m welcomed at every turn to walk into deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and to grow in His virtues. I’m welcome to serve charitably and to give of myself along side everybody else in that family.”

This is contrary to the world’s view of the Catholic Church. When a Catholic insists that homosexual acts are sinful, but the degree of culpability depends on the person’s freedom, he is met with cries of “homophobic!”

“Here I understand completely from where the rage in the gay community originates. In their cloistered world of gay sex, they have created a completely separate reality with its own set of guidelines. When the realm of the heterosexual, especially the Christian, attempts to curtail their self-imagined freedoms, it is immediately perceived as an attack on the whole of gay society. Without their towers of sex, the gay substructure collapses and their unstable universe disappears. Once again you are left alone and afraid,” Joseph said describing how Christian efforts to “help” are perceived as threats.

That’s the problem with fantasy. It disintegrates when reality tarnishes the charm of the fake. It was like that when I followed my husband into a restaurant run by men, who self-identify as “gay.” They were delighted to see my husband, but their smiles faded when I walked through the door a little while later. “Yes,” I said, flirtatiously waving my wedding ring, “I am his wife.” It was the truth.

Dedicated to helping people embrace a greater degree of truth is the Pursuit of Truth website, which contains writings from a number of faithful chaste Catholics who have been permitted the experience of same-sex attractions. I interviewed “Andrew,” one of the contributors, for this story. His life is full of hope. [Coming Home to the Catholic Church: My Testimony](#)

“2014 already feels like a big year. The rejection of an unchaste life is becoming more commonplace,” Andrew said. Pursuit of Truth believes hearts can be won over to chastity if the falsehoods embedded in our language are exposed.

“People are seeing how living unchastely is more unfulfilling than ever. And they are starting to realize because of connectivity through groups like Courage that the Church upholds the virtue of chastity as something to strive toward -- not as a means of fixing ourselves, but as a form of growing in self-mastery.”

Pursuit of Truth slowly leads you to the realization that to call oneself “gay” is a grave deception. Neither am I “straight.” My sexuality is only one facet of who I am. It is very important part, but it is still less than the fullness of who I am.

I also have a great capacity for laughter, the ability to see good in others regardless of their actions, and I practice the virtue of Talk (Tell the Good News). But I don’t call myself “Laughter.” Nor do I call myself “Big Mouth” -- even if other people do!

Instead of identifying ourselves by our sexual attractions or inclinations, the Pursuit of Truth website invites us to either anchor our embraced identity in our personhood (in the case of atheists) or in our relationship to God. The latter is what the Catholic Church invites us all to do, and it’s very healing. Many things can be overcome when we come to deeply understand that we are Beloved of God.

The website invites people to distinguish between attractions that are not specifically chosen and our embraced identity, which is the manner in which we define ourselves. The latter – our self-concept -- is specifically chosen by us.

For whatever reason, a person may realize that he is attracted to persons of his own sex instead of the opposite sex. These inclinations are not specifically chosen. Rather, they simply "are".

But it’s critically important how he sees himself after he recognizes his attractions to be distinct from his identity, or who he truly "is." The world wants you to believe you are “gay” and to fully and wholeheartedly embrace that identity. That is the message of despair. The Church does not see you that way. We are made in the image and likeness of God, Who is Love. You are a person, a child of God. There is freedom in that relationship.

Andrew says that in this context self-honesty is a lie: “It is a falsehood to not distinguish attractions from identity.” Ironically, Notre Dame University has fallen into this trap. Last fall, they created Prism ND, an organization for “gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students.”

These kinds of groups are about having people grow into their “gay” identity. Instead, the university should be directing students to anchor their identity in Jesus Christ. At least, I think that is what a “Catholic” University would do.

“To choose celibacy as a form of fixing oneself is like getting married to run from a porn

addiction. It doesn't work. To merely live a celibate life is not to change the heart condition. True celibacy is the culmination of chastity to the point of desiring to reserve yourself completely for God. Simply not having sex is called "abstinence." However, not having sex for the purpose of offering your life to God originating from one's desire to pursue mastery of the virtue of chastity ... is what it means to be celibate," Andrew said, adding that this form of celibacy is for all single people, not just those who have taken religious vows. But married people are called to live chastely, reserving the gift of their sexuality to one another, with Christ as the bedrock of their marriage.

Sadly, the Pursuit of Truth website has been criticized for not revealing "Andrew's" identity publicly. There is a group of false evangelists in the Catholic Church, who openly self-identify as celibate "gays." They say they live chaste Catholic lives, but they insist that the Church has to "develop" her teaching on homosexuality to make a place for them.

Austin Ruse, president of the Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute (C-FAM), who probably has done more than any other person on earth to stop the spread of abortion worldwide, courageously exposed this group, which he calls "The New Homophiles."

"They are the New Homophiles and they accept the Church's teaching that sexual activity can only occur between married men and women. They oppose a redefinition of marriage to include anyone else. They are fine, if that is the right word, with living celibate lives. They do not want to stop being gay; they don't believe they can or even should. They believe God made them gay so they want to be known as gay and they want the Church to accept them on those terms. And they believe being gay is part of God's plan and vocation for them," Ruse wrote in Crisis Magazine.

One in this group is Eve Tushnet. She writes: My lesbianism is part of why I form the friendships I form. It's part of why I volunteer at a pregnancy center. Not because I'm attracted to the women I counsel, but because my connection to other women does have an adoring and erotic component, and I wanted to find a way to express that connection through works of mercy. My lesbianism is inextricable from who I am and how I live in the world. Therefore I can't help but think it's inextricable from my vocation."

Pursuit of Truth would say that Eve has planted herself in a square box. What Eve doesn't understand is that our nature is fallen. Our nature now is like a faded photograph. It is not a reliable image of how God made us to be. The spiritual life, the pursuit of holiness – if you wish – means being re-made more fully into the Image of God. But that absolutely requires that you anchor your identity in Jesus Christ, not in something so minimizing as your sexual attractions. You are more than that.

So Pursuit of Truth is criticized by this group because "Andrew" is not out and about and visible to the world as a "gay" man. One commentator said that his choice to "hide" shows the Church as intolerant. My dear man, someday "Andrew" may marry and have 10 children. The lives of these future children could be endangered by his public admission now.

Pro-chastity Catholic bloggers like “Andrew” and Joseph are violently hated by people who have embraced the “gay” identity. I’ve met them online and they have warned me strongly against reading Joseph’s work. While I love these little munchkins dearly I recognize that they can be dangerous.

So “Andrew” is very prudent to remain hidden, and besides he does not see himself as anything but another person, so why come out? He is a child of God like everyone else in the Church. Pursuit of Truth has also taught me not to identify myself by my sexuality. I was arguing with an atheist on Twitter, and he said, “So when did you discover you were straight?” I answered furiously, “I am not straight. I am Beloved of Jesus Christ.” That left them scratching their heads.

But Andrew is only invisible in the eyes of the world: “I am very visible in the eyes of the Church. The Church is keenly aware of the gifts we have to offer. It’s the people outside the Church who don’t think we exist. But they’ll be reached when they are ready.”

And he fully believes that will be soon because the movement toward chastity is growing rapidly.

“What happens with crowd sync is that as soon as something becomes the place to be or the direction to go, the excitement for it grows. The excitement to live a chaste life (is growing.) It sounds ridiculous to people who never understood chastity or never tasted it before. But people are gaining strength in excitement of their role. We are rising up to take our places in the Church to be that voice to the world. (It is the voice) that says the Church is love, the Church loves us, we belong in the Church and it doesn’t matter what your attractions are. We need to collectively strive to support each other on this journey towards chastity regardless of our state in life whether it be marriage or single life,” Andrew concluded.

He shared the following video with me. It is his idea of what it means to see the love of the virtue of chastity spread around the world: (It's a riot)

This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-new-evangelists-bringing-christ.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Theme of 2014: Work and Pray [at Revolution of Love Blog]



For the last two years I have had a theme word or phrase for the year. For 2012 the word was “homemaking.” I didn’t plan it that way. It just happened. For 2013 it was “[loving God](#)” and it matched the new blog design and logo. I have been thinking about 2014 and one word kept popping into my head and it was “Discipline.” Not exactly what I wanted to hear. On the other hand, it made sense because by the end of December I felt like a wild 2 year old hopped up on birthday cake sugar. All the festivities had me eating too much, spending too much, playing too much, and whatever ever else too much I shouldn’t be doing. I can feel the desperate need for a little reigning in and disciplining.



As I was pondering all this I clicked over to Jen’s [Saint Name Generator](#) and said a prayer before receiving my randomly chosen saint for the year. I was given St. Benedict. The first thing that came to my mind? His motto – work and pray. It was as if the Holy Spirit was kicking me in the rear and letting me know what was ahead but I was still dragging my feet. It wasn’t exactly exciting. I was reading other blogs and they had really cool words. Jenny had [Delight](#) and Sarah

had [Rest](#) (in the Lord) and even Jen had something about and having fun. This morning I was seriously thinking about ditching the whole idea or just picking another word. But then the Holy Spirit let me know WHY I was given “work and pray.”



Today Brian went for his routine testing to make sure he is still cancer free. (If you recall, I talked about his cancer in our annual [Christmas letter](#).) My father-in-law took him this morning and I took care of getting the kids to school etc. Then Brian called me from the doctor’s office to break the news that the cancer has returned. We were in shock. When we went through this last January, after the surgery and his recovery the doctor said everything looked great and he had a 90% chance of remaining cancer free. He went for his follow up tests 6 months later and again, everything looked good. But now it is back. In the same area and at the same size. Brian couldn’t believe it. The doctor couldn’t believe it.

So now Brian has to go through surgery once again. Plus, we are praying that the tumor is only at stage 1 (possibly 2) because if it is any more advanced he will also need to have chemo. I pray to God we will not have to go through that.

I have a very vivid imagination. A person can tell me one thing and my mind will automatically play out the whole scene in my head. So I think to myself, “My husband has cancer,” and my mind then thinks, “what if...” and I can see the funeral and the kids in tears and me being despondent like Lady Mary unable to cope with the loss of her love. Until I snap myself out of it and say, “Get a grip.” There is work to be done and kids to be taken care of and a husband that needs my support...I need to get to work...and I need to pray. Aha! Now I get it. The Holy Spirit was giving me a heads up. I need to work and pray.

It was the only way I was able to get through the rest of this day. It is the only way I will get through the days and weeks ahead. I don’t know how big this cross will be but I’m trying not to worry about it and just focus on doing what needs to be done right now.

In the meantime, I ask you to please, please keep us in your prayers. I will keep you posted as to

how things are going.

(I'm linking up with Jenny for "[Naming the New Year.](#)")

UPDATE: [Dear Diary: Chronicling the Last Few Days \(and an update on Brian\)](#)

Bobbi ☺

This contribution is available at <http://www.revolutionoflove.com/blog/theme-of-2014-work-and-pray/>
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| [Contents](#) |

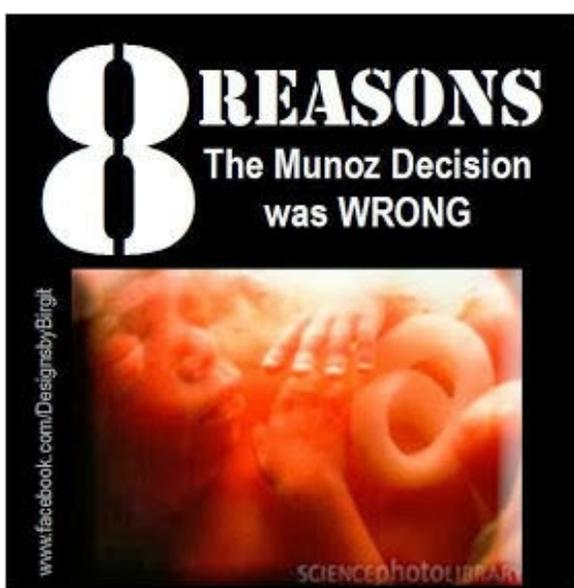
Removing Life Support - 8 Reasons the Munoz Decision Was Wrong [at Designs by Birgit]

By now you've most likely heard about the

[brain dead Texas mother](#)

, whose life support was removed recently - even though her pre-born child was still depending on it for survival. Many have weighed in on this heartbreaking story. The multitude of comments I have read have been provocative, morally based and/or well thought out, while others were heated and emotionally charged. I've read, pondered, debated and discerned. Below I've listed eight conclusions to which I've come.

1. The mother, Marlise Munoz, was irreparably damaged - physically. Her own life would most likely never improve. Removing extraordinary medical measures from her body seems to have been a licit act - had she not been pregnant.
2. Since Mrs. Munoz wasn't the only person to be considered, however, a different set of criteria begged to be used. Almost certainly, she lacked the physical ability to recover but within her womb lived another person. This pre-born child was living and growing. She had her own unique set of God-given rights.
3. Texas law, justly, has called for sustaining the life of the mother if she is pregnant. In the Munoz case, judicial manipulation countermanded this ethically based law.
4. Baby Munoz's life had been maintained, within her mother's womb, for nine weeks already. This wasn't a case of asking for extraordinary means after the fact. The medical intervention, needed to assist the continuing life of the child, was an on-going treatment. Removing this treatment, once implemented, was morally different from not having initially begun it.
5. Whether or not this little baby girl was suffering from physical or mental defects had no licit impact on the morality of this case. Physical or mental perfection has never been an acceptable criterion for the right to life.



6. Pre-born children of similar gestational age (23 weeks) have [historically](#) been found to be viable. Maintaining life-support on the mother for a few more weeks would have significantly improved the potential outcome for this pre-born little girl.

7. Instead, removing life-sustaining treatment had the direct effect of death - the ceasing of the life of a pre-born person. On the other hand, a Cesarean Section would have given the child an opportunity to live. Had the baby died under this circumstance, it would have not have been morally objectionable.

8. Had baby Munoz been born via C-Section, she would have had the opportunity to receive the sacrament of Baptism. I have found this aspect to be morally incomprehensible.

While I realize this situation was fraught with emotional difficulty for the Munoz family, I contend their decision was the morally wrong one. As understandable as it is that they would want to bury and mourn this loved member of their family, their emotional desires resulted in a morally illicit choice. Had they waited just a while longer, the fruit of their union – a little girl, posthumously named Nicole – could have continued to be a living legacy of their love. Rest well, Marlise and Nicole Munoz. May God, His Mother Mary, and the Angels wrap their loving arms around you.

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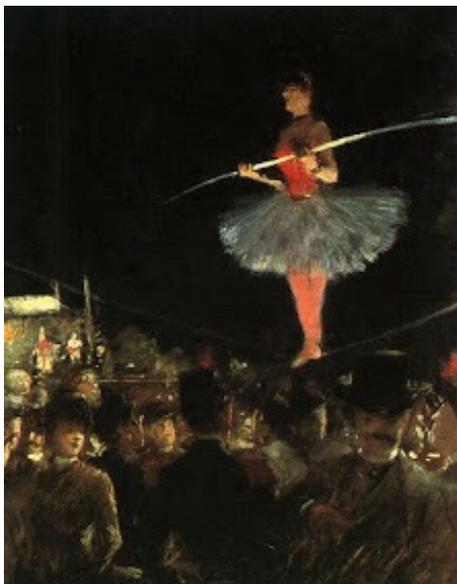
[related story](#)

, a brain dead mother sustains twins - while on life support - until their birth at 25 weeks. They are slowly improving and her family is grateful for their lives.

This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2014/01/removing-life-support-8-reasons-munoz.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

This Cloud of Witnesses [at The Breadbox Letters]



I had occasion today to step out of the mold on

[my other blog.](#)

just rambling on about whatever came to mind. And you know what? I enjoyed it. So much, in fact, that I'm going to try an experiment right here, where you usually find a very brief post with a picture.

I do like matching words with paintings. Maybe I'll even find an illustration to go along with.... well... with whatever tumbles out as I click away here on a keyboard, determined to make this a ramble of whatever comes to mind.

Which is a scary thought indeed. I feel like an acrobat performing without a net (note to self: look for a painting of an acrobat performing without a net).

Let's see. It's cold here today. Very. The snow that fell overnight sits right where it landed; it isn't going anywhere at these temperatures. Nor am I, for I don't go out much anymore in snow. I had to drive through it, however, back when my children needed rides home from school.

It was during one such drive when God let me know (again) that He loved me. Inching my vehicle through a sudden snowstorm, I panicked when the car's back started to fishtail. I panicked anew as I watched a school bus skid through a stop sign and spin totally around in the intersection.

I had a small child waiting for me eight miles from my home, but could I reach him safely? My toddler, meanwhile, sat beside me, humming happily. In those days, little ones could ride in the front seat with Mommy, in regular seat belts. And in those days, cell phones were far in the future.

Totally lacking in driving-confidence, I was pretty hopeless in snow. But my husband drove in anything - he could make it through a storm like this. He'd have to leave work to help us out, but that would be better than my plowing our little ones into a tree. Realizing I needed his help, I pulled (slid) into the parking lot of a pizza restaurant. Only to see, in the window, a sign.

"Restrooms for customers only. No public telephone."

I did what any sensible "me" would do under the circumstances. I sat in the car and cried.

And then I felt guilty about crying, and hopelessly un-adult, and most of all lacking in faith. I mean, I trusted in God, I knew I did, and I believed He was watching out for us, and He could get us through anything, and this was just snow after all. It wasn't a famine.

But I was a failure. I was, I just knew it. I didn't have enough confidence to keep on driving. I felt I was failing my children, myself, my husband, my God.

My tears turned out to be an asset when I finally slogged into the restaurant with a three year old in tow. I was allowed to use the non-public phone and then go back to the car to wait for my husband to round up us all. As my toddler ("Frankie") sat oblivious to my lovely pity party, he continued humming, thankfully unconcerned.

I, meanwhile, was praying. Not aloud - this was happening inside my heart, where I was apologizing to God for not having enough faith to keep on driving, and where I was feeling embarrassed, and even secretly asking God how (if) He could possibly love a scaredy cat like me.

"Mommy?" Frankie's little voice interrupted my silent confession. "Mommy, Jesus loves me!"

Yes, He indeed did, I said to my little one (who'd been humming "Jesus Loves Me" all this time).

"And Mommy," Frankie continued, this time with emphasis. "Jesus loves YOU, too!"

Out Of The Mouths Of Babes.

It is now years later, and I have made my peace with snow. And with the truth that God loves me, even if I can't make myself drive when the weather is bad.

And notice the painting I found to go with this ramble. There the lady stands, perched atop the high wire, which obviously isn't all that high. One stumble and she'd be in the arms of the people all around her.

One stumble, and I find God's love waiting for me.

I need not fear reaching even for so marvelous a goal as holiness, for all around me are the saints of God.

*"Since we for our part are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead."
(Hebrews 12:1) Painting: Forain, The Tightrope Walker*

This contribution is available at <http://thebreadboxletters.blogspot.com/2014/01/this-cloud-of-witnesses.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

How this simple question turned me Catholic [at The Orant]



About six years ago I was living in Ann Arbor Michigan. I worked as the youth director at an ecumenical Christian organization and spent a lot of my time helping to build relationships between Churches in the area. Part of this work involved volunteering at the inter-church prayer room for a few hours each week, praying with students who would drop in and spending a lot of time alone thinking about God.

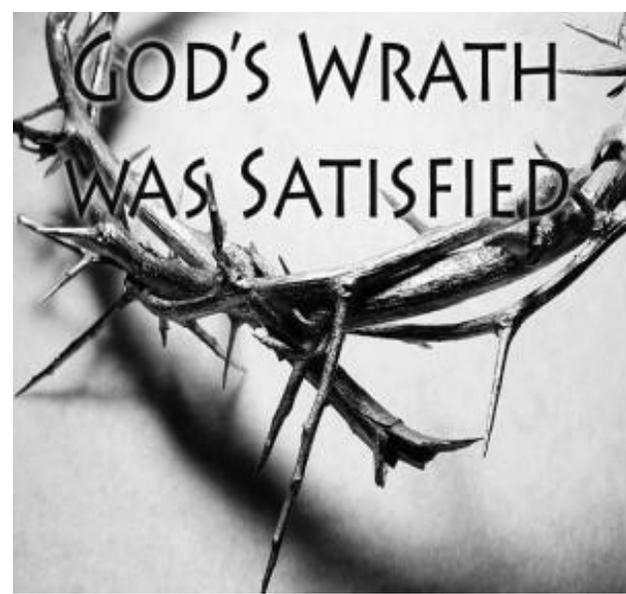
One day I came in and there was a giant banner hanging over the pulpit that read, “Why did Jesus die?” At first I didn’t take too much notice of it, but as I sat alone in the room for the next two hours the question began to gnaw at me. It got under my skin, it infected me. It became more than a question, it became a challenge. The question “why did Jesus die,” eventually drove me to question my faith, rethink my dogma and eventually set me on a path that ended in my joining the Catholic Church in the 2013 Easter Vigil.

I don’t think I am alone in this struggle. It is at the heart of many of the strongest objections to the Christian faith I have encountered, and it is one of the most divisive issues in the inter-Christian dialog today.

This article seeks to offer a brief look at this question, and hopefully will inspire you to take a closer look.

So let’s begin with the common narrative that is often told about why Jesus died, at least the most common I hear among American Christians today.

The common narrative



The answer to this question that is most well-known is probably the one laid out in the “four spiritual laws” made popular by the group Campus Crusade. The narrative goes like this:

1. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. He created you with a good and perfect plan in mind for your life.
2. You have violated that wonderful and perfect plan with your sin. This sin has separated you from God, because it is an offense to his nature and an affront to his honor. Your sin has robbed God of the glory due him. Now his wrath must be appeased and satisfaction must be made for your offenses.
3. The wage of sin is death, but even if you died 1000 times you still wouldn't be able to satisfy the wrath of God, for what he requires is a perfect sacrifice. God provided that perfect sacrifice in Jesus. Jesus' death reconciled man to God and offered satisfaction for our sin.
4. If one believes in Jesus, and trusts in the sacrifice he made on the cross, they will have their sins forgiven and will be able to live in union with God forever.



This was basically the explanation that I grew up with, as a confessional Lutheran protestant. I was raised in a tradition that had answered the question of why Jesus died using an explanation ~~invented~~ *inspired* by the writings of a man named Anselm of Canterbury in (d. 1109), which had emerged as medieval scholastics wrestled to develop a perspective of salvation in light of the feudal world-view that was dominant in Europe at the time.

In a world where the Lord of the land's honor reigned supreme "penal substitutionary atonement" became a dominant perspective. In this view Jesus dies in order to satisfy the wrath of God. God is angry because our sin has racked up a great debt. Every time we sin we are essentially stealing from God. God gave us our lives to glorify him and every time we sin we are robbing God of the glory he created us to have. There is no amount of good works that could ever pay the debt back for neglecting to give God a return on the investment he made in creating us. Our debt could only be paid with an infinite sacrifice. This sacrifice needed to be God himself (for only God is infinite) so Jesus (fully God) reconciled the Father to humanity by offering his blood as that infinite atonement required. Jesus' death appeases the wrath of God and allows God to forgive us without God violating his righteousness justice and honor. You can see this view

Like many today, I had difficulty squaring this God with the God I saw in Jesus. It just didn't make sense to me. How could a man who told parables where kings forgave debts without any mediator or sacrifice be actually saying that God was less capable of mercy than this man. How could the man who refused to condemn the women caught in adultery without her even repenting or forgiving the sins of a paralyzed man because his friends had faith (Mark 2:5) be the same God who required the blood sacrifice of his son in order to maintain his honor while forgiving others their sins.

Rocked by Waldenstrom



I began to question everything I had been taught about salvation, and then my world was rocked by a simple question, "Where is it written?" This is the question that was written by Swedish Lutheran pietist, P.P. Waldenstrom. Like myself, Waldenstrom had grown up being told that God's wrath burned against man because his sin was an affront to God's infinite honor. But, like me, it bothered him. One day Waldenstrom was talking to his friend and he asked the question, "Where is it written?" He could not find any place in the Bible that explained why Jesus had died in that way. It was a presupposition that was read into everything else. He began to argue that the ministry of reconciliation was not Jesus reconciling man to God, but rather God to man. Jesus was God entering into the brokenness of this world and taking on the full wrath of our sin. He died because we are a sinful people who killed him. When Jesus was raised God overcame the final sting of death with a new final word, Jesus. Jesus is the word that testifies that God will not let our sin get in the way of God's own desire to embrace us. It wasn't a new thought, in fact it was one of the primary ways the fathers of the Church had answered this

question, but for many deeply entrenched in the “penal substitutionary atonement” model it was revolutionary.

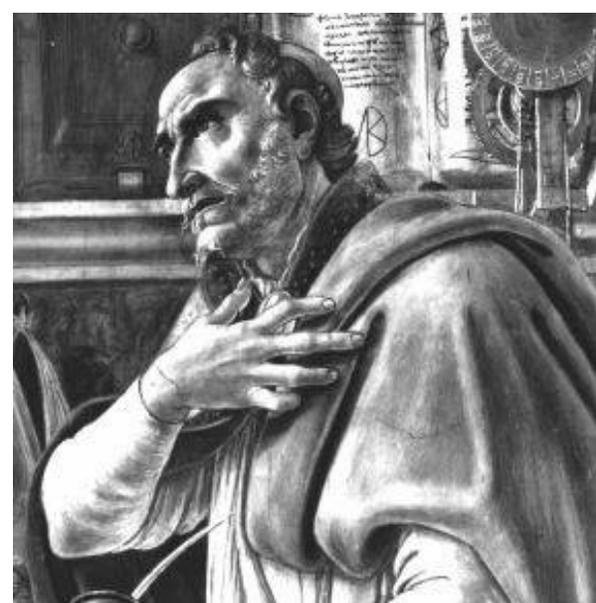
This insight helped fuel a revival movement in Sweden within the Lutheran church, which in turn came into the United States through Swedish immigrants in the 19th century. These Swedes, inspired by the loving God they saw in Christ, formed a denomination today known as the Evangelical Covenant Church. It was in this church that I came to rest as I looked for a denomination that reflected my own convictions about caring for one’s neighbor and worshipping a God who dwelt in solidarity with us.

The Evangelical Covenant Church was a good home for me. They offered room for theological dialog and disagreement. They offered avenues for exploration and encouraged dialog, and most importantly they practiced what they preached. They loved the Bible and their neighbor. They served God and others. They’re mantra in all they did was, “God’s glory and neighbor’s good.” I loved being in the ECC.

However the question about why Jesus died still haunted me. Although I no longer had a theological system that turned God into a monster, I still had to deal with the reality that often I was a monster myself.

An Augustinian insight

The solution to my own dark side was addressed in an unexpected place, through St. Augustine. As I was working on my thesis for my MDiv I began to explore how the fathers of the Church articulated the question of why Jesus died. I was surprised to find that there were a number of attempts made to articulate a rationale that sounded an awful lot like P.P. Waldenstrom. One writer in particular captured my imagination, St. Augustine.

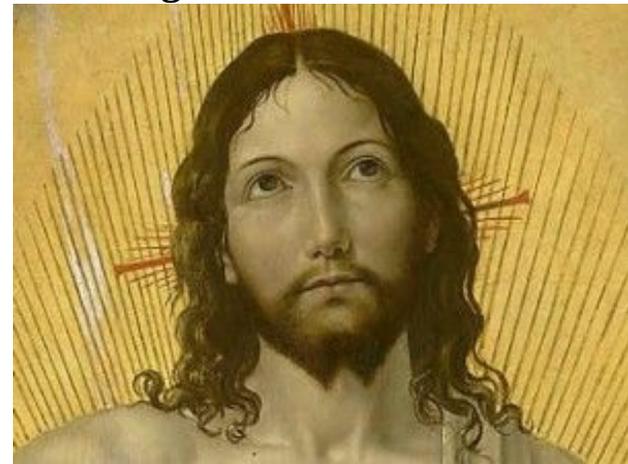


Augustine realized that God could have saved us with his power. God is fully capable of overpowering any creature, sin, vice, or person. God chooses to overcome with Christ’s death because God wanted to create a life with humanity where they could participate in God’s saving action with Him. A pure exercise of divine power would not have given humanity a way of participation. God used the shedding of blood because he wanted to give

humanity a path of salvation that they could imitate, and even be united in through the sacramental life of the church.

Although men and women are freed from death and forgiven of their sins, they are not made perfect when they are baptized into Christ. People still fall into temptation and sin. Augustine also viewed the Cross as a sure guide for endurance in Christ. God's action in Christ's life, and death is the starting point that demonstrates what true obedience to God looks like. The salvation which is inaugurated on the cross is worked out as God's grace works actively in us, and is made perfect as the Church as a whole is saved from even their sinful desires through the purgative life of the saints in unity with one another in Christ. (c.f. Augustine, Sermon 222; 232; 233)

Becoming Catholic



To summarize my journey, I came to believe that Jesus died because we are a people bound to death, and in his death he makes available to creation the power of resurrection. In Jesus we are invited to live again, to join his body, the Church, and to participate more fully each day in the freedom found in his death and to receive grace as he works to sanctify his Body, the Church, and all of its members.

I am not bound to be a lone sinner, forgiven yet broken. Instead I am invited to join into a holy body united with the healing salvation in Christ and commissioned with the promise that the work of my redemption from all sin will be completed as we live and move as a body with Christ our head. I longed to be as fully a part of that body as I could be, and so I began to discern whether that place was the Catholic Church. It wasn't an easy journey, but eventually I came to the conviction that in the Catholic Church I could most fully be united to the body of Christ ([A story told elsewhere](#)). And so in Easter 2013 I entered into full communion to join more fully into the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

This contribution is available at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2014/01/how-this-simple-question-turned-me-catholic.html>

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I remember us catching this man, Dzhokhar and killing another man, his brother, and feeling pride that the lifetime cop who led the efforts to get him is a member of the community where I work. I remember [seeing Father Sean Conner](#), who worked so much with the Richards family, mourning their little boy, mourning the fact that his sister lost her kid brother and her left leg, and thinking that was the type of priest I want to be someday.

I remember . I remember the absolute guts the [guy in the white beard, brown robe, and red hat](#) had standing in front of a group of reporters, microphones on, just a few days after the bombing, saying “Forgiveness does not mean that we do not realize the heinousness of the crime ... But, in our hearts, when we are unable to forgive, we make ourselves a victim of our own hatred.”

I don’t want to remember Dzhokhar Tsarnaev dying at the hands of the state.

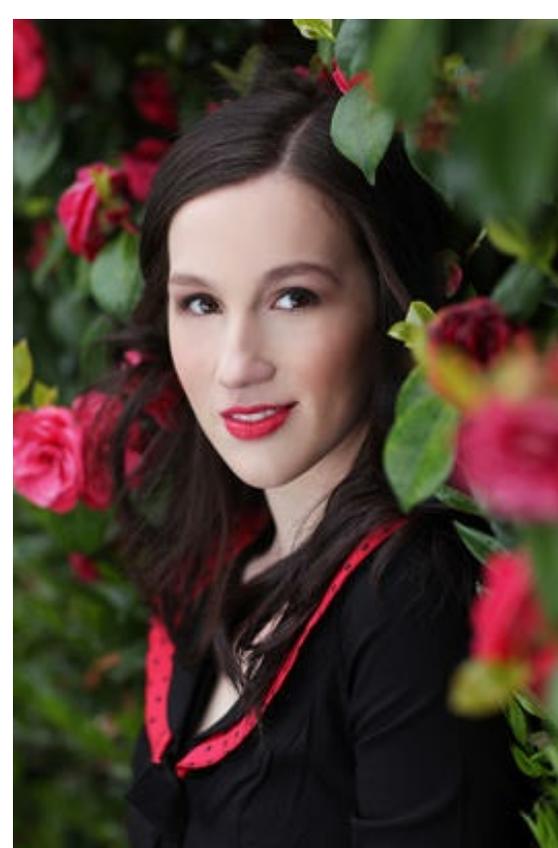
In sending a telegram to President John F. Kennedy in 1963, the great Abraham Joshua Heschel claimed, in reference to the civil rights struggle, that our nation had entered a time which required “moral grandeur and spiritual audacity.” As is too often the case, the failure to heed a prophet’s advice makes that same advice no less true. And that is why Dzhokhar ought not receive the death penalty: whenever we execute another human being, we tarnish whatever cause we stand for, and diminish its audacity by a failure of moral and spiritual imagination.

I will always remember the victims of the Boston Marathon Bombings. And when I do, I also want to be able to remember that when we all saw something evil on our streets, on our screens, and later on a Rolling Stone cover, we did not sink to the level of vengeance. I want to remember that we reached for something grander, something more worthy of those we lost, and something more worthy of us.

This contribution is available at <http://catholichow.wordpress.com/2014/01/31/i-want-to-remember-more-than-evil/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Holy Is His Name performed by Melissa Maricich [at About the Rosary]



A musical version of the Magnificat also known as the Song of Mary or the Canticle of Mary. This is an excellently performed version by Melissa Maricich, a young talented singer, dancer and actress. Find out more about her over here melissamaricich.net

Below are the lyrics for the song **Holy Is His Name**:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
And my spirit exalts in God my savior
For he has looked with mercy on my lowliness
And my name will be forever exalted.
For the mighty God has done great things for me
An his mercy will reach from age to age

And holy, holy, holy is His name.

He has mercy in every generation
He has revealed His power and His glory
He has cast down the mighty in their arrogance

And has lifted up the meek and the lowly
He has come to help His servant Israel
He remembered His promise to our fathers

And holy, holy, holy is His name.
And holy, holy, holy is His name.

This contribution is available at <http://www.abouttherosary.com/melissa-maricich/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Once a Mother, Always a Mother [at String of Pearls]

When I watched the long-awaited first episode of Season 4 of "Downton Abbey" the other night (hey, have you heard of this show--ha ha!), I really pitied Isobel Crawley when she talked about how lost she was in the wake of her son Matthew's death. She said something along the lines of, "You see, when you're a mother and your only child dies, then you're not a mother anymore. You're nothing. And I'm having trouble getting used to that."

Wrong, Isobel. Wrong, wrong, wrong. I feel so incredibly sorry for you (and I'm so bummed that Matthew is off the show!); but you are still wrong. Because once a mother, always a mother. You can't hug and kiss him anymore, Mrs. Crawley, and you'll miss him all the days of your life; but his soul lives on, and the love between a mother and son survives even death.

I have been struggling myself the past few years, trying to get used to the idea that the caretaking part of my mothering job is coming to an end. I have always been a stay-at-home mom, happiest when I'm feathering my nest and feeding the chicks in it. But the time came when they started to fly the coop, one by one, first leaving for college, and then heading out into the working world. Now two of my boys are married and a third will be tying the knot in February. My youngest son will become an official adult when he celebrates his 21st birthday in a few weeks. When he graduates from the University of Notre Dame in May of 2015, my career--my life's work--will be completed.

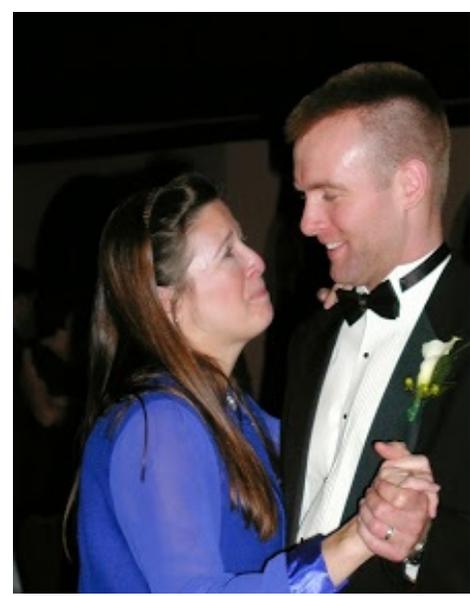
Or will it? Does a mother ever stop worrying about her children--and doing whatever she can for them--no matter how old they get?

No, she doesn't. I know this from experience now.

Moms, don't listen to Isabel. She'll always be Matthew's mother. I know that even if God had only blessed me with one son, instead of five (my cup runneth over!), and that son had preceded me to Heaven, I would still be a mother.

There are wonderful moments in store for you, mothers of young children. They will become independent, they will move away, they will start families of their own. But there

will be incredibly joyful experiences to enjoy with them in the future, such as mother-son dances (like this one with my firstborn son at his wedding in 2009), where you will shed tears of joy while dancing in the arms of the little boy you raised, the man who has become a husband to a new daughter.



There will still be heart-melting hugs and kisses like this (from son #2, who was the best man at his older brother's wedding).



It's bittersweet, seeing them grow up. Believe me, there are moments when I look back at the days when my husband and I had five little boys living under our roof and eating dinner with us every night, when our home was filled with noise and chaos and laughter, and my heart feels heavy with the weight of missing their constant presence in our lives. The walls of our home are plastered with pictures of their beloved faces.



But if they'd never grown up, I wouldn't have the joy of knowing them as the amazing men they are

today.

If they'd never grown up, I wouldn't have had the chance to become a grandmother--and now that I have three absolutely precious little granddaughters, I can't imagine my life without them in it.

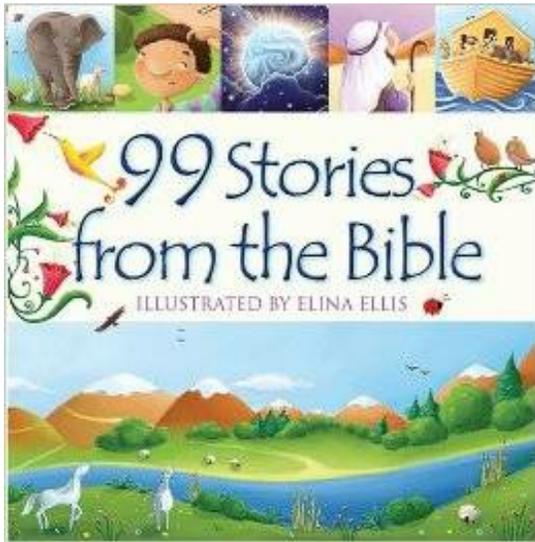


So now I'll not only be forever a mother; I'll be forever a grandmother, too (lucky me!).

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2014/01/once-mother-always-mother.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Blog Tour: 99 Stories from the Bible [at This That and the Other Thing]



About the Book:

Following the narrative of the Bible, this collection of 99 stories starts with At the Beginning, and covers a wide variety of key events, including Samuel Listens, Esther, A Blind Man Sees, and Jesus Walks on the Lake, through to One Day Jesus Will Return. Each story is told over a double page spread with vibrant illustrations and some full page art.

My Comments:

I thought my nine year old might enjoy this book but it was a little young for her. Nevertheless it was beautifully illustrated and most of the stories are well-told. As a Catholic reviewing children's Bible story books I have several stories I look for/at. This book has The Wedding at Cana, but while it mentions that Mary was there, no mention was made of her intercession. Peter's profession of faith and being given the keys to the Kingdom isn't there. The Last Supper is included but while the washing of the feet was described, as well as the conversation with Judas, and we are told that Jesus blessed the bread and wine and shared them with His friends, no mention is made of "This is my Body..." While it mentions that Jesus' family and friends watched the crucifixion, no mention is made of John and Mary being given to each other.

I'll admit that another thing I look for in children's Bible stories is a lack of gore. I know the crucifixion was awful; I just don't want to deal with nightmares. In this book the crowd is looking into the distance at the crosses. No blood is visible, and crowing with thorns and the scourging at the pillar aren't mentioned.

As the book basically just retells the stories, and doesn't add any commentary about what they are supposed to mean, I don't think a Catholic parent would find anything objectionable in it, the only problem is what isn't here.

I'd like to thank the publisher for providing a complimentary review copy. Grade: B.

This contribution is available at <http://ranthisthat.blogspot.com/2014/01/blog-tour-99-stories-from-bible.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Pope Francis and Notre Dame: "Thou shalt not, or Thou SHALL" [at The Lady in the Pew]

Numerous folks have weighed in on the Holy Father's

[address to the trustees of that university which more than one wag have dubbed "Humanist U](#)

"...and why should I not join in?

At first, like many I'll wager, was hoping the Pope would give the trustees the old one-two punch. May God forgive me.

What he didn't say:

"Thou shalt NOT honor anti-Catholic jerks, which indeed you have done in the past."

"Thou shalt NOT offer so-called `entertainment' which mocks, not only the Catholic Church, your morons but humanity in general."

"Thou shalt NOT keep repeating the imbecilic acts which, God only knows why, you seem to delight in persisting!"

(I could go on with the weird things Notre Dame has done, but that's not the point of this post.)

What he did say, in part:

It is my hope that the University of Notre Dame will continue to offer unambiguous testimony to this aspect of its foundational Catholic identity, especial in the face of efforts, from whatever quarter, to dilute that indispensable witness. And this is important: its identity, as it was intended from the beginning. To defend it, to preserve it and to advance it!

Yeah. That's actually really good. That's very Jesus.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks us to not hide our light under a bushel basket, but to expose it for all to see.

Uh-huh, Jesus, on occasion, did get really mad. But more often than not, He took sinners and made them into saints.

Just a thought...but isn't that what our simple (in the best sense of the word) Holy Father is trying to do?

May God continue to bless you.

This contribution is available at <http://pewlady.blogspot.com/2014/01/pope-francis-and-notre-damethou-shalt.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Playing Ball

I've been watching enough athletic events lately that I've started thinking philosophically about them. As I watched my son defend a goal or shoot a basket or my daughter try to get open for a pass this past weekend, I began thinking about how that soccer game or that basketball game are a lot like life and in particular a lot like God's will in our lives.



That little ball flying up and down the field is a little bit like life. Sometimes we have a handle on it. Sometimes we have to entrust someone else with our life as we pass it off, praying they have our best interests at heart. Sometimes we lose control and that ball slips from our grip and goes the opposite direction.

We know where we are supposed to be on the field, who we are supposed to defend, and the plays we are to run, but sometimes, others get in the way or perhaps we even get in our own way. Even when we know what we are supposed to do, we don't always get it done. Sound familiar? Like the game of life?

And we have our cheering section – those who love us and support us and pray for us. They see wrongs against us. They see our potential. They recognize missed opportunities sometime even when we don't. But they are always on our side.

We also have our Coach. The Coach who stands on the sidelines – He can see the bigger picture. He can see the beauty of the game and where he needs the team to move as a whole. He sometimes yells at us to get into our positions or to take particular shots. Other times, He lets us figure out the right way to go on our own. He always wants us to succeed, but he knows that



sometimes we must sacrifice so that others may shine.

We may feel like we are losing the game and that the other team is going faster, farther and doing better than you. But the Coach on the sidelines knows that this sport is so much bigger than just one game. It is so much bigger than one season. It is about sculpting the players to become better than they think they can be, dream bigger than they dream for themselves.

And at the end of the game, our Coach says “Good game” and pats us on the back. And whether we feel like our life is a “win” or “loss”, if we have trusted in our Coach and done our best, we leave the game when time has run out on the clock and enter into that locker room to our Eternity.

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/our-kids/playing-ball/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Valuing Life's Interruptions [at bukas palad]



Year A / Ordinary Time / 3rd Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 8.23-9.3 / Psalm 27 (R/v 1a) / 1 Corinthians 1.10-13, 17 / Matthew 4.12-23

My friend, Joshua, always tells this story about his morning routine. He wakes up at around 7am. He prays a quick good morning to Jesus. He checks his emails, reads the New York Times website for the latest news and scrolls his Facebook to catch up on his friends' lives. He then washes up, has his breakfast and heads off to work.

What Joshua does as he tells us about his morning routine is called narrative-making. Narrative-making is about telling stories of who we are and what we do, both for ourselves and for others.

Like Joshua, you and I tell stories about ourselves. We narrate stories about our past to friends, often highlighting the good and hiding the bad. We share with families our future dreams about what we want for ourselves and those we love. And in these first weeks of this new year, you and I might be fashioning our own narrative of how this year will unfold and how we hope it will end.

Yes, we all write narratives about our lives with words and images, with memories and hopes. Sometimes, our narratives are gifts we share with those we cherish so they will know us better. At other times, we use them as a mask to protect ourselves from being hurt or exploited. And even when we don't tell others our life stories, they wait to hear them because they want to know who

we really are.

No matter how much we determine and manage the narratives of our lives, there are moments, now and again, when something interrupts them. Someone may intervene and toss the entire narrative we have created upside down. Sometimes, an unexpected event demands we alter the narrative.

When moments like this happen, we might find ourselves confused, disorientated, lost. We might even be angry, frustrated, and disappointed. And, naturally, we ask ourselves, "Why?", "How come?", "What should I do now?", "What's next?"

But, I'd like to suggest that there are better questions to ask as people of faith. Questions like: "Where is God in this disruption, this interruption, this intervention?"; "What is God asking of me in these moments?"; "Is God present and wanting to make something good out of all this?"; "Could God be inviting me to let go and to let him take over my life?"

Today's gospel passage of Jesus calling his disciples is an interruption. Here are Peter and Andrew, James and John doing their own thing, going about their fishermen way of life and minding their own business. They are living the narrative of their lives as fishermen. And Jesus comes and he calls them to follow him, calls them to an unknown future. All he promises is that he will make them fishers of men.

Though they would not have asked questions about God as Jesus interrupted them, I'd like to think they asked, "What is this man promising us?"

Jesus' promise is about transformation--about making their lives something more and better than their everyday existence. His is a promise of how God wishes to write the life stories of each of these fishermen, as only God can, and not as humankind so often plans, with our self-centered agendas and wants. Instead of fishing being the ordinary narrative of their lives, Jesus calls them to God's extraordinary narrative to in friendship with Jesus as his disciples.

Calling them to this new way of life is Jesus' way of inviting them to let God bring out the best in

their lives—their faith, their generosity, their courage and their love. And Jesus will teach them to practice these not for themselves but for others, through lives of service, which is what living as a disciple is about. He calls them to live as disciples so that they can experience the Good News he proclaims, which they can then share with others. Our First Reading describes this Good News as the experience of abundant joy instead of distress and gloom, of freedom from oppression and burden, of living in the light, not in darkness anymore.

Haven't you and I also experienced this Good News when another's action interrupted our lives? Actions like your child who disappointed you coming to hug you and saying "I'm sorry Mommy and Daddy and I love you", or when a friend's forgiveness drew you out of your stubbornness to reconcile, or even when a stranger's smile on the T encouraged you to smile back at the end of a disappointing day.

Perhaps, you and I are more aware of God when he really intervenes and makes a difference in our lives. Like when God made right our bad decisions and gave us hope again. Or, like when God turned misfortune around and taught us that we are already rich even with much less. Or, like when God blessed us with a new lease of life after the doctors told us our illness has no cure. And may be, even like when God gifted us with another's love and care when we had given up on this possibility because we had judged ourselves unworthy of ever being loved.

If such moments are real in our lives, then what we proclaimed in our psalm today is indeed right: "The Lord is my light and my salvation."

If you agree with me that all this true, then today's gospel passage offers us this hope: God will definitely interrupt our lives to write—may be, even to rewrite—the narratives of our life stories because he wants nothing less than to make them even better than we can make of our lives with our limited human effort.

But we can only receive and enjoy this gift if we surrender ourselves to the many interruptions and interventions God will most definitely make into our everyday life of studying and working, of praying and playing, of living and loving.

Only then will we see more clearly how Jesus is God's light in our lives. He is God's light

because it is through, with and in Jesus that God continues to lovingly write our life stories according to his original script.

Today, you and I are being challenged to let God unravel the narratives we have made or are constructing about our lives for this year. If we accept this challenge, we can begin to enjoy God's promised goodness of new beginnings that he always blesses us with whenever he interrupts our lives.

Are you and I then ready, excited, willing to welcome God's interruptions, and to let God write the narratives of each of our lives, as only God wants to and as God must? Let us pray we each are.

Because when we are, we will be surprised and delighted, like Joshua was last week when his mother's early morning phone call from faraway Singapore allowed him to enjoy what he never paid attention to but was always there beyond his window: God's beauty that is the radiant light of a new morning dawning in his life, and in our lives too.

Preached at Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta Parish, Dorchester, Boston

photo: from the Internet – photo still from AMC's *Mad Men*, "The Summer Man," Season 4, Episode 8

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.com/2014/01/homily-valuing-lives-interruptions.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

Extreme Mothering [at CF Family]

Raising children with CF drives me to extremes:

- * I want people to treat them just like anyone else.
- * I want people to treat them with kid gloves.
- * I'm comfortable in the hospital.
- * I want to burn down the hospital.
- * I thank God for the extra gifts in caring for kids with health problems.
- * I can barely speak to God.
- * I am capable and strong.
- * I am weak and sad.
- * I'm just like any mom.
- * I don't want to be around anyone with healthy children.
- * I could kiss the researchers as they work for the good of humanity.
- * I could slap the researchers if it would hasten a cure.
- * My kids are just like yours.
- * My kids are better than yours.
- * My kids are worse than yours.
- * I believe that suffering can bring us closer to Jesus.
- * I don't want to be closer to Jesus.

I'm a little bit of all of this, often every day. It is easy to be tossed about with all the passion and lose sight of what is true, good, and beautiful:

Our lives,

Our loves,

Our Lord.

And while I will happily give up any gifts for a cure, today they are still my gifts. Today I will live well. Extremely.

This contribution is available at <http://northerncffamily.blogspot.com/2014/01/extreme-mothering.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Woman created "for her own sake" [at Catholic Deacon]

At least from my perspective, 2014 seems to be moving ahead at a quick clip. For the past few years how much I will post here on Καθολικός διάκονος is not something pre-planned. Last year and the year before I posted less than in previous years. This year, Who knows? Certainly not me.

It's been more than four years since I watched Catherine Breillat's

Anatomie de l'enfer

(i.e., "Anatomy of Hell"-see

["Cultural Crisis=cultural turning point"](#)

and

["Opposing God to nature: the denial of the ontologically obvious"](#)

). I am currently re-reading Bl. Pope John Paul II's breath-taking Theology of the Body in Michael Waldstein's invaluable

[*Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology Of The Body*](#)

, which feature Waldstein's magnificent introduction to the philosophy/theology of Karol Józef Wojtyła (a.k.a. Blessed Pope John Paul II), which, in my view is indispensable for anyone serious about grasping the essence of Theology of the Body.



What many people may not know is that what became Theology Body, which was delivered by John Paul II during weekly Wednesday Papal Audiences from 5 September 1979 to 14 November 1984 (not straight through, there were some interruptions), was written as book entitled

Man and Woman He Created Them

. Then-Cardinal Wojtyła, who also authored several other major works, most notably as regards theology of the body specifically,

[*The Acting Person*](#)

and

[*Love and Responsibility*](#)

, brought the completed Polish manuscript to Rome with him when he was elected Pope in October 1978.

What does one of the most controversial films by one of France's most controversial film-makers have to do with Bl Pope John Paul II's theology of the body? A lot, one might say without exaggeration, "Everything!" It would be utterly fascinating to analyze Breillat's film

vis-à-vis

Wojtyła's theology of the body. Due to its extremely graphic content, I can't really recommend watching

Anatomie de l'enfer

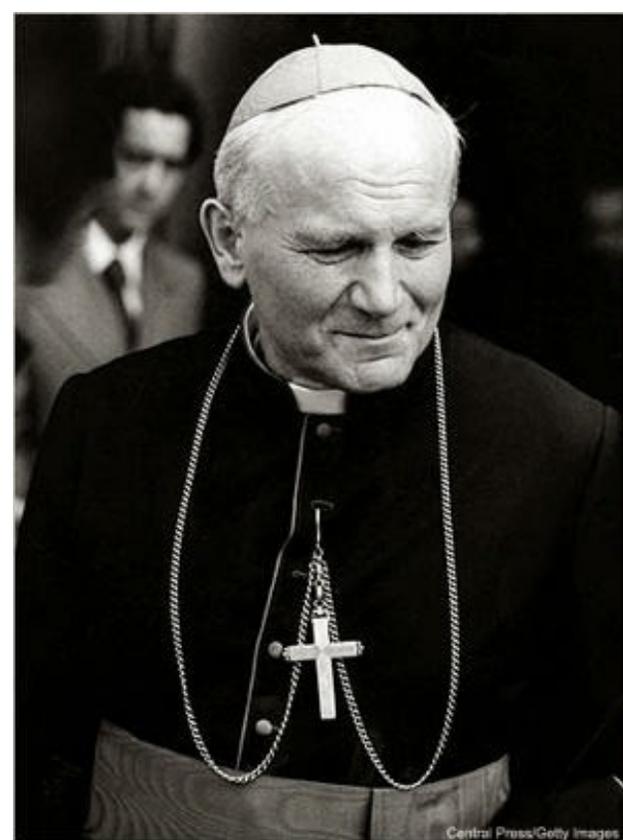
. This implies no judgment or ridicule of those who simply, and for very good reasons, do not watch sexually explicit movies (although I would argue that sex in Breillat's movies is not depicted in a prurient manner, far from it!). Even the music video I flirted with as today's

traditio

is too much to post (but not to link to-

BE WARNED

).



Genesis 2:23-25 enables us to deduce that woman, who in the mystery of creation "is given" to man by the Creator, is "received," thanks to original innocence. That is, she is accepted by man as a gift. The Bible text is quite clear and limpid at this point. At the same time, the acceptance of the woman by the man and the very way of accepting her, become, as it were, a first donation. In giving herself (from the very first moment in which, in the mystery of creation, she was "given" to the man by the Creator), the woman "rediscovers herself" at the same time. This is because she has been accepted and welcomed, and thanks to the way in which she has been received by the man.

So she finds herself again in the very fact of giving herself "through a sincere gift of herself," (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 24), when she is accepted in the way in which the Creator wished her to be, that is, "for her own sake," through her humanity and femininity ("Theology of the Body" Catechesis, #17, delivered 6 February 1980)

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2014/01/woman-created-for-her-own-sake.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Surrendering to Suffering [at CatholicMom.com]

The reality of growing older or being sick is that there are things that you simply can't do on your own. You need help. But the rub is that you have to learn to ask for it and then you have to take the help.

I had to have surgery recently and because of it, I have had to sit back and let others do for me what I would normally do for myself. I hate being incapacitated. I especially hate relying on anyone to do something for me, because (yes, this is very control-freakish thing) they won't do it the way that I would do it.

I was really surprised by the level of disability I would experience in those first few days after the surgery. I expected to be lying around, and needing to be tended, but nothing prepared me for the lack of focus, the inability to pray and the sheer exhaustion of just trying to breathe around the huge lump in my throat.

I would check in with my friends on social media and see that they were suffering in other ways and think that the least I could do is to pray for them. Unfortunately, that's when I discovered that I couldn't keep my focus. I felt defeated and wondered what I could possibly offer to God in my current state. That's when it came to me: I can offer my suffering for someone else.

Each morning I pray the Morning Offering:

Oh Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

I offer you all my works, prayers, joys and sufferings of this day,

for the intentions of your Sacred Heart,

in union with the holy Mass offered throughout the world today,

in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all our associates,

for those who will die this day, for the holy souls in purgatory,

and in particular, for the intentions of the Holy Father. Amen.

Even though I have prayed this prayer off and on for years, I never really realized what it meant. This is what people mean when they say, "Offer it up."

I always hated that phrase, but that's because I didn't understand. **That pithy little phrase is not meant to be dismissive of the suffering you're enduring.** It's meant to help you put it into

perspective. It's meant to help you realize that Jesus, who did nothing to deserve the pain and suffering of his Passion took it on anyway, not for His sake, but for ours.

When we offer our suffering for someone else, we become little Christs (Christians), as we should be. Even in my weakened state I can make an offering to God to help someone else who either can't pray, or won't pray for themselves by offering up my lack of focus, my pain, even my little joys.

The amazing thing is that this sacrifice comes back to you. The pain and discomfort don't seem so pointless and unfair. Instead, that pain is being given for someone else and suddenly, because the effort is turned outward, it becomes constructive instead of destructive. That suffering becomes the prayer. No words are necessary.

I can tell you exactly when I realized that the other people praying for me were helping me with all the heavy spiritual lifting. I was trying to pray the rosary and couldn't focus long enough to say the opening prayers. My brain wandered off to some fictitious scenario where I was going to have ice cream to eat.

When I caught up with my thoughts, I was bitterly disappointed with myself. I was some sick person, I couldn't even pray properly. But somewhere, in the grey mist of my thoughts, I realized that that's why so many people were praying for me. They were helping to carry me along the path. I'd have my turn to pray for them, too. At that moment, it was my turn to be carried.

All I had to do was surrender.

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| [Contents](#) |

A Tiny Doubting Thomas [at Peace Garden Mama]

I was absorbed in some project

or another when they barged into my work space; my 13-year-old daughter and youngest son, 8.

He was in tears and struggling to find words, so she filled in the blanks.

"We've been talking about reincarnation, and he's getting freaked out," she explained.

"I don't wanna believe it but what if it's true?" he said between sobs.

Apparently, my youngest three kiddos had been having a deep discussion about life and faith, and it had all come around to the idea of reincarnation. My middle son, 11, had said that when he thinks about it, his stomach feels funny. And that got my youngest thinking...and wondering...and worrying.

If reincarnation were true, he must have been surmising, then everything he'd been learning about God, about faith from the Catholic worldview, would be false.

"I want to believe in God

. I really do. But what if..."

After a while, my daughter left and I was alone with my littlest.

"Come here, hon," I said, closing my laptop cover and shoving it aside. "Let's talk."

When he'd first come in I thought he'd been hurt in a sibling squabble. But it had quickly become clear it was his soul, not his body, that was hurt. Was I up to the task of setting things on a smoother course? For a moment, I felt incapable, and then somewhere from deep within, a calm confidence.

I can do this.

After all, the anticipation of these kinds of moments is really what had set me on a path of better knowing my faith starting around 1994. The thought of my future children having big questions that I couldn't answer had sent me spinning, and researching. Through this study, I fell deeply in love with my Catholic faith. Soon thereafter, I learned I was pregnant and knew I'd be calling on my new knowledge someday soon to help me in nurturing the souls of my growing family.

And now, one of those someday moments had come.

This same child would be Confirmed in the spring; his soul was readying for something big. Suddenly, I saw the question less as threat and more as a wonderfully-timed moment in his spiritual life.

And I was ready, not

by my own accord but by God dwelling within me.

"First, I want you to know that God made you to ask questions and he wants you to ask questions," I began. "In fact, he doesn't ever want you to stop asking. God is the one who put that curiosity in you in the first place!"

"But what if it's true?" he asked. "What if that really does happen?"

We talked for a while, and though I don't remember now everything that I said, I assured him there would be a lot of different ideas that would come to him during his life, either by others or through his own mind, and that there was time to sort through all of this. I told him his questions would bring him closer to God in the end; that asking them would actually help him love God more; that those who don't ask, or who simply don't care, are more at risk of being far away from the love of God than those who do.

"I want to believe," he said. "I really do. But I don't know..." He was still in distress.

It was then that

inspiration rose up.

"I can really see that you do want to believe, and the really cool thing about that is that God sees you wanting to believe, too, and the fact that you want to believe makes him so happy!" I said. "It's hard to believe in something you can't see, but he sees your good heart wanting to believe, and knowing that you want to is huge. God can handle your not being sure. He will keep loving you through all of the questions."

As I talked, he began to calm down. Can an 8-year-old really understand these big answers, I wondered? I don't know for sure, but what I do know is that he left the room a whole lot lighter than when he came in.

And then a few days later, this jumped out at me in the comments box of a blog:

"The desire of your heart is itself your prayer." (St. Augustine) Or, translated by the one who shared,

"To desire to believe is to believe."

And there it was -- sweet affirmation of what I'd told my young son.

Even when we're not absolutely sure, even when we're more aligned with Doubting Thomas than the saints in moments of unequivocal certainty, the desire to believe is as much belief as belief is.

Though I know this won't be the end of his big questions, I'm not alone in helping keep my son going in the direction of faith, in belief in the God who set this world in motion and will lead us to eternal happiness if we seek him.

And to be honest,

when I reflect further on this incident, I see so many good things. I see a conscience being formed, a desire to want to know truth, a yearning for love and goodness. It was all there -- the biggest stuff of life rolled into a five-minute, spontaneous, teachable moment.

What I want most for my son, and his siblings, and all those I love and even those I don't even know, for that matter, is the taste of true freedom; the kind this same son so aptly demonstrated during a boat ride this summer.



To me, this is a picture of someone being in a stance of complete trust because he knows he is tethered. And with God's help, I want to help guide him so that by the time his earthly life ends, he will have returned to this place, arms open and trusting and lavishing the love meant for him from the start.

What big questions have you helped answer as a parent?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.blogspot.com/2014/01/faith-family-fridays-tiny-doubting.html>
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Do You Know The Precepts of The Church? [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]

The 6 Precepts of the Church (The Duties of a Catholic)

1. To go to Mass and refrain from servile work on Sundays and holy days
2. To go to Confession at least once a year (traditionally done during Lent) (AT LEAST)
3. To receive the Eucharist AT LEAST once a year, during the Easter Season (known as the "Easter duty")
4. To observe the days of fasting and abstinence
5. To help to provide for the needs of the Church according to one's abilities and station in life
6. To obey the marriage laws of the Church

I am going to focus on one of these today.

The 4th Precept.

Observing the days of fasting and abstinence.

A couple years ago, our priest at the time,

gave a wonderful homily talking about this particular Precept.

I am so happy he did.

First I'll explain the difference between fasting and abstaining.

Fasting:

Catholics are only required to fast on [Ash Wednesday](#), the first day of Lent, and on [Good Friday](#), the day that Jesus Christ was crucified. Anyone over the age of 18, but under the age of 60, should eat only one full meal on those days, although they can also have small amounts of food in the morning and the evening. Pregnant and nursing women are exempt from fasting, but are encouraged do some form of penance instead.

Abstaining:

Abstinence refers to the avoidance of particular foods. The most common form of abstinence is the avoidance of meat, a spiritual practice that goes back to the earliest days of the Church.

Now, the reason I was happy our priest went into depth about this Precept, was because of a part I did not know about:

Many Catholics don't realize that Church still recommends abstinence on *all* Fridays of the year, not just during Lent. In fact, if we don't abstain from meat on non-Lenten Fridays, we're required to substitute some other form of penance.

(ages 14 and up)

(information taken from

[HERE](#)

)



I had always thought it was just for Lent!

It is for ALL Fridays.

If we do not give up meat, which is allowed in the United States,

we need to give up something else.

In a spirit of sacrifice for our Lord, who was crucified on a Friday.

To be honest, I find giving up meat easier than something else, because I have a harder time remembering to pick something else.

I guess I have a question for you, because I see so many different things out there on this subject.

It seems some know about this rule, and some do not.

Some do it and some do not.

Now that you know, you know, you must though, right?

Another questions is:

Do you do it?

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2014/01/do-you-know-precepts-of-church.html>
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I'm a Feminist [at Walk By Faith]

I was once told a story of a man who had recently come back from fighting in the Vietnam War. As a sign of respect, he opened the door for a woman, who instantly turned around and called him a pig. He had left the nation in a culture where a man treats a woman with admiration, and came home to a world where women fought against it.

I consider myself a feminist- a strong, self-reliant feminist. I grew up with amazing parents who spent years teaching me what it means to be a woman. My favorite book was *Amazing Grace*, and my parents read it to me often. Grace desired to be Peter Pan in the school play but was told she couldn't because she was a girl. In the end, she is bowing down at the end of the play- as Peter Pan. I loved this story of determination. In fact, it wasn't until late in high school that I had ever heard of the disparities between women and men in our nation, like the glass ceiling. Even then, I didn't believe it.

But hold up. Before you imagine me as some typical man-dissing feminist, let me explain what I mean, and why I see today's perception of feminism as totally and completely warped.

My grandparents came from a generation of everlasting love where chastity was a given. Then, the generation before me ushered a new movement of feminism defined by women scolding men for opening their doors, and ran the streets proclaiming sexual 'freedom'. My generation is now a bunch of confused women wondering why the statutes of feminism delivered to us by those who slept their way through the seventies isn't fulfilling them. After all, if these attitudes are supposed to empower us women, why aren't we happy? Why are we constantly let down by men?

As a typical girl of the 90s and 2000s, my teenage and college years included lots of time with friends pouring over magazines like *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* that supposedly told me how to be a confident woman. What I should wear. How I should act. Most important, though? How to behave around men to win them over, as if love and sex were all one giant game in which it was of utmost importance that the woman was always (as if it were possible) winning.

Modern feminism tells us ladies that the true value of being a woman is in how much a woman can be like a man. Not only does this take away from the very feminine genius we were given through God's grace, but it tears us down until we are mere shadows of women. I am nothing short of baffled. The very things that anger us about men are the things women are told to be.

Let's take a moment to reflect on what women complain about the men in the modern world: their lack of commitment (gone-in-the-morning syndrome, blurred lines, cheating, dashing away the second marriage is brought up), lack of chivalry ("forgetting" their wallet on a first date, not opening a door), one track minds (everything revolves around their constant need to 'get some'), and degrading talk (see previous 'get some' comment, speaking about women as parts and not a

whole).

Instead of asking men to step up and be, well, men, us ladies have created a culture that not only expects these attitudes, but also actually desires them. Think about it. This modern culture of feminism tells us that we should open our own doors, darnnit, because we can. We tell ourselves that lack of commitment is a good thing; it allows us to be more 'free.' Instead of being gravely offended that a man would dare use our bodies as just a means to an end, we now are encouraged to do the same. *Cosmopolitan* applauds women who can hook up without any feelings or attachment (although scientific evidence proves otherwise, dopamine gets in the way, but more on that in a later post). The whole idea of a consensual one night stand revolves around the premise that the woman welcomes the opportunity to reduce a person to a mere tool for pleasure, and yet think of how angered women get when they realize the man thought the same thing. Feminism tells us that hey, if guys can speak vulgar things, then why can't we? The kinds of things I hear just walking around campus everyday make me embarrassed for the woman saying them, and yet she has no concept of boundaries.

During the past century, where women have risen in respect and power in our nation, where we actually had the opportunity to demand more of our men, we instead decided the answer was to be more like them at their worst. It's like sinking down to gossip about others when you hear you've been gossiped about, to 'even the score.' Haven't we been taught since a young age not to sink down to the level of the one we disagree with? Please, someone, tell me how this view of feminism, where we reduce ourselves to the qualities we most genuinely dislike in others, is bettering society.

Here's the thing: I'm not angry at men all the time. Yes, I just rattled off a long list of qualities that frustrate me to no end. But I do love men who act like MEN. Who are manly enough to know that it is their role and duty to protect women, not because we can't ourselves, but because that is what they were created for. I love men who open doors. I love men who speak kindly, gently, and treat me with respect. I love men who view me as more than just a body. I love men who are brave and courageous enough to stand up to culture and say yes to chastity. I love men who treat me like their sister in Christ that I am. I love men who aren't afraid to ask me (or anyone for that matter) on a proper date (not, "Uhh hey, you wanna like come to my place tonight and we can hang out?").

Ladies, let me provide you with a healthier view of feminism. A view that doesn't diminish our self-worth, or brilliance, or feminine genius, or individuality, or wicked ability to make a half court shot. My view of feminism is not 'be a man.' It also is not a cake-baking, kitchen-cleaning, craft-making, makeup-wearing 1950's woman clone. It's a view that expresses our individuality without demeaning our self worth. Whether you love dressing up or would rather be in dirt from head to toe, or a combination depending on our moods, it's all beautiful and good. I'd like to present a view of feminism where we make men actually work for us. Where we respect men with the same respect we demand from them. Where we can work up the cooperate ladder with self-determination and hard work, without having to put anyone down. Where we embrace the gift we have been given to create and bear human life. A view where know that taking on roles as a wife and mother actually empower us to fight for more than just ourselves.

Where we ask that a man opens a door for us not because we can't ourselves, but because we love our men enough to allow them to serve us in that manner.

So men, be manly. The virtuous kind of manly. The manly that would take a bullet, not just for your girlfriend, but for any woman. Women, let the men be manly. And while you're at it, demand you be treated with respect. Make a man work for your love and heart.

1 John 4:7

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

God bless,

Catie

This contribution is available at <http://walkbyfaith7.wordpress.com/2014/01/21/im-a-feminist/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Set A Fire [at Dancing in the Rain]

What's your playlist and what's your highlight reel?

The other day I was swimming and it looked as though a Duke Basketball highlight reel was playing against the wall. Now this Duke fan was thrilled. It got me wondering what's my highlight reel. What do envision for yourself? What thoughts and images are on loop in your mind? Do you see success and prosperity? Do you see trial and difficulty, health and love, or sickness and fear? Do you take time to mind your mind? The thoughts we have influence the words we say, the decisions we make, the prayers we dare to utter, and the disposition of our heart. What verses of scripture do you cling to and proclaim over your heart and life? What promises do you cling to?

There is not enough room for fear and faith. So starve your doubt and feed your faith. I think of Pier Giorgio's "highlight reel" and his play list. He yearned to constantly know the Lord more intimately and He sought Him in community, nature, his studies, and most importantly through relationship with Our Blessed Mother and The Eucharistic Lord, Himself. The song Set a Fire Comes to mind. Like the coals of a fire burn brightest when lumped together, Pier Giorgio knew the vital necessity of being connected to Christ through community and adoration. He knew Christ was His daily, Providential, provider and that He was the source of his strength and faith.

As Catholics we proclaim the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of our faith and Bl. Pier Giorgio knew the necessity of fostering the gifts he had been given by receiving the strength of the Lord. Do we run to the fire of His love so as to live more ardent charity? Let us pray for greater faith, bolder hope, charismatic love and radiant joy so that others might know the joy of the Gospel and the freedom that is found in Christ.

Verso l'alto,

Kathryn

No place I'd rather be than here in your love

What it takes to come alive, got to let it go

We've got the Fire and we're gonna let it burn

(let us live with the power of the Holy Spirit)

This contribution is available at <http://dancingintherain401.blogspot.com/2014/01/set-fire.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Making sense of hurts: PEACE

January 22, 2014 by [Ruth Anne](#)



Back in the middle of November, I was waiting, once again, to see if that would be “our month” for another baby. (It turned out to be one of the times where I got a faint positive on a test and a few days later it was gone.) That Sunday, I was kneeling down after receiving the Eucharist, I had pulled my veil over my face and I was trying very hard to pray. I pictured myself kneeling beside Jesus at the foot of the cross, I was crying, yelling, pounding my fists into Him, screaming “why?” as I was bleeding... He put his arms around me, still bleeding from being crucified. I was still saying “why? why me? why us? why can’t we have another baby? I didn’t want to be bleeding, I wanted to give life” He said “me too”.

Immediately I was quiet. I had an inkling, a shadow really of a feeling of what it must be like for Jesus feel when he “looses” one of his children.

I share that story for a few reasons.

One being that, while I obviously feel very strongly about my little piece of real life, and it does hurt when it doesn’t go how I think it should, that really, *really*, my little piece of reality isn’t the whole picture, and there are other, important things that are happening. People returning to Jesus and the Church, for example, in the end is more important than whether or not I conceive a baby in any particular month. That was one thing that was very strongly impressed on me as soon as He said “me too”.

The other being that, I’m currently preparing for a Consecration to Mary. {Our Parish is doing a “group” consecration, concluding on February 2. We’re reading 33 Days to Morning Glory by Michael E. Gaitley. I’d love to say with certainty that I’ll do a more in-depth post on this in the future, but at the moment I have no plans for it. So far it has been a very positive and beautiful experience. One that’s causing me to do a lot of internal meditation and processing, and I don’t feel that at this time I can really put that all out there. Not yet at least, I’ll be happy to take thoughtful questions though if you have them (email or comment, if you’d like).}

Ok, back to my train of thought... I'm doing the preparation, and one of the daily reflections I think it was last week, came from Bl Mother Teresa:

Suffering has to come because if you look at the cross, he has got his head bending down – he wants to kiss you – and he has both hands open wide – he wants to embrace you. He has his heart opened wide to receive you. Then when you feel miserable inside, look at the cross and you will know what is happening. Suffering, pain, sorrow, humiliation, feelings of loneliness, are nothing but the kiss of Jesus, a sign that you have come so close that he can kiss you... That suffering has to come that came in the life of Our Lady, that came in the life of Jesus – it has to come in our life also... Suffering is a gift from God. It is between you and Jesus alone inside.

A final thought, if I had not had the experience mentioned above, I don't think I would have "got" the passage from the readings. At least not as well. What I take from all this is, if I am willing to go to Jesus, fully, then I have to be open to receiving his kiss. (This goes beyond the desire for another baby, there are definitely other areas of hurt in life that this gets applied to.)

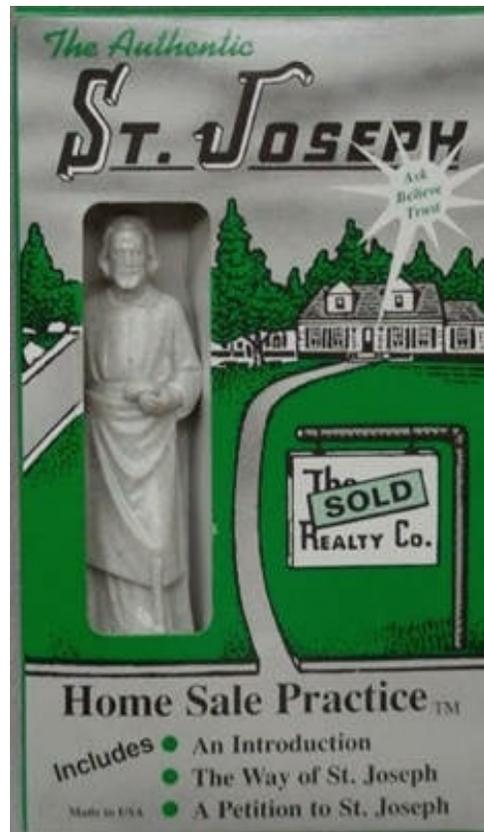
I don't know why his kisses can hurt so bad. I cannot pretend to understand. But I take comfort in the fact that if I am that close to Jesus that I am receiving that kiss, then I'm at least close enough for his to put his arms around me. And I don't know about you, but if I can get to that place, it brings much peace (which I do still have to be open to receiving).

This contribution is available at <http://hollowayfamilynorth.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/making-sense-of-hurts-peace/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Burying St. Joseph [at Working to be Worthy]

A few years ago, I was in one of our local Christian bookstores. This one has an aisle of Catholic stuff, including a set for people trying to sell their homes. The kit contained a statue of St. Joseph and instructions for burying it upside down to sell your house. Superstition? If a person believes planting that guarantees a sale, then yes, it's superstition. Planting a statue, even upside down as you're "supposed" to do, does not guarantee the intercession of St. Joseph and certainly does not bend God to your will. It is far too easy to use this as magic.



It doesn't have to be that way, though. The same statue can be a reminder of God's protection, particularly as it played out in the life of St. Joseph. St. Joseph lived his life seeking God's will. God responded through more direct intervention than most of us will get! St. Joseph followed God, even when it was difficult. As a provider for his family and exile for a number of years, St. Joseph may well be inclined to intercede with and for us as we seek God's will for our families.

Trusting God's protection in all circumstances is a valuable lesson. Learning to see God's providence in a situation (such as the sale of a house) is certainly worthwhile. If a physical act like planting a statue helps you learn that, go for it.

Fifty Shades of Gray...if not more! [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

The color gray, they say is the "new" black for all things fashion and chic. Interesting, since there really is only real shade of black and grey comes in many shades and hues...which gray is this "new" replacement? Why, there are even a couple of different ways to spell this "new" fashion color, gray or grey...both are correct, one is the British version, but black is and has always been black.

Gray or grey is also a place, it's that area between black and white in our world, ways of thinking, working, speaking, and doing things. This grey through the years has expanded to quite a large parameter, to the point that it's hard to see where it ends and the black/white area begins. Black and white have always resembled the good and the bad, the right and the wrong and the gray area has always been that limbo place that has no definitive definition...no real right or wrong/good or bad.

As a parent, I guess I see more gray areas for my children as they step through the hoops of life. Moral and just plain good judgment seems to have been replaced with an attitude of "I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else...but if it does, that's not my problem."

Personal rights have replaced personal responsibility

. Case in point: My son and his wife surprised us a year or so ago while we were on vacation by building a really pretty flower garden around our mailbox, bricks, perennials, the works. We have been very successful in keeping it up through the years, but one day, I was out weeding another garden and a neighbor walked by with his huge dog, they promptly stopped at our mailbox for the dog to inspect and do his business. I stood up and said, "Please don't, please don't!! We've worked hard to keep that little garden nice!!" The guy didn't move his dog, instead said, "It's an animal, lady, what's the big deal." "The big deal is that this dog is YOUR dog and your responsibility to train him not to go on neighbor's property!" The dog relieved itself on my mailbox garden and the guy never looked at me just walked away. I guess calling out to his back that he was a pig, and a terrible neighbor and that he needed to live in the country didn't seem very turning the cheek-like conduct...grr!!

The black area

: So this guy has a pet that needs to relieve itself and it doesn't really matter where so long as the dog is taken care of, don't mind me and my property in the process, "it's just an animal, for heaven's sake!"

The White area:

Property owner asks that the pet owner not allow the pet to do business on their property. The pet owner respects the wishes and takes the dog to their own property for business doing.

The Gray area:

The pet owner comes back another day with pet and allows it to relieve itself when property owner is not around.....no harm done, right?

Where is the conscience? Where is the compassion for neighbor? Where is the respect for others wishes?

These are the signs of the times where programming holds nothing back; music continues to saturate immorality to the point that the gray area has the upper hand. Like the saying goes, if little Johnny is told he's bad, stupid, ugly, enough times, he begins to believe it. As is the case for what we are served every day from TV, radio, movies, and what we read in the newspaper, magazines, books, etc.

During the past decade or so, things like co-habitation has become common place, children born out of wedlock...normal, and the women that do get married wear white (70% of them have been living with their to be husbands); homosexuality is being accepted in the mainstream, and life must be fought for and protected, not welcomed and deemed precious in the public arena.

Nothing is right or wrong anymore.....Does any of this stuff scare you?

This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2012/09/fifty-shades-of-gray-if-not-more.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

Gentle Women [at Children's Rosary]

Today is the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God. It also is the Marian Feast which we chose to end our 33 Day Consecration to Jesus through Mary. Like many members of the Children's Rosary we said our prayers as a family. Today our plan was to attend the 9AM Mass for which Alina my 13 year old daughter was altar serving. I also happened to be assigned to lector as well. After Mass we had arranged to join with other local members of the Children's Rosary to say the Consecration prayer.



My daughter, who we adopted with her biological brother from an orphanage in Kazakhstan almost 5 years ago, is now 13. She has many cognitive disabilities including short term memory loss. She has been an altar server for a number of years however this has always been a struggle for her. Many have come up to her with a smile and asked if it was her first time serving as she is often somewhat unsure of all the steps. Yet she has persisted and not given up even though sometimes she feels embarrassed. One thing which has been extremely intimidating for her are the bells. She has on occasion served alone and from the pews I would raise my arms when it was time to ring the bells but she always knelt like a statue and would never try to ring them. If she was with another server the other server always rang the bells.

Today seemed to be unfolding in its typical fashion. There was some confusion about the water which brought the priest over to the side table. I was thinking that I should write to our Pastor and explain Alina's disability to him so he would understand why things were always somewhat confused. Then something happened that took me so by surprise. The priest said, "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you." The bells rang but it was Alina bent over ringing them. This time, it was I that was like a statue, watching in disbelief.

Then the priest raised the wine and again Alina bent over and rang the bells. After she finished she looked at me with a big smile. The rest of the Mass I was somewhat in shock. After Mass we went over to the statue of Mary with some other members of the Children's Rosary including two

boys from the Children's Rosary group at St. Peter Claver Church. One of the women began singing Gentle Women. The children knelt at the rail. We then all together said our Consecration prayer to Jesus through Mary. Then each person brought a flower and placed it on a small altar under the statue of Mary and the baby Jesus.

In thinking about what had transpired I was struck by something. Alina had been for years frightened to ring the bells at the sacred moment of consecration during Holy Mass. On the morning of the Feast of Mary Mother of God and the final day of the 33 day Consecration to Jesus through Mary, Alina had found courage. The other altar server who was with her, as I would discover, had encouraged her this morning to ring the bells and said he would help her if she needed help.

Our Lady, through the hands and words of others, had found a way as a mother to support this child and help her more perfectly honor her Son.

This to me seemed to sum up the whole consecration process. Mary did so gently, not with reprimands as I often find myself doing as a mother, but through gentleness and kindness. How wonderful that the song Gentle Women was chosen to sing this morning for truly Mary is a gentle and loving Mother. She takes our hand and gives us courage when we are frightened, she steadies us and points us always toward her Son, Jesus that we may more perfectly honor Him in all things.

photo courtesy of <http://www.pamphletstoinspire.com/#!gentle-women/c7ed>

This contribution is available at <http://childrensrosary.blogspot.com/2014/01/gentle-women.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Setting successful goals [at crucesignatiblog]

I am terrible at setting goals. I can make to-do lists galore and simply end up crumpling them up at the end of the week while saying, “Well, I don’t *really* need to do that,” and it simply doesn’t get done. However, I have found a way to change that.

Over the past few weeks I have been listening to podcasts by this wonderful fellow named [Dr. Taylor Marshall](#). In each podcast he gives (among other things) a tip that will help you to be more productive or just improve your life in general. In [one of the podcasts](#) he suggested just making a few goals for every day. You write down one or two things to do in the morning and one or two things to do in the afternoon. This is how I write mine out.

Jan. 23

AM

Sew on quilt

Practice 30 min. of piano

PM

Do catechism with kids

And that’s it. Just a few things each day and I can say that doing this has definitely improved my life. Why? Because it helps you to focus on the most important tasks and then when they are finished you have time to focus on other things. So if you want to improve your productivity, I suggest you try this.

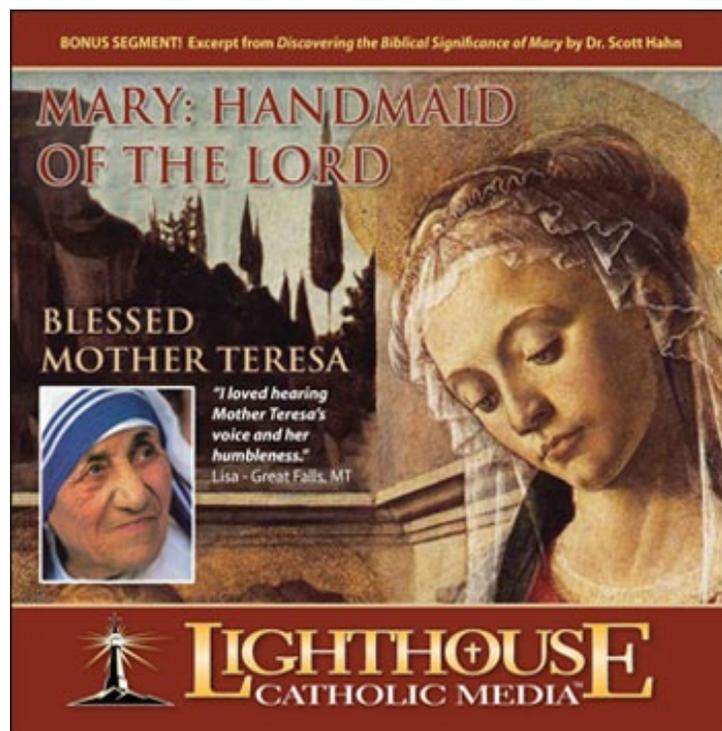
Until next time, God bless!

This contribution is available at <http://crucesignatiblog.wordpress.com/2014/01/30/setting-successful-goals/>
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Catholic Doctrine all makes sense - prayer to Mary [at Washed, Sanctified and Justified]

Catholic doctrine all makes sense.

Consider our prayers to Mary. In Scripture, God the father sends an angel to tell Mary that she's blessed among women. In the same chapter, the Holy Spirit inspires a saintly woman to proclaim Mary's blessedness. These words are pronounced by God's creatures. But it is God who was speaking to his creatures. Through an angel in one case and a woman in another.



How much more plainly can God tell us that he wants us to praise and glorify Mary. When we praise and glorify Mary, we are repeating God's message. We are prophesying. Therefore, join in with the saints and angels in praise of Mary at every opportunity. It is the will of God.

Yes, Catholic doctrine all makes sense.

This contribution is available at http://washedsanctifiedandjustified.blogspot.com/2014/01/catholic-doctrine-all-makes-sense_31.html

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Pope Francis and the Media



Jesus said the world would recognize His followers by how they loved one another. He also said His followers would be persecuted, but not to fear, because He had taken the worst of it. He warned that the world would be against us, but not to fear—He has overcome it all.

The Church would have persecutors—she shines too brightly, and the world cannot bear it. The world will be against her, because she exposes things of darkness.

What does it mean when the media suddenly grows to love us?

I'm not saying it's bad that Pope Francis is suddenly on so many magazine covers. I'm glad that the world sees a good man and the wonderful example he is setting. It's nice to see someone holy on Rolling Stone—gives me hope.

What I'm worried about is this: When the enemy puts our leader on a pedestal, it is not him they love. It's the version of him they're creating from scratch. It's the enemy using a new tactic to sink our ship.

By taking our shepherd and making him an icon of our culture, satan is using a new card. When the body of the faithful is placed in the spotlight to look like something she isn't, it is a direct contrast to the words of Christ Himself.

The enemy's disconcerting the flock, making the world love us. We find ourselves in pastures of gold, when the gold will not sustain us. We cannot eat gold and it won't keep us warm, but some of the flock will stay because it's shiny and makes us look favorable to the world. Some of us will abandon the idol of worldly approval and return to the pasture with the real shepherd, abandoning the clone the media wrought of him in gold.

We will return to the flock persecuted and and hated—the flock in which Christ can be found. It won't be a comfortable place, but we are not destined for comfort. It will not be extravagant or luxurious, but we will find the Bread of Life. It will look like a normal pasture with grass—the food we need to survive.

When the world eventually realizes where our shepherd truly stands, the backlash could grow to persecution. Their idol of gold is lifeless, and their latest tactic failed; when the devil cannot change us from the inside, he will go back to the first thing he did: Assault from the outside. It will be more violent than ever, and few will stand the test.

Satan knows he isn't going to win, but he will keep trying with a thousand tricks until Judgment Day.

The world does not love us—just an idea it wishes were true. The media does not really love Pope Francis.

Christ's flock will always be hated. The moment we begin loving the attention, we are no longer in His pasture but the golden one—where we will die, because truth cannot thrive there, and our souls live off truth.

We should use the spotlight as an opportunity to evangelize and tell the world what the Church really teaches, and what Pope Francis really believes. The media seem to think he forgot. Otherwise, we allow the lie to grow.

Brothers and sisters, take the blow and keep from golden pastures: Christ promised riches in the next life, not this one.

Don't lose your way following the path of gold, when only the narrow path gives life.

This contribution is available at <http://mariellahunt.com/2014/02/01/pope-francis-and-the-media/>
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ in Ukraine: URGENT

Opening Prayer

In the Name of The Father, The Son, and of The Holy Spirit: (x3)

Brothers and sisters in Ukraine: we join you in sincere prayer, that our sufferings may be jointly offered to the Lord – that we may be unified to Our Lord Jesus Christ upon His Most Holy Cross, by which All of Death and Darkness was defeated. To You O Lord, we commend our spirits, for Your Eternal Reward, of which we are unworthy to partake on our own accord. We continue to pray that greater truth may become known, and that peace will arise out of darkness. Lord have mercy on us all. Amen.

Out of our love for you – our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are at the cusp of a potential massive social uprising, please be aware of the dangers of becoming too close with the European Union.

Here is why:

Your future children and children's children will be put at great risk of hostility directed towards them as Christians if Ukraine enters deeper relationship with the rest of the European Union. This may be difficult to accept, especially since the alternative at this time appears to be a deeper connection with Russia, which has historically been responsible for much suppression of Ukrainian people. **This is not to suggest that Ukraine should unify with Russia.**



Three Ukrainian priest/monks from Kiev stood between protesters and soldiers last week, refusing to take sides and preserving peace.

However, be it known that the European Union, along with the United States and all other “Westernized” nations have all embraced (to varying degrees) the poisonous way of thinking that **we should self-identify and define ourselves according to our sexual attractions and or inclinations.** Be it known that the social climate that has been created as a result of this, has imposed shame on Catholic and Orthodox Christians for resisting this way of labeling people. Where the Atheist regime decimated and forced Christianity underground by threat of physical torture (which was carried out in horrendous ways), this new world-wide movement will do even

worse - **it will twist the minds of your youth, to make them desire to reject Christianity.** Instead of an outside force suppressing your Christian nation, it will be your children and your children's children who will be the oppressors. This is the fast-approaching state of North and South America, along with other "westernized" nations.

Be it especially known that in these countries, Christian youth are rapidly abandoning their Catholic and Orthodox faiths because they have been taught by the culture that their Churches are hateful and bigoted. The culture does not invite questioning, but rather relies on indoctrination – motivated by heartfelt stories designed to win over the hearts of the listeners. This strategy has worked well, and today we have entire nations supporting this way of thinking – the way of thinking that embeds the idea "as something proper" that we should self-identify and define ourselves according to our sexual attractions and or inclinations. **Editor's Note: Only a few days after this article was written, LifeSite News reported this [THIS ALARMING ANNOUNCEMENT](#).**

This way of thinking leaves no room for people to recognize *non-specifically chosen sexual attractions and inclinations* to be considered distinct from *the identities we specifically choose to embrace*. In this way, this way of thinking embeds a falsehood, yet promotes the idea that just because you experience a particular attractions, it should define "who you are" as a person. The shift in our cultural climate has brought people to embrace this on a more wide-spread level, has led to an increased hostility to **all** orthodox Christians in the western world. **We are telling you from our first-hand experience, that unless you take pro-active measures to prevent that ideology from spreading, it will decimate Christianity where you are as well.**



Our culture now promotes the glorification of the demonic – and this is greatly influencing our youth.

Within two generations, the people who become invested in the "westernized" culture promoted by the European Union, will not only become de-Christianized, but will also become hostile towards Christianity altogether. **THIS HAS ALREADY OCCURRED IN THE WESTERN**

WORLD. People will call themselves Christians while demonstrating an irreverence for all that is Holy, including all of the Sacraments – namely The Sacrament of Marriage. Your country will degenerate into what we have in America – self-proclaimed Christians who are advancing the work of the Evil One. In addition to that, there will be legions of people who will renounce their faith and who will take pride in their choice to reject Jesus Christ and His One Holy Apostolic Church (the wholeness of the authentic orthodox catholic Orthodox-Catholic Church).

People of Ukraine, I write to you from a place where Christianity has been all but burned to the ground. Indeed it is springing forth new life in those who have clung onto truth and the Wisdom of the Holy Apostolic Churches, but the result will be even greater suffering as other ideologies fill the void that Christianity once occupied. For that reason, I sincerely pray you to heed this warning – joining the European Union will transform the social climate in an incremental way. This will primarily be done through the insertion of elements into the educational system that will be sure to undermine Christianity, and which will especially undermine the role of the parents in the formation of youth.

This occurred in recent memory as anyone who lived through Nazi power will be able to attest. Children will turn in their parents, if their parents disagree with what is being taught by the state. Children will be raised to self-identify and define themselves according to their sexual attractions and or inclinations, and they will seek fulfillment within that form of self-concept – and they will begin to attack **all orthodox Christianity** for shining the light of Truth.

Generations will be deceived, but the Truth of Jesus Christ unchanging – but there are dark forces at work in this world, and we must pray.

Letter continued below video...

NOTE: The physical torture being inflicted on the people of Ukraine far surpasses what you will see in this video (Argentina and Brazil). It is a different type of torture- it is an affront by a legion of darkness, roiling in self-glory and desire for god-like status. However, like the physical violence inflicted under Communist Russia, and other times of persecution (including what is happening today), it too is a direct encounter with dark forces which have become manifest in the hearts of humankind.

WARNING: THIS VIDEO CONTAINS GRAPHIC WORSHIP OF SEXUALITY. PLEASE PRAY BEFORE AND AFTER VIEWING, AND PLEASE PRAY FOR ALL PERSONS AFFLICTED WITH THE DEMONIC.

To view the same video with an urgent message from the author, please contact the author (see below).

We are on the cusp of that here in North America – but you, and all of Ukraine, still have an opportunity to prevent this from occurring. However, unless your people become educated about what is at stake, and about the tactics of the new ideology that is spreading to destroy Christianity, your people (who will be immersed in the life of the culture) will not realize the magnitude of destruction of Christianity until it is long beyond repair.

Though it might be a bitter situation to embrace, the further you distance yourselves from the European Union, the better off your country will be in the long run, as within the European Union, your children will be brainwashed into believing that Christianity is something that should be abandoned. **This is a guarantee that I make to you, for as long as the European Union is on its current trajectory.**

I implore you to pray and fast, in hopes that you may grow in humility and submission, even at the expense of earthly suffering. Your children are at stake. In America, we are already suffering because of generations of short-sightedness.

Closing Prayer

In the Name of The Father, The Son, and of The Holy Spirit: (x3)

Lord have mercy on us all as we strive to keep our eye on the Eternal Reward, and our hearts in constant gratitude for the fullness of self-sacrifice that was made, freely, by You, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, King of the Universe, to Whom all of creation will bend at the knee. Give us the strength to pray for all afflicted by that which is evil, and give us the strength to suffer for the Glory of Your Most Holy Name.

Amen.

Yours in Christ,
<Name withheld>

PS: If you are not sure what to pray, start [here](#) and don't stop.

***Editor's Note:** The author of this post can be contacted via our common email: info@pursuitoftruth.ca. The author has also authorized the copying of this article in full.*

This contribution is available at <http://www.pursuitoftruth.ca/2014/01/29/dear-brothers-sisters-christ-ukraine-urgent/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Red Shoes [at Convert Journal]



We have all read the narrative...

Pope Francis has decided NOT to wear the **red shoes**. He is a pope who gives a resounding NO to previous papal decadence and unbridled luxury. He is one of us brown shoe wearers – finally, a pope of the people!

Yea, sure.

I love and respect Pope Francis, as I have his predecessors. They each have unique gifts and styles, called by the Holy Spirit for the needs of Holy Mother Church at their time.

There are interests who wish to DIVIDE the Church. Satan is their leader but he has many helpers (even if unbeknownst to them). This scheme of division is subtle and clever, as many of Satan's plans are, by attempting to divide us *in time*. The new pope is “good” while his predecessors (the decadent luxury lovers) were “bad.” The bad time ended when the good time began – with the new pope.

This is an attack on the Church, on Christ's vicar and ultimately on God. If we can begin to think less of prior popes, we can discount their teaching. We can then begin to depreciate their many, many great contributions to the body of Christ.

We must not fall for this trap. It is offensive, as all attacks on the Church are, and at its core is a ridiculous supposition.

You never read about WHY popes have occasionally donned red shoes. Was it high fashion and a symbol of great wealth, perhaps as [one wearing Prada](#)? Sorry to disappoint the fashionistas, but nope.

Historically, episcopal footwear (in the form of “slippers”) has been part of the vestments of bishops. Those vestments, as we all know, have colors keyed to the liturgical calendar. The “outdoor shoes” worn by the pope are an outgrowth of that. This is more of a “uniform” than a decadent fashion statement. The uniform, like all clergy and religious, reminds the faithful who he

represents.

So, what is special about the color red? It is the color associated with martyrs – saints (known and unknown) who died for the faith. When the pope, the Vicar of Christ, wears red shoes he is figuratively standing upon the spilt blood of martyrs following in the footsteps of Christ. Red shoes also symbolize Christ's own bloodied feet as he walked to his crucifixion and the pope's submission to Him.

Red also has significance as a color of royalty and power. As the Vicar of Christ, no one on earth is of higher rank. He is a person and a sinner just like us, but we can not speak for God the way the pope can. No one else can.

Pope Francis' style is different and interesting. He captures, at least for a moment, the attention of many to hear the message of the Gospel. Openings are created through which the Holy Spirit can enter. Lives will be changed and more importantly, souls saved.

Do not be misled by style vs. substance. Pope Francis has made clear on many occasions his commitment to the "hermeneutic of continuity." He is, as he says, a "son of the Church." Personally, I believe the media's "hope" in the Holy Father will wane when they figure out he is actually Catholic. Until then, be especially alert when you read about red shoes, the pope's choice of residence, where he eats his meals and so on. There is much more to know than the media will present. Often, not only is their spin wrong but their facts are too.

A current example is *Esquire* naming Pope Francis the "Best Dressed Man of 2013". Their purpose, of course, has nothing to do with the promotion of fashion but with division. Robert Gieb wrote a good piece for *Catholic Lane* on Saturday. Read his [The Best Dressed Man](#) over there.

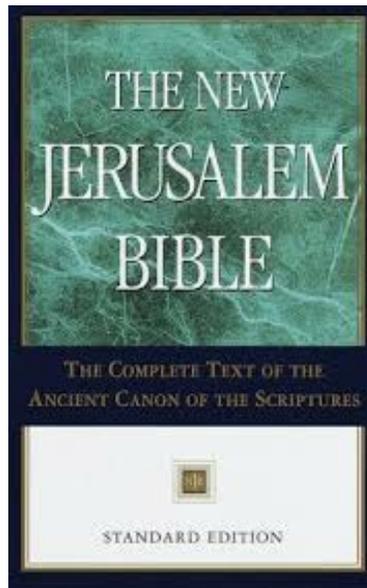
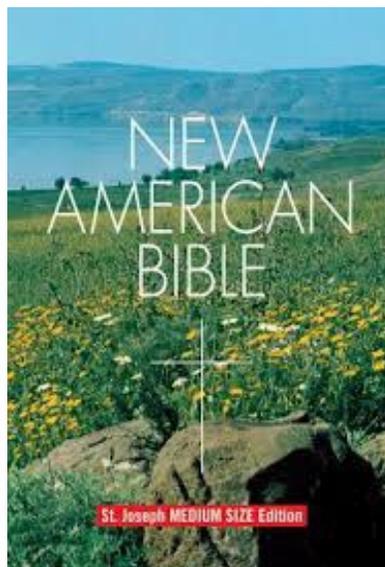
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| [Contents](#) |

From Precious Moments to Ignatius Press [at Single Catholic Girl]

I think I've owned a total of three Bibles in my life:

1. My pink Precious Moments Bible from my childhood.
2. The New American Bible (NAB) that showed me Catholics had 'extra books', given to me by the TEC community.
3. The one my homegirl, [Shawn](#), the hippie mystic that she is, suggested I read in college: The New Jerusalem Bible. She thought I would like the flowery and poetic language, and I did.



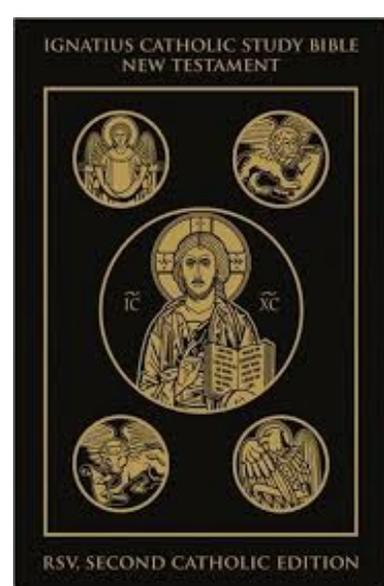
Each of these Bibles brought me through a specific time in my life. My Precious Moments, which I read through the Psalms in 8th grade, began my journey on reading through Scripture. The NAB invited me to Wisdom and Tobit and got me through high school. The New Jerusalem brought me through a time of wavering faith; my faith was sinking like Peter did when he stepped out of the boat.

Recently though, I've become enamored with Scripture in a new way. I want to dive into the Scriptures like a deep-sea diver, uncovering the gems, jewels and hidden treasures along the way. Perhaps it's because I now live near my Protestant brothers and sisters (literally, they are Protestant and they are my blood relatives) and seeing them opening their bibles daily encouraged me to do so as well. Or maybe the desire was sparked when I began working in campus ministry because college students have a lot of questions.

I wanted a bible that I could easily navigate my way through to help with the disputes in the Acts of the Apostles, the Bread of Life discourse in John 6, and the entire book of Revelation. I wanted a bible that gave a history and introduction to each of the books, one that was easy to navigate, had clear footnotes and a concordance. Essentially, I wanted a study bible. I did my research and knew that [The New Testament Ignatius Catholic Study Bible](#) published by Ignatius Press in 2010 was the one. It is to die for. Literally, because it's our faith. Go martyrdom.

Do you love Scripture and want to fall more in love with Christ? This study bible is for you. Do you desire to learn more about the New Testament and the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, or mystery? This study bible is for you. Are you looking for a new study bible that is easy to navigate? This one is for you!

My favorite features about this study bible include:



- Each chapter comes with an introduction, including a write-up about the author, date, themes and an outline
- Text and commentary, cross-references and footnotes are included
- Concise Concordance, an Index and Colorful maps included
- I appreciate good type, the text and bolded headings are perfect and make it easy to read.
- When I first checked this book out at the store I had to get my hands on it because I am such a sensory girl. It is just right. The paper is perfect; trees are still bringing us to salvation!
- As if that isn't enough, Ignatius press has supplied study guides to go along. Download for free [here](#).
- It comes in softcover, hardcover, leatherette and as an e-book. Happiness for everyone.

I pray that this study bible brings you and me to a greater understanding of Jesus and the Gospel message. May we use this knowledge to further the kingdom and truly live as Jesus

calls us to live.

What Bible do you have? What do you like about it?

Thank you to Ignatius Press for this free copy to review. For this study bible and other great Ignatius Press items, visit [here](#).

This contribution is available at <http://singlecatholicgirl.com/thoughts/from-precious-moments-to-ignatius-press/>

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| [Contents](#) |

Worship as a Modality of Prayer [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

Worship as a Modality of Prayer



“God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:24)

My fellow pilgrims and family in Christ,

As Jesus clearly tells us, true Worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the One Jesus calls “Father”, can only be entered when one is in a state which Jesus terms, “in spirit and in truth”. In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John relates that was in such a state, on the Lord’s day when he received the visions presented in the sacred writings. Although, entering such a state, is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, He will not force us into such a state without our willing cooperation. Deep, intimate Prayer, is the means through which we subdue our flesh and yield willingly to the Spirit so that He can bring us to the state of true “worship”.

I can truly say that, it was not until I yielded my religious self to the Holy Spirit that I, through Spirit-guided prayer was able to truly understand and experience what “worship in spirit and truth” really meant. For this reason I now post this article excerpted from our Brother, Jorge Madrid’s works, as a follow on to his article on the “Modalities of Prayer”, which I presented to you in my prior posting. In this excerpt our brother Jorge, expands on this topic by presenting his testimony on the ultimate modality of prayer, that is “worship”

In this submission I present to you Mr. Madrid’s reflection in order to ensure that as you enter into a deeper prayer experience, you clearly understand that prayer, the path of dialogue and relationship with the Divine, has, as its main objective, the yielding of ourselves to God through worship, and especially, worship as expressed through Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice of Love, as

expressed in the ordinance He left us – the Eucharistic service we Catholics call the Mass.

Because many of us Christians have not fully comprehended the Word of Truth and the Glorious Gift of God's redeeming grace and His Presence in us, we are seemingly afraid to enter into a deeper spiritual relationship with the Divine through prayer, mainly from sensing correctly that we are sinners and that, as sinners, we are not worthy to enter into the Divine Presence. However, if we are truly converted Christians and thus are baptized "into Christ", we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and, when we come before the Father in prayer we come not in our name or in our presumed righteousness, but in the Name of His Son, Jesus and in His righteousness which is imputed unto us who believe.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21)

Therefore, We need not fear or be inhibited in coming to an experience of this deeper level of personal spiritual relationship with the Divine, in fact, it is Jesus, himself who has given us His Divine invitation for us to enter into prayer at this ultimate level as He says to us:

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev.3:20)

Now, our brother Jorge Madrid is no different from any of us, and, according to his own assessment, is merely a repentant sinner whom God has graced because he turned to Him in desperation. His testimony, which follows is merely his attempt to share with us his experience in how the Holy Spirit activated his heart through the Word, repentance and prayer bringing him to experience Worship at a Eucharistic service at a spiritual level he had never experienced before in his life. He shares his story with us to encourage all of us to go deeper in our relationship with the Father, through Jesus, His Son, who is the Door to the Father and the source of all the graces for our relationship with Him. Graces that He offers freely to us through the precious Blood!

Realizing that ***"...we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"*** (Heb.4:14-16). Praised be His Holy Name!

The only condition to this confidence of Faith being that we "put on Christ" as we enter into prayer. In order to do so, always keep in mind St.Paul's admonition to the pilgrims of his day ...

The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:12-14).

awesome and magnificent act of God's Love for humanity and that, by being present, I was, in fact, present at the greatest act of worship ever. However, my personal participation in that worship was limited in that I perceived myself more as a devoted observer than a participant.

One circumstance that limited me was my lack of spiritual awareness through faith. At the intellectual level, I assented theologically to the concept of the mass being a participation in Christ's offering of Himself to the Father, but in hindsight, I know now that I was not entering the level of awareness of being in communion with Christ during the worship that I ought to have had. I cannot speak for others, but for me, before my conversion experience, I never really comprehended the full meaning of that worship in my spirit. Metaphorically speaking, it was as if I were an observer of the Temple worship from the court of the gentiles but never as an actual participant in that worship in the Holy of Holies as I ought to have been. For that reason I could not, at that period in my life, say I had personally experienced, at the spirit level, the worship that the Father desires, which is, that we worship Him "in Spirit and in Truth". Now, I must be clear, I did also believe that I received the Body and Blood of Christ at the reception of the Eucharist and I can say that the sustenance of the life of Christ did help me through some difficult times in my life. I am only attempting to state that there was a certain dullness in my spirit that prevented me from receiving the fullness of the graces that flow from the Sacrament of His Love. It was only after my conversion experience, which opened me to a spiritual awareness, that I have been able to experience the fullness of the worship experience at mass, the Eucharistic celebration.

As I later discovered, through the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, there were three major factors casting a veil over my worship experience. These were as follows: (1) my spiritual ignorance, (2) my un-yielded self-will, and (3) the hidden sins of my heart.

Spiritual Ignorance

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ..." (Hos. 4:6)

My ignorance consisted of not clearly understanding that we humans are endowed by our creator with three levels of awareness: (a) an awareness through our physical senses of our physical self and the material worlds around us, (b) an inward mental awareness of our personal identity and all of our intellectual and our emotional attributes and capabilities (ie. what we sometimes categorize as the "soul"), and (c) the spiritual level of awareness, which we sometimes identify with the human heart or spirit. This latter level of awareness is intuitive, non-conceptual and non-verbal and includes our conscience. It is this latter level of awareness that we sometimes ignore or overlook as a part of our personal assessment. Yet it is at this level of awareness that our Creator intended as the level where He desires to meet with us and establish a personal relationship that brings us into communion with Him. Due to Adam's act of disobedience (original sin), however, this level of communion with the Holy One was disrupted in Adam and all his generations.

I must add, with great sadness that my ignorance extended further to the fact that I did not understand that in order for me to connect with the Father in true worship, I had to enter the spiritual level of my spirit, which had been renewed in me through baptism. I also was not aware

that, even though baptized, this channel of relationship remained inactive, and needed to be activated through an act of my will – by a sincere, heartfelt repentance and conversion. In my traditional and cultural passivity as a young child, I went through the motions required of me in receiving the sacraments but did not truly understand the level of heartfelt repentance and commitment needed in giving my heart to Jesus. As a result, although the grace of baptism and confirmation worked in the circumstances of my life, I had not totally yielded my inner self to my Savior, Jesus, thus creating a veil that kept me from a true relationship with the Lover of my soul. Through the grace and mercy of the Father, the Holy Spirit continued working in the circumstances of my life so that as an adult He brought me to the point where I recognized my need to know Him in a personal way, and thus, after a heartfelt repentance, I turned to Him in a conversion of heart, inviting the Lord Jesus into my Heart and thus beginning a personal relationship with Him “in the Spirit”.

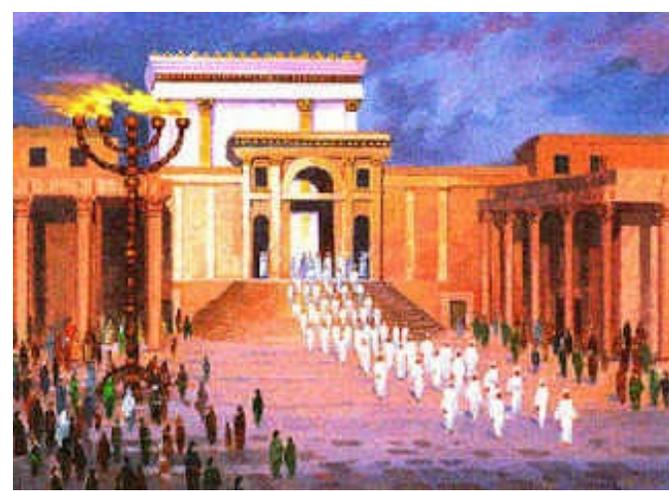
My Unyielded Self-will

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 16:23-25)

This brings me to the next barrier that hindered me from fully entering the spiritual awareness I needed to truly participate in worship, namely my self-will. You see even though I had come to conversion and repented of my known sins, and turned to the Lord for his forgiveness, I still retained my self-will. That is, I had not fully yielded myself to the Holy One. In my continuing ignorance and, of course, my pride, it had not entered my mind that what the Father desired of me is the total yielding of my self to His reign in me. I incorrectly supposed that, I, in my turning to Him I could now use my self will to serve Him. So the Holy Spirit had to make it clear to me, through His Word, that I had to deny my self will in order for the Lord to rule in my life. I had to yoke my self to Jesus so that all that through that yoking I my desires, and my thoughts would become His desires and his thoughts, and thus my actions would be in conformity to his will and thus “walk in the spirit”.

Of course, once I understood my problem, I repented again and I made the decision to surrender my self completely to His reign in me. What this decision did was to begin a process of transformation in me where I now continually come to situations where I have to put down my self will so that He and He alone would reign in me. This tension between my spirit and my flesh is still the cross I have to bear daily but now I am more aware of my self will attempting to creep in, but now, by the grace of God, in Him I have the spiritual strength needed to walk in the spirit and not in the flesh. Praised be His Holy Name!

The Hidden sins of the Heart



“ Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?

Who may stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.

He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.

Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of

Jacob.” (Psalm 24:3-5)

Having yielded my self completely to the Lord, He then began His work of transformation in me to conform me more and more into His image. He began His work in me with a very thorough house cleaning. In this process the Holy Spirit began to reveal to me the secrets of my heart.

Yes, although I had repented of my sins at my conversion, there were secret sins that I harbored in my heart, that were barriers to the fullness of worship. These were sins that I had long ago buried in my subconscious by justifying them as merely human idiosyncrasies. They were very personal sins, which included things like: bitterness originating from unresolved personal grudges and hurts, an anger and cynicism towards others that came on me for no apparent reason, a prideful and stubborn attitude that always placed my ideas and will above others, and flowing from this sulking behavior when I didn't get my way. These sins, of course, affected all my relationships but again I was blind to them because they were so deeply hidden in my inner self. Even now I still encounter them attempting to creep back into my life. But now that the Lord has brought them into His Light I am rapidly aware of them and bring them under His Blood in confession. Some of these sins are gone forever as the Lord healed me of my inner hurts and I forgave all who had injured me. Praised be His Holy Name!

Worship revived me

Oh ! I built my defenses well!

In my narcissist enclave all was to justify the Self.

All I said and did was well under the control

Of reason and science and intellectual disdain,

Of a measured theology and attitude profane,

But sorely wanting of the very thing from which I fled,

.... That Eternal Love for which my soul was made.

But then as if from nowhere, I heard ...

A Word that pierced and shook me to my very depths

A Word that revealed the sham that I was living

A Word that deflated my ego and my pride

It told me that nothing in me was worthy

But that He who Loves me, died that I might have

.... That Eternal Love for which my soul was made.

As into my heart His Word descended,

I was overcome by the intensity of His Love.

As His Love called out to me and sought me,

Willingly, I ceded self to its manifold embrace,

Basking in the warmth of His Compassion, the Mercy of His Grace,

Asking only that He renew and restore me, to receive more of

I Am More Than My Desire [at Can We Cana?]



I am a woman who desires men, but I don't define myself that way. Who I am depends equally as much on the parents who raised me, the town where I grew up, and the schools I attended. I am an introverted and somewhat socially awkward intellectual, who likes Renaissance music, science fiction, and macaroni and cheese. I am all of these things and I like all of these things completely apart from my heterosexuality.

I could identify myself as a Virginian born-and-bred or a New York transplant, as a blogger or a lawyer or a stay-at-home mom, but these categories don't constrain or pigeon-hole me. On a deeper level, I am a former WASP turned Catholic convert. I am a baptized Christian who bears on my brow and in my soul the seal of Him who died. I am bound to my husband through the Sacrament of Matrimony, and in some mystical way we have been made one. On a still deeper level, I am a creature of God brought into existence out of love and because He has a special plan for me.

So I don't post my sexual preference on my Facebook profile, parade it through the streets, wear certain colors on certain days, or join special-interest groups. Because I can't be reduced to a certain type of longing.

My sexuality didn't matter much when I was a child and likely won't matter much when I'm 90. While heterosexuality is an integral part of my marriage to my husband, our vows to love each other through riches and poverty, sickness and health, encompass far more than a ratification of our desire. As St. Josemaría said:

for normal people, sex comes in fourth or fifth place. First come spiritual ideals, with each person choosing his own. Next, a whole series of matters that concern ordinary men and women: their father and mother, home, children, and so on. After that, one's job or profession. Only then, in fourth or fifth place, does the sexual impulse come in.

Although sexual desire exerts a powerful emotional pull, it is not the most important aspect of anyone's life.

Sexual desire can point towards our

[desire for loving union](#)

with another and loving union with God, but it can never substitute for true union. On the contrary, strong sexual desire can swamp our sense of right and wrong, dragging us under in an emotional flood, drowning our reason. Succumbing to the temptation of the moment is one thing. Turning our sexual desires or preferences into the keystone of our identity is quite another.

I am so much more than simply a woman who desires men. And since that is true, every homosexual is more than simply a man who desires men. Every gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning individual is more than a disembodied sexual orientation. Each one is an individual, who is funny or reserved, impulsive or controlled, gregarious or shy. They might be musicians, doctors, actors, lawyers, or members of any other profession. They might be baptized Christians or a professed atheists. And, like all of us, they might be lonely, hurting, in need of friendship, in need of love, in need of being saved.

So when we say "love the sinner and hate the sin," perhaps we should think "love the person and weep for the desire that leads them to sin." Because we all have our temptations and our unhealthy desires, but we can't and shouldn't be reduced to that. Every one of us is more than our desire.

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This contribution is available at <http://canwecana.blogspot.com/2014/01/i-am-more-than-my-desire.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Young marriage: Another daughter engaged! [at Little Catholic Bubble]

I feel like such a rebel! I have condoned -- no, encouraged! -- something that would have been unthinkable to me just a few years ago. The first public hints of my mental shift came through on a giddy facebook status a few weeks ago:

Through steady growth in my Faith and (please God) in wisdom, some of my philosophies of life have changed so much that I don't think even my 40-year-old self would recognize Leila today. Life is wild and wonderful. Hang on tight....

Followed by:

People think that the great freedom is in jettisoning the "constraint" of the moral law and God Himself. But they are wrong. There is no freedom there. The freedom is in jettisoning the more secular conventions of the culture, sometimes with abandon.

My mind was whirling, processing, but few people knew what was was happening behind the scenes.

Soon, I quoted the Holy Father:

“God always surprises us. Like the new wine in the Gospel, God always saves the best for us. But he asks us to let ourselves be surprised by his love, to accept his surprises. Let us trust God!” -- Pope Francis

I even brought my hidden excitement

[to this blog](#)

, posting these inspiring words from Pope Francis to those at World Youth Day:

Today, there are those who say that marriage is out of fashion; in a culture of relativism and the ephemeral, many preach the importance of "enjoying" the moment. They say that it is not worth making a life-long commitment, making a definitive decision, "forever", because we do not know what tomorrow will bring.

I ask you, instead, to be **revolutionaries**, to swim against the tide; yes, I am asking you to **rebel** against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes that you are incapable of responsibility, that you are incapable of true love. I have confidence in you and I pray for you. Have the courage "to swim against the tide". Have the courage to be happy.

The pope's exhortation to the youth resonated deeply within me, because something was brewing in my own family and was changing my own heart and mind.

I had always been a theoretical proponent of young marriage for our Catholic youth

if

the couple was sufficiently mature and understood the meaning of the Sacrament -- but not actually for my own children! After a college degree, yes,

then

the Miller children could safely head to the altar. But before? I couldn't condone it. I was just not that brave. Ultimately, I cared too much about what people thought.

But that was before the shocking realization that my 19-year-old daughter not only would soon get engaged, but

should

soon get engaged!

And now I don't care what people think.

Early marriage is not for everyone, to be sure. But this particular young adult couple, firmly ensconced in their Catholic Faith, desired to be married. Dean and I assessed the situation and ultimately agreed that they should be. Bam! Just like that, the conventions we grew up with were cast off like shackles. Our daughter would marry at the age of 20, before her degree was complete.

And so, with Mama still basking in the wonderful strangeness of it all, my husband and I give our blessing to what happened last weekend in Charleston, South Carolina, when our younger daughter agreed to marry the stellar 22-year-old man who proposed to her on bended knee in front of the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus Christ Himself, Who is the Source and Summit of both of their lives.



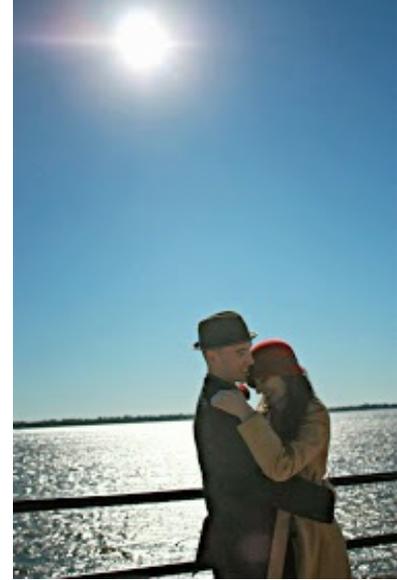
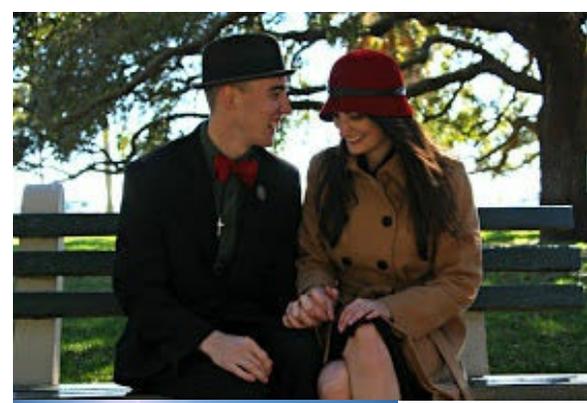


With the young man's parents' support and blessing as well, the Millers have begun planning another wedding that (depending on the Navy!) should take place in about a year.

I'm still in awe, and I couldn't be more thrilled by this turn of events -- and my own turn of heart.

God is full of surprises!





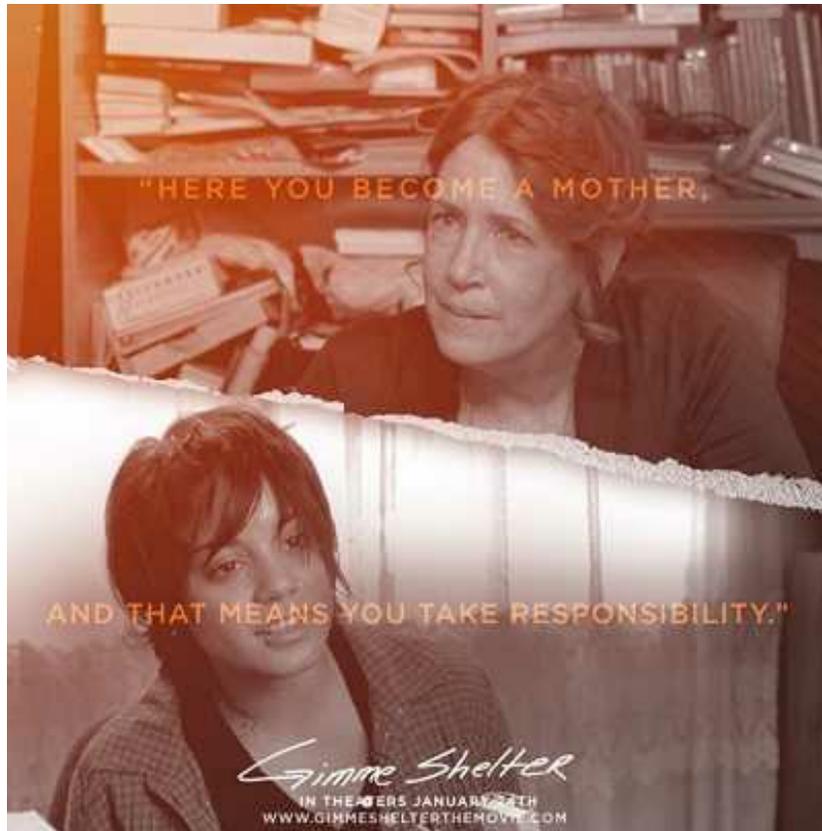
May the Lord bless the happy couple now and for many, many decades to come!



This contribution is available at http://littlecatholicbubble.blogspot.com/2014/01/another-daughter-engaged_24.html
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| [Contents](#) |

A movie worth the effort: Gimme Shelter [at Leaven For The Loaf]



from gimmeshelterthemovie.com

I hate being told that a movie is good for me. Sounds too much like “eat your spinach.” I don’t like a hard sell or hearing that something is a “Christian” or “pro-life” or “inspiring” film. Just tell me what it’s about, and I’ll watch it and draw my own conclusions. And I’m picky, seeing only two or three first-run movies each year.

Gimme Shelter came to my attention through an email from a pro-life group. Not a hard sell, exactly, but a nudge. I’m glad I let myself be nudged into attending a screening. I was captivated by this story of a pregnant teen trying to find a safe place – both physical and emotional – for herself and her baby.

There are many ways this film could have gone wrong: too much sentimental preaching, too tidy an ending, too glamorous a heroine. Director/screenwriter Ronald Krauss and his crew avoided these pitfalls. *Gimme Shelter* is based on the true story of Kathy DiFiore, who has founded a number of shelters in New Jersey for pregnant and parenting teens. Krauss reportedly spent a year in such shelters as he wrote his screenplay. Rather than trying to make a saint of DiFiore or make a documentary about her shelter, Krauss listened to the young mothers. He has paid them a handsome

tribute in the character of Apple Bailey, who in less than two hours of screen time becomes an unforgettable character.

Apple – the reason she abandons her birth name, Agnes, becomes clear late in the movie – is sixteen, a foster-care veteran, and the abused child of a drug-addicted prostitute, June. Born to teen parents who split up before her birth, Apple has known only violence and poverty with her mother, with intermittent unsatisfactory stays in foster care. She wants something better, and while she's not quite sure what "better" means, she knows it means getting away from her mother. Unsmiling, defensive, and precariously streetwise, Apple sets off to find her father. Her appearance at his beautiful suburban home is like a bombshell to his picture-perfect wife and children. Even so, he welcomes the beaten-up, starving, tattooed-and-pierced teenager. The crisis heightens almost immediately when the wife recognizes that Apple is pregnant before the teen herself knows it.

Apple herself is overwhelmed and confused. Tom, her father, is a decent man who is torn between his shocked family and the daughter he has never seen before. He tells her in a compassionate tone that she is not ready for motherhood, and that she can put "this whole thing" behind her. "Like you put me behind you?" replies the haunted girl. He has no answer for her.

The word "abortion" is never mentioned. When Tom's brittle and beautiful wife Joanna takes Apple to an unnamed clinic, the scene is underplayed to great effect, with no ominous music or villainous clinic workers. An ultrasound image of her child moves the unsentimental girl to decide to carry the baby to term. When she discovers that Joanna has abandoned her at the clinic, Apple goes on the run again. Hospitalized after being badly injured while fleeing from a predator, trusting no one, she reluctantly encounters the unlikely mentor who will bring her to the shelter that will give her and her baby a chance.

This has all the makings of a soap opera. The film escapes that trap. Characters that could have been reduced to mere types are instead rich and interesting. With only a couple of unfortunate preachy exceptions, the dialogue sounds natural. The music is one of the best things about the movie; with the wrong soundtrack the story could have descended into sappiness at several points. The cast could have overplayed the roles. They didn't.

A danger of a big-name cast is that the viewer sees the actor on the screen, not the character. In *Gimme Shelter*, thanks to both the screenplay and the skill of the players, the characters prevail. Vanessa Hudgens nails it as Apple. Hudgens became a star in the hugely popular *High School Musical*, and it would be easy but false to say that she's surprisingly good here. She's wonderful, without any reference or comparison to *HSM*, period. As Tom, Brendan Fraser has a huge emotional range to cover, and he does the job without melodrama and with total believability. Rosario Dawson in a few brief scenes perfectly conveys the menace of the ravaged and ravaging June. James Earl Jones, reliable as always, portrays Father Frank McCarthy, who guides Apple to the shelter. Any *Law and Order* fan will recognize Ann Dowd, who had several remarkable guest roles during the series's long run. In *Gimme Shelter*, she plays Kathy DiFiore, whose work inspired the film – and who, alas, is the one character who comes across as two-dimensional. One

scene redeems this: June and Tom come to see Apple at the shelter at the same time, unexpectedly, and DiFiore has to manage the sudden convergence of the violent mother and well-meaning father who haven't seen each other in sixteen years. Here, Dowd shines.

The conclusion of the movie is true to the realism of the story. There's a measure of healing, but it's not complete. There are reconciliations, but there are also unresolved relationships. There's work to be done, yet there's hope. And here, I finally had to bring out the tissues. Without trying to pull any strings, simply by telling me a good story, the movie got to me.

Note: Moviegoers of a certain age will find the title *Gimme Shelter* annoying. The Rolling Stones used it for a documentary decades ago. The project comes by the title honestly, though, since DiFiore calls her book about her work *Gimme Love, Gimme Hope, Gimme Shelter*. She calls her [Several Source Shelters](#) "an Emergency Room for God's most needy."

This entry was posted in [prolife](#) and tagged [Gimme Shelter movie \(2014\)](#), [Kathy DiFiore](#), [pregnancy care shelters](#), [Ronald Krauss](#), [Vanessa Hudgens](#) on [January 10, 2014](#) by [Leaven for the Loaf](#).

This contribution is available at <http://leavenfortheloaf.com/2014/01/10/movie-worth-the-effort-gimme-shelter/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Spiritual Combat [at From the Pulpit of My Life]

*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion,
seeking someone to devour.*

1 Peter 5:8

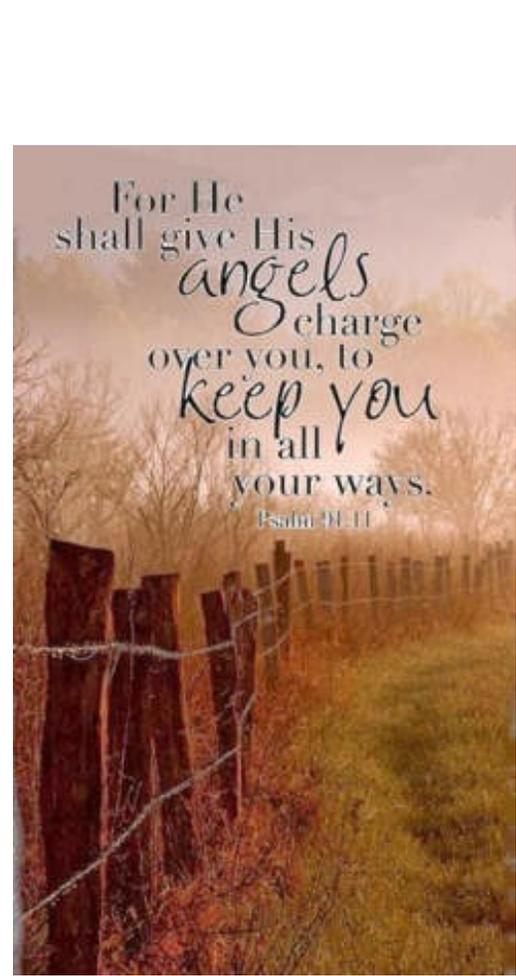
Saint Peter paints a terrifying picture of what Christians are up against. Have you ever said or thought, “The devil made me do it”? Sometimes it is said humorously, although it is anything but.

Is it true that the devil *makes* us do what we don’t want to do? No. God allows evil spirits a certain amount of freedom in the world, but it is not unlimited. They can influence us by tempting us to offend God. Such temptations, however, are like bait, but they are not sins.

Even Jesus was not exempt from the temptations of the Evil One. After his baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the desert. Satan cleverly waited until Jesus was weak from 40 days of fasting before trying to manipulate Him. The synoptic gospels give accounts of how Jesus prevailed.

We, too, can overcome Satan’s temptations. Our God-given free will allows us to make moral choices either for good or for evil. No one, not even the demons, can *make* us do anything. We have to consent.

Still, it is difficult for us mortals to do good consistently. Even Saint Paul said, “... I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate.” *Concupiscence*, a result of our fallen human nature, makes us prone to give in to temptation.



For He
shall give His
angels
charge
over you, to
keep you
in all
your ways.
Psalm 91:11

When it comes to *resisting* Satan's advances God's grace is sufficient. It is a comfort to know that God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. He invites us to ask Him for protection, "Ask and you shall receive." This promise gives us confidence.

Furthermore, each of us receives from God a guardian angel. The very name of this special angel explains its role. This angel protects and guides us on the path to our salvation. We can ask our angel for help. Often they make themselves noticeable.

Prayer to Your Guardian Angel

Angel of God, my guardian dear,

To whom God's love commits me here,

**Ever this day be at my side,
to light, guard, rule and guide.**

Amen.

This contribution is available at <http://fromthepulpitofmylife.blogspot.com/2014/01/spiritual-combat.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

When You Were Under the Fig Tree [at MCCatholic - Making Scripture Known]

When You Were Under the Fig Tree

John 1:43-51

“Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”

Nathaniel said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

You can find some interesting sayings on the Internet:

If you think nobody cares about you, try missing a couple of payments.

Change is inevitable ... except from vending machines.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite criticism.

He who hesitates is probably right.

No one is listening until you make a mistake.

Two wrongs are only the beginning.

Monday is an awful way to spend 1/7th of your life.

A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

I really like this last one:

If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving definitely isn't for you!

Cynics are everywhere these days. Philip had come into contact with Jesus and was excited about what he had heard and seen. He was bubbling over with enthusiasm and so he went to get Nathaniel. When Philip expresses that he has found the One about whom the Law and the Prophets wrote and spoke, I can image a glimmer of hope coming from Nathaniel only to be quickly extinguished when Philip says that the man is Jesus of Nazareth.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathaniel cynically replies.

It is evident from the passage that something had occurred under the fig tree by which Jesus was able to judge the true character of Nathaniel. Whatever it was is not recorded for us. It is not improbable that Nathaniel was accustomed to retire to the shade of a certain tree, perhaps in his garden or in a grove, for the purpose of meditation and prayer. The Jews were much in the habit of selecting such places for private devotion. The Torah was often read under a fig tree.

In Zechariah 3:10, after describing how God would remove the sin of the high priest and the land, the prophet wrote, “In that day, each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree, declares the Lord Almighty.”

The prophet Micah used the image in the same way, describing the state of man after the kingdom has arrived (Mic. 4:5). Because of this imagery, faithful Israelites would sit under a fig tree as a place of prayer and hope and expectation.

Under the fig tree was a place of stillness and retirement that was favorable for meditation and prayer. In that place of retirement it is not improbable that Nathaniel was engaged in private devotion.

A.T. Robertson says, “Jesus saw Nathaniel’s heart as well as his mere presence there. He saw him in his worship and so knew him.”

Jesus says, “I saw you.” Three simple words that are pregnant with meaning. It is clear, from the narrative, that Jesus did not mean to say that he was bodily present with Nathaniel and saw him; but he knew his thoughts, his desires, his secret feelings and wishes. Our Lord exercised His Divine omniscience and from a far distance knew Nathaniel and saw him.

When Jesus saw Nathaniel coming towards him he said, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Some translations say, “in whom there is no guile.” Some may misinterpret this word to mean that Jesus was saying that Nathaniel had no guilt in him. But our Lord is not saying that at all.

The Lord is saying that Nathaniel was a true Israelite. There was no hypocrisy in him. He was not full of trickery or craftiness. In other words, to use a modern phrase, Nathaniel was “the real deal.” He was a man who studied the law and lived by the law. He took the words of the prophets seriously. As such, he was willing to come and examine the claims of Jesus for himself, even though he personally wondered if anything good could come from Nazareth.

In coming to Christ, Nathaniel found his expectations met. Now what can we learn from this passage?

We learn that Jesus sees what is done in secret because He is omniscient, all-knowing. We cannot hide from Jesus no matter where we may try to run. We cannot hide even our most secret thoughts from Jesus because he knows everything. Everything is laid open before him.

“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.” Psalm 139:7-12

We learn that Jesus sees us when we little think of it. We often go through our day without thinking of Christ. But he is watching. At the close of the day, as you take stock over the activities of the day, what would Jesus be thinking as he said to you:

- When you were under the fig tree I saw you.
- When you were at the coffee machine I saw you.
- When you were at school taking that test, I saw you.
- When you were making that sales deal, I saw you.
- When you and your spouse were arguing, I saw you.
- When you were reading your Bible at lunch today, I saw you.
- When you had the opportunity to speak about me to your friend today but did not do so, I saw you.
- When you were on your knees in prayer this morning, I saw you.
- When you turned your back on that person who needed help, I saw you.
- When you skipped Mass simply because you didn't feel like getting out of bed, I saw you.

We learn that the Lord judges our character chiefly by our private devotions. Those are secret; the world does not see us in our prayer closet. It is there that we show who we really are. In our secret devotions there is no place for hypocrisy. There is no one else around for us to impress. It's just us under the fig tree. And so we pray, "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults." Psalm 19:12

Wherever you are at today my friend, you are figuratively under the fig tree. The Lord sees you and he sees me. Is he able to look at us and say, "Behold, a Christian in whom there is no hypocrisy, no deceit, and no trickery? Behold, there is a man or woman who is the real deal."

May God be merciful to us and cleanse us of our hidden faults. May he, by the power of the Holy Spirit, continue to transform our lives from one degree of glory to another.

+Amen.

This contribution is available at <http://mccatholic.com/2014/01/18/391when-you-were-under-the-fig-tree/>
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A few of the many reasons we love our Catholic school [at Catholic Review]

When I mention that our son attends Catholic school, people often feel compelled to tell me that our local public schools are quite good. And I bet they are.

The thing is, though, that my husband and I don't just want an education for our children.

We want a *Catholic* education.

Sure, we want strong academics and excellent teachers. We want our children to learn reading and writing, math and science, history and another language.

But what we want most of all is for them to learn our Catholic faith—and know how to live it out each day. And this is what we see already happening with our son, who started kindergarten last fall:

- He comes home telling us whose feast day it is and how his class celebrated.



- He speaks about the Holy Family the way he talks about his out-of-state cousins.



- He reminds us to say grace—and encourages his little brother to make the Sign of the Cross, too.

- He is learning to appreciate that there are commandments—and to know that they're not suggestions.

- He accepts that heaven is just another part of our journey through life.

- He embraces prayer and finds beauty in the rituals and traditions of our faith.



- He is starting to realize that our Catholic faith isn't unique to our family, that we share it and celebrate it with many other people.

- He recognizes the importance of making sandwiches for Our Daily Bread and sending donations to tsunami victims.

- He reminds us almost daily of God's infinite love, wisdom, and power.

Academically our Catholic school is exceptional. As the homework comes home and I see what our son is doing already in kindergarten, I am surprised. He's making graphs and talking about syllables. His teacher is enthusiastic, talented, kind, and a wonderful role model. And he's in a class of only 12 students.

But I'll be totally honest with you. As happy as I am to see that he is learning so much, we are not investing in Catholic education for the strong academics. We're there for the values—values we can already see coming to life in our son.

We want him to be kind and loving.

We want him to have confidence and humility.

We want him to know he is never alone, that Jesus and a whole communion of angels and saints are on his side.



We want to give him every chance to succeed. And by success, I don't mean becoming an astrophysicist or a neurosurgeon or a poet or a professor or a trapeze artist.

We want him to be the best possible version of himself, the unique person God created for this world. And my husband and I believe that being well-rooted in our Catholic faith will give our son the best foundation for the future.

Could we teach our children our faith on our own at home? Of course we could—and we do. But we can use all the help we can get, especially the assistance of professionals, exceptional Catholic teachers.



Would it be less expensive to send our children to public school? Without a doubt, though I am amazed at all our Catholic elementary school offers considering the reasonable tuition. Our son's Catholic school experience is everything we hoped it would be—and much, much more.

John and I feel blessed to be able to afford Catholic education, and we are certain the financial sacrifice is worth it. After all, the end goal for us is not getting our children into college, but helping them make it to heaven. We're hoping a Catholic education helps make both of those journeys possible, but especially the one that matters most.

This Catholic Schools Week: Why are you choosing Catholic schools for your children? I'd love to hear from you!

1/26/2014 9:27:48 PM

By

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2014/01/26/a-few-of-the-many-reasons-we-love-our-catholic-school>

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| [Contents](#) |

She left Samuel there [at Journey to Wisdom]



1 Sm 1:24-28

In those days,

Hannah brought Samuel with her,

along with a three-year-old bull, and ephah of flour, and a skin of wine,

and presented him at the temple of the LORD in Shiloh.

After the boy's father had sacrificed the young bull,

Hannah, his mother, approached Eli and said:

"Pardon, my lord!

As you live, my lord,

I am the woman who stood near you here, praying to the LORD.

I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request.

Now I, in turn, give him to the LORD;

as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the LORD."

She left Samuel there.

"She left Samuel there "

That last line is a difficult one for me to read. Did he cry? Did she long to take him back? Why would such a sacrifice be needed? This child, Samuel, factors big in salvation history and he is close to the Lord in a mysterious way! He hears the Lord and he responds to His voice; maybe it is because his mother's generosity and trust in the Lord removed obstacles of fear and doubt. Me, on the other hand, well, my fear of pain as well as my satisfaction with the world sometime prevent me from really listening to the Lord and from wholly offering myself to Him. As I struggle with that last line, I am being asked to open my heart, to feel the longing and sorrow Hannah must have had in leaving her much loved son and trust in the mysterious majesty of God! A sacrifice made with trusting love is re-payd with unfathomable generosity that flows from generation to generation.

Withhold nothing from God!

Read

[Hannah's canticle](#)

to God after she has left Samuel with Eli. Though her sacrifice was costly, she knows God is at work. Hannah's canticle foreshadows Mary's, who also holds nothing back from God. Neither woman lets the fear of pain or gnawing anxiety over impending loss harden their hearts or dampen their joy. They do not protect themselves from their sorrow by withholding their love. This makes the pain of their loss more intense I think, yet it also disposed them to receive the intense love of God all the more. Their whole lives are an offering to God and their hearts are always in trusting prayer. They understand that all that they have is God's and that nothing can be withheld from Him. They trust in The Lord who fulfills His promises to even the barren, or a lowly young women of Nazareth.

Luke 1: 46-56:

Mary Said:

*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his lowly servant,
from this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
and has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy.
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever."*

Rejoice in His redeeming mercy!

The sorrows and sacrifices of this world should always whisper to us "

in the beginning it was not so

", and in so doing reveal to us that we are indeed souls in exile; we are separated from the Heavenly Bridegroom. If only we can allow his redeeming mercy to scatter out attachments. If we do not allow these attachments to be sent away from our hearts our hopes for things eternal

will become weak, and our fears will control us! We will settle for so much less than what God has in mind for each one of us. We have to learn to allow God to let us long for what is truly lasting; and trust in His faithfulness in filling the empty spaces in our souls. Allow Hannah and Mary's wholehearted trust to get you in touch with the holy longing in your soul -- a longing that is as poignant as a mother who longs for her child. Trust, like Mary and Hannah did, that someday we will see that the longing we so often fill with worldly things be fulfilled in abundance. It is in that longing that we should rejoice, because that longing is drawing us to Him.

God is faithful in all that He promises!

Hannah hears and responds to God in her longings, for a son, and then her longing for him in sorrow after letting him go to fulfill God's plan. God responds to her longing and sorrow. Her trust in the Lord makes straight the way for God's salvation for generations to come! God is the one who will soothe all of these sorrows in the end, because all of them reveal our world's need to be made new. Mary does not reject what she does not fully comprehend. She does not hide away from the pain and sacrifice she will face with her son, foretold by the Scriptures and by Simeon. She loves deeply and her heart is pierced deeply. There is nothing superficial or lukewarm about these women. Their sorrow is deep, but their everlasting joy is deeper still because they seek joy from God!

What is God asking of me?

He is asking for me to trust in Him in sorrow and in joy, and to hold nothing back from Him. To cast down the fear, envy and pride that keep my hopes from the heights of heaven. To let go of even good things if they are keeping my heart from Him. To seek the Heavenly Bridegroom in whom all my longing will be fulfilled!

Grace and Peace to all!

Heidi

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2014/01/she-left-samuel-there.html>
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The Importance of Secular Learning

Part of [my spiritual resolutions](#) this year is to pray more and to pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament for at least 15 minutes a day. This has been somewhat of an easy task since the parish I work at in Gilbert, Arizona, [Saint Mary Magdalene Catholic Church](#) ([Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)), now offers Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for one hour after the morning Mass during week.

Assisting me in prayer this year has been Mike Aquilina's, [A Year with the Church Fathers – Patristic Wisdom for Daily Living](#). It's meant to be a retreat done on a daily basis for the entire year. If you read my blog on a regular basis, then you know I love the Early Church Fathers and the [Doctors of the Church](#) very much. The wisdom and great theological insight they have provided for us throughout the centuries is like a road map for us Christians in today's Catholic Church.

Although the first seventeen days have been profound, the one I have enjoyed the most so far is about the importance of secular learning from Saint Basil's *Address to Young Men 2*. St. Basil tells us that secular learning is important as long as we know that Heaven is our main goal.

Two questions Aquilina gives us at the end of the excerpt – How do I make use of my secular learning?...Is it leading me toward or away from God?

Asking oneself those two questions, I provide the excerpt from Day 14 –

“...Christians we believe that is human life is not supremely valuable. We do not recognize anything as an unconditional blessing if it benefits us only in this life. Family pride, strength of body, beauty, position, universal acclaim, royal power, anything that might be called great in human terms – we see none of these things as worthwhile, and we do not envy those who have them. No, we put our hopes on what lies beyond, and do everything in preparation for eternal life.

If you were to bring together every earthly good from the creation of the world, it would not compare to the tiniest part of the possessions of heaven. Everything precious in this life falls shorter of the least of the goods in the other than the shadow or dream falls short of the reality. Or rather, as much as the soul is superior to the body in everything, so much is the heavenly life superior to the earthly life.

The Holy Scriptures lead us into eternal life, teaching us through the divine words. But as long as we are not mature enough to understand their deep thought, we exercise our spiritual perceptions on the secular writings – which are not so much different, and in which we see the truth, so to speak, in shadows and mirrors. In that way we imitate those who do military exercises: they gain skill in gymnastics and dancing and then reap the reward of their training in battle. We must believe that the greatest battle of all is ahead of us, and to prepare for it we must do and suffer everything.

So we must be familiar with poets, historians, orators, and in fact everyone who can help our souls to salvation. First we are introduced to pagan legends, and then at last pay special attention to the sacred and divine teachings – just as we might first get used to the reflection of the sun in the water, and then can turn our eyes to the sun itself.”

As long as Heaven is our ultimate goal, let us learn all things that will and can help us to attain salvation. [Saint Basil the Great](#)...Pray for Us!

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2014/01/17/the-importance-of-secular-learning/>
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| [Contents](#) |

The Silent Preacher [at Living the Faith]

In his small dark room
With his dim bright light
Does he every time he study
His eyes pierce through
The writings on the table
As he swallows each words present

His lips remain static
As he penetrates between the walls
To draw out rich flowers
Buttered with bread and fish
To feed the mind awaiting

After this silent moment of harvest
He writes words down
In his thick leather bag
Where he is going to
Hang in the public square
For all to delight in

This he does everytime
With his mild feet
Gentle hands and his
Grey thick hair

After hanging his bag
In its proper place
He leaves steadily without
Motioning a word
And people rush thereafter
To see what their food for the day was
Leaving them mostly in tears
And warm embrace of another

He bends his head in humility
And he hurries back to his room
Where he goes back in cycle
To fetch the nourishment

Of his community

This the silent preacher

Dedicates his life to

For the Love of his Divine maker

And that of his fellow men

This contribution is available at <http://twocatholicfriends.wordpress.com/2014/01/16/the-silent-preacher/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Proving It [at Martin Family Moments]

I have been really slacking in my prayer life lately. On the best of days, I get to daily Mass or pray a family Rosary, but on the worst of days (which are far too frequent) it's just morning and bedtime prayers with the kids.

Our Pastor gave a great homily on New Year's Day that challenged us all to make some spiritual resolutions for the new year. He said a lot of us make resolutions to eat right and exercise more, but what about our souls?

Then what really struck a chord with me (the exercise lover) was when he compared muscle confusion in workouts (when you switch up your workout routines to constantly challenge your body to adapt) with spiritual exercises. He said sometimes we can prefer to pray a certain way, or only make time for Mass, or attend our weekly Adoration hour and sort of fall into a rut. But if we can add something new and challenge ourselves to grow, we can flex those spiritual muscles until we become a bulky Mother Teresa. (OK, he didn't say "bulky Mother Teresa" but seriously, how strong was she?!?!)



So I decided to try harder, and my first step is to incorporate some spiritual reading into my day. I picked up

[this book](#)

the other night, and I searched for the passage about fear, because unfortunately, I am still having

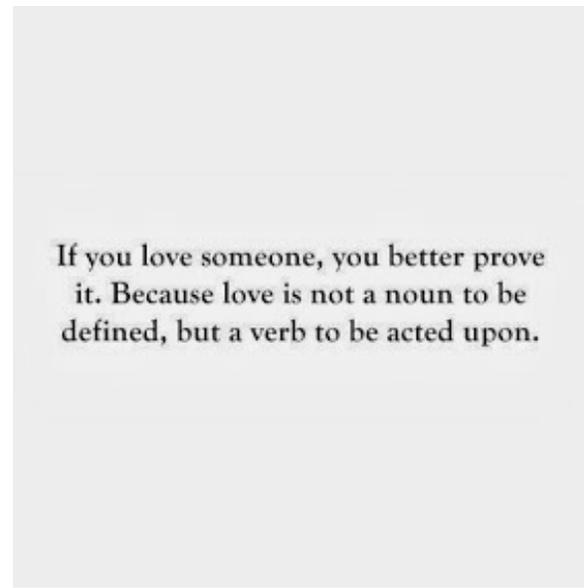
lots of fear and anxiety about this impending labor. The words jumped out of the page at me:

*My child, in many a trial and trouble, I come to you and ask you to believe in Me. Put your confidence in Me, and **prove that you mean it**, by refusing to worry. If your trials were not good for you, I would remove them at once.*

Do not be frightened. Why worry about coming events? Take care of today's problems and leave tomorrow in My hands. Many of tomorrow's troubles are only in your imagination.

Lastly, remember that nothing can happen without My consent. Put yourself in My care and fear nothing.

What a challenge this is: **Prove that you mean it.** I've never had it put that way.



If you love someone, you better prove it. Because love is not a noun to be defined, but a verb to be acted upon.

How can we say that we love and trust someone, but then check their emails and phone logs and worry and constantly check up on them? That's not love or trust.

So why do I do the same with God? I say "Jesus, I trust in You" and then I worry about everything that might go wrong that I won't be able to handle. "It's just too much, God!" I yell, "You know I can't handle this!" But only He truly knows what I can and can't handle better than me, and

[He will give me the grace to conquer the challenges when the time comes](#)

And the only way I can show Him that I actually do trust Him...the only way I can prove that I believe He uses all for good...is to stop worrying about the future and be thankful for today.



THANK GOD
FOR WHAT YOU HAVE
TRUST GOD
FOR WHAT YOU NEED

Colleen

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| [Contents](#) |

Sexual abuse by clergy the tip of the iceberg [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

Sexual abuse is a crime against humanity

The sexual exploitation and abuse of one human being by another is a crime against humanity because it is a violation of who that person is in their very identity as a sexual human being. Our sexuality is an integral facet of who we are in our distinctiveness as human beings. We are living beings with a capacity to not only relate to others and to care for them but also to do so in a great variety of distinct ways, with degrees of intimacy and expression appropriate to our age, gender, the nature of the relationship, what it is that we want to express or give, all of which is deeply tied into our freedom as individuals and our capacity for meaning and responsibility.

Sexual and other forms of abuse are particularly heinous when committed against children and other vulnerable, fragile, or innocent beings. They become doubly tragic when those perpetrating the abuse are themselves the distorted product of having in their turn suffered sexual or other forms of abuse, often at an early and deeply impressionable age.

One benefit, admittedly an incalculably costly one, of the current scandal of sexual abuse of children and other innocent and vulnerable people and by virtue of the actions that have been courageously taken by victims, those who support them, and those individuals and agencies who represent them, but also by virtue of church leaders who have made manifest their willingness to receive complaints, is that social taboos are shattering and it is becoming more possible to talk of these things openly and therefore to begin to work together towards solutions and better safeguards.

The complex nature of the human person and sexuality

The fundamental and horrible truth of the matter is that human nature, including our sexuality, has been weakened, damaged, tainted since the dawn of human history. The abominable practices and the pain and suffering engendered by misuse of human sexuality is primarily what has caused - almost across the board worldwide - religious leaders to condemn sexual infidelity and all forms of unusual sexual practices as evil or at least to be avoided if not condemned.

Human history, literature, and culture chronicles the many ways in which human beings cause others to suffer whenever they use their sexuality as a way of taking pleasure, often at the expense of others. While men and women differ by design in their naturally occurring genders - with males more intrusive and females more inclusive - sexual predators can and do exist among members of both genders, even if they admittedly can appear and operate very differently with different degrees of destructiveness in the consequences and aftermath of their sexual activity.

Particularly in our day there is an increasingly universal acceptance that sexual expression and even experimentation are acceptable providing they take place among consenting adults. Yet, increasingly there are those bold and aggressive enough to contend that such sexual activity and experimentation is even acceptable by adults to children and youth. These opinions and ideological positions do not take into account the human developmental process nor the subsidiary process of eroticization.

If we are ever to understand what is going on, how the trends in human thought, feeling, conviction, and practice are constantly evolving - and often in ways that bode ill for the common good - we need to have a closer look at the nature of the human person and of our sexual dimension in a dynamic way that makes provision for and takes into account our developmental process.

If sex were not pleasurable, then there would be little need for this dialogue because few if any human beings would engage in sexual activity. It is precisely because of the pleasure that sex can and does afford that the human impulse to engage in it is so strong. The pleasure principle in general and in sex in particular is of itself ambivalent at worst - neither good nor bad - at best high and noble, and in the middle with the average view that sex is simply good, when it is not great.

Sex is good, yes, but not in every instance

Even reluctant or prudish religious authorities have traditionally granted that sex was good with the belief that it was designed and created by God, if only for the transmission of life and the survival of the species. Those with a more objective, realistic, and appreciative eye go further in acknowledging that human sexuality also has benefits for human couples when engaged in by one woman with one man for life; in that the power of sex binds them together, allows them to mutually give pleasure and comfort, and over time can evolve and grow with them and their relationship so as to intensify their mutual attachment, fidelity, and solicitude, that is, their disposition and motivation to look out for the other and to deliberately put the other's interests first, ahead of their own.

[Pope John Paul II](#)

, the Bishop of Rome from October 16, 1978 to April 2, 2005 was of this view and went much further and deeper in his development of thought on what he called the "

[theology of the body](#)

", which emerged over time from the philosophical reflection he engaged in from his youth on human meaning, freedom, love, and "the acting person". He was of the view that human beings give meaning to their lives by their deliberate choices and that the highest meaning comes in the freedom to make of oneself a total gift to the other. He called this the "law of the gift".

[His work](#)

continues to be promoted all over the world for the common good.

Why do people pervert sex into violence?

Because human sexuality is so deeply tied into the integrity of the human person, our freedom, our capacity for giving meaning to our life, and our capacity to be open to and care for the other, sexual abuse is particularly bad for the pain it inflicts, the deep damage it causes, and the lasting harm it does as a violent act, and it is increasingly evil the more grievous its effects on the victim, the one whose freedom, integrity, meaning, caring, and openness have been violated.

Why do people then perpetrate such violence one upon another? The answer can only be found in the toxic mixture of the beauty, goodness, attractiveness, power, high purpose, and desirability of sexual expression on the one hand, and the distorted nature of the humanity of the perpetrator on the other hand. By analogy we understand that a hammer in the hand of a sculptor like Michelangelo can be instrumental in creating such inspiring sculpture as the Pieta, but in the hand of a vandal can destroy a thing of beauty, or wound or kill living things and even people.

The beauty and power of human sexuality

So it is with our human sexuality, which can be seen as a capacity for tenderness. Human beings don't simply have sexuality, but we are sexual beings. Our sexuality informs, colors, and is informed by our whole being at every level. Comforting a child engages our human sexuality, our capacity for tenderness, but in a healthy person does not generally engage one's genitals or erotic stimuli or responses. These tend not to activate without specific stimulation, unlike our other functions which operate automatically.

Our sexuality can be considered healthy when we have effective safeguards allowing us to distinguish different types of relationships giving us freedom to express a wide range of tenderness - actively in giving and passively in receiving - without any confusion from sexual arousal in ways appropriate to the nature of each relationship, time, circumstance, and the meaning we wish to express. Sexuality can be considered most noble when it seeks and effectively accomplishes the good of the other.

Genital sexuality adds to the expression of tenderness other meanings related to the union of a man and a woman and the outcome of their sexual fertility in the procreation of children, the transmission of life itself. Sexual activity outside of a woman / man couple with a mutual commitment for life sets aside the procreative function, the stability of a life commitment, or other dimensions which all have repercussions on those engaging in sexual expression and those affected by it, such as the offspring.

Human sexual development requires mentoring

However, it is easily observable that human beings don't just fall into a perfect experience and sexual life stance, but that this requires careful upbringing, learning, mentoring, and living. We

also need to learn to seek and give forgiveness when our expressions of tenderness and sexual union are clumsy or selfish and manipulate, take, and hurt rather than give and care. When our sexuality and capacity for tenderness are poorly formed, mistakenly informed, or incompletely matured, all kinds of harm can be done in the abominations that occur.

We can see this in every generation and just about in every life. Married couples must invest selfless effort to develop their sexuality so that it becomes a mutual venture that enhances their union and bears good fruit for others around them beginning with their family. The more selflessly parents live their sexuality as a couple, the more benefits there are for their children who develop a more healthy sexual outlook from the mentoring they receive.

Wandering away from the original design

Other forms of human couple have the additional struggle of not having the differentiation and complementarity inherent in the basic man-woman couple, or the permanence and stability of being committed to each other for life, or the deepening of their relationship that comes from long term fidelity and exclusivity, or the deeper freedom that comes from sharing a deep personal relationship with their Creator God as the true and existential source of their love, fidelity, and fertility. When fertility is regarded as a curse or medicated as a disease might, it is easy to understand how sexuality can become an arena of disagreement and unpleasantness if not of selfish manipulation and abuse.

When children are brought into the world in a family where at its center the parent couple do not live their sexuality with the purest of motives and the clarity and freedom of unselfish love, one can begin to understand how all kinds of misunderstandings, manipulation, hurts, and deviations can occur. It is the tragic truth that it is most often and primarily in the family that children are abused in various ways including sexually, where parents or other adults abuse children precisely because they cannot assert themselves and are in their innocence most vulnerable and easy to manipulate and exploit.

Once sexuality is in this way perverted in the young, they struggle for their whole lives to live a more wholesome sexuality in accord with our fundamental design for happiness and togetherness. Those who are fortunate are able to gradually sanitize or make healthier their sexuality, but others become inclined to reproduce in their own lives the abuse and perversions of sexual tenderness that marked them in their innocent years. It is much like the children of alcoholics who tend to gravitate towards another alcoholic when they are seeking out a spouse or life partner simply because that is the type of human personality with which they became familiar while growing up.

Exquisitely sensitive spouses or dangerous rapists

It is the very same raw material of human sexual personality that begins at conception and develops through gestation, birth, infancy, childhood, youth, and adulthood. Why, then, do some become exquisitely sensitive and loving spouses, some struggle with clumsy attempts to please, others have trouble setting aside their own desires and come across as "taking" rather than

"giving", and still others become manipulators, violators, rapists, pedophiles, ephebophiles, in short, dangerous offenders and monsters?

It is impossible to understand these differences outside of a "developmental model" of the human person as a sexual human being as opposed to a human being who simply happens to have sexual organs. A human being is a single living entity, and all of its experiences interact with all the others throughout its developmental stages and then continuing throughout its entire life cycle. You cannot examine or understand a person's sexuality without striving to understand the entire person, because everything within them is interrelated. You "pull" on one aspect and the whole fabric is pulled along.

Human development is a long and complicated process

Before the advent of discoveries and advancement in our understanding of the human person, it was generally thought - and many people have not caught up with the social sciences and still think - that a person is "born that way", the way they are, and that they cannot change. Advances in scientific observation, analysis, theorizing, and experimentation have revealed that the living entity called a human being as a physical and psychic organism has a wide and complex range of emotive experience as well as expression, and in addition has a more mysterious spiritual dimension that is more difficult to observe and quantify.

The human being begins its development with the genetic material it "receives" from its mother and father and from the moment of conception also absorbs untold billions of "impressions" from both the mother and the father during gestation in the womb and then continues to take in untold quantities of "impressions" from its parents, other people, other living things, and everything else that exists all around it, as well as its own inner processes, which in turn are also very complex.

Each individual has received from its genetic material certain "predispositions" to a variety of conditions, inclinations, sensitivities, and sensibilities. As time passes and as it takes in quantities of sensations and experiences, the individual undergoes the ongoing cumulative effect of all that it is taking in, its ongoing growth, and a developing and constantly operating process of "updating" or "rebooting" for understanding and interpretation, judgement and orientation, responsibility and freedom. Sensations, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, interpretations, awareness, feelings, moral judgements, free choices, the acceptance of responsibility and responsibilities, freedom to change, deliberate commitments, ongoing learning, admission of fault, and efforts to improve are only some of the multiple facets and operations taking place more or less simultaneously that taken together are in a continuous way formative of the human person.

Human development - becoming a person

In the social sciences it is now generally accepted that the human being is a dependent entity from the moment of its conception until it reaches maturity. One becomes a mature adult, with at least the essential elements and abilities of an adult, after having experienced 8 developmental stages between conception and the early twenties. These stages are: fetus, body identity, identity of the

doer, individual identity, psychosexual identity, psychosocial identity, identity of the self, and early adult.

We more easily recognize them as gestation, infancy (0-1), toddler (1-2 1/2), budding individual (2 1/2 - 3), Oedipus Complex or nightmare stage (3-6), the "flocking" by gender stage (6-12), teenage (12-18), and "getting a life" (18-22). Along the way, each person develops "preferences" of sensation, outlook, expression, reaction, and action. During the first year of life after birth, some become more "captative", active, or outreaching, while others prefer to become more "receptive", passive, or wait expectantly. During the "potty training" stage, some become more "retentive" and hold things in, hold onto things; while others become more "eliminative" and release things, let them go more easily. This generalizes to every aspect of life from personal hygiene to money to generosity of time and spirit.

From the stage where children "fall in love" with their opposite gender parent (3-6), some males befriend their "intrusive" mode (generally experienced as wanting to be like Daddy) - which is inscribed in the very design of their body - and let it become their natural way of being manly in the world; while some - either because they have been harmed by extreme forms of male intrusiveness or simply lacked an available model - prefer the female "inclusive" mode (they prefer to be like Mommy or like a very inclusive father; with the result that being intrusive takes more effort and energy every time they need to employ that mode, particularly if the mother was intrusive in a way that felt angry or controlling or threatening.

During that same stage when little girls "fall in love" with their Daddy, some females befriend their "inclusive" mode (generally experienced as wanting to be like Mommy) - which is inscribed in the very design of their body and let it become their natural way of being womanly in the world; while some - either because they have been harmed by extreme forms of female inclusiveness or simply lacked an available model - prefer the male "intrusive" mode (they prefer to be like Daddy or like a very intrusive mother; with the result that being inclusive takes more effort and energy every time they need to employ that mode, particularly if the father was inclusive in a way that seemed weak or withdrawing, or humiliating.

In their teenage years, boys and girls try out their newly discovered personal preferences and abilities and find that they are energized when they are with others and may become increasingly extroverted, or they may find that being with others is more draining than energizing, so that they may become more introverted. These dispositions may also tend to vary in accord with the size of the group and their familiarity with the others and degree of acceptance by the others. Some will be more inclined to be leaders and others followers and still others, either role depending on the circumstances and the others involved.

Most of us have some "wrinkles" in our development

Social scientists, philosophers, theologians, varied other professionals, and people in other walks of life will define what is a human person from a variety of viewpoints and a wide range of parameters. What does it take to become fully human? If an individual gets stuck in the first stage

of life, infancy, when it was the center of the universe and the mother was still felt to be part of its own body, then as an apparent adult, this individual turns out to behave so selfishly with such little conscience that we call them sociopath - without awareness of others as having a life of their own - or psychopaths - so intent on using others for their own ends that they are actually dangerous to life and limb. This is the case of those who in the face of the prospect of being abandoned will kill their spouse, children, and finally themselves, because they suffocate emotionally at the very thought of being abandoned.

Those who get "stuck" at the potty training stage may appear as extremely retentive or miserly or up tight, on the one hand, or on the other hand eliminative or spendthrift or irresponsibly carefree. Such an individual may be developmentally incapable of caring for others - unable to put out what it takes to care for others or unable to conserve what resources or time or energy that caring for others takes.

Those who get stuck at stage four - 2 1/2 to 3 - may never have become an "individual" in their own right, either because they became so merged with a needy parent or parents that, discouraged from paying attention to their own feelings and needs, they became incompetent as an individual human. Such an individual, perennially deprived of individuality or personal identity, would be hard pressed to properly care for others, being ever depleted for lack of self care. If they manage to heroically care for others, it would then be at extreme cost to themselves, being unable to distinguish differences in priority among the needs and wants of others and their own needs and wants, unable to reconcile those of others and their own.

Those who experience difficulties in befriending their own gender come to such difficulties from any number of factors: the degree or lack of masculinity of their father, absence of a father, frightening or humiliating distortion of a father figure, or unsteady, unstable character of their father; the degree or lack of femininity of their mother, absence of a mother, frightening or humiliating distortion of a mother figure, or volatile, unreliable character of their mother; which factors can be exacerbated by one or several occurrences of one or more forms of abuse: emotional, physical, psychological, sexual; or deprivations that are normally associated with social instability, poverty, and violence such as war, unemployment, racial or other forms of negative discrimination, religious or other forms of persecution, and so on.

Healthy, impoverished, or damaged development at any of these earlier life stages has cumulative effects when the individual enters into the subsequent more social stages of human development, which in turn can accentuate or open up delays in development of various facets of the emerging human person. Childhood and teenage bullying, social pressures to conform and even to perform anti-social or criminal acts, neglect or abandonment by significant adults, extreme social upheaval and countless other factors can enhance, hold back, or demolish an individual's human development up to that point in their young lives.

The initial result when the individual "comes of age" and is recognized as "an adult" will be a human individual that is capable of a minimum of self care, awareness of others as independent individuals with their own value and right to exist, ability to live and act in the world and society,

and ability to assume the rights and duties of a citizen and member of society. For many, this initial plateau or goal is delayed until later as they struggle to survive, to help their family or basic group to survive, all the while trying to welcome the challenges and events of life as opportunities to continue to grow and to develop into fully functional human persons.

The role of "eroticization" in becoming a human person

Distorted human beings - undeveloped or "petrified" persons

to be continued....

This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2014/01/sexual-abuse-by-clergy-tip-of-iceberg.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

Getting "ready" for Baby [at Little House in Chicago]

I was waiting around before prenatal yoga class on Saturday when the question came that threw me off guard.

As a young first-time mom, prenatal yoga classes are way outside my budget, but I planned ahead and asked my parents for a membership for Christmas. This was my first class and I'd been looking forward to it for weeks—not just for the health and relaxation benefits, but for the opportunity to meet other new moms. I don't know many other pregnant women in Chicago, and I would love the chance to talk about changing bodies and labor plans with someone walking the same road.

I made sure to arrive early, and after getting signed in, I bounced eagerly to the waiting area with a smile on my face. Operation Making Friends was about to begin. I greeted some of the other waiting women and broke the ice with the obvious question: "So, when are you due?"

"June," said one lady. "June," added another. "July," said the third. "What about you?"

"Oh wow," I said, marveling at this bunch of early birds. "I'm due in April, actually... late April."

"April?" one lady said. "That's really soon!"

"I guess so," I said.

"So you must be totally ready, huh?" the lady continued.

"Um..."

I pictured my collection of baby gear, which currently consists of three infant White Sox jerseys, a fuzzy blanket, and a stuffed giraffe, all Christmas gifts from family.

"Not exactly," I said. "I'm planning to start collecting everything in February."

Just then the instructor called, "Ladies, time for class to begin!" so our conversation ended.

The class lived up to everything I had hoped—it was relaxing yet challenging, and I could feel my muscles straining with each pose. The next day I felt sore in that awesome post-workout way. I especially enjoyed the pro-life undertone to the class, however unintended; each time the instructor urged us to "Send peaceful energy and warm thoughts to your baby," I smiled as I touched my belly and thought about the beloved little person within.

But after I came home, I found myself unsettled. I couldn't get that lady's question out of my head.

Should I be ready? Was I a bad mom for not being ready? Is it even possible to be ready for something as life-changing as your first child?

Surely I couldn't be the only mom out there waiting until the third trimester to start buying baby stuff. I decided to get back-up from a long-distance pregnant friend.

"Have you started buying baby stuff?" I texted her.

"Yep, we bought the stroller, car seat, bassinet and a sling carrier back in October," she said.

Hang on a second. This girl is due a month

after

me. How did she already have all that??

If I felt bad before, I felt worse now. Even my friend, who shares my happy-go-lucky, make-it-up-as-you-go-along approach to life, was more ready than I was.

Of course I did the only logical thing at that point, which was to obsessively Google baby essentials and stroller comparison charts. I had been working on my "Stuff Baby Needs" list since I found out I was pregnant, but I hadn't felt the need to buy anything yet. Now it suddenly seemed incredibly urgent.

I spent so long agonizing over which sling carrier and car seat and breast pump would be best that I couldn't fall asleep that night. Visions of Bugaboo contraptions and cloth diaper detergents danced in my head, and I found myself agonizing,

How on earth are we going to afford all this?

Our budget has barely an inch of wiggle room these days, and baby stuff ain't cheap. It was hours before I could calm myself down enough to fall asleep.

Baby gear was still on my mind at work yesterday as I headed out to lunch with a lovely Mormon co-worker. She has a one-year-old baby girl and I had asked her to meet for lunch so I could pick her brain about all things birth and baby—my favorite topics these days.

But when I arrived at her home near campus, I was in for a surprise. After chatting for a few minutes, she said, "Ok, are you ready to see the baby stuff?"

"Sure," I said. She had previously mentioned that I could borrow some of her daughter's old infant things, so I figured she had a handful of tucked-away outfits or toys to show me.

She led me to a big storage closet and I paused in the doorway to gaze at the bounty within.

"You'll definitely want the stroller—it's good for infants to about a year old," she said. "There's the infant car seat, and here are all the cloth diapers"—she pulled out the biggest plastic bag I'd ever seen, filled with an enormous stash. "Let's see, what else... we have about a million swaddle blankets"—she gestured at another bag—"and here's the breast pump. You're ok with a used one, right?"

"Yes!" I nodded vigorously. I could hardly believe my eyes and ears.

"Ok! Now, I did find the nursing covers useful—they're over there—and here are my sling carriers." She pulled out a Moby wrap and showed me how to use it. She made it look so easy. "There's the baby bath tub—that will come in handy. My baby loved to take a bath before bed." She showed me the bouncy seat and Boppy pillow and baby swing, and I wondered if she was secretly my fairy godmother.

"You can take anything you want," she said. "Just pass it on to the next mom when you're done."

It seemed almost too good to be true. "This is an answer to prayer," I told her honestly, and she smiled in understanding.

"Just ask people to give you everything used," she said. "You'll get tons of stuff and you won't feel bad about passing it to another mom when you're done."

As I walked back to work half an hour later, clutching her "favorite" pregnancy book and a maternity dress she'd lent me, and with plans to return with my car for the rest of the stuff, I realized a great weight had been lifted off my mind. No longer did I need to compare baby gear and agonizingly decide what I would actually need. All of it was being given to me, free of charge—just about every item I'd included on my list.

I texted Frank the exciting news—all our baby gear! Free!—and thought about how silly I'd been to worry. Every time I agonize over something, whether it's finding a job in Chicago last spring or affording all our baby stuff now, God sends me a solution better than anything I could have dreamed.

And I remembered something my grandmother once said: "Every baby arrives with a loaf of bread under his arm." I had heard before that when you're open to life, willing to accept children lovingly, God will send whatever you need to take care of them. I could hardly believe how completely that had come true for us.

I may not be "ready" for the baby's arrival, at least not in the way the lady from yoga class meant. But I know that if there is one thing I will teach my baby, it's to trust God in all things and at all times. I have seen again and again that He never fails us. And in that sense, I think I'm as ready as I can ever be.

7 Ways to Help Foster Children in Your Area [at Garden of Holiness]

My husband and I have been foster parents (and adoptive and birth parents) since 2002. This past week we attended training to become teachers of future foster parents. We are so excited to pass on everything we have learned through the years and are looking forward to learning so much more. We all know that it is a Christian duty and privilege to help the neediest among us with our talents and abilities. With this post, I would like to present some ideas for you to consider helping the needy foster children in our communities.



#1 Become a foster parent!

Of course the very best way you could help foster children would be to become a well trained, compassionate, and enthusiastic foster parent but not everyone has that option. There are numerous reasons why you might not be able to become a foster parent, but there is no reason why everyone in our communities can't help out foster children in some way.

There are other ways to help foster children

even if you can't be a foster parent:

#2 Become a respite care giver

If your circumstances don't allow you to be a full time foster parent, is it possible that you could become a part-time foster parent? Is your life structured so that you could take in a child for a few days on occasion? There is a tremendous need for qualified people able to care for foster children temporarily while their regular foster families are unable to. They are suddenly faced with an unexpected business trip or a hospital stay, for example. You'd think it'd be easy for any family to find child care in such a situation, via a relative or a family friend, but it really isn't. Due to the licensing and background check requirements for anyone who cares for foster children, many foster families are unable to come up with temporary alternative care.

That is why there is a pool of qualified, part time people who are pre-certified and willing to step in. They go through all the necessary training and background checks to become a foster parent, and then they simply wait for a phone call from foster families in their area who need them. Contact your local child protection agency and find out more about the requirements needed to become a respite care provider.

#3 Become involved in annual holiday gift drives.



Each year, local child protection agencies take down information about their foster children and present it to Toys for Tots or other organizations to ensure that needy children in foster care are provided with necessities and gifts during the Holidays. People just like you get involved by donating money, going shopping, wrapping presents, or delivering them to the agency or child. Call your local department of child welfare and see when these activities begin in your area and what you can do as a volunteer.

#4 Donate, Donate, Donate



When kids come into care, they often only come with the clothes on their backs (and sometimes not even that). Not only do they need clothing, all the little daily necessities of life need to be provided: toothbrushes, toothpaste, socks, underclothes, jackets, shoes, combs and brushes, hair ties and clips, diapers and wipes. Each child protection agency usually has a resource room for social workers to provide a change of clothing for a child newly entering the foster care system, so call your local office about the types of items that are needed and the procedure for making a donation.

Our local agency in Amarillo takes gently used items. Yours may, too. If you don't have a favorite charity that you donate your old children's items to already, seriously consider donating to your local foster care agency.

#5 Scrapbooking!



"Scrapbooking?" Yes, scrapbooking. Children in care need to have connections with their family of origin. They need that tangible reminder of who they are and where they came from. Even if circumstances were bad enough for them to be placed into care, kids love their mommies. They miss their home, their friends, their old class at school. Those of us involved in foster care try to keep up a scrap book with pictures, letters, and reminders of their history. Is scrapbooking your thing? Could you help a child with updating her Lifebook or could you organize a scrapbooking workshop for several children? Some children who come in and out of care need to have their books recreated and others need to get started on one. If you love to scrapbook, we in the foster care world would love to have your help! Call your local agency and offer your talents!

#6 Spread the word!

In our communities, there are people who would make great foster parents but they've never even considered the option. They've never knowingly met a foster child or a foster parent, so it has simply never crossed their mind to get involved. We need your help reaching them! Become a foster advocate. Post information on upcoming trainings on your Facebook and Twitter pages. Post this article! Talk about foster care at your church!

#7 Be a great parent!



Finally, the best way to help children is to be the best parent you can be to your own children. Be a loving parent and raise up a new generation of loving parents. Help ensure that the circumstances that generate children in need of foster care don't exist in your little corner of the world.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gardenofholiness.blogspot.com/2014/01/7-ways-to-help-foster-children-in-your.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

Whose Responsibility is My Happiness? [at Naru Hodo]

Earlier this week, a friend of mine shared the article "

[10 Things Happy Families Do Differently.](#)

" The picture with it caught my eye, and I was in a browsy mood, so I checked it out.

One particular statement from this article has stayed with me since I read it: "Everyone takes responsibility for their own happiness."

Now, I'm not usually one who gets a lot of out people's pithy lists of tips for how to make life all better. And my response to this was not along the lines of "Gee, thanks. I'll try that." But seeing this concept expressed in just this way in this context some something of a little naru hodo moment for me.

Two memories stood out as I've thought about this. The first involved the formation of my sense about where happiness comes from. And the fact that, in this formation, happiness was a commodity for other people. This happiness was supposed to come from me.

Oh, I would never have explicitly articulated it this way in my earlier years, but growing up in a post-alcoholic-divorced home taught me that it was my job to make the people around me happy. (Or stated conversely, everyone's unhappiness was my fault.) I decided that the easiest way for me to try to bring happiness was to "not bother anyone" and so I perfected my ability to lay no burden on others. Still, of course, others weren't happy. My eventual conclusion: my mere existence was the problem.

It never really entered into my calculations, this notion of where

my
happiness was supposed to come from.

The second memory involved my children when they were very small. On one particular night a common bedtime scene was being played out where my tired daughter was crying over some tiny nothing, consuming all my ability to be present to her and calm her so she could go to sleep. At that moment, my son entered her room, seemingly totally oblivious to the emotional drama unfolding, and asked me to intervene with some need of his that involved something like finding just the right lego to make his creation look just right. I can still see exactly where I was when this thought formulated inside me. It was sarcastic at first, but the reality of what I said impacted me shortly thereafter : "Boy, I wish I could consider my needs so dang important that I could overlook everything around me to get them met!"

My son did nothing wrong; he merely had no sense of timing (at age 5 or 6 or whatever). I, on the other hand, had a gut instinct that needs and desires are always supposed to be sacrificed on the pyre of someone else's issues.

In 1993, right after I came into the Church, I went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a group. In one of the many gift shops I saw what struck me as the most beautiful t-shirt I had ever seen. I literally gasped as I said, "Oh, I want one of those!" Now, this is not a normal comment coming from me because I don't care about shopping and care even less about "stuff." It was the beauty of the metallic gold embellishments that made me exclaim this in something like awe. I'll never forget an older woman from my group saying to me, "Well, you just go ahead and get it, then." I think I triggered something in her maternal heart that prompted her to "give me permission" to buy it. I did, and I still have it. Perhaps it is telling that this was an unusually memorable experience from my earlier days of seeing and pursuing something that brought me spontaneous happiness. I don't remember making choices like this on any regular basis until recent years.

Pursuing my own happiness used to leave me with a sense of guilt. If it was my job to get out of everyone's way so they could be happy, being as small and non-existent as possible, well, it didn't make sense for me to be filled up and big with happiness. Geez, the more I write about this the more diabolical it sounds.

Each person has the vocation, the duty, and the need to pursue happiness, beatitude, God. It is true that no one finds it alone, in isolation from others. But I am responsible for my pursuit of God, and you are responsible for yours. I am not responsible for yours, although mine actually can inspire yours, and yours, mine.

Of course children need adult wisdom to learn what will mess up their pursuit of happiness. Or better put, children and adults need biblical and saintly wisdom to learn how to pursue true happiness. Without it, we end up indulging ourselves with idolatry and filling ourselves up with not-god, at the expense of other things and/or objectified people whom we appoint to be god to us and make us happy. It ain't gonna happen. Nothing other than God satisfies the quest for happiness. Yes, created things can help us; we require their help. But idolatry not only leaves us unfulfilled, it actually empties us of whatever happiness we have found.

Personal responsibility for happiness means that I seek truth, beauty and goodness with all my heart, through every aspect of my life, and that I open my entire life to interact with the One I find. Yeah, I imagine if everyone in a family did that it would make for a happy life together indeed.

This contribution is available at <http://lift-up-your-hearts.blogspot.com/2014/01/whose-responsibility-is-my-happiness.html>
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In the Quiet [at The Wayward Catholic]

January 8, 2014

Stop what you are doing and listen. What do you hear? I hear the television, earlier it was internet radio. Do you hear something as well? Are you listening to music? Reading this and talking on the phone? Think about your whole day, are you one of those, like me, who always has to have some noise around you? Why?

The opposite of noise is quiet. Do you ever spend any time in quiet, with no noise? Are you afraid of quiet? Why? Are you afraid of what you might hear? What can you hear when it is quiet? Can you hear anything? Can you hear someone talking to you?

When we surround ourselves with noise, we can't hear what is in the quiet. We can't hear who is talking to us in the quiet. We can only hear noise, noise coming from the one who doesn't want us to hear what the One who talks to us in the quiet wants us to hear. Him.

Take some quiet time and listen, you just might be surprised what you hear.

This contribution is available at http://thewaywardcatholic.com/2014/01/08/in_the_quiet/
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My Patron Saint for 2014: Elizabeth Ann Seton [at The Koala Bear Writer]

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 (after her father remarried).

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 in an attempt to cure William's tuberculosis. They traveled with only their eldest daughter, leaving four children in America with Rebecca. Unfortunately, William died just after Christmas that year.

When Elizabeth found herself in a strange place, far from those she loved, she turned to God, just

as I did when I was in Australia. 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 (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 Catholic. 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 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. She is the patron saint of Catholic schools.

The image of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton is used with permission from HappySaints. You can find colouring pages and crafts on Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in [the Happy Saints eBook 4](#).

This contribution is available at <http://www.thekoalabearwriter.com/2014/01/elizabeth-ann-seton/>
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The Memorare [at mommynovenas]

Cold icy winds seem never ending. Spring seems so far away. Thankfully, we are never without the enduring presence of Our Savior's unconditional love, Our Blessed Mother's holy intercession, or our beloved Saint Joseph's protection.



The Memorare:

"Remember o most Blessed Virgin Mary, that never was it known, that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee oh Virgin of Virgins our Mother. To thee do we come, before thee we kneel sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy clemency hear and answer me. Amen."

This contribution is available at <http://mommynovenasdelora.blogspot.com/2014/02/are-we-there-yet.html>
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Conversion: An Enigma to Paganism and Secularism [at Sky View]

When Christianity is seen as an exclusive and singularly privileged religion by its adherents, history demonstrates that it does well. In fact, one can argue from history that to the extent Christians professed their faith in Christ as being wholly unique- not only a faith unlike others but a corresponding morality unlike others –conversions were never wanting. This defies conventional wisdom, to be sure. But the truth is that with high standards Christianity grew by leaps and bounds even when state-sponsored persecutions were unleashed by the Roman Empire.

Fr. Raoul Plus, in his book,

Radiating Christ

, S.J. captured the genius of having high spiritual and moral standards. He wrote the following in 1944:

“There is no need to be afraid of asking too much. What attracts the young especially is the hard task, the difficult exploit. If you want volunteers for easy work, they are not enthusiastic. When faced with a choice of a religious order, souls that have a vocation seem by instinct to adopt those orders which are more fervent and more exacting. Similarly, souls will only enroll themselves in the service of a leader or an organization if they see that there are sacrifices to make and hard work to do.”

Our Lord capitalized on the attractiveness of such an appeal when he demanded from his disciples the very lives. He wanted everything from them! To bury a deceased loved one or to even say farewell to one’s family had to give way to following him. And this, more than anything else, was symbolic of the kind of conversion he required from his followers. In the Gospel of Mark he prefaced the kerygma with these revolutionary words: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

To “repent and believe” hardly seems revolutionary. But it was to the ancient pagans! To believe all that Christ taught without exception; to observe his moral law as a condition of being his disciple; and to be exclusively devoted to him while manifestly rejecting the gods of the Greco-Roman world [also known as Hellenism] was preposterous to ancient pagan sensibilities.

Michael Green made this very point in his book,

Evangelism in the Early Church

(1970, 2003). He argued that Christian conversion- especially as it pertained to belief, morality

and the exclusive claims that Christianity made on its adherents -was not only a scandal, but it was an enigma to the ancients. It simply was unknown to the unbaptized world.

As for belief, Green said, "In the first place, Hellenistic men and women did not regard belief as necessary for the cult." "So long as the traditional sacrifices were offered," Green continues, "so long as the show went on, all would be well. You were not required to believe in the deities you worshiped: many people like Lucretius and Juvenal scoffed at the stories of the traditional gods but they were careful to continue the sacrifices on which on which the safety of the state and the well-being of society were held to depend."

Keep in mind that intolerance to religious error is a Judeo-Christian thing. The ancient pagans, on the other hand, did not subscribe to a creedal religion. The worship of certain gods was rarely fixed and religious tolerance was a social necessity. Hence, to be selective as to what one believed about the gods was entirely consistent with being a "good pagan."

But Christianity was different. It inherited an imperative for doctrinal purity from Judaism. Christ said to his Apostles to make disciples of all nations by "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." About four centuries later, St. Augustine, as with the early Christians, took our Lord's words, "all that I have commanded" quite seriously. He said, "There can be nothing more dangerous than those heretics who admit nearly the whole cycle of doctrine, and yet by one word, as with a drop of poison, infect the real and simple faith taught by our Lord and handed down by Apostolic tradition." Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that there was an expectation in the early Church that all of what Christ commanded was to be believed and obeyed.

"Secondly," Green adds, "Hellenistic men and women did not regard ethics as part of religion. It made little difference to your behavior whether you were a devotee of Mithras or a worshiper of Isis." That's right. Being a priest or priestess in ancient Greece did not necessitate high moral standards. Even the Greek philosophers were wanting in virtue. As regards to Plato, he "condemned drunkenness but approved of it on the feast of Bacchus. In the 'Republic' he recommends infanticide and a community of wives." (James Cardinal Gibbons,

Our Christian Heritage

1889)

It is a Christian invention that religion and morality go hand in hand. Even the charge of hypocrisy that is often leveled against the Church nowadays is only possible because it was the Church herself that made belief and morality to be inseparable. Thanks to her, the creed that one professes is expected to correspond to the morality one lives. And all who wanted to join her ranks during those first centuries had to make a clean break with their immoral past and embrace a life of virtue. No half measures, partial commitments or nominal Christians were countenanced. "For whoever keeps the whole law," wrote St. James, "but falls short in one particular, has become guilty in respect to all of it." (2:10) Fidelity to all of God's laws gives credibility faith. Morality and faith cannot be divorced. Indeed, this is yet another reason why conversion was an enigma to

the ancient pagans.

“The third reason why the idea of Christian conversion was so surprising to Hellenistic people,’ Green writes, “was the exclusive claims it made on its devotees. Christians were expected to belong, body and soul, to Jesus, who was called their master...” It’s not just Michael Green that makes this important point. E. Glenn Hinson, in his book,

The Evangelization of the Roman Empire: Identity and Adaptability

(1981) also brings to the fore this idea of exclusivity. Hinson said, “What was built into their corporate life was the exclusivism of the monotheistic covenant...The institutional forms, developed gradually in response to the challenge of enlisting and incorporating new converts, did much to inculcate and sustain the exclusivism of Christianity.”

This Christian exclusivity was expressed in ancient liturgical prayer known as the

Gloria

. The

Gloria

was added to the Mass during the second century; not too long after St. John the Apostle died. The prayer ends with the following exclamation: “For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.” If one were to read between the lines it might read something like this:

glory only to the Holy Trinity and to no other gods

! But to refuse worship or even honor of other gods was considered to be the height of arrogance and intolerance. Yet, the early Church flourished in spite of it; even in a highly pluralistic civilization.

This leads us to the reason why Michael Green’s book,

Evangelism in the Early Church

(1970), has valuable insights for today’s Church. It has something to do with the striking similarity ancient paganism has with modern day secularism. What made the idea of Christian conversion a scandalous one to the pagans is what makes it a scandal in our secular society as well. To believe all that Christ taught through his Church without exception, to sincerely repent from all mortal sin and hence live a virtuous life, and to profess a faith that is not just one among many is an intolerable kind of conversion to those who subscribe to secular values. And to be sure, this is why such conversion is rarely insisted upon in many Catholic circles. But as Fr. Raoul Plus said, what attracts people is the hard task, the difficult exploit. And do we not do a disservice to souls

and to the Church when we over accommodate and make conversion out to be too easy?

This contribution is available at http://catholic-skyview-tremblay.blogspot.com/2014/01/conversion-enigma-to-paganism-and_6538.html

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| [Contents](#) |

An Ordeal [at Doubting Thomist Art & Faith]

My child, if you aspire to serve the Lord,
Prepare yourself for an ordeal. (Ecclesiasticus 2:1, NJB)

The word "ordeal" means an extremely severe or trying test, experience, or trial. That's what Sirach promises us if we plan to follow God. Not health and wealth, or an easy life. Not even a life that averages good and bad days. He tells us that if we want to serve God, we should be prepared for trial-by-fire type misery. Throughout the second chapter of Ecclesiasticus, he gives us the impression that this ordeal isn't going to be a one-time deal, either. In fact, let's face it: the martyrs get off pretty lucky. They get their painful trial all at once, and then their reward. For the majority of us, however, the ordeal is one of endurance, of perseverance, of continuously striving to do the difficult thing because the difficult thing is so often the right thing. Growing up Pentecostal, that wasn't a teaching I heard very often. Maybe that's because Pentecostals don't have Ecclesiasticus in their Bibles. Whether it was taught explicitly or implicitly, suffering and hardship were seen as God's disfavour. How many people do I know who started out with the noble aspiration to serve the Lord, only to find their faith shaken and shattered when the ordeal came. Where was God then? That kitschy "Footprints" poem rings a little hollow when it says God carries us through the hard times, when we look around and our world has fallen apart more than once. If we believe that God's role in our lives is just to bless us or heal us or make us happy (because that's what the Bible promises us, isn't it? Isn't it?), then we'll be woefully unprepared for the ordeals of life.

Sirach tells us to

prepare

for an ordeal. We need to expect difficulty, to steel ourselves for it. We're not going to always experience the consolations of an emotional sense of God's nearness. Jesus, who

was

God, and was always immediately present with the Father, nevertheless in His human nature, felt alone and abandoned by the Father on the Cross. Shall we, who are only human, expect to always feel that God is with us? Bl. Mother Teresa suffered through the agonising sense of separation from God every day for the last twenty years of her life. When this admission of hers was published posthumously, many people immediately jumped to the conclusion that she had somehow abandoned her faith. Yet the fact is, her commitment--to the poor of Calcutta and to God--never wavered, and she continued to do what she had always done. She was prepared for the ordeal. She knew that feelings are unreliable, but that faith and the knowledge that God will never leave us, no matter how we feel, is what is true.

This is our preparation: to know that the trial will come, and to know God, to know that His presence and His love are not dependent upon our feelings, and that our suffering doesn't mean He doesn't love us. How do we achieve this preparedness? I can think of no better way than to gaze lovingly upon the Crucifix and meditate daily upon His Passion. For love of us, He endured His own ordeal, in order that when we surrender to Him in ours, the very suffering and pain that we endure will be the

source

of grace. God did promise that if we serve Him, we will be happy, but He didn't promise that we would be happy in this valley of tears. So we must be prepared to persevere in hope.

You who fear the Lord, hope for those good gifts of his,
Everlasting joy and mercy. (Ecclesiasticus 2:9, NJB)

This contribution is available at <http://doubting-thomist.blogspot.ca/2014/01/an-ordeal.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Christian Community: Part 1 [at Blissful Thinking]

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines community as "a unified group of individuals." When Brandon and I were asked to write and present a talk on Christian community for a Catholic retreat for college students, the first thing I did was search good ol' Google for the definition.

Community is a word I use rather frequently, especially during the time I worked in Student Activities and was tasked with "building community among students" right on my job description. "A unified group of individuals" is just about as broad as you can get. There's probably no personal trait or belief that I don't share with many someone-elses in this world. So what is *Christian* community and why does it matter? Over the next few posts I'll be sharing with you our reflections on community, the impact they've had on our lives, and how we attempt to treat our marriage as one of the most important examples of Christian community.



First of all, God put us together on this earth for a reason. Think about it—He could have put us each on our very own planet if He wanted, filled with plenty of resources, feeling constantly showered with love, with the purpose to serve and praise and love Him for our entire lives. But He didn't. Instead we are here on this earth, born out of love between two other humans into a family, and even though this community is far from perfect, a community of people is exactly what it is. We are surrounded by other human beings pretty much anywhere we choose to wander.

God put us here together for a reason. Humans, and especially Christians, are called to life in community. We are to transform society through our vocations and the way we live our daily lives. How do we know? Well, in Paul's letter to the Romans, he extrapolates on the definition of

community:

For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12: 4-18)

Paul reminds us that we are all given gifts by the Holy Spirit and deems these gifts useless if we don't share them with others: the purpose of community. Think of some of the groups of people you've been involved with throughout your life. Whether they are your family, the school you attended, or a parish you were a member of, you might say that you've been shaped and perhaps even defined by them. Whether good or bad, you are constantly influenced by those around you. Think about the gifts and talents you have both shared and received with the other members of those groups. These reciprocities are both a way of loving your neighbor and also the basis of Christian community.



In each of our lives, we have had people within our own families and friends model what it looks like to use their gifts within a community. My mom always stressed how important the gift of family is and modeled this to us frequently. I can remember numerous occasions when my sister and I were reprimanded for not looking out for one another more. We're only 2 years apart and therefore found it easy to have mutual friends who would come over and we'd all play together, especially between the ages of 6-10. There was one friend who would instigate arguments between my sister and I, at times telling us that she liked one of us better than the other. When my

mom found out about it, she'd always respond that as sisters we had no choice but to be one another's BFF. "Other friends will come and go," she said, "but your sister will be in your life forever." Although eyes were rolled in response at the time, I totally get it now. Relationships are important, but especially those with family who just aren't going anywhere!

My family was intentional about using the gifts each of us was given to also build and maintain our relationships. There were many things that we did as a family. For example, both of my parents coached my sisters and I in volleyball, with more than 15 years between them. We'd all go to games together, joined by my grandparents who rarely missed any sporting event, sacrament, or theatre production. They both fostered our interests and shared their gifts of generosity and encouragement with us.

We were shown that not only is it important to use your own God-given talents, but also to encourage others in their callings. My dad is a talented singer and actor and I can remember many, many rehearsals I attended with him—not because I was in the show, but because I wanted to watch! It is an amazing feeling to be truly proud of your dad and I was lucky enough to experience it at young age. Also, my mom was willing to sacrifice time with him at home so that he could pursue his passion. These experiences shaped how I view relationships in community and taught me how important and necessary it is to both foster and cherish the people in our lives.

Now, before you think that I'm being completely Susie Sunshine and ignoring the fact that living in community with others is *so hard*, I have to say—living community can be so hard! While I cherish these relationships, they have sometimes been difficult to maintain. If only you asked my dad how tense our relationship was in high school...

By asking for God's grace, however, we are able to face the challenges daily living in community presents. It is *only* through this grace that we can find mercy, forgiveness, and patience, all of which are necessary when interacting closely with others. It is then that we are also able to enjoy the rewards.



Brandon’s family experienced the gift of generosity and the rewards of community when he was a senior in high school. One morning he was called out of class over the PA system and then told that he should go home immediately—it was an emergency. When he pulled up to the farm his family lived on, the barn was on fire. The same barn that held all of their cows, the cows from which they made a living milking. They lost many of their cows, had to sell the others because there was no place to house the ones who had been saved, and had a huge, burned down mess in their yard. It was devastating, to say the least. Afterwards many members of the community approached Brandon’s dad saying, “Let us help you. People really want to help you right now.” And so they had help cleaning up their farm, selling their cows, meals brought to them, etc.

When Brandon has told this story, he always recalls seeing a genuine spirit of generosity and selfless giving in the people who came to help, just wanting to show his dad that they were there for him in a time of great need. How incredible is it that when one member of a community is suffering, many other members can, and will, do whatever they can to help out!

But God has so constructed the body
as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,
so that there may be no division in the body,
but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.
If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it;
if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. (1 Corinth 12)

The friends and neighbors that helped his family not only showed their concern, but took

action to help ease their suffering. God uses each part of His body of Christ to aid and balance out the other parts. Showing Christian love to others, because we were loved by Him first, gives God honor and glory and raises these communities to a higher calling.

What does vocation have to do with community and how do we try to infuse this into our marriage? Click on over to read [Christian Community:Part 2](#).

This contribution is available at <http://daniellekuboushek.blogspot.com/2014/01/christian-community-part-1.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Month of the Holy Name of Jesus [at Happy Little Homemaker]

*** This post originally appeared in January 2010 and has been modified to include additional information for the month. ***

January is dedicated to the Month of the Holy Name of Jesus in the Catholic liturgical year. As such, the month is dedicated to reminding us of the power of Jesus' name.

There are several short aspirations that could be added, in the fashion of praying without ceasing:

There is also a lovely Litany of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, that I have a hard time saying silently and/or by myself, but that I love.

Litany of the Most Holy Name of Jesus

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us. Jesus, hear us. Jesus, graciously hear us.

God the Father of heaven, *have mercy on us.*

God the Son, redeemer of the world,

God the Holy Ghost,

Holy Trinity, one God,

Jesus, Son of the living God,

Jesus, brightness of eternal light,

Jesus, king of glory,

Jesus, son of justice,

Jesus, Son of the virgin Mary,

Jesus, most amiable,

Jesus, most admirable,

Jesus, the mighty God,

Jesus, father of the world to come,

Jesus, angel of great counsel,

Jesus, most powerful,

Jesus, most patient,

Jesus, most obedient,

Jesus, meek and humble of heart,

Jesus, lover of chastity,

Jesus, lover of us,

Jesus, God of peace,

Jesus, author of life,

Jesus, example of virtues,

Jesus, zealous lover of souls,
Jesus, our God,
Jesus, our refuge,
Jesus, father of the poor,
Jesus, treasure of the faithful,
Jesus, good Shepherd,
Jesus, true light,
Jesus, eternal wisdom,
Jesus, infinite goodness,
Jesus, our way and our life,
Jesus, joy of angels,
Jesus, king of Patriarchs,
Jesus, master of the Apostles,
Jesus, teacher of the Evangelists,
Jesus, strength of martyrs,
Jesus, light of Confessors,
Jesus, purity of virgins,
Jesus, crown of all saints, *have mercy on us.*

Be merciful, *spare us, O Jesus.*

Be merciful, *graciously hear us, O Jesus.*

From all evil, *deliver us, O Jesus.*

From all sin,

From Thy wrath,

From the snares of the devil,

From the spirit of fornication,

From everlasting death,

From the neglect of Thine inspirations,

By the mystery of Thy holy Incarnation,

By Thy nativity,

By Thine infancy,

By Thy most divine life,

By Thy labors,

By Thine agony and passion,

By Thy cross and dereliction,

By Thy sufferings,

By Thy death and burial,

By Thy resurrection,

By Thine ascension,

By Thine institution of the most Holy Eucharist,

By Thy joys,

By Thy glory, *deliver us, O Jesus.* Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, *spare us, O Jesus.*

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, *hear us, O Jesus.*

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, *have mercy on us, O Jesus.*

Jesus, *hear us.*

Jesus, *graciously hear us.*

Let us pray.

O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast said: ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; mercifully attend to our supplications, and grant us the gift of Thy divine charity, that we may ever love Thee with our whole heart and with all our words and deeds, and may never cease from praising Thee.

Make us, O Lord, to have a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name, for Thou never failest to help and govern those whom Thou dost bring up in Thy steadfast fear and love; who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

While the DAY for the Most Holy Name of Jesus is over, it is the focus for the whole month. Here are some fun crafts and activities I've found around the web.

This contribution is available at <http://www.happylittlehomemaker.com/2014/01/january-devotion-month-holy-name-jesus/>

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| [Contents](#) |

Happy New Year 2014. Your Name is.... [at Em's Estuary]

.... I'll tell you in a moment. But first allow me to tell you about our RUCKUS New Year's Eve!
HA



You see all that ruckus right? haha Rum & coke in a Naval Academy glass. Sparklers. Poppers. Wii Bowling. Board games. Coffee (in my new [Mantilla Mug from CafePress](#)). Champagne and/or fizzy grape juice. AND reading the notes in our Blessing Jar. That was so awesome. We all plan to write more notes this year.

It is beautiful here today. BEAUTIFUL! It's 71 degrees outside. We have been outside all afternoon. Well, I got up around Noon. We were preparing to go to Mass, but a friend's husband had to be rushed to the hospital and we have the children. I know our Lord will forgive us. Pray for us. I hated not starting the New Year in Mass. And yet, I am glad to be here for our friends.

[Jenny, over at Plain Grace](#) has been talking about naming our year. In the Catholic Church, we love to name things. The Liturgical year of 2013 was the Year of Faith. 2014 is the year of _____ (I can't find it). But the year 2015 is the Year of Religious Life. We name our seasons, our Feast Days, etc. It is a great way to remember things frankly.

As for my family, we chose the word HEALTH to name our Year. Yep, we talked about it and hope/pray we will meet the goals we set for ourselves this year... the year of HEALTH. It's time.

health *noun, often attributive* \ˈheɪlθ *also* ˈhelθ\
: the condition of being well or free from disease
: the overall condition of someone's body or mind
: the condition or state of something

Full Definition of HEALTH

1 a : the condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit; especially : freedom from physical disease or pain
b : the general condition of the body <in poor *health*> <enjoys good *health*>
2 a : flourishing condition : well-being <defending the *health* of the beloved oceans — Peter Wilkinson>
b : general condition or state <poor economic *health*>

Related to HEALTH

Synonyms

[fitness](#), [healthiness](#), [heartiness](#), [robustness](#), [sap](#), [soundness](#), [verdure](#), [wellness](#), [wholeness](#), [wholesomeness](#)

Antonyms

[illness](#), [sickness](#), [unhealthiness](#), [unsoundness](#)

Related Words

[fettle](#), [shape](#), [cleanliness](#), [hygiene](#), [hardiness](#), [lustiness](#), [robustiousness](#), [ruggedness](#), [stamina](#), [strength](#), [toughness](#), [vigor](#), [vigorousness](#), [vitality](#), [bloom](#), [flush](#), [flushness](#), [activeness](#), [agility](#), [liveliness](#), [spryness](#), [weal](#), [welfare](#), [well-being](#)

Near Antonyms

[debility](#), [decrepitude](#), [feebleness](#), [frailness](#), [infirmity](#), [lameness](#), [sickness](#), [weakness](#), [ailment](#), [condition](#), [disease](#), [disorder](#), [malady](#), [trouble](#)

I know my definition box is big. Health means so many things. Just look at the Synonyms/Related words & Antonyms/near antonyms... what we do and what we do not want to be for sure. Yep we are striving for healthy inside and out. Do I think we are healthy? In a lot of ways – YES.

- We all need to lose weight. This needs no explanation.
- Eat less. We are good cooks, but we are learning to cook even more healthy. Sigh – it's hard.
- Move more. We are turning our garage into a gym. Yes we are! Universal gym is there. We are looking for a stationary bike AND a treadmill.
- Less TV. More reading (this is a healthy trend). We are not BIG TV watchers, but we moved the TV out of our room.
- Less Computer time for me. I need to plan my blogs out so that I don't get on and then.... Facebook! — it is my "squirrel" (think Up! The movie).
- We all need to work on spiritual wholesomeness (it's one thing to read/talk about something, but to live it is KEY). We all know those people who talk (ad nauseum) about all the spectacular things they read and such... but do they LIVE what they are talking?
- We all need to make better choices of friends and putting ourselves out there. We are a pretty giving bunch, my family, and we need to be more particular about who we give to and share with. Military family life can get lonely. And although we are not in the military anymore, we are alone here in FW in terms of long-term friends/family. And that is hard. Sometimes loneliness can make you see friendships that aren't there and such. It's unhealthy. And we have made big strides to change this for ourselves. We have met some wonderful people and have really weeded out those who are not... And yes, we still pray for them.

I can not guarantee free from disease. Only God can. But I have read a lot about exercise and healthy eating curing diseases. I believe it is with God's help of course.

Look, let me be honest, I need work with punctuality, patience and a lot else. I need to read the 30+ books I have here on my shelves I haven't touched and the other 20 or so on my Kindle that were FREE and I couldn't resist. There are many things this year could be named.

But for us – it means getting healthy. Mentally – Physically – Financially – Spiritually! We are to be good Stewards of our bodies/minds/environment... so getting healthy is going to be hard work! We are up for the task!

Here are a couple Bible verses I found that mention health. Some were kinda scary... but here we go:

1. [Sirach 30:14](#)

Better off poor, **healthy**, and fit than rich and afflicted in body.

2. [Sirach 31:20](#)

Healthy sleep depends on moderate eating; he rises early, and feels fit. The distress of sleeplessness and of nausea and colic are with the glutton.

Go on over and link up with Jenny and the rest of us at [Plain Grace](#). What did you name your year? I would love to hear!

Pray for us! That we may live up to our goals and our quest for Health!

Love, Hugs & Blessings,

Em

This contribution is available at <http://emilysestuary.wordpress.com/2014/01/01/happy-new-year-2014-your-name-is/>
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| [Contents](#) |

Forty-Plus Years of Legal Mass Murder [at Justin's Corner]

Today we Americans observe with great sorrow the forty-first anniversary of the unconstitutional, unjust, and tragic

Roe v. Wade

decision.

On January 22, 1973, seven men on the U.S. Supreme Court arbitrarily decided that a woman has a right to kill her innocent unborn child for any reason whatsoever. In producing this ruling, the Court misinterpreted the Fifth Amendment to our Constitution, which states, “No person shall be... deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” This passage, along with most of the Fifth Amendment, was written to protect the rights of persons accused of crimes. When our nation’s Founders authored this text, they meant that no one could be executed or deprived of his freedom or land without first being properly tried and convicted of a crime. But the irresponsible activist Court led by Chief Justice Warren Burger chose to ignore the intent of the Constitution’s authors and, through some incomprehensible twist of logic, arbitrarily reinterpreted the Fifth Amendment due process clause to justify legalizing the murder of innocent unborn persons—something the Founders would never have approved of in their wildest dreams. *Roe v. Wade* represented nothing less than an attack on the integrity and meaning of the Constitution of the United States by the very institution that is supposed to protect it, the U.S. Supreme Court.

Not only was

Roe v. Wade

an unconstitutional decision, it was also an unjust decision. In the Declaration of Independence, we the people of the United States declared, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The right to life is the most fundamental of all rights with which God the Creator has endowed all human beings. This right to life is an “unalienable” right, meaning that it cannot be taken away. Human life is sacred because it is a gift from God the Creator. To deprive an innocent human being of life is a violation of that person’s unalienable right to life. It is also a violation of the Fifth Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” Our nation’s devout Christian Founders took these principles of the natural law for granted. They could scarcely have imagined that, two hundred years later, the judicial branch of government would somehow justify allowing innocent human beings to be killed in their mothers’ wombs right here in the United States of America. They did warn, however, that the United States would not long endure without what George Washington referred to as the “indispensable supports” of religion and morality. If the people of a nation don’t believe that human rights—

especially the right to life—come from God, then those rights will be perceived as coming from the state and the state will claim the authority to give or take away those rights as it sees fit. And if people don't believe that it is wrong to deprive an innocent person of his or her right to life, then human life will not be respected.

Finally,

Roe v. Wade

was an immensely tragic decision. During the past forty-plus years, some 56.5 million innocent unborn human beings—an average of 1.38 million a year—have been murdered in their mothers' wombs through legalized abortion. That is an alarming and staggering figure. That's more than nine times the number of innocent Jews murdered in the Holocaust. It's also more than the fifty million people killed in World War II, the deadliest conflict in modern human history. It is difficult to comprehend the full magnitude of this loss of life or to calculate the full impact of this massacre of the unborn on our nation over the past forty years. Excluding miscarriages, accidents, disease, and other causes of death outside the womb, our country is currently missing some 56 million inhabitants; in addition, many of those aborted in the 1970s and 80s would now be married and raising children of their own, so our country is really missing somewhere around 70 million people, and our nation's population should be around 388 million instead of the 318 million it is now. Think of how much different—and better—things would be in our country if we had all these missing people contributing to our economy and using their God-given talents to serve our nation in a variety of professions and fields. We will never know how different the United States would be in 2014 if nearly all the innocent unborn had been born and were alive today. The absence of 70 million citizens is an incalculable loss to our nation.

Blessed John Paul II once said, "The condition for the survival of America is to respect every human person, especially the weakest and most defenseless ones, those as yet unborn." The appalling legal mass murder of the unborn in our nation must be brought to an end.

Roe v. Wade

must be overturned so that the unalienable, God-given right to life of every innocent unborn human being in the United States is once again protected by our Constitution and guaranteed by our laws. We must not rest until we achieve that goal.

This contribution is available at <http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2014/01/forty-plus-years-of-legal-mass-murder.html>
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Neil deGrasse Tyson: religion and science [at Christopher's Apologies]

Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson was recently [interviewed by Bill Moyers](#) to discuss the possibility of reconciling of religion and science (among many other things).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Neil deGrasse Tyson did not hold out a lot of hope for such a reconciliation. He said, during the interview, that previous attempts to reconcile the two had produced a “poor track record” adding, “going forward I have essentially zero confidence that there would be fruitful things to emerge from the effort to reconcile them.”

I smiled when I heard the word “essentially” because that means Tyson, as a scientist, must not fully rule out the possibility of a “reconciliation.” It is similar to the way Richard Dawkins placed the chances of God’s existence at “[6.9 out of 7](#).” They have to have some “wiggle room” if they are wrong. After all, science is only **objectively** true until the next discovery comes along and disproves the earlier theory.

This is one debate – the reconciliation of religion and science – that I don’t feel I have to enter. Strange, right? Me, *not* jumping into the fray.

The reason is pretty simple really. If something is true, then God is the source of that truth, and those things will not contradict with what the Catholic Church has received in Divine Revelation. God is the author of physics; he is the author of biology; he is the author of chemistry. I don’t have anything to fear from discoveries made in scientific fields. Father Joseph Pohle, Ph.D., D.D., wrote in his 1916 book, *God: The Author of Nature and the Supernatural*:

The Word of God, rightly interpreted, cannot clash with the firmly established conclusions of science, because both Sacred Scripture and science have God for their author. Any apparent contradiction between the two must be traceable either to some false and unproved claim on the part of science, or to an incorrect interpretation of Holy Writ (pg 104).

So basically, I disagree with the extreme positions at both ends of the spectrum: science “disproves” God or the Bible needs to be taken literally on things such as creation.

Another quotation representative of the Catholic position of the harmony between religion and science is found in the *Ecclesiastical Dictionary* under the heading, “Science and Revelation:”

True science cannot be in conflict with revelation, because the same God of truth is manifest in nature as He is in revelation. There is unity, there is harmony, there is order in all God’s works, and no part of His divine plan can conflict with the other. For let man calmly consider what revelation is, and what science is, and he will speedily come to see that any conflict

between them is the result of misunderstanding (pg 636).

From the interview with Bill Moyers, and in previous ones as well, Neil deGrasse Tyson seems very concerned about the encroachment of religion into the “classroom.” Tyson suggests there are some who would put their religious convictions above objective data:

“I’m not telling you what to think, I’m just telling you in the science class, ‘You’re not doing science. This is not science. Keep it out.’”



Neil deGrasse Tyson ✓
@neiltyson

Not that anybody asked, but I object to religion in science classrooms not because it's religion but because it's not science

4/30/13, 12:05 PM

It’s been a LONG time since I took a science class;

however, I can say with a high degree of certainty that I never heard anything about God while taking a science class. Maybe it is happening in schools today. Maybe scientists are creating a strawman to knock down. Most likely it is a combination of both.

I did a Google News search for, “religion taught in science class” and the majority of the top hits were redirects to this Bill Moyers interview (strawman creation?). To be fair though, I did find an article about a school in Texas “illegally teaching creationism.” Illegally? That’s an ugly word. We can’t use it to describe people who “illegally” enter our country; surely, we can’t use it to describe people who teach “creationism” in science class. Can’t we find a better word? 😊

I do want to introduce the Neil de Grasse Tyson video with an overall positive tone; it is not 25 minutes of him and Moyers bashing religion. In fact, neither of them “bash” religion at all. I actually really like one of Tyson’s quotes about God; he says, “At the end of the day, God has to be more to you than where science has yet to tread.” I think that is very true. That type of God, one that is completely shrouded in mystery, a mystery unrevealed by science, is a “God of the Gaps,” not the personal God of the Bible. **That** God, focuses on relationships, on making himself known to mankind which is the reason for the Incarnation of his son, Jesus.

I encourage you to watch the entire video, but if you don’t have the time, you can fast-forward to roughly 16 minutes in where the discussion is completely focused on religion and science until the end (about 9 minutes). Previous to that, they discuss dark matter, the concept of a multiverse, and galaxies colliding. It is all really interesting stuff!

GEORGES LEMAÎTRE



- Ordained a Roman Catholic Priest in 1923
- Originated the theory of the expansion of the Universe in 1927
- Originated the Big Bang theory in 1931
- Member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences from 1936, named president in 1960

SCIENCE AND FAITH ARE COMPATIBLE

Fr Georges Lemaitre is discussed briefly in the video

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| [Contents](#) |

Incredible Things Planned for Us [at The Road Home]

I read this recently - written by a momma who had just adopted her son after infertility and attempts to adopt in which other families were chosen or birth parents chose to parent rather than place for adoption:

He truly does have incredible plans for us even when it's hard to see.

I want to be clear before I continue, this isn't about this blogger, or her saying the wrong thing, she didn't, **not at all**. I'm not trying to call anyone out (that's why I'm not linking to it) or to make anyone feel bad. I'm so happy for this lady and her sweet baby, that kind of **pure happy** that seems so hard to come by as it relates to baby announcements.

This new momma, having her child in her arms, her prayers finally answered in the affirmative, she can now see the path clearly looking back on it. **Her words are true**, He truly does have incredible plans for us, even when it's hard to see. So many of you who have gone on to become parents have said similar words, no less true than these.

In the days of treatments and filling out adoption paperwork and waiting, we see the next step on the staircase, but we do not know if a baby awaits us at the top. It is hard to see. Rather than seeing incredible plans, we feel forgotten, left behind, abandoned to our sorrow.

When I read words like this, they sting. As I've said before, not because of the words themselves, but because they are a reminder of [my own pain](#). Though, I've figured something else out, they hurt **because they challenge me**. Regardless of whether or not I ever hear the words "I love you mommy", I must remember that He does have incredible plans for me. He has them for all of us. It is easy to forget this when AF arrives on Christmas Day or when pregnancy announcements seem to multiply all on their own.

For some of us, these incredible plans will include physical motherhood. For others, it will not. Only He knows the outcome (and I'm guilty of demanding that He show me what ours is...I'll leave it to you to figure out how that's working out for me...). **Our task, and what I long for is to be able to see and say and feel it deep within my bones that "He has incredible things planned for me" while I'm on this dark road that I can only see a step or two in front of me, rather than the whole journey.** That I might believe and have faith without seeing.

So these words of truth, spoken most often from one who has had their prayers answered in the way they hoped, shine a spotlight not only on my own pain, but **on my own lack of faith**. On my own inability, or perhaps refusal, to see that He does indeed have incredible things planned for us.

At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed. (John 20:29)



Rebecca

This contribution is available at <http://www.theroadhomewv.blogspot.com/2014/01/incredible-things-planned-for-us.html>

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| [Contents](#) |