

NewEvangelists.org

new
evangelists
monthly

April
2014

New Evangelists Monthly #16

April 2014

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

New Evangelists Monthly - April 2014

- [Forward](#)
...about this eBook
- [Spring Will Come Again](#)
Camino La Mancha by Lora Goulet
- [Princess Bride Revisited - Prepare to Pray](#)
TASTE and SEE by Kathleen Laplante
- [Is welfare accountability really libertarianism on overdrive?](#)
Kitchen table chats by Denise Hunnell
- [Spring Has Sprung](#)
V for Victory! by Anita Moore
- [Out of the Mouths of Converts](#)
Forget The Roads by Renee Lin
- [Saving Sex: Why My Target Audience Isn't Teens](#)
by Arleen Spenceley
- [Babies & Metaphysics](#)
Smaller Manhattans by Christian LeBlanc
- [Repealing the death penalty: not an easy call](#)
Leaven For The Loaf by Ellen Kolb
- [Why Lent is NOT a diet...](#)
For Such a Time as This by Esther Rich
- [Weekends with Chesterton](#)
Campfires and Cleats by Chris Capolino
- [God doesn't create clones](#)
JOY Alive in our hearts by Nancy Ward
- [A Bell and an Open Vein](#)
The Cloistered Heart by Nancy Shuman
- [Good Manners and Ugly Habits](#)
parishpriest by Father David Berger
- [Let There Be Light from Archbishop Desmond Tutu](#)
The Koala Bear Writer by Bonnie Way
- [I Told You So](#)
Working to be Worthy by Liana Eisenman-Wolford
- [What taking our son to Mass taught me about God's love](#)
Catholic Review by Rita Buettner

- **[Let the Rabbits Run](#)**
Dancing in the Rain by Kathryn Cooper
- **[The Story of Peace - an Inspiring YA Novel by Miriam Ezeh](#)**
String of Pearls by Laura Pearl
- **[Becoming "like" God or becoming Gods?](#)**
Catholic Deacon by Deacon Scott Dodge
- **[Lent ~ the Last Great Race](#)**
CF Family by Allison Howell
- **[Seeing with God's Eyes - JESUS heals us of our blindness...](#)**
JesusCaritasEst.org by Miriam Westen
- **[Dusty Coffee Tables and Spotted Windows](#)**
Busy Catholic Moms by Shannon Vandaveer
- **[It's Not Naaman's Fault!](#)**
Loved As If by Drusilla
- **[Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Jesus the Winnower](#)**
Dulcius Ex Asperis by Liam Ferguson
- **[Who Was That Man?](#)**
Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation by Michael Seagriff
- **[Three Reasons I Love Lent](#)**
Jess by Jess Fayette
- **[4 Things Catholics Do that Rightly Scandalize Non-Catholics](#)**
for Aleteia by Brantly Millegan
- **[Five \(5\) Catholic Action Sites](#)**
A Catholic Life by Matthew P
- **[St. Dismas & Fr. Emil Kapaun ... And ... How Do You Treat Your Priest?](#)**
The Hill Country Hermit by Theresa Doyle-Nelson
- **[Severing Ties with World Vision](#)**
St. Joseph's Vanguard by Devin Rose
- **[Feeding the Hungry \(and Allergic\)](#)**
FranciscanMom by Barbara Szyszkiewicz
- **[Playful Thomas Aquinas](#)**
walk the way by John Donaghy
- **[Yup, another post about Lent](#)**
Conversations with Sophia by Bethanie Ryan
- **[How To Say 'No' To Him](#)**
The Veil of Chastity by Cindy Hurla

- [**Faith and a NEW way of thinking**](#)
A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars by Ebeth Weidner
- [**Spiritual Motherhood: Not Just for the Infertile Woman**](#)
The Road Home by Rebecca Royse
- [**Why We Can Trust Him**](#)
The Contemplative Catholic Convert by Rich Maffeo
- [**Lent, life, loss, hope**](#)
makingthetrek by Tracy E
- [**Thankful for Everyday Life**](#)
Lord, Make Me a Saint by Jamie Jo
- [**Presence Evangelism is the New/ Old Evangelism**](#)
joy of nine9 by Melanie Jean Juneau
- [**Caught Up In Appearances**](#)
City On a Hill by Adam Morin
- [**The case for Communion on the tongue**](#)
crucesignatiblog by Christina Sawchuk
- [**Two Hearts Swelling In Sweden \(The Conversion of Ulf Ekman\)**](#)
Peace Garden Mama by Roxane Salonen
- [**Come Spirit Blest, with God the Son / Nunc, Sancte, Nobis Spiritus**](#)
Breviary Hymns by Kevin Shaw
- [**To the Woman Who Knows Her Husband Will Never Cheat on Her**](#)
Can We Cana? by Karee Santos
- [**The Catholic Study Bible - NABRE**](#)
Catholic Bibles by Timothy McCormick
- [**God Is Not a Vending Machine**](#)
Suffering With Joy by Barbara Schoeneberger
- [**The Exceeding Beauty of Creation**](#)
Treasures of the Church by Brandon Otto
- [**7 Qualities She Wants in a Catholic Man**](#)
A Still Small Voice by Zoe Jumonville
- [**Halftime Grace for Lent**](#)
bukas palad by Fr. Adrian Danker
- [**Believer or follower?**](#)
Convert Journal by George M. Sipe
- [**Waiting for the Lord and Fasting**](#)
Bartimaeus' Quiet Place by Bartimaeus Timeo
- [**Light Spreads, Darkness Stays Where It Is**](#)

- [**Walking the Camino - Trust in God or Fake It 'till you Make It**](#)
His UnEnding Love by Mallory Hoffman
- [**She Left Her Water Jar**](#)
A Catholic Heart For Home by Niki Chris
- [**Awaiting the Church's Final Decision on Medjugorje**](#)
Justin's Corner by Justin
- [**Does Your Posture Affect Your Prayer?**](#)
A Shower of Roses by Sara Boyle
- [**My Decision to Wear a Veil**](#)
Catholic Stand by Birgit Jones
- [**Agatha, Rose and other miracles**](#)
Mere Observations by Jeff Walker
- [**Play Dough and Lent**](#)
The Fisk Files by Britt Fisk
- [**Zombies Don't Share the Gospel**](#)
Flow Chart to Surrender by Julie
- [**What Would Fred Phelps Do?**](#)
Catholic Chapter House Blog by Gregory Watson
- [**Why is March 25th Tolkien Reading Day?**](#)
by Philip Kosloski
- [**Laetare Sunday and my pink belt**](#)
by Margaret Felice
- [**I Made Her Cry**](#)
This Cross I Embrace by Amy
- [**A Reformed Wedding**](#)
One Arrow Alone by Eli Stok
- [**For the Mother of Christ!**](#)
Living the Faith by Michael Ogundele
- [**Counterfeits**](#)
Bible Meditations by Barbara Hosbach
- [**A Healing Balm for the Soul**](#)
The Beautiful Gate by Mary Nicewarner
- [**"Jesus I Trust in You" is Easier Said Than Done**](#)
The Catholic Worrier by Justine Brason
- [**The Truth & Meaning of Sexuality / The Cultural Reform Begins In the Church**](#)

Sticking the Corners by Calah Alexander

- **[Mission: Atlantic City](#)**

Walk By Faith by Catie Bettendorf

- **[Are you Rolling the Dice](#)**

The Wayward Catholic by Paul Roy

- **[A Quick Field-Guide to Discussing the Saints](#)**

Even the Wilderness by Grace

- **[My First Penance Service](#)**

MCCatholic - Making Scripture Known by Mark Camp

- **[The Silenced](#)**

Pursuit of Truth Ministries by Hudson Byblow

- **[NEWSFLASH! Jesus is Lord and God, Not the State](#)**

Christ's Faithful Witness by Lawrence and Susan Fox

Forward

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

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

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

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

NewEvangelists.org

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: Regardless of where you enjoy *New Evangelists Monthly*, either online or in this format, note that copyright is exclusively retained by the respective contributing authors. If you wish to use or redistribute any of their content, please contact them directly for licensing information.

Spring Will Come Again [at Camino La Mancha]

Pain carries with it supernatural gifts.

It ignites hope that Spring will come again.

It causes us to slow down and consider

The direction of our lives.



Resting beneath the veil of pain

Is the clearest focused vision

Of the Holy Face of Jesus

In the faces of those around us.

Only Our Lord can measure the supernatural merits of pain.

We can offer our pain for the holy souls in Purgatory.

We can offer our pain for the well being of

Our loved ones as well as for those who oppose us.

Pain teaches us to live as Jesus died

With a heart full of unconditional love and forgiveness.



"The Lord is good and giveth strength in the day of trouble
and knoweth them that hope in Him"

Nahum 1:7

Douay Rheims Roman Catholic Bible

This contribution is available at <http://caminolamancha.blogspot.com/2014/03/spring-will-come-again.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Princess Bride Revisited - Prepare to Pray [at TASTE and SEE]

"Hello. My name is Kathleen Laplante. You killed my Father's Son. Prepare to pray."

That is my spoof on a popular quote from the movie Princess Bride. I am being silly, but there is some truth to it. Jesus was killed and we must continue to pray. In one form or another, our lives can become prayer, especially during Lent.

Prayer is one of the three stabilizing legs of the Lenten season:

prayer, fasting, almsgiving

.

"So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?"

(Matthew 26:40) is the famous phrase the disappointed Jesus says to the Apostles, when they fall asleep on Him that foreboding night. We may fall short like the Apostles, but the point is to strive to make all things prayer.



Monks are familiar with that concept. Prayer is their life and they have a lot to teach us. Once a year, the monks at

[St. Benedict Abbey in Still River, MA](#)

, bring in a speaker/leader and go on retreat for a week. Last October, Fr. Cassian of San Benedetto in Italy was the speaker. He gave ten conferences which had the common thread of "praying without ceasing". The list is below.

Please go to

[CONFERENCES ON PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING](#)

for the links. Fr. Cassain will be revealing one conference per week, every Friday, until just before Holy Week. The first four have already been posted.

1. 2/7: Praying Without Ceasing (49:00)
2. 2/14: Praying the Divine Office: The Connection with the Desert Tradition (44:12)
3. 2/21: Praying the Divine Office: Nihil Operi Dei Praeponatur (Let Nothing Be Preferred to the Work of God) (45:51) [included handout]
4. 2/28: Lectio Divina (41:24)
5. 3/7: Personal Prayer; St. John Cassian (46:07)
6. 3/14: Personal Prayer; Lessons from the Rule of St. Benedict (36:49)
7. 3/21: The Minor Orations; The Eucharistic Prayer (41:42) [included handout]
8. 3/28: Mass Euchology in the Roman Canon (38:35)
9. 4/4: The Mass Chants (46:37) [included handout]
10. 4/11: The Ordo Missae (The Order of the Mass) (44:00) [included handout]

Wishing you a Blessed and Holy Lenten Season,

Kathleen +

image - <http://osbnorcia.org/2014/02/21/conferences>

This contribution is available at <http://www.tasteandsee2.blogspot.com/2014/03/princess-bride-revisited-prepare-to-pray.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Is welfare accountability really libertarianism on overdrive? [at Kitchen table chats]

Mark Shea is a popular Catholic writer who is not afraid to verbally knock heads together when he sees something he doesn't like. He really dislikes anything that hints of libertarianism.

[Over at the National Catholic Register](#)

he is busy chastising "many prolife people" because they don't want to write a blank check for state assistance to single mothers. His specific quote is

"It is indeed a curious disconnect that many prolife people who support the work of Crisis Pregnancy Centers have a strange blind spot when it comes to the state providing help for low-income women in crisis pregnancies."

First of all, I am not sure who these proliferers are. Are they acquaintances of his? Are they blog commenters? How does he know that there are many of them? Has he taken a poll? Is many the same as most? Shea does not cite one specific example of pro-lifers who work at crisis pregnancy centers objecting to state help for low-income women. He only offers rumors and innuendoes and with one blog post he has tarnished the image of all those who faithfully help women in crisis pregnancies. This broad brush labeling of people is sloppy and a good way to demonize those who might disagree with him on state welfare programs without actually taking on the specific arguments.

Shea compares

[Al Gore's call for fertility management](#)

to prevent increases in the population of developing countries as a way of combatting global warming and promoting economic development to

[Rand Paul suggesting that the government could put a cap on welfare benefits](#)

. Gore is endorsing the strategy of the Gates Foundation and their promotion of contraceptives like Depo-Provera to limit large segments of the world population from reproducing. Paul is not suggesting that the government impose limits on reproduction. He is just saying that the government is not necessarily compelled to pay benefits on a per child basis. Equating these two stances is building a strawman argument and is not justified by facts.

Shea also suggests that there is something hypocritical about those who give generously at prolife crisis pregnancy centers yet balk at liberal welfare benefits: "Of course, the objection is that this[*unlimited welfare benefits*] (though, curiously not crisis pregnancy centers, which also give away free stuff to low-income women) is 'enabling' sexual irresponsibility and teaching poor people to game the system." Every time there is any sort of charity, whether it be private or state run, there has to be a balance between eligibility criteria and the liberality of aid. If the screening criteria are too stringent then people who really need help will be excluded. If the criteria are too loose, the program will be abused and limited resources will be wasted. I do not see why Shea should be surprised that the same people who hand out free stuff willy-nilly at crisis pregnancy centers want more stringent scrutiny of taxpayer supported programs. It is not unreasonable to me that the tolerance for abuse may very well be different when the program is privately funded instead of taxpayer funded.

I resent the insinuation that any attempt at accountability is hard hearted. Whether someone is receiving food from a church food pantry or receiving an EBT card from the state, they should acknowledge that they are subsisting on the beneficence of others and should seek to be good stewards of this generosity. No one should live with food insecurity and the state in collaboration with private entities should make sure that no one goes hungry. People need to be fed without being judged. On the other hand, those receiving aid should not self-righteously proclaim that they are entitled to be supported and any attempt to regulate benefits is evidence of selfishness and greed.

This contribution is available at <http://catholic-mom.blogspot.com/2014/03/is-welfare-accountability-really.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Spring Has Sprung [at V for Victory!]



Today at 16:57 Universal Time, the sun crossed the celestial equator. That means the point on the earth where the center of the sun was directly overhead was on the equator; the sun reached zenith at the equator; the Southern and Northern Hemispheres were equally illuminated; and the periods of daylight and nighttime today are roughly equal. In other words: it is now Spring. From this point forward, the hours of daylight will exceed the hours of nighttime. When the Summer Solstice occurs on June 21st, the daylight will begin to recede, until the Autumnal Equinox; then, the nights will lengthen, until the Winter Solstice.

As I have commented many times before in this space, and will go on commenting, the changes of season are freighted with a spiritual significance that has been obscured since the iconoclasts took their scissors and blue pencils to the liturgical calendar in the wake of Vatican II. The Annunciation, March 25th, coincides with the Vernal Equinox; Good Friday is also held to have taken place on March 25th, followed by Easter Sunday. This was to show that the winter of satan's reign was ended, and the Kingdom of God, with its light and warmth and abundance of life, was begun. The Summer Solstice, when daylight begins to decrease, coincides with the Nativity of John the Baptist; the Winter Solstice, when daylight begins to increase, coincides with the Nativity of Christ, to underscore the Baptist's saying that he must decrease, while Christ increased.

As far as the Autumnal Equinox is concerned, my own entirely personal opinion is that, since this falls during the time for harvest, it stands for the harvest of souls at the end of time, when the wheat is gathered into the Master's barn, and the tares are bundled up and burned.

The modernists would have us believe that this is all just man projecting his religious yearnings onto impersonal nature and seeing what he wants to see. The reality, however, is that not one

single thing exists outside of God's plan and loving providence, in which there are no gaps or deficiencies that He needs us to supply for. It is all meant to communicate God's love to us, and to lead us to Himself.

This contribution is available at <http://v-forvictory.blogspot.com/2014/03/spring-has-sprung.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Out of the Mouths of Converts [at Forget The Roads]



My daughter, a “cradle convert” in that she entered the Church at the age of 10, is issuing informal “save-the date” invitations to the Easter vigil to her Protestant friends (she attends a large Evangelical Protestant university). We’re hoping to get a small group together on April 19th to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord. It’s a fantastic way to introduce people to the Church – after all, *the Easter Vigil is Catholicism at her finest!* And watching those converts as they enter (or are reconciled to) the Church just might give her friends pause for thought....

Here’s hoping!

Converts have a way of doing that, you know – giving people pause for thought. The first thought that probably pops into your mind when you hear that someone is converting to Catholicism is “why?” – *what drew you to the Catholic Church?* If you’re a Protestant, and you get the news that someone is “popping,” I’m sure “why?” is the question on your mind, too – *why in the world would you become Catholic??* Very often, converts to Catholicism aren’t really allowed to explain their decision to the church they are leaving behind – members of that church all too often do that for

them, spreading the impression that their exodus was the result of a less than passionate relationship with Christ. So it tickled me when I came across the conversion of Swedish pastor Ulf Ekman. He was a very prominent charismatic clergyman instrumental in bringing the Word of Faith movement to his native land. Not only did Ekman get the chance to explain his conversion to Catholicism to his church, he got the chance to do it on camera. You can watch it [here](#) (interpreted in English) – all 45 glorious minutes of it! Pastor Ekman explained the reasoning behind his (and his wife Birgitta's) decision to leave his work of 30 years behind and ask to be reconciled to the Church Jesus established (starting 29 minutes into the video):

In the Catholic Church we've found a continuity that goes right back to the apostles and Jesus Himself, with a strength and a stability which the gates of hell have not prevailed against. We believe this power and these roots are necessary for the future, and we're talking about the survival of the Christian world in a cruel future world. We believe that God wants to unite us as one... God's Spirit was actually drawing us and urging us to join in earnest with the Catholic Church.

The congregation took it well. I didn't see anyone get up and leave. Perhaps it's Swedish stoicism, but when the camera cut to the audience they looked pretty composed. In fact, they applauded warmly when he finished, and the pastor who spoke after Pastor Ekman's sermon assured the congregation that he felt that Ulf and Birgitta were "following the guidance of the Holy Spirit." What I enjoyed the most was the fact that Pastor Ekman told the congregation what he has discovered about Catholics: "how alive their true faith is in Jesus," "how biblically anchored the Catholic Church is in its classical doctrines," and that "in their services they use the Scriptures more than we do!" It was quite a blessing that he was allowed to say that, and to explain why he feels that his decision is the right one – that doesn't always happen.

So, when all else fails, write a book to get your point across! German pastor Andreas Theurer did just that, a book entitled *Warum werden wir nicht katholisch? Denkanstöße eines evangelisch-lutherischen Pfarrers* (Why Don't We Become Catholic? Food for Thought from an Evangelical-Lutheran Pastor). Why did Pastor Theurer become Catholic?

The Bible arose from the Church, not the other way around. The deciding criterion is: what has the Church believed since the time of the Apostles?

This decision had no one certain cause, but rather was the result of many years of looking into the doctrines which divide the church; this finally led me to the insight that on all the contested points Catholic teaching agrees with the beliefs of the Apostles. At some point I came to the realization that I no longer had a reason not to become Catholic, and then I naturally had to face the consequences.

Sounds a bit like what Pastor Ekman was saying, doesn't it? "In the Catholic Church we've found a continuity that goes right back to the apostles and Jesus Himself." When Protestants begin looking into the first few centuries of Christianity, they often come away with a nagging suspicion that something may have gone awry in the doctrines of the Reformers.

My friend "J" – a layperson hoping to be reconciled to the Church later this year – expressed thoughts similar to those of Pastor Theurer's. When asked what caused him to consider Catholicism, "J" responded:

I think a major factor in my conversion was simply working in the adult world for several years and realising how the real world worked. Issues of authority, hierarchy, organisation...all these became real and I realised Protestantism has no good solution – or rather, its (present) solution seems to look like modern democracy which, I realised, may simply be a reflection of modern prejudice instead of the government that Christ instituted.

Another factor was just growing older and realising that expertise and properly instituted authority matter. I mean, in companies there is no such thing as democracy and no one kicks up a big fuss about it – why should we then assume that the Church founded by Christ had no lines of authority? Why do we assume that the Church Fathers were free to hold whatever theological opinion they wanted to and that no one took action against them? Why do we assume that there was no authority who could judge such things? The more I examined the issue the more I realised that the Catholic picture of reality fit with the facts better than the Protestant one....

Authority, of course, is the central issue here. Protestantism can seem very appealing with its loose organization, if any at all. The YOUCAT succinctly explains why the Church is not, and cannot be, a democracy:

Democracy operates on the principle that all power comes from the people. In the Church, however, all power comes from Christ. That is why the Church has a hierarchical structure.

Kind of hard to argue with that.

The question of authority is definitely a subject that turns people's mind towards Rome. Blogger [Kala Nila](#) had an interesting experience with a pastor who, when he learned of her intention to swim the Tiber, wrote to her: "I can't believe you're letting someone else tell you what the Bible says." As she put it:

The reality is that I have always believed what somebody else taught me. Before I studied Bible in college, I merely trusted those who taught me and I wasn't aware of all the assumptions that inform our reading of Scripture (and often compromise our correct understanding of it). Even during college, I trusted my Bible professors so I was shaped by their thinking and persuasions. It seems to me that the difference now as a Catholic is that I am listening to and being taught by the Church which Christ founded, the very one that He promised to protect against the powers of hell.

Pretty perceptive, I'd say. The Protestant idea that individual believers are relying on the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth is a mirage. Protestants are being taught by whoever their leaders are, by whatever materials they are given, even by the Bible translation they choose to use ([as Pastor N.T. Wright has bemoaned](#)).

So there you have it, out of the mouths of "11th-hour workers," as [Russ Rentler](#) terms us converts and reverts. But remember, as the catechumens undergo the Second Scrutiny this Sunday (the subject is "Light!"), those of you called "early in the morning" (Mt 20:1) *also need to prepare a reply*. "Why are you Catholic?" is a question everyone needs to be able to answer articulately, not just us converts, as our first pope instructed us: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet 3:15). For incisiveness, I think so far no one has beaten blogger [George Sipe](#) on this point. He was asked that very question recently – *why are you Catholic?* – and his response nails it:

For me, it always boils down to one thing, upon which everything else depends. I answered simply "it's the truth."

Bravo! The Truth awaits you in the Catholic Church, and He will lead you to Himself. *Just ask Him!*

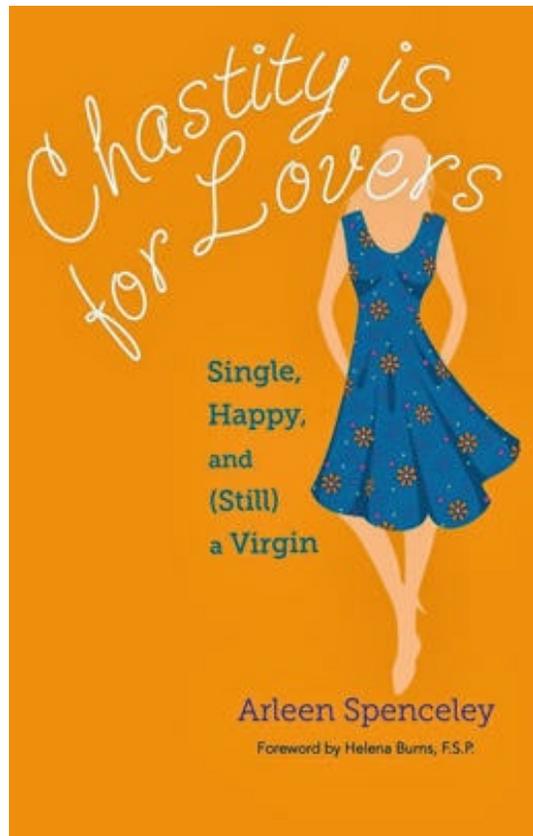
On the memorial of St. Cono di Naso

Deo omnis gloria!

This contribution is available at <http://forgettheroads.com/2014/03/28/out-of-the-mouths-of-converts/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Saving Sex: Why My Target Audience Isn't Teens



The other day on Facebook, a reader learned that for my forthcoming book, called

Chastity is for Lovers: Single, Happy, and (Still) a Virgin

, the target audience is adults, and primarily young ones.* She suggested that in the future, I target teens instead. Another reader, who had asked if the book is fit for teens, suggested in jest that young adulthood is too late.

If the goal is necessarily to meet a reader before he or she has had sex, the latter reader is probably right: According to Advocates for Youth, 62 percent of high school seniors aren't virgins. Six percent of high school students had sex by their thirteenth birthdays. Fourteen percent have had sex with four or more people.

The stats are shocking (or not, depending on your perspective). They point to how important it is to discuss sex with young teens (and younger). They may disappoint the people who wish I would. And don't get me wrong -- people should. And lots of people do (like

[Jackie Francois](#)

and

and, ideally, kids' parents or guardians).

But how important it is to talk chastity and sex with kids has too long overshadowed this: it's important to talk about both with grown-ups, too.

It's important for the sake of virgins, who are few and far between.

Ninety-eight percent of women and ninety-seven percent of men ages 25 to 44 have had sex.**

I write for adults because when people who are part of the two and three percent who haven't had sex stumble upon my story, they learn -- sometimes for the first time -- that they aren't as alone as they have felt.

It's important for our own kids, who will turn into teenagers, and -- let's face it -- into their parents. It

is

too late for adults to take back the sex they have had. It is not too late to learn a new way to approach sex.

I write for adults because I want to present chastity to them -- an alternative way of life, in case the way of life they've lived so far isn't working.

If adults don't know chastity is possible, they won't practice it. If they don't practice it, they won't model it for their kids.

It's important because young adults who went to church as teens were told to save sex for marriage, and most of them didn't -- and that isn't a good excuse to stop discussing chastity.

I write for adults because adults deserve not to be forgotten

; because being left out of the chastity conversation might be why most of us aren't saving sex.

*Teens certainly

can

get something good out of

Chastity is for Lovers

-- especially older ones.

**according to the National Center for Health Statistics

This contribution is available at <http://www.arleenspenceley.com/2014/03/saving-sex-why-my-target-audience-isnt.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Babies & Metaphysics [at Smaller Manhattans]



not appreciating the cosmicness of it all

I was at lunch with my father earlier this week, we were discussing a favorite subject: God. Somehow we got around to contraception, and that in neither of our marriages was there any contraception, natural or artificial. We reflected on how much less our marriages would be if we had contracepted, and why that was so. This led to me pinpointing when in my life I embraced the idea that God was completely interested in, and aware of, every hair on my head. That God loved me personally, infinitely and uniquely. Such that now, decades later, I accept it like I accept gravity: a done deal.

I was in my early 30s when my understanding of God-stuff and Science-stuff merged into just Stuff, my own Grand Unified Theory. That is, it seemed to me as though all knowledge pointed toward God, and that lumping it all together worked better than keeping it in separate boxes. On the science-side I was especially prodded by Einstein's wonderful equation $E = mc^2$. It essentially says that Energy and Mass are interchangeable. Einstein said Energy and Mass are "manifestations of the same thing," sort of like 1 gallon = 4 quarts; or 1 kilo of ice = 1 kilo of water. That fit in well with something I read (I think it was in Hawking's

A Brief history of Time

) about the first instant of the Big Bang: the universe was a small (40' dia.) hot, dense, churning continuum of matter and energy, both and neither at the same time. What is colloquially referred to as

massergy.

So matter is a manifestation of energy; and I believe the source of that energy is God. And that God created the physical universe through some energy manifesting the characteristics of matter. That's why there was Light before there was the Sun or the Moon: first the Energy, then the Matter. Which reminds me on the religion side that Dante described the energy of the Universe as "L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle/ the love that moves the sun and the other stars."

You may also recall that at every step of Creation, God saw that it was good, at least until He noticed Adam lacked a wife. Why was it all good? Like Dante, I believe it's because the energy of the Universe is Love. That is, the Universe is 100% composed of God's love. Not love as how one feels, but love as a force; the generative force that sustains the Universe; the force that we may also understand as gravity or magnetism or light. Or as a rock. Or a drop of water. Or a hair on my head.

God is typically described as omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent; and in that order. I'm more inclined to put all-benevolent/ all-good/ all-loving first. Why? Because God could have the first 3 qualities and not be moved to create a single thing. God's all-loving nature manifested itself as Creation; that is, God "thought" love, and Creation resulted. Why, I bet Einstein would agree with me that Love and Creation are "manifestations of the same thing." Put in Catechism class terms, Love Creates. Where there is Love, there is Creation. And where there isn't, there isn't. Think of Satan. He hates being made of, and sustained by, God's love. And he doesn't create a single good thing.

We also know from Genesis, and from simply being alive, that God shares with us humans the ability to love, so we create too. He gave Eve to Adam, and our quintessential creativity channels through married love: babies. So for us to contracept is to profoundly push against the entire loving-creative *raison d'être* of the Universe, its very fabric; and our own loving-creative natures, which we among all creatures uniquely share with God.

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2014/03/babies-metaphysics.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Repealing the death penalty: not an easy call [at Leaven For The Loaf]

I listened intently online this week as my state legislature voted to repeal the death penalty. It wasn't close: 225-104. The bill now goes to the state senate. I'm happy with the day's result, even though it leaves me unsettled.

You see, I lobby for pro-life bills, not including capital punishment, on which my employer takes no position. A number of the legislators who dependably cast votes recognizing the right to life for preborn children do not recognize such a right for death-row inmates. By being against the death penalty, even as a private individual, I recognize with regret that I offend some of those legislators without winning over others who defend abortion and consider me "anti-choice." From a pragmatic point of view, [my decision to speak out against the death penalty](#) was asinine.

I don't regret writing about repealing capital punishment, but I'm sure glad I didn't do it to please anyone. I would have misfired badly.

This week's debate in the New Hampshire House was beyond heartfelt. Gut-felt, is more like it.

The chief sponsor of the repeal bill, Rep. Renny Cushing, has a calm manner which paradoxically makes his arguments particularly compelling. His father was murdered some years ago, so no one can accuse him seriously of not understanding the grief and anger of families of murder victims. He has worked for years for repeal of our state's rarely-invoked capital punishment law. His experience and the calm authority with which he told his colleagues "New Hampshire can live without the death penalty" kept the words from sounding like a trite slogan.

On the other hand, his colleagues who want to retain the death penalty were not so calm. They were angry and indignant. Some of them are cherished defenders of the rights of the preborn.

Rep. Jeanine Notter, for example. She's one of my town's state reps. She has sponsored legislation to promote women's health by increasing public oversight of abortion facilities and stiffening informed-consent requirements. She's also a determined advocate for the death penalty for heinous crimes. She went to the well and sharply spoke to her colleagues about the murder of Kimberly Cates and the attempted murder of Mrs. Cates's daughter. No one who lived in New Hampshire in 2009 and was old enough to comprehend news reports will ever forget the horror of that crime. Jeanine reminded the House of every horrendous detail. The murderers are now serving life sentences. There was public outrage that the death penalty didn't apply at that time to home invasions (the law has since been changed). For Jeanine, justice and fairness dictate that such killers deserve to get what they dished out to their victims.

What can I say to her? I know where she is on this, and she knows where I am – and we agree to disagree, unable as yet to bridge the gulf.

Then there's Rep. Al Baldasaro, who tackles bills like the Marine he is (I dare not say "was," since he once told me there's no such thing as an "ex"-Marine). He spoke with an anger that came through clearly to me across the audio stream. "We have fifty million dead babies, and we're concerned about capital punishment?" He knew perfectly well that some of the strongest advocates of repealing the death penalty are some of the most reliable votes against any bill to regulate abortion. Baldasaro could see that contradiction perfectly clearly.

He sees no contradiction in his abortion and capital punishment views. He sees innocent life vs. guilty criminals. So many supporters of repeal – including Rep. Cushing, judging from his voting record – see no contradiction between protecting women's "right to choose" and eliminating state-sponsored killing.

I do see contradictions. But there's a huge void between what I see and my ability to explain it

One interesting if protracted speech today came from the pro-choice Rep. Steve Vaillancourt. Erroneous capital convictions haunt him. So does repeal without retroactivity. He tried to amend the repeal bill so that it would commute the death sentence of Michael Addison, New Hampshire's sole death row inmate. He said if repeal is passed without applying to Addison, it would be like serving a meal to the whole community except for the one person "living under the bridge." He's right.

That's how I feel about abortion-related bills with rape-and-incest exceptions. Lots of babies under that particular bridge. That hasn't stopped me from supporting things like the Hyde Amendment, even with its exceptions.

His amendment failed in a lopsided vote. Everyone in the chamber knew that the governor has said she'll sign the bill as long as it's not retroactive. And so it's not a "clean" bill. Someone will mutter "hypocrisy." More hard feelings.

It was balm to my ears to hear the words of Rep. Robert Rowe, who spoke late in the debate. Pro-life across the spectrum, Rowe got his law degree about fifty years ago. He has never forgotten a case study from his student days, involving an erroneous conviction. "We can always restore freedom. We can't restore life." It was impossible for me to tell, listening from a distance, if anyone was still listening to the debate at that point. Late in the day, during lengthy debate, attention wanders. I sometimes wonder if the later speeches change anyone's mind. I hope Rep. Rowe's remarks did.

Rep. Cushing closed out the debate by saying, "If we let those who kill turn us into killers, evil triumphs." A few moments later, the House voted overwhelmingly for repeal – a decisive victory by any reasonable measure.

Yet I can't help but think of the 104 representatives in the minority. I look at the [roll call](#) and see many names of compassionate defenders of innocent life. They offer nonviolent options to pregnant women, they fight to make abortion providers accountable for long-term outcomes to women's health, they fight for the right of the babies to be born. They make the world a better place. When it comes to the death penalty, though, we're far apart. And I'm the one who moved, after too many years of hesitation.

What can I do to reach across the divide?

This contribution is available at <http://leavenforthe loaf.com/2014/03/13/repealing-the-death-penalty-not-an-easy-call/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

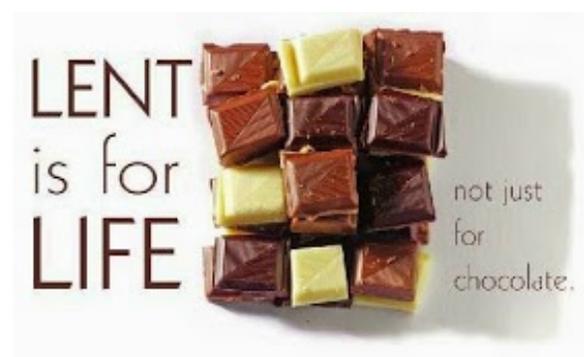
| [Contents](#) |

Why Lent is NOT a diet... [at For Such a Time as This]

As women we're constantly bombarded with the latest weight-loss techniques, exercise crazes and fad-diets. The automatic attention we pay to even the word 'diet' in magazines or on billboards is so ingrained it's almost as though we're hardwired to seek out ways to refine and perfect ourselves.

When it comes to Lent, how many of us naturally veer towards food when deciding what to give up? How many of your friends have named chocolate, biscuits, sugar, desserts or chips as their chosen sacrifice? How many have simply vowed to 'eat more healthily'?

How many people who aren't religious and don't observe any other part of the Lenten tradition have you heard say those things? **The question is...** When is it less about God and more about you? When is it no longer fasting but simply starving? When is it no longer a means of spiritual discipline but instead an early attempt at the pre-Summer health kick? It's a fine line which we have to be aware of in these 40 days as we try to prepare ourselves – hearts and minds – for Christ's resurrection.



The trouble with giving up 'unhealthy' food is that the next time we reach for that favourite chocolate bar or biscuit, the little voice inside encouraging us to **“make this small sacrifice for the sake of drawing closer to God”** becomes so easily confused with the equally persuasive voice reminding us that **“you're not allowed that, it's banned”**.

That's not to say giving up a type of food isn't a valid Lenten pledge! For many people

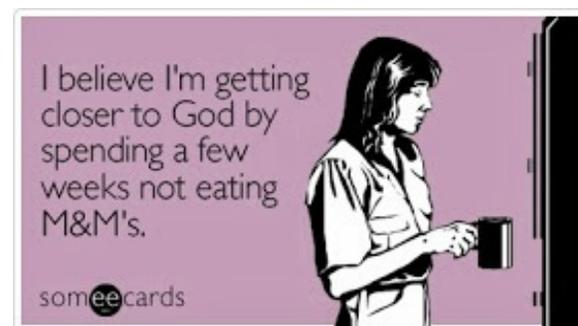
sacrificing those squares of chocolate in the afternoon or the morning coffee and biscuit may be the hardest thing in life to give up as it's the thing they rely on most or do out of habit. It takes extreme **self-discipline**. Food is also one of the only things that is absolutely essential in life, and so one of the only things that we can guarantee we'll be reminded of if we decide to give it up. There are few things that we'll be tempted by so often, and in that sense giving up chocolate, for example, acts as a regular reminder to turn your heart back to God.

Everyone has some sort of favourite food or little indulgence that they know would be hard for them to give up. As such, in many ways it serves as the perfect Lenten sacrifice because the point of that sacrifice is that it's *not easy*. But it's important to continually make sure that your heart behind your sacrifice is in the right place.

'I will decrease, so that God can increase.'

I think this is the fundamental basis of Lenten promises. Whatever we give up, we have to ensure that God is kept at the centre of our resolve, and that the primary purpose is to draw near to Him. I will decrease my indulgences or bad habits so that God can increase in glory. NOT: I will decrease my chocolate intake so that I can increase my confidence on the beach, popularity at school or likeness to the celebs.

We need to remember that there are three pillars of Lent: **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**. One without the others loses significance. Prayer alone causes no harm but costs very little of the self, almsgiving alone becomes self-righteousness, and fasting alone become merely dieting.



2000 years ago a guy called Jesus gave up His own LIFE so that we might live. He sacrificed

His own flesh on the cross at the hands of people like you and me, FOR people like you and me. Our simple acts of self-sacrifice during Lent are a way to share in that Good Friday spirit and dedicate our own bodies and our own lives back to Christ.

So next time you find yourself tempted by whatever it is you've given up for Lent, check your motivation. If it's become an arbitrary rule a mere sense of duty, or even a subconscious method of fixing your figure after the weeks of eating Christmas chocolate, then offer that to Jesus and ask Him to give you a heart of **truly sacrificial love** in return.

This contribution is available at <http://forthisverymoment.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/why-lent-is-not-diet.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Weekends with Chesterton [at Campfires and Cleats]

Five minutes on "writer."

No editing, no over thinking.~~

Go:

We are all failures.

At least the best of us are.

Words credited to JM Barrie, writer. Simply, a writer. A man whose genius brought us sparkling words, some of the most beautiful of our language some hundred years ago.

Have you read [the original script](#) penned by this master of words? No, not *that* version. Please, no. <gasp> Green clad, blondish flying imp, mini fairy, croc eschewing captain. No. Please, not the version which destroyed his. Have you read this gem of a script, performed Christmas Day, 1904, London.

Beauty? Awe? Stealth mastery of the language? It's all there. Right there in print and it's the quintessence of perfection in writing. Like nothing I've ever read, felt, been swept away by.

Not character development, plot, setting. Here's the gem: dozens of pages of stage directions before act 1 even opens. Descriptions of furniture placement, characters' social standing, lighting spilling from the nursery, shadow angle at window, wow. life altering experience for me to read as we readied our kids for the stage production of this theatrical piece. Just awe. Just jaw dropping.

And yet, *failure*? To read these words, this thought by a man whose creative genius parlays the ordinary word into sheer elegance to me, is, well, humbling. It's frightening, maddening. And aren't these the feelings that creep, that wrap, that beg to be noticed as we writers attempt our art in the margins of our lives, as we craft our posts, our poems, our days? As we write our stories?

The things that are most important to us are the things that are mostly hidden, that we mostly think we're not good at, that we mostly feel like failures around. Am I right? These cathedrals we're building as Moms, these words we craft around these lives, the capture of the crazy and the everyday, the moments?

Mommas, they are beautiful words. They are gripping, they are powerful, they are dignified, they are sumptuous, they are you. If one who's considered a master of the language, felt defeated, failed,

well, let that be our ammo. When we feel creatively bankrupt, when we think there's nothing to remember and jot on those tough days, no. There is. We live it, we write it, we remember, we are graced by the words that recall the blessed lives we are given, the blessed souls we are charged with. By the Author of all. He has faith in *us*.

This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2014/04/five-minute-friday-writer-weekends-with.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |



I grew up in the shadow of my sister who was 18 months older than me. I followed her around, copying her every preference and obeying her every request. She convinced me that her likes and dislikes, friends and fashions were the best and only choices possible for me. When she was 16, she got married, leaving me wondering who I was without her.

Perhaps like me, you habitually compare yourself with others, find yourself lacking and stop trying to succeed. Stuck in comparison mode, we can never develop into the person God created in his image. God doesn't create clones. When we measure ourselves against others, all we see are our weaknesses. Our uniqueness hides from others and ourselves. Blessed John Paul II wrote about this, "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures, we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son Jesus."

I didn't get over my attachment to my sister for a long time because I didn't realize that, before I was born or even conceived, God loved me! Learning that truth did something the most expensive makeover or self-improvement program could never do. It changed my self-image by giving me the ability to see myself in the image of Jesus.

Like me, God created you in his image by placing his heart and soul within you. He delights in who you are and even counts every hair of your head. Think about that when you comb your hair. He takes pleasure in every aspect of your body and your soul.

God loves you so much that when he looks at you, he sees nothing but joy and holiness and goodness and kindness and courage and faithfulness! All these virtues he planted in your heart so you could become his image, not a clone of someone else he created.

He formed you out of love so you could love him. He redeemed you so you might remain in this loving relationship for all eternity with him. Your purpose is to know him, love him, adore him and serve him with all your heart just as the Father and Son know, love, adore and serve each other. Through the gift of his Spirit, God makes it possible for you to enter into this sphere of loving that the Father and the Son enjoy, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even while he transforms you, the world tempts you to find your identity in who you admire or who makes you feel good. So it is invaluable to find your identity in Christ. He designed you to show the world a glimmer of his image. Only you can shine his presence in this dark world in the unrepeatable way he fashioned you to express his love. You reflect his divinity through your authentic humanity centered in him.

"We become most truly human in the measure in which we go out of ourselves and give ourselves for the sake of others." How can we do what Blessed John Paul said and give ourselves away so we can become who God meant for us to be?

Jesus gives us the answer: Love each other as he loves us. Help each other, support each other, talk with each other, pray for each other, encourage each other, need each other. We find our true selves as we give away the life of Christ in us. This is how we stop being who we were and become who we are.

How does imitating others keep you from finding your unique identity in God?

(© 2014 Nancy H C Ward)

This contribution is available at <http://joyalive.net/god-doesnt-create-clones/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

A Bell and an Open Vein [at The Cloistered Heart]



One facet of monastic life that looks greener on the other side of the fence (to me) is the call to prayer. The bell rings, it's prayer time, and there's no putting it off. No opening a newspaper, no checking the morning news, no doing 'just this one thing' before settling down to pray.

I don't know about you, but if I do just one thing before giving God a few minutes, all too often one thing turns into ten, and before I know it, 'things' have crowded out prayer altogether. Again.

Of course, there are important reasons why some of us need to squeeze prayer into a 'To-Go-Box' from the minute we get out of bed. Babies need feeding, we're late for work, kids need to be gotten off to school... but these are not the things that take up *my* personal time, not anymore. Even when I have a busy day ahead, I can usually grab at least a few minutes to NOT turn on morning news and NOT check e-mail and to instead give that little chunk of time to God. But do I? I will just say this: it's a struggle.

Sometimes I long for the discipline of a bell. I long for the accountability of those who will notice if I'm not in my choir stall. Oh, I know my mind might wander if I were in fact standing there, breviary open before me and my mind still half asleep. But at least I'd BE there. I would be praising God, and giving Him a chance to whisper... something... to my sleepy heart.



I often compare the first prayer of morning to a time when I received an i.v. During preparation for the birth of my second child, I was given an i.v. of saline. Asking why this was necessary, I was told that it was in case I needed medication administered quickly at any time during the birth. The doctor wanted to have an open vein, ready to receive help on a moment's notice.

Years later, the memory of that came back to me as I pondered the grace of morning prayer. If I pray, even briefly, early in the morning, I am in effect opening the vein. Once I've begun conversation with God, prayers on-the-go are somehow easier throughout the day. I believe inspirations from God are more easily 'heard' as well.

Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise.

"Live on in Me, as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine can you bear fruit apart from Me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me, and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5)

Text not in quotes © 2012 Nancy Shuman. All Rights Reserved.

thecloisteredheart.org (this is a slightly edited re-post from our archives) *Click here to comment in the Parlor*

This contribution is available at <http://www.thecloisteredheart.org/2014/03/a-bell-and-open-vein.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Good Manners and Ugly Habits [at parishpriest]

Luke 11:14-23; JEreemiah 7:23-28

We begin today with the last words of the prophet Jeremiah, "Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech."

This is quite the critique. Jeremiah does not mess around nor does he dance around the issue, as we might see from modern so called prophets.

No, Jeremiah is clear, precise, plain, to the point.

Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself has banished from their speech.

No wonder Jeremiah raised the ire of his contemporaries. He aroused deadly hostility, conspiracies against his life, he was confined in stocks, flogged on another occasion, and eventually we are told he is stoned to death by Jews in Egypt.

The life of one who seeks to speak the truth is never a bed of roses. Certainly thorns though.

But the words of Jeremiah could easily be projected upon our current society.

Look around. Faithfulness isn't what it use to be.

I am not just thinking faithfulness to God and His commands, but faithfulness to one another.

A man's word use to be golden, but now, not so much.

Don't get me wrong we still have plenty of good manners, we just added ugly habits to boot.

The ugly habit of breaking our word, rejecting our promise, refusing our oaths. We sell ourselves out for comfort.

It is true what CS Lewis said, "we are not bad people, no we just are too easily satisfied." We look for things to accommodate us and our wishes rather than digging deep and enduring for the sake of true love. We all speak about the power o forgiveness and mercy but what we need to start realizing and speaking about is the power of accountability. Here true strength rises.

Besides isn't forgiveness hanged upon our own accountability. As St Augustine states clearly somewhere in his many volumes of written word, we should accuse ourselves here and now because it is better than to be accessed later.

The lack of accountability is what has caused this malaise in fidelity. We excuse our selves to frequently. We are too busy building our alibis and not attentive enough to the grind of

perseverance.

Circumstances and emotions to often dictate our fidelity and thus faithfulness as disappeared.

Good manners, ugly habits.

Be on the look out today for ugly habits disguised as good manners then call them out. Be the prophet in the spirit of Jeremiah.

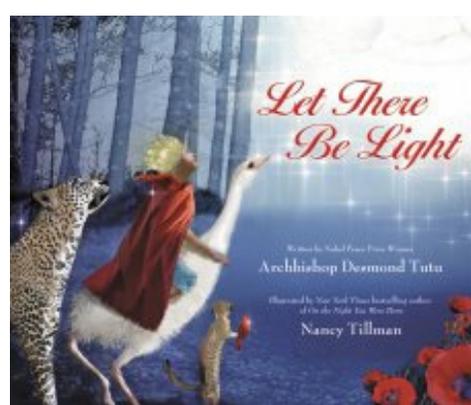
This contribution is available at <http://parishpriestblogger.blogspot.com/2014/03/good-manners-and-ugly-habits.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Let There Be Light from Archbishop Desmond Tutu [at The Koala Bear Writer]

[Let There Be Light by Archbishop Desmond Tutu](#) is a beautiful re-telling of the creation story for children, with gorgeous images by Nancy Tillman. This story evokes awe from the first pages, as Nancy's drawings capture the beauty of creation and the manner in which each new act of creation adds to the world.



Even I found myself spending as much time staring at the pictures as reading the story, for the details in the pictures invited careful scrutiny. The image of God in light from the first page was also repeated in many elements of the following pages, and I found myself looking for it and smiling when I found it in some new element of creation. Jade love the pictures of giraffes and elephants when we got to the sixth day of creation and Lily liked the fact that all the people had crowns at the end of the day.

In the introduction to the book, Archbishop Tutu tells young readers, “And you’ll see, God got very busy creating wondrous things. And eventually, God said, ‘Let there be you.’ **God wanted you to shine your own special light of love, because without you the world would not be quite as bright and beautiful.**” Nancy echoes that idea in her introduction and I think this book completely captures the love and light of God’s creation.

We have many children’s Bibles for preschoolers in our house. I liked the way that this book focuses upon the creation story, inviting readers—both parents and children—to slow down and to think about this huge moment of history that is often sped past. *Let There Be Light* is a great book to read for bedtime, as it invites quiet thought, yet I’d also like to find some crafts to go with this book to invite the girls to think more about creation.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his lifelong struggle to bring equality, justice, and peace to his native country of South Africa. He was the first black South African Archbishop in Cape Town and is primate of the Anglican Church of South Africa. In 1995, he worked with President Nelson Mandela on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body set up to probe gross human rights violations that occurred under apartheid. He and his

wife Leah live in South Africa and have four children and seven grandchild. Archbishop Tutu is also the author of numerous other books.

Nancy Tillman is a best-selling author and illustrator and lives in Portland, Oregon. In her books, she wants to convey to children everywhere that “You are loved.” You can find out more about Nancy on [her website](#) or by following her on [Facebook](#).

This contribution is available at <http://www.thekoalabearwriter.com/2014/03/let-there-be-light-archbishop-desmond-tutu/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

I Told You So [at Working to be Worthy]

I've been reading *The Imitation of Christ* recently and learning quite a bit from it. One of the oft-repeated themes is the necessity of humility. If we're full of ourselves, our hearts have no room for God. Meditating on this has brought to mind times when I just HAD to let others see how much I knew. I can't recall saying, "I told you so," recently, but there are other ways to make the same point.

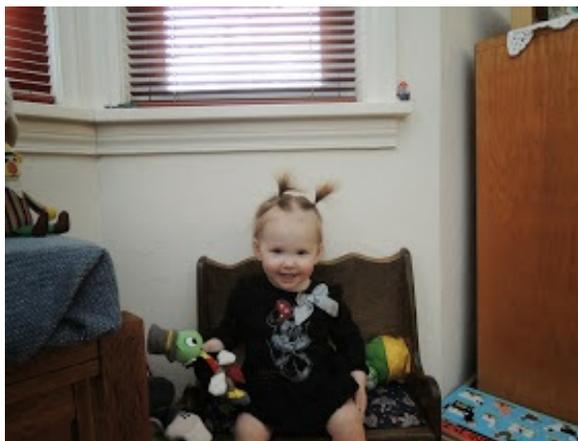
"Yeah, I know."

"I saw that last week."

"That's what it said when I was there, too."

It's pride or insecurity speaking. What do I have to prove? If I pounce on the opportunity to show off my knowledge, I make it clear that I am less interested in what others have to say than what I already know. This can put others on the defensive (understandably!) and destroy a chance for me to learn something new.

Humility softens our hearts, allowing our souls to draw closer to God. It also opens our minds, allowing us to draw closer to each other.



What taking our son to Mass taught me about God's love [at Catholic Review]

Maybe it was when I noticed our 4-year-old was playing with a rubber band he found in the pew.

Maybe it was when I was fielding murmured questions about whether everyone has “infinity” strands of hair.

Maybe it was when I glanced down and saw that he was pretending his coat was a horse.

But at some point during Mass it hit me.

How I view my son's behavior in church may be similar to how God sees me every day.



Our younger son may not get much out of Mass. Maybe he hears a few words of one of the readings. Maybe he sees part of the consecration. But for much of the experience, he's wriggling and whispering or focusing on something he just found in my pocket.

I know he can encounter Jesus in so many ways at our church. But so many opportunities to experience our Lord are going right past him. He is only 4, after all.

Still, it occurred to me today that our Father in heaven may see me the same way.

He must watch daily as I miss so many opportunities to connect with Him. He must present Himself to me in numerous ways all the time, and I fail to see because I've just discovered the grown-up equivalent of a rubber band or a pencil or a piece of lint. And whether it's a work email or an aggressive driver or a spilled glass of orange juice, it takes all my attention in that moment, and I temporarily lose sight of Him.

During Mass I glance down at my son and he's sitting on the kneeler, facing the back of the church, not noticing that bread and wine is becoming Jesus' body and blood just a few feet away from us. How many times does God see me doing the same thing—looking the wrong way, overlooking some message He is sharing with me?

So often I'm distracted and busy and focused on the things that don't matter. Lent is the time for me to try to move beyond that and connect more deeply with God. Today I was thinking how much I love our sons even after their most challenging Mass behavior. And I am confident that God loves me that much—and even more.



What a gift God gives me every day through his infinite mercy, patience, and love.

What a gift I can give our children by realizing that they don't need to understand and appreciate everything to be benefiting from merely being present with Jesus.

And, especially during this first week of Lent, what a gift I can give myself by trying to grow closer to Jesus, trusting that he will reach out to me again and again, knowing that my faith can continue to grow.

3/9/2014 10:21:15 PM

By

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2014/03/09/what-taking-our-son-to-mass-taught-me-about-gods-love>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Let the Rabbits Run [at Dancing in the Rain]

One of my favorite training sessions we did at camp was called Let the Rabbits run. There is a fable that tells the story about a duck, a fish, an owl, an eagle, a squirrel and a rabbit who all went to school with the hopes of improving themselves. On the first day, the rabbit is elated over how great school is. He got to run!

He found out not only that he was very good at it, but that he enjoyed it. However, when the rabbit tried swimming and flying he was discouraged and frustrated. Now, I'm all about personal growth and think it is important to honestly assess areas in our life that are opportunities for growth. Yet, how often do we squander the gifts we have in an attempt to become something or someone we are not ? Are you trying to be everything to everybody? Are you spreading yourself too thin?

The moral of the story is to "let the rabbits run." What are you great at? What unique gifts, talents, experiences has God given you to build up His kingdom and to incarnate love? When we look at the stain glass windows at Church we can see the light entering through the beautiful, unique depictions. As the saints highlight different aspects of who God is, so too are we called to bear the unrepeatable stamp God has placed on our hearts and lives. St. Peter's already lived his story. St. Therese? She's already taken. "The glory of God is man fully alive". In a world that aches for our unique story, why do we hide in conformity and mediocrity?

"Our biggest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking

So that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were all meant to shine, as children do.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,

We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same

As we are liberated from our own fear,

Our presence automatically liberates others.” Marianne Williamson

Let God give you the courage to live the story He has written for you. It’s

the freedom to be as you are settled in the truth of whose you are

. “Become what you are.” JP II

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

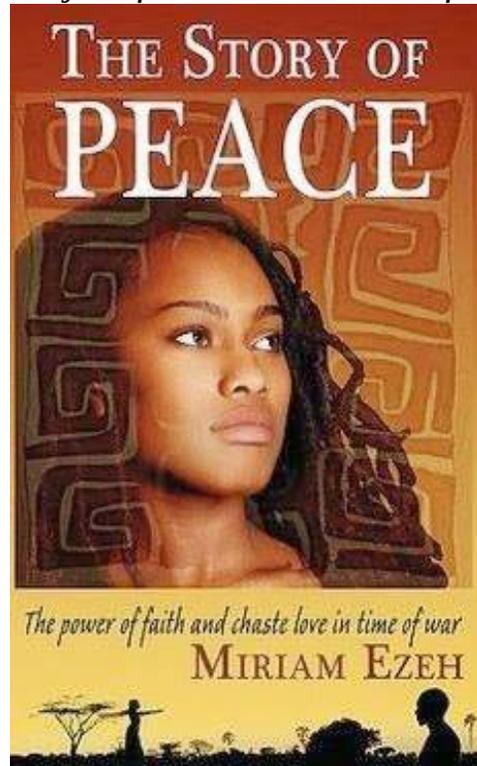
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it SHINE

This contribution is available at <http://dancingintherain401.blogspot.com/2014/03/let-rabbits-run.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Story of Peace - an Inspiring YA Novel by Miriam Ezeh [at String of Pearls]

Last week in my "What We're Reading Wednesday" [post](#), I gave you a little teaser about a book I'd just finished, a wonderful Catholic YA novel published by Bezael Books.



I promised that a more in-depth review of this book would be forthcoming, and here it is:

The Story of Peace **An Inspiring YA Novel--for Readers of All Ages**

Miriam Ezeh's haunting Catholic novel

The Story of Peace

absolutely blew me away. Aimed at teen and young adult readers, it is a deeply moving and beautifully written book that will touch the heart of any adult as well. Days after finishing it, the character of Peace Udomm (a beautiful young African woman who has seen her village and her family torn apart by war) stays with me. She is the most selfless, loving, humble, faith-filled person, despite the fact that her life has been anything but peaceful and easy.

After she loses her mother and father, in a brutal act of terrorism during a war with a neighboring village, Peace (barely more than a girl herself) must become a mother to her younger brother, a teenager named Lawrence. Unlike Peace, Lawrence is consumed with anger and longs to punish an entire village--the innocent along with the guilty--to avenge his parents' deaths. He becomes part of an underground group whose plan is to fight violence with violence, and Peace is sick with

worry. Her one goal in life is to take care of her brother and keep him safe from harm, and she doesn't know what to do.

Enter a devout young American doctor named John Williams, whose late mother was born in Peace's village. He has reverted to the Catholic Faith, after having fallen away, and has returned to Africa to settle in his mother's birthplace. His plan is to set up a medical clinic to help all the needy people of that war-torn area. John is immediately taken with the quiet and serenely beautiful young woman named Peace, who works so hard and so selflessly to make a home for herself and her brother. The relationship that develops between John and Peace shows young readers what REAL love--chaste, pure, sacrificial love, the kind that mimics the love Our Lord has for us--looks like.

Throughout Ezeh's book, Peace's sweet and childlike faith is touching and inspiring. When she was a child, her mother taught her that she should tell Jesus everything that was in her heart; "He loves you so much and is listening to you," she assured her daughter. Peace has taken her mother's sage advice and adopted the practice of talking to Him often; and as she prays aloud when her soul is filled with fear and anguish, she begins by saying, "My dear Jesus, it's me." Those five simple words, uttered with such trust in the listener, speak volumes about this young girl's relationship with Our Lord.

The title of this book has a two-fold meaning: it is about an unforgettable young heroine, a peaceful soul named Peace Udomm, who embodies the kind of pure, unwavering love for God--and utmost faith in His will for her life--that is reminiscent of the saints; but it is also about peace itself, about finding a way to end the hatred that leads men to wage war on one another.

The Story of Peace

is a story of love and loss, of war and peace, of sin and redemption. Although it is only 163 pages long, it is an epic book.

I believe Miriam Ezeh's triumphant novel should be on the shelves of schools across the country--and not just Catholic schools. I recommend this book highly for readers of all faiths and all ages--but particularly for impressionable teens and young adults who will benefit so much from its messages about faith, hope, chastity, sacrificial love, and of course, peace.

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-story-of-peace-inspiring-ya-novel.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Becoming "like" God or becoming Gods? [at Catholic Deacon]

At least to much local acclaim, the "Gospel Topics" section of the official website of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,

lds.org

, has recently featured an essay entitled

["Becoming Like God."](#)

Apparently this article was posted in an effort to explain the odd Mormon take on what Christians, especially Eastern Christians, have traditionally called "deification." The purpose of the essay is to debunk caricatures of LDS belief on this matter. Without a doubt, there are crude caricatures of this belief. Nonetheless, the piece strikes me as more than a bit disingenuous. As I hope to briefly show, the disingenuous nature of the essay arises from placing the emphasis on becoming "like" God rather than on the traditional LDS emphasis of becoming as God "is," or a "god" in your right. As anyone who has ever made even a cursory study of informal logic knows, analogy and identity sit pretty far apart.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

Since our knowledge of God is limited, our language about him is equally so. We can name God only by taking creatures as our starting point, and in accordance with our limited human ways of knowing and thinking.

All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. the manifold perfections of creatures - their truth, their goodness, their beauty all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently we can name God by taking his creatures' perfections as our starting point, "for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator."

God transcends all creatures. We must therefore continually purify our language of everything in it that is limited, imagebound or imperfect, if we are not to confuse our image of God -- "the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable"-- with our human representations. Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God ([par. 40-42](#))

This is precisely what makes the Incarnation so cosmos-shattering, or, as the authors of

[Paul's New Moment](#)

put it- "this Event of God becoming human is so earth-shattering that it enacts something akin to the

psychoanalytic concept of trauma..."

It is important to mention up-front that Latter-day Saints clearly and explicitly reject the dogma of the triune God, perhaps best and most succinctly summarized as "one God in three in divine persons." In fact, as recently as January this year, a LDS General Authority, Gérald Caussé, who serves as second counselor in the Presiding Bishopric,

[speaking to LDS mission presidents](#)

, reminded them of something that it seems to me the LDS frequently try to gloss over: "Among the critical elements of the doctrine of the Church that are an essential contribution of the Restoration are a correct knowledge of the identity of God, that God and Jesus Christ are separate and distinct, each with a body of flesh and bone." This teaching arises directly from LDS scripture, particularly from the Doctrine and Covenants, which book is comprised almost exclusively of a series of revelations Smith claimed to have received directly from God. In the Doctrine and Covenants we find, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (

[130:22](#)

). It is for reasons surrounding this that the

[Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#)

, back in 2001, definitively concluded, answering a

dubium

, or question, formally posed several years prior, that LDS baptism is not sacramentally valid. The LDS, however, refuting their own claim to be Christians "like we are Christians," baptize everyone and anyone who joins the LDS Church regardless of any prior baptism.

Perhaps the best summary of this distinctive LDS belief, and if not the best, at least the most famous, is something known as the

["Lorenzo Snow couplet."](#)

Lorenzo Snow was the fifth president of the LDS Church. Latter-day Saints believe their president, along with the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, is a "prophet, seer, and revelator," a belief much more robust than the Catholic belief in papal infallibility. Snow served as president from 1898 until his death in 1901. His couplet states, "As man is God once was, as God is man may become." This is perfectly coherent with what is taught in LDS scripture, particularly

[the third chapter of the Book of Abraham](#)

and sections 130-132 of the

[Doctrine and Covenants](#)

. In addressing the couplet, the essay insists that not much is known by way of revelation with regard to the first half of the couplet. At least to me, it does not seem on its face to be terribly abstruse. I take it to mean that at one point God was like we are now. Brigham Young, Joseph Smith, Jr.'s successor as LDS prophet, took it that way too. Young went so far as to assert during a General Conference in 1852 something he insisted he was taught by Smith, namely that Adam is "our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do." This is known as the

["Adam-God" theory or doctrine](#)



Book of Abraham Facsimile 1

In addition to revealing passages from the Doctrine and Covenants, the

[Book of Abraham](#)

, which can be found in the

[Pearl of Great Price](#)

, which, along with the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Bible, is one of the books revered by Latter-day Saints as scripture, we find that there actually is a fair amount revealed about both halves of couplet. In fact, it's fair to say that the couplet arises from what is written here. Of course, as with all theology, doctrinal statements require correlating what is claimed to be revealed with the claimed sources of revelation.

While on the subject of claimed sources of revelation, it bears noting that Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of the LDS Church, claims to have translated the Book of Abraham from some papyrus scrolls that he acquired by purchasing an Egyptian mummy from a carnival man. Smith made the purchase and claims to have translated the scrolls prior to the deciphering of the ancient Egyptian language, which resulted from decoding the Rosetta Stone. It became clear after the decoding of the Rosetta Stone that the scrolls, facsimiles of which have long been published as part of the

Pearl of Great Price, Smith claims to have translated as the Book of Abraham were, in fact, copies of the Egyptian book of the dead.

It is in

[the third chapter of the Book of Abraham](#)

that the key to understanding where LDS theology fundamentally diverges from historic Christianity can be found (this is where the essay strikes me as disingenuous). It is this chapter that seeks to show that everyone, you, me, God the Father, God the Son, etc., has always existed. The

[official summary of Abraham 3](#)

states, "The Lord reveals to him [Abraham] the eternal nature of spirits." This "eternal nature of spirits," it seems, is precisely what obliterates the most obvious ontological barrier between God and His creatures: being eternal, that is, self-subsistent, or uncreated. In other words, according to LDS belief, we have all always existed.

The progression, according to the LDS "Plan of Salvation" (see graphic below), works something like this: you first and eternally exist as an uncreated "intelligence," then you are born into a pre-earth, or pre-mortal existence, a "spiritual," yet embodied, state (

[Doctrine and Covenants 131:7-8](#)

: "All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter"); from this pre-mortal existence, you are born into mortality, which is a period of testing, then, after the resurrection (there is a temporary, "spiritual", abode between the death and the resurrection, a place- must be a place because you are still material- where righteous LDS people proselytize others in a last ditch effort- this is why they perform baptisms for the dead- for you to accept Mormonism between your death and the resurrection); should you enter the highest level of the highest kingdom, called exaltation (see

[Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-4](#)

), sticking with Snow's couplet, you become "as God is." For those who obtain exaltation, which requires being married (see

[Doctrine and Covenants 131:2](#)

),

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have call power, and the angels are subject

unto them ([Doctrine and Covenants 132:20](#))

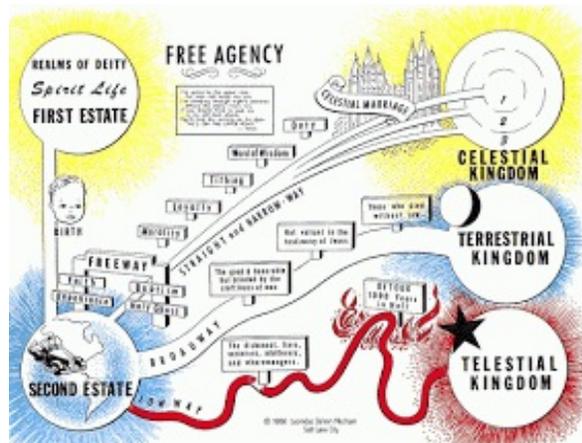
Most telling is this passage, also found in

[Doctrine and Covenants 132](#)

, referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, states, "because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods" (

[132:37](#)

).



In addition to the vast expanse stretching between "like" and "is," the problem I see with the essay is that there is no effort connect the dots of what the LDS Church claims to have been revealed by God about God and man, even claiming ignorance where there is evidence. Hence, there is no attempt to show how that "revelation" bears on man's eternal destiny, but an effort to obscure what seems, based on the evidence, pretty clear. At root, because of the belief that we, like God, have existed eternally, beginning as uncreated intelligences, the main ontological barrier that Jews, Christians, and Muslims discern as existing between God and humanity is done away with, thus clearing the way for human beings to become "as God is," which is just what former Catholic priest, now Mormon, Jordan Vajda, insisted in his relatively famous master's degree thesis

["Partakers of the Divine Nature."](#)

Along these lines, see my post from a few years ago-

["Is Israel's God Glenn Beck's god?"](#)

That is much different than becoming as much "like" God as you can become, given the ontological difference between Creator and creature.

If I am not mistaken, the original (more precisely, the "ancestral") sin consisted mainly in the

rejection of creaturliness, preferring instead to usurp God. It looks like March roared in like a lion here on Καθολικός διάκονος!

Servant of God

[Cora Louise Evans](#)

, pray for us.

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2014/03/becoming-like-god-or-becoming-gods.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Lent ~ the Last Great Race [at CF Family]



These early March days find us, along with many Alaskans, daily checking standings for the mushers running the 1100-mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race, the “last great race.” My dog-loving twelve year old daughter checks multiple times a day and moves colored pins for her four favorites along a map (She’s a hard-core fan.). Since it is also Lent, I see Lent everywhere and the Iditarod is no exception.

Initially called the Great Race of Mercy (Hello, Lent), the race commemorates the 1925 diphtheria serum run to Nome by way of the Iditarod trail, a mining transport route through the now-ghost-town of the same name. Those mushers were smart and strong, risking their lives and the lives of their working dogs to get that medicine to stricken Nome. The Iditarod is still a dangerous run, “Not safe,” according to musher Dee Dee Jonrowe. “Challenging conditions are true every year. It’s the Iditarod Trail. The race must go on,” says Iditarod Trail Committee Executive Director Stan Hooley.* As is Lent. Each year has its own spiritual dangers and challenges. We have our Hell’s Gates and Dalzell Gorges. We may be lonely. We also have our rest stops available in Friday evening soup and stations. Extra reconciliation services are our health checks. And the race will go on for us, too, ending with the Easter celebration year after year until the Great Banquet in the Father’s House.

We may need to drop out, or “scratch,” in order to get our dogs or ourselves (or both) tended back to health for next year’s run. This is OK. If we desire betterment and do not allow bitterness to creep in, we will learn what we should and become closer to Jesus His way. “Let it be unto me according to what you have said,” said our Blessed Mother. Two years ago, my baby was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis in the beginning of Lent. That year, fasting for me took the form of mentally wrangling fear and anger to the ground and lifting my eyes to Jesus to embrace love and redemptive suffering. It was exhausting. I fired the computer back up and made needed

connections. On the Yukon River deciding things for racers, says musher Martin Buser, “The Yukon always is a decider if it’s punchy or slow.”* Indeed. Sometimes Lent is decided for us, whether punchy or slow.



Physically running the Iditarod and spiritually running Lent begins with preparation. Take stock, figure goals, decide risks, and gather materials. While there is a general pattern in Lent (pray, fast, give) and a general pattern in mushing (food, gear, map), everyone’s plan is their own (Musher Jeff King is known for his inventions like boxed sled seating and heated handlebars!). Then jump in and participate. Just do it and see what happens! There are physicians and public servants at checkpoints on the way (priests and angels) and those watching on the periphery for culture and entertainment may be inspired to get in the race themselves. God be praised.

The last great race truly is a great race of mercy. May we find opportunities every day to enrich Lent with mercy accepted and given. May we actively look for burning bushes, even in Iditarod stories. Go mushers! Go us!

*March 7, 2014 Frontiersman and Anchorage Daily News headlines

This contribution is available at <http://www.northernfamily.blogspot.com/2014/03/lent-last-great-race.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Seeing with God's Eyes - JESUS heals us of our blindness... [at JesusCaritasEst.org]

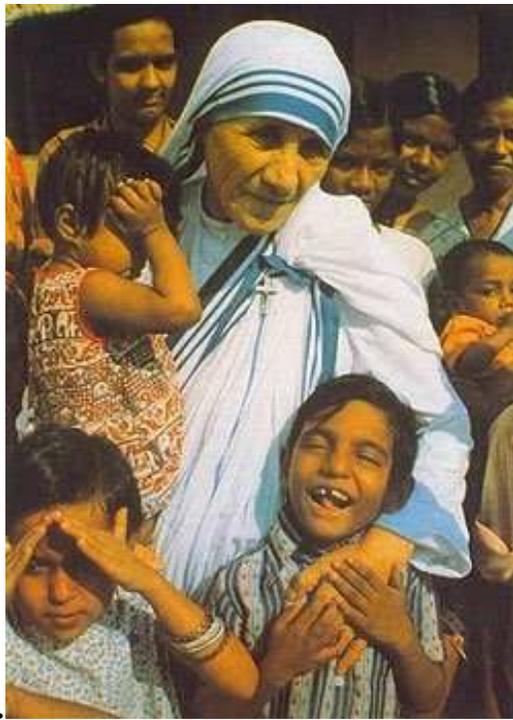
Ruby was alone in her class for over 1 year. US marshals were sent to escort her to school since she was threatened with death and even presented with a black baby doll in a wooden coffin. Her mother told her "Remember, if you get afraid, say your prayers. You can pray to God anytime, anywhere. He will always hear you." So Ruby prayed on her way to school but she said, "I was praying for them." She prayed, "Please be with me, I'd asked God, and be with those people too. Forgive them because they don't know what they're doing." The people of that community who protested were blind to the black community. Her father lost his job and even her grandparents lost their sharecrop farming land that they farmed for 25 years. It took the actions and prayers of Ruby and the government to open their eyes. In this way Ruby's suffering was used to manifest God's love. Ruby had God's vision that helped her see through the blindness of her community.

Similarly, Jesus explains that the blindness of the man, in the Gospel, was used to "display the works of God". Sin and suffering in our lives can also be used to show God's grace. Jesus used the physical elements of mud and water to heal the man. This story alludes to the sacrament of Baptism that provides Divine grace to open our eyes to God's truth. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." (John 9:39) In the sacraments God enters our souls in a spiritual way to heal our mortal blindness. Sacraments are visible signs of God's grace. Jesus used mud, spit and water to heal the man born blind. These physical elements are necessary in the administering of the sacraments. Sin causes us to be interior blind to God and people. By partaking in the sacraments our souls are illumined by Christ.

In many countries the blindness of people can reach extremes. Becoming a Christian can mean a death sentence for you and your family. How little we suffer compared to so many others in the world.



Mother Teresa was born in Macedonia in 1910 she became a nun at the age of 18. Reaching out to those suffering was why this young nun chose to leave her teaching position and minister to the poor in India. Mother Teresa once told the story, “One day I picked up a man from the gutter. His body was covered with worms. I brought him to our house, and what did that man say? He did not curse. He did not blame anyone. He just said, “I’ve lived like an animal in the street, but I’m going to die like an angel, loved and cared for! It took us three hours to clean him. Finally, the man looked up at the sister and said, “Sister, I’m going home to God.” [they Baptized him] And then he died. I’ve never seen such a radiant smile on a human face. He went home to God. See what love can do!” How many of us have ever been blind to the needs of a homeless person, or even one covered with worms. Mother Teresa received God’s spiritual sight with the sacraments she



participated in on a daily basis.
Gospel,

Her daily prayer relates to this

Dear Jesus, help us to spread Your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with Your Spirit and Life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of Yours. Shine through us and be so in us that every soul we come in contact with may feel Your presence in our souls. Let them look up, and see no longer us, but only Jesus!

Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others. The light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be ours. It will be You, shining on others through us. Let us thus praise You in the way You love best, by shining on those around us.

Through prayer she was able to truly see the needs of God's people and thus start her work in the slums of Calcutta. Her order now has 4,500 sisters and is active in 133 countries that minister to the poor, sick and dying but are grounded in faith, prayer and the sacraments. Mother Teresa had God's vision.

There is a different blindness in North America now. There is selfishness, indifference, complaints, greed, pride, vanity, judgment, criticisms, ridicule, anger, hatred which consume our society. This is often the cause of much of the suffering in our world today. Like a ripple in the waters causing a wave our sins can affect the world. God allows sin in this world as a part of our free will. However, the sufferings we endure here when united with him will bring us glory in heaven. Sufferings often help us see clearly the needs and sufferings of those around us. When sufferings come it may seem that God has abandoned us. However, how many of us look back and see how sufferings have opened our eyes to deeper truths about God, others and ourselves. In our sufferings we have the example of Jesus who suffered for us and suffers with us. God is not blind to your sufferings rather he uses them to bring about good as in this Gospel story.

"Not all of us can do great things.
But we can do small things
with great love."

Mother Teresa

We can be freed from our sinful blindness by our participation in prayer, the sacraments and by our efforts to be good to others. This Lent is a time for a *metanoia* or a turning away from sin and back to God. We need God's strength to do good – this is why prayer is important too. But we can change our lives and others by our good works. Patience, humility, silence, kindness if practiced well on a daily basis can change the world. We must begin with ourselves by refraining from actions that cause suffering in others. This Lent is a challenge to refrain from evil and do good. We can smile at others. Remain silent in the face of adversity. Take time to listen to the needs of others. Do random acts of kindness. Refrain from excessive eating or spending. In these ways we gain Godly vision of the world, others and ourselves.

Dear God, help us see people and all your creation with loving eyes,

with a Godly vision that remembers that we are sinners,

with a Godly vision that forgives,

with a Godly vision that gives hope,

by: Miriam Westen, M.Ed., M.A. Theology, is a speaker, writer, teacher and Choir director/organist.

Email:

This contribution is available at <http://jceworld.blogspot.ca/2014/03/seeing-with-gods-eyes-jesus-heals-us-of.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Dusty Coffee Tables and Spotted Windows [at Busy Catholic Moms]

So, here I am going along, having picked up clutter off the floor, shoes all put in their appropriate places, toys and books on their shelves. I am feeling pretty good about my housekeeping – everything is in general order. Of course, the closet needs to be overhauled but not too many people see that and if the door is closed, I can even forget about it.

But then the sunlight streams through the window. It brightens the house and warms me up inside. And as I look around, in the brightness of the room, I realize that maybe my housekeeping isn't what I thought it was. The windows are spotted from months of cold precipitation and dusty



winds. And oh my! That coffee table is dusty! When did that happen?!

The brightness of the sunlight shines on everything, brightening the house, but also showing all of my shortcuts and neglectful housekeeping. All of the dust that has settled without me knowing it. All of the spots that I have not had time to wipe.

And it reminds me of Lent. During this time, God shines his light on my soul, showing me all of the places that I have been neglecting, all of the spots that have collected during my winter, all of the places where I have become lazy in my sins without realizing it. And I realize that I cannot do



this sort of housekeeping on my own. I need God's help.

Do you happen to wear glasses? I do when my eyes get tired of contacts at the end of the day. Whenever I go in for an eye appointment, I love to bring my glasses to have the specialist clean them up. He molds them to my face and has just the right cloth to shine them until they are clear of grease, smudges and spots.

Confession is very similar to this cleaning. The sacrament of Reconciliation is like handing our glasses to the specialist, as we hand our soul to the priest. Through the grace of God, he declares our sins forgiven. With Reconciliation and Absolution, our view of God becomes unblemished and we can look at the world with greater clarity. Our focus can turn to selflessness and charity and away from our own shortcomings and sins.

God is our housekeeper, our light and our hope, shining sunshine on our dust and wiping it away.



Thank you, Mom, for the great idea....Now, where is my duster?

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/sample-page/dusty-coffee-tables-and-spotted-windows/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

It's Not Naaman's Fault! [at Loved As If]

Today's lectionary included 2 Kings 5:1-15:

Na'aman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel, and she waited on Na'aman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Sama'ria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Na'aman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the maiden from the land of Israel." And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten festal garments. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Na'aman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." And when the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me." But when Eli'sha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Na'aman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the door of Eli'sha's house. And Eli'sha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." But Na'aman was angry, and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. Are not Aba'na and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel."



I first read this story when I was five. Once my hands had been well scrubbed, I would stand on a dining room chair and read from the illustrated “family” Bible. The book was too big for me to lift so it lay on the big table and I propped myself on one hand while turning the pages with the other. The lovely pastel illustration showed Naaman’s little maid servant peeping over the edge his chariot as he dipped himself in the river. She was, at most, about six or seven.

I’ve reread the story the story of Naaman’s healing many times since, in many translations. I’ve also heard many sermons and homilies on 2 Kings 5 from different Christian preachers. All of them have been much like the one I heard today, an exhortation to accept healing by doing the simple things God asks of us, particularly admitting our sins. But today, I realized Naaman isn’t a leper because he has done something wrong. He is ill. Elisha does not tell Naaman to confess his sins. Instead, Elisha gives him a treatment protocol so that he will be healed from the disease that has invaded his body.

Those of us who were abused as children (and the numbers are staggering) can sit in church and find ourselves bewildered. It’s such a simple thing, *Confess your sins and you will be healed*. The book of James tells us that. But our gaping wounds, though hidden, come not from what we did. Rather, they come from what was done to us. Except in rare instances, confession of my sins against God and my neighbour, while necessary, won’t heal the wounds others have incised within me. And, being told to stop the obsessive behaviours that came as a result of the sins committed against us is utterly ineffective. Usually we can’t just stop. We need something else.

At times, I have wanted to sit in a public square and cry out, *Look! Look at what was done to me! Look!* Instead, I learned to act as normally as I could. It was not until I found myself overwhelmingly loved by other Christians in Christian community that I was seen and loved as the wounded creature I am. The love I encountered didn’t negate or ignore any of the wisdom I had gained, neither did it patronize me. The love of my brothers and sisters, the love of the Body of Christ, scooped up the whole of me, including the crier in the public square. Before I knew what was happening, those Christians scooped me up and healing was happening. Some of them still don’t know the extent of the wounds I carry.

Children are inordinately harmed by the evils in this world because they are unable to fend for themselves. But many of us grow up. Some seek revenge on the entire world or as much of it as they can affect. But others simply do the best we can with broken hearts and shredded souls. And, quite simply, we've all been a bit shredded. One thing that might start many on the road to healing is acknowledgement of those times when Scripture makes it clear, the wounds are not always our fault but God will heal us anyway.

This contribution is available at <http://lovedasif.com/2014/03/24/itsnotnaamansfault/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Jesus the Winnower [at Dulcius Ex Asperis]

This post is adapted from a lecture I gave to the Knights of Columbus at St. Bernard Church in Tulsa tonight.

His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." **Matthew 3:12**

Although we are surrounded by farmland that stretches for miles and miles outside of Tulsa, our modern methods of farming have kept many of us far from the metaphors and similes of the Bible. Most of us could get to a farm within 15 minutes from this church, but we would not be at home there. Unless we were raised on a farm, we would not, beyond the basics of gardening or preparing eggs or caught fish for a meal, have an understanding of the processes that go in to making sure that we are fed each day. A farm in the consciousness of most of us in this part of the country, in this part of our city, is a place where cows keep the grass in check until the foundation for a strip mall can be laid; for all we know, after this happens, the cows go on to their next job five miles further down the road and wait for the next developer to come in an endless cycle of cows and concrete.



Yet, if we have allowed ourselves to become attuned to the Bible by listening to the cycle of readings at Mass through the years and by paying attention to the weekly homily, or gone even further to become involved in good Bible studies, then we find ourselves using these phrases as if we were truly relying on the soil beneath our feet and the water in the ponds or creeks near our houses to directly provide our next meal. The Christian immersed in Scripture daily sows and reaps, is a branch of the vine, is seed that has fallen on good or rocky soil, is a sheep searching for the shepherd, is a fisher of men or a worker in the field. Countless

times the work of farming, or catching or caring for animals that are destined to be food, is the canvas on which Jesus brings forth to his disciples in words the Kingdom of God.

As I was reflecting on this year's journey through Lent, the metaphor of the wheat and the chaff came strongly and persistently to me. There are others: Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats; the wheat from the weeds; the trees that bear good fruit from those that do not. But, what strikes me about these is that they seem to be pictures of the end of time, the Day of Judgment when no one is able to doubt that Christ is King because it will no longer require the eyes of faith to see, but simply eyes. We will all see the ultimate reality that has been obscured to us by original sin. We will either be at Christ's right hand or left, we will be saved or damned.

When John the Baptist tells the Pharisees and Sadducees, however, that the winnowing fan is in the hand of the Lord, he is alluding to the end of time, but also, in some sense, telling about a process that is happening in the present. The wheat will be gathered into the granary; the chaff will be burned in unquenchable fire; however, the winnowing fan is in his hand. The separation is going on right now.

For those of you who, like me, are used to buying your wheat processed into hamburger buns, cereals and pastas, it may help to reflect on the winnowing process as it was done until the age of modern farming. The kernel of the wheat, the good part of the plant that we eat, has to be separated from the outer covering which is light, insubstantial and not good for food. To separate them, they were scooped into a fan which in this case is a type of basket and thrown into the air. The lighter chaff would be blown away by the wind while the heavier kernels fell back into the fan. It didn't happen in one throw, it took many throws to get the chaff out of the wheat. It was hard work.

When we bring it back from biblical metaphor, we sometimes can't help but think how long it seems to have taken Jesus to separate the wheat from the chaff in our world and in our own lives. How long it seems to have taken our Lord to separate the sinners from the saints, the good from evil. It's nearly 2,000 years on and he still is at his winnowing. Up goes the wheat and chaff, and down comes the wheat with a little less chaff, over and over again.

For me, this comparison seems to describe very well what we see in the world. We look out at one time in our lives at a world where evil and disorder seem to prevail, and then a few months, years or decades on the good and order seem to have won out. And, then, evil and disorder come

back. In truth, they've never really fully gone away—the wheat and the remaining chaff having settled back into the fan. The wheat, those who keep and live the Faith, can and do get comfortable ignoring the chaff, those who embrace the evil. And, yet Jesus, the Winnower, isn't satisfied. He is building a perfect kingdom in which evil cannot exist, he is making a loaf of bread that must only be made of the good grain. So, he tosses it all up again and our world goes into disarray. We are no longer able to rest in the fan making our accommodations with evil. The chaff is surrounding us in a thick cloud and we feel as though God has forsaken us and that evil cannot be defeated. But, unseen by us, the cloud is being dispersed in God's wind. The chaff is being separated out.

Various philosophers and religions have ways of describing what seems to be the interplay of good and evil in the world. Georg Hegel in 19th Century Germany saw the conflict about him as the forces of history engaging in conflict followed by a temporary harmony followed by conflict again until such a time as humanity achieved civilization at the end of history. In the East, the philosophers see an unending battle of good and evil, equally matched. For me, though, the image of Salvation History as Jesus the Winnower throwing us up and down with firm but caring intent seems not only more likely but vastly to be preferred. There is a certain, loving finale.

Still, it is not just all of mankind that must be winnowed, but each individual as well. We must join with Christ to separate the wheat of our lives from the chaff of our lives. Just as we get comfortable with evil in our societies, we get comfortable with the chaff in our lives. And it doesn't require a lengthy discussion to see that the wheat in our lives is the Faith we have and the good that we do. The chaff is the sin we commit as well as the sin we allow. It is failing to respond to the mercy of a loving God; failing to allow ourselves to be winnowed.

My brother knights, tonight, we have the opportunity to rid ourselves of the chaff in our lives, to recover the wheat and make the work of Christ the Winnower more complete. Out in the church, priests from around the diocese have come for our Lenten penance service. Let us go and present to them the chaff in our lives that needs to be separated from us and burned. May your Lent be fruitful and your Easter blessed.

This contribution is available at <http://liamferguson.blogspot.com/2014/04/separating-wheat-from-chaff.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Who Was That Man? [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

[If God used Balaam's donkey to get that prophet's attention, I guess he can use me to get yours. May these periodic postings on the second and fourth Mondays of each month (God willing) generate fruitful discussion and faithful change.]

I've walked these few blocks countless times over the past twelve years during my visits to see my ailing sister. Although I have seen homeless individuals soliciting money many times, I had never seen anyone quite like the gentleman I saw this day as I headed toward confession.

There he was sitting with folded legs on the cold dirty icy cement sidewalk in front of the Catholic Church I was about to enter - sitting right next to the little tree where neighborhood animals defecate and urinate. His presence there caught me my surprise and made me uncomfortable.

He had a thick white beard. He wore several layers of dirty clothing hoping I am sure to stave off the bitter cold. He just sat there staring at the concrete slab and passing feet that rushed past him, holding the smallest of Dixie cups in his outstretched hand - his head bowed down conveying a sense of shame and utter despair. The paltry size of his cup suggested he was not anticipating any sizable donations from the hundreds that would pass him by. In the few moments I watched him, no one stopped. No one said anything to him. No one put any money in his cup. No one seemed to care.

Who was this man?

The cynics who passed him by probably felt he was an alcoholic or addicted bum looking for money to get drunk or high. No way would they be enablers by throwing a few coins his way.

Others perhaps believed he was just a lazy man unwilling to work for food and thereby not deserving of their assistance.

Maybe he was one of those professional “homeless” one sometimes reads about who actually rake in a nice chump of change. If he was, parking himself right in front of a Catholic Church was a stroke of marketing genius – really how could Catholics entering and leaving Church ignore a man in such obvious need? But they did, without exception.

Perhaps he was there conducting his own personal “undercover” research, feigning to be in need in order to assess how many Catholics authentically live out their faith and follow God’s command to be generous and willing almsgivers.

Or maybe, just maybe, he was legitimately and desperately in need, through no fault of his own, unable to feed himself or find safe shelter, ashamed to or unable to access programs that might be able to help him.

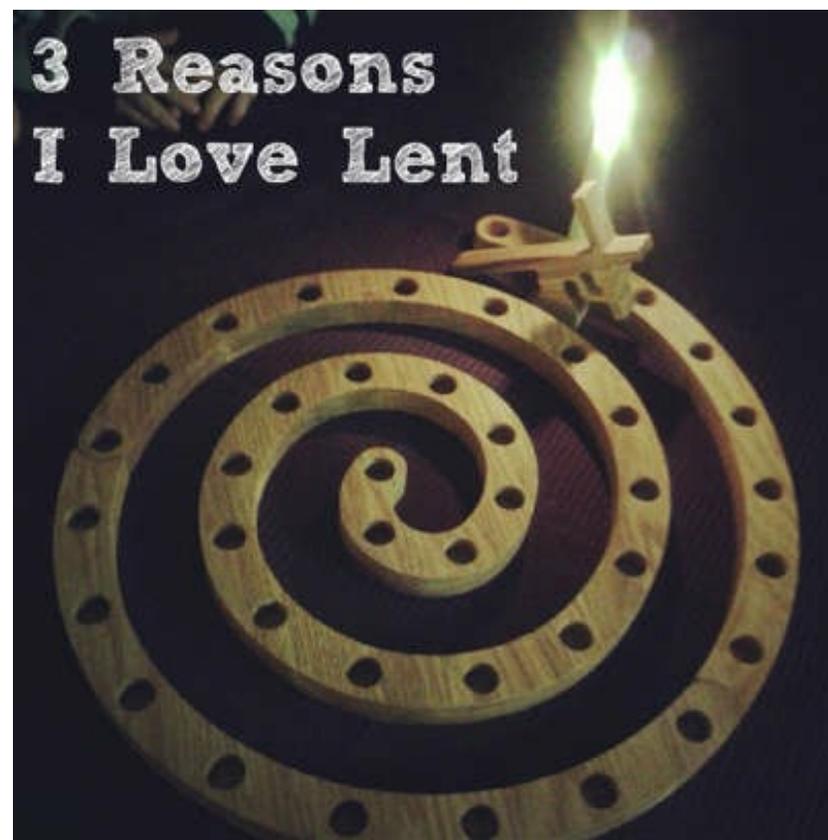
Whomever he was no one cared enough to stop.

But what if He was actually Jesus disguised as an unkempt and despairing beggar and nearly everyone passed Him by?

Our Lord meant it when He said: “I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me...as often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it to me.”

This Lent let us remember that we should not pick and choose between those we feel worthy of our help. For if the one we neglect is the Jesus we profess to love, what could we possibly tell Him when He asks us why we did not stop and help?

Three Reasons I Love Lent [at Jess]



Last night (early this morning) was the first time I had been able to make it to adoration in over three years. It was a part of my faith life that was sorely missed. I wanted to share with you some things that I was thinking about last night.

one

Finding some joy in sacrifice. Lent is not easy for many reasons, one being I love meat and really need to just admit that I am not a fan of fish. I have always seen fish as Lent. Why would I eat it if I didn't have to? Anyway, there is a joy that comes from the sacrifices we make during Lent. I see it radiate throughout social media this time of year, and it is a nice reminder of community and the forever growing yet shrinking Catho-circle. This joy is small and comes at the expense of giving something of ourselves to God, but it culminates at Easter, and it is just really lovely.

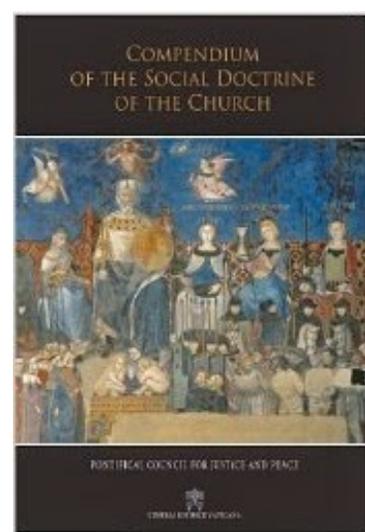
two

The liturgical simplicity. When I was growing up, the church I attended always cut the processional hymn during Lent and (even as a child that made up her own words to "Here I Am, Lord") there was something powerful in what was missing. We are at our new parish for the first Lenten Season, and on Ash Wednesday there was some piano during the Mass, but **no singing**.

Now, I have no idea if they keep that up throughout Lent, but it was such a powerful reminder of what this season means.

three

God's Gratuitous Presence. Life is wonderfully busy. It is stressful and there is never enough time. Lent forces me to reconnect and readjust my life. Last night, I busted open the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.



It is exciting to finally be digging in, but a bit tedious, I will admit. The title of Chapter 1 is "God's Gratuitous Presence." That is such a calming and exciting thought! A part of the chapter linked to Exodus 3:14 and Moses' encounter with God, so it gave me a great reason to break open my study bible that I bought a year ago (ahem) and continue on down the rabbit hole. A version of the translation for I AM WHO AM can be "He who causes to be." Incredible. It also made me think of Count of Monte Cristo.



Edmond: Can I never escape Him?

Mercedes: No, He is in everything.

This contribution is available at <http://www.jessfayette.com/2014/03/three-reasons-i-love-lent.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

4 Things Catholics Do that Rightly Scandalize Non-Catholics [at for Aleteia]

“Most Catholics don’t know the Bible,” “most Catholics use contraception,” “the religion of most Catholics is dead,” etc. There’s nothing new or shocking about these and similar criticisms, especially if you’ve spent any time defending the Catholic faith on the Internet or elsewhere. But they still sadden me, for at least one important reason: they are absolutely, undeniably, and scandalously true.

And they make it easy for non-Catholics to dismiss the Catholic faith they need for their salvation. Yes, we Catholics are sinners just like everyone else, and nominalism plagues every every religion. But we can do better. We have the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and full access to his infinite grace. We

should be held to a higher standard.

Now, it’s important to note that **none of the problems I list here are inherent to Catholicism itself**

, but come from Catholics not living out their own faith. Further,

none of them apply to all Catholics

, at least not in a significant way. Nonetheless, all of these things apply to

enough

Catholics that they cause scandal to non-Catholics, giving them easy reasons to not take Catholicism seriously.

I also do not pretend to not be a part of the problem. I am. But I’d also like to be a part of the solution. So here are four things that we Catholics unfortunately do that rightly scandalize non-Catholics - and that we need to improve to better bring the Gospel to the world. **1) Not talking enough about Jesus** He’s depicted on the cross front-and-center in most Catholic churches, it’s his Gospel we are charged to take to the ends of the earth, and he is mysteriously made present on the altar at every Mass. Jesus is the absolute center of the Catholic faith, the beginning and end of everything. At least he’s supposed to be. This problem is huge and can’t be overstated. Even among otherwise faithful Catholics, it sometimes seems we can spend a lot of time talking about the Church, the clergy, the Pope, the Mass, moral teachings, the Sacraments, and yes, Mary and the saints - all important things - but hardly ever mention *Jesus*

Yes, I'm saying it: evangelicals sometimes have a point when they say it seems all these things can be a distraction. And they are right to be scandalized by it. Of course, the solution isn't to throw the baby out with the bathwater, reacting to the other extreme and engaging in a certain sort of minimalism, but to have a proper ordering of things. Catholics must follow the teaching of their own Church and put Jesus first, for he is God incarnate and the only one who can save us. Everything else is only meant to help bring us closer to him and must be regarded as such. **2) Not knowing Scripture** "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." This isn't a quote from some fundamentalist Bible-only preacher, but from the 4th century Catholic saint and Doctor of the Church Jerome. It's also quoted in [*Dei Verbum*](#)

, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

It seems, then, a lot of Catholics are ignorant of Christ. The Catholic Church agrees with our Protestant brothers and sisters that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and final in all that it teaches. It is a primary way that we learn about Christ and the way of salvation. We Catholics have the Bible and are encouraged to know it, but most of us don't. **3) Dissenting from Church teaching** This might seem counterintuitive, but this especially applies to those teachings with which other Christians or non-Christians disagree. Because why should they take Catholic teaching seriously when it appears that Catholics themselves don't take Catholic teaching seriously? And though I'm just a layperson, I'll also humbly offer this thought, since I've had many Protestants express this to me: it's hard for some non-Catholics to take seriously the supposed authority of bishops (an essential aspect of Catholicism) when it seems they allow so much dissent. When I talk to my evangelical friends about the faith, I can point out all the confusion and disunity *sola scriptura*

causes for Protestants and then show that the Catholic magisterium offers a solution - at least in principle. This is because it appears as though our bishops often allow just as much dissent, confusion, and disunity on important issues as Protestants have with

sola scriptura

. What good is a bishop, they say, if he doesn't actually guard the faith and maintain a semblance of order? This can make it easy for Protestants to dismiss the need for the Magisterium, saying that Catholics really don't have it any better than they do.

4) Not living out Church teaching This is similar to number three, and it comes down to this: No one is attracted to hypocrisy. This message is not earth-shattering, but we Catholics can always use the reminder. Yes, we all have sin, and no one is perfect regardless of their religion. But are we even trying? Does our faith make any difference? It's an understatement to say the Church has countercultural moral stances. But her witness is greatly reduced when we Catholics don't seem to be trying to live them out. It doesn't inspire non-Catholics to rise to the heroic virtue called for by

the Church's teachings when Catholics don't seem to be trying. **We Need a Reformation** I don't mean to get people down on the Church herself. The Church is the Church of Christ regardless of the faithfulness (or lack thereof) of her members at any given moment. And there are faithful Catholics who are doing a lot of great things. But we are in need of a reformation. Not a reformation of schism, but a true reformation, the kind modeled by the saints in which we renew our dedication to the Catholic faith. It's then that we can most effectively fulfil Christ's commandment, and the first purpose of the Church's existence: to bring the Gospel of salvation to the whole world. **Brantly Millegan** is an Assistant Editor for

Aleteia

. He is also Co-Founder and Co-Editor of [Second Nature](#), Co-Director of the [International Institute for the Study of Technology and Christianity](#), and is working on a M.A. in Theology at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity. He lives with his wife and children in South St. Paul, MN. His personal website is brantlymillegan.com.

This contribution is available at <http://www.aleteia.org/en/religion/article/4-things-catholics-do-that-rightly-scandalize-non-catholics-5818252508790784>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

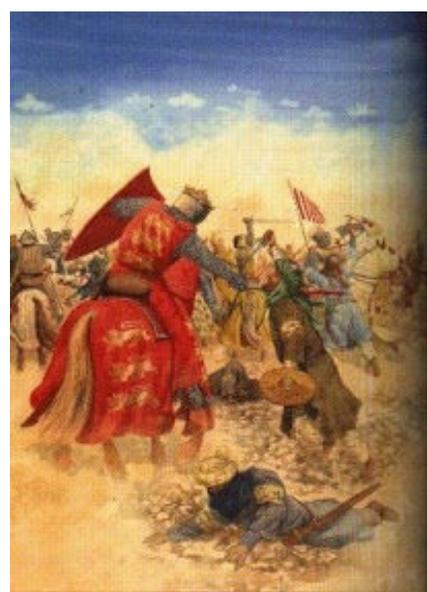
Five (5) Catholic Action Sites [at A Catholic Life]

In the past I have spoken at length on the importance of Sunday and the

[Top 10 Activities for Catholics to do on Sundays](#)

. As I had mentioned, Sunday is a day of activism for the glory of God and His True Church.

But what does this look like on any given Sunday? What are some concrete ways that we can be making a difference for the good of the Church and for society?



I present to you a list of some of the websites I routinely check each Sunday to find action items to address:

1.

[LifeSiteNews](#)

: This site is likely familiar to many of you as it includes a treasure trove of pro-life news. I scan the articles and find situations to which I can make an impact. For example, if there is an article about a pending piece of legislation, I will use that to write to my elected officials.

[Find yours here](#)

(or

[click here if you are from Canada](#)

).

2.

[American Life League](#)

: Like the item above, this site has great pro-life news and helps me stay informed and shows me action items that I can address.

3.

[Cardinal Newman Society](#)

: This organization is a tax-deductible institution focusing on keeping the Catholic Identity in Catholic schools and learning institutions. I glance the news recaps to see if there are any so-called Catholic schools hosting pro-abortion speakers or anti-Catholic thought or heresy. If so, they get a letter from me.

4.

[TFP Student Action](#)

. This organization defends Catholic values on campuses. They have a great "Get Involved Page" and I check it regularly for new petitions, surveys, and ways to make my voice heard.

5.

[SSPX Headlines](#)

. I check in each week to see the News Headlines for what is new in the realm of Traditional Catholicism.

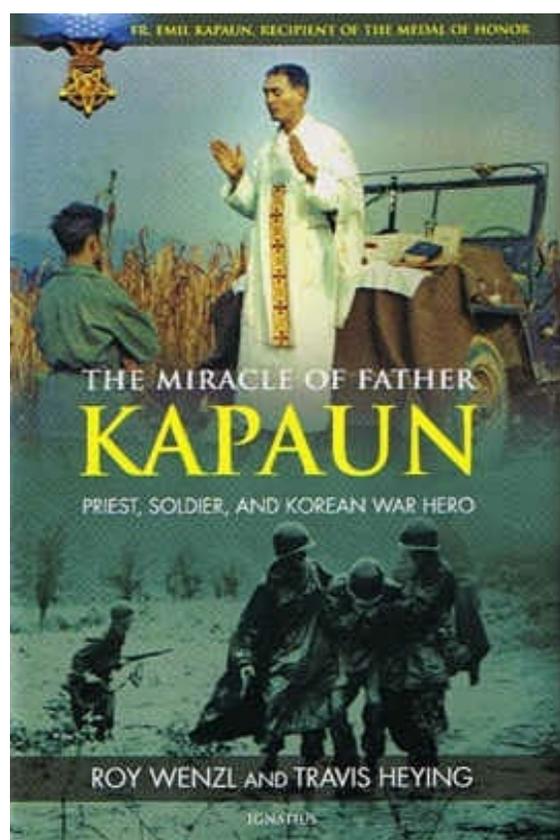
And please remember to bookmark and participate in the activities I have listed on

A Catholic Life's [Take Action Page](#).

This contribution is available at <http://acatholiclife.blogspot.com/2014/03/five-5-catholic-action-sites-for-sunday.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

St. Dismas & Fr. Emil Kapaun ... And ... How Do You Treat Your Priest? [at The Hill Country Hermit]



Today, March 25, is the feast of St. Dismas (by the way, March 25 is also the feast of the Annunciation!), and it seems a good day to recall/learn about a military chaplain from the Korean War, Fr. Emil Kapaun (kuh-PAHN). While a prisoner of war, this Catholic priest was expert at "stealing" food. His fellow POWs suffered terribly from extreme hunger, and so Fr. Kapaun felt as though it was fair to take a little food to keep his fellow soldiers from starvation. Sometimes Fr. Kapaun had some of the other POWs help out ... sneaking out in the middle of the night to find and snatch what food they could. Sometimes before going out on these food hunts, Fr. Kapaun would have the fellow POWs ask St. Dismas (the "Good Thief" who was crucified with Jesus) to pray for their success. Soon, Fr. Kapaun was nicknamed Dismas by his comrades!



Then he ('Dismas') said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him ('Dismas'), "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

-Luke 23:42-43

I learned another thing from Fr. Kapaun's story,

[The Miracle of Fr. Kapaun](#)

... that it is important to think careful about the way we treat our parish priests. True, they are not perfect and sometimes need to be challenged; however, sometimes

we

can be too difficult as well. I was stunned to learn that Fr. Kapaun served in World War II and so was not obligated to participate in the Korean War. It was his deliberate choice to go back to a war zone! When asked why he volunteered to go to a second war, Fr. Kapaun replied:

"Serving in those parishes - it didn't work out. I mean, my God, Bob! Have you ever had to deal with one of those women's committees of a church Altar Society?"

Now, this seems pretty unfair to a lot of Altar Society ladies, I'm sure many, many of them are very nice (and I'm sure that a few Knights of Columbus fellows can be rather trying, too). If Fr. Kapaun had known that he would be quoted, he probably would have couched his words a little differently. But, overall, the comment made me pause and think about the way we all treat our parish priests. That one preferred war over parish life staggered me! I now try to watch more carefully what I say to or ask of my parish priest. I'd really feel bad if he left us and headed over to Afghanistan!

| [Contents](#) |

Severing Ties with World Vision [at St. Joseph's Vanguard]



We've been sponsoring a boy in Bolivia through World Vision. But we are going to end it now, sadly.

Principles Matter

I was surprised when I read the [announcement](#). While I don't think that continuing the sponsorship would be a formal cooperation with evil—instead, likely only a material, and remote cooperation—I found the decision disturbing because it presents a radical change in the organization's principles regarding marriage.

If same-sex “marriage” and relationships in general are considered moral by World Vision, that principle will almost certainly affect how they minister to the needy, the people they choose to be missionaries and work with vulnerable children, and so on.

But that's not the only thing. Through this series of events I learned from a friend that [World Vision already promotes contraceptives, including abortifacient ones, among the needy](#). As a Catholic that is simply not acceptable. If I had known that originally, we would not have sponsored a child through World Vision.

Unity?

Poor World Vision. The well-meaning president had hoped that this move would increase Christian unity.

Stearns asserts that the “very narrow policy change” should be viewed by others as “symbolic not of compromise but of [Christian] unity.” He even hopes it will inspire unity elsewhere among Christians.

The [Called to Communion guys did a quick and accurate dissection of why this idea of unity is so confused](#).

Refusing to make a decision is a decision. Changing an important policy is a decision. It chooses A over B and so makes a statement about one's underlying beliefs and principles.

Today [Stearns haplessly lamented](#) that their original decision, which he hoped would lead to unity, actually only increased the division, and now with their reversal of the decision that division is cemented:

This has been a painful week in terms of the division that we created around our initial decision, and then reversing the decision two days later has created a lot of concerns with our employees and our key partners around the country.

And rightfully so. His actions were concerning.

I'm Hateful, Just Like Evangelicals

Liberal Protestant bloggers went into a frenzy, first singing World Vision's praises (and yelling at Evangelicals who protested) at the initial decision, and then condemning World Vision when they reversed it (and blaming Evangelicals for it).

[Rachel Held Evans immediately jumped into this latest culture war fray:](#)

But please, for the love, don't leave a child and a community that was depending on you in a bind so you can make a point about gay marriage. It's just not worth it.

What seems to be lost on Rachel and her followers is that *they* were making a point about gay marriage just as much as Evangelicals were. Apparently when Evangelicals do it, it is hateful and persecuting. When liberal Protestants do it, it is moral and just.

Also conspicuously absent are words of praise for all the Evangelicals who *for years have been sponsoring children, not because of gay anything but because they want to help needy people*. Suddenly World Vision makes this decision and liberal Protestants decide that It's Time to Sponsor Children Because "It's the Right Thing to Do."

Wasn't it the right thing to do a week ago, back when they weren't doing it?

Once World Vision reversed its decision, [Rachel](#) made a false accusation:

I confess I had not realized the true extent of **the disdain many evangelicals have toward LGBT people**, nor had I expected World Vision to yield to that disdain by reversing its decision under financial pressure.

Wha? Because we support traditional marriage and oppose false ideas about marriage, we "disdain LGBT people." That is simply not true, and seeks to conflate support for traditional marriage with disdain against people.

Rachel [wrote earlier:](#)

The gospel is at stake only insofar as we make one's position on same-sex marriage a part of

it. The gospel is threatened, not by gay people getting married, but by Christians saying support or opposition to gay marriage is an essential part of the gospel when it's not.

Is Rachel the arbiter of what is essential to the gospel and what is not? By what authority does she make such a determination? Perhaps she formed her opinion about what the Bible says by counting verses [like Tony Jones' friend Rev. Dr. John D'Elia](#):

Want to know what's "core" to our Trinitarian faith? Wrestling with the idea of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the community at the center of all existence. Perpetuating the lie that issues of human sexuality are somehow central to Christian doctrine, only ensures that our collective eye will remain firmly off the ball.

Let's simply reflect on the weight of God's word: The poor and needy are mentioned **400+ times**, while **homosexuality gets a paltry two mentions (four, at most)**. Let's at least agree to order our own lives and ministries according to **God's clearly stated priorities**.

This Protestant minister claims to know what "God's clearly stated priorities are" based on counting up verse mentions. Where does it say in the Bible that that is how we know what God's clearly stated priorities are? Many important things in the Bible are mentioned only once or a few times, yet we don't discount them because of that. And if God condemns something as evil, how many times does He have to say so for us to believe it?

Choosing a charity based on their principles is a good thing to do. That's what Evangelicals do. It's what liberal Protestants do. The only difference is, Evangelicals admit that they do it and liberal Protestants try to act like they don't. Their true colors were shown by the World Vision reversal, when their talk about not pulling sponsorships based on the organization's principles were put to the test, and some admitted that they had made their first gift to World Vision but now would never give to them again.

Not the Only Game in Town

We already sponsor another child through the Catholic organization Unbound/CFCA. After this World Vision fiasco, I am going to investigate whether CFCA also promotes contraceptives. They might, which would be shameful. Hopefully they do not. Giving abortifacients to poor people does not help them.

The canard that we who have been sponsoring children are doing it for ourselves is bogus. The fact is that I don't want to support an organization that has bad principles because those bad principles with invariably hurt the people I want to help.

I heard from friends on facebook of several other organizations that help people, without doing objectionable things.

<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnboscochildrensfund>

<http://www.chalice.ca/>

<https://www.facebook.com/EmilianiProject>

<http://www.helpthehelpless.org/>

Please chime in with comments on other organizations you know. Katie and I plan to choose one or two to support them.

This contribution is available at <http://www.devinrose.heroicvirtuecreations.com/blog/2014/03/28/severing-ties-with-world-vision/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Feeding the Hungry (and Allergic) [at FranciscanMom]

To the mom who was so apologetic about mentioning her daughter's dairy allergy to me at dinner the other day:

Do not feel as if it is an imposition on me to tell me what I need to know in order to safely feed your daughter.

With a bit of advance notice and an opportunity to bounce ideas around with you, I can come up with safe alternatives. I don't want you to have to feel like you need to send "special food" with her wherever she goes. (Or, at the very least, when she comes to dinner with us.)



It is both a corporal AND spiritual work of mercy to honor someone's medical dietary needs.

The corporal part is obvious. I think the spiritual part falls under the category of "comforting the sorrowful."

When your child has special dietary needs, it's tough on parents. By comparison, I have it "easy" with a diabetic. We just need nutrition labels and insulin. It's not that he *can't* have something.

I get a lot of "what can he have?" from people who don't know how diabetes works. That is an opportunity to gently educate ("instruct the ignorant" in a way). I do know that the people who ask me this question are acting on a generous impulse, and I appreciate it. I appreciate even more when they ask first, rather than investing in expensive special foods like sugar-free candies, which are much less diabetic-friendly than people think.

So when I ask what your child can have, I intend to provide that. She's singled out enough. You

have to bring special food for her most, if not all, of the time. I wouldn't offer to find something that works for her if I wouldn't gladly do it. I am happy to find a way for her to enjoy the meal that all her friends will be sharing.

(And don't worry—I left out the Parmesan on the [tomato pie](#).)

This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2014/03/28/feeding-the-hungry-and-allergic/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Playful Thomas Aquinas [at walk the way]



St. Thomas Aquinas statue, detail, Ames, Iowa

Though the church celebrates the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas on January 28, Thomas actually died on March 7, 1274 – 740 years ago today.

I think Thomas is one of the most maligned theologians of the Catholic Church.

In part this is due to the scholasticism that reduced Thomas' dialectical method into a set of propositions – forgetting the serious questions that pervade Thomas's *Summa Theologica*.

We also forget that Thomas, though steeped in the scriptures and in the writings of the fathers of the church, was not adverse to seek inspiration in the writings of the pagan Aristotle as well as in the texts of Jewish and Islamic philosophers.

But I think we also miss that Thomas was a person steeped in the love of God and seek to live this out in his daily life.

He could be a little absent-minded – or, rather, super-focused on a problem. There is the story of his attending a banquet with King St. Louis where, in the middle of the banquet, he pounded the table and stated that he had just found the perfect way to respond to a heresy!

But I think he was also practical.

In grad school a friend told me that Thomas had a three-fold way to respond to feeling bad: a good meal, a bath, and sleep. I have no idea where this is found in Thomas' works, but it's rather good advice.

But what I really like about Thomas is what I found this past year in Timothy Radcliffe's *Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation*:

St. Thomas Aquinas believed that an inability to play was a sign of moral weakness: ‘Therefore, unmitigated seriousness betokens a lack of virtue because it wholly despises play, which is as necessary for a good human life as rest’.

So, today, on the anniversary of St. Thomas Aquinas’ death, let’s play!

This contribution is available at <http://walktheway.wordpress.com/2014/03/07/playful-thomas-aquinas/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Yup, another post about Lent [at Conversations with Sophia]

Now that we have a few days of Lent under our belts, I'd like to know how you are doing and what you've given up. If you are feeling a little wishy-washy on this, then this post is for you! For all the stragglers, maybe this will be a little motivation. It seems like every blog I read has lots of Lenten wisdom to share about the purpose and nature of the Catholic practice of giving something up for Lent (note: this is not Catholic doctrine, but simply a Catholic discipline designed to help us grow spiritually).

Have you given up something that you know you can't really stick to? Or maybe you aren't really sure what to give up so you haphazardly and randomly give something a go but don't stick to it?

I'm seeing this with my kids. They are having trouble committing, 47 days is a long time, after all.

And if you are an overachiever like me, then Lent can take on a 'Larger than Life' persona. I feel like I should just give up everything and that it's not OK to enjoy anything. After all, Jesus gave up everything. And what makes me think I deserve comforts and pleasures in the first place?

Others that I talk with are just sort of going through the Catholic motions with no real conviction behind their actions. That's always a recipe for failure.

Making a Lenten sacrifice can be very powerful though, so I want to offer a little encouragement to get back to basics and give it a go.

1) Pick just one thing. Don't fall into my trap. Unless you are already a complete saint you will likely find it difficult to deprive yourself of every pleasure. Pick one that you feel you can stick to. Simple.

2) Make it a daily sacrifice. Giving up junk food, when you only have it a few times a week, and you are always trying to give it up anyway, doesn't really count. Big or small, it should be something you can sacrifice on a daily basis.

3) It doesn't have to be something big, it just has to feel like a sacrifice. Don't be afraid. The discomfort is only temporary and the potential gains are eternal! I've decided this year to do something small though difficult for me. God can do big work with a small gift.

4) Remind yourself of the reason you are sacrificing every day and then sacrifice on purpose. Why should you sacrifice anything? If you don't know, then find out. You can check out this great post on [Interior Illuminations](#) for starters. And then give something up willingly and with Joy.

5) Don't give up something that is ultimately a good. One of my children (who shall remain nameless) said, "How about if I give up church on Sundays?". Obviously, that is so far out of the

question that it's laughable. (If you find yourself wanting to give up mass for Lent we need to have a different discussion!). This may be helpful to keep in mind when discerning if Facebook is



something you should give up.

It's never too late, so jump in! Keep in mind that this is not a contest to see how long you can go without chocolate before you are so desperate for a fix that you give up entirely and buy out the candy aisle at the grocery store (ahem.) Stick to the basics and keep it simple. The success is discovering what you really possess in spite of what you have given up. Christ of course! And what a Joy that brings. If we don't practice this in small ways, then we won't be able to call on it when we have no choice. More than anything, Lent is an opportunity, and by our obedience and participation we allow God the chance to shower us with spiritual gifts.

Isn't the church Wise???

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. (James 1:2-3)

This contribution is available at <http://jpicenterforwomen.wordpress.com/2014/03/08/yup-another-post-about-lent/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

How To Say 'No' To Him [at The Veil of Chastity]

As I mentioned in my 7QTs 3 weeks ago, several readers have written to me wanting advice on how to start saying 'yes' to Chastity. This 'yes' to Chastity will mean saying "no" to the person they are sleeping with. They want to know how to go about it. It is not a silly question.

Sex is supposed to attach us to our lover. That is the whole point. So, when the attachment is to someone who never plans to make a commitment, then it is devastating. They wonder, "*How do I detach myself?*" and "*How do I strengthen myself to say 'no'?*" and "*Is there anything I can say or do to change his mind?*"

If you have had a revelation about the wisdom of Chastity and want to start living out this virtue, how should you go about implementing this decision? What words should you use knowing that a premarital 'yes' to Chastity means a premarital 'no' to him.

Marriage

Ahhh, marriage. Isn't it a major driver in all this?

It is so easy to say 'yes' to sex. The dating relationship starts out with great affection and attentiveness from him. His eyes may even sparkle when he looks at you. His family seems to love and approve of you. He begins the moves which lead to sex. You know the moves. You **respond** feeling confident that this guy is serious about you and that the relationship is heading in the direction of.....what? **Marriage**.

"Having sex and thinking about marriage are 2 quite different things" [Biltrix](#)

What Are His Intentions?

Women come to the decision for Chastity in a variety of ways. Sometimes it is the Holy Spirit Who convicts them about their sexual sin. But most of the time it is a logical, rational and emotional decision when they realize that the much-hoped-for marriage is only in their head. They assume he has the same intentions and are devastated when they realize he is not going to marry them anytime soon. Or at all.

A Ploy For Marriage?

Sometimes a girl will put the 'marriage' cards on the table to try to figure out where the relationship is heading. She may be able to tell about his intentions toward her simply by **his reaction** to her [decision for chastity](#). She hopes he will say, "*Okay. I understand. I love you and want to keep dating you to discern marriage.*" But, often times she is met with "Why?" or "What?!?!?" or "Goodbye." Sometimes, he disappears once he knows there is no longer anything

in it for him. Repeating this wonderful quote:

“Having sex and thinking about marriage are 2 quite different things” [Biltrix](#)

When girls write to me, they are often wondering how to present their desire for Chastity without it sounding like a *ploy* for marriage. But, let’s be honest. It is about marriage. And, this is nothing to be ashamed of. The requirement to have sex with you is marriage. This does not disqualify him from ever having sex with you. If he marries you, he qualifies. So, this is not about him. It is about you and your future husband.

What Is Your Reason?

This question about how to implement Chastity is one of my favorites. I usually respond to it with a series of questions to try to figure out ***your specific reason*** for wanting to commit to Chastity.

You see, I cannot tell you your reasons. The best reasons come from **inside of you**. After one girl responded with her reasons, I asked her to read the reasons back to herself every day for 30 days. This is an exercise that is usually effective.

How To



Once you understand your specific reasons, here is what I suggest:

1. Write down your reasons. Read your reasons to yourself everyday for 30 days.
2. Avoid near occasions of sin. You know the ‘situations’ that lead you to sin. Avoid those.
3. Be firm in your decision. Be clear in your words to him about waiting until marriage. If he doesn’t marry you, he doesn’t get to sleep with you. It is not personal. It is not a ploy. He just doesn’t qualify for this level of bonding and intimacy.
4. Pray and seek grace to strengthen you by living a [Sacramental Life in Christ](#).
5. If you are struggling, write to me so that I can pray for you and walk you through this.

“Chastity is a difficult, long-term matter; one must wait patiently for it to bear fruit ...”
Blessed Pope John Paul

God love and bless you!

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2014/03/11/how-to-say-no-to-him/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Faith and a NEW way of thinking [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

Have faith.

But when you are at the lowest of your moods, how do you have faith? Where does that ability to have faith come from?

Presently I am reading a book about being happy despite your circumstances. Being happy doesn't fix the problems and concerns of daily life, happiness doesn't even pay the bills or find the lost spirit. Happiness is fleeting for the most part.

Joy is what seems to be lasting, but how do you find joy? Where does the joy come from? Someone, I'm sure will come back and say that you find it in Jesus Christ. Yes, yes, I agree that knowing our Savior should bring us joy...joy that is everlasting and eternal.

But how do you find joy or HAVE joy when you are down, lost, depressed, feeling out of sorts?

This book talks about thoughts, how we are always constantly thinking...without even knowing or realizing that we are thinking, we are thinking. Thoughts are formed within a nano second and can last as long as we think about them. The key here is how long WE DECIDE to think about them, good or bad.

Our thoughts are divided between two things...reality and non-reality which is formed by fear, emotions, past experiences that can or cannot relate to the present situation, and habit. It's in the knowing the difference between these two thoughts that gives us the high mood or the low moods we as human beings experience each and every day.

The silly thing about many of us (

ME included

) is that there is nothing wrong with our lives, we have wonderful families, (with a few nuts, of course) a good marriage, great kids, a roof over our heads, food on the table, and a job to go to each week. Our health is good, money in our pockets, and friends to count on, but still the moods, the thoughts come and carry us away...nothing is right, life sucks, I'm too fat, not smart enough, I hate this house, this town, ahh! Then before you know it you're as low as one could get; no faith, no joy, no happiness just discouragement.

So the key here is to control the thoughts that are coming fast and furious without consciousness or control. Quickly deciphering which is reality and which thought is not; since so many of our

thoughts are not even possible, is difficult at best. These thoughts have been created from fear, mental deception, temptation from the great Deceiver, and wherever else we have exposed ourselves to; TV, movies, Facebook. I, myself, have read way too many of these stories to forget, much less dismiss easily as possible non-realities, sigh.

But we must, one thing the author says in this book is that we need to review our present situation and see that mostly there is no reason or proof of reality of our thoughts, so we much discount them and replace these negative thoughts with positive ones. Redirect your head, or as a friend of mine says, "re-frame it" look at it differently and see through rational eyes what is truly reality. What I see here is having the courage to change and basically release thoughts that are not reality and that are formed from fear. Having the courage to believe in a reality that we may not see with our eyes, but with our hearts. I've heard courage decribed as being fear with running shoes on, interesting, but makes sense. Courage is having the gumption to take off on faith despite our thoughts and fears.

So back to my original question: How does one have faith when at the lowest of our moods? The snap of a finger, or pat on the back...no through prayer, not just one prayer, but many prayers and many thoughts of God and a saint or two whose journey through mortal life had it's challenges and that they persevered.

The bottom line is that we must persevere in faith, finding the joy that is in Jesus Christ through positive thinking, redirecting our heads and hearts to more meaningful and joyful reading material....like the Bible to help us along the way, both spiritually and mentally...

and don't forget your guardian angel who is there to keep and guide you!!*Dear Heavenly Father, when the dark thoughts happen across my mind, grab them before they reach my heart and hold me firmly in your arms. Help me to think only of your love and feel the joy that is in your son our Lord Jesus Christ! AMEN*

This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2014/03/faith-and-new-way-of-thinking.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Spiritual Motherhood: Not Just for the Infertile Woman [at The Road Home]

I've been working on this for a long time and even as I hit publish I'm not sure it's quite right. I've come back to it, tweaked it, deleted it all together, and more. I even have a

~~very eloquent~~

post sitting in draft form that's been there for a while, you'll see it in a bit.

A couple of weeks ago, when we were in Texas for NFP Teacher Training/Enrichment, after The Man and I shared about infertility with the NFP teachers, we also spent some time looking at the structure of the third class we teach. This class has always included something about infertility and while it can be brutal (emotionally) to teach, it is important and a good lesson in dying to self is also important. I'm so glad that it was already part of what couples get when they learn Standard Sympto-Thermal NFP before The Man and I gave our presentation.

Ever since The Man and I started TTC it has gotten a bit harder and harder to teach this particular class though I couldn't quite put my finger on why. Through conversations that I've had with a number of people recently and then standing up doing a "what we teach in class 3 and why" presentation (instead of just teaching the class) it hit me. There is (was - it's been changed now) a transition from the slide about infertility to a slide about adoption and being open to life in other ways than just physical. What really stuck out to me about this is that adoption, volunteering, coaching little league, etc. are not to be reserved for those poor, unfortunate souls who can't "have children of their own." (I'm sorry, I'm hearing Ursula from The Little Mermaid in my brain...)

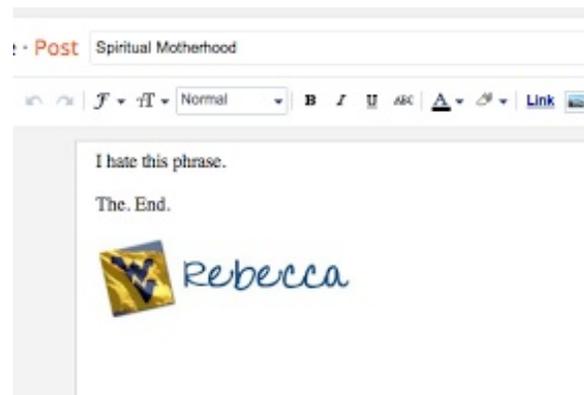


Anyway, I spoke up and it seems that most everyone in the room agreed and so the ordering of the slides was changed. That's the background on why this post and why now. Here's the real "stuff" I want to say.

I have long since really disliked the phrase "spiritual motherhood" - see? (this is the

~~very eloquent~~

post that's been in my drafts for, oh probably at least 6 months now)



I also hate the phrase "why don't you adopt"? But honestly that is a whole other post of it's own.

I want to say to the people who say these things to me (usually they are already parents): why didn't/don't you adopt? how about I take your kids and you can have spiritual motherhood?

(In order to not confuse two topics, I shall focus on spiritual motherhood here and just state that adoption is not just for the infertile couple either. I will also say that all of this applies to men and fatherhood as well, I will just mostly use mother and feminine pronouns to help keep this a bit easier to read.)

I, of course, do not say these things. I know (or at least I assume) people genuinely mean well and I realize this is just one more instance of it being about my pain. Only, in this case I think it needs some considering...

Is it really only infertile couples who are to adopt? Is it really only women who are infertile who are called to spiritual motherhood? Well, we'll count priests and sisters in there on the spiritual mother/fatherhood side of things, and of course people who are single, right?

But what about everyone else? You know, the people who marry and give birth to children? What about them? Are they exempt from spiritual motherhood?

I don't think so.

I don't remember reading anywhere in scripture that only those who aren't physically fertile are to care for the widows and orphans. I don't remember Jesus saying "when you infertile women visited the sick and fed the hungry, you did that for me." And even though the Catechism states that infertile couples should consider caring for orphans, it doesn't say

only

infertile couples should consider caring for orphans.

If we want to create a culture of life, to create a new humanity, I think that it's time every woman

starts to ask herself, how am I called to motherhood? Is it physical motherhood? Is it adopting (Side Note: I suspect that adopting is much more in-line with physical motherhood than it is spiritual motherhood since after the child is born and then adopted (even if adopted older), there is very little, if any, difference. I admit I have no direct experience with either, but I can't help but think this way, my friends who have adopted, feel free to correct me if I am wrong.)

Many times every day, women are called to mother and men are called to father -

regardless of their marital status or fertility.

When I consider spiritual motherhood in this light, in the light of who I am as a woman rather than as an alternative to physical motherhood, I free myself to walk down the road towards it; to see how I live out this call that is part of my feminine genius. The enemy is smart though, for each time I take a step down this particular road, someone suggests to me that I can "always be a spiritual mother" or asks "why don't you just adopt?" and I stop and decide that I will not go down this road after all. This is evidence to me that I'm on to something here, that this isn't just the ranting of some bitter, infertile woman, but rather that if we all (myself included) truly stepped up to our call to care for one another, to be mothers and fathers to those we encounter, that it would have a tremendous impact.

I'm not advocating for an either/or here, it isn't physical mother/fatherhood OR adoption OR spiritual mother/fatherhood, but rather a both/and approach to openness to life. I'm speaking specifically about those called to the vocation of marriage (and I'm including those who are called to marriage but still wait for their spouse in with those of us infertile married people, as I have it on good authority this difficulty with the phrase "spiritual motherhood" applies greatly to them as well.) Someone called to consecrated or religious life embraces a call to spiritual mother/fatherhood alone, giving up physical mother/fatherhood for the sake of the kingdom, just as they are celibate for the sake of the kingdom. For the rest of us, again, myself included, we must open our hearts to both/and.

Et et

(Edited to add: Usually I like to respond in an email message to comments, but I'm finding your comments are really helping me to work through this some more, so if you don't usually subscribe to comments, you might want to this time. Also, please read the comment thread if you have time, as I've already been able to have some more pieces of this puzzle filled in for me.)

 Rebecca

This contribution is available at <http://www.theroadhomewv.blogspot.com/2014/03/spiritual-motherhood-not-just-for.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Why We Can Trust Him [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are always in my presence. (Isaiah 49:16)

Every Christian knowledgeable of the hundreds of Old Testament prophecies of Messiah's first coming are aware of the word-picture Psalm 22 (especially verses 1-18) paints of the crucifixion. Jesus Himself quotes from the psalm while on the cross (Matthew 27:46). But many Christians are unaware of the additional prophetic information about the crucifixion found in one of the books Catholics believe to be part of the Bible. The book of Wisdom was written a century or so before Jesus' birth. This is from chapter two:

"Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, because he is annoying to us; he opposes our actions, Reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the Lord".

"To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, Because his life is not like that of others, and different are his ways. He judges us debased; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure. He calls blest the destiny of the righteous and boasts that God is his Father."

"Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him in the end. For if the righteous one is the son of God, God will help him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. "

"With violence and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him."

I think this is not only an amazing prophecy clearly fulfilled on Golgotha, but it can be an enormous encouragement to those of us who sometimes wonder if God really is in control of things – even when things go bad.

Yes. He is.

As He tells us through the prophet Isaiah (37:26): *Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass* And the psalmist tells us (Psalm 139:15-16): *My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place . . . Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one*

of them came to be.

He knows our name. He knows our address. And our lives are engraved upon His hands.

That is why we can trust Him.

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2014/03/why-we-can-trust-him.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Lent, life, loss, hope [at makingthetrek]



Once upon a time, there was a couple who had been married a long time. Blessed with 4 children who were happy, healthy and going through the usual ups and downs of childhood. No complaints, just normal life. This couple was open to life. Even though they are both approaching mid 40s, they were healthy and open to God's plan in regards to their family. Lo, and behold one day it happened. The woman suddenly and without warning re-gained her sense of smell during Mass whilst seated next to a woman who clearly hit the garlic rolls the night before,(heavy emphasis on garlic). Confused with this return of olfactory sensation and accompanying nausea, a quick count on the PeriodTrackerApp prompted a visit to the local CVS.

Confirmation post peeing on a stick. Twice. And the world began to spin.

Fast forward through the week of sudden shock and awe at this life turn of events as the couple quietly processes the news with prayers, trepidation, joy, laughter, wonder and trust. Clearly God has a plan here; who were they to question.

Then.

Just as the reality settled itself and planning stages were to begin: when to tell the kids, the family, friend, etc., doctor's appointment, bedroom rearranging, financial rearrangement, etc, etc, etc.. The woman began to bleed.

And cramp.

And reality readjusted. And plans were undone. Tears were cried. A mental day was taken. And with Lent upon them, they clung to the promise that God's plan is infinitely better than their own.

Despite the temporary confusion and fog, He has great things in store. In addition to His promise of hope and plans and future, He has given this family, this couple a special soul to intercede on their behalf.

Thanks be to God.



Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

This contribution is available at <http://makingthetrek.wordpress.com/2014/03/13/lent-life-loss-hope/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Thankful for Everyday Life [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



Thankful for so many things

Even through the muck of everyday ups and downs



Thankful for the mama fox in our yard.

I keep the kids away from her den though.

She sat and watched us looking at her in the window....

Isn't she beautiful?



Thankful for what we call "Grandma's feather bed"

We have 4 kids in here, sharing 2 double beds.

(Little Red just joined them...poor boy)

(Oh, shush, he just sleeps here)



Look at that dresser.

One of the nicest ones we have

and one girl decided to (years ago)

sit on the drawer, as a bench.

Yes, it did break

Our fix?

I painted a piece of wood...we are going to nail it over the hole.

Please tell me these kind of things happen in your house too...



Thankful

for

[Holy Heroe](#)

s, and that at least one of my children likes to watch their videos!

Thankful for my little puzzle man

He can do 60 and even 100 piece puzzles

(100 with help)





Thankful for under 10 bucks,



I recovered this dressing table bench!

My 9 year old picked the material, isn't it cute?



Thankful for sweet 4 year olds, full of kisses and hugs and screams.

She is all cuteness wrapped up in a tiny body



Thankful my plant continues to bloom and bring spring to my kitchen!



And we need to mow the lawn!



Thankful for my blooming spring cactus!

(it might be a sign for Phoenix?)



Thankful for toddlers that undress themselves (anywhere, anyplace, any time he wants to) because this will come in handy, right?



Thankful for this sweet girl, she is just dying for mud... looks like she found a little.



These girls can't wait for the snow to get off the trampoline.

(why, yes, we did leave it out all winter)

They've been shoveling it off and trying to get it off

(this is a very big, heavy, hard chunk of ice)



Thankful for sweet as pie



Thankful for our racetrack built right into our home.

He starts at the living room, (where I am taking this picture)

runs to the office and back

157 times per day.



Thankful for toddler antics.

The only reason he even is holding this particular baby

is because his older sister wants it.

He held it all morning so she couldn't play with it.

And she only wanted this particular baby

even though we have 26 other ones that look very similar to this one.



Thankful for muffins in the morning

(pumpkin chocolate chip)

Thankful my 2 youngest girls can sing all the songs from the movie

Frozen.

Of course, since we live in Minnesota

and are expecting 8-12 inches tonite,

they love the snowman one best.

They've seen it in video 4 times

(well worth the \$16 deal I got at Sam's Club)

They also have all the lines memorized.



Since we are looking at moving to San Antonio



or Phoenix, Arizona

I thought you'd enjoy this song!

Classic, huh?

Linking up with

[Margaret for her Weigh in Wednesday](#)

(I'm not weighing in by actually "weighing in")

I'm going to weigh in on the fact that I'm still trying to lose this accumulated baby weight and still trying to work out when I get a chance.

And

this week on the treadmill

(I made it there twice)

I'm

Thankful

that

My favorite song to walk to was:

(off my i-pod)

(please excuse the meaning of the video)

I had to watch it 3 times to get it.

I'm

Thankful

for Backstreet Boys songs,

they get me moving!!

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2014/04/thankful-for-everyday-life-link-up.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Presence Evangelism is the New/ Old Evangelism [at joy of nine9]

Evangelism has gone through many stages to reach the place we are today. Up until the late 60's, evangelists were mainly preachers of the Word. In the Protestant camp, Billy Graham shone the brightest while for Catholics, the first name that pops into my head as an example is Bishop Fulton Sheen and his radio program. These men focused on an evangelism of the word, a preached sermon or talk with the purpose of convincing people to repent, change and commit their lives to God.

The primary way the Holy Spirit touched people in large crowds in the 70's, 80' and 90's was through power evangelism. Rather than preaching long sermons, the evangelists who drew the largest crowds were prophets and healers. The Spirit fell in a tangible way. This was not restricted to the Protestants. The Catholics experienced their own Charismatic Renewal with crowds of 30,000 gathering in Rome in the mid 70's. I remember one Catholic Charismatic Conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where 10,000 people sang gently, harmoniously in tongues like angels and I am sure with angels. Organizers allowed the Holy Spirit to move gently among the crowd, healing physically and emotionally.

Now the Spirit of God is moving among the grassroots. It is the time for the little people to shine.



God is choosing humble, ordinary people who have suffered and lived obscure lives faithful to Him and allowed Him to purify and mold them into His presence. Such men and women attract others who are hungry for God because people sense the love and power of God in them. There is no room for pride or ego because it is all about God saving them in their littleness.

He shocked me. Sure I felt God and His joy was bubbling up within me but I had not prayed for or healed this man. I simply made him laugh.

Caught Up In Appearances [at City On a Hill]

*Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature,
because I have rejected him.*

*Not as man sees does God see,
because man sees the appearance
but the LORD looks into the heart ([1 Sam. 16:7](#))*

We'll, we're more than halfway through Lent, so us procrastinators better start to buckle down and get serious about it. Now what should I give up? Actually, for me, this Lent has been very spiritually productive, especially in my contemplating God's plan and trying to be less bogged down by my own struggles and falling into self pity from thinking how hard I must have it. [Last Sunday's readings](#) were exactly what I needed (they usually are) to help keep me on course in my Lenten journey.

Whenever I hear the account of David being chosen from among his brothers, I can't help but think of [this](#). That's what having children...or at least the mind of one will do. In the Veggietales version, young David is given the [Sisyphean](#) task from his brothers of propping up their ever-falling sheep. He was the youngest of eight, and as we know, *s**t* flows downhill. David had no shot at his father's inheritance and probably resigned himself to the fact he'd be tending the flock for the rest of his life. Little did he know God's plan would be beyond his wildest imagination.

I'm sure we all feel this way from time to time - I know I do often. We get discouraged by our daily labor and lost in the darkness of self-pity. Then we run the danger of getting caught up in appearances as Samuel did. He saw the oldest brother as big, strong, and handsome and figured he was prime king material. However, while man judges appearances, God judges the heart. He calls us to see His plan that is far beyond our routines and what we can see on the surface. Our struggles are temporary, but God wants us forever.

My friend Kevin mentioned the scene in *The Empire Strikes Back* where Yoda chastises Luke for judging him but his stature and appearance. He's looking beyond the odd little green guy in the swamp to find the great Jedi Master, which is a great comparison to the scripture. The people of Jesus' time also looked beyond the simple carpenter for their great Messiah, not realizing the great *I AM* was in their midst.

We've been praying the [St. Padre Pio Novena](#) together as a family. I'd like too close with part a prayer from that Novena which he composed for confidence and trust in God's Mercy.

*O Lord, we ask for a boundless confidence
and trust in Your divine mercy,
and the courage to accept the crosses and sufferings
which bring immense goodness to our souls
and that of Your Church.*

Of course now I'll never get this image out of my mind when I read Samuel. Have a blessed week.



This contribution is available at <http://1cityonahill.blogspot.com/2014/04/caught-up-in-appearances.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The case for Communion on the tongue [at crucesignatiblog]

Let's get something straight here: the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord, right? Right. And we receive the Eucharist at Mass, right? Right again. And because we love Him and want to show reverence for Him, we should handle the Eucharist as much as possible before consuming it, right? Uh...

Where I live, there is no real problem with Communion on the tongue versus Communion on the hand. All the priests we have had in the past fifteen years have been okay with either way of receiving. This is good, as I have read that in other parishes, some people are even refused Communion by the priest when they want to receive on the tongue (by the way, it is against canon law for a priest to do this). So how, after several hundred years of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, did the Church gradually slide into receiving mostly on the hand?

Well, for starters, it was one of several liturgical changes that were made shortly after the Second Vatican Council (a great article to read can be found [here](#)). It started in Holland and although the pope, Paul VI didn't originally want to, he granted them permission and the Holy See established seven regulations regarding Communion on the hand. In the late 70's, Communion on the hand came to America.

Now before I start ranting, let me just say that I have nothing against the people who receive Holy Communion on the hand. However, I have many objections to the practice of it.

1. It does not foster an attitude of love and reverence towards Our Lord.

To quote the afore-mentioned article:

In 1950, 87% believed in the Real Presence. Today, that number has plummeted to a mere 34%.

I'm not saying that the reception of Holy Communion on the hand is the only reason for this statistic. There are a host of other reasons for it. But I think that this is one of them. Out of respect for Christ, we should refrain from handling the Eucharist more than we actually need to. This is God we're talking about, people! Don't tell me that receiving on the tongue is too good for Him.

2. It is more likely that the Eucharist will be dropped or abuses may occur.

When the Eucharist is placed in a person's mouth, the physical aspect of digestion begins once the saliva touches it (remember the soda cracker science project back in grade three?). Soon, the

sacramental presence is completely dissolved. When the Eucharist is received on the hand, the communicant has to place it in their mouth, but here is the problem: many choose to take their time in doing so. When the rules for receiving Communion on the hand were laid out, part of it was that the Eucharist was to be placed in the mouth while still standing in front of the priest. However, many begin walking away before consuming it, and this can lead to problems. There are a number of satanic cults that use the Eucharist in their ceremonies, and the reception of Communion on the hand makes it easy for anyone to walk up in the line, take it, and put it in their coat pocket when they get back to the pew. My second cousin from Ontario was telling me how when he was serving a high school Mass, he had to tell a classmate to consume the host as he had tried to walk back to his seat with it.

As for dropping the Eucharist, this can happen under either method. Heck, the day of my First Communion I ended up dropping the host and I was receiving on the tongue (thankfully, it was saved by the wonderful altar-boy with the paten). I learned that the tongue has to be out a certain distance, but once you know that, you know it for life.

3. It can foster dislike or hatred towards Catholics who prefer to receive on the tongue.

This isn't really a big one where I come from, but in other places it can be. Sometimes people who kneel and receive on the tongue, pray the Rosary daily, or attend Mass during the week are seen as "tradsters", "old-school Catholics", or sometimes "rad-trads". Along with poor catechesis, it is one of the things that breeds resentment between Catholics who want to be good and Catholics who want to be holy. There is a difference, you know, but that is for another post.

4. Many saints throughout the ages have shown support for Communion on the tongue.

St. Hippolytus: "The Body of Christ is meant to be eaten by the faithful, not to be treated with irreverence."

St. Basil the Great: "The right to receive Holy Communion in the hand is permitted only in times of persecution."

St. Thomas Aquinas: "The dispensing of Christ's Body belongs to the priest for three reasons. First, because He consecrates in the person of Christ. But as Christ consecrated His Body at the Supper, so also He gave It to others to be partaken of by them. Accordingly, as the consecration of Christ's body belongs to the priest, so likewise does the dispensing belong to him. Secondly, because the priest is the appointed intermediary between God and the people, hence as it belongs to him to offer the people's gifts to God, so it belongs to him to deliver the consecrated gifts to the people. Thirdly, because out of reverence towards this sacrament, nothing touches it but what is consecrated, hence the corporal and the chalice are consecrated, and likewise the priest's hands, for touching this sacrament. Hence it is not lawful for anyone to touch it, except from necessity, for instance if it were to fall upon the ground, or else in some other case of urgency."

Blessed (soon to be saint) John Paul II: "In some countries the practice of receiving communion in

the hand has been introduced... However, cases of deplorable lack of respect toward the Eucharistic species have been reported, cases which are imputable not only to the individuals guilty of such behavior, but also to the pastors of the Church who have not been vigilant enough regarding the attitude of the faithful towards the Eucharist.”

“There is an apostolic letter on the existence of a special valid permission for this [Communion in the hand]. But I tell you that I am not in favor of this practice, nor do I recommend it.”

So there you have it: four reasons for Communion on the tongue. In my opinion, it seems pretty clearly spelled out. Saints and holy people have encouraged it, and because it has been almost discontinued in the United States and Canada, irreverence and abuse levels have risen. Reception of Holy Communion on the tongue is a little way of expressing true love and adoration for God, which in turn, makes us holier.

I have decided my position. I leave it to you to decide your's based on the points presented.

God bless!

This contribution is available at <http://crucesignatiblog.wordpress.com/2014/03/20/the-case-for-communion-on-the-tongue/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Two Hearts Swelling In Sweden (The Conversion of Ulf Ekman) [at Peace Garden Mama]

[Please note: I'm coming out of my blog fast temporarily once more to keep up with my monthly contribution commitment to the ever-informative and inspiring CatholicMom.com.] **Somewhere in the heart of Sweden**

, a heart is swelling. Well, two hearts actually.

I recently learned, thanks to the daily roundup,

[Catholic Top Tweets](#)

by Chuck Wakelee, that an influential, non-denominational evangelical pastor in Sweden, Ulf Ekman, has announced the turning of him and his wife, Birgitta, toward Rome.

I want to tread lightly here for any non-Catholics reading this. One headline in the wake of this conversion, from

[Christianity Today](#),

says the move has caused pain and disillusionment within Ekman's former fold. The pastor, after all, founded a church and movement that grew into the thousands. If the conversion were reversed, I'm sure we Catholics would feel the loss, too. So any grieving from the Protestant sector is certainly deserved.

That said, it would be unfair to deny those of us welcoming Ekman to our home, which is now his home too, a moment of celebration. Maybe we can think of it like a bride leaving her family of origin to join with her husband and family. It's not that she's turning her back on everything she's known. No, it has formed her and she will be forever grateful and remain indelibly connected, for life. But now, a new life awaits.

I think of my faith before what I call my "reversion" happened in contrast to when I began fully embracing my Catholic roots. It was an euphoric time for me. I definitely felt I'd stumbled upon a life-altering gem -- a precious stone that had been right in front of me all along, but not shining due to my lack of understanding. I still feel that way. So please allow me a momentary outburst of joy that another has discovered this beautiful treasure.

You can actually watch the pastor making the announcement to his congregation

[here](#)

. What I enjoyed about watching it was how gracious Ekman was, and how gracious the pastor taking over his former spot was as well (

[seen here on the longer version](#)

starting around minute 59).

It's very hard to argue with the journey of a soul, after all. Ekman was determined to get at the heart of things, to discover truth. He wouldn't have expected to find it in the Catholic Church, of all places, but somehow, that's exactly where he was led.

And I think what I love most of all about this story is that it happened not through studying Church documents, though he did that eventually, too, but through bumping into Catholics in his travels, and seeing something in them -- something that contradicted the world's impression -- that made him pause.

That's where this whole thing gets very personal in my mind. I see a man promising God that he will go wherever God leads him, even if it lands him in a place that will potentially bring him a fair amount of discomfort. Keep in mind, too, that this conversion did not happen overnight. It has been slowly unfolding over a period of about a decade. Ekman did not go lightly into this, not by a long shot. And that's one of the reasons he has earned my respect and why I feel such joy over his conversion. It was hard won, and I'm sure exhausting at times. But here he is now with a renewed sense of hope before him, and his wife by his side.

As mentioned in

[a First Things article](#)

telling of the conversion, the reasons for the transformation can be boiled down to this, according to Ekman himself:

"We have seen a great love for Jesus and a sound theology, founded on the Bible and classic dogma. We have experienced the richness of sacramental life. We have seen the logic in having a solid structure for priesthood that keeps the faith of the church and passes it on from one generation to the next. We have met an ethical and moral strength and consistency that dare to face up to the general opinion, and a kindness towards the poor and the weak. And, last but not least, we have come in contact with representatives for millions of charismatic Catholics and we have seen their living faith."

I am sharing this as much to spread joy over this conversion as to hearten you. It can be very easy to feel beaten down about Catholicism as the world sees it. Even when we feel confident we're in the right place, there are so many forces all around telling us we're stark-raving mad to be associated with this Church; a church that so often contradicts the world and yet begs our

involvement in it. It is easy to feel we must defend ourselves even when we know a defensive stance is not what will win hearts in the end; rather, living it and sharing our joy will.

But every once in a while, we need something like Ekman's conversion to give us a little lift, to remind us that we are in the right place, and that it's a very good place and worthy of our commitment and sacrifice.

We are blessed beyond measure to be Catholic, and we have every reason to rejoice when others find their way into our family of love. Oh, Ekman may have moments of disillusionment as he discovers how very human we all are, but hopefully we can help him see that even in our imperfection, we are a blessed lot with immeasurable gifts at our disposal, which are now at his, too.

Welcome home, Ulf and Birgitta Ekman. It's Lent, but nevertheless, let the happy dance begin.

Question: Are you a convert? What was it that pulled you into the Church? If you're a cradle Catholic, what is it that compels you to stay?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.blogspot.com/2014/03/faith-family-fridays-two-hearts.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Come Spirit Blest, with God the Son / Nunc, Sancte, Nobis Spiritus [at Breviary Hymns]



[Come Spirit Blest, with God the Son](#)

is an 1852 translation by the Anglican priest, scholar and hymn-writer

[John M. Neale](#)

of the Office hymn for Terce:

[Nunc Sancte Nobis Spiritus](#)

, attributed to

[St. Ambrose of Milan](#)

(337-397). In the Divine Office (1974),

[Come Spirit Blest with God the Son](#)

is used with the Office of Readings. The recommended musical setting is the tune:

St. Ambrose

. An alternative tune that can also be used is

[Eisenach](#)

, as featured in the following video.

Alternative Tune: Eisenach

COME, HOLY GHOST, WITH GOD THE SON by John M. Neale, 1852 (Public Domain)

1. Come, Holy Ghost, with God the Son

And God the Father, ever One;

Shed forth Thy grace within our breast,

And dwell with us a ready Guest.

2. By every power, by heart and tongue,

By act and deed, Thy praise be sung;

Inflame with perfect love each sense,

That others' souls may kindle thence.

3. O Father, that we ask be done,

Through Jesus Christ, Thine only Son,

Who, with the Holy Ghost and Thee,

Shall live and reign eternally.

Ambrosian Chant

NUNC, SANCTE, NOBIS SPIRITUS attributed to St. Ambrose (Public Domain)

1. Nunc, Sancte, nobis, Spiritus,

Unum Patri cum Filio,

Dignare promptus ingeri

Nostro refusus pectori.

2. Os, lingua, mens, sensus, vigor

Confessionem personent.

Flammescat igne caritas,

Accéndat ardor proximos.

3. Præsta, Pater piissime,

Patríque compar Unice,

Cum Spiritu Paraclito

Regnans per omne sæculum. Amen.

Gregorian Chant

This contribution is available at <http://kpshaw.blogspot.com/2014/03/come-spirit-blest.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

To the Woman Who Knows Her Husband Will Never Cheat on Her [at Can We Cana?]

*Don't ever imagine that **infidelity** can't happen to you.*



The Internet is abuzz with a duel of sorts between Patheos blogger

[Simcha Fisher](#)

and young, engaged-to-be-married Emma Smith, who wrote on

[Catholic Exchange](#)

that she knows for a fact that she and her husband will never have to face the issue of infidelity.

"God is faithful, but we're not marrying God," proclaimed Fisher. "What do we know about human beings? They sin. They sin, and they sin, and they sin. Sometimes they enter into a valid marriage and then they cheat. Sometimes they understand fully what they are supposed to do, and they just don't feel like doing it," she explained.

I'm inclined to agree with Fisher. Because the issue in Catholic marriage is not whether anything will go wrong, but how will you handle it when it does. In pre-Cana marriage prep classes, many engaged couples fill out the FOCCUS questionnaire, which asks if you "could not under any condition remain married" to your spouse "if he/she were ever unfaithful." If you agree with that statement, then there's a big problem.

You can't annul a Catholic marriage for infidelity.

Marriage is for life, remember? So no matter how much it hurts, a betrayed spouse has to search

deep inside themselves and find a way to forgive and trust and rebuild a relationship that seems irrevocably shattered.

Infidelity can be overcome. My husband has seen it in his psychiatric practice.

When both spouses want badly enough to save a marriage even from repeated sexual infidelity, it can happen.

There needs to be absolute honesty, a commitment to avoid temptation, and a system of accountability. Therapy helps, spiritual direction helps, and Sexaholics Anonymous can help. It's not easy, but a marriage can make it through that firestorm.

My husband's courtship of me gave me complete confidence that he would be faithful to me. We were young, wildly attracted to each other, and yet managed to stay chaste until the wedding. I figured I would never have to worry about his self-control. But as we get older and our bodies bulge and sag in funny places, I wonder what he sees in me sometimes. And

I thank God that my husband has never strayed.

"There but for the grace of God go I" expresses perfectly the awareness that we and the ones we love, when pushed to our limits, are capable of the direst deeds. Temptation strikes the young and the old, the weak and the strong, and it never rests. As one story goes, a priest leaned over a man on his deathbed to give him last rites. The man reached up to touch the cross hanging over the priests' vestments, greedily whispered "gold," and then died.

That's why we're invited to spiritual combat.

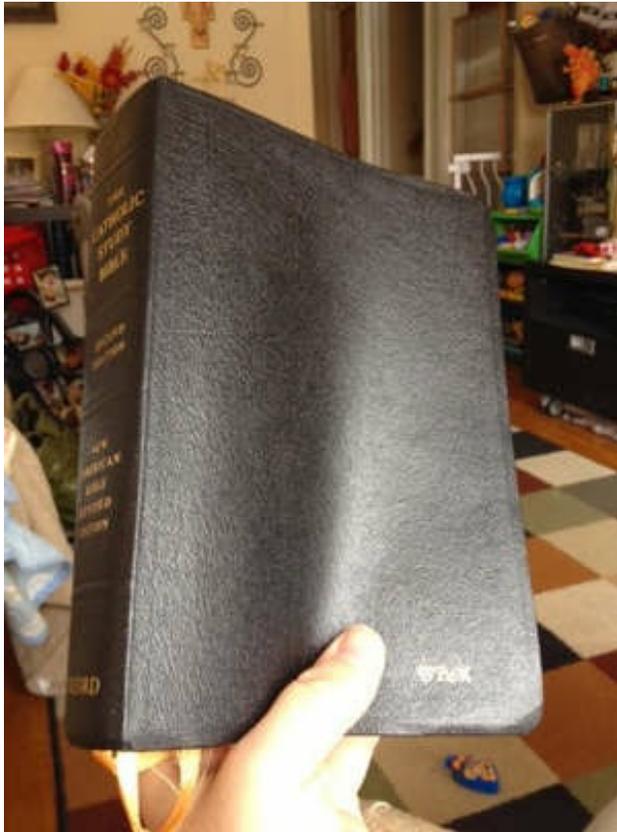
Growth in holiness doesn't proceed along a smooth incline from base to summit until we step easily through the doors of heaven. Holy marriages aren't formed that way either.

They're formed by perseverance in good times and bad, through periods of infatuation and anger, and sometimes through forgiveness in the face of infidelity. Infidelity is horrible, but it's not unforgivable, and doesn't have to be the end.

This contribution is available at <http://canwecana.blogspot.com/2014/03/to-woman-who-knows-her-husband-will.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Catholic Study Bible - NABRE [at Catholic Bibles]



[The Catholic Study Bible](#)

(CSB) from Oxford University Press has a history going back to 1990, just before the publication of the '91 NAB Revised Psalms. I have genuine leather edition of that volume, which was unique due to the 500+ pages of reading guides that preceded the Biblical text and the generous 2 inch margins. Needless to say, the combination of those two things made that first edition a bit of a beast. Perhaps in a desire to reduce its size, later editions, including the most recent NABRE one, got rid of the large margins. The same thing happened if you compare the 1991

New Oxford Annotated Bible

NRSV with its subsequent revisions. I kind of liked the larger margin editions though. I will be reviewing here

[The Catholic Study Bible NABRE 2nd Edition](#)

(black bonded leather).

It must be said straight away that the biggest issue I have with this edition of the CSB is the fact that the reading guides have not been updated since the release of the NABRE. For example, if

you are looking up the reading guide section (p. 128) on the topic of the Levitical sacrifices in Leviticus 1-7, it will mention that in Lv 2 the NAB calls this the 'cereal offering' when in fact it is called a "grain offering" in the NABRE. Look down one more paragraph which discusses the often translated "Peace offering" of Lv 3 which is now "communion offering" in the NABRE.

There are also issues when we get to the prophets, where mention is made of how the NAB rearranged verses. However, the NABRE restored many of them to their proper order. Then there is the embarrassing fact that one of the introductory articles called "The Challenges of Biblical Translation" talks about the "proposed NAB Old Testament" which is of course the translation found in this study Bible. The reading guides need to be updated. This is an issue that has been mentioned before on this blog, including some helpful comments by reader and blogger

[Theophrastus](#)

. One wonders if this will be corrected only when the NABRE NT is published. I hope it will be sooner.

After getting that out of the way, let me move to its overall feel and appearance. The CSB scores high marks here, due to the quality sewn binding and its classic look and feel. The sewn binding is well done, which assures longevity for this volume. Attached to the binding are two gold ribbon markers. The gold gilt-edged is a nice touch, which works well with thumb indexed pages. I know some people don't like thumb indexed pages, but I find them to be helpful in a study bible of this size. Now, my 1990 edition of the CSB was covered in genuine leather, which the current edition is not available in. The bonded leather is ok, nothing special really. Would have preferred a genuine leather cover like the

[NOAB 4th Edition](#)

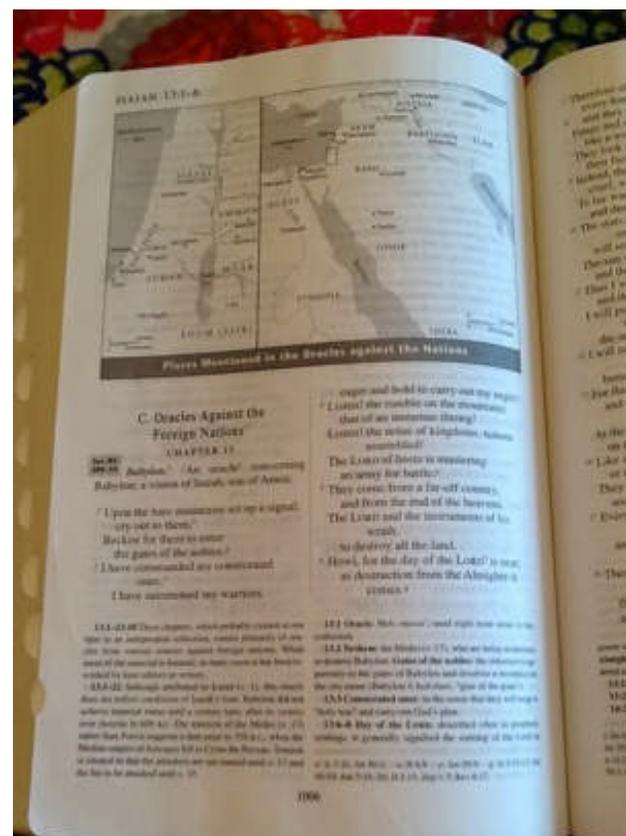
, but if I continue to use this edition as much as I have in past months, I may have to give Leonard's a call.

Now on to the content that is found within its bonded leather cover. I have truly grown to love the page layout. The type is large enough to read for study and to use when teaching. Personally, I always have a bit of a hard time finding a Bible that fits both the at home and in the classroom setting. This one seems to meet both needs. The print itself is quite dark, and while the paper used is a fairly thin Bible paper, I don't feel the ghosting is any where near the problem as found in the HarperCollins Bibles. The paragraph headings are in a clear

bold

from the rest of the biblical text, while the NABRE notes and cross-references are distinguishable

from the text. In sum, the page layout is easy on the eyes and is inviting to read.



The one thing I think the CSB excels at is in the fact that it contains a whole lot of additional study helps, which not all Catholic study bibles include. Part of this is due to the NABRE itself, which comes with study notes and cross-references built into the translation. The CSB goes above and beyond this with the reading guides, which I will discuss later, but more importantly it includes a considerable amount of material in the appendix. First, we find probably my favorite set of Bible maps, the 14 New Oxford maps which are large, highly detailed, and indexed. Also included is an almost 100 page concise concordance, which most of you indicated in one of my recent polls was a mandatory element of a good study bible. There is also a small glossary, a table of measures and weights, and an index to the reading guides. Rounding out what is found in the appendix is a full listing of lectionary readings for Sundays, Holy days, and weekdays. It still amazes how many Catholic bibles are missing this. The Mass and the Bible are tied together, shouldn't all Catholic bibles reflect this?

Having looked at the appendix, let's go back to the beginning of the CSB. This section has two main parts: the introductory articles and the reading guides. There are eight introductory articles that cover issues related to Biblical history and archaeology to Catholic interpretation and the lectionary. The authors are well known Catholic biblical scholars, including CSB co-editor Donald Senior, Ronald Witherup, and the recently deceased Daniel Harrington.

The over 450 pages of reading guides are authored by many of the most prominent biblical scholars of the post-Vatican II Church. The late Lawrence Boadt composed the reading guides concerning the Pentateuch. Leslie Hoppe composed the ones for the books of the Deuteronomistic histories, as well as 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther and both Maccabees. The Old Testament reading guides are rounded out with Diane Bergant's treatment of the Wisdom books, Richard Clifford's guides on the Major Prophets, and John J. Collins who does the guides for Daniel and the Minor Prophets. The New Testament reading guides are anchored in the Gospels and Acts jointly composed by Donald Senior and PHEME Perkins. Mary Ann Getty and Carolyn Osiek completed the guides on the Pauline corpus, with Luke Timothy Johnson concluding the reading guides with the Catholic Letters and the Book of Revelation. These reading guides are generally quite helpful at giving an overall walk through each book. They are more academic in orientation, being primarily concerned with historical, literary, and textual issues. While the reading guides do address theological issues, I would not say that it is of its primary concern. I find that most of the guides help to fill in the gaps of the NABRE notes. There are particular areas in the NABRE's Old Testament, I am thinking here of Chronicles and some of the Wisdom books, where more notes would be helpful. The reading guides give that additional background and exposition. Those who have issues with the NABRE notes may not appreciate the tone and focus of the information found in the reading guides. I should add that at the end of each book in the reading guide, there are recommendations for further reading. These have been updated since the first edition came out in 1990, and I would expect to see a further updating whenever a third edition is published.

Finally, incorporated into the NABRE text are 52 in-text maps and 18 side-bar essays and charts. These are placed in their appropriate location within the biblical text, which makes them quite helpful. Would love to see more of these in future editions. How about maps and charts in color? Perhaps that is asking too much.

In conclusion, when I consider the entire package, the CSB is a serious candidate for best Catholic study bible, with one major caveat being the desperately needed updating of the OT reading guides. Oxford should really fix this. Perhaps they could come out with an "augmented" edition, much like they did with the NOAB 3rd Edition. Some will not like this Bible because of its focus on historical-critical issues. I think if you know that ahead of time, you will find that this study bible contains a wealth of helpful information. The fact that the translation is the NABRE, with its much improved OT and Psalms, make this an upgrade over all the previous editions. I look forward to seeing what might be produced in the coming years as the NABRE NT is revised.

God Is Not a Vending Machine [at Suffering With Joy]

April 3, 3014



Prayer Before Meal, before 1740, Chardin, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon, Musee du Louvre, Paris

From the time many of us raised in Christian homes were small, we were taught to pray. Pray for others, pray for what we want/need, pray in thanksgiving and adoration. Often, when we reach adulthood, the prayers of petition become our main reason for praying if our faith has not matured.

I remember as a child that my Mother would say in frustration, “You kids have a terrible case of the ‘gimmies’”. What we wanted was either not in the budget or it was something our parents deemed bad for us. As kids we weren’t aware of how much we were doing this, or that we were looking at our parents as some kind of vending machine that would drop out whatever we asked for.

Fast-forwarding to today, I can say that it was a hard learning for me to not view God as a vending machine. Perhaps it was because in all my years outside the Church I forgot how to really pray. Time apart from God will do that. When I look back on all the frivolous things I prayed for, I hang my head in shame. Even in praying for things that were not frivolous I lacked the one thing necessary that we were all taught as children in our family – a spirit of submission to the will of God.

The God-As-Vending-Machine mentality is a result of what psychologists call “magical thinking”. We, unknowingly, think that if we make this or that novena, say x number of rosaries, give money to the poor, fast, etc. that we are automatically going to get what we want. Just put the money in, press the right button, and out pops the answer to our prayers. When we think this way we are assuming we have some kind of power over God that can force Him to give us what we want if we only jump through all the hoops out there. After all, it worked for Saint So-and-so, so why not us?

If we’re approaching God in this way we are doomed to disappointment. We are not considering what Jesus told us in Matt. 5:8, “*Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God.*” To rightly know what to ask for, we first must do a thorough housecleaning on our desires. In Mark 7: 20-23 Jesus talks about that clean heart:

What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of a man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.

Saint So-and-so received answers to his prayers because he had a clean heart and asked for what he wanted in that spirit. Does it not follow, then, that if we are asking God for this, that, and the other material thing and at the same time we are doing nothing to curb our greed, our tongue, our lust, we are not in a disposition to receive what we’re asking for? God will never give us anything that will hurt us, no matter how many rosaries we pray. He will always, though, give us what we need. Sometimes that gift is the withholding of something we’re asking for chiefly because we are not ready to receive it, or in receiving it we would veer from the path He desires for us.

I am reminded of a married couple who were in deep trouble with their relationship. The man thought that if he gave thousands of dollars to this and that charity, if he made this and that novena and prayed the rosary with his family, that everything would magically get better because he was doing all the right things. Except that he wasn’t. He did not want to admit his drinking problem and he did not want to view his wife as anything other than a servant rather than as a partner whose views deserved due consideration. He did not view his great income as “family money” for the support and sustenance of his wife and children but rather as his to spend however he wanted on himself. Finally, because he refused to submit to God creating a clean heart in him, he lost his family.

One time I got very angry with God because He wasn’t giving me what I wanted. “Why aren’t you helping me?” I yelled. It took a few years before I got the understanding. It was, “Because you’re not doing what I want you to do.” Obvious now but not then. I was consumed with getting what I wanted and it most definitely wouldn’t have been good for me nor for the people God had in mind for me to help one day.

The Germans have a saying, “We grow too soon old and too late smart.” In our prayer life our disposition must always be, “Thy will be done.” It is never a problem to ask for something as long as we are not so attached to getting what we want that we get angry with God for not giving it to

us. Moreover, as we seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to clean our hearts from all the attitudes Jesus condemned, we become more sensitive to what we should ask for, both on our behalf and our neighbor's behalf. When the self-centeredness clears out, the peace of Christ moves in and we learn to recognize all the gifts God is giving us without our even asking for them. We become "smart" in what to ask for, and are able to experience the joy of the Holy Spirit regardless of our circumstances. With the psalmist we can say,

A clean heart create in me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. (Ps. 51:10)

We can save ourselves a lot of grief if we learn what we need to know early and don't become "too late smart."

This post is linked to [Sunday Snippets](#).

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

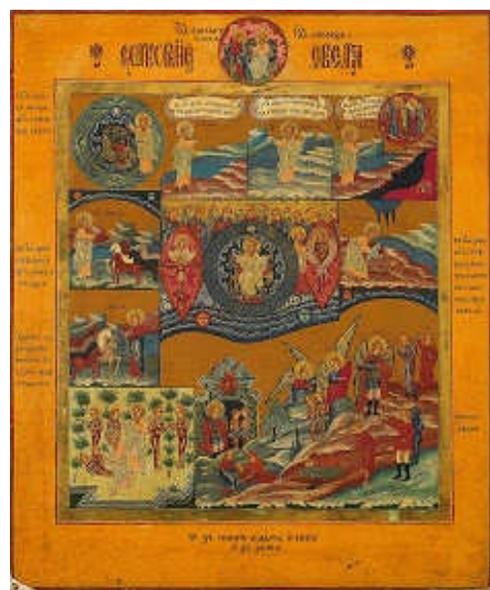
R. Now and forever!

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

This contribution is available at <http://www.sufferingwithjoy.com/2014/04/03/god-is-not-a-vending-machine/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Exceeding Beauty of Creation [at Treasures of the Church]



"And God saw everything, which He made, and behold! it was beautiful exceedingly."--Gen 1:31

Tradition lends a new dimension to the Faith which can easily be missed. Think, for example, of the account of creation in Genesis, in which each day it is repeated: "And God saw, that it was good." A quick

[comparison of English Bible translations](#)

shows how ubiquitous the use of the word "good" is in these passages, with only one rebel saying "He was pleased" instead. Even the Vulgate speaks of how God's creation is "bona." These all translate well the Hebrew טוב, "pleasing, good, agreeable." Yet Tradition gives us a rich nuance which should not be avoided.

The first line of this post is a translation from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Scriptures, according to tradition a miraculous translation, of which St. Augustine said, "the same Spirit that was in the prophets when they spoke was present also in the seventy men when they translated them." It is the text quoted in the New Testament, and it is a text that is an essential part of the Church's Tradition. Thus from it we can gain nuances or details not present in the Hebrew, and such is this nuance.

When the Lord looks upon His creation in the Septuagint, He does not merely see it as "good," but as "beautiful." Καλόν (kalon) is the word used, a word that makes up the title of the

Philokalia

, the great collection of writings of the Fathers named "Love of the Beautiful." God did not merely create the world in a good way, in a way that is "pleasing" and "agreeable." He made the world

more than this: He made it beautiful.

When the whole world fell through man's sin, it became ugly. St. Gregory of Nyssa described our fallen human nature as "smeared" or "smudged," being unable to reflect the beautiful image of God we originally had in fullness. During this time of the Fast, we remember our sin, how we now wear the garments of skin, as the Fathers spoke of it, our "garment that is defiled and shamefully blood-stained by a life of passion and self-indulgence," as St. Andrew of Crete wrote. "By passions, I have discolored the first beauty of the image, O Savior," as his Great Canon puts it so pointedly. So great the sin of man, that what was once "beautiful exceedingly" is now wallowing in filth like the Prodigal Son!

Maybe it is for this that the Church bids us read the account of creation these first three days of the Fast, in order to remind us of the exceeding beauty with which God created us, the beauty whose loss we will recall in the coming days' readings. Yet the Gospel, the Good News, is that God did not leave us in our ugliness: for the Lord came to give men life in abundance by cleansing them with water and the Word, leaving them without spot or blemish or stain, white as wool and snow. The beauty of the glory to which Christ grants access is greater than that which we first received from the Lord's hands. "Where sin abounds, grace hyperabounds," and where ugliness abounds, beauty hyperabounds. Through the Lord's grace and our partaking in His nature, what was originally beautiful, even beautiful exceedingly, will become even more exceedingly beautiful, beautiful beyond measure, for eye has not seen and ear has not heard the beauty that awaits us in Heaven, a beauty that we can begin to partake of even on earth.

In these days of the Fast, let us lament the exceeding beauty creation has lost, but let us implore the Lord that we may partake in the still more exceeding beauty He shall bestow upon those who love Him, the beauty of His Paschal light to which we are processing. Let us lament with hope, for Christ has come to raise up the beautiful likeness that has fallen.

Nota Bene: The quote from St. Augustine is from

De Civitate Dei

, Book XVIII, Chapter 43, translated by R. W. Dyson as

The City of God against the Pagans

, published by Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1998). The quotes from the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete are from the portion of the Second Ode read on Tuesday of the 1st Week of the Great Fast, as found in the

Publican's Prayer Book

, published by Sophia Press (Boston, MA, 2008).

was consulted for understanding all the meanings of the Hebrew יָדָע.

This contribution is available at <http://thesaurostesekklesias.blogspot.com/2014/03/the-exceeding-beauty-of-creation.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

7 Qualities She Wants in a Catholic Man [at A Still Small Voice]

Whenever I say “she” I mean “me”. So it should actually be titled “7 Qualities She Wants in a Catholic Man - According to Zoë”. Although, I know that some of them do pertain to those girls who value Catholicism, God and respect in general. Others that I may list are my own preferences; so don’t take them too seriously.

The reason I’m doing this topic is because James Sama posted one called

[7 Qualities She Wants in a Man](#)

, and while these aren’t wrong in any way I just found it would be quite entertaining if I made my own, but a Catholic version. Pretty much all of the qualities he stated are super important and will blend together with the qualities I will state (and most of the qualities I will state blend in together with each other.)

Note: They are not in any particular order!

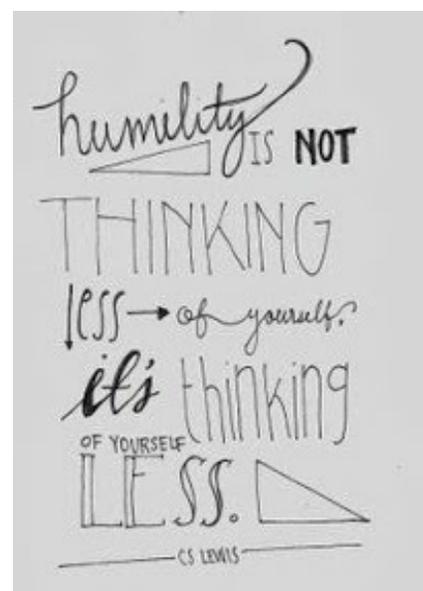
- feeling or showing deep and solemn respect.

The most attractive thing (to me) is one who is reverent to Jesus Christ who is fully present in the Eucharist.

I want to share a funny story on just how taken I am with one who is reverent. I will not state who, when, where, what the full occasion was - anything. But it's funny and embarrassing so I thought to share it. I was in Adoration and the way the Monstrance was placed was by the back wall and to exit you had to walk past Him. Well, I was kneeling down, praying fervently in the presence of the Eucharist and this guy enters into my sight because he was leaving and before he left he took one good look at Jesus and put his hand to his heart. At this time, (I was looking of course) I was completely taken back by this simple, beautiful, loving action that I'm pretty sure my jaw dropped . I say I'm pretty sure because I don't remember if I did that or not, but I'm sort of convinced I did because I realized he was looking at me and I closed my mouth, but I never remembered opening it. It's sort of embarrassing but I can't stop laughing at the situation. What a beautiful, humiliating situation to be in!

- having or showing a modest or lost estimate of one's own importance.

Humility is such a pertinent virtue and without humility (like love) the other virtues become meaningless. So it's very important to me that my husband will have humility and also have humility as to teach how me to become more humble.



- feeling, expressing, or causing great pleasure and happiness.

I wish for him to "act in such a way that all those who come in contact with {him} will go away joyful {that he will} go through life like a little child, always trusting, always full of simplicity and humility, content with everything, happy in every circumstance. There, where others fear, {he} will pass calmly along, thanks to this simplicity and humility."(St. Faustina Kowalska)

- **Intelligent**

- having or showing intelligence. (I just learned about this in Psychology.) Intelligence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills. I want him to be intelligent in the Catholic Faith, where he can apply the thing that the Bible and Catechism teach us to do in our daily life.

- concerned more with the needs and wishes of others than with one's own.

This is one that I struggle with a lot. Everything in me wishes to be selfless but I continue to fail all throughout the day; however, God's mercy overcomes my lack of selflessness. I desire this so that, again, I may continually learn from the selfless acts. Considering to be married to another is a huge act of sacrifice and selflessness. But I'm still growing and always will.

What a beautiful husband and father would he be to exemplify selflessness!

- very loving or loyal.

I wish him to be devoted not only to me, but to God and His Church as well.

- showing or caused by strong feelings or a strong belief. To have passion for the Catholic Church means to me that you are pumped to be able to live out this beautiful way of life. To have passion you must have wonder and awe, and there is so much wonder and awe in this Catholic Faith that I need someone to be just as pumped up and even more so than I am! I love the the Celebration of the Mass - I need someone who loves this Sacrament. I love praying - I need someone who loves to pray also, and so forth...

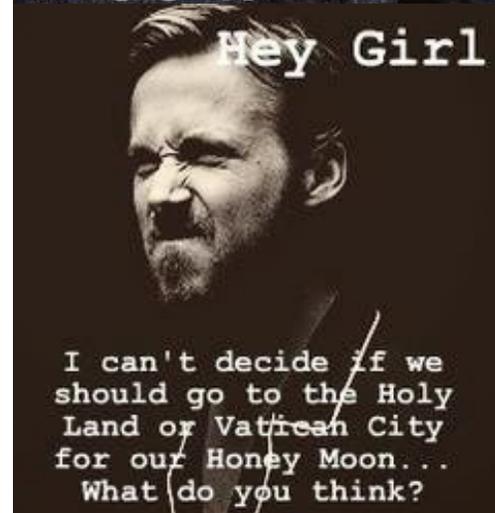
• ***Bonus - Fair Dancer***

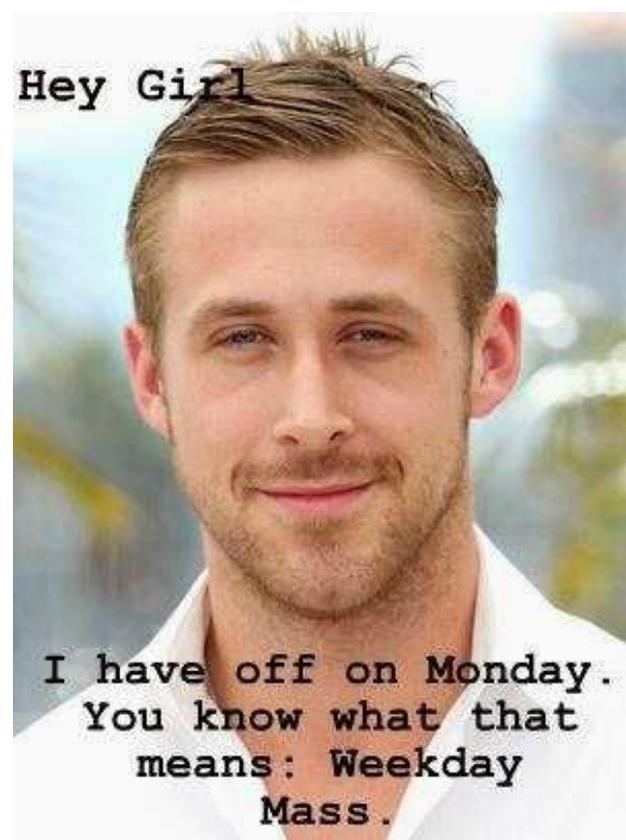
-I love to dance. Now, I never said I was good but if you have an exceptional dance partner then it's really hard to be bad. Even to just have fun with dancing is a plus! I could honestly care less if we look like penguins, I enjoy it and it would be pretty cool if he did too.

• ***Bonus - Humorous but equally Earnest***

- Let's just face it, I laugh all the time. When I'm happy, I laugh. When I'm annoyed, I laugh. When I'm frustrated, I laugh. But I need someone who can make me laugh because they are simply funny in their nature. Even if it's the cheesiest thing, I'll laugh - because it's cheesy. Which here a few pictures that are cheesy and one honestly funny. . . (sorry for all the Ryan Gosling.)

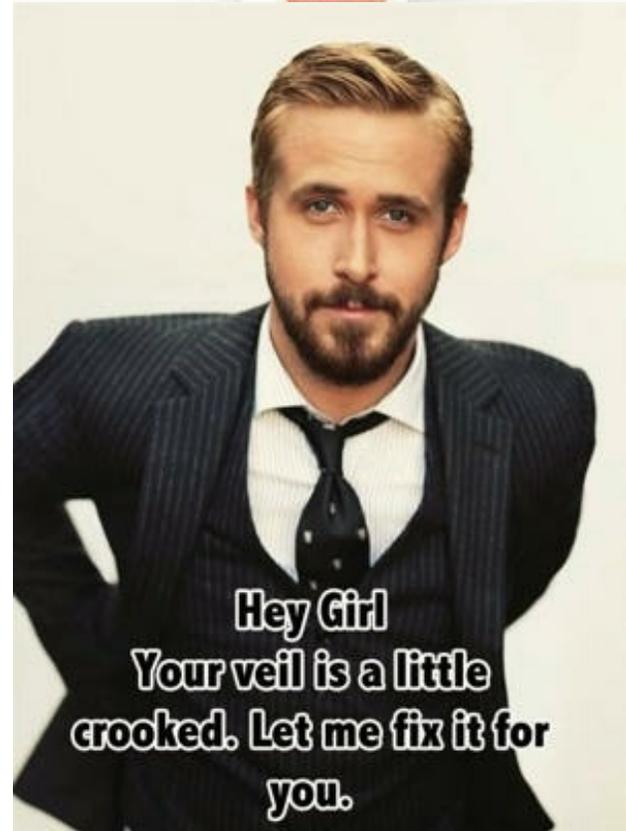
These are simply for those who find humor in such things: (I do)





Hey Girl

I have off on Monday.
You know what that
means: Weekday
Mass.



Hey Girl
Your veil is a little
crooked. Let me fix it for
you.

Hey Girl

I forgot my Rosary...
Can I use your fingers?

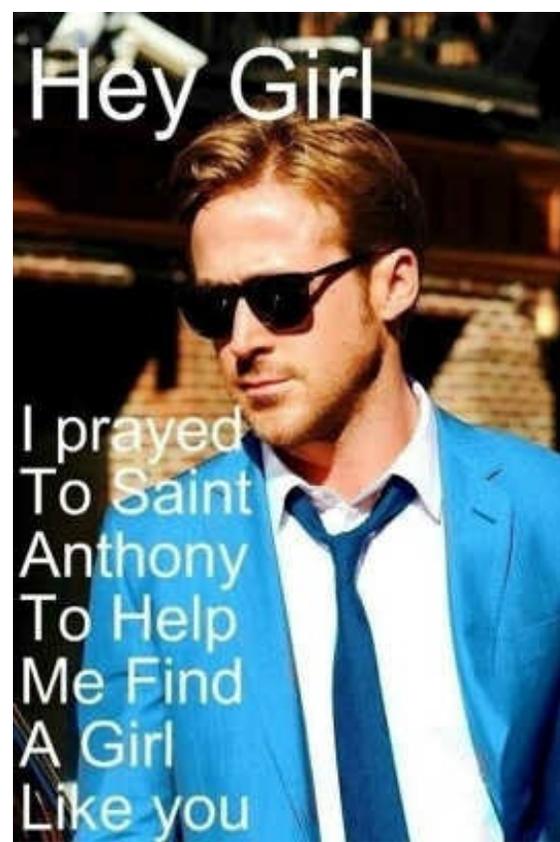
Hey girl,

Let's get our
Evening Prayer on.

**HEY GIRL, TAKE YOUR TIME
GETTING READY. I'LL JUST SIT
HERE AND PRAY THE ROSARY...**

**YOU'RE WORTH WAITING
DECADES FOR.**





I could keep on going and get materialistic but this pretty much sums up virtuous qualities I look for in a Catholic guy. The bonuses are for my purposes only but other than that the other qualities are generally what I want in all men who have such a beautiful faith before them (and also for us women). Of course, these are pretty essential to me to have in a husband (if God wills) but these are also just nice to have in any guy who befriends someone.

But most importantly, I desire in a man just this one thing, and I feel like if he is simply striving for this than all the rest of my desires are found in this quality: That he loves God before all, and yes that means me included. I do not want to be first on who/what my husband values, rather I want Christ to be.

I have come to understand that if he puts God above all other things then he will be more in union with God's will for himself and also his family. I am not losing anything if he loves God above myself; rather I'm gaining a husband who seeks holiness for his soul and that of his wife and children. And the same goes for me. It's been said multiply times that the most fruitful way to obtain what you desire in a spouse is to maintain those same qualities.

WE BECOME
WHAT WE LOVE

+

WHO WE LOVE
SHAPES WHAT
WE BECOME

st. Clare of Assisi

IMAGINESSTERS.ORG

-Now I want to reflect a little bit on the Sacrament of Marriage-

The Sacrament of Marriage is just as much of a vocation as Religious life and Single life. It's a vocation to which He calls us to follow Him and to do His will.

Holiness is not exempt in this vocation.

I know that some don't consider marriage much of a Sacrament, because I know I didn't until this year. Marriage is something so sacred and beautiful and just like all things sacred we somehow twist it into something that it's not intended to be.

But I've learned a lot from my ignorance and I thank God that I did. The Sacrament of Marriage is such a beautiful vocation that we can so easily take for granted because of sin.

Marriage is intended to reflect the love of the Trinity and the unfailing love God has for us. When you are married you become ONE with your spouse the same as the Trinity is ONE. When you marry you are saying (from the action of the sacrifice of oneself to another) that you are open to partake in the divine mystery of love, which brings forth new life. Just like how the Holy Spirit PROCEEDS from the Father and Son, out of perfect love. It is a sign of God's love for us by giving yourself until "to death do us part", resembling the eternal love of God.

"God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: 'And God blessed them, and God said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'" CCC 1604

Marriage, like any vocation, comes with sacrifices and daily challenges. I reflected on the act of sacrifice in

[The Struggle](#)

and all that I stated deals with every vocation, and with it are varying sacrifices accordingly.

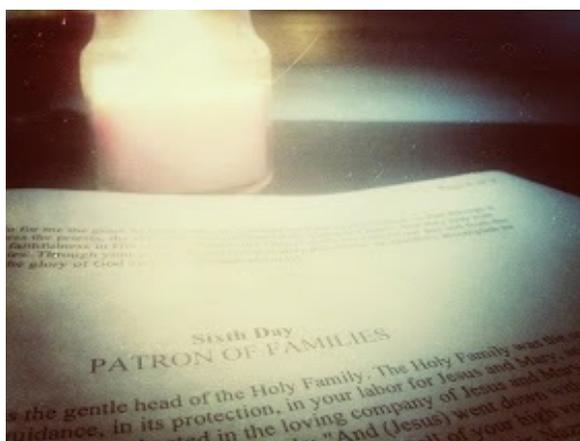
I'm not writing this because I'm married or have even come close to being married, rather I'm writing about it because I have finally started to discern if God is calling me to marriage through being a wife and mother. I've opened up my will to the possibility that God may be calling me to this Sacrament and I can honestly say I have not been more free. I'm no longer sulking in the idea of not being a sister, but rather I will be able to respond to the call with a willing and faithful 'yes!' (Whenever He wills and to whichever He wills).

Certainly God will provide for me the graces I need to obtain a holy and fruitful marriage if that's my calling. I can't cook much, clean accurately or even know how to deal with men but I will learn! I will also learn in a convent, so either way, I have a lot of learning and experiencing to do.

From Christ comes graces upon graces and that's why I find it so vital that my future husband will put Christ before all, so that from our marriage we may be able to be strengthened by graces to produce a holy and beautiful vocation. Surely we will not be perfect but in faith, we will strive to overcome the difficulties in ways that will lead us closer to Christ and each other.



So with the little said, I want to commend St. Joseph. I've been praying a novena to him and I've come to realize just how beautiful this saint is. I've never thought a lot about St. Joseph but he is most definitely growing on me, and quickly at that. I just want to share a quick snippet from one of Pope Francis' homilies, which was said on his inauguration (a year ago to this day).



He said: "How does Joseph respond to his calling to be the protector of Mary, Jesus and the Church? By being constantly attentive to God, open to the signs of God's presence and receptive to God's plans, and not simply to his own. This is what God asked of David, as we heard in the first reading. God does not want a house built by men, but faithfulness to his word, to his plan. It is God himself who builds the house, but from living stones sealed by his Spirit. Joseph is a "protector" because he is able to hear God's voice and be guided by his will; and for this reason he is all the more sensitive to

the persons entrusted to his safekeeping. He can look at things realistically, he is in touch with his surroundings, he can make truly wise decisions. In him, dear friends, we learn how to respond to God's call, readily and willingly, but we also see the core of the Christian vocation, which is Christ! Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation!"

With that being said, let us all protect those whom God entrusts to us and to His Holy Church, which brings forth the Sacrament of Marriage. Let us never tire of defending the Sacraments continually and faithfully unto which God has given us.

May God bless and Mary protect.

"Father, you entrusted our Savior to the care of Saint Joseph.

by the help of his prayers

may your Church continue to serve its Lord, Jesus Christ,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever."

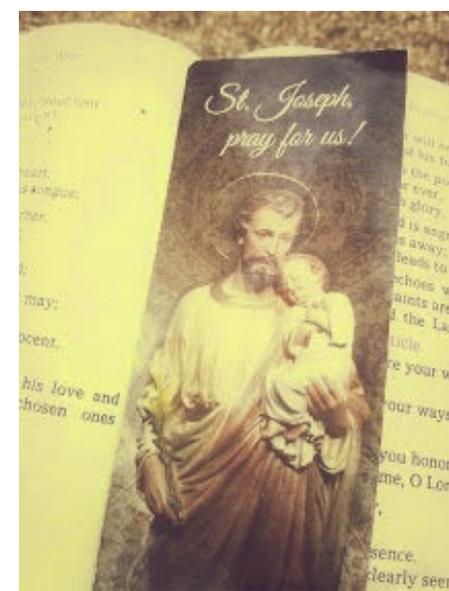
Amen.

+JMJ.M+

"For you have said: love is built to last for ever,

you have fixed your constancy firm in the heavens.”

- Psalm 89:2



This contribution is available at <http://zoejumonville.blogspot.com/2014/03/7-qualities-she-wants-in-catholic-man.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Halftime Grace for Lent [at bukas palad]



Year A / Lent / 4th Sunday

Readings: 1 Samuel 16.1b, 6-7, 10-13a / Psalm 23 (R/v 1) / Ephesians 5.8-14 / John 9.1-41

If the forecasters are right, spring is in the air, and summer is not far behind. The days are beginning to slowly warm up. Daylight is ending later. And the rent—a—ride Hubway bicycles have been put into racks all around town—a sure sign that we're in spring time.

Anticipating this, some of my brother Jesuits have packed away their winter boots and winter jackets. Others have begun to plan for the coming summer. And in our community garden, the crocuses are sprouting and the kingfishers are belting their song in the mornings. (The tulips have yet to bloom but they will in good time!)

You might say that change is in the air. And the world as we have known it in wintertime is being re-created. Re-creation is in fact a theme in our readings on this 4th Sunday of Lent.

In our First Reading, we hear the story of God choosing David to be the new king for Israel. Working through the prophet Samuel's anointing, God re-creates David; he is no longer shepherd boy but king.

In our Gospel Reading, we hear the story of Jesus healing the man born blind. He now not only

sees physically but with eyes of faith. He comes to know Jesus as Lord. Working through Jesus' healing, God re-creates this man; he is no longer a blind man and an unbeliever but a believer and a follower of Jesus.

These stories invite us to consider our Lenten journey in terms of re-creation. As David and the blind man were re-created by God, I believe God wants to re-create you and I this Lent. I believe this is God's deepest desire for us at this time.

But why does God want to re-create us?

Our Psalm explains to us that *God wants to re-create us so that we can be with him eternally*. God wants to walk with us through our darkness and to free us from those things that oppress us. God wants to set us on right paths that lead to no other space but to his table for us to feast with God. And in a remarkable sign of God's love, he will anoint our heads, fill us with all that is good and kind, and let us stay with him all the days of our lives.

But this eternal life is not something we have to wait for as a future event, nor is it something that God will give us in return for our rigid obedience of the Church's rules and regulations.

In our 2nd Reading, Paul assures us that this life of goodness and kindness is already ours. It is truly and rightfully our inheritance that God has already given to us through Jesus' death and resurrection. God has already saved us from the sin and death, and brought us into eternal friendship with Godself. We have already been re-created as God's own. This is who we are now—children of light—and this is how we are to live—as God's light in the Lord and for one another. And God has freely and generously done this for us because of love.

But if we are honest to God, to one another and to ourselves, you and I know that we don't always live as God's re-created children. We sin. We sin in so many big and small ways. We even sin when we choose not to do what is right and good and just. And perhaps, even as our holy desires this Lent are for a change to walk with God more closely and to walk in God's walks with others, like Jesus showed us how to, we have sinned, haven't we? Indeed, who amongst us here is not a sinner? And, who amongst us does not need God's mercy and loving forgiveness as we continue our Lenten journey?

I'd like to suggest that today, at this mid-point of our Lenten journey, God is graciously merciful to us. Through our readings, God is offering us a time to pause and to reflect on the quality of our Lenten journey thus far. And if needs be, to make the necessary adjustments to finish our journey well.

How are we living our life and faith as God's re-created children this Lent?
Do we need to let God further re-create and perfect us to become more God's own?
Is there anything more you and I need to do to cooperate with God to be re-created anew?

I'd like think that what God is offering us is *the grace of halftime*.

If you've played soccer or basketball or hockey, you know how important halftime is. It's a time to take a short rest to refresh and to recharge. It is a time to look at what worked well in the first half, and to stay the course if all is going as planned. Or, if we've played the first half badly, to take stock, to evaluate and to admit honestly to what went wrong. This halftime review gives us a chance to plan anew how we want to finish the game. We have the opportunity to consider a new approach, to reposition ourselves, and to regroup. We can return to the game with greater focus and clarity, and with a renewed energy for this next half.

At this halftime mark of our Lenten journey, God is inviting us to do likewise. God is inviting us to be honest about our Lent life. God is asking us to examine our openness to change, our willingness to cooperate with God for change, and our enthusiasm to make this Lent journey one of changing in God's ways. More radically, God is asking us to consider, in the depth of our conscience, the truth of what we know is God's desire for us to change our lives, and confessing this, to admit the more embarrassing truth that we might have remained blind to God, now and again this Lent, if not, maybe throughout these past weeks.

If we are blind to what God is offering us in Jesus this Lent, it might be because of such reasons as these: we are too familiar with what Lent is, and so we are not bothering enough; we are too apathetic or lazy to make this change; or, we are careless with our "take-it-for-granted" attitude that God will always forgive, so why bother. Perhaps, one of these reasons resonates with you; I know a blindness I have and need to work on.

If we have chosen to remain blind to God's desire to re-create us, then, I'm afraid that you and I might be missing out on the gift of God perfecting us this Lent. And, when we remain blind, we are sadly no better than the real blind men in today's gospel, the Pharisees. Though they had sight, they would not see who Jesus is and what Jesus offered, and so they lost their opportunity to be re-created for life with God.

In a homily Pope Francis gave at a penitential service in Rome on Friday, he reminded us that our Lenten journey is a journey towards becoming a new person. And the destination of this journey is to remain in the love of Jesus Christ that lasts forever. This is God's hope-filled gift for each one of us. God bestows it on us in his mercy and compassion, Francis assured us.

It is good to have this assurance at this halftime point in Lent. As we look back, we might see that we have lived out the first half of Lent well, and so we should stay the course. Or, if not, we might want to work harder with God to turn our lives around in the next three weeks.

No matter what the state of our first half of Lent has been, God is inviting you and I, once again, to make those changes we must in our lives, and so better carry on our Lenten journey with Jesus of being re-created even more in God's image and likeness. Let us do this with hope. The kind of hope we will experience as we move with certainty from winter into spring, and then into summer. In the same way, we can be certain that our Lenten journey will take us from the repentance of Ash Wednesday to the reality of our salvation on Good Friday, and to God's joy in raising us with Jesus on Easter morning.

So, sisters and brothers, let us finish this second half of our Lenten journey well. For as a good coach I once had say to our team: "the first half is gone, boys; there's only the second half now. So, go out there and do some good! All is not lost. The best is yet to be!"

Preached at Blessed Mother of Teresa of Calcutta Parish photo: internet; valley news

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.com/2014/03/homily-halftime-grace-for-lent.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Believer or follower? [at Convert Journal]



I know someone you may know. He is no atheist or agnostic, but rather a firm believer in the existence of God. He knows Jesus and fears the Lord! (Hold that “Hallelujah!” for a moment.)

Not only that, this individual also knows and understands scripture very well. He quotes it with ease from memory. (Not so fast on that “Praise God!” response.)

Many people would say that such an individual is saved. He is not. In fact, he is evil and will spend eternity in hell, a fate he richly deserves.

He is an extremely dangerous stalker but there can be no relief from the police or a court. He prowls around like a roaring lion, tenacious in his pursuit, looking for someone to devour. He is self-centered – an idolater of himself – and a notorious liar. No dummy he, but rather one who uses his God given high intellect to the detriment of others. I’ll just come out and say it — I hate him.

When I told my wife about him recently, at this point I quickly got a firm lecture on judgment and Christian charity! You may be inclined to agree. Putting aside the issue of judgment, how could anyone who (1) believes in God and (2) is even a Bible scholar be destined for damnation?

It is of course, Satan of whom I speak.

We recently read from [Matthew chapter 4 \(1-11\)](#):

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted

for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread.”

He said in reply, “It is written: *One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*“

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*“

Jesus answered him, “Again it is written, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*“

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, “All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.”

At this, Jesus said to him, “Get away, Satan! It is written: *The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.*“

Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Satan is a scripture quoting believer. In no way does this mean that scripture quoting believers are (necessarily) like Satan. Rather, being a believer is but a *first step* to becoming a true follower. Being only a believer is NOT ENOUGH. We must actually, in our own heart... in our personal thoughts and actions, FOLLOW Christ in order to be saved. Unlike Satan, we must put God and His will before our own.

Satan fears the Lord too, as [James 2:19](#) tells us: “You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble.” His fear is rooted in God’s almighty power not God’s love. Accepting God’s love and mercy means following His will – not just selective parts of it (those parts which we “agree with”). In Jesus final words, the Great Commission, He commanded the Apostles to teach us to “observe ALL that I have commanded you” (my emphasis; [Matthew 28:20](#)). One last verse (again, my emphasis):

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. [Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you."] But he said in reply to the one who told him, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?? And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. **For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.**“

Take up your cross and follow Christ ([Matthew 16:24](#)). “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” ([John 14:6](#))

Follow, do not just believe.

As for Satan...

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2014/03/believer-or-follower/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Waiting for the Lord and Fasting [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

Waiting for the Lord and Fasting



On Eagles wings

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to {him who} lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up {with} wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” (Is 40: 28-31)

My dear Fellow Pilgrims in Christ Jesus,

At times in the past I have commented on the need for Christians not to act impulsively on everything that comes into their minds, or act out of frustration because things don't seem to be going their way. I usually refer them to the scripture in Isaiah that tells us that ***“... they who wait upon the Lord shall rise up as with eagles wings”***.

Some responses I get are a bit critical regarding “waiting on the Lord”, implying that if we do nothing until we get an OK from the Lord we will be remiss in meeting the responsibilities of life. Their discomfiture comes mainly because they don't truly understand the principle of “waiting on the Lord” that the scripture espouses here. They only see it from a human perspective – they separate their secular every day duties from the religious or spiritual activities. Thinking, no doubt, that their day-to-day obligations are more urgent. After all, they think, prayer can wait. They don't understand that they need God in all aspects of their lives and prayer is the main factor that opens the door for the Lord to be involved in everything we do in life.

The scripture just quoted does NOT indicate to us that we are to do nothing while “waiting”, in fact, it is really an exhortation trust in the Lord as we keep on living a righteous life and meet all

of our responsibilities in obedience to the Lord's guidance and commandments. More than that, it indicates that we need to trust and to seek Lord in all of our affairs, secular or religious, for it is only He that can provide us the strength to fulfill them.

It is also true, that, at times, as we live out our lives there are circumstances that come up that put us to the test by permitting situations that, to all appearances, pose certain challenges that are beyond our ability do anything about. Circumstances that drain us of our energy and effort leading us to become despondent and thus weaken our faith ... and our trust.

The Word tells us that as soon as we become aware of our situation and repent, remaining faithful in your trust in the Lord, and enduring in prayer, the Lord will redeem the situation such that not only will He re-energize you but He will provide you the spiritual wings you need to fly over the circumstances and free you to accomplish His purpose for you in the stressful situation you are encountering!

Sometimes the reason the Lord may permit these types of situations to occur in our lives is because, in our attempt to take control over everything we do (even the things we do for the Lord), we have left no room for the Lord to be our helper in the roles and tasks He has called us to act on as His partners.

Instead, we try to accomplish on our own, desires that come out of our own self-directed ambitions, things that are beyond His design for us but that we do because of the glory and pride we derive from them. Because of this we lose access to the strength He provides when we are in an obedient partnership with Him. In order to restore us to our appropriate state of reliance and partnership with Him, He lets us experience the results of our own self-willed weaknesses so that we may repent and return to Him and His fellowship and strength.

All He is saying through these testing circumstances He permits is: ***“return to Me; give yourself to Me again and I will restore my strength in you if you merely return to your commitment to Me as the Lord of your life – then, and only then, you will rise up again with the wings of an eagle that I will provide!”***

During this period of Lent we, through prayer and meditation on the Word, should constantly assess our motives for why we do the things we do, not only in our every day lives but, more importantly, in our religious lives – in our supposed works of holiness, are we really mortifying the flesh? Is our intent truly to mortify or are we doing these things because we think that by doing them we are going to increase our holiness or approval before God? Isn't this motive in itself a work of the flesh?

My brethren, the goal we need to set for our motives is to humble ourselves and die to our own desire for holiness or approval. Our main goal or aim must be to die to our very selves as true disciples of Jesus. What we sometimes overlook is that “waiting on the Lord” is in itself a form of fasting – where we fast by not acting out of our own human drives and instincts but instead suppressing them so that the Lord's work in us may take precedence. We are to say and act just as

John Baptist said: ***“He must increase, but I must decrease!”*** (Jn.3-30)

The aim of any type of fasting must be to put down the human incentives that drive us and divert us from truly walking in the Spirit, and NOT to use fasting as a way to exalt ourselves as spiritual heroes. Similarly, our giving of alms must be in secret in order to avoid self-righteousness and self-exaltation ... and even then we may still fall if we are not careful with our inner motives.

The thing of which we must really fast is the feeding of our self-righteous ego and our pride, and the things in our lives which move us in that direction (this may include religious things done for the wrong reasons). Fasting from food, for instance, should be used as an act of faith indicating our willingness to control and deny all our fleshly desires and as an indication that we submit ourselves and ALL our trust and reliance on our relationship with God our Father through Jesus our Redeemer and Savior. Praised be His Holy Name!

Listen to how the Lord exhorts us regarding the matter of fasting...

... (through the words of Isaiah, Chap. 58)

<> [We, the presumed penitents, ask ...]

3‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not?

Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’

<>[The Lord answers:]

***“Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.***

***4Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.***

***Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.***

***5Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,***

and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Will you call this a fast,

and a day acceptable to the Lord?

6“Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of wickedness,

to undo the straps of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover him,

and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

8Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,

and your healing shall spring up speedily;

your righteousness shall go before you;

the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

9Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;

you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’

If you take away the yoke from your midst,

the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,



To be filled, We must be first emptied out ...

10if you pour yourself out for the hungry

and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,

then shall your light rise in the darkness

and your gloom be as the noonday.

11And the Lord will guide you continually

and satisfy your desire in scorched places

and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden,

like a spring of water,whose waters do not fail....”

*Jesus not only confirms these promises but tells us that these promises are fulfilled in Him!
Praised Be His Holy Name!*



Jesus Offers Living Water

Jesus said to [the Samaritan woman], ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’ (John 4:13-15)

So, ask the Spirit of Jesus that is in you to guide you into a true fasting experience in Him! Ask him to give you a drink of the Living Water unto Eternal Life! Wait for Him, obey His guidance and you will truly enter in a fast that honors the Father through Him who is your Lord and Savior! Amen and Amen!

May the Holy Spirit Guide you in your spiritual walk as you yield yourself to Him this Lent.

Your Brother in Christ ... Bartimaeus

(© B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus' Quiet Place, [2008-2014])

Recommended Link(s)

[*Jesus the Source of Living Water and Us*](#)

[*Jesus and His Sweet Yoke of Love*](#)

[*Spiritual Growth and the Wilderness Experience*](#)

[*Christ In us The Hope of Glory*](#)

<> *This Good Friday Video will help you into the Spirit of Fasting (skip the advertising)*

<> *Here is a Worship Music Video that will open up your spirit ...*

[*Remember: It's in the Valleys Where we Grow*](#)

IF YOU NEED PRAYER GO TO THESE LINKS

[*Intercessors of the Lamb*](#)

[*Prayer Requests*](#)

This contribution is available at <http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2014/03/25/s-waiting-for-the-lord-and-fasting/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Light Spreads, Darkness Stays Where It Is [at Children's Rosary]

These were the words our 7 year old son said as we were getting ready to have dinner a few weeks back. His comment left my husband and I wondering what exactly he was talking about.

He repeated the phrase again. "Light Spreads, darkness stays where it is." Thinking that such a philosophical comment was odd for a first grader somehow the bustle of getting dinner ready for all the children broke our train of thought for nothing more was said about the topic.

Yet little Asher's words seemed to come back to mind the next day and an interesting contemplation of the idea began. On many levels the idea intrigued me. For so often one thinks of light as an imagery for good. It was an uplifting thought to think of light spreading.

The thought of our children taking a nap and trying to block out the sun in the afternoon with shades, yet despite all best efforts, it seems impossible to keep all light out. Yes, it was true, when one is in a dark room during the day it surly is hard to block all light out. It was a comforting thought to think of light or in the case of goodness or God as spreading and pervasive. So often today there is a tendency to see the dark and think such ways are overtaking us but in fact it is light that spreads more naturally.

Several days later an interesting discovery. A school worksheet on shadows and light in Asher's folder. A simple answer for why he was thinking about these things.



Yet last night as I lay down in bed a bright light shown through the tiny gap between the shade and the window. It perfectly hit me right in the eye. Sitting up I could see it was the moon. Indeed it was a full moon. With such light there would be no way to darken the room. Asher's words returned but another thought also...Our Lady is often compared to the moon.

The moon has no light of its own but is a reflection of the light of the sun. Our Blessed Mother has also been described as a mirror as she reflects her Son so beautifully. None of the light is her own

it is perfectly reflected from God. The moon was doing what the sun had done during the day. The light was entering from every crack and illuminating the room. When one is a mirror of God, as Our Lady shows us, then we can help to spread the light. It is our hope and prayer that the Children's Rosary may be such a mirror of Good in this world. For even Pope Francis said, "The face of the child is the face of Our Lord."

This contribution is available at <http://childrensrosary.blogspot.com/2014/03/light-spreads-darkness-stays-where-it-is.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Walking the Camino - Trust in God or Fake It 'till you Make It [at His UnEnding Love]



Life is out of our control. We have no control over the weather. We have no control over other drivers. We have no control over what someone else will do to us. We have no control over world leaders who threaten war. We have no control over earthquakes. We have no control over terrorists. We have no control over illness.

Life happens, and it can be frightening. Our anxieties rise. We fall to our knees and pray and pray and pray hoping to affect the outcome. We bargain with God. “If you do this for me, God, I’ll never miss Mass again.” “If you give me the money I need, I’ll never use another credit card as long as I live.” “If you make sure I keep my job, I will go back and find the car I hit and leave a note. I promise to pay for the damages.” We do things we would not normally do as we are battered by the storm of fear.

We say novenas that require us to publish the novena in the newspaper or leave copies of it in church for others to see. We lose sleep. We miss meals. We snap at our families and coworkers. We eat too much. We drink too much. We self-medicate. We become so self-involved that we fall into a box of fear that even prayer cannot release. We forget that fear and anxiety are not gifts of the Holy Spirit. Fear opposes peace in our souls. Anxiety prevents trust in God.

Real control begins by turning everything over to God, even if we are still afraid, even if we do not trust that God really does know what's best for us and those we love.

Think of Abraham, when the Lord commanded,

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.” Genesis 22:2

Although stunned by what God was asking of him, Abraham set out on this journey to sacrifice his only son to God knowing that he would return alone. In the end, God pleased by Abraham's trust and obedience, stopped the sacrifice of Issac and provided a ram for the sacrificial offering.

Not every ending to a storm will be a happy ending. Our loved ones die. We lose our homes. Our lives are destroyed by a tornado that devastates a town. Children die from cancer. We feel pain. We feel devastation. We doubt and wonder why. These reactions are normal. This is when we need to trust that God, as in the case of Abraham, does know what He's doing and that He is working in our lives to bring us closer to Him.

So, how do you begin to trust in God when you are fearful and full of anxiety? You fake it 'till you make it. Even if your emotions pull you the other way, you begin to learn to trust in God by saying,

“Jesus, I trust in You. Take care of this for me.”

You retrain your thinking so that every time you gasp in fear, you say, “

Jesus, I trust in You.”

Jesus loves to hear this, and He knows what's in our hearts whether it's love or fear. He knows where you are, and He appreciates these acts of faith, even if you are in a full blown panic attack. He will give you the strength to bear it. He might not give you the outcome you would like, but He knows that you are working to trust Him in His goodness and mercy to know what is best for you and for your loved ones. He is filling you with graces so that you will draw nearer to Him.

Jesus did His Father's Will knowing that He would die a painful death on a cross, a death reserved for the lowest of the low. He knew that in giving His all for us, we would be saved. He knew and He trusted His Father. Jesus asked that His cup pass, the Father withdrew, and Jesus accepted His Father's Will. Jesus left the garden to face His destiny.

Mother Theresa, in her bleakest moments, would say,

“Jesus, I trust in Your tender love for me.” Jesus, Sweet Jesus, I trust in You. Take care of this for me

. Our journey begins. Trust. Peace.

Jesus, I trust in You. Take care of this for me.

This contribution is available at <http://hisunendinglov.blogspot.com/2014/03/walking-camino-trust-in-god-or-fake-it.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

She Left Her Water Jar [at A Catholic Heart For Home]

"Then the women left her water jar and went back to the city." John 4:28



Yesterday I was reading and something jumped at me "Faith is the willingness to look foolish." This Samaritan woman who Jesus met at the well she had just such Faith after her encounter with Christ.

She went to the well at the sixth hour alone. Women of that time did everything in groups, a journey to the well was not a solitary trip. She went at the sixth hour aka noon aka the hottest time of day aka the time of day that no one else will be making a well trek. This woman wanted to avoid others, to have nothing to do them.

Yet after an encounter with a Jewish man (the cultural faux pas abound) who offered her what should be impossible

even after

He lets her know that he knows all of her sins. Every wrong things she has ever done and is still doing (the husband she has not her husband).

This woman's time with Jesus inspired enough Faith for her to be willing to look foolish. Willing to face the people she went to great lengths to avoid. Her Faith was so great that she inspired others, others who were probably also trying to avoid her.

"Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony," John 4:39.

Can I step out in Faith like that? Can I inspire Faith like that? Can I leave behind my water jar? Can you?

Awaiting the Church's Final Decision on Medjugorje [at Justin's Corner]

Earlier this year, the Vatican announced that it had completed its thorough investigation of the alleged apparitions and messages of our Blessed Mother to six individuals in Medjugorje, Macedonia, which began in June of 1981 and continue to this day. The findings of this investigation are currently being examined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Once this examination is complete, the results of the investigation will then be forwarded to the desk of Pope Francis, who will make the final judgment regarding the authenticity of these apparitions and messages.

What will our Holy Father decide with regard to Medjugorje? It's difficult to predict his decision because of the complexity of the situation. Debate as to the authenticity of the alleged apparitions and messages has been raging for decades among theologians, bishops, priests, and canon lawyers, while millions of lay faithful have embraced the apparitions and messages as authentic. Unless I am mistaken, a number of years ago the Vatican under Blessed John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger did issue a provisional statement to the effect that the alleged appearances and messages of Our Lady in Medjugorje were "worthy of belief" and that therefore the lay faithful were temporarily permitted to accept them and believe in them if they wished.

However, recent signals from the Church hierarchy have sounded a decidedly negative tone. A few years ago, Vinko Puljic, the Bishop of Medjugorje, filed an official complaint with the Holy See regarding the massive goings-on in his diocese surrounding the alleged apparitions, which prompted the Vatican in 2010 to appoint a special commission of selected bishops, priests, theologians, and lay faithful from around the world to investigate the whole matter. Last October, Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the Vatican office in charge of the commission of investigation), sent a letter to the U.S. bishops ordering them to forbid alleged Medjugorje visionary Ivan Dragicevic from speaking at two public events in the States during which he expected to receive apparitions from Our Lady. Cardinal Mueller pointed out in his letter that the alleged apparitions have yet to be ruled authentic. With regard to the credibility of these "apparitions," Cardinal Mueller stated that "all should accept the declaration" of the former Yugoslavian bishops dated April 10, 1991, to the effect that there is no proof that apparitions or supernatural revelations have taken place at Medjugorje.

For those of us who have uncritically embraced the alleged Medjugorje revelations as authentic for many years, such pronouncements and restrictions from the Church hierarchy may seem harsh and severe, even conspiratorial, designed to persecute true visionaries and to shut down authentic apparitions. However, the Church, as

Mater et Magister

(Mother and Teacher), is simply doing its job of looking carefully into and rigorously evaluating claims of supernatural phenomena and private revelation in light of Catholic doctrine and discipline in order to provide sure guidance for the faithful. The Church bears a tremendous responsibility in this regard. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith would rather err on the side of caution than approve alleged apparitions that turn out to be a fraud. Taking the latter course would cause great scandal and confusion among the faithful, possibly leading to many people losing their souls, and would seriously damage the Church's reputation. Sometimes we children of the Church don't understand why she won't give us what we want when we want it, but our Mother the Church knows what is best for us and we have to trust her judgment.

The Church, upon duly investigating, did find proof of supernatural occurrences in the cases of the apparitions at Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, Knock, Paray-le-Monial (Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Sacred Heart devotion), Rue du Bac (Saint Catherine Laboure and the Miraculous Medal), Banneaux, San Gervasio (Mother Eugenia Ravasio and the Eternal Father), Plock and Vilnius (Saint Faustina and Divine Mercy), Garabandal, and others (I'm not sure about Kibeho, Rwanda, but I think that one has been approved by the local bishop). What is not always remembered, however, is that several of these now approved private revelations were at one time restricted or banned altogether, either by the local bishop or by Rome, or both, before further investigations finally confirmed their authenticity beyond doubt. For example, the Bishop of Fatima once temporarily forbade Sister Lucia from circulating messages she had received from Our Lady in his diocese. Grammatical errors caused Saint Faustina's diary to be condemned by the Church in the 1960s. Even the great Italian mystic Saint Pio of Pietrelcina was severely restricted by the Holy See for many years until the Church was satisfied that he was not involved in any suspicious activities. So keep in mind that recent negative statements from the Church hierarchy concerning alleged supernatural events at Medjugorje do not necessarily portend a final negative decision. These matters are complicated, and many factors are involved.

Church leaders have said little or nothing publicly thus far about the theological content of the Medjugorje messages and whether there is anything in them that conflicts with Church teaching. I'm no canon lawyer, but it seems to me the main questions at stake here are 1) whether the alleged apparitions of Our Lady at Medjugorje are authentic supernatural events of divine origin or not, 2) whether the alleged messages are theologically sound and in conformity with Church teaching or not, and 3) whether the alleged seers are telling the truth or not. All of these questions are further complicated by the fact that not just one alleged visionary, but six, are involved in the case of Medjugorje.

On one hand, the alleged apparitions at Medjugorje have borne a great deal of positive fruit in the life of the Church that no objective observer can ignore or dismiss. Over the past thirty-three years, millions of people have experienced life-changing conversions and renewal, spiritual and emotional healings, and all manner of graces and heavenly blessings as a result of making pilgrimage to Medjugorje to pray to Our Blessed Mother; millions more have been led through the messages to deepen their personal prayer lives and their commitment to Christ and His Church. The alleged messages emphasize personal conversion, prayer, fasting, and penance for world

peace, which is consistent with the content of approved messages from Our Lady in Lourdes, Fatima, and elsewhere. Furthermore, most if not all of the alleged Medjugorje visionaries have demonstrated humility resulting in obedience to their superiors, i.e., their spiritual directors and their local bishop; for example, when the U.S. bishops forbade Ivan Dragicevic to speak at several events in the U.S. at which he claimed the Blessed Mother would appear to him, he cancelled his appearances at those events. All of these things would seem to augur in favor of the authenticity of the alleged apparitions at Medjugorje, and the Church has undoubtedly taken these things into account in its investigation of the private revelations claimed at Medjugorje.

But on the other hand, there has not been a lack of reports and rumors that would seem to detract from the authenticity of these revelations. One of the alleged seers, for instance, is apparently a millionaire, married to a fashion model and residing in a palatial mansion, supposedly having profited immensely from the sale of religious items at Medjugorje. If this scandal is fabricated, it could be a lie spread by someone determined to discredit the apparitions. But if it is true, it would present a serious obstacle for the Church in the path of recognizing the apparitions as authentic and would lend credence to the theory that the apparitions at Medjugorje are nothing more than a hoax and a scam concocted to generate revenue for the alleged visionaries.

In deciding whether a given series of private revelations is authentic, the Church (the local bishop) must carefully examine the personal character, integrity, truthfulness, and holiness of each of the alleged visionaries involved as well as their mental and psychological health. If they have a clean slate in all of these areas, then the Church has to examine the alleged messages themselves for doctrinal error or theological problems. If the messages are determined to be free from such, then the path is clear for the bishop to proceed toward canonical recognition, and thus approval, of such alleged apparitions. If one of the Medjugorje visionaries has grown wealthy by taking advantage of the pious faith of millions of Catholic pilgrims, this could deal a death blow to Medjugorje from the Church's perspective. A genuine visionary would never turn the apparitions to his or her personal profit. And yet it would still be possible that one or more of the other visionaries has been, and is still, receiving authentic apparitions and messages from the Blessed Virgin Mary.

So what will the Church ultimately decide with regard to the alleged apparitions of Medjugorje? A possible indirect critique has already come from Pope Francis, who remarked a few weeks ago that "Mary is our Mother, not a postmaster who sends us messages every day." However, Pope Francis is also greatly devoted to Our Blessed Mother and thus a champion of authentic Marian devotion. Regardless of whether the alleged apparitions and messages of Medjugorje are authentic or not, and regardless of whether any of the alleged visionaries have engaged in deliberate hoodwinkery, it's clear that Medjugorje has functioned for the past three decades as a place of authentic Marian devotion. Therefore, I anticipate a mixed ruling on Medjugorje, perhaps declaring that no genuine apparitions have taken place there, perhaps stating that the messages are free from doctrinal or moral error but are not of supernatural origin, and perhaps allowing the faithful to continue coming there on pilgrimage as to any other Marian shrine. Whatever decision Pope Francis makes will certainly be for the good of the Church, and even as a longtime devotee

of Our Lady of Medjugorje myself, I am prepared to accept his judgment without question, even if the decision is more negative than I anticipate.

Since we are not privy to the details of the Vatican's official report on Medjugorje, it is possible that we may be completely surprised by the final verdict. But regardless of what that decision includes, it will be a relief to finally know the Church's definitive position on the matter after more than thirty years of claims, doubt, and controversy.

Copyright © 2014 Justin D. Soutar. All rights reserved.

This contribution is available at <http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2014/03/awaiting-churchs-final-decision-on.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Does Your Posture Affect Your Prayer? [at A Shower of Roses]

Sitting in the choir section at Mass, I have an interesting perspective since we're in the front, right corner of the church. I'm sitting perpendicular to the pews, so I look out over the first third of the congregation if I look straight ahead. The altar is at 2:00 from where I sit; my family is usually in front of me at 12:00. When I'm tired of turning my head to look at the priest giving his homily, I look at the congregation.

What I see when I look out is a wide variety of postures and clothing. The ones that strike me the most are the people who are casually dressed, or dressed very inappropriately, and they are not necessarily one and the same. I'm also struck by the poor posture of some, especially my own teenager, who sit with elbows on knees, chin in hands, and eyes facing the floor. I do understand being physically exhausted or terribly sleepy on occasion, but every Sunday?

I've noted before that this posture is disrespectful, to say the least, but I've been looking for an opportunity to bring up the subject again, as I keep thinking that if we habitually practice such a poor posture, that it would begin to have an effect on what we

think and believe

. I also thought that I might be a little off-base there...until I read

[Fr. Barron's lenten reflection](#)

this morning. Do click over and read the whole thing if you haven't subscribed (it's short!), but here's a snippet:

It is not so much keen feelings of devotion that force us to our knees as kneeling that gives rise to keen feelings of devotion. If you're having difficulty in prayer today, try kneeling, or bowing, or making some sort of reverent gesture. The body often leads the mind into a deeper spiritual space.

When I was not in the choir, and sitting with the rest of the family, I was always adamant about their postures. Kneeling with one's bottom against the pew is not acceptable in a normal, healthy individual who is not otherwise weakened by a stressful camping trip or recent illness! Proper kneeling and sitting or standing erect during the various parts of the Mass show respect for the people and the activity. I can't help but believe that it actually affects how much one actually respects and cares about the sacrifice of the Mass! I

In a similar vein, we're pretty adamant about a certain standard of dress for Mass on Sundays. No jeans, no shorts, no short skirts or otherwise inappropriate clothing. Though I will confess that skirts as long as I would like can be hard to find for my growing, lanky girl! We may be found in

jeans at a weekday Mass, but they're on the nicer side; boys wear collared shirts, etc. We have our own standards, but we try not to judge others! I understand that sometimes people are legitimately late, or decided on the spur of the moment that Mass & receiving Jesus took priority over anything else that day! But, as a rule, shouldn't one's dress for Mass indicate that we're going to a banquet with the Creator of the Universe?

I've noticed the same thing in family prayer. Normally, we say a decade of the rosary, and most of the time, everyone can handle staying on their knees that long. But we don't pressure them to do so all the time. For Lent, we've been praying the whole rosary, and there's much more sitting. Even lying down and playing with the rosaries. And my youngest is 12, folks! There's no reason on God's green earth that she can't kneel for 16-17 minutes! I don't think we want to apply undo pressure so that family prayer becomes a huge burden and a battleground, but I think sitting respectfully and using the beads is a minimal requirement.

What I'm talking about here is our

habitual

posture and dress for Mass and prayer. Maybe you don't think it's a big deal today, but when it becomes a habit, are we revealing how we feel about the activity we're participating in? If you don't think so, do you think it might affect how one feels about it later, after years of slouching and assuming a bored posture? Like a teen...who acts bored every Sunday at Mass...even if he says he isn't...and then goes to college where he suddenly has the freedom to decide if he goes to Mass or not, and maybe he remembers that attitude because, now, he thinks he really was bored? Heaven forbid.

What do you think about this? I'd love to hear your thoughts!

This contribution is available at <http://ashowerofroses.blogspot.com/2014/03/does-your-posture-affect-your-prayer.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

My Decision to Wear a Veil [at Catholic Stand]

The process by which I answered the [call to veil myself](#) was slow discernment. As a list maker, I began to weigh the pros and cons in my mind and eventually wrote several posts outlining my thoughts. Venturing out of our comfort zone is often that way. We ponder and forget, remember and reassess, until a decision is made. It was a measured consideration for me but a decision I've not regretted making these past two years of practicing the devotion. One deterrent for me was the impression my veiling would give to others. What would they think or say? Would someone comment negatively? Would it be like my attempt at being a Lector and have me so nervous I couldn't properly assist at the Holy Sacrifice of Mass? Evaluating my intention was probably the thorniest obstacle.

What finally helped me make the decision was assigning a motive to the action. Was I doing this for me? For others? Or was this a spiritually sound concept for me? In the end, I found my answer and on Mother's Day of 2012 I wore my veil to Mass for the first time.

After the initial period of becoming accustomed to my veil, wearing it became second nature. Feeling the weight of the veil on my head is a tangible reminder of where I am and who I am there to see. An added bonus is the amount of mental privacy it affords. As someone who is very much a fan of 'personal space', I appreciate the intimacy veiling affords me while I pray. Distractions become less disturbing and my focus sharpens. I'm truly in my own world – with Jesus.

There is, however, another aspect to wearing a veil. As with any outward cues we give to those around us, a woman who practices the devotion of veiling is making a public statement about her respect and reverence – for Jesus, present in the Eucharist, and for herself. If she is to carry this statement to fruition, there are also certain commitments to be met. She is presenting herself as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. In wearing the veil she emulates the humility of our Blessed Mother Mary. With this comes a set of obligations.

If veiling is an outward sign, then there must also be inward signs. The weight of the veil becomes about more than covering, focus, or devotion. To be beneficial to the eternal soul, we must transform ourselves. Are we simply displaying our faith on our heads or are we transformed interiorly? To be true devotees the answer must be both. Are we more charitable, more giving, and more sacrificial? Do we volunteer to assist the parish in service to others? Do we pray more deeply, fervently?

When we make a commitment motivation is key but the ideal, put into practice, is even more important. Those of us who have chosen to follow this devotion are in it for the long haul and for

all of the implication it carries. To emulate the Blessed Mother, to veil our feminine God-given attributes, and to offer ourselves entirely to Jesus – these all go hand in hand with actions.

So if we wish to pattern our lives after Mary's, we must look beyond the surface. The devotion should indicate an inner holiness and submission to the will of God. If the resolve is to be taken seriously, if the Lord is to recognize our gift of self, our actions must speak fully and without reservation. Otherwise we are no more than the clanging gong of self congratulatory vanity.

- **My Decision to Wear a Veil**

×

This contribution is available at <http://catholicstand.com/decision-wear-veil-mass/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Agatha, Rose and other miracles [at Mere Observations]



This is where I was for part of last Thursday morning.

After months of discomfort and pain for her.

After tests and weeks of awaiting their results.

After not saying anything to anyone for the entire time until we broke the news to our children a few days before and assured them everything would be alright.

After driving my bride to the hospital at 5:15am for pre-op.

After kissing her goodbye as she was wheeled into surgery.

This is where I sat.

And knelt.

And prayed.

As I did a thought entered into my mind.

How many prayers have gone forth from here?

How many tearful pleadings?

How many angry demands?

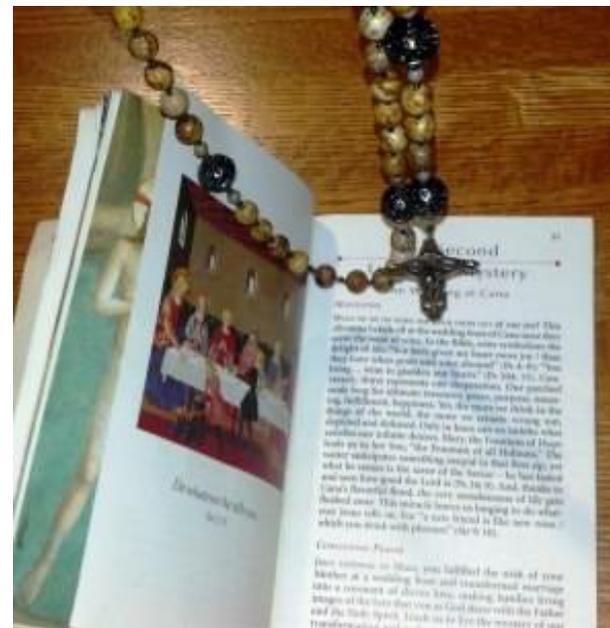
How many were answered?

I know the answer: *all of them.*

But not all of them answered in the preferred manner of the asking.

Mine has been answered in such a way.

This time.



Meditating on the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary.

A little later I ate alone in the hospital commissary. For three days I visit, and each day I bump into someone I know.

The mom and little brother of a boy who I coached in little league. A nurse who is the mom of one of my oldest son's teammates. A co-worker of my wife.

In solitude I did a little people watching. The Korean family with the cutest little girl ever, toddling around in bare feet with ice cream and happy squeals on her face.

The pretty young nurse in her scrubs and long ponytail, smiling her big dimpled smile as she read text after text on her phone.

The Asian-American man who made my beef philly sandwich who smiled as he watched me herd my two youngest through the line on the last day. "I have six kids," he said. "I know what it's like."

"I have three. My oldest is a senior," I smiled back.

"You're a young pup!" he shot back. "I have two grandkids. Ain't it great?"

Yes sir, it is.

On our way to the commissary I walk my children passed a large sitting area with a fireplace and a grand piano programmed to play soft music. Walking by it from the mezzanine above my daughter is fascinated by the music coming from a piano with no one sitting at its bench.

“The hospital has hired a ghost musician. Her name is Agatha. She plays every day.”

Eyes roll. “Da-a-a-a-a-a-a-d.”

The elderly volunteers who man the desk in the waiting room are amazing. When I check in with them I give my name, which they memorized and never forgot during my time there. Rose reads my sweatshirt with my son’s high school baseball team and asks about it. I tell her he is a senior.

“What are his plans after baseball and graduation?”

“He’s enlisted in the Marines. He leaves this fall.”

She smiles and tells me of her own two boys who were Marines. One was drafted by the army during the Vietnam era after he took a semester off from college to work for tuition money. He walked next door to the Army recruiting station and “signed up to be a Marine because he was mad at the Army for drafting him.” We both laugh, but I notice a slight sadness behind her eyeglasses. Eyes that smiled earlier are not smiling as much now.

After I return from the chapel she tells me the doctor is ready to give me a post-op report. I’ve met with him several times in the past as he is the man who helped us through years of infertility, questions, pain, heartache. After the birth of our first child it took us another seven years and a miscarriage. Dr. H helped us through in a manner consistent with our moral beliefs after we’d left other doctor’s offices disgusted and distraught.

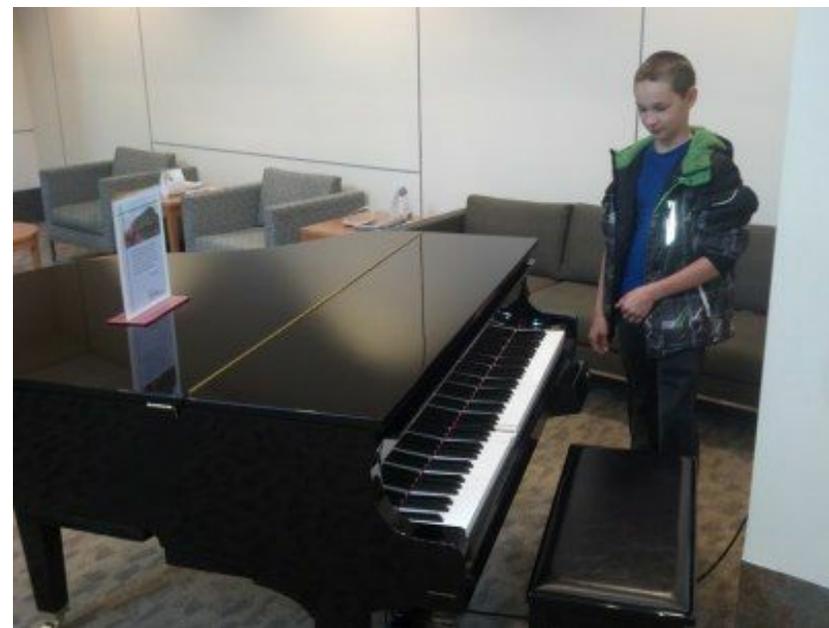
Still, in this tiny room, he described the surgery that took place in words that went way over my tired and stressed mind. But in the end we found common language.

How many people have sat in this chair in this room and felt the same way?

How many did not receive a positive report?

Did Rose put her arm around them to comfort them when they emerged in confusion and pain?

My wife's recovery room is a few doors down from the baby nursery. Ten years ago it also housed the NICU, which has since been relocated to another area. It was in this room that ten years ago I sat beside an incubator and watched my second son of a few weeks struggle for life. I sat in a chair and listened to the monitors beep with each heartbeat and the respirator record his breathing. Several times he stopped. Each time I nudged him with a gloved finger so he would breathe again. When I walked him by this room on Sunday and told him the story he stopped to look inside through the window, lost in thought, while looking at two brand new baby boys in their knit caps. I had never told him that story before.



Returning from our lunch the kids and I pass the ghostly piano again. Walking down the stairs we approach it and I say "Hello Agatha" to the empty piano bench. I lift the keyboard cover to show them the keys being "played".

My daughters eyes widen and she grins. "I do believe in ghosts!" and then she looks at me sideways to let me know she's humoring me once again. It's a little game we play.



I believe in prayer.

I believe in healing.

I believe the nursing staff at this hospital to be the best.

I believe in the skills of our doctor.

I believe in the wonder and trust of a child.

I believe it's going to be alright.

Our home is awash in the most beautiful scents right now. Floral arrangement galore.

Our freezer is full (and getting fuller) of meals prepared by family and friends who know that outside of a BBQ my culinary skills are good enough to feed me, but not three children and my wife. For me to feed them consistently would take a small miracle. *And while I do believe in miracles...*

I, too, believe in friendship. It is a most under appreciated miracle.



Going home.

This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/agatha-rose-and-other-miracles/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Play Dough and Lent [at The Fisk Files]

This weekend it dropped 30 degrees in less than an hour. We had a quick ice storm which kept us inside for the weekend. Luckily, lurking in the back of the fridge (along with who knows what else) we found some homemade play dough. And, the boys got right to it. In fact, it kept them entertained off and on for hours.







There's nothing that John Paul loves more right now than his big brothers (most of the time). I'm not so sure that the feeling is mutual as he tries to steal/destroy anything they are playing with, but it's precious to see his adoration for the both of them.





Being inside all weekend and watching the boys mold and form that play dough into different things gave me plenty of time to think about what to do for Lent which is fast approaching. Every year I feel that I need to start thinking about it sooner than I did the year before, that I need to seriously just pick one thing and give it my all, that I'll find a way to feel less guilty when I mess up, or that I need to try harder to truly focus on what matters. The problem is, sometimes I don't know what really matters. I mean, I know I need to make more time for God, but does that mean reading the Bible more? Or, is it committing to a certain time of prayer or silence, or both? Is it reading religious books or listening to religious commentary? Any one of them would be beneficial, but what do I need most?

Then I think about my love/need for sweets - for just a taste after a meal that turns into a full-

blown dessert and the unceasing craving for more throughout the day. Giving that up, if not for everyone, is a sacrifice for me. But, then there's that little thought in the back of my head saying, "and maybe Lent could be a wonderful way to jump start healthier eating/a bit of weight loss" - is Lent about that? Not really. Yet, giving up sweets is still hard for me.

Then, it's the additional things...how do we involve the little ones? How do I take on doing more for others while making sure I do it peacefully, not just adding more to the plate and furthering the feeling of no peace at all.

In the end, it typically goes like this: let's take on as much as I feel humanly possible because I know I SHOULD be doing all of these things anyway. It will be a sacrifice, and not one in which I'm trying to outdo the neighbor, but one in which I know myself well enough to know I need much change in my life. A week or so in, I feel like I've taken on too much to focus on much more than that very sacrifice...not Christ's, but mine - in the piece of chocolate lingering in the pantry or the workout DVD I've come to abhor and never mind the rosary I said while I was working out to get me through the next set (or three) - that counts, right?

It all just becomes a jumbled mess on my to-do list rather than a reflection on His passion, death and resurrection. It makes life seem busier (even if it's just my perception) instead of simpler, as I feel Lent should be. Rather than peace, I feel guilt. Instead of taking in all that the season has to offer, I focus on what I'm offering it.

Will I probably still give up the sweets? Will I more than likely commit to getting in more prayer time and even more exercise? Will I try to find a way to involve my little guys? Probably so. However, this time my focus will be on His grace, His peace, and His mercy.

Without it, I can do none of it - successfully, anyway. Without truly letting Him mold my life (as the boys were so diligently molding their play dough), nothing I do makes much of a difference. A turn toward Him, His desire for my vocation, and a Center for my days...that is where the sacrifices, additions and out-of-self thinking will lead me. Or, it should. If not, what is this season for?

Zombies Don't Share the Gospel [at Flow Chart to Surrender]

I like to stay busy. It keeps me out of trouble! We aren't supposed to be idle and we're called to use our time wisely for God. So far in 2014, I've been actively involved in RCIA, I tutor algebra once or twice a week, and I've been taking the excellent Certificate of Theology courses from JP Catholic. I've been doing CrossFit three times a week, ran three times a week as part of a Couch to 3.1 group, and began a morning exercise program twice a week at the start of March. I like to visit my Dad on weekends I'm free, hang out with my friends as much as possible, read novels, and write here or elsewhere. Oh, and there's work too. I'd not given much thought to this hectic schedule until this month.

The week I began the morning exercise program, I started noticing mild physical symptoms. I'd just finished an added-sugar fast in February so I assumed they were from the re-introduction of sugar. As the weeks went by though, they kept getting worse and worse. Things got really bad when I stopped being able to go to sleep until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning if I'd worked out that day. I love my sleep! I grew more stressed and irritable. One night (morning) I was still awake at 2:00 and finally decided to throw some research into what might be causing me all of these problems. Every single result on Google indicated I was WAY too busy and was having a textbook response to too much stress. I didn't *feel* stressed before the symptoms appeared, but apparently my body didn't care how I felt.

I was reminded of a few posts Jennifer Fulwiler has made at regarding scheduling and being overwhelmed. I'm not a mom with that many kids, but the signs and solutions seemed obvious in my life once I'd re-read her posts.

I'm in between classes at JP Catholic, so I talked to them about withdrawing from the program for awhile. They were very supportive. I also dropped the morning exercise program I'd started at the beginning of the month and skipped a 5k I was signed up for over the weekend. Just as she experienced a lot of results by making some changes, I've noticed huge improvements as well. I'm sleeping better which is amazing. I feel like I have time to do things in my house, like clean the dishes. I'm in a better mood in general, and I feel like I'm more prepared to tackle the day.

We are supposed to keep away from idleness and serve God with our time, but we can't be so busy that we fail at being joyful communicators of the Good News. We don't set a good example if we're cranky all the time or too tired to help with anything not on our schedule. Nobody wants to hear about Jesus from a zombie.

What Would Fred Phelps Do? [at Catholic Chapter House Blog]



**KEEP
CALM
AND
LOVE
YOUR ENEMIES**

“But I say to you, Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you” (Matthew 5:44).

Last week, the founder and pastor of the infamous Westboro Baptist Church, Fred Phelps, died. In his life and “ministry”, he preached a message of hatred toward sinners, especially homosexuals, and organised protests and picketings of various public events, including war veterans’ funerals, because he maintained that their deaths were a sign of God’s judgement on America. When it was reported that he was on his deathbed, and later, had passed away, social media was buzzing with comments and reactions to his death, often uncharitably rejoicing at his death, hoping for his eternal torment, and suggesting people even picket *his* funeral.

Dishearteningly, many of these comments were made by Christians.

Understandably, the WBC did a lot to reinforce in the public mind, the idea that the Church hates homosexuals, etc., and thus undermined authentic Christian witness to the Gospel. Others simply resent Phelps’ condemnation of their own faith, particularly the Catholic faith. Feelings of bitterness and resentment are natural in such circumstances.

But that’s precisely the problem. Jesus calls us to go above the natural, through His grace, to the *supernatural*. If we only love our friends, but hate our enemies, we’re no different than the pagan culture Phelps railed against. We must love and pray for everyone, hoping that the grace Jesus offers will break through even the hardest hearts of the most entrenched sinners. And that includes Fred Phelps. And that includes me.

Celebrating someone’s death, hoping they are in hell, proposing to picket their funeral, even in jest—these are sinful attitudes that make us no different than the preacher we are deriding. Having this uncharitable attitude shows that we are actually following Phelps’ example.

Let us not be his disciples, but true disciples of Jesus. Let us pray that, in the end, even a hateful preacher might know God’s Divine Mercy.

Requiem Aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis:
Requiescant in pace. Amen.

[Catholic Living](#), by Catholic Chapter House.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicchapterhouse.com/blog/2014/03/28/what-would-fred-phelps-do/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).



Why is March 25th Tolkien Reading Day?

There are not many people who view March 25th as a very significant day. In some sense, it has no real importance to the secular world. Yet, it is one that has shaped the world in more ways than one.

Catholic Significance

In the Catholic Church, this day has always been a day of "doom"; a day of great "fate" or "destiny." It is a day that traditionally has been assigned very "fateful" events in the salvation of the human race. For example, it was thought to be both the day of the creation of Adam and Eve as well as the day of their disobedience in the Garden. Not only that, but it was believed to be the exact day that Our Lord was crucified on the cross.

Yet, there is more. It was also counted as the day when Lucifer fell from Heaven and when the Israelite people passed through the Red Sea to begin their journey to the promised land. Lastly, it was the day when Isaac was to be offered as a sacrifice by his father Abraham. (

[Catholic Encyclopedia](#)

)

Currently in the Church's calendar, it is the day when we celebrate the Annunciation of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore, this day is when Mary, a simple peasant girl of 14, freely accepted the mission of bearing in her womb the Son of God, Jesus Christ.



Putting it all together, today is the day when Adam was created by God from the dust of the earth and when Lucifer was thrown out of Heaven. It is the day when the New Adam came to dwell in the womb of the New Eve.

This is the day when "the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary

. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith" (

[Saint Irenaeus of Lyon](#)

). Thus Mary became the

"Untier of Knots."

On this day the Lamb of God was slain, the Lamb who was foretold when Abraham told Isaac that "God Himself will provide a lamb" for sacrifice. Lastly, Christ is the new Moses who by His blood destroyed our slavery to sin and opened up the way to our true Promised Land, Heaven.

Death was destroyed. Slavery to sin; liberated. Knots were untied.

Why Tolkien Reading Day?

What else happened on this day? Frodo came to Mount Doom to throw into the fiery furnace his own slavery in order to put to death the Evil One

. He came to cast out of Middle-Earth the one who blocked out the sun and to do what many great men could not do before him. In the end, it was another who destroyed the Ring of Power, not out

of his own design, but in the Design of the One who is greater. The One Ring was destroyed and it opened up a new life for those in Middle-Earth. No longer were they under the slavery of a Shadow King, but now they could breathe the air of freedom.

The Ring was destroyed. Slavery to Sauron; ended. Evil; cast out.

Tolkien did not choose this date arbitrarily. He knew what he was doing and because of that March 25th remains a day of special significance for all Tolkien readers. Providentially, a day where the world reads the words of Tolkien, the world also celebrates the Divine Word, the *logos*,

who was conceived and died in order to undo the word spoken by Adam & Eve in the Garden. If Tolkien were here, he would pray that all who read his words would be further spurred on to read the

Word

of scripture.

The Ring was destroyed in the fire and was "unmade" and the

Logos

died upon the cross to "undo" the word of disobedience spoken in the garden.

Today is a day of "doom," a "fateful" day. There are no "coincidences." Events do not happen at random.

Let us not forget the words of Gandalf,

"There are other forces at work in this world Frodo, besides the will of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the Ring. In which case, you were also meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought."

This contribution is available at <http://www.philipkosloski.com/2013/03/march-25th-day-of-doom.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Laetare Sunday and my pink belt

On this fourth Sunday of Lent, many liturgical Christians will shed their purple, don some rose, and heed the call to rejoice.

Naturally, I feel some pressure to [match my clothes to the liturgical calendar](#), especially since I always spend Laetare Sunday conducting a choir and attending a brunch at a large alumni event for my alma mater. There have been a few pep to pink dresses in the rotation for the last few years.

This year I wanted a change, so I went off in search of a pink belt to wear with black. If you have read this far, this whole saga may seem inconsequential, but the ensuing internal monologue was anything but.



Oh, here's a bright pink belt! Fun! But do you really need this? You shouldn't be frittering money away, especially during Lent. It's not like you haven't been generous lately. You've left big tips at the coffee shop and donated to the Catholic Appeal. So maybe you can spend a little. It's only \$12.99...but that means it was probably made in a sweatshop, by little kids or desperate adults. How can you be so blithe about buying things? Remember that year you didn't buy anything other than food during Lent and joked that you were giving up capitalism? What happened to your values?

After much handwringing and emotional flagellation, I bought the belt for this reason: it made me joyful.

Little things, bright colors, the laughter of friends who recognize exactly why I am wearing a pink – nay, rose – belt on the Fourth Sunday of Lent are all cause for me to rejoice.

It is so hard to be good, especially if you are of a personality type for which every decision is

hopelessly fraught and you never live up to your own standards. I am called to be just, loving, generous, thoughtful, and kind. But **I am also called to be joyful, just where and how I am.**

One challenge of growing into a heart three sizes too self-critical has been to recognize and accept that God delights in me. This shouldn't have been so hard, since I tend to find delight daily – in a warm breeze, a ripe tomato, a held hand, a pink belt. I enjoy these things, I see value in them for the goodness they bring to the world, and I appreciate that they are in my life, for however long they are.

Every time I experience delight I grow closer to knowing what God knows, to existing in the realm of perfect love for which I long. My heart is moved to joy, joy that does not ignore the problems of the world, but that values beauty more than pain.

This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2014/03/30/laetare-sunday-and-my-pink-belt/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

I Made Her Cry [at This Cross I Embrace]

Hanging on the wall in my NaPro office, right outside the ultrasound room, is a poem I wrote for

[Sew](#)

several years ago,

[The Barren Tree](#)

.

The Barren Tree

*When God created the barren tree,
I wonder, what was the plan to be?
For this broken monstrosity may stand tall,
but really casts no shadow at all.*



Nor does it yield any leaves or fruit, no life comes forth but from its root. Leafless, lifeless, dry, and thin, the Barren Tree just doesn't fit in.

*Yet, amongst the fertile trees of green,
the barren one is clearly seen-
The only tree without any dressing,
in its deficiency shines forth its blessing.*

*Strong and sturdy, tall and proud,
the Barren Tree stands apart from the crowd.
While its branches reach outward and upward to God,
it seems to be praying, giving thanks to its God.*

*For it has been chosen for wondrous things,
it knows what importance its presentation brings.
And so with its presence, it sets an example,
which its green, fertile neighbors never can trample.
Knowing that it is fulfilling God's will,
its strength fuels its perseverance in standing tall and still.*

*And it's then that I no longer question God's plan,
because as I reflect on the woman I am*

I see my soul in the strength of that tree...

and I realize, the Barren Tree is me.

-A.S.

In the beginning of my work with Creighton Model clients and ultrasound patients, I would very candidly share about my experiences with infertility. Without delving into too much detail, I would give the information where I saw that it could benefit someone in their stage of life, be it infertility, single life, premenopause, or avoiding pregnancy. Today, I usually only disclose the information if and when it is asked of me, except in cases of infertility clients who are greatly suffering. And so, it does surprise me when I get sneak-attacked by my own infertility when I least expect it! And that's what happened yesterday.

I was having a follow-up Creighton Model session with a woman I've been teaching for about a year, now. She is a lovely 30-something, currently spacing pregnancy, and comes with a lot of emotional baggage of her own. She asked me right at the beginning of our meeting:

"I saw that poem in the front of the office, about the barren tree... I read it last time I was here, and just noticed the initials at the bottom are A.S. Did you write that?"

"Yes, I did."

"Oh! {pause of silence and contemplation} When?"

"Umm... I think several years ago, maybe 2009?"

"{another long pause} Oh... do you mind if I ask...do you, have you... are you able to have any children?"

{matter-of-fact-ly, and with a jovial tone of voice} Well, I haven't been able to up until this point, but I'm not going to say it'll *never* happen."

"And so, you do this work and you deal with others all day who are charting, and... {voice trailed off}"

"Oh, it's been such a blessing! I only got into this line of work because of my own infertility. I really enjoy it, and have met some truly amazing people."

It was at that point that I noticed she had reached for the tissue box in our consult room, and was wiping away tears in her eyes and on her cheek.

And my first reaction was, *Oh no, what did I say??!* It was only when she began to talk again that I realized why she was crying.

"Well, I just... you've been so important in my life, and I really think of you as a great friend to me. I'm very thankful you do this. I'll be praying for you..."

I am very much a "In the Moment" type of person. I react quickly, respond quickly, and move along to the next thing. But processing? Processing takes me a bit longer. (I think that's the Melancholic in me.) It hit me in the moment that she was crying because of me. Not because of anything I said, but just because of me - my situation, that she had been ignorant of until that moment. It touched me that she said what she did, and that she was moved to tears, even, but in the moment, I responded with an assurance that I'm ok, that it's ok, and that God has a beautiful plan for me.

Now, in processing it all after the fact, I wonder just how sad my story must seem to those who hear it for the first time. I know there were definitely moments in my infertility journey when I believed I had the absolute worst of every possible problem, and there was *no doubt in my mind* that my story was not only sad, but also hopeless, desperate, and isolated. No one needed to cry for me to convince me I was a sad, sad case - because chances were, I was already crying on the inside. But yesterday was different. I wasn't sad outwardly. I wasn't sad inwardly. And even after our dialogue, I only became mildly sad for her, in her discovery of my past pain and suffering.

Yet, the truth is that it is a sadness. To hear about someone you know and respect has been going through a pain you cannot even identify with, but can imagine - and then to hear them discuss it so

nonchalantly (*and I think the real shocker came when I told her I think I wrote the poem in 2009*) - that is a real sadness. Not just for her, but for me. And I acknowledge the pain and the suffering of my past, and I continue to live in the sorrow today. But maybe, just maybe, her tears weren't just for the discovery of my infertility. Maybe her tears had more to do with the person she saw in front of her yesterday. The woman who could speak nonchalantly about such a heavy cross. The woman who hadn't thought it pertinent enough to discuss her cross with someone whose cross was so different and so much heavier in many ways. Maybe it was that woman, the woman I continue to work on daily, that stirred the emotion of yesterday.

And I rejoice in that thought. To God be all the glory, I am only the vessel who finally learned to empty herself to make room for the riches from above.

(Stay tuned for GAPS prep work in the TCIE kitchen!)

This contribution is available at <http://www.thiscrossiembrace.blogspot.com/2014/03/i-made-her-cry.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

A Reformed Wedding [at One Arrow Alone]

A friend of mine got married on Thursday. I've known him from the time we both attended a Reformed secondary school, and as we belonged to the same group of friends, we've stayed in touch. His bride comes from another part of the country. Her family name is De Pater, but since women traditionally acquire a double surname on their wedding day, her last name is now Brande Pater – which translates as 'Burn the Friar'.

I was unable to make it to the civil ceremony and the church service, but I did attend the wedding reception. While standing in line to congratulate the bride and groom, I had a conversation with someone I had not seen since secondary school, about seven years ago. Back in the day we had had only casual contact.

We exchanged news on what we were doing these days; he had gone into graphic design, I think. On hearing that I was in formation for the priesthood, he remarked that there was an ongoing rapprochement between Catholics and Protestants. 'The main lines are the important thing,' he thought.

'Yes, those too,' I said.

More confidentially he went on, 'I don't know how [the groom] stands in the faith; do you? I couldn't make it out from the sermon either.'

'I don't know either,' I said. 'But what do you mean by 'how he stands in the faith'?''

'Well, whether he is converted,' he answered, 'whether Jesus Christ is his Redeemer. I don't know how that is with you...' (This was in the plural form and thus referred more generally to the Catholic perception on conversion. 'Yes, certainly,' I said.)

‘But I’m afraid to ask him now,’ he said. ‘I haven’t really talked to him since secondary school and it might be strange to ask the question now, when I haven’t brought it up all those years. You do feel that you’ve fallen short...’

I agreed today might not be the best day to ask, and excused myself on the ground that I still had to write my card.

The bride and groom were radiant and cordial, and I managed to extend my congratulations just past the point of awkwardness; for which I take full responsibility.

Once inside, I joined two old friends at a table and asked, ‘How was the church service?’

Before the answer was given, we were joined by a young couple. The husband also belonged to our group of friends; he had always maintained a near-complete silence at our gatherings, but had still managed to get married in January, whereas the two others did not even have girlfriends on the horizon. His young wife was with him, and being married seemed to agree with them both.

One friend told them I had just asked how the sermon had been.

‘Technically speaking I was asking about the church service,’ I said.

The couple said that the sermon had been mostly inaudible where they were sitting; the sound installation had not been properly synchronized with the minister’s speech.

The friend had been seated more towards the front and had not experienced these problems. He said: ‘It was good, it is always good when the Gospel of grace for sinners is preached honestly.’ Or words to that effect.

Some time afterwards, we were joined by another person I hadn't seen since secondary school, though I knew he had gone on to study theology. He was accompanied by a girlfriend. The last three years of school, we had had heated but friendly debates about all sorts of topics. When I converted to Catholicism during my first year of college, the first question he asked me on MSN was whether I had already returned to Protestantism. I was insulted because he seemed not to take me seriously, and stopped responding.

Today the six-year silence was broken. One of the first questions he asked was, 'Are you Reformed yet?'

'I am in a process of daily reformation,' I said, 'in the context of *Cornelis semper reformandus*.' This made him laugh.

Studying God's revelation as an academic subject has a way of generating rather than arresting conversations, and so my talk with him was longer and more spirited than the ones reported above. It turned out he was in his final year of his Masters in Theology. 'And then?' I queried. 'I don't know,' he said. 'What would you do if you were me?' 'I haven't seen you in seven years,' I said. 'What would *you* do if you were you?' 'I really don't know,' he said.

Though he had been a math-and-science type at school, he had started specializing in Semitic languages, studying not only Biblical Hebrew, but also Ugaritic and Syrian on the side, and who knows what else. Also he had started reading *The Lord of the Rings*, after having seen the first movie. 'Only now I begin to understand what kind of world you were living in back at school,' he said, not unkindly. He praised the masterful writing of the book, its Christian themes and the way it conjured up an authentic medieval worldview, but still saw the danger of getting too involved in a fantasy world.

He asked: 'What do you think about Luther? What do you think about the justification of the sinner?' I struggled to give just answers. He said, 'The answer is, *Does not this doctrine make men careless and profane?*' (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 64)

It was good to chat with him again. His girlfriend was nice too; she studied English at Leiden University, so I asked about her favourite author. It turned out she was less interested in literature than in grammar and phonetics. Knowing her boyfriend, perhaps I should have guessed.

Around 7.30pm the reception ended. I shook hands with the bride, walked out, realized I had overlooked the groom and walked back to shake hands with him. My theologian friend called out, 'It's nice to see you retrace your steps. You should do that more often.'

This contribution is available at <http://turgonian.blogspot.nl/2014/03/a-reformed-wedding.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

For the Mother of Christ! [at Living the Faith]



O Queen
Thy beauty drops
With glamour rain
From The sunny shades
With the sprinkling jail

Plentiful with enriching taste
Old yet ever young!
Oh! The tides of beauty
Sing your name ever on her lips

Epitome of beauty
With the tower's rays
Glittering in its maid
Of crystal clear double-minded hail

Who can equal thy beauty
In all fellows that peep
In their gaze
Among the gardens that soil thee eyes

Who can tell

Of all the radiance
That glitters merrily
With no hard diamond sale

Who can tell of your smile
That sweeten the farmyard sale
Merrying the fruits of the
Winter's pain

You
Oh! Most beautiful queen
Who was plated with divine grace
Sparking with the father's robe
A beauty forever sung
A beauty ever made

MO.

Photo: <http://www.pinterest.com/carolthibus/blessed-virgin-mary/>

This contribution is available at <http://www.twocatholicfriends.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/for-the-mother-of-christ/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Counterfeits [at Bible Meditations]



My children, keep yourselves safe from false gods! 1 John 5:21

Temptations are seductive. If they didn't offer us something that looks good, why would we go after them? They lure us by promising to make us feel good, or satisfy our desires for pleasure, power, or fame. They promise protection from painful feelings like loneliness, helplessness, or rejection.

The problem is, temptations are impostors. Their promises are lies—no matter how many people “worship” them. At best, they let us down. At worst, they are destructive. Ask any addict who started out wanting to feel good and ended up devastated by loss of health, loved ones, and income—not to mention the freedom to choose, as they find themselves pushed around by the demands of the booze, drugs, etc.

But we don't have to end up on skid row to be taken in by false gods. How many trips to the mall does it take until we know that more things aren't going to bring us lasting happiness and might even leave our bank accounts in dire straits? How many times do we have to join in gossip until we recognize that tearing someone else down doesn't build us up but instead damages our character at least as much as the person we're talking about? How many times will we surrender our principles and self-respect by going along with what others want because we can't risk being rejected? Physical comfort, wanting to feel important or accepted aren't wrong in themselves, but when we let them take first place in our lives, we make them into false gods. These idols feed on pride and fear. Pride tells us we are the center of our own universe and that the way to happiness is focusing on Number 1. Fear tells us we don't dare experience rejection or look bad or else we'll not only feel worthless, we'll be worthless.

Maybe that's why the Bible tells us so often, "Do not be afraid," and encourages us to grow in humility. The God of Truth can teach our hearts that we are valuable, precious, and loved, even if we aren't the center of the universe. He can show us that our ultimate joy and good comes from trusting Him instead of going after happiness in short-sighted or self-defeating ways. He will teach us that joy runs deeper and endures longer than the pleasure promised by false gods. When those false gods let us down or hurt us, the One True God is always waiting for us to turn back to Him.

Prayer: God of Truth, open my eyes to see false promises for what they are.

Reflection for sharing: What false gods are promising you more than they can deliver today?

This contribution is available at <http://www.biblemeditations.net/archives/1830>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

A Healing Balm for the Soul [at The Beautiful Gate]

What is the cure for the soul that is weary? What is the antidote to a world stricken with vice? The remedy for the soul overwhelmed by despair?

What "sweetens" the crosses we bear?

The answer is one and the same for all of the questions above.

Virtues. Those God given helps for the soul. The beautiful "coat of many colors" the soul needs to be cloaked in...that God yearns to cover its nakedness, its poverty, with so it doesn't walk about the world completely exposed to that which seeks to harm it.

In the painting above, "An Allegory of Man", Man is being attacked by the Seven deadly Sins and Death, but is shielded by the Seven Virtues. We have really gotten away from studying and practicing the virtues in the past century and this loss is becoming more noticeable each day as the proliferation of every kind of sin and vice sweeps across humanity. Sometimes it's hard to believe that we can be so obdurate in our unwillingness to see what is as plain as the nose on our face:

The world is drowning in the Seven Deadly Sins. We all struggle with them but millions have given themselves over to them completely.

The loss of the practice of virtue in this world has had tragic repercussions. One of the effects of the Deadly sins is that they

do

in fact have a deadening effect on the soul. The soul grows numb and weary. It cannot function properly in the manner that it was created to - as a clean and holy temple of the Holy Spirit. It loses its sense of being closely connected to God. The soul falls asleep, you could say.

We are a people who are snoring their way into oblivion. An oblivion where no one exists except me, myself, and I. The ultimate dreamworld where the only god that exists is the god of self. A world where people have forgotten both God and neighbor. (Oh, wait, so sorry...I forgot that this "dreamworld" actually has a name. Hell, I think it's called.)

The virtues on the other hand "wake up" the soul. They have a vivifying effect on it because their source is God. When the soul is not coated in virtues it feels their absence because the spiritual state of man depends on the virtues. We have lost our understanding of the protection virtues give us, a truth which the people of past centuries understood well.

When our physical bodies are ill they manifest clear symptoms so that we know something is

wrong. It's the same for our souls - they too manifest spiritual symptoms so that we may take note and apply the remedies needed to cure its ills.

And God has given us so many remedies.

One of the greatest is Confession, which purges the soul of the poisons within it. Once the poison is cleared, the virtues have the necessary room to take root, flourish and grow. Not confessing our sins is like trying to plant a seed in rocky soil, the plant has no room to grow because the soil (of the soul) is so poor. Confession removes the rocks and preps the soil.

Prayer is the conduit through which the soil is watered.

Holy Scripture and the Eucharist feed it. (Anyone who likes gardening knows soil needs to be fertilized to produce anything worthwhile.)

The virtues protect it and cause the soil of the soul to produce fruit abundantly.

Let's turn the tide of sin and despair in our world today by praying for and practicing the virtues.

Sanctify yourself and you will sanctify society.

St Francis of Assisi

This contribution is available at <http://openingthefloodgatesofmercy.blogspot.com/2014/03/a-healing-balm-for-soul.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

"Jesus I Trust in You" is Easier Said Than Done [at The Catholic Worrier]

My name is Justine, and I am 23 year old newlywed and soon to be mommy! I live in a small village in Ontario, Canada with my husband Dane and our kitty Boots. When I'm not at the office, or putting together fundraising events for my parish, you can usually find me curled up at home with a good book or watching home renovation shows with my husband.

Being a young catholic woman as well as a wife and mommy-to-be, isn't always easy but the Lord always finds a way to make it work. I hope you'll keep reading and join me as I try to figure out the new roles I've taken on in life.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicworrier.blogspot.ca/2014/02/jesus-i-trust-in-you-is-easier-said.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Truth & Meaning of Sexuality / The Cultural Reform Begins In the Church [at Sticking the Corners]



This morning I was considering a remark from my combox comparing those who uphold the sacrament of marriage with, for example, supporters of the KKK. The comparison was made in the context of some charitable and thoughtful arguments, however erroneous I found the reasoning to be. What struck me: How have we come to this?

How have we gone from recognizing the various forms of unchastity as the sins that they are, to comparing the virtue of chastity to the worst sorts of depravity? If I find sex to be a sacred thing, the act between husband and wife that engenders a new and eternal human being, and I wish that act to be treated as the sacred thing it is . . . that makes me like Hitler?

Quite the opposite.

But before you lay into the misguided soul writing a letter to the editor today, sit down and have a chat with your Catholic grandmother, or great-uncle, or elderly cousin three times removed. I have spent long hours in conversation over dinner with this and that graduate of the golden days of American Catholic schools, when nuns were everywhere, and the Mass was in Latin, and you didn't eat meat on Friday, ever. I've heard all kinds of heresy. Namby pamby wish-wash.

These aren't the Vatican II generation . . . these are the good Catholic parents who reared the generation that gave us the sexual revolution. Whose children enrolled in Catholic school at age six, and at age 26 protested for steady access to contraception, divorce, and very, very bad music.

The decay of American society did not come out of nowhere. Statistically speaking, that is, if we look at percentages of Americans who were Catholic at this time and that, and the way self-identifying Catholics vote today, we can conclude this revolution came not out of nowhere, but out

of the Catholic Church. Crazy people may have proposed these ideas, but Catholics voted them into reality.

It is tempting to try to predict the future by surveying the present. We look at the current cultural momentum, the surveys, the voting patterns, the number of children from this sort of family or that kind, and propose that the future lies this way or that. If statistics were God, it might work.

They aren't. God works through His Church. God, a Person (technically: Three Persons, One God), seeking intimate relationship with each individual human being, one eternal soul at a time.

Cultural reform, when it comes — next decade, next century, next millennium — will come through the Church.

That was my thought this morning; thus with pleasure I saw this e-mail in my inbox this afternoon:

Hello, Friends of [Family Honor](#),

In case you or anyone you know is interested, this is a good way to find out more about Family Honor's online course and ask questions ...

Family Honor is hosting a free info webinar tonight, Monday night, April 7 from 7-7:45 pm East Coast time and also on Tuesday, April 8 from 12 noon -12:45 East Coast time for anyone who might be interested in taking the Summer Session of our online course, [The Truth and Meaning of Sexuality, Love & Family: Cultural Implications](#), which begins later this month. To sign up for this FREE webinar, contact Vincent Weaver at upstatefamilyhonor@yahoo.com or call the Family Honor office: 803.929.0858.

This is a good course. My husband and I took it last summer, and while it is a lot of work, I can attest that it was one of the best things we as a couple have done for our marriage. I'm appalled that anyone is allowed to teach upper-grades religious education without first completing some course of this nature. When I find myself in the confessional admitting that I've lost my temper, again, at this or that person in authority somewhere in the Church, my thoughts are typically along the lines of *Why isn't that !@#\$%^& coward teaching this stuff!*

People are literally dying of STD's, botched abortions, depression, pill-induced strokes, perforated IUD's . . . because no one will speak up. Because very few people even know how to think about the questions surrounding sexuality, let alone how to answer them. Even if you don't care about your fellow men's immortal souls, you might at least have a little mercy on their bodies?

FYI for those working on a degree right now, the course can be taken for undergraduate or graduate credit, so make inquiries about that if you have an elective to fill. The Family Honor

staff are also quite creative in suggesting ways to drum up financial aid if you need it — my husband and I were beneficiaries of that line of inquiry, so I know it's possible. And finally, if a college-level course is beyond your ability (doubtful for most who read here), you can phone or e-mail and get suggestions on other general-audience courses and reading material that can scratch your itch.

[Check it out.](#)

This contribution is available at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jenniferfitz/2014/04/the-truth-meaning-of-sexuality-the-cultural-reform-begins-in-the-church/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Mission: Atlantic City [at Walk By Faith]

Last Saturday evening, I returned from a leading six students on a weeklong mission trip in Atlantic City. I have so much I want to share, but this post would be a novel if I wrote everything! It's a great problem to have.

We were blessed with the opportunity to serve our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ by rebuilding homes destroyed by Hurricane Sandy. Even though it is over a year after the devastating storm, there are still hundreds of families either displaced or forced to live in moldy, unsanitary conditions.

Many volunteers rushed to serve initially after the hurricane. Wonderful organizations like the Red Cross delivered supplies and provided hotel rooms to families. These were necessary materials for the time, but only the immediate needs were met.

In the months following, individuals and families were waiting on the slow, trickling government aid. The bulk of this aid went to the homes directly along the coast. Who lives on the coast? Those who can afford the five million dollar homes that lie along the Atlantic do. Now, the poorer families living inland are forced to wait, hoping some day grant money will finally reach their home, knowing full well they sit on a long list of others waiting for the exact same thing.

This is where groups like Atlantic City Long Term Recovery Group come in. They hire construction workers and managers to serve with them, and send them out in pairs to houses. Volunteer groups, like ours, join these workers to speed along the process, speeding the process along, to ensure more and more residents of Atlantic City can live in a safe home.

Before the trip, I was nervous. I was worried the car would break down, I was worried the group wouldn't get along, I was worried we wouldn't have a place to stay, I was worried someone would get hurt, I was worried there wouldn't be food, I was worried I wouldn't know how to do anything and wouldn't be able to help... The list went on and on. I can't even recall how many times in the weeks leading up to the trip that my prayer was simply, "God, I just ask that you get us all back to Mankato alive." Clearly I'm a very chill and relaxed barrel of fun.

I went in to the mission trip with no expectations (see above paragraph, where success was defined solely by living). I'm going to ruin the suspense that I'm sure you're feeling right now and say that yes, we did get back all alive (Sorry, you were probably hoping for a climatic ending). God knew what he was doing though, as always. By going in to this trip with no expectations, I was able to fully embrace every moment. Like, for instance, the way the first night, Saturday, played out.

We were planning at staying overnight at St. Peter's Catholic church in Steubenville, Ohio. I dialed the number of the church during the day to let them know we would be coming in late

(11pm), only to find that the parish office was closed. I left a message on the secretary's line, wondering if anyone would even notice before Monday.

Fortunately, that evening the priest called me. After speaking him, it sounded like we were the first group to ever spend the night at the church. He also told us the best place would be for us to sleep *in* the church. I had been under the assumption we'd sleep in a classroom or hall. In addition, the rest of the church would be locked, so we would need to find the stairway leading to the adoration chapel, in the dark, in a strange city. Last fun fact, we would have to be ready by 6:15 am, as that was when the priest opened the church for Sunday mass (after losing two hours of sleep from the time change and daylight savings). Needless to say, I was concerned at how this would all work out.

Turns out, all my anxiety was for nothing (as usual). We arrived to find a priest waiting for us outside of the brightly lit entrance to the chapel. He lead us up to the church, and the minute we stepped through the doors... Wow. The beauty of the old church made me stop in my tracks. At the end of long rows of pews was a mural of Jesus that extended from floor to ceiling. The tabernacle where Jesus was had a light shining on it, glowing in the otherwise-dark room.



We laid out our sleeping bags, and within minutes, we were all sound asleep. Most of us woke up a few times throughout the night, but in the words of one of the girls on the trip, "Waking up in the middle of the night was the best. I would look up, and there was Jesus." Spending a night with Jesus in a church will forever be a cherished memory.

The next morning, we went to mass at the very church we slept at (very convenient), and then we were off again! After driving for fifteen hours the day before, we were excited for a nice and 'short' seven hour drive to Atlantic City.

Our destination was a town right outside of Atlantic City, Pleasantville, where we would be staying in for the week. We would be at a small Methodist church that frequently housed volunteers. It was here that we met Carol, the sweetest human being I have ever had the pleasure

of meeting. She informed us that there were nine students from Auburn that would be staying with us. We saw their cots set up in the fellowship hall, and figured we would be staying up there. The irony was not lost on us when Carol instead lead us up to the stairs and showed us where we would be sleeping: in the church itself.

After unpacking, our first mission was to not smell. The showers were off-site at a local fitness club. Some of our group decided to run the mile to the gym to stretch out our legs, not realizing how quickly it had gotten dark. Despite the darkness, we arrived safely. For the rest of the week, I was always amused at our daily shower trips as a group, as we would all pile in to the minivan covered in paint, sawdust, and glue (and then make the men wait as us ladies took a little longer to get ready).

We hit the ground running on Monday morning. We were working at the same site as the Auburn group, which was a lot of fun. Upon our arrival to the site in Atlantic City, we met Mark, who we would later find out has done practically everything in life: Medic in the military, college professor, environmental engineer, personal trainer, and construction worker. He filled us in on the home we would be refurbishing. The owner lived with her nineteen-year-old grandson. After a year and a half, she finally was able to remodel her home that had flooded in the hurricane. Just imagining having to live in a house that without a doubt was soaked in mold made me disgusted, and I really felt for her.



Next, we met the construction manager, Windell. He was loud, excited, and ready to work. Within minutes, the majority of us were in the demolishing business.

Throughout the day, I ripped apart a wall and two levels of floor. It was such an amazing feeling to be able to physically help in the way Jesus calls us to serve. He asks us to be his hands and feet. The work we were doing meant that a woman would have her *home* back. There is just so much gravity in the meaning of that.



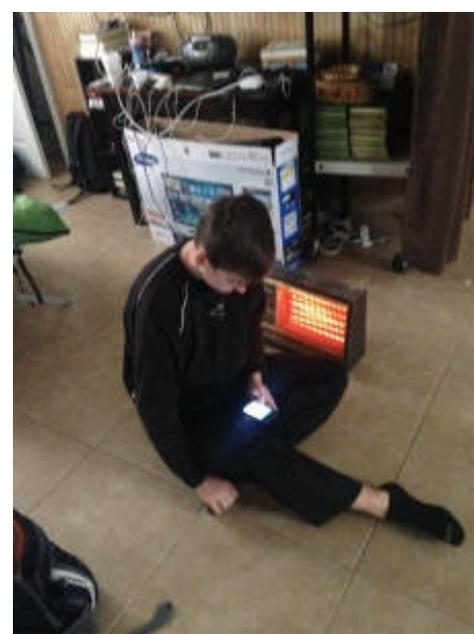
At the day's end, we cleaned up and returned to the church. A great blessing was having dinner together with the Alabama students. We brought in extra chairs into the small kitchen so that we could all eat together. It was crammed and hectic, but so worth it. There was such great conversation and learning about our new Southern friends.

Once we had sufficiently stuffed our faces with the food that was brought to us, we spent most nights relaxing, praying, playing games, and getting to know each other.



Each day our group always spent time in prayer together. I would lead a rosary or a meditation for everyone to participate in. My first priority is always Jesus, and I didn't want us to forget that we were on this mission out of love for *Him* and his people. That time in reflection rooted me to what was truly important throughout the trip.

A few days in to the trip, the weather turned cold... and so did the church. The furnace stopped working, and we were left with two tiny space heaters. Us Minnesota kids were were adequately prepared with warm jackets (and the harsh memories of a brutal winter). The Alabama kids, however, were absolutely freezing, and could often be found huddling around the space heater. Eventually the furnace was fixed, but it was a good reminder of how 'good' we had it compared to the homes we were fixing.



There were a lot of moments like this- these little reminders of how much I had to be thankful for. Whenever I would miss the comforts of home (for example, not sharing one bathroom with 10 other girls, having a shower that isn't a mile away from where I sleep, or my own room and bed that is not a cot), I quickly reminded myself that I was fortunate that this was only temporary. The individuals we were helping lacked even the necessities. God provided so much grace to be thankful for the accommodations we had.

I had been feeling sick all week, but I promised myself I'd work hard anyways. After all, I can offer up my sufferings to Christ as a prayer. However, Wednesday morning I woke up so dizzy I couldn't even sit. I took that as a sign that just maybe I should take some time off. It was a great life lesson, because as much as I desired to be on the work site, I had to take a humility pill and accept that this morning, I was going to have to take it easy. At noon, I woke up and thankfully felt much better.

That afternoon, we all went out to tour Philadelphia! I could write an entire post just on that gorgeous city. There was just so much history in one place. We toured Independence Hall, saw the Liberty Bell, ate Philly Cheese Steaks, and wandered the city on a nighttime Ghost Tour. It was incredibly inspiring to really immerse ourselves into the lives of our nation's fathers. Just like us, they were fighting for what they knew was right and just. Losing meant death, and yet, they pressed on.



On Thursday and Friday, we served at two different sites. The first was a church that held a daycare that had been flooded. The daycare, like many in Atlantic City had to close, forcing daycares across the city that were able to stay open to be way over capacity with children. We painted, glued, laid down tile, and saved two pet turtles from a messy aquarium (a highlight).



We ended the trip on Friday with a wonderful and gracious woman named Cecelia who kept bringing us water bottles and offered food. She was converting her flooded basement to an apartment for her son to live in. We did everything from varnishing to building cupboards to laying and caulking trim. In addition to helping others, this week was a great crash course in home repair!



Sadly, we had to leave Friday. We said our goodbyes to our Alabama friends and drove off into the sunset (FYI- Philly at night is just gorgeous). The way back was filled with so many laughs and happy memories being shared.

We drove all through the night, and realized we had made such good time that we were a few hours ahead of schedule. It was breakfast time, and we were near Chicago, so we figured... Why not? Major props to those students who us drove through Chicago (not me, I was voted most accident prone in high school). We had such a wonderful time. I truly felt like it was God's way of thanking us for serving His people.





We visited the main tourist attractions: Millennium Park and Navy Pier. Chicago is one of my favorite cities, so I knew the area well. One of the best surprises was that it was the day of the St. Patrick's Day parade in Chicago- a HUGE event for the city. While we left before the parade, we were able to see the Chicago River dyed green. Such a fun surprise!

After 24 hours of traveling, our van and all its passengers arrived safe and sound in Mankato. Driving back to my apartment was such a sad journey. I wanted to relive that week forever. And yes, even though I had spent a full day crammed into a minivan with six other adults, I missed all of them already.

To say God blessed this trip would be an understatement. On Sunday afternoon, the graces from the trip hit me like a freight train. Now that I finally realized that yes, we were all alive and well, and yes, we had helped so many people, God dumped a fifty-gallon tub of joy all over me. That joy stayed with me for the week following the trip. I couldn't fall asleep at night, and woke up bright an early in the morning, because I was just reveling in happiness and awe of God.



The prayer of St. Francis came to mind:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood

as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.

I can't completely prevent the damaging effects of severe weather. However, in all situations, my attitude can help to change someone's life. My simple 'yes' to go and serve was part of a much bigger yes from so many other individuals that banded together to make this mission a reality. Oh Lord, where there is despair, let me sow hope.

God Bless

Catie

This contribution is available at <http://walkbyfaith7.wordpress.com/2014/03/25/mission-atlantic-city/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Are you Rolling the Dice [at The Wayward Catholic]

Last week I talked about the [sin of sloth](#). I followed that up with a post [about choices](#). What better way to follow up than to write about making the best choices.

While we may or may not agree that we all have free will and are able to make our own choices, there is something we should all remember that with every choice we make, comes responsibility. We are responsible for our actions, and the affect they may have on both ourselves and on others. We live in a time when many people no longer take responsibility for their actions, always blaming their problems on someone else.

If we are able to make choices, freely, then we should be held responsible for the consequences of these actions. That isn't the way it is in these times. Instead we live in a world where it is all about "me" and nothing is my fault. Parents no longer discipline their children, we don't keep score in games, teachers aren't allowed to use red ink and nothing bad is allowed to happen, at least we won't blame anyone for anything bad that happens. This is a problem.

Here is the catch however, even when we don't take responsibility for our choices, we still are responsible. We may be able to deflect blame to others, but in the end, when, as the old song goes, "When the roll is called up yonder" we will be held responsible. This leads us to the question: Does it matter, should it matter?

Yes and yes.

How can we learn to make choices? This isn't as easy to answer as one might think, especially in today's world. It really depends on what our end goal is. Where do we want to end up? When we decide that, then we can better decide what choices we should make.

When you look at the title of this blog, it says "The Wayward Catholic" which means I am Catholic. Catholics believe in life after death. We believe that when we die we have a chance to go to heaven and live there for eternity, which is a good thing. We believe the way we can do this is to follow the teachings of Jesus and live like he did. This leads to a problem because not everyone feels the same.

There is no God, there is no Heaven there is no Hell, is how many people think. If this is true why should we follow these rules? We should just do what we want because once we die, that's it. Let's look at this. The other word in the title of my blog, is wayward. Here is the definition of [Wayward from Dictionary.com](#):

way·ward

1. turned or turning away from what is right or proper; willful; disobedient.

This is what I was, I turned away from the Catholic faith, which means when I began my journey back, one of the questions I had to ask myself was “Is there a Heaven and a Hell?” Obviously I believe there is. But if you don’t, that’s fine, but I want you to think about something. When I was researching all these questions I had, I came across something called “[Pascal’s Wager](#)” You can click on the link to get the info on Pascal, but I will give you what you need to know.

When we look at what Heaven and Hell are, whether or not you believe they are real or just fiction, Heaven seems a lot better than Hell. Read [Dantes Inferno](#). if you want to get a description of Hell. Therefore, if there is a chance there is life after death, and Heaven and Hell exists, wouldn’t it be worthwhile to do whatever you could to get there? What Pascal believed, and what makes perfect sense when you really think about it, is this.

You have a fifty/fifty chance of being right, either there is an after-life or there isn’t. I admit, it is a crap shoot. But wouldn’t it be better to bet there is an after-life and be wrong, than to bet there isn’t one and find out there really is? As I said above, in order to get to Heaven we need to live a Christ-like life, or at least as close to it as we can. If we do this, we would certainly be living a good, honest, caring life. We would be doing good things, treating others kindly, etc. and we will be a good person. On the other hand if we don’t live a Christ-like way, we might not necessarily be a good person. We would live for today, we would probably be very materialistic and do anything to get ahead. There is a pretty good chance you wouldn’t be a good person.

Now, here is the point. Wouldn’t it be better to live a Christ-like life with the hope of getting to Heaven and what it has to offer and be wrong, than to not live a Christ-like life figuring there is no Heaven and find out there is a Heaven and conversely Hell? After all if you live a good life and find out Heaven doesn’t exist, at least you lived a good, honest life and were considered good. Whereas if you don’t live a Christ-like life and Hell exists, well, you will end up there. Which is the better bet?

This is where making the right choices is important. We should bet there is a Heaven and do whatever we can to make sure we will get there. This should be our guide.

This contribution is available at http://thewaywardcatholic.com/2014/04/03/rolling_the_dice/
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

A Quick Field-Guide to Discussing the Saints [at Even the Wilderness]

People need to talk about the saints more. That being said, it's sometimes difficult to figure out which saints your companions will enjoy talking about. But not so! Here is a quick and easy guide to discussing the saints, ordered according to stereotype. Keep in mind that this article is supposed to be good-natured, and nothing in it is meant to offend anyone. Anyway, I hope it proves helpful!



I can think of no situation where you would discuss a saint with that one cute parishioner, who, unfortunately, only goes to church four times a year; but, hey, anything's a valid excuse to converse.

Patron of this conversation: Saint Afra, patron of converts. She was burned to death by the pagans for having too much apostolic zeal. Just because we don't want to scare anyone away.

Geeks~

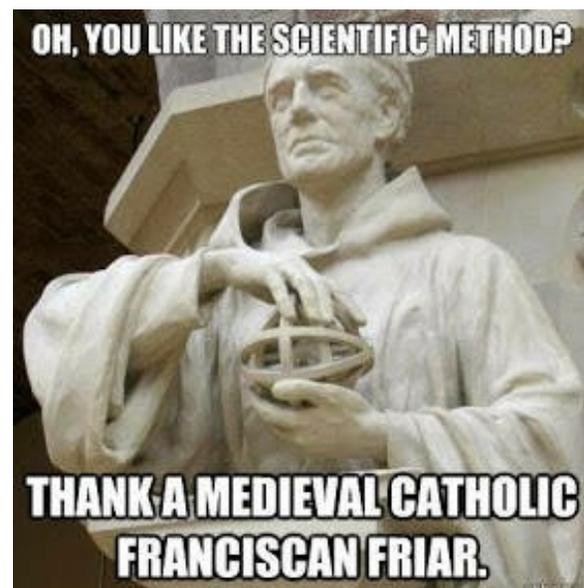
You might be one if you've had an argument with Richard Dawkins via your television screen.

Any saint who made a scientific discovery is fair game. See if you can find any Holy Cards behind their Periodic Table of Elements; if there are any there, they might happen to be Saint Hubert, patron of mathematics, or Saint Albert the Great, patron of the sciences. Read up on the patrons of

technology, like Saint Charles and Saint Vidicon.

Patron of this conversation:

Saint Isidore of Seville, patron of computers. Obviously.



Hipsters~You might be one if

you coordinate your flannel shirts to fit the liturgical colours of the current spiritual season.

Hipsters stereo-typically steer away from anything they consider 'too mainstream', so leave the popular saints behind and focus on the forgotten Benedictine abbots from obscure Bavarian monasteries. Bernard of Clairvaux, Robert of Molesme, and Stephen Harding are cool (they were Trappists, the hipsters of all religious orders; they do, after all, make liquor and tend llamas). Saint Hildegard is a winner as well, due mainly to her thing for beer and natural food. [Note: hipsters will also want to be so traditional in their celebration of Feast Days that when the trend is inevitably reborn, they can say they did it before it was cool. End note.]

Patron of this conversation:

Saint Arnold of Soissons, patron of hop-pickers and Belgian brewers.



Nerds~

You might be one if you've been confused as to whether you should wish someone a happy Day of the Doctor or a happy Feast of Saint Wilfretrudis (or you compromised by saying Saint WilfreTARDIS).

Nerds are the best people to discuss saints with. Seriously, you *cannot go wrong*. Since a nerd is basically someone who lives life with passion and wants to READ ALL THE BOOKS, they will, like the hipsters, most likely be into saints with weird stories and even weirder names. Since they'll be the first to wish you a happy Feast of Whoever, you won't even have to bring the subject up. Pick a saint, any saint, and be prepared to learn all sorts of things, like the legend of Saint Dwynwen or the extent of Saint Valentine's patronage. Don't even bother reading up unless you want to impress a particularly attractive hard-core Catholic nerd. Also be prepared to discuss Catholic Memes.

Patron of this conversation: Saint Meriadoc? Saint Peregrin? ~~Saint Frodo?~~ Or Blessed Ela Fitzpatrick, since it was her castle that was used as Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* movies? Or Saint Hedwig? Gah, so many choices.



TOBers~You might be one if

you think the expression 'complementary difference between male and female' is a great conversation starter.

Discussing saints with the TOBsessive is easier than it seems. Hidden in the chastity talks, deep within the mire of tasteful phrases like 'love over lust', 'afterglow', 'nuptial joy' and 'holy marital union', there are many disguised references to the TOBers' homeboy: John Paul II. Know a few of his quotes. But, if you want to go the extra mile, read some Edith Stein.

Patron of this conversation:

JPII and Saint Edith Stein. See also

Asks girl on a date.

Begins date with Holy Hour.

All Saints, pray for us!

Much love,

Grace

This contribution is available at <http://garlicgraffiti.blogspot.ca/2014/03/how-to-discuss-saints.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

My First Penance Service

I am going to depart from my usual exposition of Scripture to relay my experience at my first Penance Service since being received into the Roman Catholic Church.

My wife and I were received into the Catholic Church on Easter Sunday 2013. I had retired in September of 2012 after serving as an Anglican priest, bishop, and archbishop. While I was the archbishop of a small continuing Anglican jurisdiction, I had gone on a two day private retreat to Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Hanceville, Alabama (EWTN). While there, I took advantage of going to confession on the morning of the second day. (I know, I was not an official Catholic although I was in my heart.) Experiencing some serious inner conflict, I needed to set some things right with the Lord. I was floored by how the priest (Father Mary) knew the exact words of comfort to say to me in the confessional.

So we come to the present and last Monday I went to my first Penance service as a full-fledged Catholic. I had been preparing for several days, going over what I needed to confess. On the way to the church last Monday, I was praying and telling the Lord that I just wanted him to make me a good person, a good man. (Often I have not liked the person I perceive I am.) However, that desire is not a sin so why should I confess it to the priest? I kept praying as I drove, “Lord, please make me a good person.”

I arrived at Church and sat in the parking lot, again praying that God, by His grace, would make me a good person. I thought about saying something to the priest when it came time for confession but I finally decided I would just confess the sins I needed to confess and let it go at that.

The time came in the service to seek out a priest for confession. I sat down and made my confession. I was waiting for the priest to tell me to pray ten Our Fathers, pray the Rosary, or some other such penance. And then, the Lord really showed me what he can do. I had not said anything at all about praying that God would make me a good person. When the priest gave me my penance, he said, “As it is the Lenten season, go and pray that the Lord would make you a good person.”

I have to tell you, my defibrillator almost went off! I sat there stunned for a moment not sure if I had heard the priest correctly. I left and immediately began not just praying to be a good person, but rejoicing that the Lord had put in the priest’s mind and words just what I need to hear. It was confirmation that I was praying for the right thing.

In my Protestant days, I thought the Catholic idea of going to confession was ridiculous. After all, all I needed to do was pray to Jesus and confess my sins to him. But, hearing the words of God through the voice of a priest, who without knowing what I had been been praying, give me that same penance, I realized in that moment that God had heard my prayers and was confirming to me that I was praying in accordance with His will.

The Lord speaks to us in many ways. Sometimes it is by the still, small, inner voice of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is in the events of life. Sometimes through the reading of Scripture. And, sometimes it is through the comforting voice of a priest who, listening to the Holy Spirit himself, is moved to say just what we need to hear.

May God be praised! In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, +Amen.

This contribution is available at <http://mccatholic.com/2014/04/03/my-first-penance-service/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Silenced

The world is trying to prevent our voice from being heard. We pray your heart might be open...

We are persons who experience same-sex attractions. We are honest with ourselves about the existence of our attractions, but first and foremost strive to grow in Christian virtue (in chastity, humility, and others). We do this out of our love for Christ, and the joy that we today experience as a result of our conscious decision to pursue fulfillment in this way. It is heartbreaking to see so many who would do everything in their power to steer people not only away from the Catholic Church, but also from learning about what the Church teaches and why.

Rather, many try to proclaim that people like us do not exist, and or if we do exist, we live in a state of self-deception, or that we are somehow being dishonest with ourselves. We are often “pitied” and are made out to be seen as miserable, and even hateful, that we might suggest that chastity is something that *all* persons should be open to – especially Christians. The attacks that are directed at us, speak volumes about the state of the world, and the elevation of sexuality to god-like status. The fact is, while being honest with ourselves about the existence of our attractions, we see ourselves first and foremost how God the Father sees us – as His beloved sons and daughters, and how Christ sees us - as His beloved brothers and sisters.

Today, we speak to defend the very church the world taught us to reject. In the name of fair and open dialogue, we invite you to open your hearts to what we have to say. This could not be anymore urgent, as our youth are rejecting the faith on account of their understanding of the topic of homosexuality (and sexuality in general).

There is no time to lose.

Here are the truths we have discovered along our journey that everyone needs to know:

1. Regardless of who we are or where we have been,

- We are loved by Christ and the Catholic Church
- We belong to Christ and in the Catholic Church
- And we walk together with Christ in the Catholic Church

As one unified family.

2. The Catholic Church invites all of us:

- To be honest with ourselves about the existence of our sexual attractions
- To let go of shame or guilt internalized on account of the existence of our attractions
- And regardless of our sexual attractions or our state in life,

To be open to growing in the virtue of chastity (among other virtues).

3. Chastity is not the same as Abstinence or Celibacy.

- Abstinence – simply not doing something
 - Chastity – abstaining with a purpose – to offer our sacrifice for the Glory of God
 - Celibacy – the commitment to Chastity for a person who is in a single state of life.
- Chastity involves an intention and purpose that is beyond ourselves.*

Note: *Everyone* experiences sexual temptation, regardless of their sexual attractions and or inclinations, and regardless of state in life – including persons who are married, single, or living in a form of vocational religious life. Regardless, we are *all* called to strive to joyfully exemplify the virtue of chastity in our lives. True chastity is a strength; *it is self-mastery.*

4. Chastity is a virtue that forms how we live our lives.

- Emotional Chastity - seeking Christ first and foremost in our hearts, even when we are lonely or when our hearts ache
- Physical Chastity – pursuing mastery in our ability to control our sexual desires
- A Chaste Identity – wholeheartedly seeing ourselves first and foremost as Christ sees us; as His beloved brothers and sisters.

To be closed to any one of these facets of Chastity is to willfully inhibit the virtue of Chastity from being reflected from within us.

IMPORTANT:

A Chaste Identity leads to a *Chaste Self-Concept*, and a Chaste Self-Concept leads to *seeking fruition within a Chaste Self-Concept*, and seeking fruition within a Chaste Self-Concept leads to a *“letting go” of that which counters the virtue of Chastity* – whether it be physically, emotionally, or in how we see ourselves. This is the summation of the role and significance of the identities we specifically choose to embrace; how we specifically choose to self-identify and define ourselves *influences what we perceive to be fulfilling*. We can look towards *finite* creation (of which our sexuality is a part), or *infinite* Creator to be the anchor of our fulfillment – with the anchor of our journey towards fulfillment being formed by how we specifically choose to wholeheartedly self-identify and define ourselves.

The Church invites us to embrace the truth that *the infinite* is greater than *the finite*, and then to reflect that truth in how we see ourselves by inviting us to anchor our *embraced* identity (and resulting self-concept) first and foremost on our relationship with our infinite Creator, above all other things of this earth. The infinite is greater than the finite, and thus can provide a greater degree of fulfillment. How this translates into our lives is that a Chaste Self-Identity, when *wholeheartedly* embraced (which forms a Chaste Self-Concept), leads us to honor Christ above all else, not just in how we self-identify, but also in how we wholeheartedly define ourselves and thus *in how we live our lives*.

5. We Do Have a Choice

Though we do not specifically choose our attractions, we do specifically choose where to place Christ in our lives, via the identities we choose to wholeheartedly embrace. As well, we are able to specifically choose whether to be open *or not* to growing in the virtue of Chastity (physically, emotionally, and in identity).

We are able to specifically choose how to self-identity and define ourselves.

Summary

Striving to first and foremost honor Christ in how we live our lives is what it means to be authentically Christian.

We are invited to share the joy and love of the Christian faith, and the virtue of chastity, via our own lived example.

If we are not living out that invitation to others, then we cannot expect that invitation to be received by the world, or our youth.

Thus, to share this important message to the world at this critical time in our human history, is up to no one other than *you* and *I*. Please do not let the rest of us down – we are gaining in our resolve to share our voices – but we need your help and prayerful support. We pray that you might desire to walk with us and proclaim *with your lived example*, the freedom that only virtue can bring. We also pray that you might be motivated to share this message.

If you don't do it, who will?

Blessings in Christ,
Nameless Servant

Please Copy and Share to all ends of the world.

Dated: April 7, 2014.

[DOWNLOAD AND SHARE THE PDF](#)

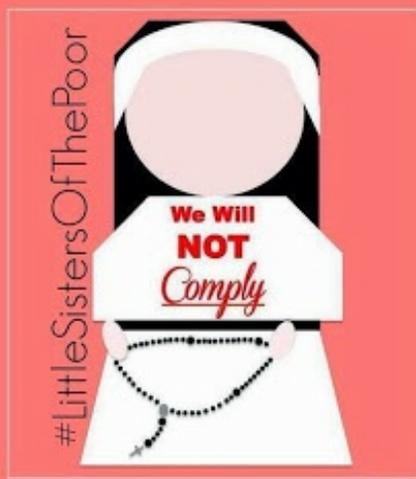
This contribution is available at <http://www.pursuitoftruth.ca/2014/04/09/silent-urgent/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

NEWSFLASH! Jesus is Lord and God, Not the State [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Lawrence Fox

“Just sign this letter, and you will not be prosecuted,” the Obama Administration coaxed the Little Sisters of the Poor, urging them to allow third party insurance to provide contraception to their employees.



The Little Sisters of the Poor are tasked with a 21st Century decision: obedience to the Deposit of Faith or participation in the Culture of Death. They refused to sign.

Up until six years ago such a mandate imposed upon religious orders from the U.S. Government seemed vaguely possible, but not necessarily likely. With the two-term election of Barack Hussein Obama a cursed reality has blatantly “emerged out of the earth.”

It seems that most Americans have not even noticed the bullying tactics of the Obama Administration, and perhaps a large part of American Catholics sympathize with the mandate. This is probably due to collective amnesia. Disastrous Catholic education, catechesis, homiletics, and pastoral care in the past 50 years have caused Americans to completely lose any sense of Catholic identity or memory. The last 2,000 years of Catholic history no longer exists in their minds.

The Little Sisters of the Poor care for the aged and those unable to stay at home, and their Catholic apostolate is gravely endangered. The God we once worshipped has been shoved aside. Now Americans hunger for the state.

The Worship of the State

Christianity's missionary journey to the gentiles took place within an empire fashioned by the "Cult of Caesar." In most pagan cultures, the person who ruled was divinely ordained and protected by the gods of the land.

With the establishment of the Roman Caesar, this divine ideology reached its logical conclusion. Caesar was not simply ruling by divine authority but was "Dominus et Deus", that is the "Lord and God." With the death of Julius Caesar at the hands of Brutus, his adopted son Augustus forced the Roman Senate to proclaim Julius to be divine. Augustus then was logically known and proclaimed to be the "son of god." Under Augustus Caesar, there was a period of worldly peace. His decrees then became known as the "good news" to the citizens of Rome.



Images of Augustus Caesar and subsequent Caesars were erected within the Roman Empire. Loyalty to the Empire was demonstrated by offering incense and sacrifices before the image of Caesar. To do so was to preserve one's virtue of citizenship, livelihood, and understanding of peace and justice within the Empire. *The state was understood to be the primary distributor of bread to the masses.*

Within this context, Jesus of Nazareth made it clear to all those who wanted to follow him, "If you want to be my disciples, you must pick up your cross." The cross was the Roman's perfected instrument of cruel death. The in-scripted sign placed on the cross above the head of Jesus read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The inscription was meant to mock the Sanhedrin (evil also

turns on evil) and to remind everyone, there was only one recognized emperor in the Roman Empire. The state alone was to be worshipped for the emperor was the state, and the emperor was the “son of god.” The Romans with the encouragement of the Sanhedrin placed before Jesus’ apostles and disciples a stark choice. Either “Jesus is Lord and God,” or the state is lord and god.

Peter’s faith in Jesus -- “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” -- is the profession that would bring about his death sentence. Thomas’ profession, “My Lord and my God,” echoed throughout the Empire. Rome took notice time and again.

Paul addressed his letter to the Church in Rome, “When a person believes in his heart and proclaims with his lips that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ he shall be saved.” (Rom 10:9) Paul was not inviting the Church to recite “the sinner’s prayer.” He was encouraging them to embrace the death of Jesus Christ. Not only that, but he asked them to embrace the possibility of losing their virtue of worldly citizenship, losing their livelihood, and losing their worldly sense of peace and justice as promulgated by the state. Paul was not beheaded for possessing a religious sentiment; instead he was beheaded for refusing to worship Caesar, for in fact professing “Jesus is Lord and God.” Peter was crucified for steadfastly proclaiming Jesus to be “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” There was no comparison in the minds of these apostles between Jesus and the Caesars, who were just dust and to dust they would return.

Image of the Beast (rational man living as an irrational creature or animal) and His Puppet

In the Rev. 13:11-18, the author describes the persecution of the Church by a puppet (a second beast like a lamb with two horns), which orders everyone to worship and offer incense to an image of the first beast. Those who do not are killed.

This language is literally contained in Pliny’s Letter to Emperor Trajan (113 AD). Pliny was a Roman governor of Bithynia. In his letter, Pliny describes for Trajan the conditions that existed in his territories. Christians were brought before him for trial and judgment. Pliny would ask the accused several times if they were Christians. If they responded, “Yes,” to each question, they were condemned to death.

In some cases, those accused denied they were Christians or said that they were at one time Christians and subsequently renounced their faith. To prove their rejection, Pliny required them to offer incense and wine to the image of Emperor Trajan and then to curse Christ. Pliny really had no firsthand knowledge of what Christians believed only what they would not profess.

“Those who renounced Jesus as Christ, declared to Pliny that the sum of their guilt or error was simply to meet on an appointed day before daybreak (an indirect reference to Sunday) and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ as to a god and then bind themselves by an oath (sacramentum), not for commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of faith and to not

deny a deposit when it was claimed,” the letter said.

In one case, Pliny was not certain of their account and like a good materialist and empiricist tortured two deaconesses, “but (he) found in their testimony nothing but depraved and extravagant superstition. And therefore he postponed his examination.

Their depraved testimony was only their baptismal profession of faith: “I believe in one God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth; in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered and died and was buried; on the third day he rose from the dead; ascended into heaven and will come again to judge the living and the dead...”

Pliny notes in his letter to Trajan that with the persecution of the Christians the pagan temples were being visited again, the purchase of idols was increasing, and sacrifices once abandoned were now coming back into vogue.

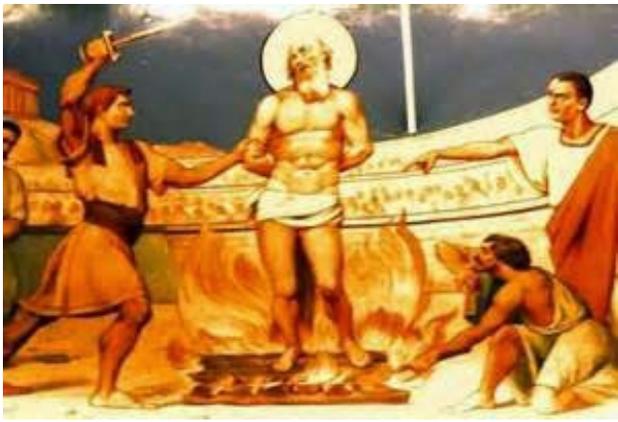
The Voice of the Good Shepherd and the Voice of the Beast and His Puppet

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd...my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:21)

I remember participating in a retreat, which purposely placed side by side the words of Jesus and the words of Satan as captured in Sacred Scripture. The intent was to contrast their manner of delivery, the content of their messages, and the logical conclusion of following the one voice versus the other. The voice and message of Jesus Christ was a call to live in truth in order to experience freedom in which one’s intellect and will governed -- through grace -- sinful nature. The voice and message of Satan was to live a life of materialistic efficiency and expediency that flowed from a small compromise of conscience in which one’s intellect and will served sinful nature. Satan speaks through human agencies -- some very well intentioned. The events surrounding the martyrdom of Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, and the Obama Administration’s advice to the religious Little Sisters of the Poor offer almost identical satanic voices.

A disciple of John the Evangelist, Polycarp headed the diocese of Smyrna, one of the 7 churches identified in the Book of Revelation. As such, he was hunted down by Roman soldiers and brought to Herod - the head of Roman security in the City - and Nicetas, his father. They coaxed Polycarp, “Come now, where is the harm in just saying, ‘Caesar is Lord’ and offering the incense and so forth when it will save your life?” Polycarp responded, “No I am not going to take your advice.”

Obama Administration: “If you only sign the letter permitting a third party insurance company to provide contraception to your employees, you will be in compliance with the HHS Mandate, and you will not be prosecuted, fined, and eventually forced out of religious service.” The Little Sisters refused to take the advice of the Administration.



Eventually, Polycarp was taken to the “Circus”-- the arena where the State staged cruel gladiator bouts to appease the masses. Polycarp was brought before the Governor who advised Polycarp, “Have some respect for your years...Swear an oath, ‘By the Luck (fortune) of Caesar’ ...Save yourself and say you are wrong and say, ‘Down with the infidels.’” Polycarp responded to a different voice: “Polycarp be strong, be the man.” He refused the offers and resisted the threats of the governor. So he was burned at the stake and stabbed.

The Little Sisters of the Poor also face a similar trial in U.S. courts, where Obama’s cronies very well may decide their future.

What is at Stake?



The Obama Administration (beast) and the Secretary of Health and Human Services (puppet) are advising the Little Sisters of the Poor to cooperate in their efforts to promote evil; to compromise the principles of moral good; and to participate in diminishing the dignity of human life. Consider the fact that one of the major benefactors of the HHS mandate is Planned Parenthood, which happens to be the leading provider of abortion the U.S. and an avid promoter of masturbation, promiscuity, pornography, and homosexuality.

Tragically, prior to 1930, almost all Christian denominations would have looked on in horror at the tableau of the U.S. government demanding a Christian organization pay for and subsidize contraception -- especially forms of abortifacients such as the morning after pill and IUDs as well as sterilization. But times have changed. Elements of anti-Catholic prejudice both within and without the Catholic Church have increased significantly. We are living in what Blessed John Paul II identified as the “Culture of Death.”

“The fact that legislation in many countries, perhaps even departing from basic principles of their Constitutions, has determined not to punish these practices against life (abortion, contraception, euthanasia), and even to make them altogether legal, is both a disturbing symptom and a significant cause of grave moral decline,” he said in the Gospel of Life. In fact, the promotion of moral decline by so-called political and voting “Catholics” is most distressing.

Contrast



The Little Sisters of the Poor is a religious order composed of women who have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, saying to them, “Leave all that you have and come follow me.” (Matt. 19:21) They are women who have given up all things including father, mother, family, wealth and even the goodness of married love in order to embrace -- by God’s grace -- the beatitudes of Jesus Christ: Blessed are the pure of heart, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who mourn and blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

They are also being called to embrace the more challenging beatitude, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.” (Matt. 5:11)

They suffer this while serving the least in the Kingdom of God. In their lives, they fulfill the words of Jesus Christ: “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren you did it for me. I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I was sick and you looked after me.” (Matt 25:31) Theirs is a ministry that affirms the Gospels, the Glory of God, and the dignity of human life.

The Battle Ground

I was asked by a curious non-American, “What is the meaning of the good?” I explained in the simplest of terms that an action by its very nature which promotes, preserves, and protects the dignity of human life is good. Any action, which by its very nature prevents, diminishes, destroys and denies the dignity of human life as intrinsically good is evil.

The Catholic Church drawing from the Deposit of Faith has consistently maintained that the

promotion of activities, which by their very nature are contrary to the dignity of human life, such as contraception, abortion, sodomy, and euthanasia, are intrinsically evil. “The acts of sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, schisms, and envy drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”(Ephesians 5:19-21)

The term sin means to miss the mark. The causes of sin include ignorance, weakness of intellect and will, and moral indifference. The Catechism of the Catholic Church identifies sin as an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is a failure in genuine love of God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. Sin is a personal act, moreover we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them directly or voluntarily by ordering, advising, praising or approving of them, by protecting those who do evil, and by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so. This is what the Obama Administration is doing.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12) When immoral people attain political power there is a one-to-one participation in evil. That is, earthly rulers participate in the evil of the demonic rulers, and human authorities participate in the evil of the demonic authorities. And yet Paul writes where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

Jesus does not promise that sin will diminish; in fact it will continue to grow until the Second Coming. “But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?” (Luke 18:8) But Jesus does promise that he has overcome the world and that through grace, God’s adopted sons and daughter will overcome the evil one and remain steadfast in the truth and enduring in faith leading to life everlasting.

I say, “Play the man, Little Sisters of the Poor. May more Catholics join you, and stay firm in their faith.”

This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2014/03/newsflash-jesus-is-lord-and-god-not.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |