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monthly

*December*  
*2014*

# New Evangelists Monthly #24

December 2014

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# Forward

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

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

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# Ten Things About Living A Godly Life [at A Catholic Heart For Home]

This past weekend I attended a Catholic Women's Conference where

[Teresa Tomeo](#)

was one of the speakers. Now I listen to her on her

[Catholic Connections](#)

radio show some mornings and I have watched her on the

[Catholic View for Women](#)

so I may have gotten a little fangirl. She is very friendly and personable, a great speaker and pretty funny in person. I hope to do a review of the Conference soon, in fact Teresa mentioned the conference on her

[show](#)

on Tuesday.

One of her talks was

## "Ten Things I learnt about living a Godly Life"

so with her permission here are the 10 things:-

1. Offer it up to God and put it at the foot of the cross
2. Remember the Blessed Mother is watching you.  
*(and we need to be watching her)*
3. Remember, it's the Ten Commandments and not the ten suggestions.
4. Pray and go to Mass
5. Think of the word Bible as an acronym: Basic Instructions before Leaving Earth.  
*(Dusty Bibles lead to dirty lives)*
6. Give thanks.  
*(an attitude for gratitude)*
7. Say God spares or God willing.

*(In Trinidad we say Please, God)*

8. Be Nice

9. Remember it's not all peaches and cream you know.

*(all sunshine makes a desert)*

10. Keep Smiling

*(even if it hurts)*

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This contribution is available at <http://acatholicheartforhome.blogspot.com/2014/11/ten-things-about-living-godly-life.html>

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# Baptism, Babies, and being Born-Again [at A Faith-Full Life]

Evangelical Christians often enjoy asking cradle Catholics if they have been, “born again”. If you ask them what they mean by “born again”, you will more than likely get an answer like this: “*You are born again when you believe in Jesus Christ and put your faith in Him. To be born again you should pray the Sinner’s Prayer, and ask Christ to come into your heart.*” This question, and its explanation, frequently confuses Catholics, many of whom aren’t quite sure how to respond. Often they will simply stand there with their mouth ajar and a blank stare on their face. Evangelical Christians love this response. “*Aha!*” they think, “*I knew it! Catholic’s aren’t even Christians!*”

I know of at least one Catholic however who has the perfect response. Steve Ray, a Catholic author, speaker, and certified guide to the Holy Land answers,

*“When someone asks me ‘Have you been born again?’ I simply answer ‘Absolutely! But I’ve been born again the Bible Way!’“*

Let me tell you from first hand experience, when an evangelical Christian is told by a Catholic that they have been born again the “bible way” it tends to confuse them. They often simply stand there with their mouth ajar and a blank stare on their face. After all, they’re used to calling themselves the “bible” Christians.

## — 1 —

### **The Problem**

The problem with the common evangelical conception of being born again is just this: it is entirely un-biblical.

Allow me to illustrate. Please direct me to where I can find the “Sinner’s Prayer” in the bible.

No? Then please refer me to the verses which talk about, “asking Jesus into your heart”.

Coming forward after an [altar call](#)?

Hmmm...it would appear that we have a problem...

Before anyone gets their feathers ruffled, I want to take a step back for a moment and admit something. I don’t have a problem with the sinner’s prayer per se. I don’t even have a problem if we visualize welcoming Christ, “into our hearts”. But, we should be clear that these practices certainly *do not* come from the bible alone – something that Protestants typically insist on. Furthermore, when we look to the Scriptures, we find that these things actually have nothing to do with the practice of being born again as described by Christ Himself.

## — 2 —

I was [briefly] talking with one of my sisters the other day about baptism. She and her family are helping

to lead a small group at the Baptist church that they attend. They are working with a new family who want to become members of the church, but are struggling with the fact that they will be required to be re-baptized before becoming members. The wife of this family was christened as an infant in the Lutheran church that she grew up in, and for the life of her, she can't understand why she is now being told that her baptism wasn't valid.

My sister told me, *“I know that we won't agree on this issue, but in our church it is necessary that one be baptized as an adult. We've explained to her that baptism doesn't save you, it is only an outward sign of an inward reality.”*

At this point I asked her, *“Where does the bible say that?”*

She replied, *“Over and over again we see the words, ‘believe and be baptized, believe and be baptized.’ It is our belief which saves us, the baptism is merely an outward sign of what has already occurred inwardly. With the exception of maybe one passage in the bible, the only people we see being baptized are adults. Since infants can't possibly believe, they shouldn't be baptized.”*

Since this particular issue wasn't really the point of our conversation, and since we both knew that we didn't see eye to eye on the subject, we didn't really linger on the topic. But it did get me thinking. Because for the vast majority of my life I would have agreed with her statements, and until even very recently I would have probably asked the question, *“Is it really that important whether or not we as Christians agree on this issue?”*

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## **The Answer**

The answer, of course, is, *“It depends.”*

If baptism is *only* symbolic – if it doesn't really *do* anything, then no – it doesn't really matter all that much. This is the position that the vast majority of Protestant Christians have taken. Baptism is only a symbol. Baptism is not necessary for salvation. Of course, for me this only leads to the following question:

Why is it that this purely symbolic non-necessary action *requires* adult belief to be “valid”? Valid in what sense? A valid symbol?

If on the other hand baptism is *not merely symbolic but also efficacious (causing an effect)* - If in other words, in addition to being symbolic it also does what it says it does – then yes, it vitally important that we understand and agree on the necessity of baptism; especially as it relates to being born again.

Both Protestants and Catholics appear to largely agree on the symbolic nature of baptism. Where they tend to disagree is on the question of whether or not baptism also actually *does* anything. While resonating with the idea of baptism as, *“an outward sign of an inward reality”*, Catholics are careful to note that the sacraments are, *“efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.”*<sup>1</sup> So what exactly does baptism *claim to do* from a Scriptural standpoint? Let's

take a look.

- *“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;’”<sup>2</sup>*
- *“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”<sup>3</sup>*
- *“Baptism,... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”<sup>4</sup>*

It seems relatively clear from a Scriptural standpoint that baptism is not merely symbolic but that it also does something – namely wash us of our sins and save us. In fact, to come full circle back to where we began, as it turns out *Baptism* is the biblical method for being born again!

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## **Born Again the Bible Way!**

Many will be surprised to learn that the **only** biblical use of the term “born again” occurs in John 3:3-5. We do however, see similar and related expressions such as “new birth” or “regeneration” found elsewhere in Scripture.<sup>5</sup> With that in mind however, it may be useful to turn to John chapter 3 and look at the term “born again” in its rightful context.

*Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup>*

What could Christ have meant when He spoke of being born of, “water and Spirit”? To answer the question we could turn back a few short verses and read the account of Jesus’ baptism:

*And John bore witness, “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”<sup>7</sup>*

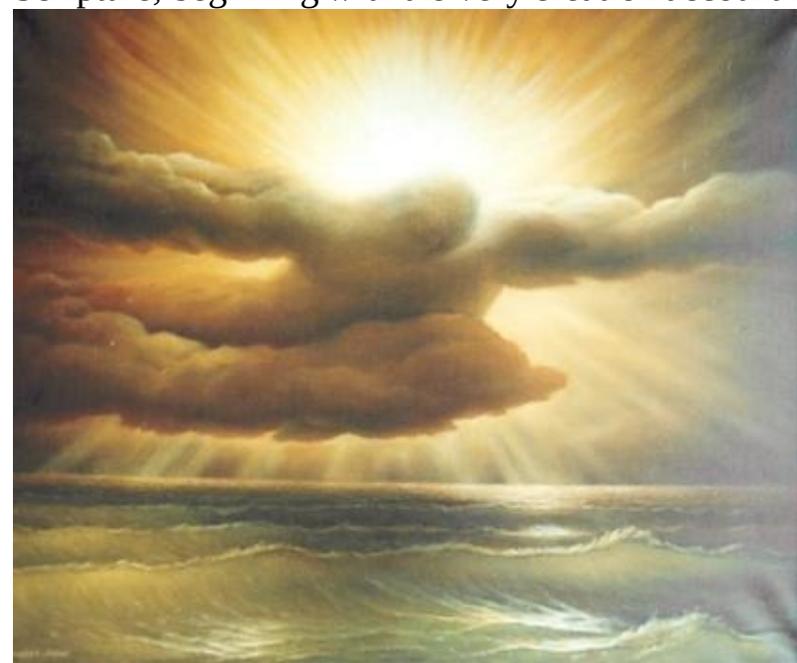
Or we could continue reading the verses immediately following Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus when the text goes on to say, *“After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized.”<sup>8</sup>*

Either way, we will see that the context of new birth – what Jesus refers to as being, “born again”, is entirely about baptism – both by water and the Spirit. This is reinforced throughout the New Testament in texts such as Titus 3:5 which reads, *“he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit,”*

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## Scriptural Types

Indeed this typology – the new birth of water and Spirit – is repeated over and over throughout all of Scripture, beginning with the very creation account in Genesis!



*“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”<sup>9</sup> Here we see the earth, and indeed all of creation, born of water and Spirit. In a similar way, when the earth is reborn after the flood we also see it born anew (or born-again) by water and Spirit. *“the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; ...He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove [a symbol of the Holy Spirit] came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.”<sup>10</sup>**



St. Peter himself draws our attention to this connection between Noah’s flood and baptism when he

writes, “God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”<sup>11</sup>

The nation of Israel was born of water and the Spirit as they passed through the Red Sea, led by the Spirit of God as a pillar of fire or cloud.<sup>12</sup> God promises a rebirth for the nation of Israel and a New Covenant saying, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, ...A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you;”<sup>13</sup> Again, the cleansing of water and the gift of the Spirit.

Christ is baptized by John in water and the Spirit descends (like a dove) upon His head,<sup>14</sup> and he teaches Nicodemus that he must be born again by water and Spirit.



This is, and always has been the prescription for new birth. It is why He commissions His disciples to, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;”<sup>15</sup> Did you notice that He doesn’t instruct them to lead others in the sinner’s prayer? Or instruct them to use altar calls, inviting people forward to ask Jesus into their hearts? They are to create disciples by *baptizing* and then they are to teach them to *obey* all that Christ commands. I fear that too many Christians have strayed far afield from the instructions of this commission.

But it is because of this commission that St. Peter tells the crowd, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.”<sup>16</sup>

Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Born again the bible way!

But isn't belief a necessary component of being baptized? Contrary to what most Protestants think, I could only find a single scriptural reference which directly links the two: Mark 16:16 *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved;"*

The vast majority of verses dealing with baptism speak far more of *repentance* than belief. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying that belief shouldn't be a part of an adult conversion, but as St. Peter points out, *"the promise is to you and your children..."* and we see this reflected in multiple places in the book of the Acts of the Apostles and in St. Paul's writings.

- *"And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.'*<sup>17</sup>
- *"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family."*<sup>18</sup>
- *"Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized."*<sup>19</sup>
- *"I did baptize also the household of Stephanas"*<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, there are many places where Acts records crowds of thousands being baptized without telling us who is in the crowd. In contrast to this,

*Nowhere in the Scriptures do we see a prohibition against baptizing infants.*

Obviously, the first converts to Christianity were adults. For them conversion consisted of belief and repentance which culminated in the new birth of baptism and the Spirit. But, as these early converts had children it was natural for them to initiate their children into the family of God; into this new life and second birth. It is Christ who teaches us that unless one is born again, *"he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* and it is also Christ who asserts that the kingdom of God belongs to the children – who are we to keep them from it?

*Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God."*<sup>21</sup>

Reflecting on this, St. Augustine said, *"Who is so wicked as to want to exclude infants from the kingdom of heaven by prohibiting their being baptized and born again in Christ?"*

St. Paul teaches that baptism replaces the circumcision of the Old Covenant,<sup>22</sup> and we should note that the Jews circumcised their infants on the eighth day after birth. In fact, the early Church argued that waiting eight days after birth before baptizing an infant was waiting too long! The Council of Carthage, in AD 253, *condemned* the opinion that baptism should be withheld from infants until the eighth day after birth.

Origen wrote that, *"according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants."*<sup>23</sup> and later, Augustine taught, *"The custom of Mother Church in baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned . . . nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic."*<sup>24</sup>

Circumcision was the rite of initiation into the Old Covenant; Baptism the rite of initiation into the New. From the earliest days of the Church, Christians everywhere have followed suit, baptizing their

infants into the New Covenant, into God’s family, and into new life as they are washed clean of the stain of original sin.

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## Final Thoughts

Finally, we should remember that Scripture teaches that baptism is the means of new birth, of being born again, and a new birth by definition is a beginning – not the end. Those who believe in a doctrine of, “once saved, always saved” often equate salvation with a mere intellectual assent to the truth along with a simple prayer of faith. In their view this prayer of faith is both the beginning and the end. They’ve been saved! Process complete!

But salvation (as the bible teaches it) merely *begins* as we are born again to new life in the waters of baptism and the indwelling of God’s Spirit. The stain of original sin is removed, grace is imparted, and another soul has been welcomed through adoption into the family of God!

But, this is only the beginning of the process – not it’s end! How foolish we’d appear if we were to look at a newborn and say, “*Well, that’s it! You’ve arrived! Well done, now just sit back and relax, the hard part is over!*” In some ways that may be true, but in many more ways the hardest parts are still to come. The hard work of sanctification is now before us!

It is because Catholics believe so fully in the grace of God alone that we are willing to baptize our infants who are completely unable to earn their salvation – even by putting their faith in God.

It is because Catholics believe that salvation is a process that we acknowledge that this new life will still require the individual to, “*work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling;*” because having been born anew, “*God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*”<sup>25</sup>

Amen! Welcome to the beginning!

Also check out our latest [podcasts!](#)

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1. Catechism of the Catholic Church 1131 [↔](#)
  2. Acts 2:38a [↔](#)
  3. Acts 22:16 [↔](#)
  4. 1 Peter 3:21 [↔](#)
  5. Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3, 23 [↔](#)
  6. John 3:3-5 [↔](#)
  7. John 1:31-34 [↔](#)

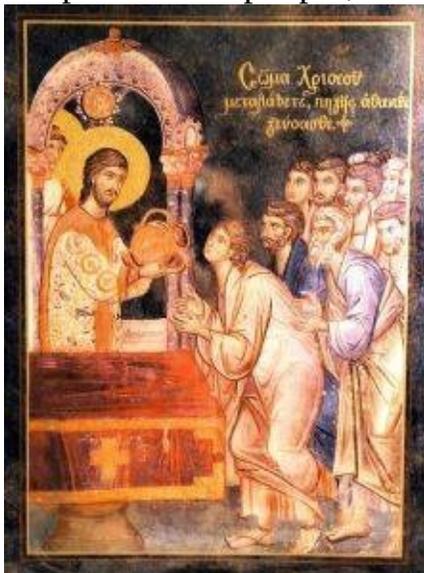
8. [John 3:22](#) ↵
9. [Genesis 1:2](#) ↵
10. [Genesis 8:2-3, 10-11](#) ↵
11. [1 Peter 3:20b-21](#) ↵
12. [Exodus 13,14 & CF 1 Corinthians 10:2](#) ↵
13. [Ezekiel 36:25-26a](#) ↵
14. [Matthew 3:16, John 1:29](#) ↵
15. [Matthew 28:19-20b](#) ↵
16. [Acts 2:38b-39](#) ↵
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20. [1 Corinthians 1:16](#) ↵
21. [Luke 15:16-18](#) ↵
22. [Colossians 2:11-12](#) ↵
23. [Origen, Holilies on Leviticus, 8:3:11 \[A.D. 244\]](#) ↵
24. [Literal Interpretation of Genesis 10:23:39 \[A.D. 408\]](#) ↵
25. [Philippians 2:12b-13](#) ↵

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# Mystical Theology and Liturgical Renewal

The Old Testament tells the story of God's plan for his people, and eventually through them for all



mankind, and for the whole of creation.

Many different metaphors are used to this end, but the commonest is to present the plan as creating a perfect kingdom to be inaugurated by the Messiah. When the Messiah did come however, in the person of Jesus, he never said that the Kingdom has come, but only that it is to come (Jn 7:39). It is to come, he promises, after a unique and unprecedented outpouring of God's own infinite love, in such a way that human beings can receive what they have never been able to receive before.

Receiving the infinite love of God would have instantly annihilated a person, according to the teaching of the Old Testament. It only became possible because of what happened to Christ immediately after the Ascension. When, on his return to the Father, he took with him the human nature that he shares with us, something quite literally, out of this world took place. God's love not only continued to fill his divine nature, as before, but his perfect and unsullied human nature too. This enabled the infinite love of God to be transformed through Jesus into human loving, enabling his human nature to become the means of transmitting that love to other human beings. In the same way that a massive voltage of electricity can only be transposed and transmitted to small receivers through a transformer, the glorified human body of Jesus now became the spiritual transformer that could successfully transmit the infinite love of God into finite human receivers, making possible what was quite impossible before.

The first Pentecost was the first time when this love had been unleashed on all who would choose to receive it, to bring about God's plan. Before this happened it would have been impossible to see how God's plan could be put into operation. Even then it took time and an 'outsider', in the person of St Paul, to see it being put into operation. St Paul wrote in Greek so he called God's plan – *'The Mysterion'*. In Greek the word simply means *'The Secret'*. He chose this word, because the plan had only partially been revealed before Jesus came, and never fully revealed even by him, and even now it is only taking place in secret within the personal spiritual lives of his faithful followers. At the time, the first Christians knew that the word *'Mysterion'* meant not just a secret but, – *'The Secret'*, the *'Secret Plan of God'* now being put into operation through Jesus. It was he who continually sent the infinite love of God, or The Holy Spirit, to draw all who would receive it back home into the eternally loving of God whence they came.

(Eph. 1:3-14 & Col 1:15- 21). This plan will continue to operate, until as many as possible can return home to enjoy the destiny that has been prepared for them in Jesus.

The word *mystic*, derived from the word '*Mysterion*', was first used in the Christian milieu to describe all those who chose to enter into '*God's Plan*' - '*The Mysterion*'. It simply means '*secret*' or '*hidden*' because the journey to which they had committed themselves is deeply spiritual and cannot therefore be seen by others. They would be characterised by their full blooded daily commitment to offer themselves up, as Jesus had done to the Father, so that like him they would receive the same love that raised him from the dead, so that what had happened to him would eventually happen to them. They were not called mystics, because they had strange esoteric experiences, but because of their total commitment to take part in - '*The Mysterion*' for themselves and for others. If however, as a bi-product of their total commitment to the love of God, they eventually came to experience that love, as Jesus had done throughout his life, then they came to experience what later came to be called *mystical contemplation*. At that time such an expression was not used. There was no emphasis on inner psychological states that came later from the influence of *Neoplatonism*. However the occasional use of expressions like '*sober inebriation*', '*spiritual intoxication*', or *deep inner peace (Apatheia)* were used. Jesus was himself a mystic, the first mystic, in the fullest and most complete sense of the word, because he was not only engaged in a '*hidden*' or '*secret*' journey into the fullness of God's love, like his first followers, but because he experienced that love in every fibre of his being all the time, and wanted others to experience the joy that this gave him, as he explained at the Last Supper (John 15:11).

The word *mystical* was used by the Fathers of the Church then, to refer to the '*hidden journey into God's love*, that was their prime preoccupation, as it was for their people, for whom they wrote many works full of advice and encouragement. However they never used the word '*Mysticism*', a later word derived from the Greek word '*Mysterion*' that is used today. It is used to describe various states of esoteric or transcendental awareness that many have been encouraged to pursue. They have been wrongly led to believe that by using mental techniques, like mantras for instance, they can attain mystical contemplation which they cannot. There's a million miles of difference between mystical contemplation, as described in the Christian tradition, and a certain man-made peace of mind or mindfulness, that can be obtained by forms of mental yoga. I do not condemn these forms of mental yoga, they have their purpose, but I just want to make it clear that the peaceful state of mind that they may help to generate is not mystical contemplation, as understood and explained in the authentic Christian tradition. In this tradition no one is encouraged to seek out mystical experiences for their own sake, rather they are encouraged to seek out the love of God for his sake. As in all authentic love, the pleasure that may ensue is not sought for its own sake, but it is the result of giving oneself in love to another for their sake. We have another word to describe a person who seeks out another for their own personal pleasure and satisfaction! In the Christian mystical tradition no one will come to experience true mystical contemplation until the 'bounty hunter' in them, which encourages self-seeking and self-satisfaction, learns to seek out and love God for himself alone. That's why, on their mystical journey, a person has first to pass through what St Catherine of Siena called '*The House of Self-knowledge*' or St John of the Cross called '*The Dark Night of The Soul*'. These titles are given to the 'place' where a self-centred person has to learn the selflessness that will enable them to be united with Christ, the perfect selfless one, for unlike things cannot be united, dross cannot be bonded to gold. Inevitable learning the truth about oneself is not a particularly pleasant experience, and it shouldn't therefore be surprising that it leads to a certain depression. It is only by accepting the truth about oneself and then by opening oneself to the truth about God's all-consuming love, that leads a person from the '*Dark Night*' into the bright light, when that love finds its home deep down within.

The many counterfeit forms of ‘Mysticism’ that are in vogue to-day have become ever more rampant thanks to the condemnation of a false form of ‘mysticism’ called *Quietism* in 1687. This condemnation was the signal for witch-hunts against all forms of prayer that seemed to encourage inner recollection, spiritual quiet, or contemplation. Even St Teresa and St John of the Cross came under suspicion and all talk of mystical prayer has come under suspicion ever since. When seeking the spiritual help that I never found, I was warned that ‘*Mysticism begins in mist and ends in schism*’! Few, were ever encouraged to journey on beyond first beginnings in prayer into contemplative prayer, because few, in my own case no one, knew anything about it. In his monumental history of the Catholic Church, Monsignor Philip Hughes put it this way:-

*“The most mischievous feature of Quietism was the suspicion that it threw on the contemplative life as a whole. .... At the moment when, more than at any other, the Church needed the strength that only the life of contemplation can give. It was the tragedy of history that this life shrank to very small proportions, and religion, even for holy souls, too often took on the appearance of being no more than a divinely aided effort towards moral perfection.”*

The way to fill the gap left by the demise of true Christian mystical life is to go back to relearn the profound mystical (hidden or secret) theology that was at the heart and soul of early Christian spirituality, long before monasticism or religious life began to flourish. Despite the excellent work contained in the scholarship that preceded the Vatican Council, by scholars of every denomination, it failed to understand the mystical theology that permeated the everyday life of the first Christians. In the great studies of early Christianity you find little if anything on this subject, except little more than a footnote on ‘*the devotions of the first Christians*’, if anything at all. In those days the mystical, or hidden inner journey, was not an extraordinary way for the few, but the ordinary way for all. Perhaps the scholars were themselves children of their time, and, like their *contemporaries*, were suspicious of mystical theology and were understandably wary of what was being introduced as it’s counterfeit. In most conciliar documents their failure was not as apparent as it was in the document on the Liturgy.

Although this document was able to, both reproduce and represent the principles that comprised the early Christian liturgy, ignorance of the quality of the daily mystical spirituality that inspired and animated it, has undermined its successful implementation. Until this ancient mystical spirituality is re-introduced and practised daily by the faithful, the action of Christ may still be made present at Mass, but the fullest possible participation in his action will not be as apparent as it was in the early Church. Then, St Justin said, the faithful were so conscious that the Eucharist was the fullest possible liturgical expression, of what they offered and sacrificed for the honour and glory of God every day of their lives, that their participation in it was alive, vibrant, and dynamic. At the end of the Eucharistic prayer, for instance, when the words – ‘*Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and Glory is your almighty Father for ever and ever,*’ were said, he insists that the Amen that followed, nearly raised the roof of the ‘church’! No matter how perfect the liturgy may be, no matter if it’s every word and every rubric satisfies everyone, it will never be perfect. It will never be perfect until the offering of Christ is not just the perfect embodiment of his sacrificial life, but of the daily lives of those who join him too in giving all honour and glory to the Father of us all.

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This contribution is available at <http://blog.davidtorkington.com/mystical-theology-liturgical-renewal/>  
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# Laughing, Loving, and Crying Through 36 Years of Marriage [at joy of nine9]

My husband and I answered 5 questions about marriage for Karee Santos on her blog, [Can We Cana? A Community to Support Catholic Marriages](#). This post was part of a series.

Today we welcome Michael and Melanie Jean Juneau to the series [How to Stay Married 10 Years & Then Some](#). Michael and Melanie live on a small family farm in Canada, where they raised their nine kids. I know Melanie from her excellent work at the [Association of Catholic Women Bloggers](#) and through her prolific writing. Today Michael and Melanie explain how suffering doesn't have to crush a



marriage, instead it can lead to great joy!

## 1. How many years have you been married and how many kids do you have?

*We have been married for 36 years, and we are still in love. Surprisingly, we really have become one, deeply in tune with each other's spirits. Our tangible joy is inexplicable through secular eyes because from all outward appearances our life together has been a tough journey including poverty, nine kids, overwhelming chores on a small family farm and clinical depression.*

One priest gently consoled us by explaining we have lived through "trials by fire." Another friend, not given to dramatics, once pointed out to my adult children, "You do not realize it, but your parents have suffered deeply." I have a running joke on the typical marriage vow about for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. I say, "Well, we've seen worse, poorer and sickness and we are more than ready for better, richer and health." Then I dissolve into gales of laughter.



## 2. Name 3 things that have helped you to stay married this long.

The first key we discovered was found by accessing the power in the Sacrament of Marriage. The grace available in the Sacrament of Marriage is not some esoteric theology — no, it is real and it is powerful. The power available in the sacrament is what kept us together through the rough years. And ***we both understood, beyond a doubt, that God had brought us together.*** We never questioned this basic call from God, our vocation together, even during the dark years.

My second key is a wicked sense of humor. ***When we could laugh at our foibles and not take ourselves too seriously, problems suddenly shrank*** and we gained perspective once again. Over-dramatizing conflict is deadly. This is simply a bit of cognitive therapy, taking a step away from each conflict and looking at the big picture, through the eyes of God.

Surprisingly, my third key to the longevity of our marriage is suffering. ***Suffering was a gift that unified us because it stripped away false pride and forced us to our knees in prayer.*** Honest prayer led both of us to self-knowledge, humility and compassion for each other. When I asked a priest what my life would have been like if I had not suffered, if I had married a well-off dentist, had 1.25 kids and lived in an efficient, modern house, he put on a phony, pious face, put his hands together in prayer, and said in a high, mocking voice, "Oh, you would be a nice Christian lady, praising the Lord." What he meant by that amusing bit of acting was I would be shallow, without depth and strength. Well, when I see the results of a bit of suffering in our marriage, I say bring it on!

### **3. What role has your faith played in your marriage?**

The only reason we got married and stayed married is our faith. We are a brother and a sister in Christ, fellow children of God who seek His will together. We have always been on the same page, sensing the next level of growth in our spiritual walk and changing at the same pace. This has been a pure gift from God. A growth in maturity, in my faith, healed our marriage. ***When I quit demanding love from my husband, quit trying to control him, he was set free to love me in freedom and in truth, in the power of the Spirit of God.*** When I let go and surrendered to God, He blessed me with more than I could ever have asked for in our marriage.

### **4. What advice would you give people who are dating and considering marriage?**

Do you find yourself waiting secretly for your knight in shining armor to whisk you off your feet so you can live happily ever after? Or for a wonderful woman to lift off your depression and sense of aimlessness? Although we laugh at such ridiculous fantasies as the stuff of naïve, lovesick teenagers, we all must face the deep temptation within ourselves to seek out a future partner to fulfill all of our needs. We have been brainwashed by Hollywood's romantic movies.

***If you want to get married, seek the face of God, trust Him and He will drop someone in your path because marriage is just as much a vocation and a calling as Holy Orders.*** My husband asked God to find him a wife and then forgot all about it as he dedicated a year to Madonna House in Combermere, Ontario, Canada. Then he spent another year at his local parish where he lived in the residence with an ill priest. Travelling across Canada, stopping in to see a friend who was a parish worker, he read a note on the door explaining that Steve had taken his youth group on a picnic. Michael came over to my house to wait because I lived with Steve's fiancée. As soon as Michael saw me, he KNEW I was the one. Michael swears by this method for finding a bride.

## 5. What advice would you give newlyweds?

Society does not prepare people for a Christian marriage. You have to actively seek out help and advice. Read insightful books, go to conferences, retreats, confession, make sure you pray, seek spiritual direction and counselling to help you mature and grow together as one in Christ. ***As a newlywed, I wish someone had explained to me that in marriage, partners irritate each other by pulling out each other's darkness, bringing their wounds to the surface.*** Once I understood this spiritual dynamic, I quit blaming Michael and pointing out his faults. The truth is, counter to what secular society would lead us to believe, only God can meet our core need for love.

Countless marriages end up in divorce because people have embraced the crazy notion that the man or woman of their dreams will completely satisfy and fulfill them. This is a lie. Before I understood this reality, I spent years as a pitiful, innocent victim, crying my eyes out over my plight married to an insensitive man.

Once I focused on myself rather than Michael, the Spirit of God could finally deal with my own sinfulness and need for healing. ***If I had thrown up my hands and divorced Michael, chances are the second fellow would have turned out exactly the same. My sinfulness triggered my husband's sinfulness.*** Period. I had to stop blaming and pointing out Michael's failings if I wanted a great marriage. Instead of pointing out the grain of sand in his eye, I had to allow God to show me the log of faults in my own eye. God designed us so that only His love will fill the desperate desires of our hearts. Once I understood this truth, I could allow real love, respectful love to grow between Michael and myself without making crushing demands on the poor guy to fulfill the role of God in my life.

## 6. What advice would you give new parents or couples who are trying to have children?

First and foremost, if you want to get pregnant, relax and trust in God and His timing. Numerous stories are told of anxious couples, desperate for a baby, who finally give up, adopt and then when they are relaxed, they conceive. My problem was the opposite, I could conceive days before ovulation. Yet the answer to both problems is the same — Natural Family Planning teaches people how to understand their fertility cycles in order to conceive or not.

We read a homily by Pope John Paul II whose main premise was that letting go of control and trusting in God was not some abstract principle but a day-to-day practical call that included the surrender of our fertility by not using contraception. Although we could not imagine how large our family would become, his words continued to resonate within both of us. Guilt lifted off and a sense of purpose took its place. Many small experiences kept reinforcing the truth: ***God calls each of our children into being with our cooperation.*** We stumbled blindly at times but then a burst of clarity would shine light on our purpose as we lived out our pro-life mission.

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This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanjuneau.wordpress.com/2014/12/04/laughing-loving-and-crying-through-36-years-of-marriage-10-years-then-some/>  
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## Trust, Fertility and Advent [at Plot Line and Sinker]



image copyright James Hrkach/Josh Hrkach

One of my favorite shows is

[“Mayday.”](#)

a documentary which recounts stories of plane crashes or near crashes. My favorite episodes are the ones where everyone (or most) survives. Survival often depends on the skill and precision of the pilots and flight engineers. I find it fascinating just what can bring a plane down and what can also save a plane.

It dawned on me when I was flying back from Chicago last summer that it takes tremendous trust to get on a plane: trust that the pilots are trained to fly the plane with precision, trust that the builders created a solid, well-performing plane, trust that the mechanics have serviced the plane properly. After all, which one of us wants to be 20,000 feet in the air when a mechanical problem happens or when a pilot encounters a situation he’s not trained to handle?

Of course, the same can be said for any situation. We trust our doctors, food companies, school bus drivers and many others. On a daily basis, we are called to trust those who are human and have the potential of making mistakes.

Consider how most couples “trust” with regard to their fertility. They take pills, get injections, apply chemical patches, insert devices, consent to operations. Instead of working with their fertility, they try to destroy it. Instead of embracing their fertility, they fight it. They “trust” that by using contraceptives, they will be able to “control” their fertility.

Newsflash: none of these chemicals, devices or operations are 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy. No method, except for complete abstinence, is 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy. And yet millions of couples put their “trust” in contraceptive methods on a daily basis. If the methods “fail,” and a child is conceived, many will resort to abortion.

So what does this have to do with Advent?

Well, a lot. When told that she would be the mother of our Savior, Mary replied, “Be it done to me according to your word.” **That took tremendous trust in God’s plan for her.** She didn’t say, “Hmmm, let me think about that for a few weeks and I’ll get back to you.” Without her trust, without her yes, we would not be preparing to celebrate Christmas.

Admittedly, the times I've appreciated Our Lady's fiat the most have been when I was expecting a child during Advent and Christmas. I loved being pregnant and feeling the movement of my babies. It definitely helped me to be more empathetic to what Mary went through: nine months pregnant, on a donkey and making a long journey away from home. It was equally difficult for her to give birth in a stable, surrounded by the smells and sounds of animals. And yet Mary trusted that this was God's plan for her and accepted it without question.

So what is God's plan for us especially regarding our fertility? I *can* tell you what it is not: **God's plan is not for us to destroy the gift of our fertility** with devices, behaviors, chemicals or operations. This "trust" that many couples place in contraceptives can sometimes result in an unwanted, permanent loss of fertility and can lead to numerous other consequences as well. Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On Human Life, 1968) talks about one of the most common consequences of contraceptive use: "A man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection."

God's plan is for couples to embrace their fertility and to be generously open to life. Does that mean that God wants us to have as many children as possible? No, it doesn't. God gave us the gift of reason and he also gave us a built-in natural method of avoiding pregnancy that works with fertility and not against it. **God, the Author of life, wants to be part of our decisions regarding our fertility.**

What about us? Who do we trust with our fertility? Is it God or is it a device, operation or contraceptive behavior?

Couples who want to trust God with their decisions will trust Him with all of their decisions, including the beautiful gift of fertility. When couples have serious need to avoid pregnancy, Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a moral way to do so. NFP uses no devices and **works with God** instead of against Him. Wives who use NFP seldom feel used by their husbands. NFP also works well to achieve pregnancy. It's healthy, effective and safe. NFP encourages good communication and strengthens marital relationships.

Advent is the ideal time to rethink who we trust our fertility with. Do we trust a chemical company? Do we trust a condom manufacturer? Or do we trust God, the Author of Life?

Learning Natural Family Planning nowadays is as simple as turning on your computer. My husband and I teach NFP online through the [Couple to Couple League](#). For more information on NFP classes or NFP in general, please comment below or email me: [fullquiverpublishing\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:fullquiverpublishing(at)gmail.com).

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## Christmas Gift Ideas For Kids: Catholic Style [at Saints 365]

Looking for ways to keep Christ in the gifts you purchase for your children and others this Christmas - here are 7 ideas for Catholic gift ideas that your kids will love!

### 1. For the babies....

This has to be the most adorable little gift for a Catholic baby that I have ever seen. I so wish we had one of these when my children were small. This

#### [Baby Rosary, Plush Bright Colored Single Decade with EVA Teething Cross Purple](#)

is just perfect for snuggling your little one and praying the rosary! What a great gift for a baby shower as well!



My little guy started pretending to celebrate Mass when he was under 2 years old. Again, I sure wish this was around then. This plush

#### [My Mass Kit](#)

is a perfect way to teach the littlest ones in your family about the Mass - best of all - the children can bring them to Mass without disturbing anyone.



## 2. Nativity Sets

Our favorite faith-based Christmas gifts when our children were small were Nativity sets that they could play with. Watching the kids act out the first Christmas and role play being "Mary and Joseph" was priceless.

*(The bonus was that once they had their own nativity set they no longer wanted to play with our less - ahem - child friendly Olive Wood from the Holy Land nativity!)*

The two sets that we gave to our children when they were younger were the

[Fisher Price Little People Christmas Story Nativity](#)

and the

[Playmobil Christmas Manger](#)

## 3. Catholic Board Games

Traditional board games are a great way to have fun together as a family and make great, reasonably priced gifts. There are a wide variety of Catholic and scripture-based board games available that have the added bonus of growing in faith while having fun. Some of our family favorites are:

[Scattergories- Catholic Edition](#)

and

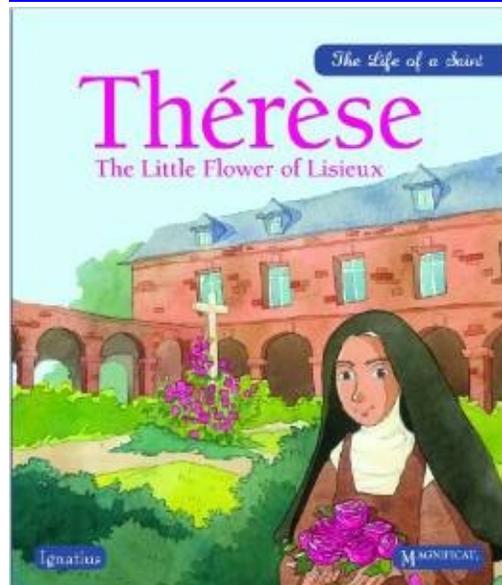
#### [DIVINITY, The New Catholic Catechism Learning System](#) 4. Saint Stories For Kids

Ignatius Press' "Life of a Saint" series for young children are the perfect read-alouds for small children and a wonderful way to introduce the saints to your kids. These would make a perfect gift for a godchild, niece or nephew as well as your own children. We have the whole series but our favorites are:

[Therese: The Little Flower of Lisieux \(Life of a Saint\)](#)

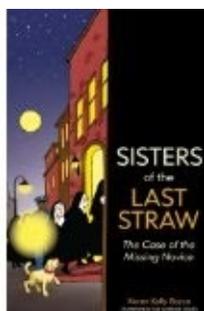
and

[Francis: The Poor Man of Assisi \(Life of a Saint\)](#)



#### 5. Catholic Chapter Books

My children have begun to really enjoy mysteries and we have been blessed to find two great series of mysteries that they have delved into with pleasure! Any of these would make great stocking stuffers for the 8-12 age group.



The book

[Sisters of the Last Straw: The Case of the Missing Novice](#)

by author Karen Kelly Boyce, had my 10 year old daughter laughing out loud while she read it. The antics of the Sisters in this wonderful series are engaging, hysterical and wholesome (a win-win-win all around!) I highly recommend it for young girls.

## [The Father Brown Reader: Stories from Chesterton](#)

are a wonderful compilation of mysteries based on Chesterton's famous character Father Brown. My children have really enjoyed these stories as well!

## **6. Catholic Saint Videos**

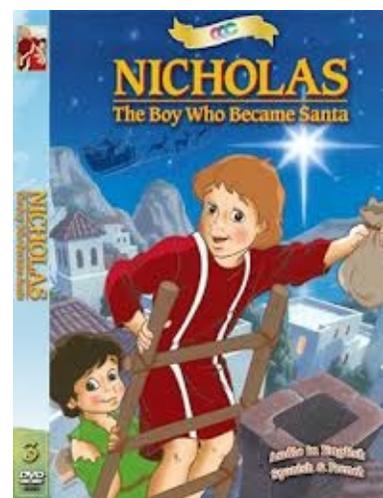
My family and I have learned so much and been so inspired by the lives of the saints depicted in CCC's animated videos. These videos set the historical facts of the saints' lives in engaging story lines complete with humor and song. They are extremely well done and appeal to both kids and adults alike. I cannot tell you how many times my husband and I have wiped tears from our eyes watching these alongside our children. I highly recommend the entire series but our personal favorites are:

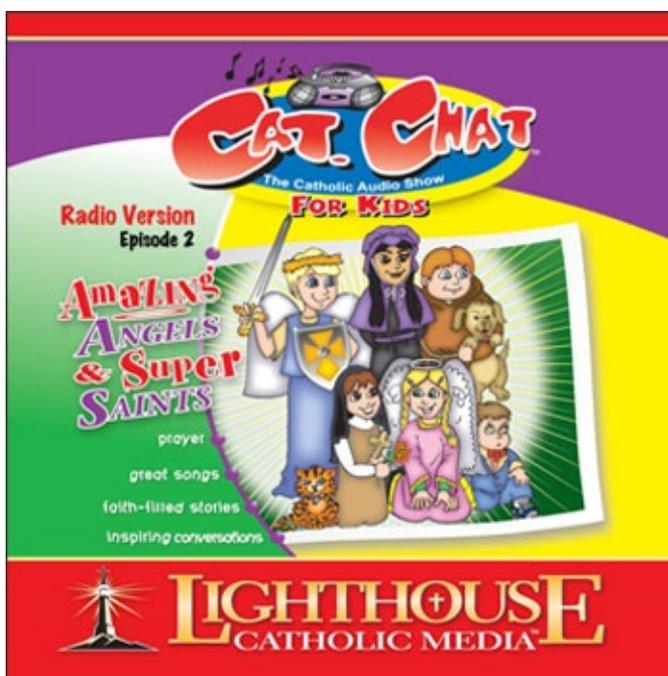
[Juan Diego: Messenger Of Guadalupe](#)

[Bernadette - The Princess of Lourdes](#)

and

[Nicholas: The Boy Who Became Santa](#)





## 7. Catholic CDs

Looking for an inexpensive stocking stuffer that can teach your children about their faith and entertain them on long car rides at the same time? Check out Lighthouse Catholic Media's Cat Chat series of audio CD's for kids. These high-energy, song and skit filled CDs are filled with memorable characters and meaningful messages. Suggested age is 3-11 but my 12 year old still loves them. (CatChat is also available as an .MP3 download.

CatChat CD's have 4 titles to choose from:

[Amazing Angels & Super Saints - Episode 1](#) [Amazing Angels & Super Saints - Episode 2](#) [The Mass Comes Alive - Episode 1](#) [The Mass Comes Alive - Episode 2](#) **Read related posts here: [Keeping Christ in Advent: 7 Ways to a Peaceful December](#) [7 Ways to Celebrate Advent With Your Family](#)**

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# Preparing for Christmas: 1st Sunday of Advent [at Fr. Ben's Biblical Blog]

It is a quick season, short enough to make realistic goals and achieve them. Interestingly enough, psychologists say that it takes twenty days to build a habit. What habits will you build this Advent?

I challenge you to do three things to prepare for Christmas. First, give something up—chocolate, alcohol, television, complaining. Pretend it's Lent in this regard!

Second, spend ten minutes a day in quiet prayer. Ten minutes—the time of two sets of commercials in a TV show. I promise that if you spend ten minutes a day for the next three and a half weeks, your life will be better. Plus you will be more engaged in the quiet and stillness this season entails.

Third, come to our mission this week. We deliberately scheduled our mission at the beginning of Advent to help us open our hearts to Jesus Christ. This will be a powerful week of fellowship, prayer, adoration, confession and, please God, conversion. We will be giving you books and cds to help you grow in your faith. Please come and bring your family and friends, especially those who have been away from Church for a while.

I have been listening to some cds by Matthew Kelly. His basic message is that we should become the best version of ourselves. We do this by assessing where we're at and setting realistic goals to become better. *This* is what Advent is all about. I guarantee that if you give something up, pray ten minutes a day and enter into our mission, you will be a better person in twenty-five days. And there is no better gift we can give you our family, spouse, parish, workplace or God than the best version of ourselves.

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# Welcoming Advent, with arms wide open [at Leaven For The Loaf]

*(This post was originally published in 2013 and appears here with minor revisions.)*

I look forward to Advent every year. I actually look forward to rummaging through the candle drawer for the little purple votives (and I know there's a pink in there somewhere). I like putting a purple-beribboned wreath on the front door, even when it's a premade bow from the craft store tacked on to artificial greens. I like the app that puts daily Advent readings onto my tablet. Lest you think I'm burnishing a halo, I hasten to assure you that I don't have one. I'm just a very plain human being who knows a good thing when she sees one. And Advent is decidedly a Good Thing.



## *Charlie Brown never worked retail*

I was a kid when *A Charlie Brown Christmas* debuted on TV way back when. In the show, Charlie Brown bemoans what he knows is an over-commercialized season. I still love that show after all these years, even though I know that the kid obviously never had to work retail to support his family.

Have you ever worked in retail? You know, one of those businesses that depend on the last two months of the year for a third of the year's revenue? The kind that makes you listen to Christmas holiday music on every shift beginning right after Thanksgiving/Veteran's Day/Halloween? The kind where you work until close of business on December 24, whereupon you collapse and want to sleep for a week?

I have. It was hardly involuntary servitude. I had great bosses and coworkers and customers. It was a new small business, featuring chocolate and coffee, and we all had the exhilarating and well-founded feeling that each thing we did could mean the difference between staying open and going under. December had to be huge for us. We all pitched in and pitched hard. Thank you, December shoppers. You made sure my bosses could pay me. That job was a blessing...and it absolutely drained me. When I locked the shop door at 3 p.m. on my first Christmas Eve there, I was ready to keel over. I hadn't had time to shop for my husband and kids. I hadn't done any advance prep for the extended-family dinner I was supposed to have ready by 6. I wanted to go to Midnight Mass but had no idea how I'd be awake for it. (In fact, I can't remember if I got there.)

I wasn't ready for Christmas. I had dropped Advent.

## ***Don't blame the cash register***

Here's where I could blame Commercialized Holidays or Secular Christmas for my post-retail letdown. I would love to point a finger at outside forces whenever December gets overwhelming.

That would be nonsense.

No one can "do" Advent for me. No one owes me four weeks off from real life so I can be bright-eyed & chirpy at Midnight Mass. I've learned to treasure Advent not because it makes me feel good, but because if I am to celebrate the Incarnation, I want to do so with fresh reverence and joy each year. I can't pick that up from someone else, although being amid fellow believers in Christ's divinity during the season is a big help. Others can influence me, but they can't choose for me. I choose to observe Advent.

Frankly, I *have to* make the choice, or else it ain't happening. There's work (by the way, have you hugged your local retail worker today?). There's parenthood. I spent many years with my December calendar full of school concerts and projects. There are all the cultural gems that would be lovely the week after Christmas, except that everything seems to be jammed into the first three weeks of the month. Seriously – wouldn't it be nice to see the local dance school put on excerpts from the Nutcracker *after* December 25? Why does the community *Messiah* singalong have to be over before December 10?

We live in a country and a culture where Christmas ends on December 25 instead of beginning there. I can whine about that, or I can concentrate on living the Advent season.

## ***Cultural subversion***

Undermine American Christmas culture. You know you want to. Wouldn't be the first time you stood against the tide – not if you spend any time defending the value of human life from its beginning to its end. Compared to that, celebrating Advent is a piece of cake.

I just got off the phone with a friend who apologized for being unable to join me at a political event tomorrow. Her reason? She's leading an Advent prayer group at her church. There's a countercultural woman in action. God bless her. The political event will be poorer for her choice, while the community as a whole will be richer. That's a net gain.

I will do all I can to affirm this unique and irreplaceable season. I'm preparing to celebrate the Nativity of Christ, for crying out loud. The Incarnation! Taking the time to let that sink in is perhaps Advent's greatest imperative. *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.* If that fact doesn't rock my world every time I contemplate it, I'm a spiritual orphan.

The blogosphere is full of Advent material, most of it provided by people far wiser than I. I'll simply list a few things I do during the season. Whether they make you think, laugh, or just roll your eyes, I offer them for what they're worth.

- I look for good reading and good praying, which are inseparable as far as I'm concerned. Absolute bare-bones minimum, no matter how full the day, is five minutes morning and evening. On some December days, the calendar is so full that prayer tends to slide off the agenda. I keep handy [\*The Essential Advent and Christmas Handbook\*](#) from the Redemptorists. It includes Scripture readings, prayers, and suggestions for practical activities.

- I look for a decent Advent calendar. I refuse to get one that's Santa-themed, unless Santa is depicted kneeling in prayer in the snow. I think St. Nicholas might be with me on that one.
- I have a bracelet made of braided parachute cord, in shades of purple and rose. I wear it to remind myself of the season, even in the midst of everyday activities. This will probably prevent me from getting any offers to model in *Vogue*, but I'll cope.
- When my parish offers an Advent program, I try to attend. At best, I learn something and I benefit from being amid my sisters and brothers in faith. At the very least, I devote an evening to a public observance of Advent, thus poking in the eye all the forces that made Charlie Brown sad.
- We put Advent candles on my family's dining table. It's not an elegant display: the base is an old plate, a neglected wedding gift from decades ago. The candles are from the grocery store, and the holders are from the dollar store. It's the Advent-candle equivalent of Charlie Brown's Christmas tree. All the more reason to love it.

So hello, Advent. Make yourself at home. I've missed you.

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## Today's find: Chillin' [at With Us Still]

The heat didn't kick on overnight, so things were a bit chilly in church this morning – a reminder that our almost-40-year-old building is showing some unmistakable signs of age. Somehow, the discomfort we felt – we '6:30 Mass regulars' – seemed oddly appropriate as we near the end of the liturgical year.

We've been hearing from the book of Revelation the past couple of days – passages filled with [bizarre creatures and mind-bending images](#), all calculated (I suppose) to remind us of the end times. And huddled in our coats, as we were this morning throughout the liturgy, it felt a bit like a [dystopian](#) gathering: Creature comforts, suspended (at least temporarily); normal circumstances, overridden.

I can't speak for my fellow Mass-goers, but I found the chill to be spiritually invigorating. It reminded me how prone I am to believe that we are in control. That we've got things figured out. That all will proceed – more or less – according to plan.

At some point, though, we inevitably discover just how powerless we are, in matters large and small. The Plan seems to take on a life of its own, and '*no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth [is] able to open the scroll or examine it,*' as the writer of [Revelation observes in tears](#).

Our occasional helplessness can be a gift, it seems to me. It can remind us that we tend to look for power in all the wrong places.

Revelation's startling imagery assures us that there is One who is found worthy to lift us up from the dysfunction or destruction we might be experiencing at any given point in our lives. But we have to keep our eyes peeled, because our Hope comes disguised in the blood of the Lamb...now raised up to become the .

A big part of our job, perhaps, is simply to keep chillin' – to keep our eyes and hearts open – so that we are prepared to '[recognize the time of \[our\] visitation.](#)'



Worthy is the Lamb, triumphing now as the Lion of Judah!

*Let us pause now...to recall that we are in the presence of the Holy One.*

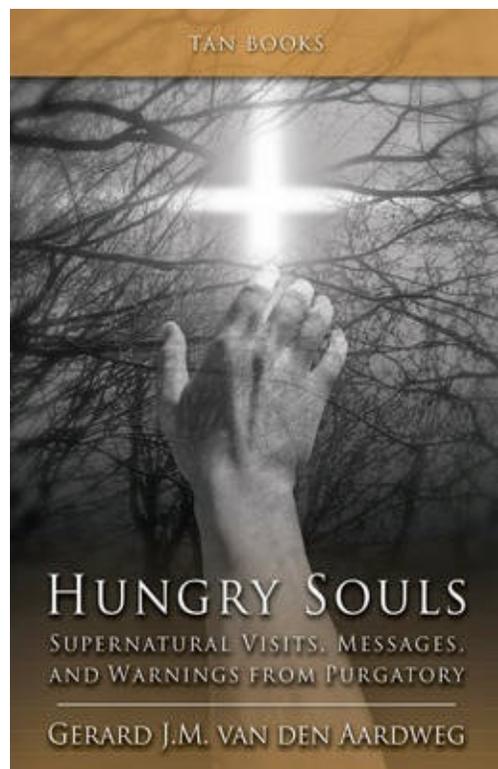
*IHS*

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## Please Pray for the Dead [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



the month of the Holy Souls.

I've learned quite a few things about Purgatory.

One thing, is that we Catholics are not the only ones that pray for the dead!

This was a Jewish custom and in fact, Orthodox Jewish still pray for the dead.

Please go

for biblical proof of Purgatory.

I'd try to explain it but he does a much better job than I'd do!

I love that Everything we Catholics do is BIBLICAL!!

I am black and white, I need that order, that backing so to speak.

I've always thought of Purgatory as a place of cleansing.  
A place where the soul wants to be, to be purified for God.

Now, Yes, Jesus died for us, for our sins.

But sin is sin and the soul knows it.

The flames of Purgatory is the yearning the soul has for God.

The way I understand it is

each day in Purgatory is one day closer to God

so there is Joy and a yearning pain at the same time.

The soul wants to be there.

The soul knows that he is going to Heaven.

Last week, I couldn't go to my holy hour

because I wanted to go to my uncle's funeral.

On the way there, I had this pain in my heart,

upon the realization of not seeing Jesus that day.

This pain is yearning. It brought me to tears.

I think that is a very small example of what Purgatory will be like.

It's a love.

The Love we have for our Father in Heaven.

The love and desire to be perfect for Him.

St Faustina Kowalska relates in her diary, her mystical experience

of the complete moral self-insight that one day will be revealed to every man at the particular judgement after death:

***Once I was summoned to the judgement (seat) of God, I stood alone before the Lord. Jesus appeared such as we know Him during His Passion...Suddenly I saw the complete condition of my soul as God sees it. I could clearly see all that is displeasing to God. I did not know that even the smallest transgressions will have to be accounted for. What a Moment! Who can describe it? To stand before the Thrice-Holy God! Jesus asked me, "Who are you?" "You are guilty of one day in purgatory." I wanted to throw myself immediately into the flames of purgatory, but Jesus stopped me.***

From Hungry Souls:

"St Faustina transmits the awfulness of the soul's confrontation with the Eternal,

its insight that perfect holiness is required before it can enjoy God's presence--the smallest imperfections having more weight than even a pure soul as Faustina's had been aware--and the instinctive impulse of the soul to be cleansed, even in the flames of Purgatory."

This book also explains that ANY spiritualist phenomena,

or so called manifestations of the dead during states of trance, hypnosis, or at a spiritualist and other magic or occult sessions: they are by no means the departed persons they pretend to be, but hoaxes or demonic imposters.

This makes me think of mediums claiming to be "Catholic" and yet

going against the Church and continuing to delve into this kind of phenomena.

Poor souls are not sensitive to commands to vanish in the Name of God, or in the Name of Jesus.

Their anxious begging for help signals hope for deliverance.



The sad thing is that I don't think many people give much thought to what happens to the soul after death, except that it goes to Heaven. I think that most people think that almost everyone goes to Heaven.

This is one of the greatest tragedies. The souls in Purgatory, having no one to pray for them, all their loved ones believing they are already in Heaven.

Pray, Pray, Pray...  
They need our prayers



Another book, I'm going to read again (in Texas this winter)

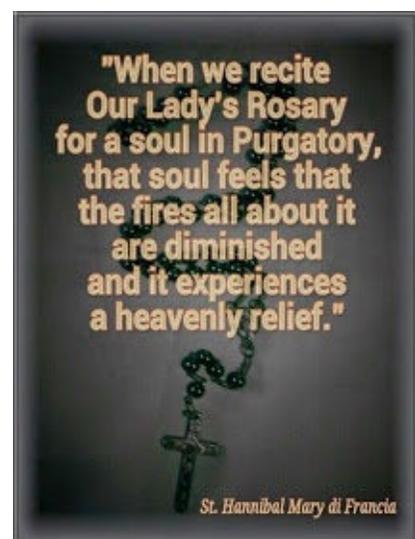
is Get Us Out of Here!

This book is Maria Simma's accounts of the Poor Souls that appeared to her,  
begging for prayers.

This book is SO good!!



If you click on this picture you can see my Little Red in the background, getting ready to run!  
(stinker)



Pray for the dead, pray rosaries, offer Masses,  
never give up praying for them!



Last week we had some of our Catholic Homeschool Youth  
(32 of them) over for a walk to the graveyard  
(up the hill, down the hill, through the woods, and across the field)  
to pray for the Holy Souls  
and a little about St Gertrude and the prayer given to her from Jesus:

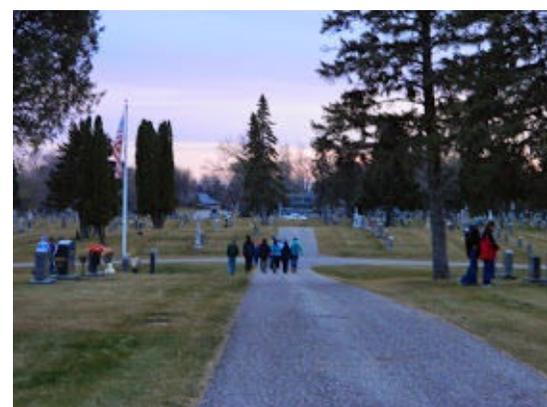
***Eternal Father,  
I offer you the most precious  
Blood of Your Divine Son,  
Jesus, in union with the Masses said  
throughout the world today,  
for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory,  
for sinners in the Universal Church,  
those in my own home,  
and within my family.  
Amen.***

***(This prayer was given to St Gertrude and Jesus promised that every time it was said, 1,000 souls would be released from Purgatory and allowed into God's Presence)***

The saints knew of Purgatory!!



Here we are walking across the field

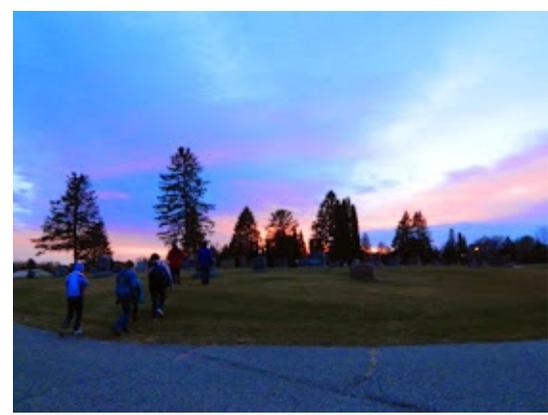


After my short talk, the kids got to explore and try to find the oldest grave.

We also have a section where all the babies that were miscarried during the year are buried through our Catholic hospital in town.

Several of us went over there.

Instant tears, I tell you, instant.



We caught this beautiful sunset on our way home...



Then it got loud and a little crazy...



We had pizza, pop, snacks and lots of fun!



We broke into 2 groups (16 kids each)



And played Minute to Win it games!!



M&M Suck it (I named this one)



Face the Cookie



Stack Attack!  
The parent helpers were awesome!



Guess the Candy amount to win the candy!!



Have you ever made this? Tastes exactly like Salted Nut Rolls...

The games were a lot of fun, but next time,  
I think we'll set up several places where the games can be going on at the same time,  
it seemed like there was a lot of waiting around...and then the non game players

got bored...but most had fun, I think!

My daughter heard kids talking about it the next day after Mass and she said they had fun!

My own kids thanked and thanked me over and over

for a fun night!!



Please pray for the Holy Souls!!

I've always had a love for the Poor Souls

I have a hard time writing about it, for fear of not doing justice,

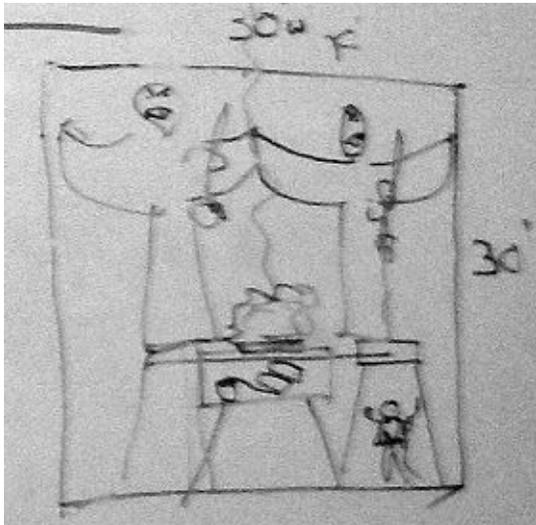
but my goal here is to make people aware and to hopefully pray more!

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## Pitchers 20: Qodesh Qodesh [at Smaller Manhattans]



*From the Nov. 5 Catechism class*

Drawing and reading about the Holy of Holies\* in Solomon's temple: "The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high; and he overlaid it with pure gold. In the most holy place he made two cherubim of wood and overlaid them with gold. The wings of the cherubim together extended twenty cubits: one wing of the one, of five cubits, touched the wall of the house, and its other wing, of five cubits, touched the wing of the other cherub; and of this cherub, one wing, of five cubits, touched the wall of the house, and the other wing, also of five cubits, was joined to the wing of the first cherub. The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits; the cherubim stood on their feet, facing the nave. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles." Not included in the text is the High Priest at lower right, and the LORD's presence hovering over the Mercy Seat. Cherubim's swords are my addition based on Genesis.

I first drew the 30 x 30 x 30 shape of the space, and the kids recognized it as a cube. Then the other details were added on the fly as they came up while reading. The cube will matter this spring when we draw and read about a much larger one described in Revelations: "The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal." The other bits will matter when we transition from God's Old Covenant dwelling to his New Covenant dwelling.

When teaching adults, a picture is worth a thousand words. A live drawing is worth five thousand words. And with kids, a live drawing is worth ten thousand words. When I get to Revelations in April, will they remember the shape and stuff of the Holy of Holies? You bet they will.

\*Qodesh Qodesh,

קדש קדש

, Holy (of) Holies.

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## Quite Simple Life [at Cherishing Everyday Beauty]



My life is so simple these days. So beautifully, wonderfully simple.

On most days, I awaken at 5am (I stand by my original claim of this beautiful, wonderful life). On most days, 5am comes waaayyyyyy too early, so I might be known to hit snooze once before I actually greet the day. More often than not, I was praying the rosary while drifting off to sleep the night before, so my first action of the day is locating my glow-in-the-dark rosary (it's actually harder than it sounds) amongst my sheets, beside my "bed" (I actually don't have a bed; I sleep on a mattress on the floor. PS: I'm actually not that holy), or sometimes under my pillow.

I attend the early morning daily Mass at my parish and I enjoy my breakfast sandwich while on my commute to work.

Prayer defines the day at work; one of oh-so-many reasons why I *love* working at a Catholic school. This afternoon I listened to two 5 year olds pray a Hail Mary aloud together when they heard a distant siren outside -- their idea completely!!

Upon my return home in the mid-afternoon, there could be any number of ordinary tasks in need of completion (that also includes 'nothing'). The motto for this time of the day is "Do small things with great love." I'm so grateful for the witness that was Mother Teresa ♥♥♥

Remembering my earlier waking hour, I'm typically *very* ready to turn in for the night by 9pm (sometimes as early as 8:30!). I probably prayed a rosary during my commute home from work, but I might very well at least hold my beads as I drift off to sleep again. There's nothing quite like resting in the arms of your Mama :) :) ♥♥

I'm learning to see the wonder and beauty of this quite simple life. It's quite different from the hustle and bustle of a college student's schedule and I feel sure that it is still temporary (yet another part of the journey to my true vocation). I'm learning to accept with great joy these simplest gifts that I encounter throughout the day.

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## Mustard Seed Faith [at Making It In Vermont]

How is THIS my life?



Six weeks ago our 7th child, our 7th son to be exact, arrived. The photo above was taken about 16 hours after he was born, when his brothers packed the solarium down the hall from our room at the hospital and met their newest brother for the first time.

~O my 3 year old seen above holding the stuffed kitty, so enjoyed meeting his little brother for the first time outside of my belly that he comes up to baby ~P every few days and says to him in his 3 year old way “That was so bootiful at the hospital...” reminiscing about that special moment and thanking his baby brother for his role in it.

I always tell people that I never dreamed I would have a big family. I grew up with two older brothers and three kids if I was going to be pressed to pick a number always seemed like a good one.

So really I have no well thought out, hammered in steel answer as to why I have this outrageous life besides mustard seed faith.

What is mustard seed faith?

It’s hearing the subtle voice of God that rises up inside you like a wisp in thoughts that seem all too easy to shush away as ridiculous, impossible, foolish, and imprudent and saying yes to them.

God then takes your yes and grows it, like a mustard seed.

Mustard seeds are really small, but when planted and watered they grow into something quite large, nothing like how they started.

And yup I heard, “Give me the things you are white knuckling Lisa.”: so bit by bit one yes at a time I : moved to Vermont away from family and friends, tamed my perfectionist tendencies, turned to humility instead of pride, and the biggie, gave God control of my fertility.

I know, it sounds crazy but there it is and each time I say yes to those nagging whispers this life becomes more and more filled with grace (the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become more like him).

Not perfect, but filled with grace. Yes I get irritated and let myself and others down, but I am so thankful that I have more opportunities to try again in little mustard seed sized portions.

I have seen with my own eyes how that mustard seed grows, and it is beautiful.

Love to y'all.

~Lisa

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# It Ends, It Begins: The First Sunday of Advent [at God-Haunted Lunatic]

Behold, I am coming soon ([Rev. 22.7](#)).

**Do you like movie trailers?** I do, although my family would tell you otherwise.

I admit that when we sit down together to watch a DVD, I'm usually the one who is anxious to skip through the commercials so that we can get right to the "feature presentation" (as they say). And when we have a chance to go to an actual theater to catch a new release? It's true that I like to arrive late



in order to miss the interminable trailers that precede the main event – tacking on ten minutes to the posted showtime used to be enough, but fifteen is more realistic these days.

All that being said, it's nonetheless true that I do enjoy watching movie trailers. I only wish they actually *trailed* – which is the [origin of the word](#), did you know that? The earliest sneak previews were appended *after* a feature film was over, *not* before it began. That way, the folks in the theater – the people who forked over for tickets and seats – weren't forced to sit through a bunch of ads before they got to see what they'd *paid* to see. "First things, first," was the original (short-lived) idea: The main attraction appropriately took precedence, and then those who elected to stick around could look ahead to what was coming up.

**The First Sunday of Advent is like that I think.** I mean, today was almost like an old-fashioned trailer that essentially gave us a peek of what lies ahead, but it came on the heels of a main event: The liturgical year just concluded.

And what a main event it was!

There was the opening credits and anticipation leading up to Christmas and the Incarnation last December, followed by a period of Ordinary Time that gave us a chance to catch our breath and take in what had just occurred: God himself becoming a baby!

Then, pretty quickly it was on to Lent and an intense time of interior preparation – sprucing up our souls and looking forward to the literal crux of our salvation. After several weeks of that, [Holy Week](#) arrived and we witnessed the horrible drama of that divine baby from Bethlehem, now the grown-up Jesus, enduring a trial and execution that was directly tied to our own sin – *my* own sin.



Another time of waiting followed – this one much briefer, only about a day – and thereupon...an explosion! A shock and a shove, as Jesus rose from the grave – *can you believe it?* Yes, it's really true! That stone dead God-man was alive again, bulldozing his way back into our story and giving us hope of heaven.

An event like that deserves a party, and it got one – fifty days of celebration until the feast of Pentecost. After that, it was more [Ordinary Time](#) and lots of green – the color of plants and the ordinary growth they undergo. That kind of growth takes time and patience, just as any farmer or gardener will tell you: Water and fertilizer, tending and protecting occupy their time, although there is little sign of the flourishing going on beneath the soil. It's happening all the same though – just like it does in us throughout the quieter times of the church year.

Finally, November, and the liturgy grinds down to the end. There was lots of imagery of the end of the world this past month, things coming to a finish – which they did, quite literally and spectacularly, on the Feast of Christ the King, a day honoring Jesus as Lord of heaven and earth, and one directing our attention forward to the Second Coming.

But, even then, we weren't done quite yet. There's was a week of closing credits, as it were – the days between Christ the King and the start of Advent – which led up to the very last expression of the liturgical year, the Saturday before the First Advent Sunday.

**Now, that last Saturday morning of the church year** – the very last image on the liturgical screen before all went dark – do you know what's amazing? As Fr. Martelli pointed out



at Mass yesterday, the [Gospel reading](#) that day, the last of the year, basically parallels the [one](#) from *today*, the first. In fact, there's more than a parallel – there's actually a

*repetition*. Here, listen: “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy,” St. Luke had Jesus saying on Saturday, and “be vigilant at all times.” And then, today, St. Mark presented Jesus saying pretty much the same thing: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.... May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.”

What’s going on here? It’s like the very last scene of the church year yesterday led into today’s liturgical trailer that previewed...more of the same!

Why?

You know the answer, I’m sure. It’s because the *new* liturgical year *is* more of the same, and that “same” is Jesus himself who’s *always* showing up at unexpected times. For Christians, there’s only one show, and it’s perpetually new. As [St. Patrick](#) put it, it’s “Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me; Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me; Christ on my right, Christ on my left,” basically Christ *all over the place*. He’s the director, cast, and crew; he’s the dialogue, the plot, and the script; he’s the special effects, the soundtrack, and the cinematography.

The whole shooting match, the whole shebang! And we always have to be ready to receive him, not just at Christmas!

So, yes, take a deep breath – one screening has past; the next is just about to start. Sit back and [stay awake](#): The adventure is about to begin all over again.

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## The Power of the Eucharist [at String of Pearls]

I've been meaning to write about a rather extraordinary thing that happened to my husband and me, on a rather ordinary day, while we were doing ordinary things. I don't know why I didn't write about it immediately after it happened, so that I could tell it in sharper detail, remembering the exact words that were spoken by all the players. But I'm afraid now that if I don't tell it, it'll grow too fuzzy in my mind to repeat. (Although considering the circumstances, that isn't likely.)

So here it is: a true story about the Holy Eucharist--and its power over even those who don't comprehend its significance.



Back in late spring or early summer, my husband and I were on our way to the airport, looking forward to a trip out to the Midwest to visit our oldest son and his family (including our three precious granddaughters)--taking advantage of the best perk of his job: non-revenue stand-by privileges, which allow us to travel for free on flights, if there's space available. We boarded the shuttle bus that takes airline employees from their parking lot over to the terminal, and when we got on there were four women in their mid-thirties or so sitting nearby, gabbing excitedly. From the way they were dressed and the bags they had with them, it looked like they were taking off on a "girls only" getaway, perhaps to someplace beachy and exotic.

We didn't mean to eavesdrop, but it wasn't a very big bus. And before long, one of the gals was gossiping about a wedding she'd gone to not too long ago, and how weird and awkward it was

*standing-sitting-kneeling-standing-sitting-kneeling*

her way through a too-long Catholic nuptial Mass. There was some "OMG-ing," some chuckling, and some joking about how crazy those Catholics are--you know, the whole "What's that stuff all about,

anyway?" This was a tad annoying, of course, because it always stings when I hear the Faith denigrated and made fun of by people who don't understand it and certainly don't love it. But whatever; so far, it was pretty easy to ignore the prattling going on, and to just do some mental eye rolling and silent sighing.

Then the gal who'd gone to the wedding told her girlfriends that she'd gone up for Holy Communion. Unfortunately, the presiding priest hadn't instructed the guests that if they weren't Catholic, they should just come forward with arms folded to receive a blessing; or if he had instructed them, she hadn't been listening. So she found herself sort of trapped in a line going up, and when the priest put the consecrated Host--the Body and Blood of Christ!--in her hand, she didn't know what to do with it. So she ended up putting it

*in her purse*

, and she'd been carrying it around in there

*for weeks*

!! At this point, I felt myself go all cold inside, and I looked at the floor, feeling shocked and sad. She kept talking about how she'd asked Catholic friends what she should do, and no one had any good advice to give her. She mentioned that she was worried now that it probably had make-up on it from spending all that time in her bag.

My husband, God bless him, spoke up. "Hi, listen, I'm a Catholic. You shouldn't be carrying that around. You should take the Host to a Catholic priest. Or if you have a Catholic friend who knows one, have them take it."

At this unexpected instruction, the girl looked appreciative, but also a bit shame-faced. My husband proceeded to assure her that no one would be angry--in fact, he told her that everyone would be happy if the Host was returned to someone who knew what to do with it and would treat it with the respect it deserved. She thanked him, and we all exited the bus when it reached the terminal.

Then my husband realized with a jolt that he should have taken it himself, to be absolutely sure that she didn't just continue to carry it around. So he hustled over to where she and her friends were checking in and said, "I can take that Host for you." And God bless her, she agreed to give it him. She reached into her purse and produced a small, soft-sided mini-purse made to hold credit cards and whatnot. And the Sacred Host was in the outer pocket of this purse, inside a see-through plastic sleeve meant to hold a driver's license or some other sort of picture ID. It was not covered with make-up, as the girl had feared it might be. It was clean, having been protected by the plastic. But it was broken.

Here's the amazing thing, though: after being carried around in that woman's purse for weeks, the Host was broken cleanly into three pieces, one slightly larger than the others, with no crumbs in sight. It was broken in three, like the Trinity. To my husband and me, that seemed nothing short of a sign from Heaven.

My husband made a Sign of the Cross and consumed those three pieces, and we both finally felt at peace. Had he not caught up with that woman and asked her to let him have that precious Host, we both would have always wondered what had happened to it.

We've talked about this incident several times since it happened. In spite of the fact that the non-Catholic

woman seemed very disparaging about the rituals of Catholicism, my husband likes to point out that there was something about that Host that made her feel as if she couldn't just throw it in a garbage can. She didn't believe what we believe, yet something about it spoke to her and made her realize that it was not just run-of-the-mill bread. And something made her bring up the subject of her embarrassing Catholic wedding

*faux pas*

within earshot of a guy who loves Our Lord more purely and deeply than anyone I know, and who would know just what to do about her situation.

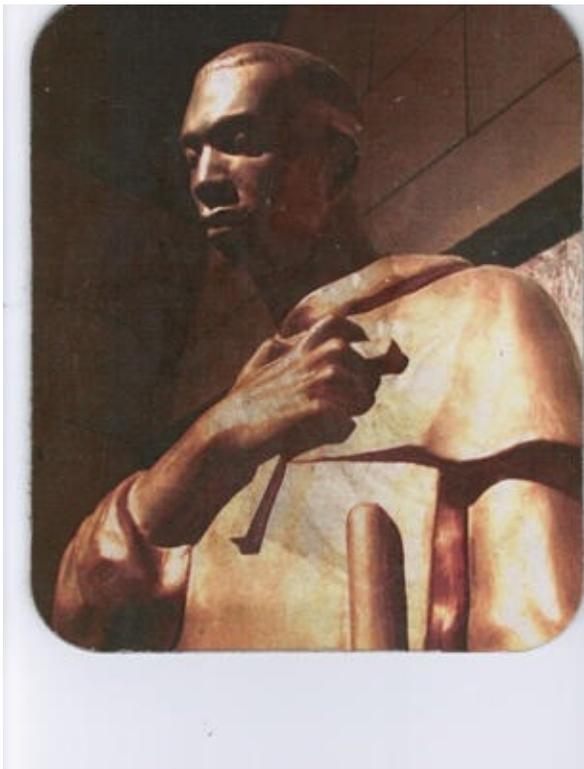
Whenever I remember that extraordinary ordinary day, I get chills. My husband and I both believe that it was no accident that we were on the same employee bus with that particular woman on that particular day...and that something compelled her to tell her story, so that we could hear it. God does indeed work in mysterious ways!

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This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2014/11/the-power-of-eucharist.html>  
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## St. Martin de Porres and My Sister [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]



Today we Dominicans celebrate the memorial of St. Martin de Porres (1579-1639) – one of three Dominican saints who walked the streets of Lima, Peru in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries - St. Rose of Lima and St. John Macias being the other two.

St. John XXIII canonized St. Martin on May 6, 1962.

There are a number of reasons why I have a great fondness for St. Martin de Porres.

He was a simple, humble and holy layman who initially refused the Dominican habit, not feeling worthy to wear it. After serving his Dominican brothers for nine years, as an act of obedience, he made his Solemn vows as a lay Dominican brother.

During his life, he joyfully fulfilled the most menial of tasks within and without the priory walls. He loved everyone and everything God created. Though he often suffered ridicule and discrimination because of his mixed race (even from some of his Dominican brothers), he harbored no resentment toward anyone. He had a deep and abiding love for the Blessed Sacrament and a bottomless fount of love and compassion for all those in need. He was known as “a wonder worker”.

I also have a more personal reason for revering this simple saintly quiet giant of our Church. When my twin sister was diagnosed with cancer more than two years ago, I placed her in the arms of my loving Lord and His Mother and then turned to St. Martin, seeking his intercession as well. I would stop and pray before his image at St. Vincent Ferrer Parish in New York City (the image depicted above) whenever I visited Jane.

Her physical and spiritual struggles continue but I draw comfort from the fact that St. Martin de Torres and countless other souls continue to storm heaven on her behalf. She has much to be thankful for even amidst her current limitations and crosses.

You can learn more about St. Martin by reading two articles I had referenced in previous posts

- [St. Martin de Porres: 50 Years a Saint](#), a brief but informative article into the life of this humble servant of God, written by Father Thomas Schaeffgen, O.P. in May of 2012, and [- A Brother to His Brothers](#)

, posted a few years ago by Brother John Baptist Hoang, O.P.

Let me conclude by asking all who read this post to pray for the spiritual and physical well-being of my struggling sister Jane.

**St. Martin, de Porres, St. Rose of Lima, St John Macias and all the Dominican Saints and Blesseds pray for Jane and for all of us!**

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This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2014/11/st-martin-de-porres-and-my-sister.html>  
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## Good Christian [at A Spiritual Journey]

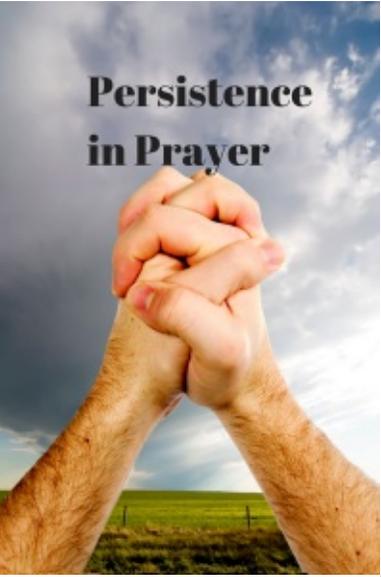
One who is happy and content does not harbor evil thoughts. He who accepts suffering draws strength from it. The one who forgives his enemies has no enemies. He who does not judge others remains peaceful. A good Christian is that person.

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This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2014/11/good-christian.html>  
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## Persistence in Prayer

*“Then he told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. He said, “There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, ‘Render a just decision*



### Persistence in Prayer

*for me against my adversary.’ For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, ‘While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.’” The Lord said, “Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” –Luke 18:1-8*

Do you ever feel like your prayers are never answered? Do you wonder if God actually hears your prayers? If God knows my needs, then why do I need to pray more than once or at all for that matter? Wouldn't He just know and answer them?

The parable of the persistent widow offers us some answers. The judge in the parable was a man who didn't fear God or respect anyone. He was in it for himself, the money and the power. So when the widow asked for a judgment, there was nothing in it for him. So, he was unwilling to help.

The widow, however, was persistent, approaching him multiple times until he finally gave in and rendered a just judgment.

If the judge eventually listened through her persistence, wouldn't God answer those who pray for his help? How much more merciful is God than man? And, wouldn't he do it quickly.

Unlike the judge, God wants to intervene on our behalf. We are His chosen people, His beloved children. He wants to answer our prayers. What God simply need from us is our faith.

*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

What can we do to be more persistent in our prayer life?

First, understand that **God hears us**. He is a God of justice, he shows no partiality, He hears our cries, and He knows our hearts. He wants to quickly answer us.

Secondly, **God honors persistence**. Throughout the bible, we read of persistence. Even Jesus was persistent in prayer. At the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus left his disciples and prayed three times. Shouldn't we follow His example?

And third, if we have faith **God will handle our request**. We must believe that we will get an answer to our prayer. It may not be the answer we want or were expecting, but God will answer our prayers.

The parable concludes with a tough question for each of us; When Jesus returns will he find faith?

Do we really believe in answered prayers? Are we willing to persist, to ask, seek and knock?

Dear Lord, I'll keep praying in faith assured that you will answer me.

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. –Matthew 7:7-8*

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This contribution is available at <http://tonyagnesi.com/2014/11/persistence-in-prayer/>  
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## Priests Say The Funniest Things! [at Adam Introvert]

"Well, the good Lord did invent humor." I vaguely recall Fr. Mulcahy saying that once on *MASH* after someone apologized to him for cracking a joke. Fictional TV characters aside, priests are people too. While their primary job is to lead us to Jesus, it's also okay for priests to be funny.



To give you a lighthearted break from your daily grind, I have compiled a summary of some of the funniest things I've heard priests say over the years.

### Licensed to Drive

A priest shared an amusing story about a brush with the law many years ago. He was pulled over by a police officer late on a Saturday night for drifting out of his lane. The priest admitted that he was distracted. But you'll never guess what he was doing. Texting? No. Talking on the phone? Not a chance. Dozing off? Certainly not. Drinking and driving? No way.



He was reading the Bible while driving. He had the Bible right there on the steering wheel and was glancing up and down while driving. Or maybe he had one eye on the road and one eye on the good book. He said he was returning home late from a trip and hadn't had time to prepare for the next morning's Mass. Is DUIP (driving under the influence of prayer) a crime?

### **Peeking at Prayers**

I'm a Catholic convert as of 2005. Within the first year or so, I felt like I was not doing an adequate job in learning some of the basic prayers. I felt inferior during Mass when everyone else seemed to know things like the Creed by heart while I had to cheat and read it out of the book.

So I went to confession and told the priest that I was having trouble with my prayer life because as a new Catholic I thought I should have already memorized more prayers. The priest responded, "Hey, I'm a priest and I still peek at the prayers during Mass."

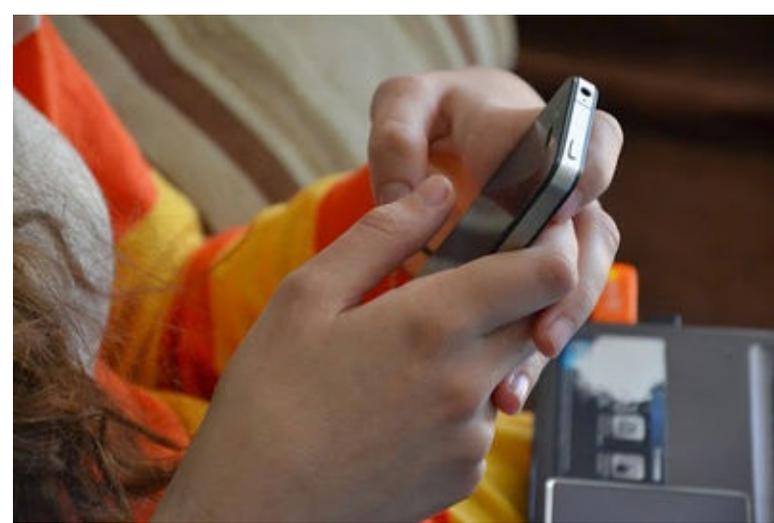
### **Clandestine Candle**

During Easter time I attended a daily Mass, and in the middle of the celebration the priest noticed that the he, or perhaps somebody else, had forgotten to light the paschal candle. So he paused and said, "You may have noticed that the paschal candle is not lit. Well, I'm not going to climb up there now and light it. So just pretend it's lit."



### **You-Know-Who Is on the Line**

No matter how many times we are warned about silencing our cell phones in church, you can almost always count on someone's phone ringing. While he never said this during Mass, one particular priest was not shy about his disdain for phone interruptions. If a phone happened to ring in the middle of a ministry meeting, he would say, "That better be God calling!"



### **Beat the Baptists**

Another pet peeve is when people duck out of Mass before it's actually over. One priest used to remind people about this often. One day in his homily he said, "I know you want to get out of here so you can beat the Baptists to lunch, but you really need to stay until the end."

### **The Patron Saint of Punctuality**

I'm a stickler for timeliness. So whenever anything doesn't start on time, even Mass, I get antsy. At a daily Mass one day, the priest processed in about seven minutes late. He took his place at the altar and said,

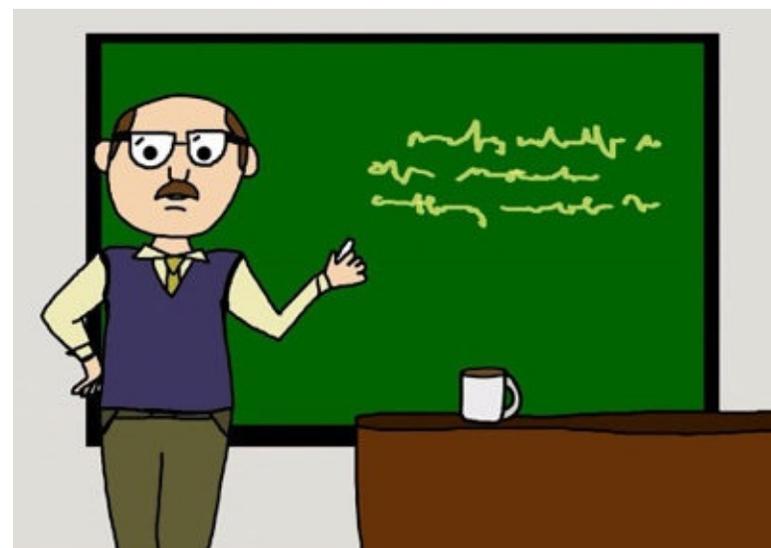
"I'm sorry for being late. I was talking to Sister [name withheld], and she would not shut up."

Rest assured, the priest said this in a very humorous tone.



### Good Answer

It didn't sound like an original joke, but during a homily a priest told the story of a teacher who asked his class what the difference is between ignorance and apathy. Nobody in the class answered, so the teacher asked again. Finally, he singled out a student in the front row and asked one more time, "What's the difference between ignorance and apathy?" The student replied, "I don't know, and I don't care."



### Christmas Competition

My family attended Christmas Mass at 10 a.m. last year, and I was scheduled to be an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion in the position next to the priest. My older daughter who was seven at the time wanted us to sit right in the front pew closest to the altar so she could watch me give Communion. That worked out well for her, but not so much for my younger daughter who was 13-months old at the time.

She really must have liked the Eucharistic prayer, because she joyfully and loudly babbled along with the

priest. He glared at her a couple of times. (Sorry, Father!) To this day he still jokes with us about how my little one competed with him during Christmas Mass, and he lost.

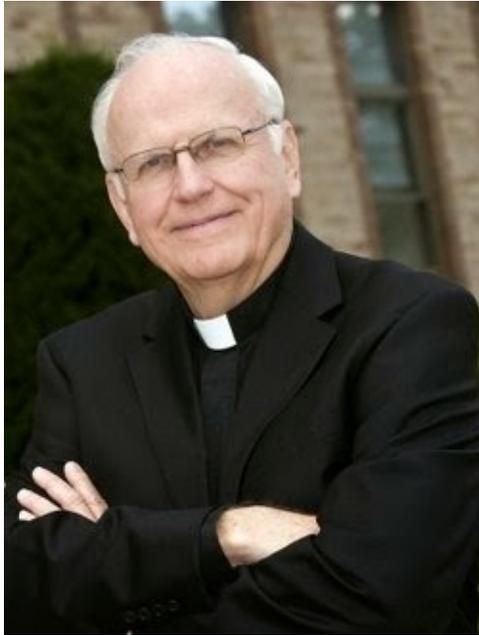
*[There are more funny priest stories on the list. Please head over to [Austin Catholic New Media](#) to read the rest.]*

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This contribution is available at <http://www.adamintrovert.com/2014/11/priests-say-funniest-things-acnm.html>  
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## 7 Questions: Fr. Richard Clifford, S.J. [at Catholic Bibles]



*Richard J. Clifford, S.J., a native of Lewiston, Maine, Professor of Old Testament, and Jesuit priest, taught biblical studies at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge from 1970 to 2008. He is a graduate of Boston College (A.B., M.A.), Weston Jesuit School of Theology (S.T.L.) and Harvard University (Ph.D.). He was General Editor of the [Catholic Biblical Quarterly](#) and is a former President of the [Catholic Biblical Association](#). A former President of Weston Jesuit School of Theology, he was Founding Dean of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry from 2008-2010. As well as teaching and lecturing in scholarly circles, he is also active in adult education in various New England dioceses. He has published numerous [books](#) and [articles](#) dealing with Scripture and Scripture interpretation.*

**1) How has Scripture played an important role in your prayer life? Has it always been that way? What inspired you to focus your education on the study of the Bible?**

As a novice in the Jesuits, I could not understand many passages, and was much helped when I figured out the meaning. Finding the truth in these passages greatly helped my prayer. I loved the Latin and Greek classics, so I was predisposed to enjoy ancient literature, especially literature as fascinating and consoling as the Bible.

**2) Can you talk a little bit about the importance and influence of *Dei Verbum*, particularly in light of the upcoming 50th anniversary of its publication?**

The Bible has a transformative power. It provides a vocabulary and a spirituality for Catholics. The Pew Foundation Study found that the Catholic Church has lost a third of its members over the last few years. Half give up religion and half become Protestants. Of the half that become Protestants, 73% say their spiritual needs were not being met in the Catholic Church. I suspect that if that group had discovered the riches of the Bible, they would not have said their spiritual needs were not being met. If only, Catholics would begin reading on Monday the Sunday readings what a difference it would make!

**3) In connection to the prior question, what are your thoughts on the state of Catholic biblical literacy today, particularly here in the USA?**

Among most Catholics, it is not very high. Yet when they are introduced to the Psalms, most people come to love them. So also with the Gospels. Yet many Catholic sermons do not explain the Bible's relevance for daily life.

**4) You were one of the revisers to the recent (2011) revision of the *New American Bible* Old Testament. Could you talk about your role in the revision? Which books did you revise? How did you approach the task of composing the annotations to the books you worked on?**

I revised and annotated Genesis and Proverbs. Both books had been well translated originally and so only retouching was necessary. A fair number of verses and notes were subsequently revised by a committee. I greatly expanded the notes for each book.

**5) What do you think makes a good translation of the Bible?**

I think translations should be fairly literal, so that some of the flavor of the original language comes through. The Bible after all arose in a non-Western culture and should not be too quickly domesticated. It's good that we have "the stole into the camp," "a drop in the bucket," "God saw that it was good," "you are the apple of my eye," and other memorable phrases.

**6) Are there any particular resources you think are most helpful for the average Catholic in learning what the Catholic approach is to studying the Bible?**

Listening carefully to the biblical passages used in the liturgy; using an annotated Bible; praying two or three psalms and a short passage from the Gospels every day in the morning (sunrise) and evening (sunset).

## **7) Finally, do you have a favorite passage or verse from the Bible? Why?**

OT:

15 Early the next morning, when the attendant of the man of God arose and went out, he saw the force with its horses and chariots surrounding the city. “Alas!” he said to Elisha. “What shall we do, my lord?” 16 “Do not be afraid,” Elisha answered. “Our side outnumbers theirs.”

17 Then he prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes, that he may see.” And the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, so that he saw the mountainside filled with horses and fiery chariots around Elisha. (2Kings 6:15-17 NAB)

NT:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God;

9 it is not from works, so no one may boast. 10 For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them. (Eph 2:8-10 NAB)

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This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicbiblesblog.com/2014/11/7-questions-fr-richard-clifford-sj.html>  
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## Advent, hope, and abuse in the Church [at Catholic Deacon]

A week ago Friday I posted REM's "Don't Go Back to Rockville" as our Friday

*traditio*

( see

["Going where nobody says hello"](#)

). Later that same day someone anonymously posted the following comment on that post:

Hi- I would like to request prayers for the victims of rape and abuse by members of the Catholic Church. Many of them were children when they were attacked or abused. This is also an ongoing crisis, with new victims each year, worldwide. I will remember them and their stories forever, but for the healing to truly take place, it will take the voices and efforts of many. To paraphrase a poem by an Indian schoolgirl, "Too many Catholics, in too many countries, speak the same language-- of silence." Thank you

As both of my readers know, I am not a fan of anonymous comments. After dealing far too much and too often with one or two genuine trolls earlier in my blogging career, I no longer publish negatively critical comments posted anonymously. I think being on-line all-too-often plays to our natural, sinful, tendency to be passive aggressive. I don't want to encourage or facilitate such cowardly behavior. Anonymous posts that are positive, insightful, neutral, or perhaps even constructively and charitably critical, I may well post. This is my blog and so these matters are at my discretion.

Dave Manthei, who blogs over at

["A Humble Servant's Catholic Blog."](#)

who received the same comment on one of his posts, did some looking into the matter. He discovered that this same comment was made on at least nine Catholic blogs. He spent some time putting together a response:

["The Sex-Abuse Crisis: What are Christians Doing About It?"](#)

On the whole, I appreciate Dave's post. It is important, as he noted, for our society to deal with this vexing issue across the board, meaning in any and every institution that such evils have occurred and have been swept under the rug. Given the prevalence of pornography-driven perversion, such efforts seem to me more important than ever!

I have no idea who wrote the comment in question. Hence, I have no idea what her/his intentions or motives are. While I can understand how someone might construe the comment as an attack on or attempt to smear the Church, I think there are other ways of taking it. I certainly plan to continue praying for those who have been raped and sexually abused by members of the Catholic Church. I always pray for these evils to stop, especially within the Church, but in other institutions too.



I am well aware that there are other institutions, like the ones Dave mentions, that are guilty of the same evils and perhaps at even higher rates. But as someone who has pastorally assisted people who were victims of sexual abuse, both within and outside the Church, I feel I need to note that this is not an issue that can be dealt with justly or compassionately by using statistics. It is no consolation at all to someone who was sexually abused by, say, a priest that someone else, perhaps many others, were sexually abused by, say, public school teachers.

Not too long ago, I drew the ire of a good friend, who is a great guy, for complaining about all the Facebook posts I read whenever someone outside the Church was found to have sexually abused children that snarkily asserted something like "If only news anchors were allowed to marry." I get the point and feel the tug of such temptations myself. But I don't want to ever downplay the evils that occurred or be seen to minimize the painful, devastating experience of someone who was abused by a person in the Church, let alone attempt to relativize such grotesque evil.

I like that Dave noted how important it is for victims of rape and sexual abuse not to remain silent no matter what, no matter where it occurred, or who did it. In this, we agree with the person who made the anonymous comment. I also appreciate that he highlighted the tremendous effort the Catholic Church, at least in the U.S. and most of Western Europe, has put into identifying, apologizing to, and helping bring about the healing of those people who were violated in Church institutions by members of the Church and for putting measures in place aimed at reducing and eliminating, as far as possible, these atrocities. It's nice to believe we have put this all behind us, but no sooner do we think that than something else is brought from the dark into the light. As painful as such revelations are, we should thank God that what was hidden has now come to light.

When I consider the sad reality of sexual abuse in the Church I can't help but think of what then-Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in his reflection for the Ninth Station of the

### [Stations of the Cross](#)

he composed back in 2005: "How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to him!"

Since Advent is a season of hope, I can't leave it there. So I point to the response by

### *Communion & Liberation*

to these matters in the wake of Pope Benedict XVI's

## [Letter to the Catholics of Ireland](#)

(see

### ["Greater than sin"](#)

): "Alongside all the limitations and within the Church's wounded humanity, is there or is there not something greater than sin, something radically greater than sin? Is there something that can shatter the inexorable weight of our evil?" These question strike me as most useful points of reflection during Advent.

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This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2014/12/advent-hope-and-abuse-in-church.html>  
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# Healthy Fear [at The Veil of Chastity]

Several weeks ago [I shared the story of a dear reader](#) who is dating a nice, Catholic guy. He has a job, interesting hobbies, friends, nice family, is cute and practices his faith for real. So, what is the problem? The problem is that she is not sure if she feels a spark or not and therefore is unsure of what to do. In that post, I shared that there is [paralyzing fear](#) and there is **healthy fear**. Last week I covered paralyzing fear (which needs to be healed by God) and this week I will cover healthy fear.

## Hesitation

Back in May I wrote the [Give Him 3 Dates](#) post. Much of what I wrote had to do with the beginning stages of dating. I suggested that you give a guy 3 dates to allow for God to move **if He chooses**. You can always say to God, *“I gave this guy a chance. No spark.”*

But what about when you have been dating this nice, Catholic guy for a while and although things are good, you just don’t feel a spark? What if God is not moving your heart towards this guy?

I describe this as a feeling of **hesitation** and when it comes to marriage, I believe we should heed these feelings of hesitation. I believe that they come from the Holy Spirit. But, how do you know that the fear you are feeling is a healthy feeling of hesitation from the Holy Spirit?

## Would You Pick Him?

The Catholic Sacrament of Marriage is permanent. When considering your husband, you need to believe that ***if you had all the men in the entire world to pick from***, you would pick this man. And, you should have confidence and peace about ***forever*** with him.

During the ‘forever’ many things will happen. He will make you mad and his human imperfections will annoy you. The same goes for your human imperfections. You may even feel tempted towards infidelity. It is during those times that you need to be able to say to yourself, *“He is not perfect but there is no other man I want.”*

## Not A Safety Net

When considering marriage, be sure to avoid the **safety net syndrome**. This is when you marry a guy because another man might not come along. That, to me, is not a good reason. Your beloved needs to be more than just a safety net for you. You need to look at him with **admiration** and be able to thank God for such a wonderful husband. If you cannot do this, then those feelings of hesitation and fear are **healthy** and it may be time to break things off.

## Ask The Question

So the dear reader in this story did ask herself the *“if I had all the men to pick from...”* question. It was a good process for her to go through because it forced her to look at this wonderful man and all his qualities. It softened her heart towards him to know how much he cares about her and accepts her with all her human flaws. It helped her understand and **prioritize** what she is looking for in marriage. Then, she

decided to give things more time because so far, the answer to the question “*if I had all the men to pick from, would I pick him?*” was “*yes, I think so!*”

It may have helped when I reminded her that the type of man she is dating, with all his qualities and character, is exactly the type of man who can make a girl **very** happy. When you go to Mass and see families, do you notice that the men leading these strong, faithful Catholic families don’t always have the ‘**Wow!**’ factor? But they are solid men and their wives are, more often than not, happy and at peace.

## Discernment

Sometimes our fears are a product of our need for healing. Sometimes they are signposts of hesitation that force us to evaluate the relationship. Other times, they are healthy fears which are intended to steer us away from a relationship which may seem good but is not God’s will. This discernment process should include the following:

1. A look at ourselves and our need for healing
2. A look at the guy and his qualities/character
3. Asking the question, “*If I had all the men in the world to pick from, would I pick him?*”
4. If the answer to #3 is “*No*”, then I suggest you break things off.
5. If the answer to #3 is “*Yes*” or even, “*Maybe*”, then I suggest you give it more time.

## Yes

There are so many opinions out there about discerning marriage with a particular man. Some would say that my question in #3 above is the wrong approach.

My opinion on this is a result of my experience. I could not answer “*Yes*” to #3 above for any other guy **until I met Gregg**. And, that question still gets a “*Yes!*” from me today.

I had feelings of hesitation and what I now call ‘**healthy fear**’ with all other guys. It is true that with these guys, some of my paralyzing fears were due to my issues and need for healing. So, I can’t blame it all on them. But, what is interesting is that I still had the **same issues** which **should have caused paralyzing fear** when I met Gregg. But, instead of feeling paralyzed, I felt **confident** in our future and filled with fortitude. I, of course, credit this to God’s beautiful will and [The Veil](#).



## Trust

Do you trust that the Lord has a will for your life? Do you trust that the Holy Spirit will lead you to His will? When you are confronted with healthy fear, please pay attention to your feelings of hesitation. But,

may I sweetly recommend that you take the time to discern first before breaking things off with a guy who has the potential to be an amazing husband?

As always, you are welcome to email me at [theveilofchastity@gmail.com](mailto:theveilofchastity@gmail.com)

God love and bless you!

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This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2014/11/09/fear-part-3-healthy-fear/>  
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# Care to Join Me for the Mystical Rose Hour of Grace? [at Written By the Finger of God]

The Mystical Rose ‘Hour of Grace’ may not be new to many of you. But about six years ago, this devotion came to my attention at the time I needed it most. We were trying to sell a house in a market that had crashed, and in desperate need of graces, I called on the “Mystical Rose” for help. She didn’t fail me.

The history is traced to a small town in Northern Italy called Montichiari. Sometime in the spring of 1947, Our Lady appeared to a nurse named Pierina Gilli. The Mother of God continued to appear to Pierina eleven times. (For a detailed description of the apparitions and messages, [click here](#)) On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1947, the seventh apparition, Our Lady introduced the Hour of Grace Devotion in the crowded parish where she was scheduled for an apparition and the rosary was being prayed in anticipation.

“I am the Immaculate Concepcion,” she said with a smile.

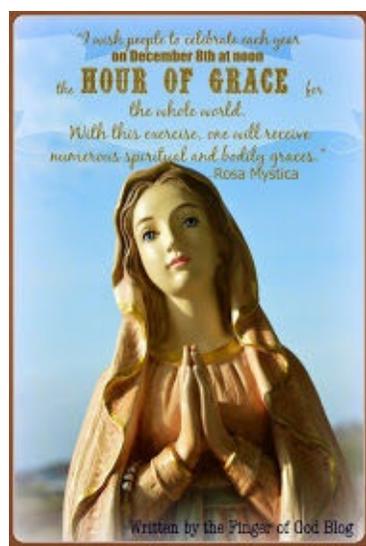
“I come here to Montichiari because it is my wish to be appealed to and venerated as the ‘Rosa Mystica’. I wish people to celebrate each year on December 8<sup>th</sup> at noon the hour of grace or the whole world. With this exercise, one will receive numerous spiritual and bodily graces. Our Lord, my Divine Son Jesus, will be abundantly merciful as long as good men go on praying for their fellow men. As soon as possible, let the Supreme Shepherd of the Church know that it is my wish that this hour of grace be publicized and spread throughout the world. If someone cannot go to church at this time, he is to pray at noon at home, and he will receive graces from me...”

The apparition was accompanied by miraculous healings. Further instructions on how to pray during this hour came later:

1. The hour starts at noon;
2. As an opening prayer, Psalm 51 must be prayed three times with arms outstretched;
3. One must be in continuous prayer at church or home until 1:00, with the rosary or personal prayer or silent prayer.

Our Lady also said that this hour of grace will “produce great and numerous conversions. Hardened and cold hearts resembling this marble will be touched by divine grace, and they will become faithful to Our Lord in loyal love.”

With such a promise, I have a list of names of people to pray for. If you can’t make the hour yourself and want me to include you and yours, I’d be glad to. Please email me [bythefinger@yahoo.com](mailto:bythefinger@yahoo.com).



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This contribution is available at <http://www.anabellehazard.blogspot.com/2014/12/care-to-join-me-for-mystical-rose-hour.html>

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## Francis: style, substance, execution [at Convert Journal]



I have written very little about Pope Francis since he was elected to the See of Peter 18 months ago. I, like so many others, have been and remain somewhat confused. There are already so many things written about him, what he has said, what he has done and what he is trying to do. There should be little to add – except, that so much of what has been said is so terribly contradictory.

How to make sense of it all? I propose, gentle reader, that it may be helpful to understand the Holy Father in a framework of three areas: style, substance and execution.

### Style

Obviously enough, every pope has a different personal style. These are very different men with different backgrounds, education, experience and focus. Recent popes in particular have also been from different cultures and native languages. Except for a very small handful during the Middle Ages (less than 10 “bad popes” – out of 266), the Church has been blessed by extraordinary, but of course imperfect, men.

I do not believe for a second that Pope Francis is more humble, or cares more about the poor, or wants to center the Church on Christ even one iota greater than his predecessors. When I read anything that suggests that, I know it is not only completely wrong, but incredibly insulting to previous popes and thus the Church herself. I understand how some people, particularly the media, twists things in this way to further their own agenda.

That said, I believe that the Holy Spirit may have given us Pope Francis as the pope we need at this time. His style is suited well to highlighting what I believe are two areas in which we collectively need to rededicate ourselves.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Pope Francis asks us to look outward, renewing and reinvigorating our mission. He wants our message to be one of peace and joy in Christ, which is sometimes lost when we lead with rules, liturgy and the like. The Holy Father is right! We are well advised to keep this foremost in our evangelism efforts.

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord,

your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

The second area in which Pope Francis wishes to strengthen is our commitment to the poor. That is, the second part of the *Greatest Commandment*: “love your neighbor.” In our relatively comfortable lives, the needs of the poor can seem distant. The Holy Father reminds us that the poor are always with us and of our responsibility to these brothers and sisters.

The Holy Father’s “messaging” centers around these two areas. We do well to listen, reflect and act accordingly.

## **Substance**

Pope Francis describes himself as a “loyal son of the Church.” Put another way, the pope is a faithful Catholic. Duh.

There is absolutely no chance whatsoever that the pope will change doctrine. This will (eventually) come as a shock to the politicized media, to some non-Catholics and to poorly catechized Catholics.

Even if Pope Francis wanted to change doctrine, which he certainly does not (and would be heretical), he could not. Nor is he free to play games with it like keeping certain doctrines “technically on the books” but diminished and ignored in practice. These are revealed truths from God (ref: “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”). The Church protects the truth, does not “evolve” it, and exists to change the world, not be changed by it.

## **Execution**

Unless you believe there is a brilliant, intricate, long-term plan to which virtually the whole world has not caught on — then you would have to concede that there have been serious problems in this area!

The Holy Father has often spoken vaguely leaving us confused with what he is trying to say. Knowing he is a faithful (orthodox) Catholic, we put a meaning on the words such that they are consistent with doctrine and 2,000 years of Magisterial teaching. The media and heterodox Catholics assign a completely different, often opposite meaning. It seems that the pope has a policy never to clarify what he meant. Confusion reigns.

Another problem area is some in his “inner circle” who claim to be speaking for him, often with alarming pronouncements. This too seems to be tolerated without any objection from the Holy Father or requiring any retraction. Confusion reigns.

Another area is seemingly intractable systemic problems, such as the string of translation “errors” and unapproved, highly slanted information releases. These lapses always tilt toward the heterodox, seem to continue unabated and... confusion reigns.

Finally, there is the issue of discipline. Those proposing and promoting heterodoxy, from all appearances (which admittedly could be misleading) are usually tolerated. Those affirming orthodoxy appear to often

be unjustly disciplined (again, appearances could be wrong). Cardinal Burke's reassignment *may be* one such example. The extremely severe treatment of the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate *may be* another. There are plenty of other examples. How much Pope Francis is involved in these matters or how much he defers to that inner circle is unknown. The result is chilling however to many faithful Catholics.

## **The Future**

A tremendous amount of good can come from Pope Francis' pontificate. Fallen away Catholics and non-Catholics could be brought home. The mission of the Church to save souls could be fulfilled to the highest degree possible.

Alternately, a lot of bad could result if doctrine, while left "technically" unchanged, is diminished, reworded, reinterpreted or otherwise skirted to give heterodoxy a place in the Church. Scandal, by definition, does not save souls but leads them away from Christ. Only truth sets one free.

Frankly, it is unclear to me which path we are on. We must continue to pray for Pope Francis, his intentions and his leadership. May he one day be known as Pope St. Francis the Great!

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# Illness, grief, and the things that don't go away

Sometimes I cry because I'm sick.



The pain itself doesn't make me cry, though there have been times when it has made me cry out. What makes me weep is the inversion of all that was normal in my life: health and lack of worry. Just when I think that I have accepted the new normal, frustration flares and I have to bury my head in my hands for a minute.

When I describe this it sounds familiar: it sounds like grief.

When I was first diagnosed I put off grieving for a time, because my symptoms were only occasional, and my disease didn't affect my life that much. Perhaps I'd have one day a month of vomiting, and I'd have to go to the doctor a little more often. A part of me believed I wasn't truly sick, that this would go away and not be a nuisance.

That has changed: I'm now on meds that require blood tests every two weeks. How's that for a nuisance? My doctor wants to step up my treatment to include some heavy treatments that will bring the constant worry of side effects. I consider and resist and research and pray and then think "Who is this woman? Who have I become?"

And that is why I grieve. I cry for my youth, for my ignorance, for my health, for the person I left behind when I was diagnosed. She was not any better or more valorous than the woman who looks out at the mirror from me now, but she was different, and now she is gone.

I should be over this by now. I should be acclimated, but we all know that [grief never truly goes away](#). It continues to remind you of its presence when you least expect it, and if you're like me perhaps you find yourself at your desk with tears in your eyes while a group of students is taking a test.

Would that this knowledge made me more compassionate or offered me some sort of benefit, but I fail to see evidence of that. I look for meaning and don't find it. I look for consolation but nothing presents itself to me. I look for progress and I blame myself for clinging to [the injustice of it all](#), for failing to accept my

suffering.

I believe there is grace in taking up my cross, but I can't help but look behind me at that unencumbered girl who thought she understood what mysteries the future can hold.

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# Respect - A Defining Virtue

## RESPECT

A Defining  
Virtue  
for Character  
Building



Respect is to have concern for what is noble in every human being. It is a defining virtue regarding the basis for character building. Without respect for God and others, how could other virtuous habits spring forth? Father Romano Guardini more clearly defined the virtue of Respect within his book titled *Learning the Virtues That Lead You to God*, as something akin to reverence. He states:

- Every genuine virtue extends over many levels and stages because it is an attitude of a living person. Hence reverence can and should appear in everyday life, and then we can call it “respect” (p. 59).
- Respect means that one takes another’s conviction seriously (p. 60).
- Respect desires privacy for the other person (p. 60).
- Respect is the guarantee that the relations of one person to another preserve their dignity (p.62).
- True courtesy is the expression of respect for the human person (p. 62).

What are we to make of this? If we are to recognize that we are all created in the image and likeness of God, then we must also acknowledge that every human life deserves the same dignity and respect that we extend to God; remembering also, that the Divine Indwelling of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit resides in every person. Remember what Saint Matthew’s Gospel says, “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (25:40). Yet, in today’s society we see far too many examples of disrespect. For example,

1. When we deny the human rights of our neighbor, (i.e.: a fair trial) we show disrespect in the form of discrimination.
2. When we deny the human rights of the unborn child, through the act of abortion, we show disrespect for God’s creation and a lack of love for God, as well as a lack of love for one’s own child.

Why should we embrace respect, rather than being disrespectful? We’ll address the answer to that question in our next reflection on the virtue of Respect. Don’t miss it!



## The Good, the Bad, and the Divine [at CatholicSoup]



There's always a constant battle in life between the good and the bad. A battle between the divine, and the evil. In our lives, it's up to us to make that distinction and we have to do it quick, like Clint East would (No pun intended). The battle, is of three things, the good, the bad and the divine. While the good is from the divine, theologically, there is also a good that we might be distracted of. This is the world's view of good, or what might be good. Life is full of good things, and as sensible beings, we desire everything that is good, or what makes us feel good, or be good. We hear from philosophers that the good, is that which is desirable, meaning we desire it, we want it constantly. This is why we sin, because in our eyes it's good and pleasing to us. Sin has to have something 'good' about it or else we wouldn't do it, right. There is good, because it's pleasing, but it might not always be healthy. What we don't see, is that most times, our desire for the divine goodness is shortened and we turn to those things that aren't good for us. It's like we cheat ourselves from experiencing that divine goodness. All of life, from beginning to it's end, leads and points us to the divine goodness. We are slowly, ordered, prepared and led to this great goodness that God wants us to experience. Where we fall short is when we turn to something false, something that only pleases us for a moment and then it's gone. The cool message is to seek the divine goodness and look past those temporal things that take us further and further away from the divine hand. We become distracted and now what was bad becomes 'good' and that's it, we don't wanna move any further because we're set. Now, there is no longer a move to experience a greater goodness, that divine goodness because, we are content with that 'good' the world gives us. So...

Don't cheat yourself.

Don't be content with the bare-minimum.

We should strive to seek God's goodness everyday, start by recognizing that there IS a greater goodness, one that is eternal. Like I said, it's a constant struggle, even for me. The battle is now, and it's either life or death. The great thing is that this takes time, patience. I always want to be spot on, or be virtuous all of a sudden, like if it happens overnight. It doesn't. Conversion is a process and takes prayer and silence even when it is hard. I read somewhere, that the hardest yet most effective prayer, is the prayer that comes when you don't want to pray. It's almost like we have to force ourselves to sit still, we have to literally sit and train our minds and our hearts to be faithful and fruitful. and It doesn't happen overnight. Take steps and join me in being faithful in small matters first before the great matters. Often times we have to habituate, train and mold those small basic virtues before we can strive for those heroic virtues.

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This contribution is available at <http://catholicsoup.blogspot.com/2014/10/the-good-bad-and-divine.html>  
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## **Boldly Into His Throne Room [at The Encouragement of Scripture]**

So I'm reading in Hebrews this verse in chapter 4:

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (15-16).*

The word 'confidence' in Greek can also be translated, 'boldly.' Thus, another translation of verse 16 can read: *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

And speaking of High Priest, according to Moses, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle only once a year to make atonement for the nation (Hebrews 9:7, Leviticus chapters 16 and 17). But now, the Holy Spirit tells us we can "have boldness to enter" that holiest of places by the blood of Jesus. Whenever we want. As often as we want.

You can't make this stuff up.

Who'd ever think up a story of a God, the supreme ruler of the galaxies, the final and decisive arbiter of life and death, who would think this Being would permit – no, that He would *welcome* – His creatures to *boldly* enter His very Holy of Holies? No religion aside from Judeo-Christian faith – none hold their god so near. So personal. So gracious. So compassionate. So loving.

But our God, whom we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, from the time of Adam to this very moment as you read this, our God *welcomes* us to enter confidently, boldly, into His very throne room.

Whenever we want. As often as we want.

Do you have a problem? Have a need? Just want to talk? You can enter His Holy of Holies now.

Confidently. Tell Him what's on your heart.

He is always ready to listen.

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You can find my YouTube Bible study through 1 Peter if you click this

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This contribution is available at <http://theencouragementofscripture.blogspot.com/2014/11/boldly-into-his-throne-room.html>

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## No Better Aphrodisiac: Why NFP? [at Can We Cana?]

*Kevin and Allison Gingras speak honestly about why they switched from artificial birth control to Natural Family Planning (NFP) after discovering, among other things, how artificial birth control can lower a woman's libido. They also cover topics like the effect of peri-menopause, the benefits to using over-the-counter ovulation kits, and how regular times of abstinence can improve intimacy.*



Kevin and Allison started out as high school sweethearts who went to both junior and senior prom together, and now they've been married for 25 years. They are proud parents of Ian (age 18), Adam (age 15), and Faith (age 8). Faith, who is deaf, was an extra special gift coming to them all the way from China when she was almost 4 years old. Kevin and Allison began using Natural Family Planning over 20 years ago, after reading about a local class in their church bulletin. Allison blogs at

### [Reconciled to You](#)

and is a Catholic radio and tv personality as well as an app developer. You can read Faith's adoption story

[here](#)

and find out how God touched Kevin and Allison's heart to adopt even while they were using NFP to prevent pregnancy.

### 1. Why do you use NFP?

Our use of NFP coincided with our reversion to the Catholic faith over 20 years ago. We were at a point in our lives where we wanted to open our hearts to children, after living very self-centeredly for the first several years of our married life! I had discovered the horrific things I had subjected my body to by using birth control pills including their abortifacient effect and the increased risk for certain cancers (no one ever bothered explaining that, and I foolishly never read the lengthy pamphlet tucked inside the package each month). We saw a class being offered in our parish bulletin and signed up to learn more. I particularly loved that this method was not just my responsibility, that we'd be achieving and avoiding pregnancy together – yet of course, always open to God's will.

### 2. Which method of NFP works best for you?

We were able to rely only on

## [basal body temperature](#)

for 17 years, until Allison began peri-menopause. We have now added the Clear Blue Easy ovulation detector along with temperature charting. To be very honest, this new phase of fertility has been incredibly challenging especially in light of how easy it was for us before this change of life.

### **3. What are the biggest pros and cons of using NFP, in your experience?**

#### **Pros: Allison:**

The natural breaks of intimacy that come in conjunction with a woman's fertility cycle has been one of the most powerful marriage strengtheners. When you are able to say not tonight I'm "not safe" without hurting your husband's feelings, that is a beautiful blessing. At one point in my life, I was in a Bible study with 40 women, and was one of the only women practicing NFP. One night we had an open honest discussion about sex in marriage – more than half of the women complained about always having to be "on" or "available" to their husbands. They spoke of intercourse with their spouses as a task – one most were not interested in - instead of the bonding, procreative gift from God it truly is. I recognized instantly the negative effect that birth control or sterilization can have on a marriage (nearly all of the women reporting an unhealthy intimacy also confided they were either on some form of birth control or one of spouses had received sterilization surgery).

Another huge benefit, which I never considered when we began our NFP adventure, is being able to accurately estimate the day of conception. This became very helpful when our first child was born 2 months premature – he was such a monster the doctors doubted my actual due date. I told them, if I had time to go home, I would bring them my chart! After he was born they did the Apgar tests, and lo and behold we were spot on with the gestational age of our little man (who was dubbed as the big man on campus because he was 5 lbs already at only 32 weeks!)

#### **Cons: Allison:**

Really I had NONE until peri-menopause. While I want with my WHOLE heart to trust God's plan for us, the idea of being mid-40s with a new baby is terrifying. I remember sitting in the class as a mid-20something-year-old joking that I'd be the woman with the mid-life baby as we covered that in the class. Now that I've arrived in mid-life, it is NOT as funny as I thought, nor am I as willing to be that woman as I was 20+ years earlier. So the con is definitely the extended abstinence couples can face with irregular cycles resulting from peri-menopause.

### **4. What NFP resources does your diocese have?**

#### **The Diocese of Fall River web site**

lists two NFP teaching couples in the Massachusetts area. But we have not been able to find anyone (except online) to teach a peri-menopause informational update class. That's what we really need.

### **5. What NFP resources have been most useful to you?**

We received all our NFP resources from

## 6. How do you think your marriage would be different if you used artificial contraception instead of NFP?

### Allison:

We know what it was like, because we used them for many years. We had needless arguments and hurt feelings when one of us just wasn't up for intimacy. I also struggled with a very low libido, a side effect of birth control – this also led to a period in our marriage when my husband really wondered if I loved him or if I was even maybe having an affair because of my lack of interest in being intimate. It was only in hindsight did we recognize that all of these issues, which truly threatened our marriage, were directly related to our use of artificial contraception.

Our marriage with those “natural breaks” that comes from following my cycles provided the healthy balance we needed. It also forced us to learn other ways to express our love and affection apart from having intercourse. Added bonus, there is -- dare I say -- an excitement that builds with anticipating your safe time together that continues to fan our passion for each other. The grace from being open to life and God's will are no better aphrodisiacs if you ask me!



If you enjoyed this post, we highly recommend:

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This contribution is available at <http://canwecana.blogspot.com/2014/11/no-better-aphrodisiac-why-nfp.html>  
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## A Letter from a Methodist Pastor [at St. Joseph's Vanguard]



I received this email from a Methodist pastor. My response is below.

Hello Devin,

I found your email on your blog and thought I would ask you a question. I am a Methodist pastor leaning heavily conservative and Catholic, much thanks to the Catholic writer Peter Kreeft, but also due to my exposure to the Catholic faith.

I have many questions about your book. It seems to me that it deals with many issues rather quickly, or rather shallow. You often come back to the unity of the Faith of the RCC, and the lack of unity in the Protestant circles...this or another version of the same problem that Protestants don't, but should, agree on the Bible.

It is true that the many different "takes" on the Faith among Protestants is a big problem. Connected with this is of course the problem of authority. However, are you aware that many Protestant churches, including my own, have a hierarchy that resembles the RCC and that it claims that this hierarchy is trusted and sent by the Holy Spirit to teach and protect the "Deposit of Faith", or true faith, handed down through the ages?

The only difference is that the RCC claim apostolic succession, but that seems rather vague to me, considering the history of the RCC and the many Popes with many un-Biblical problems. Is the succession a spiritual one or a hands-on one?

However, the biggest problems for me have to do with the extra-Biblical stuff that the current RCC strongly believe in. I have tried to find ancient sources for the whole "Mary" thing and they are scarce. So is the "infallibility" of the Pope, as it was decided in the 1800's. I don't think Luther was a great success but I also fault the RCC for not heeding his obvious service to the Church of pointing out the many

heretical and problematic practices they “indulged” in. Seriously, how can anyone *not* have a problem with selling indulgences?

On a more modern note, I recently visited Rome and the Vatican. It was an amazing trip in many ways but also troublesome. For example, what’s up with the former statue of the Roman god Jupiter in St. Peter’s Basilica that has been upgraded with a halo to symbolize Peter that people walk by and touch/kiss on the foot? How far can you stretch a belief in something before it becomes idolatry?

I do appreciate many of the RCC’s teachings and practices but I still have serious questions about some serious issues...although I am also very open to the problems of the Protestant churches. I find it very hard to “convert” to the RCC when it involves *so much* and *so many* beliefs that are weird and/or un-Biblical.

Respectfully,  
<Name redacted>

My response:

God bless you, and thank you for your message. I am encouraged that you are considering Catholicism from Methodism. Your reservations are understandable, and especially for a Methodist pastor, whose livelihood and possibly retirement rely on your remaining a Methodist, I imagine it must be very difficult to consider leaving Methodism.

I definitely deal with issues quickly in my book. I would argue though that it gets right to the critical differences so that people can judge whether Catholicism or Protestantism is more plausible. I have come to the conclusion that in fact simple arguments can be made for Catholicism over Protestantism that are quite succinct and clear. Now, whether one ultimately decides to become Catholic requires something more than just recognizing the validity of a rational argument. It requires faith, because even if Protestantism is implausible as God’s plan for the Church, it is still possible that Protestantism is the best thing out there and that God is pleased with it.

I am aware of the various hierarchical Protestant denominations that claim some sort of succession or God-ordained leadership. But as you no doubt see, claiming such authority is a very different thing than demonstrating that one (or one’s church) actually has it.

Apostolic succession is not vague though. It is a direct, spiritual and “hands on” transmission of authority that is traced back to Christ ordaining the Apostles themselves. It is a fairly simple matter to determine whether or not one has valid succession from the Apostles in this way, and most Protestant denominations do not even claim that. Rather they claim that, at some point in the past, God rose up new leaders (whether Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, or others) who restored the gospel and that their church follows the gospel. Sure, they have ordained people but where did they get authority to ordain anyone? That’s the question.

With the Methodists, you have essentially an offshoot from the Anglicans, who themselves broke from the Catholic Church. So you have to go back in history and determine whether those schisms were justified, beginning with the Anglican one. Further, you have to inquire into the bishops who left the Catholic Church and acceded to King Henry VIII’s demands—excepting St. John Fischer—and determine whether the subsequent ordinations they performed were valid or not. This all is of great importance, but few people

look much into it.

Regarding “extra-biblical” stuff, coming to such beliefs requires first knowing what books exactly are in the Bible, and how we are to know that with certainty, as well as requiring a belief in sola Scriptura and a rejection of (or big truncation of) sacred Tradition. This is another area where say Methodists claim to accept “Tradition” of some kind but without being connected to Apostolic Succession it is a nebulous and varying thing that is no stronger than human opinion.

Marian and papal dogmas can be found early on the Church, but often then they were in a seed form. It took years for the Church to deeply understand the charisms and gifts God had given to her, to the bishops, to the bishop of Rome, as well as the great gifts that God had bestowed upon the Blessed Virgin.

Luther was a headstrong man, confident in his own opinions and refusing to submit to anyone. It was his way or the highway, a quality shared by Calvin and many other early Protestant leaders. This is why they argued among each other and could never agree. The Church could have done better with him, no doubt, but ultimately he chose his own opinion over the teaching authority of the Church. He rejected the belief that God protected the Church from error in her teachings. Protestants have continued to do the same ever since.

Selling indulgences was a bad idea and was abused. Bad thing, and the Church reformed it. Indulgences still remain today; they are good and always have been good.

The statue you mention is really just St. Peter, not Jupiter. Some have claimed that an old Roman statue of Jupiter was adapted for it, but I don't think that is a majority opinion. Even so, kissing a statue or kneeling before one is just a sign of honor to the person commemorated. It is against Catholic dogma to worship a statue or the saint depicted by it.

Realize you have likely had a lifetime of Protestant filters ingrained into your mind and heart. That is why Catholicism seems foreign in many ways. It is an obstacle, but not an insurmountable one. I would keep an eye on your Methodist denomination. I would say it has already flip-flopped on many non-negotiable doctrines. It appears poised to flip-flop on more, unless the Africans save the day! Whereas the Catholic Church has changed no dogma and stands firm as ever. That is a motive of credibility to believe that God truly is protecting the Catholic Church from error.

God bless,  
Devin



Get Equipped

You can become a Catholic apologist! Sign up to get my free tips, tactics, and accumulated knowledge so that you can defend your faith with grace and understanding.

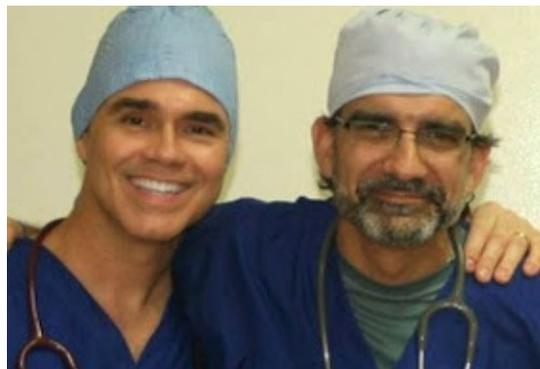
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## Friends in High Places [at Association of Pauline Cooperators]

Every March, as part of a group of health care providers from St. Louis, I travel to Catacamas, Honduras, to offer free medical care to those who need it most. We had already dedicated our gastroenterology team to Blessed Father Timothy Giaccardo, SSP, so we are the “Giaccardo GI Group.” Blessed Timothy was among the first Paulines to make his vows in 1921 and later became Blessed James Alberione’s vicar general, his right-hand man. In March 2014, I was especially grateful for Blessed Timothy’s intercession and saw myself why Father Alberione could entrust him with so much.



Early in the week of our trip, Dr. Mario Castro (a pulmonologist) saw a cachectic\* man who was thought to have lung cancer. He had a cough, weakness, and weight loss that would not respond to antibiotics. A chest X-ray showed a mass in his right lung. Mario needed a bronchoscope, and Jim, our equipment expert, had brought a bronchoscope that worked with our GI equipment just in case such a need would arise. Mario performed a bronchoscopy and saw a foreign body lodged in the right lower lobe of the man’s lung. Unfortunately, after two hours, Mario could not remove it. Usually he would have dozens of instruments to choose from to facilitate removal of a foreign body from the airway, but not this time. He hated to stop, because he knew the man would die if it were not removed. Even if the patient would have had access to a thoracic surgeon to operate, he was too weak and cachectic to survive such a surgery.

Our GI team had brought some equipment, but the equipment I had to remove foreign bodies was for GI scopes, and much too large to fit through the working channel of a bronchoscope (the diameter of the channel is 6mm, so an instrument has to be less than 6mm in diameter to fit through the bronchoscope). The few snares and biopsy forceps that fit through the channel were ineffective in moving the mass.

Jim went through every piece of equipment we had several times. So did the nurse assisting Dr. Castro. I then went through every piece of equipment we had and found nothing suitable.



Jeff Mathews, MD

Giaccardo GI

I returned to the OR to tell Mario. He was visibly upset at the thought of stopping the procedure without helping this man. Mario asked me, “Are you praying?” I was embarrassed to say no, so I simply said, “I will.” I felt so humbled and helpless at that point. As I looked down, I saw “GIACCARDO GI” where we had it stitched above the pocket of my blue scrub shirt. I prayed aloud, “Blessed Father Giaccardo, please help this man. We are entrusting this mission to you, and we need your help so we won’t have to just let this man die. Please help us to help him. Amen.”

I returned to our supply room, and sitting on top of all of our equipment was a 5.5mm diameter Caesar foreign body removal tripod. None of us had seen this in all our searches. I ran it into the OR. Mario slid the tripod through the bronchoscope, grasped the foreign body, and successfully removed a large molar that we later learned the man had lost in his sleep months earlier without knowing what had happened to it.

Our patient began to finally respond to his antibiotics. By the end of our mission week he looked and felt tremendously better. Thanks be to God through the intercession of Blessed Father Timothy Giaccardo.



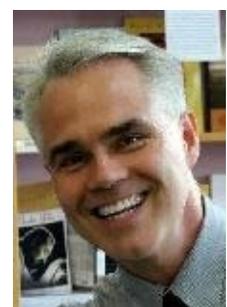
The entire mission team now has a great devotion to Blessed Father Tim, and it looks as though next year our entire mission team, not just the GI Group, will be under his patronage.

The Pauline Family has many Blesseds, Venerables, and Servants of God, including Father Giaccardo. One of the many reasons I am so happy to be a Pauline Cooperator is that these incredible men and women are now part of my family, the Pauline Family, and I know I can call on them in my times of need. If you have a need to entrust to Father Tim's prayers, send me an e-mail ([jeffmathews@yahoo.com](mailto:jeffmathews@yahoo.com)) with your mailing address, and I'll be happy to send you his relic and a prayer card asking for his powerful intercession. (I won't keep or use your address for anything else.)

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\* Emaciated, due to serious illness.

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Jeffrey E. Mathews, MD, has been a Pauline Cooperator since October 11, 2009. He and his wife, Carolyn, live in St. Louis, MO, and consider themselves blessed to have three sons and two daughters, two of whom still live at home. Dr. Mathews has a love for languages. He has studied French and Chinese in the past, and he is currently studying to become more fluent in Spanish.

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This contribution is available at <http://paulinelaity.blogspot.com/2014/11/friends-in-high-places.html>  
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## Brokenness and Whispers [at The Road Home]

I certainly didn't intend that string of close together posts to be the last thing I posted for so long.

There is much struggle in life right now. Some infertility related, some not. Your prayers are appreciated, so much.

I have sat down to write a few times over the last couple of months, but knowing that the whole story can't go here has quieted me. I realize I need to keep writing, and somehow reach out despite that it all can't be public. I have to start somewhere, and this seems as good a place as any.

A big part of infertility for me has been reconciling my objective brokenness, my body does not work correctly - that is a fact - from the subjective experience of that. Of feeling like less than a woman, less than a wife. The fact of brokenness and the feeling of brokenness are two very different, but related things. My head knows that I (and you, my dear sisters) am no less a woman, no less a wife. That my femininity is not tied to my ability to conceive and bear a child. That I am created as a woman and that my body, whether all the parts are fully present and working or not, is a sign of a sanctuary of life, of receptivity, of nurturing whether it ever does any of those things or not. The fact that it does not is evidence of the Fall and the brokenness of our world, not of my brokenness.

Recently, God whispered to me these truths in a way that finally reached my heart, if only for a moment. I, of course, missed His whispers, even His clear words spoken by others, and spent some time arguing with Him before I let myself hear Him. Someday I might learn that He is going to win. Clearly I haven't yet.

So, if you'd permit me to return to this place with a story of brokenness and whispers.

It all starts and connects back to another argument I had with God that I lost. That argument was about receiving Eucharist on the tongue rather than in the hand. (Disclaimer: Both are appropriate ways to receive Eucharist, this is not meant to be a post about the theological reasons for one or the other.) He suggested it. I said no. He pushed. I said no. He pushed. I tried. He won. It's that simple and that complicated. But it was the first time I'd heard Him ask me to do something outside of my comfort zone as it relates to Mass and it was a very distinct argument and experience.

So, back in the spring when I started hearing Him suggest that I cover my head during Mass, I recognized it. It felt very much like the request to receive Eucharist on the tongue. I resisted. Strongly this time. So many reasons why not. And nothing but a feeling, rather an invitation, but I didn't see it that way at the time, for why. Well, much like with Eucharist, He is persistent and so I asked a couple of trusted priest-friends what they thought. Specifically about how to prudently do this when my job requires being in front of people who do not regularly attend Mass and are not going to understand it at all and not wanting to alienate them; needing to be accessible.

Then, when we went to the beach, one of these priest-friends came with us and brought a couple of articles about traditions of women covering their heads in different cultures. I read them, interested and still very much arguing with God about this. The more I read, the more the logical and theological reasons

just didn't add up for me. There was a flaw in each one, an argument used out of context or taken to an extreme. All I had was this pull from God and arguments that were not satisfying myself. (Disclaimer: This is also not a post designed to argue the theological reasons for a woman covering her head. It is not required and does not prove holiness or piety one way or the other.)

Then, in late August/early September, I was at Mass and stayed after to pray and a prayer came and went so quickly I barely registered it. I didn't say it or give physical words to it and I forgot about it. The prayer? "Lord, if you want me to cover my head during Mass, I will, but only if a veil is given to me as a gift."

Less than two weeks later, the priest-friend who went to the beach came to visit us and brought with him a thank you gift for me for inviting him. I'm sure I don't have to tell you what that gift was, but in case I do, yes, it was a veil. Not just any veil, but the veil I had decided that if I were going to wear one would be the one I would wear. As I opened it, that unspoken, barely thought, barely prayed prayer echoed in my heart. I told him the prayer and we both just stood in awe.

And so, two days later I started covering my head during Mass. I've learned to listen to His voice and use prudence to know when is the right time to wear my veil and when I need to not (for example, at my home parish where it would stick out and be a distraction to all around me). I have settled into a comfort with covering my head and haven't given it too much thought since then. The theological and logical reasons still falling short, but very much feeling like this is what I was supposed to do.

Then, I found this article:

[Men, Veils, and the Mystery of Femininity at The Catholic Gentleman](#)

. There is a lot there that doesn't resonate with me - the problem of the theological reasons continues, as the argument that Mary is always shown with her head covered is not 100% accurate, nor are the reasons given. But, there was something different in this article. A whisper while I was reading the parts about femininity and the female body. All things I already knew in my head, but now read in light of an argument that He won about covering my head and feeling in my heart that it was the right thing to be doing.

The whisper?

*You are not broken. You are my beautiful daughter. You are sacred. You are loved. You are not broken.*

And finally, I heard the whisper behind the request from Him to cover my head.

My body is broken.

I feel broken.

*I am not broken*

.

I don't know why He chose covering my head to whisper this to me. I don't know why this is where I heard His voice. Perhaps it is that I am stubborn and that the feeling of brokenness is nearly always with me and so by covering my head regularly at Mass, He can remind me often.

I have heard many times that it is in our woundedness, our brokenness, that we are closest to Christ. It is our wounds and scars that are our familial resemblance to Him, our wounds that will shine with the most glory in heaven. It is through our wounds that He enters, when we let Him. He will enter our brokenness with whispers of Truth. How I pray for the grace to hear and respond to Him.



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This contribution is available at <http://theroadhomewv.blogspot.com/2014/11/brokenness-and-whispers.html>  
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# Why I [Don't] Hate Early Christmas Music [at My Domestic Monastery]

Halloween is over. You know what that means...2 months until Christmas! In retail world that translates in to Christmas decorations for sale, ads for deals on toys and other presents, and Christmas commercials galore.



People tend to fall on two sides of this - either they LOVE all the early Christmas commercials or they hate them for their liturgical inaccuracy. As someone who really loved studying liturgical theology, I completely understand the concerns.

BUT I also completely understand why people love the early Christmas music and commercials. And I think that, with the right mindset, you can find them less grating, too.

I have had two babies, two pregnancies. As anyone who has ever been pregnant will tell you, the final stretch can see to last forever. Personally, once I hit that third trimester, I feel like I'm home free...even if I still have three months to go!!! But you can't help it - anticipating a baby is exciting. Maybe some mothers are more patient than I am, but I can't help but getting geared up for birth and meeting my new baby a good 2-3 months before that fact.

And let's be honest - my preparation looks really different throughout that stretch of time. Right around 30 weeks, I start thinking about what I want to accomplish before the baby is born. 30-37 weeks is the span where I am planning, and trying to finish whatever needs to get done. But once I hit full term, the remaining weeks are spent mentally, spiritually, and emotionally preparing for what is coming.

[You can read more about how I spiritually prepare for labor and delivery here.](#)

As much as possible, I try to finish up any projects before that point, have the house mostly ready, make any purchases I need to make, and wash and fold baby clothes by that 37 week mark. (Because my pregnancies are

[chock full of nausea](#)

, I am ready to be done once I'm full term!!!!)

In a way, that's my approach to Advent and Christmas. Mary was pregnant for a full nine months, and I'm willing to bet that when she reached the beginning of November, she was tackling whatever last minute things needed to be done. Swaddling blankets made? Check!

That's my approach to November, and why I think the secular world isn't as off as one might think. We need this month before Advent begins, to complete our to-do lists. Christmas presents won't make/purchase themselves!

We can take it a step further, though. As Advent begins, we can turn inward with full term Mary, and prepare our hearts and minds for the great feast of the Nativity. Yes, we may have a stray present to buy, but all in all, our disposition should shift in the way a woman's does as she approaches labor. With Mary, we can become quiet and focused, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of her son.

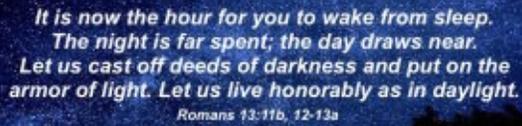
But in the meantime, it's perfectly normal to be getting excited for what is coming. Christmas music reminds us to get done what needs to get done, because we are in the homestretch! If you take advantage of that, and allow joy to begin creeping in, you will be ready for the quiet anticipation of Advent. As with all things - turn what is of the world into something beautiful for God.

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# Advent 2014: Week 1 [at From the Pulpit of my Life]



It is now the hour for you to wake from sleep.  
The night is far spent; the day draws near.  
Let us cast off deeds of darkness and put on the  
armor of light. Let us live honorably as in daylight.  
Romans 13:11b, 12-13a

At this time of year the Northern hemisphere brings us darker days and colder temperatures. We yearn for physical light and warmth. We also long for its spiritual counterparts, the light of God's Word and the warmth of God's love.

At sunset on Saturday the 2015 Church Year began. So, Happy New Year! What will the new Church Year have in store for us? It will be a year of grace and transformation, personally and communally. We will mark the year with holy seasons.

First we celebrate the feast days of the Advent-Christmastide seasons. Sundays are feast days. So are Holy Days, like the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Nativity of the LORD, the Holy Family, and more.

Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington D.C. says, "Feast days are to time what churches are to space. They mark sacred moments, moments of grace. They form us. Keeping the feasts is part of one's commitment to live as a child of God."

This Church year has a new set of Scripture readings, cycle B. The Sunday gospel readings of 2015 will be selections from the evangelist, Saint Mark. Through Mark, the Church starts us off with Jesus' admonition to "Be watchful! Be alert!"

Why? The lyrics of [one of my favorite Advent hymns](#) give the answer.

***People, look East and sing today: Love, the guest, is on the way.***  
***People, look East and sing today: Love, the LORD, is on the way.***

Our Savior is near. We want to welcome him. The focus of the entire Advent season is on preparing to welcome our guest. The traditional spiritual practices are prayer, fasting, and acts of generosity.

Personal prayer is central. The more time spent praying, both privately and communally, the closer to Jesus we grow. The more Christ-like we become, the easier it is to make sacrifices and to be generous. Good Advent-Christmas reading can inspire our prayers and sacrifices. My suggestion: Scott Hahn's [Joy to the World: How Christ's Coming Changed Everything \(and Still Does\)](#). Also the prayer ideas in my post of the 15th, inspired by Msgr. Vincent Rush, can be used not only before Mass, but anytime. Let's pray for one another during this holy season.

# ***Divine Infant of Bethlehem, come and take birth in our hearts.***

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This contribution is available at <http://www.fromthepulpitofmylife.com/2014/11/advent-2014-week-1/>  
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## Why Did It Have to Hurt?



Just last week in my catechism class, the fourth graders and I were discussing Jesus' life. We talked about his parents, his childhood. Maybe he played with his cousin or spent time with his grandparents. Probably Joseph spent time teaching him carpentry and Mary made good meals for him and doctored his injuries.

Then we discussed his ministry and friends and how people eventually wanted him to die. And he made that choice to die, so that he could save all of us from sin and death. I told the kids that I had my notebook so that I could write down all the things they could tell me that Jesus did wrong to earn him a place on the cross. At first, they were puzzled by my question, but then they realized that he did nothing! He did it all for us out of selfless love.

But then one of my very astute fourth graders looked up at the crucifix and asked, "But why did it have to hurt?"

Stunned by the depth of this question and pleased that the kids were really getting it, we talked about all the things that we do to hurt God. All of our sins – our mean thoughts, our selfish actions, our unkind words – put Jesus on that cross. Everything we do against God hurts other people too. Jesus, Our Savior, took all of that hurt and pain from people all over the world into himself – all the sins committed against others and against God throughout time – and offered them all up in a perfect sacrifice for our salvation.

If it had been an easy painless death, the emphasis of how much sin hurts others and damages our relationship with God would be diminished. It would not mean as much. If Jesus had just fallen asleep into death, his conquering of death through the Resurrection would not be as powerful.

In acknowledging the suffering that led to Jesus' death, we can find meaning in the pain and suffering in our own lives. Chronic pain or bouts of discomfort can be offered up and united with the suffering of Christ in atonement for sins. We cannot save others through our sacrifice but we can make our own suffering more meaningful and share in the struggles of Christ out of love.

So the crucifixion had to hurt because we have hurt and continue to hurt others. When we look to the crucifix, however, we can be assured that Christ atoned for all that hurt and saved us from death!

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/our-kids/why-did-it-have-to-hurt/>  
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One December Sunday my granddaughter, Nancy, invited me to Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) Day on Tuesday. The Catholic school Nancy, 9, and her older sister Mary, 12, attend uses this unique event to foster reading. This invitation began a little adventure in discovering how God plans our good works in advance.

As a bookworm, I loved the idea, so I called the school. No openings for Nancy's fourth-grade class, but there was an opening for Mary's seventh-grade class.

I accepted but wondered how Nancy would feel since she was the one who had invited me. Several phone calls later a generous school staff member had arranged my visit to both classes!

On DEAR Day guests, mostly parents and grandparents, read stories they have selected to the children. Except for recess and lunch, this takes up the entire schedule. What's more, the students put aside their uniforms, with the younger ones wearing their pajamas and the older ones their jogging togs. They bring pillows and sleeping bags and lounge on the floor and delight in bedtime stories.

### ***The Books Choose Me***

Instead of choosing the books to read, I let the books choose me. For Nancy's class, Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Christmas in the Big Woods" jumped out at me from an anthology that had been on my bookshelf for decades, ready for this day. For Mary's seventh-grade class, I discovered a beautifully illustrated book about the Spanish Saint Anton. Someone left it at our house a couple of years ago, planted it in a basket of books in the playroom for me to find when I needed it.

When Nancy introduced me to the fourth-grade class, they greeted me as a celebrity. Soon all eyes and ears were attuned to me as those wondering faces shone up at me from the relaxed children. The Little House on the Prairie story kept their attention. I knew Nancy liked the television show, and discovered that many of her friends also watched it. They commented how they enjoyed the Christmas story of a TV family they already knew.

### ***The Seventh Grade Discovers Saint Anton***

Then I was escorted to the seventh grade where a boisterous group was settling down. As I began to read the story of Saint Anton, all became quiet. I showed the illustrations to the class to nurture their belief in the miracles of this Spanish saint. Soon they caught on that this was our dear St. Anthony. Their animated

comments on the events in the story compelled me to leave the book with Mary so they could read it again.

As I walked to my car, utter delight erupted in my soul. This upsurge of joy surprised me a little as I had focused so intently on the children and my task. The pleasure of participating in DEAR Day was surely enough reward. But the rapture in those little faces and the loving acceptance of everyone I encountered at the school brought me such joy that I could not keep it from bubbling up and overflowing. And overflow it did—to everyone I met that day beginning with a school mother (a stranger to me) who was coming across the parking lot. “Have a great time!” I exuded.

### ***Fully Alive!***

I was fully alive – doing exactly what God had created me to do this day. He created me with a love for reading and put me in a family of writers.

Although the concept of DEAR Day was new to me, the pleasure of reading to children was not. In my first job as a library page, I was assigned to Saturday morning Story Hour, and I had lots of practice reading to my younger sister. I loved reading to my children and later my grandchildren.

God planned this DEAR Day for me. He gave me my unique children and grandchildren, put them in this school at this time in my life when I was available to come across town and read. He inspired my little granddaughter to invite me, and he cleared my schedule. Everything clicked! I was living Ephesians 2:10,

For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.

What special event in your life made you feel fully alive?

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# Stone Walls do not Daunt the Immaculate Heart [at Freedom Through Truth]

Recently I was asked by Father Gordon if I would write a guest post for

[These Stone Walls](#)

. Though Father invited me to write about anything I wanted, he did suggest that I write about my Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and what it has meant for me.

It was reading that Father Gordon and Pornchai had

[begun](#)

and then

[completed](#)

the Consecration that initiated my direct interest in it, and that of many others as I have come to understand. Soon after my interest was piqued, a conversation I had with my spiritual director, who at the time was in the midst of his own Consecration, was the final impetus I needed.

Now having read Father Gordon's Thanksgiving

[post](#)

on the tapestry that is being woven and has been woven in the life of Pornchai Maximilian Moontri, we see once again how marvelous our God is, and how grace filled his servant Our Blessed Mother Mary is and how that grace flows to us.

But also I saw something in this story I never saw before, that my life too has been a tapestry and I was reminded of the opening lyrics of Carole King's song of that name:

My life has been a tapestry of rich and royal hue  
An everlasting vision of the ever-changing view.

The vision is everlasting since it belongs to God, but our view of it is ever changing as we grow closer to Him or further away from him. And, of course the rich and royal hue is the wonderful threads of gold and royal blue that our God and His Queen Mary weave into our tapestry.

I was raised in a small Catholic family of 2 parents and 2 children in London Ontario. My parents were very Catholic in the context of the Catholic Church in Canada at the time, regular mass and confession, Catholic schools for the kids, Catholic Women's League for Mom, and Knights of Columbus for Dad.

When I was a child in the 50's Saturday night was bath night. My mother supervised my younger sister and I to ensure we were properly cleaned, and that our clothes for Mass on Sunday were set out for us. On

Sunday we, as a family, attended Holy Mass. It was my mother who urged me to become an altar boy, and also every day in Lent and Advent we would go to Mass together. My father had served in the war, and was physically handicapped, so though he was present, the head of our home, and an important part of our formation, my mother was the heart of our home, and focused on matters of the heart with us.

It is only recently that I have come to understand how important my mother was in leading me to the Holy Eucharist, to Jesus. But, also importantly she gave me a model of the Blessed Virgin in her mothering of my sister and me. Having an earthly mother who loved me has helped me to see that I have a heavenly mother who loves me even more, and who like my earthly mother wants to clean me up, and dress me appropriately in spiritual and mental apparel to come with her to Her Son Jesus, in the Eucharist, and in personal relationship.

We Christians and even Catholic Christians have such a misunderstanding of the role that Our Heavenly Father has given to Mary in helping us on our journey of salvation.

Recently, I became aware of how authority and power were viewed in biblical times. It seems that the second most powerful person in the kingdom was the mother of the King. Queens tended to outlive their husband Kings, and so as mother of the then King, her son, were respected with special authority of their own. Subjects could petition the Mother of the King for help, and if she accepted their petition she would take them to her son the King and plead their case for and with them. It is said that the King seldom disagreed with His Mother in such matters out of his respect and love for her.

When I realized that I wanted to consecrate myself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus I downloaded books about Marian Consecration written by St. Louis de Montfort, seeking to understand in my mind what I believed my heart was instructing me to do. St. Louis' True Devotion to Mary is available for download in a PDF format suitable for computer or an iPad or other electronic device

[here](#)

, and his book The Secret of Mary is available

[here](#)

as a PDF.

Father Gordon, Pornchai and their friends used Fr. Michael Gaitley's book "33 Days to Morning Glory", which is available at your local Catholic bookstore or at Amazon

[here](#)

, After reading and meditating on the above books by St. Louis, I purchased the Father Gaitley book and set out on a path to Consecration. I chose to do this on my own, and quietly, while Father Gordon and friends did it together. Doing it is more important than who you do it with.

In my morning prayer time I set aside a part of it to read the book section for each of the 33 days, and contemplate what it said and meant for me. The model for this is really Our Blessed Mother who took all things in and pondered them in her heart, and I am certain that she provided me with the grace to do this,

and ponder it as well.

St. Louis called Mary the easiest and surest path to Jesus, and I have come to believe that he was correct. Since I had a personal encounter with Jesus many years ago, I wanted to become holy, to live a life worthy of the calling I knew I had received that day.

But I failed miserably, though I had help as you shall soon see. About a year after my personal encounter with Jesus my wife, three daughters and I were travelling up the interstate in Vermont heading to Stowe. The girls, who were 2, 4, and 6 at the time were talking animatedly with their mother and me, as kids do. Suddenly, I noticed it was quiet, and looked around to see that the 4 of them were asleep. As odd as this seemed, what I heard next was disturbing. I heard a voice I knew immediately to be that of St. Michael the Archangel say to me words that are etched in my mind to this day, 23 years later: "Satan has asked for permission to sift you and your family. And, God has granted it."

Then a few moments later, my daughters and wife were carrying on the conversation that had stopped moments before.

That evening we decided to rent a cottage at the foot of Madonna Mountain, which should have been a clue for me, but was not until recently. It was a two bedroom cottage and we put our youngest down in a crib in the living room. As the two older girls and I headed for their bedroom, they stopped in the hall and pointed to one of the beds. They both said that there was a bad man sitting on the bed and refused to enter. I prayed for it to leave and knew that it was the devil making himself known. After he departed the girls went to bed peacefully.

Later as my wife and I were asleep in our room, with two windows open for air, I was aware of the light from the moon filtering into the room. After being asleep for some time, I was awakened to a presence at the foot of the bed. I also noticed that all light that had been present before was sucked out of the room, and that this presence was evil. I knew it was the devil again, and prayed for him to leave. 2 more times that night he appeared at the foot of our bed. And so it began.

What I had missed then, and did not grasp until recently, was that Mary (the Madonna) would have been happy to help me if I had only consecrated myself to her care at that time.

So, though I prayed often, the ensuing years saw the end of our marriage, the loss of our business, and much emotional, and spiritual pain for us and particularly for our children. Our children still bear the effects of all that happened in those years.

But, consecrating myself to Mary has brought about much change already. The tapestry of my life has been altered and is being rewoven with "rich and royal" threads. Slowly and calmly Mary has been breaking down the stone walls of my heart, the sins and tendencies that separate me from her Son, Jesus. These sins/stone walls in my life were very instrumental in how the devil was able to disrupt my focus from my family during our most serious trials. But, now these stones are being replaced with beautiful, but strong threads, and those threads connect me to her Immaculate Heart and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

As Mary has reached into These Stone Walls to touch her sons in the New Hampshire State Prison for Men, so she wants to reach into the stone walls in each of us, cleaning us up, instructing us, and preparing us to stand with her at the foot of the Cross and worship and adore her Son, Jesus. That is what Mary is all about. She is all about Jesus, in the Love of the Father, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, as we prepare to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we can contemplate how she was chosen from the beginning of time to be the Mother of God made man, and so was herself made perfectly clean and free of original sin in her Immaculate Conception. Then we can ponder how Mary wants to teach us to do as she told the servants at the wedding feast at Cana in John 2:5:

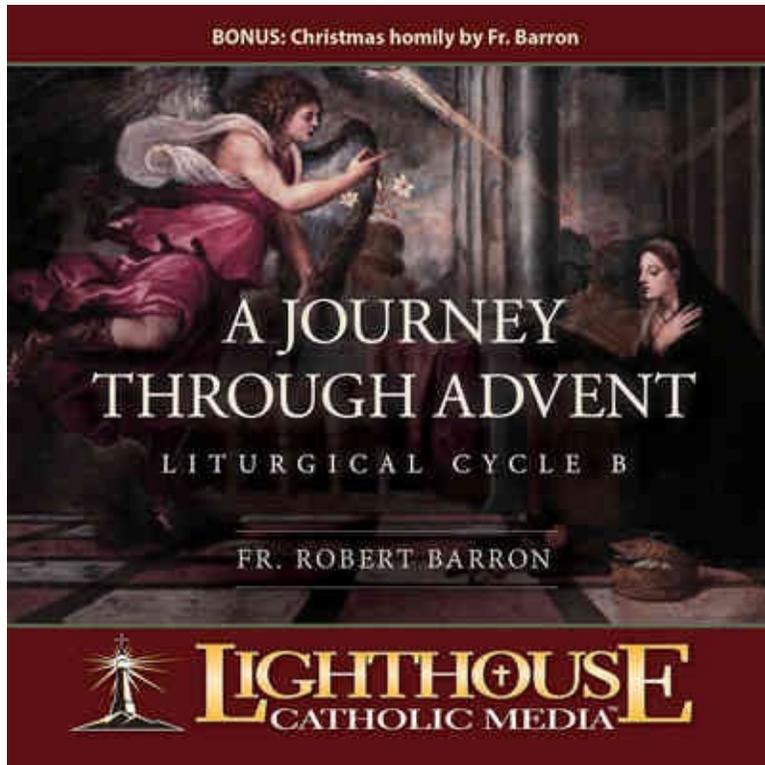
Do whatever He tells you.

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This contribution is available at <http://freethroughtruth.blogspot.ca/2014/12/stone-walls-do-not-daunt-immaculate.html>  
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## Advent [at Washed, Sanctified and Justified]



Prepare the way of the Lord!

Sunday, November 28, is the first day of Advent. So, its time to find those purple and rose candles and begin to celebrate the season before the season.

Purple, rose, straw, wreath, reality check, one more thing, Rejoice!

What does Advent have in common with Lent? The color purple.

Advent is considered a penitential season when we prepare for the coming of our Lord. This is why the priests will wear purple vestments on three of the four Sundays and why three of the four candles on the wreath are purple.

I'm a guy. I've never recognized the color, violet. Nor the color, rose. To me, there's purple and there's pink.

I remember, years ago, I would go to Church during Advent and say, "oh, they've got the purple and pink candles out." And my wife or some other woman would correct me and say, "violet and rose!" But now, its cool to say purple. But apparently, its still wrong to say, pink.

Advent is a penitential season. Therefore, we do our best to do good deeds during Lent, errrr, Advent. So, my wife buys straw and makes a manger.

[We try to fill the manger with straw](#)

before Christmas in order to provide a nice soft bed for the Baby Jesus. When the kids were young, this helped prevent any of them getting chunks of coal in their stockings on Christmas morning.

Along with Advent wreathes, I'd like to plug a good cause,

[Wreathes across America](#)

Advent wreathes are wreathes, which we make ourselves from pine branches intertwined. We get those from our Christmas tree which we trim. Then, we lay it down in a central place and each Sunday, light the appropriate Advent Candle and sing songs and say prayers. This is also when we fill the manger with straw.

Reality check. Folks, our devotions were really hit and miss. We did our best to keep up with them, but with young children, homeschooling, extended family and other demands, we frequently found ourselves doing these things the following Monday, even on occasion, the following Saturday. And of course, forgetting altogether. So, don't feel bad if you can't do them.

The main thing is to prepare your heart for the coming of Christ.

One more thing. During Advent, we looked outward towards those in need. We found charities and other good causes which helped us to forget our selfish wants and identify those that need the things we take for granted.

The Catholic Church provides many avenues for you to exercise your love and charity for your fellow man. Food and clothes drives are frequently organized. As well as prayer vigils and other things.

And finally, Advent is a joyful season. Love is coming into our hearts and is already here.

[Rejoice!](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://washedsanctifiedandjustified.blogspot.com/2014/11/7-qts-on-advent.html>  
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# The Birth of Messiah and Us [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

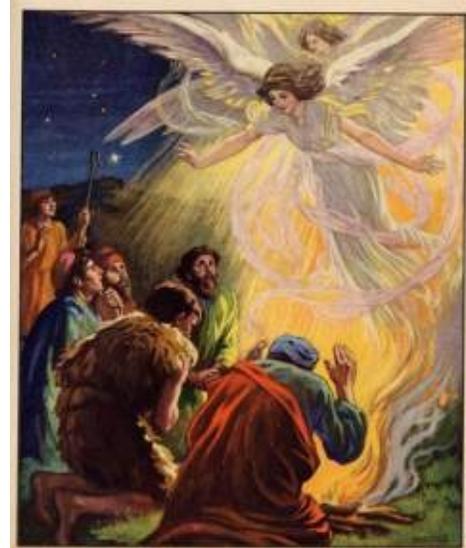
## *The Birth of Messiah and Us*

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*



*While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7)*

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.*



*Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

*But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”*

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,*

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,*

***and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”***

(Luke 2:8-14)

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we approach the celebration of the birth of Messiah, the Christ, Let us prepare our hearts by humbling ourselves in the knowledge of whom it is we are coming to worship and our own unworthiness before Him. For it is only in approaching Him in humility and repentance that we can fully experience His presence in our hearts, for it is to the poor in spirit that He reveals Himself and invites into His Kingdom.

The first persons invited to celebrate the birth of the Messiah were not those from the elite classes of Judea, certainly not its king or its princes or magistrates. Nor was it anyone from the religious class, the Priests and Sanhedrin, or the Pharisees and Sadducees. No, it was a group of poor shepherds tending their sheep who were called as first witnesses to the birth that changed destiny of humanity for all time – the birth of its savior-redeemer, indeed its King! Even the wise men, magi, or Kings from the east were strangers to Israel, but they came days or months later – it was this group of poor humble shepherds that were granted the privilege of being the first to honor the Messiah and be Blessed by His Presence – to be the first to see the Light of the World manifested in human form.

As it was then, so it is today, regarding our ability to come into the presence of the King of the Universe. Those who are considered last by human society, and consequently by themselves, are to be the first and those who are considered first by human society because of their status, whether religious, secular or political, will be last in coming to a renewed spiritual awareness of His Person, not because their status itself prevents them, but because their status puffs up their human pride and self-esteem to the point that it takes them longer open their hearts to be receptive to God’s grace and, thus, transition to the level of humility required to receive the spiritual awareness needed to come into His presence.

Unfortunately, the materialistic manner with which we celebrate the Christmas holidays works against us – for our social customs places the emphasis on the gifts (to each other) rather than on the Giver (of Himself for our salvation). Instead of leading us an awareness of our own unworthiness, our worldly traditions lead us to think more highly of ourselves than we really ought, thus blinding us to our individual need for salvation and diminishing the infinite value of the Father’s Gift of His only son for our redemption.

Note that the Father did not select any one from the esteemed classes of the time, Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds were from the poor and needy class which scripture terms the “Anawim” (Zeph.3:12). “Anawim” is a Hebrew term meaning “poor,” “humble,” or “afflicted.” Some scholars note that, it came to mean those who, because of their condition, could not rely upon their own strength but had to rely completely upon God. These same scholars speculate that, because of their simple faith and piety, most of the early believers in Messiah were from the Anawim, the poor and needy class and composed their own Jewish-Christian canticles of praise for God’s salvation in Jesus.

Listen to what the Old Testament had to say regarding the Anawim:

***1 Ah, soiled, defiled, oppressing city! 2 It has listened to no voice; it has accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the LORD; it has not drawn near to its God. 9 At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve***

**him with one accord. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, my scattered ones, shall bring my offering. 11 On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. 12 For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD— 13 the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. (Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13)**

With this scripture in mind Let us briefly review the list of the participants at the Birth of Messiah:

Joseph, was from a branch of the Davidic lineage (Jeconiah a descendant of Jehoiakim, cf. Jeremiah 36:1-32) that was under a curse, a divine curse that stated that no one from this lineage would succeed to the throne of David and would not prosper.

Mary, although a descendant of David, through Nathan, herself was under a cloud of shame because, to the uninformed, she became pregnant out of wedlock and thus was under a possible judgment of stoning.

Those who tended the sheep were from the lowest classes in Judea – they were usually uneducated, simple people living day-to-day in the most meager of circumstances, not being sure where their next meal would be coming from, relying totally on their trust in God.

Jesus, then, came from this class of disenfranchised people, the son of a carpenter, who offended His hometown residents when He claimed that God had anointed him. Essentially, they said to Him, “Who do you think you are? You are nothing but the son of a carpenter, you don’t have any religious training and we know all your relatives and they are also of no consequence, and here you are claiming to be God’s Messiah” (Luke 4:16-30).

Jesus’ disciples were no better, they were fishermen, tax collectors, political rebels, and people of no reputation. This, then, is the class of people the Lord calls to Himself, the disenfranchised, the despised, the poor in spirit. These are the ones the scriptures refer to as “my Hidden Ones”. These are the ones that the Lord told the despairing Elijah, that “... I have Seven Thousand who have not bowed the Knee to Baal” (Rom. 11:1-6).

This, my brothers and sisters is what we need to remind ourselves when the Lord calls us to discipleship. It is the grace to be formed and united to this class of people that we need to ask of the Lord as we approach Him on this the celebration of His Birth. Here is what the Apostle Paul says indirectly to us regarding our attitude in coming to Christ:

**“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:4-8)**



It is only when we permit the Holy Spirit to purify us of our pride and self-centeredness, and begins to form us into the image of Christ, that we can approach the Babe in the manger of Bethlehem and present Him our gifts. Yes my brothers and sisters, I said “our gifts”, for you see, the gift He wants from us is our very selves, and only when we have stripped our selves of our attachments to this world and become poor in spirit that we are able to open and offer our presents before Him for the Glory of His Name! Baruch ha Shem! Amen and Amen!

Keep in mind what Our Lord Jesus said to His disciples:



***“...Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”*** (Matt. 19:23-29)

I confess to you my brethren that, I, myself am struggling to be one of those who are poor in spirit and thus join myself spiritually to the Anawim, In this struggle I am having trouble in detaching myself from the affairs of this world and giving myself totally to the Lord. I pray daily for the grace to draw closer and closer to Him and to the Anawim of old. Will you not join me, then my brothers and sisters, in this, my pilgrim quest, as I *“... follow the Bright and Morning Star to the dawning of the Day, to the revelation of the Christ as He in His cradle Lay”*? And, As you travel on your way, remember what our

Master had to say..,”

**“If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (John 15:18-21)**

**“... ‘I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes [anawim?]. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him’ ”. (Matt. 11: 25-27)**



As you approach His presence in the hay, give yourself to Him today – become one of the Anawim and let Him reveal Himself to you this Christmas day !

With this said, I take leave for now, that I may go to worship the King on the day of His appearing. May the Lord richly bless you and your loved ones during this wonderful Christmas Season.

Your Brother in Christ ... Bartimeaus

(© B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus' Quiet Place, [2008-2010])

### ***Related Links***

[\*God's Call to Personal Intimacy\*](#)

[\*Sweet Yoke of Love\*](#)

[\*Opening the Door to Jesus and His Love\*](#)

Document Download: “ [\*Awakening to the Love of the Father\*”\(v.6a,8×11\)](#)

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## Saint Charles the Reformer [at Father Souza's Blog]



Saint Charles Borromeo's remains are interred in the crypt beneath the Milan Cathedral.

Today the Church celebrates the memorial of a great man, a reformer: **Saint Charles Borromeo**, cardinal archbishop of Milan. St Charles lived in a time which is not too unlike our own. There were political disputes between the Church and secular authorities and the Church was in a period of decline.

We could call St Charles the unlikely reformer because at age 21 he was named a cardinal by Pope Pius IV, who happened to be his uncle. Aside from the charge of nepotism, he was from a family of great wealth and power. These external trappings, however, did not entrap his heart. St Charles freely gave that to the Lord and his wealth to the poor.

Saint Charles the Reformer, it sounds nice though talk of reform often makes people nervous. With regards to the reform of the Church there are two groups who are hardest to budge: priests and religious. Think about it: they, by virtue of their consecration, should be attached to the things of heaven, not clinging to money, luxury, or leisure. As the world thinks, those ordained or consecrated have the most to lose by Church reform, but divine thinking shows us that their gains would be eternal! Make no mistake, God wants *all* to be reformed into living a life more in conformity with the Gospel. Those in the lay state have the particular task of sanctifying their families, communities, and workplaces. When we are called to reform we can respond with resentment, calumny, betrayal *or* conversion.

Reforming oneself as well as reforming others is not easy work. On at least two occasions St Charles was fired upon by those who resisted his reforms. That St Charles suffered as reformer should serve as a reminder for us: love—not hatred, gossip or slander—should be our response to those who call us to follow Christ ever closer, especially if they have the wisdom to call us to let go of our earthy attachments. When we become coworkers in reforming ourselves and others, we should not be surprised when we have to suffer.

How does reforming happen? By emptying ourselves as Christ and St Charles emptied themselves (cf.

Philippians 2:7). We are not truly free until we have emptied ourselves of ourselves, then we can say honestly: “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). With the intercession of Saint Charles Borromeo may we heed the command of the man who gave a great dinner: “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame!” (Luke 14:21).

**Saint Charles Borromeo, pray for us!**

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This contribution is available at <http://fathersouza.com/2014/11/04/saint-charles-the-reformer/>  
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# The Right Food [at Suffering With Joy]

November 12, 2014



Still life with Fruits, Nuts, and Cheese, 1613, Floris Claesz van Dijck, 1575 – 1651, Oil on panel, 49 x 77 cm, Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem

As Thanksgiving and the Christmas holidays approach, a lot of people start obsessing over weight gain. Many of us overindulge on goodies during this time, while those attending Weight Watcher meetings discuss ways of controlling eating behaviors during this season. I own up to the fact that having been very hungry, though not starving, during some years of my childhood, I have something of an obsession with food as do many of those who attend the WW meetings. I actually fear being hungry.

While WW has a great psychology to its eating program, being a secular organization it lacks something indispensable to me. That's God. We can't overcome our obsessions without the grace of God, and learning to discipline ourselves in sensible ways is possible only by His grace. I've found that instead of focusing on a weight loss goal as the only marker of success, which is something WW cautions against, what's more helpful is to bring in the spiritual perspective along with the other types of goals WW encourages.

Beyond focusing on the body as the temple of the Holy Ghost and behaving in ways that support good health within the limitations we may each have such as my fibromyalgia, it's helpful to return to another basic truth. God is the source of all our food and He gives it to us to sustain ourselves to do His will. Now I can approach the table with the question, am I ready to eat for the greater honor and glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31) and to be better able to do His will?

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215) adds another facet to the crystal of self-discipline in the area of food, one that helps us when in times of feasting.

We are not, then, to abstain wholly from various kinds of food, **but only are not to be taken up about them.** We are to partake of what is set before us, as becomes a Christian, out of respect to him who has invited us, by a harmless and moderate participation in the social meeting; **regarding the sumptuousness of what is put on the table as a matter of indifference**, despising the dainties, as after a little destined to perish.

**“Let him who eats, not despise him who eats not; and let him who eats not, not judge him who**

**eats**”(Romans 14:3). And a little way on he explains the reason of the command, when he says, “He that eats, eats to the Lord, and gives God thanks; and he that eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks” (Romans 14:6).

So the right food is thanksgiving. ([Instructor 2.1](#))

Perhaps meditating on the traditional Catholic table blessing, “Bless us O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive through Thy bounty through Christ our Lord. Amen” can help us keep a right perspective in the upcoming days and whenever we enjoy celebrations.

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

R. Now and forever!

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

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## Advent Re-arranging [at bukas palad]



Year A / 2nd Week of Advent / Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 11.1-10 / Psalm 72 (R/v cf 7) / Romans 15.4-9 / Matthew 3.1-12

Growing up, I would spend every December with my family cleaning up our house for Christmas. My siblings and I jokingly called it the Big Makeover because when all the cleaning was done, things around the house would have been rearranged.

The living room and dining room would have new arrangements and things in the kitchen would be stored in new places. And decorating for Christmas meant finding a new place each year to put up the Christmas tree and arranging anew the Christmas ornaments and Christmas cards for display. Perhaps, you have a similar experience this year of making changes and re-arranging your house for the coming Christmas.

Changing and re-arranging.

It's never easy to do this with things around us and in physical settings we inhabit. What more when it comes to changing and re-arranging our interior, spiritual life.

Yet, this is exactly the call John the Baptist makes in our gospel reading to you and me this morning.

“Repent; prepare your way for the Lord’s coming; make straight our paths for him who is coming!”

He is challenging us to examine the quality of our Christian faith and life.

At Advent time, John the Baptist’s call can challenge us who are making Advent preparations to pause and take stock of our progress.

And, his call should challenge those of us who might want to let Advent pass by this year not to do so.

Instead, this can be a graced time to begin our lives anew. Begin by giving our broken selves back to God through Jesus who took on our broken human nature to save us into new life.

We all know John the Baptist’s call to repent is a good one. We know the spiritual worth of rejecting our sinful ways and enlivening our lukewarm Christian life. We do this is to live in more Christ-like ways.

Perhaps, some of us will even admit that it is timely to repent after honestly examining our lives as the year ends. Indeed, who amongst us here does not want to change for the better and to be in friendship

with God?

But isn't it always easier to listen and to say, "Yes, I hear the good message of John the Baptist"? What is more difficult I will admit is to act on it. I know that I struggle whenever I hear the call to repentance. May be, you do too.

It is not because we do not know our sins or do not want to be forgiven. On the contrary, we can and we do name our sins and admit our regret and repentance for them and come to the Lord asking for his forgiveness. Some of us do this by coming to confession faithfully and regularly.

What I think we all really struggle with is letting God enter completely into our hearts to fashion it anew. John the Baptist is challenging you and me to let go and let God do this.

Isn't easy: we yearn to make of our lives what God created us for: to be holy. But we also find ourselves wanting those attractions and distractions that keep us away from wholeheartedly loving God and one another.

One way you and I keep God standing at the doorway into our hearts is when we make such excuses as these: -- Well, I keep struggling with the same sin, even after confession. God knows I try. -- I've committed no mortal sins, just lots of small, venial ones. Surely, God who loves me will forgive me. -- I'm a good Christian: I pray; I give to the poor; I observe the commandments. God knows I'm not a big-time sinner. -- And may be even, What's the point? God will save us all, right?

I believe God knows our sins and our holy struggles to be less sinful and more faithful. And because God loves us as we are, God will forgive us and God will save us. God will do this because God is tender of heart for us and merciful for our salvation and happiness.

This is how precious we are to God that God comes down to be one like us and for us. This is what we celebrate Jesus for at Christmas with joy, as we also do with gratitude for what Jesus' humanity promises us --the divine likeness we are saved for.

But let me insist that John the Baptist's challenge is worth our serious consideration for two reasons.

First, it asks us, how serious are we about being in friendship with God? God who intentionally and always reaches out first to be in friendship with us. Jesus is God's pledge that he is. What is ours?

Second, how open are you and I to changing and re-arranging our lives this Advent for Jesus? Jesus is committed to re-arranging our lives for the better; with him our world will turn upside down, things will be reversed and God's ways will be restored. In our first reading, Isaiah paints a picture of what this will look like: deserts will come alive with fragrant blossoms; lambs will eat with wolves; young calves and lions will stroll together; cows and bears will share friendship; and babies will play unharmed with cobras. Indeed, this is the beauty and goodness of God's reign Jesus will usher in with his coming.

John the Baptist's challenge is to help us to see this promise. We cannot see this, nor can we begin to understand this newness of living in God's ways, unless we change and re-arrange the interior, spiritual space of our lives. It is with eyes of faith, of seeing with our converted hearts, and not with physical sight, that we can gaze on Jesus, know the good news he proclaims and share in the good work he is doing for us all.

This Advent Sunday, you and I have come here again, as we have faithfully done each Sunday past. I believe this is our pledge to God that we are serious about wanting to be in friendship with him. We come because we want to. The good news is that God enables us to want to come. The even better good news is that God keeps reaching out, through challenges like John the Baptist's, to keep inviting us back again and again into our salvation.

Today, he encourages us to let Jesus enter into our hearts so that he can prepare us to live in the goodness of his upside down world. This world Jesus brings about and that we experience as Christmas blessedness amidst of the pains and sufferings in our world.

As we continue decorating our homes for Christmas, let us pray that we will keep ourselves open to God

who wants to change and re-arrange our inner, spiritual homes. Then, as God does this, let us savour how God, drawing upon his delight with our rearranged interiors, will use you and me, and all of us, to decorate the one space God wishes to come and dwell in with us, this space, our world, God's house.

*Preached at Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta Parish, Dorchester, Boston* photo: window sill by adsj, dover, massachusetts, january, 2011.

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This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2013/12/homily-advent-re-arranging.html>  
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## Moments of Clarity [at Theologyisaverb]

*1// This week has been a reminder of the glimpses God gives us of his mercy, love and forgiveness.*

Those moments whereby we are challenged to move, grow, and reach out to one another in love. The ready invitation to leave our comfort zone and listen, hold, and share our hearts and journeys with others.



*2// My 7 Quick Takes week began..*

by assisting with a women's retreat on Forgiveness hosted by co-blogger and supervisor Allison Gingras. This as you can see, easily prompted the first of these reflective moments! "I am thankful for the opportunity to forgive and to be forgiven, one teaches me mercy, the other humility". (A. Gingras) What a grace it is to embrace this in our lives! While our hearts must be led by mercy, we need to resist the temptation to see ourselves as blameless without need of forgiveness. How many times have I caused injury, or has someone needed to forgive me recently? I may never know the fullness of this answer, but for those times, Father forgive me.

*3// "Forgiveness requires letting go of being right, of justice, evening scores and of an apology." (Fr. Scott Hurd)*



*Forgiveness requires  
letting go of being  
right..* *Reconciled to You*

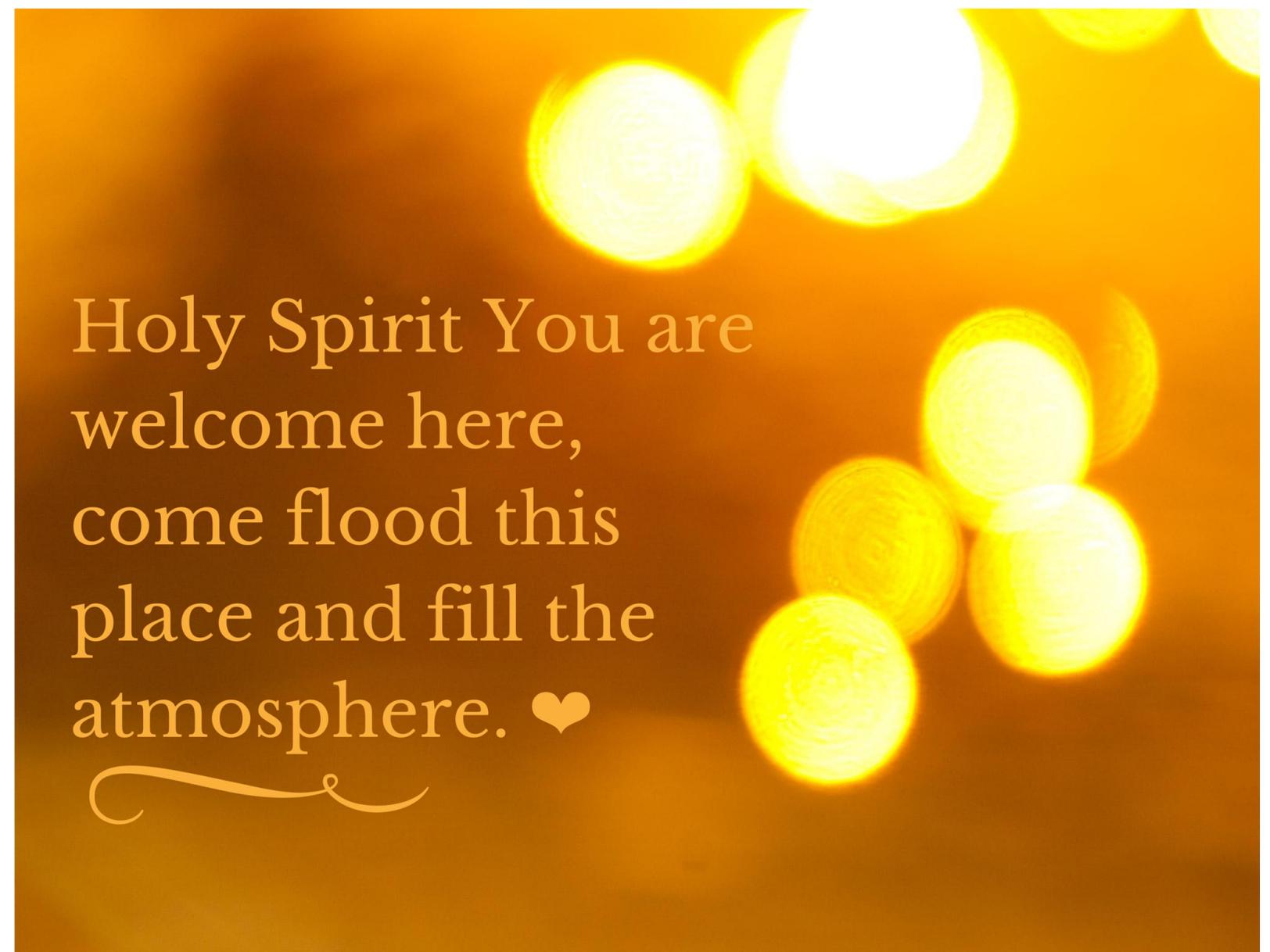
Oh, the thorny brambles we find ourselves in when led by righteousness and the need for validation! Instantly, we begin seeking those conversations and relationships whereby we are the hero and someone else made the villain. In doing so, we cling to the pain and our pride takes hold. Increasingly we find ourselves entangled in its grip. Lord help me to cling to you, the vine rather than the bramble.

4//*“Forgiveness is not reconciling, as it takes one person not two”.*



Seeking forgiveness, is about finding peace and while we might wish for reconciliation- that is not guaranteed. Sometimes all that we can offer and hope for is forgiveness. Letting go of the outcome frees us to then move forward in our faith lives to grow in acceptance and give the controls to God. Lord I relinquish all authority to you, may my desire for peace be enough. Lead me because I can't do this alone."

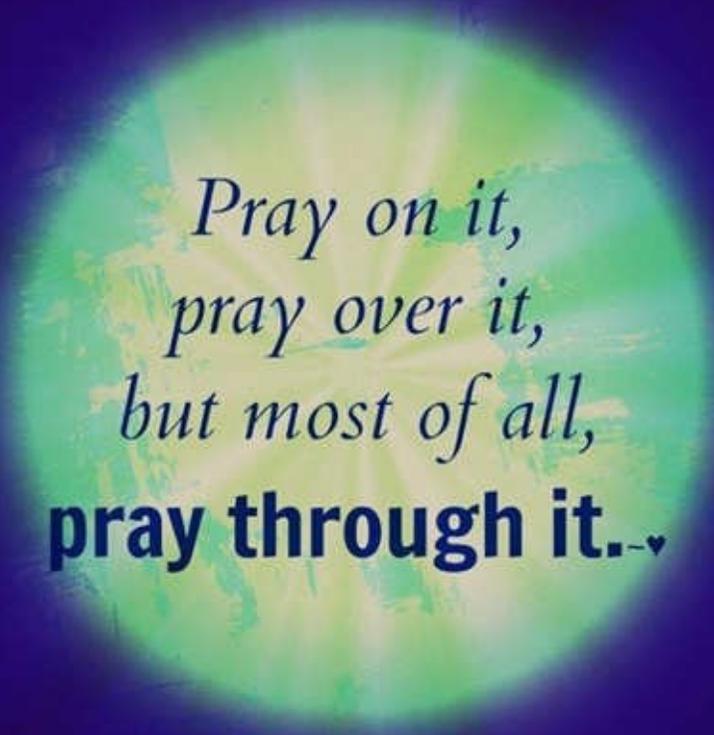
*5// And my own special sound bite from the retreat, "The Holy Spirit rocks!"*



Holy Spirit You are  
welcome here,  
come flood this  
place and fill the  
atmosphere. ♥



(If ever there was any doubt.) This retreat had an incredible turnout and the feedback extremely positive. The telling moment for me came in tending to the reconciliation line which was continuous and lasted over 2 hours! Within this there were prayerful conversations and moments of conversion of heart. So beautiful! Thank you Father for the gift of your Spirit which seeks to guide, transform and heal our hearts. I just want to praise you!



*Pray on it,  
pray over it,  
but most of all,  
**pray through it.**-v*

*6// On a more personal note,*

however, I received word a few days ago that someone that I am quite close to was diagnosed with inoperable throat cancer. As he comes to terms with the diagnosis and the given chances for survival, he is seeking greater reconciliation and connection in his life. He has been through so many trials in his life, including a stroke and several bouts of double pneumonia. Yet, I can feel that this is quite different, and he is preparing to die. In speaking with him today, he asked if I would call him to chat for a little bit each week. “Yes, of course!”. What a gift you have given me Father in this time with him. Please, I pray for your voice and heart to guide me. If I can be of any help, I humbly offer my all.

*7// So while clarity at times reveals deep hurt, difficulties, or challenges, I have found that God is there also- reaching out with open arms to embrace.*

Why wait for a doctor’s call, or a life crisis to seek forgiveness and peace in our lives? Why hold on to pain when we could take hold of Christ’s hand? Jesus you are the voice of truth. You see us, know us, forgive us and love us in spite of all that we do and fail to do. While I can never repay this gift, I will spend a lifetime trying.

Peace in Christ,



*Elizabeth*

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This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2014/11/07/7-quick-takes-moments-of-clarity/>  
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# Tiny Child [at Grace to Paint]

by Maresa Lilley, SND on December 1, 2014 · [0 comments](#)

in [Paintings](#)



8×8” oil on primed artist board; use “comment” below to inquire.

With this past Sunday, our Advent Season has begun. This is the time we need to try to renew our awe and wonder at how our mighty God comes to us, fragile, tiny, completely dependent like every other human being. How far down does heaven bend to speak our language and woo our hearts for our true identity as favored children of God? Teach us your wisdom, O Saving God.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2014/12/01/tiny-child/>  
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## To Be Vulnerable [at A Still Small Voice]

*Look who's back! I apologize for my lack of commitment towards this. I hope to do better. Stay with me. A major reason why it has been awhile is what I want to write about. Yes, time is slipping my grasp but there is always time to make time; therefore, it is only an excuse that I find pathetic and ever the more tempting.*

What does it mean, really, to be vulnerable?

Or rather, what does it mean to

*not*

be vulnerable?

One of the definitions that Merriam-Webster provides for vulnerability is to be open to attack, harm, or damage.

*Extremely enticing, I know.*

When contemplating this definition, I asked - in what sort of situation could one be in that they would be open to attack, harm, and/or damage? "To accept to be cut to pieces?" How is it that one has enough strength and courage, with ever the more humility, to be able to even accept this - to surrender?

Faithfully, the answer in the question presents itself . . .

Isn't it due to the cause of abandoning one's self for something they believe to be worth more than worldly pleasures and comforts, something worth more than that of self, for something that is ever larger?

This is what I so abundantly lack. In the time I'm most vulnerable I have discovered that I'm continuously asking questions. I would even annoy myself with all of my questions. However, shortly after I started college I ceased asking questions - to God, myself and to others. I've accepted commonplaceness and the more so I accepted it, the more so I despised it. Through this I have accomplished such things as greater selfishness and pride.

And I am aware (in which I thank God for.)

It is in the inward looking of self that I am able to recognize my faults and question them. It is in the inward looking of self that expresses humility, my nothingness. It is also in the inward looking of self, which brings forth the above stated, that I'm able to bring myself in vulnerability, more so through vulnerability, and acknowledge my Jesus.

I believe that there is a sense of fear, maybe even denial, when it comes to recognizing. The reason being is that once something is recognized, something is acknowledged, it becomes ever the more real.

To first recognize vulnerability can be daunting, but then to accept to be vulnerable to Vulnerability is a few steps steeper than the former.

To go further, the Latin word for vulnerable is

*vulnerabilis*

, which stems from

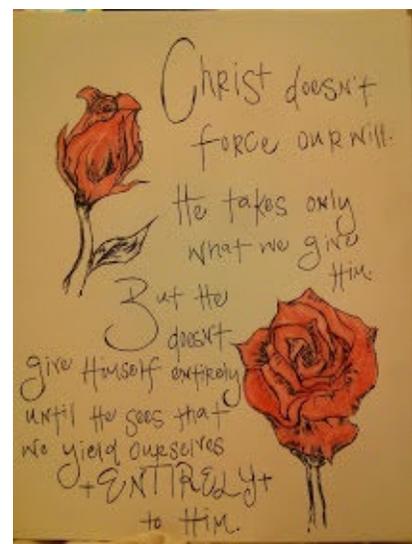
*vulnerare*

(to wound).

To wound? Why does Jesus want us to be wounded?

However, aren't we already wounded people? Don't we come from a wounded nature?

Could one possibly think that Jesus is calling us to vulnerable with Him, not so that He can wound us, but that He can possibly enter into our fresh wounds? To have compassion for us, and in the state of vulnerability, letting Him love us and give worth to the pain that comes with purification? To venerate our scars, scars that compare very little, but nonetheless compare, to the scars of the God-man who was crucified and helps carry the cross we bear to the daily crucifixions that are life giving?



Roses drawn by the Jew (Julie). I don't have artistic abilities.

It is in this vulnerability that I am able to surrender to the actuality of an

*agape*

love. It was in vulnerability that the prodigal son was going to his father and through the same vulnerability it was his father longing ever the more for him, running towards him and embracing him.

How relevant this is. Every time I take a step towards Jesus it seems as if he takes 3 towards me. He's the master pursuer, gentle but yet always desiring you more than you could desire Him.

It is here that I run -

*but away*

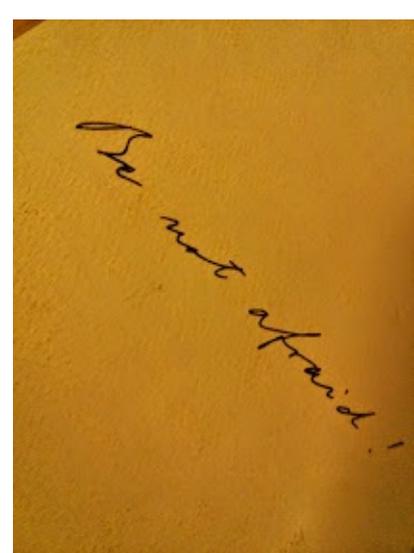
Lack of vulnerability leads to a desired distance to all who are coming close. Over the past few weeks I've noticed the extent to which this is coming true for myself. It is as if someone would draw near and I would steer away from him or her, draw near to Jesus all the while avoiding getting any closer to Him.

However, in any relationship there should be a holy vulnerability. Be it between parents, spouses, friends, enemies, children, the Trinity and even self. Father Nnamdi gets to the point when he stated that:

“We must be willing and ready to take risks and to place ourselves in situations of vulnerability before others to fulfill the will of God and to meet the needs of others. In Jesus Christ, God took the greatest risk in meeting our need for a Savior by assuming our human nature and becoming one like us in the womb of the Virgin Mary.”

As Catholics we are called to live a life of holy vulnerability. Now take this in an appropriate way. What I mean is that to live a life of dedication, evangelization and communion there has to be a reasonable amount in which you humbly expose yourself to others and completely surrender yourself to God. There will certainly be situations that the Holy Spirit will lead us to that we would not particularly desire to do, but simply being open to vulnerability is one of the first steps.

Anytime you are open there will always be a greater risk for harm but there will be a certainty for virtue, whether you are hurt or whether you are healing.



To practice what is being addressed: I ask that you would pray for me, that I may desire and come to love the state in which holy vulnerability may embrace me.

*Completely giving are You, reluctantly receiving am I, O Lord.*

Zoë

“He saw him, he had compassion,

and went to him and

Luke 10:33-34

(Talking about the man who was beaten and left for dead on the side of the road - vulnerable.)

The reason why I said that this is pertinent to why I haven't written in so long is because usually my blogs

come from questions, either from others or myself. So it was hard for me to come up with something to write about while dealing with such aridity. I hope to write again soon! :)

I'm going to be vulnerable and share that I've had an infatuation with Dan Smith for a good year and a half now and this song seems pretty relevant.

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This contribution is available at <http://zoejumonville.blogspot.com/2014/11/to-be-vulnerable.html>  
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## Satan hates community [at This Felicitous Life]

Thoughts on waging spiritual warfare with a pizza box and a chicken.

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It happened again ~~today~~ last week. I committed to bringing a meal to another family and all hell broke loose.

The mom to whom I was bringing a meal mentioned that a stomach bug was going around the community. She really hoped they didn't catch it, because her kids were just getting over a different bug and that had made them seriously ill for a week.

I stood at the kitchen counter, hand in midair to measure out Dijon mustard for a [favorite easy, delicious chicken dish](#). It was mid-afternoon, and Girl 1 had a friend visiting (from a different family). If the girls amused themselves well enough, I figured I might even be able to make brownies once I got the chicken in the oven. Then Girl 1's visiting playmate rushed into the kitchen, hand cupped to her mouth.

She had just thrown up.

I cleaned up thoroughly, but I couldn't shake the fear that a few of the stomach bug viruses might cling to the pans I planned to bring. Abandoning my cooking, I went to the grocery store and picked up a rotisserie chicken and some sides.

It occurred to me: so often when I try to make a meal for someone, everything goes wrong. There was that time I set off [a fire in the oven and the fire extinguisher coated the kitchen in powdery chemicals](#). I clearly couldn't cook that night, so I had pizza delivered to the family instead.

Then on a recent Monday morning, I tried making a meal for another family and Murphy came to visit. [Everything that could go wrong did](#). I brought the family a rotisserie chicken.

And now today. And so many other minor meal-making mishaps I can't recall now.

Am I crazy, or is Satan out to get me? More specifically, is he out to prevent us from doing works of mercy?

I attended a CCD program for eight years that used insipid curricula. The only thing I learned from CCD was that we were supposed to be a community and do nice things for each other. In my mind I demoted these concepts as not really important, at least not as important as the difficult, divisive issues that the CCD books skirted around: sin, the Real Presence, sexual morality, and the like.

But what if it really *is* important that we build community and practice acts of service? I'm beginning to think Satan thinks it's important. I belong to an [exceptional, dynamic parish community](#), and sometimes it seems really clear that the devil is trying to tear it down.

It's possible, even probable, that I'm blowing my bad luck way out of proportion. But I don't care. My little theory motivates me to keep bringing meals, even if they rarely turn out the way I want them to. And

I like to imagine myself fighting spiritual warfare with a pizza box for a shield in my left hand, brandishing a rotisserie drumstick in my right.

En garde!



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This contribution is available at <http://thisfelicitouslife.wordpress.com/2014/11/25/satan-hates-community/>  
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# Even Though It's December and We are no longer thinking about those who have passed before us or about Thanksgiving.... [at His UnEnding Love]



We need to continue to pray for the Souls in Purgatory and to be a people of gratitude to God.

**"For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me."**

**Matthew 26:11**

Whether the poor are the poor of this world or the "poor souls" of the next world,

THEY

WILL

ALWAYS

BE

WITH

US,

ALWAYS.

Pray for the Souls in Purgatory daily.

This is an excellent article on how these souls whom we seek to help with our prayers will help us.

There are many testimonies.

CLICK

Being a People of Gratitude To God.

Sacred Scripture tells us:

**"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."**

**1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18**

**"I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.**

**My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad.**

**O magnify the Lord with me,  
and let us exalt his name together."**

**Psalm 34: 1-4**

**"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving."**

**Colossians 4:2**

**Prayer and Thanksgiving!**

**Fasting and Acts of Charity.**

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This contribution is available at <http://hisunendinglov.blogspot.com/2014/12/even-though-its-december-and-we-are-no.html>

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# The 50th Anniversary of *Lumen Gentium*

Today, November 21, 2014, we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. Along with this major constitution, we also celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches) and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism).

This document like all the documents from the Second Vatican Council, take their name from the first words of the document itself. The first two words – *Lumen Gentium* – the light of the nations is in reference to Jesus Christ who is the light to the nations. In the world, it is the Church that reflects the light of the Christ. *Lumen Gentium* is Christ and that is whom the Church must proclaim to all nations.

Like the document that accompanied *Lumen Gentium* (*De Ecclesia* – name during the council), *Gaudium et Spes*, or Schema 13 (name during the council) is a document with a more weighted subject matter – the permanent position of the Church. Where *Gaudium et Spes* provides the outward understanding of the Church – *the Church is a mission*, *Lumen Gentium* focuses on Holy Mother Church and the question, what does she say about herself? The role of *Lumen Gentium* is to answer the question by listening to the Holy Spirit in our times. This document focuses on the internal understanding of the Church. As a divine institution instituted by Jesus Christ himself, and given to St. Peter, the Church calls out to the world.

The document is composed of eight chapters: 1. The Mystery of the Church; 2. The People of God; 3. The Church is Hierarchical; 4. The Laity; 5. The Call to Holiness; 6. Religious; 7. The Pilgrim Church, and 8. Our Lady.

To conclude today's blog post, I give you eight quotes for the eight chapters from the document. There are many great gems of theological insight in *Lumen Gentium*, but these are the ones that have recently stood out for me -

1. “Christ is the light of humanity; and it is, accordingly, the heart-felt desire of this sacred council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk. 16:15)... Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men – she here proposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the whole world, to set forth, as clearly as possible, and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission” (#1).

2. “The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element” (#8).

# DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH

*Lumen Gentium*

SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED  
BY HIS HOLINESS, POPE PAUL VI  
ON NOVEMBER 21, 1964



DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II

3. “Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity” (#10).

4. “From the marriage of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, those are made children of God so that the People of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries. In what might be regarded as the *domestic Church* [italics mine], the parents, by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They must foster the vocation which is proper to each child, and this with special care if it be to religion” (#11).

5. “The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in their role as teachers and pastors, and in it the apostolic college is perpetuated. Together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him, they have supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff...It is clear, however, that the office of binding and loosing which was given to St. Peter (Mt. 16:19), was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head (Mt. 18:18; 28:16-20)” (#22).

6. “They [the laity] live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties” (#31).

7. “But if charity is to grow and fructify in the soul like a good seed, each of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and carry out his will with deeds, with the help of his grace; he must frequently partake of the sacraments, chiefly the Eucharist, and take part in the liturgy; he must constantly apply himself to prayer, self-denial, active brotherly service and the practice of all virtues...the true disciple of Christ is marked by both love of God and of his neighbor” (#42).

8. “Christ lifted up from the earth, has drawn all men to himself (cf. Jn. 12:32). Rising from the dead (cf.

Rom. 6:9) he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples and through him set up his Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father he is continually active in the world in order to lead men to the Church and, through it, join them more closely to himself; and by nourishing them with his own Body and Blood, make them partakers of his glorious life” (#48).

For an explanation of Chapter 8 – Our Lady, please read “Mondays with Mary” – The Blessed Virgin Mary in *Lumen Gentium*, [Part I](#), [Part II](#), and Part III (next Monday).

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This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2014/11/21/the-50th-anniversary-of-lumen-gentium/>  
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## Let's Help Religious Book and Gift Stores [at Children's Rosary]

Do you know where your closest religious book and gift shop is located? May I humbly ask you to find out. The future of these little shops depends on it. You might wonder why it matters if these little brick and mortar shops exist when there is the internet with inexpensive prices and merchandise that comes right to your door... fair question. If one knows exactly what they are looking for, the internet may be the most efficient and possibly most inexpensive way to get what you want. But what if the book or picture that would truly touch your heart you have not seen yet? What if while you were walking through one of these shops you stumble on something completely different from what you were looking for and in that moment the Holy Spirit is able to guide you in a new direction. Maybe on that turn around the corner you see just the right thing for your child that they absolutely would love. A gift that doesn't involve a battery but stirs their soul and leads them on the road to sanctity. What if the person who happens on this store never set out to look for a religious gift at all and in looking through the store finds a spiritual awakening after years away from religion. This is leaving out the most important piece that exists in a religious store that is completely absent on the internet. There is a *person* there.



Most of these shops are run by a family or a few individuals. Not only do they want to help and answer questions there whole lives have been sacrificed and put on the line to be right there at just that special moment to help you. They have prayed and given up material dreams to help others on their spiritual journey. You may not realize that such sacrifices have been made. Several years ago I knew very little about these stores or the people behind them. However, over the past two years my children and I have attended the Catholic Marketing Network Trade show. This past year I was a presenter at the Educational Day. I had the blessing to meet these store owners. They were deeply prayerful people. Folks that would give their shirt off their back for you. They were praying like crazy and drawing on their deep faith that help would come as times have been getting very difficult for them with big box stores, the internet and general lack of interest in religious items. As the children and I sat at our informational booth for the Children's Rosary. We were able to meet individual owners. My minds eye goes back to a young married couple just opening a shop. Two best friends in their twenties who had opened a store and were

full of excitement. A wonderful women who lectured at our daily Mass each day with a southern drawl. An elegant women named Olga with a northern European accent who so wanted to help spread the Children's Rosary. So many sweet people. The last is an older man with a weathered face from Maine. He loved the Children's Rosary materials but sadly his shop had just closed. We were too late to help him.

Yes many of these stores are closing. I was told by a new store owner in Connecticut who just opened in Derby CT that she has seen 20 stores close in this state. She worries that she will be able to stay open as well. It is a sad situation for sure.

Okay so there is a value to these stores but you may wonder what can *you* do. What will one purchase do to save all the little shops hanging on across the United States and beyond? This is where I would humbly ask you to look at the situation as a child would. A child sees someone in need and doesn't worry that their help is small, they simply want to help. The rest is for people who know more to worry about. It is in the smallest little ways that a tide of change can come... an arm of help extended to these little stores. As we know, the folks who began these little stores did not do this to make money but to touch hearts. When they see someone in their store finding a treasure that touches their heart this goes a long way to sustaining them both financially but also spiritually.



Each of us can surely help. Members of the Children's Rosary are in a perfect position to help these stores. While the internet and big box stores are the final nail in the coffin so to speak the real problem is that fewer and fewer people are praying. When folks aren't praying what need do they have for Rosaries and other spiritual items that support growth in ones prayer life. When prayer is gone quickly the glamour of the world distracts us. However, when prayer comes back a thirst also returns to read and learn. A hunger to understand Scripture and to read it. An interest in saints and the rich faith we share. This blossoming is so beautifully evident with children. We have seen this thirst for all things that draw our heart to higher places in the little ones that come to the Children's Rosary. The more time they spend with Our Lady and Our Lord in prayer the more They lead them to things that will continue to draw their hearts towards heaven. Very quickly the children want little statues of Jesus and Mary, a special Rosary, a little scapular or miraculous medal. They love books on saints and the stories of the Bible. They love music that involves prayer and celebration of their faith. Yes it all begins to come together again. So I write to you on the busiest shopping day of the year in the United States with people keeping vigil outside electronic stores for the best deal. I wonder who thought to visit the little shop around the corner that sells religious gifts. Presumably the presents that are being purchased are for the holidays and wouldn't it

be fantastic if some of them had something to do with Christmas.

A few weeks ago I had the blessing to meet the Children's Rosary group leader from Naples Florida and three of her children. We spent the day at the Basilica of Mary Queen of the Universe in Orlando, FL. During the day we visited their bookstore. The children wandered around looking at the many books and gifts there. With a \$5.00 limit of what they could spend it was a hard decision as many presents were held for some time and then put back. It had to be right. Mom made an offer the children could choose an additional present but it would be kept for Christmas. Grace who is her 12 years old daughter had asked for a statue for Christmas of Our Lady. There was no rapid decision though and we would spend an hour enjoying looking at everything they had and then we would come back after a visit to the Rosary garden for a final pass. This family of 6 had the tradition that each child could have 3 presents for Christmas and one would always be about their faith. Indeed these children would not have been more excited in a toy store. Her 6 year old son loved every minute in the Basilica store. It was so beautiful to watch.

Indeed I think one would be surprised to see how many beautiful things are in these shops. The store owners certainly take so much time and prayer picking each thing out that they carry. The store owners I met were also very willing to help with getting the word out about the Children's Rosary both by putting up flyers or spreading news of this by word of mouth. Indeed these little stores are powerhouses of prayer and faith. For all agreed they have been tried these last years through a great deal of suffering and struggle. Maybe we can help them and lighten the burden they have been carrying and visit their stores. Let them know you are a member of the Children's Rosary and that we are praying for them.

Thank you all.

Your Friend in Christ,

Blythe

For those who would like to buy our Children's Rosary materials in a gift shop we have a list of places that carry our [books](#) and [CDs](#).

Other Posts You may enjoy:



## What Changed? [at Declaring the Whole Counsel]

She could not understand what her granddaughter was doing. This is why she had come to me to ask for advice. It was difficult to answer her; she had so little influence over the situation there was little that she could do. As we further discussed things, she made a comment to me that was very troubling. She said, "kids have changed; they're not like they used to be". Inside I was disagreeing, but it was difficult to communicate this to her in her situation. Children have

not

changed. I know that may shock some folks, but it is true. Kids are just as they have always been. Go back in history and you will find stories that sound like they are describing our current events. Certainly, there are times when children are behaving worse than other times, but this refers to their behavior, not to the children themselves.

They

have not changed.

The Scriptures tell us what all children are like (more than enough times for us to get the point) and what they describe is something that is a part of our very nature. The Psalmist once says that he was, "brought forth in iniquity" (Psalm 51:5) and that he was conceived "in sin". From his birth--his very conception--the Psalmist declares his nature to be fallen. This is the state of all children; they begin life in need of redemption (which is one of the reasons why we baptize them). Tainted with the sin of Adam and Eve, every child born into this world starts life as a sinful human being. Yet, what are the consequences of this situation in actual experience?

Proverbs 22:15 says that, "folly is bound up in the heart of a child". The heart is the seat of our desires, and this verse tells us that "folly" (foolish and sinful inclinations) is "bound" in children's hearts. The Scripture does not leave us, though, in that apparently hopeless position. Giving every parent the solution to this "folly", we are told that "discipline drives [the folly] far from" them. This folly is not something that children acquire after they attain the age of reason at 7 years old. It is something that is present in them from conception for it stems from their fallen state. This is what the Catholic Church calls "original sin" (cf. the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 402-404) and it comes upon all (apart from the intervention of God) who are born into this world.

Let me paraphrase the point of God's word here: "all children from birth make foolish choices, and they can only change if they are properly disciplined." Let us consider more deeply the words in Proverbs 22:15. The word "folly" means bad choices and foolish behavior. "Bound" carries the connotation of being "stuck", which tells us that this "folly" does not just go away. "In their heart" means that their emotions and desires are driven by folly, and not by wisdom. If we leave them to themselves they will choose folly. They are not able to make the right choices until (and unless) the parents actively teach them how (and sending them to a Religious Education class is good for them, but it is insufficient for the full extent of this task). We all would agree that this is the task of the child's parents first and foremost, which they themselves acknowledge in the baptismal vows they take for their children.

So, then, if all children are born with a sinful nature that inclines them to foolishness, what is it that changes? There must be something that causes the children to behave worse than at other times. For us to say "children are not like they used to be" blames the children. This is, intentionally or not, merely an avoidance of the

*real*

problem. Think again about the verse from Proverbs that was cited above. It does not say, "folly is bound up in the heart of a child, and

*giving him personal freedom*

will drive it far from him"; it says that "discipline" will drive it far from him. If children are behaving more sinfully in one age than in another, it is not because the children have changed, it is because the parents have changed and ceased to bring proper discipline. We cannot blame the children if they were not taught proper behavior. Children are not born into the world with the ability to discover truth and righteousness on their own.

I know I probably just made a number of enemies and offended many parents in saying this; not my intent, but it is the unavoidable consequence of quoting these verses of Scripture. This active teaching that parents are supposed to give to their children is spoken of in the book of Sirach (30:8). It tells us that "a son unrestrained turns out to be wilful". Parents must give their child "restraints". Not physical restraints so much as spiritual restraints on their behavioral characteristics. When Proverbs told us that discipline drives folly away from the child, this means that parents are actually able to do something about their children's behavior (so there are no excuses). They can "restrain" it so that the children do not become "wilful" (i.e. choosing their own way that is contrary to the way of God). God gives the means, parents just need to take advantage of it.

Much of modern parenting chooses to "encourage" and "point" children in the right way, but this is not what God has said in his word. He tells us to "discipline" and "restrain"--both of which are much more firm and pro-active forms of engagement in the children's lives. In fact, we read in Proverbs 29:15 that "a child left to himself brings shame to his mother". Yet, today, many children are being "left to themselves". They are being allowed to make their own choices far too often, and long before they are properly trained to do so. Children do not need more freedom, they need more godly instruction and discipline, and parents have to be willing to do the hard work to bring this about.

Children need specific guidance, on a daily basis, of how to live the Christian life. They need to have regular catechesis in the home (and not just in Sunday School--as good as that may be). They need to be taught how to avoid sin, and how to repent of it when they fall into it. I speak with many parents and children, and I find that there is little or none of this being done in the majority of homes. Children have not changed, and that is the problem--they are still sinful. It is parents that have changed; they have changed in how they raise them. If given the right path, children can stay on it when they grow up--but when they are given nothing, they will always fall away from the faith, for they have not been fully instructed in it (cf. Hebrews 5:12-14).



by Susan Fox

*This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'*" (Zechariah 13:9)



The process of refining gold brings lesser metals or impurities to the surface so they can be broken off later, while the denser pure gold sinks to the bottom of the mold.

The stuff rising to the top is called slag. It is rather ugly. Pure gold is lovely.

It seems our childlike and cagey new Pope Francis has plunged the Roman Catholic Church into this process. Many were shocked to see the slag surface from the Church at the recent Synod on the Family, affectionately called Synod 14 for the year in which it occurred. But the world rejoiced.

An interim report of the Synod released on Monday, Oct. 13, 2014 seemed to single handedly overturn Christ's own admonition that a man should cling to his wife, and the two become one.

It questioned why divorced and remarried Catholics could not receive Holy Communion and said that

people who self identify by their homosexuality should be celebrated for the gifts that arise from their unchaste behaviors.



This slag has been hiding inside the Church for a good 40 years during the reign of three canonized popes. It has been suggested from the pulpit, mentioned in confession, and discussed behind closed doors. A priest in Boston hung a rainbow “gay pride” flag over the Catholic chapel at Brandeis University outside Boston during the month of October. More slag.

But when the slag was actually **visible** in a Vatican document, people were shocked. “Like man, where did that come from?”

*I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 20:38)*

It almost seemed like we orthodox Catholics were all on the same acid trip during these past decades unaware the corrosive forces surrounding us were rising to the top. We did suffer when others, *especially others in authority*, held these false beliefs and called themselves Catholic. Now the interim report seemed to shake our foundations.

“We may see that attacks against the Pope and the Church do not only come from outside; rather, the sufferings of the Church come from inside the Church.” Pope Benedict noted in an interview in 2010. “This was always common knowledge, but today we see it in truly terrifying form: the greatest persecution of the Church does not come from external enemies, but is born of sin within the Church.”

## **Is the Church still Catholic?**

I went to one small-faith sharing group during this crisis, and everyone there had called a devout family member or a favorite nun to find out if everything was okay. They were all shaken to their core. Some are still muttering.

“The Princesses (cardinals) of the church have all been diagnosed with DDD (Diabolical Disorientation Disorder). It’s very catchy,” said Theresa on Friday (Oct. 31) upset over the Synod and the rainbow flag over her Boston chapel.

Do not despair Theresa! The authentic Catholic Magisterium – the same teaching authority that has carefully guarded the deposit of faith held by the apostles for 2,000 years -- rose up and rejected these paragraphs in the original document.



Cardinals, bishops and priests worldwide spoke out in every way possible via You Tube, News Conferences and their votes. They explained that everyone has gifts to offer the Church, but these gifts do not arise from sinful behaviors, and divorced remarried Catholics cannot receive communion because if they did it would negate the sanctity of marriage. Hallelujah! How wonderful God gave his cardinals the opportunity to teach the faith publicly. So the gold of the Catholic Church shone.

The document was changed by Friday Oct. 17, and the offending paragraphs removed. It was as if the words had never been written. I could not find them anywhere online except at the National Catholic

Reporter, a newspaper favoring the offensive positions.

The world didn't listen. Secular news articles covering this event said the pope's own cardinals defeated him. The New Yorker magazine called it a "bombshell document," lamenting the fact that Pope Francis' immediate predecessors locked the Church into positions on divorce, remarriage, contraception, homosexuality and the celibate *male* priesthood, which are at "radical variance with the beliefs and practices of the majority of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics." I must have missed the memo. I still believe in the Church's traditional position on divorce, contraception, homosexuality and the celibate *male* priesthood. I think Pope Francis does too.

The New Yorker opined that Pope Francis would be hard-pressed to break the Catholic Church out of that "recent mold" set by his predecessors. I think he is trying to do the opposite.

*Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.* (Daniel 12:10)

Orthodox Catholics – *many of my friends* – were in shock, and wondered if indeed Pope Francis had manipulated events so these false positions would be in the report.

Such is nonsense, but the pope's subsequent remarks made this clear. On Oct. 19, he described the temptations of the Synod:

Ø "The temptation to a destructive tendency to goodness, that in the name of a deceptive mercy binds the wounds without first curing them and treating them... It is the temptation of the so-called "progressives and liberals."

Ø The temptation to neglect the "depositum fidei" [the deposit of faith], not thinking of themselves as guardians but as owners or masters [of it]"

Ø The temptation to come down off the Cross, to please the people, and not stay there, in order to fulfill the will of the Father; to bow down to a worldly spirit instead of purifying it and bending it to the Spirit of God."

By that he described the temptations of those who changed the words of the interim document so it did not actually reflect what was being said in the Synod, nor what the Church has taught for the past 2,000 years.

*“Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.” (Daniel 11:35)*



Pope Francis himself told us not to be dismayed by these temptations “because no disciple is greater than his master; so if Jesus Himself was tempted – and even called Beelzebub (cf. Mt 12:24) – His disciples should not expect better treatment.”

On Oct. 25, the pope clearly spoke against the union called “same-sex marriage.” To the best of my knowledge he is the first pope to do so. “The family is being hit, the family is being struck and the family is being bastardized,” the pope said, adding the common view in society is that “you can call everything family, right?”

“What is being proposed is not marriage, it’s an association. But it’s not marriage! It’s necessary to say these things very clearly and we have to say it!” He added that “new forms” of unions are “totally destructive and limiting the greatness of the love of marriage.”

Regarding marriage, Pope Francis explained that our society has “devalued” the sacrament by turning it into a social rite, removing its foundation, which is union with God. “So many families are divided, so many marriages broken, (there is) such relativism in the concept of the Sacrament of Marriage,” he cried.

Such sentiments should reassure every Catholic that Pope Francis did not manipulate the synod to devalue marriage or glorify “same-sex” associations.

However orthodox Catholics continued to be uneasy because the pope had also discussed on Oct. 19 at the conclusion of the Synod temptations that might be considered “conservative:”

Ø “a temptation to hostile inflexibility, that is, wanting to close oneself within the written word, (the letter) and not allowing oneself to be surprised by God, by the God of surprises, (the spirit); within the law, within the certitude of what we know and not of what we still need to learn and to achieve. From the time of Christ, it is the temptation of the zealous, of the scrupulous, of the solicitous and of the so-called – today – “traditionalists” and also of the intellectuals.”

By this he did not mean that we should ignore the precepts of our faith handed down to us from the apostles. He already stated that the deposit of faith is to be guarded, preserved, not mastered, not changed nor controlled.

## **Pope Francis is right!**

There is a tendency in the Church today to hole up inside our walls and never go out. Too often our pastors believe their parish is limited to only the people they see in the pew. Lay people busy themselves cleaning the church and cooking soup suppers, but they won't visit a neighbor who might be interested in becoming Catholic. As far as I am concerned, this temptation can be laid at the door of both those who call themselves liberal and those who think of themselves as conservative.

I have seen situations where a priest faced with a dying man requesting Baptism refused to visit him because he was too sick for RCIA, the year long process of becoming Catholic. Lay ministers would not send a priest to a homebound Catholic needing the sacraments because she had to phone the Rectory directly herself. Never mind that she was a painfully shy Native American woman who didn't want to bother anybody. She died without the sacraments on a Tuesday; her family calling vainly for a priest on a day when most priests in her diocese did not work. She was a victim of “hostile inflexibility.”

I have multiple friends who witness at abortion clinics. They leave their house and go into the community, interact, listen and witness. They wait for the “God of surprises.”

One of them told me last week, a baby was saved on her watch. “We - rather God! - saved a baby a couple of weeks ago at the Abortion Clinic. The parents-to-be came out absolutely beaming, announcing they'd changed their minds. We gave them literature and jumped around laughing, crying, hugging and praying!! There is still good in the world!”

When Catholics are closed inside the small world of a parish, a community and even the Roman Curia, “then you do not grasp the truth,” the pope said further on Oct. 25. “Everything is working well, everything is well organized,” the pontiff observed, “but they could do with less functionalism and more apostolic zeal, more interior freedom, more prayer, (and) this interior freedom is the courage to go out.”

True witness takes us out of ourselves and into the streets, the pope continued. A Church, movement or community, which doesn't go out of itself “becomes sick.”



“A movement, a Church or a community that doesn't go out, is mistaken,” he said. “Don't be afraid! Go out in mission; go out on the road. We are walkers.”

It is ironic in light of what happened at the Synod that Pope Francis has spoken many times about the figure of Judas in his talks since becoming pope.

On Palm Sunday, he took the people through an exam of conscience, using various people involved in Christ's death: “Am I like Judas, who pretends to love and kissed the Master to hand him over, to betray him? Am I a traitor?”

Mostly recently, he explained that he felt sorry for Judas. Though he may not have been the worst sinner

among the apostles, he was the one who walled himself up against mercy.

“Judas, poor man, is the one who closed himself to love and that is why he became a traitor. And they all ran away during the difficult time of the Passion and left Jesus alone. They are all sinners. But He chose (them).”

After he betrayed Jesus with a kiss, Judas – realizing he had spilled innocent blood – hung himself. Peter denied Jesus three times, but he wept and sought Christ’s forgiveness. He became the first pope.

Pope Francis talks about this “night (of Peter’s denial) and the sweetness of Christ’s forgiveness,” which Judas seemingly did not seek. “How beautiful it is to be holy, but also how beautiful to be forgiven.”

It’s good that Pope Francis has prayed and meditated on Judas’ betrayal. It’s almost as if he was preparing for what would take place in the Synod.

The world betrayed Christ. Pretending to sincerely love Pope Francis, the world deliberately twisted his message of love into a false acceptance of sin. St. Augustine called these kinds of “false friends” the unfriendly friendlies.

Some cardinals apparently betrayed Christ when they arranged to put those untruthful paragraphs into the first document without the approval of the whole body of cardinals.

But Pope Francis remained tranquil, and firm in his trust in the Holy Spirit, Who was guiding the Synod, forcing the slag from the Church.



How could the impurities in the Church have remained while we had such holy popes: John XXIII, John Paul II and Paul VI? Obviously, many did not read what they wrote about the human family. Now, the Synod on the Family will force all to do so. The Holy Spirit is squeezing the slag to the top where we can all see it, recognize it and reject it.

“Many commentators ... have imagined that they see a disputatious Church where one part is against the other, doubting even the Holy Spirit, the true promoter and guarantor of the unity and harmony of the Church – the Holy Spirit who throughout history has always guided the barque, through her Ministers, even when the sea was rough and choppy, and the ministers unfaithful and sinners,” Pope Francis said in his concluding remarks for the Synod.

“And, as I have dared to tell you, [as] I told you from the beginning of the Synod, it was necessary to live through all this with tranquility, and with interior peace, so that the Synod would take place cum Petro and sub Petro (with Peter and under Peter), and the presence of the Pope is the guarantee of it all.”

It certainly is, especially when we can relax and know that the Pope does believe in the sanctity of marriage and the value of chastity.

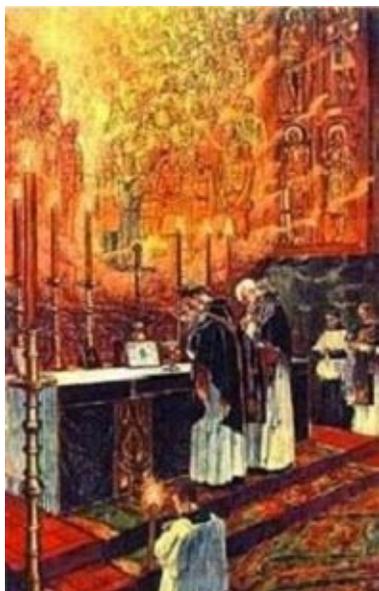
Entering the refiner’s fire is a harrowing process, but we must put our trust in the Holy Spirit, who will remove all the impurities from our hearts and our Church and turn them into pure gold.



# All Souls' Day: Priestly Celibacy Witnesses to the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

Sermon by Rev. John Paul Shea  
Feast of All Soul's Day, Nov. 2, 2014  
Saints Peter & Paul Parish, Tucson, AZ

*"They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace." (Wisdom 3: 2-3)*



Today the Church celebrates the solemnity of All Souls' Day! Yesterday our Catholic Church celebrated the feast of All Saints, those extraordinary human beings who were blessed to be among those who accomplished God's will in a special way. But today we remember everyone — all the dead — those who have repented and those who have not, those who were rich and those who were poor, those who were loved by many and those who were loved by few.

We celebrate today's feast in the fundamental belief that there is a spiritual communion among all in the state of grace, whether they have begun purification in Purgatory, live on earth or are in heaven. Today's feast is a reminder that we are part of a larger community, both living and dead. We pray for mercy on all souls, including ourselves that we will allow God's mercy entrance into our lives. We want to allow our Lord to free us from everything that ties us down to this world so that we can fly to the next.

All Souls' Day falls in the month of November when the weather begins to change and the nights become longer. So we are reminded that one day our life here on earth will end and we will face what comes ahead.

Many do not want to think about death. We do not need to fear death, but we should prepare for it. If we strive to keep ourselves pure, we can rejoice in death. *"The souls of the just are in the hand of God."* That's what we hear in today's reading (Wisdom 3:1-9) And therefore, we remain connected to those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. We should pray for them in the hopes that one day we might live in communion with them.

*"The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them."*

What is the soul? Saint Thomas Aquinas described the soul as "the animating energy of the body." We could also say that our soul is the blueprint of our existence. Evidence of our eternal soul is that we are self-aware, and this self-awareness lives on after death, perfected in our resurrected bodies. Our soul links us to our future home in eternity. Our soul transcends this world even now.

My brothers and sisters, today's celebration reminds us that each one of us will live forever! This is why Our Lord in today's Gospel passage speaks so readily of eternal life, reminding us that He came so that everyone who sees Him and believes in Him may have eternal life.

We also are reminded that our choices now will determine the state of our soul for all eternity! This is why our Lord came into the world, lived and died on the cross -- for the salvation of our souls! This is true mercy! But we must respond. He calls us to live, but not for the world because the world has become a place of immorality and corruption. He calls us to raise our minds and hearts to His eternal wisdom.

Today's first reading reminds us that if we want eternal life then we must first prove ourselves worthy. We are reminded that the souls of the just are chastised a little, but that *"they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself."*

My brothers and sisters, the Christian life is not easy! Our Lord's saving mission to restore our soul to communion with God the Father requires work on our part. It requires that we reject the values of the world! It requires that we pray and make sacrifices for our souls and for the salvation of all souls! The foolish do not understand because most want it easy. The world hates sacrifice. Yet, eternal salvation is not born from comfort. It comes by entering into the narrow gate of self-denial! If we do not grasp this now, then we will face it in Purgatory.

Priests take a vow of celibacy at our ordination. This vow is a stranger to our secular culture, and even Catholics don't understand it. We do not see beyond the limitations of our fallen nature.

Yet, this is precisely why priests take the vow of celibacy! We want to witness in a special way to the reality of the kingdom of heaven in this life on earth. We are to conform ourselves to Christ as a sign of the future resurrection, when our earthly body will be changed into a heavenly body. But you too -- each in your own vocation -- are called to show forth the reality of heaven by the way you live your lives! *"In the time of their visitation they shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble."*

My brothers and sisters, if we are truly living out our Christian life, we appear foolish to the world! But you know what, praise God because this world is passing away, and God is preparing a place for all who seek Him in His kingdom of justice, truth, and love.

*"Those who trust in Him shall understand truth, and the faithful shall abide with him in love: because grace and mercy are with his holy ones, and his care is with his elect."*

As we come together to celebrate Mass on this special celebration of All Souls, let us remember life is

short. And let us pray for those who have gone before us. God bless you.



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This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2014/11/all-souls-day-priestly-celibacy.html>  
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## My Cup Overflows [at Blogging For A Better Life]

Most of the people I know who say and live as such are filled with blessings that have come about from some type of brokenness.

They will tell you some amazing things as they describe how their current cross is a blessing in disguise. They speak from the bottom of their heart proclaiming they are okay with whatever has happened and may continue to happen to them. They'll go on and on at how God continues to bless them over and over.

What others look at as tough luck, is what they thank God for! Their cup is filled to the brim, overflowing with blessings.

Easy to get where they are? No.

Anyone who has a cross to carry knows this, and by the way who doesn't have a cross to carry?

Have you set your cup down and took a look at some of the blessings pouring in?

Fresh air to breathe, clean water to drink, legs that move, eyes that see, three meals a day, solid roof overhead, second chances, hope for all problems, family to gather with, friendships to enjoy, being loved, loving others.

And that's just the sloshing going around at the bottom of the cup.

Psalm 23:5-6 reads,

**“You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; You welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim. I know that Your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and Your house will be my home as long as I live.”**

So many blessings are being offered for those who care to drink.

Indeed, we are a group of people whose cup overflows!



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# The Spirit Immured [at Travels of a New Christian]



## God is Spirit

For God, there is nothing supernatural. All that He creates is of order and process in the spiritual and physical worlds. Whatever we see about us in this physical world is of great wonder – it is our world – so we can only conclude that the wonder of the spiritual world must be vastly beyond our conceptual ability. Why? Because God is spirit, and I believe that where He abodes there are many wondrous things. We attempt to penetrate it with the tools of our mind and body, but we always seem to know no more than when we started. Why is that?

And so man turns his inquisitive nature to the physicality of his existence in pursuing the knowledge of God's power and will through the sciences; as it appeals to his intellect and need for a gratifying respite from a day's work, or the proverbial "pat on the back". As for myself, I am a great believer in what might be termed natural theology, or the apologetics of God through what He has created, so the sciences are in good standing with me as they deal with nothing more than God's creation. What better library to draw from? No luminary man can be as illuminating as God, and no composed word is better evidence than God's scored creation. His creation is a tour de force of divine caliber.

I make this point because of what I will pursue in what follows. I want you to think in a common manner – a real manner of sensibility – without the abstract dogmatically cluttering your perceptions. In other words, put down your doctrinal pen for the moment.

There is more I wish to speak of upon the subject of the spirit, and once again as I noted in my previous post, I am not referring to the Holy Spirit as Christians seem to speak much of and yet are confused by, but rather that spirit within you. To do so, I want to briefly clarify the two other parts of a man or a woman; their mind (intellect) and their body (that squishy thing).

## The Mind and Body

They are mortal. Not a lot need be said more. They rise and they fall upon the chicken soup and sugar-infused beverages they consume. They are self-centered. They are physically imperfect and the vessel from which pours all sin. They make spiritual claims, but intellectual activity is not spiritual activity. The

same can be said for the bodily functions; hardly spiritual. Indulging the two certainly is fun in a temporal way, but life in this manner seems more like the child whacked out on that sugar-infused beverage; soon to crash, whine, and in need of a consolation.

One thing is for sure midst my yammering. It is that the mind and the body does not have the capacity to manage the gifts given unto them by God. Whether it be intellectual reason, physical prowess, the spiritual gifts, or free will itself, the mind and body seems to be always out of balance in their expression.

Genesis 2, of course, peaks with God's creation of mankind; breathing life by the ruach (breath) of the Holy Spirit into the body of Adam. That's got to mean something good about the mind and body, doesn't it? Well, yes. But the problem is that we really never got to see much evidence of that goodness, as Adam & Eve quickly transcended the spiritual satisfaction of God into the intellectual and physical abyss of man sans God. Just how did we go from A to B, in such an easy manner? Evil is evil, but are we simply victims to its scourge of all things good before God? If we played a role in our own demise, then why did we not find the way quickly back into His garden grace? The answer, as the bible testifies, is that we continued to sin. Sin became the identification of who we are intellectually and physically.

There is a part, though, within us that has remained pure, and it is this part that I wish to discuss going forward.

## **The Spirit-Within**

First, from my previous post, I wish to identify the spirit-within as that spirit which God placed within each one of us at our conception, or at some point as you have concluded; perhaps at birth. (I have not shaken that theology out yet to my satisfaction.) This assertion is well expressed in the Catholic Catechism 366:

“The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God – it is not “produced” by the parents – and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection.”

I sense that this spirit is completely unlike anything we have comfortably settled upon to date. Much discussion, by many concentrating minds, has been given over to identifying the spirit-within as a fusion of some sort; one way with the body (mind included) as a cocktail of material and immaterial processes incorporating biological, chemical, and spiritual elements to manifest themselves as psychological and physiological outcomes; or another way, as a cocktail with the intellect (mind only) and spirit, thus leaving the body somewhat separate to and dependent upon the now-formed soul. Either way, this is a bipartite (two part) view of the whole man as noted in this catechism teaching.

Whether a Christian denomination pursues a two-part or three-part view of man, much of its argument is based upon New Testament and early Christian writings. This is all good fodder in which to chew out the necessary nutrients for a logical assessment, but there is an important determinant missing from this balance; the accumulation, advancement, and God-driven evolution of knowledge that advances the human capacity for redemption. Christianity is a theistic faith, and as such revealed knowledge is fresh to liven the search for our Lord's truth.

I believe there is much more to be included in this pursuit, and what I am referencing is found in more recent history. I might venture a guess and propose a period from the late 17th century onwards. As this

period is known as the rather dangerous exposition of empirical and scientific discovery, to the more or less fundamental Christian, it is thus a period held with some skepticism by the Church; thus perhaps a certain refrainment from referencing more recent theologians, philosophers, and sciences. However, it is also the period in which Christian theology began, as examined through the natural processes of the world by those more daring in their theistic beliefs, to bubble up from the subterranean springs of Christian thought. There can be no doubt that to accept God as creator is to accept His creation as evidence of God's power, nature and purpose. St. Paul understood this to the best of his experience.

Romans 1:18-20

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

And so I propose that through scientific study – the acquired knowledge of creation and man – there can certainly be had a good discussion on the nature of man as either bipartite (body & soul) or tripartite (body, soul, and spirit). As I noted in my last post, I personally view man as a tripartite variant: body, intellect and spirit.

Now before I advance forward, please do accept that I am in disagreement with the phrase “held come what may”. What I am referring to is the automatic assumption we all tend to possess: that once an opinion is formed within one's mind there can be only the martyrdom of defending the position unto death. We have all been caught in the vise (vice) of its grip, and I have found myself there many times. But in more recent years, I have learned that one is always learning; maturity is about continuing to mature, and there is no more an end to knowledge than there is a beginning. Knowledge flows like a river; sorting the bed-stones about, smoothing some and dissolving others.

Having discussed this either/or situation enough, I choose to state that the spirit-within – that spirit placed within us by God – is separate from the intellect (mind), separate from the body, and completely distinct from the nature of the intellect and the body. I would be more inclined to propose the intellect and the body as the fusion of material and immaterial processes thus constituting the physical and psychological nature of man (sans spirit). Hence I propose a few thoughts of my own as to the nature of the spirit-within.

First, that this spirit-within is perfect. The spirit can resolve all things if it is permitted to do so. It is the “image of God” as noted in Genesis 1:27, and as such, perhaps much more than man has ever realized it to be. It's potential to affect the relationship of the mind & body of an individual with its creator, God, is limited only by an individual's sense of his or her own failings (sins) and the gates of heaven. Luke 17:6, frames this argument in which Jesus illuminates us on the power of faith:

“He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

The faith that Jesus refers to is the strength of the spirit within you. Surely your intellect is not planting that tree elsewhere, nor your body. That would lead one invariably to the conclusion that man is God. Therefore, would it not leave only some pure, spirit element as the force behind the miraculous; the instantaneous transference of a tree from land to sea? Is it faith that is doing that or is it what faith brings;

the power of the spirit?

Second, the spirit-within is directly and immutably linked with God as spirit; the Holy Spirit. In this relationship, the spirit-within may be seen as the librarian of God's Word; holding God's truth for man's observance, as man's motivation towards virtue, as man's inquisitor in his failings, and as man's hero to what ought to be done and so is done for other men's sake. What other cause would produce an unchanging conscience; knowing all truths despite all the intruding effects of life? This relationship is the perfect form of communion that God calls us all into service to Him for our sake.

Third, the spirit-within does not reason, incorporate logic or calculation, nor employ any manner of path thinking. These processes are physiological, mortal, fallible, time consuming, and the realm of the intellect, not the spirit-within. As God works outside of time, so does His "image"; it must, if it is to be in a continuum with the Holy Spirit, and no man dictates to the Holy Spirit when He might abide with him. The Holy Spirit convicts as He pleases, not the other way around. If there is spirit, it is of and in the spirit realm. It is what the Church calls communion; the natural flow of God's will.

It knows the answer to all things because it is that image of God that was placed within you at your conception by God, who is spirit also. Think of it like that of the quantum computer: it knows the answer at the same moment of the question. The spirit has no use for reason because it is fully knowledgeable of good and evil; it is morally perfect and completely consistent with God's law.

As such, the spirit-within us needs no reason, no logic, no calculations, no lineal or circular thinking to process what is the obvious and immediately available truth to any circumstance that a man might experience. As God views all of time at the same time, so does the Holy Spirit, and thus does one's own spirit. Reason is insufficient to the task of the divine. If you have reasoned your way to a Godly conclusion, I'd be wary. Yes, your intellect and body will always preclude an immediate resolution to a concern or choice, so time is always in play, but one should always be wary. (I will address ways of discernment and action on this matter in later posts.)

Fourth, that the spirit-within is that part of you that lifts you above flesh and rational. What good cause could there possibly be in the ability to reason if it is not subject to the one force that can overcome man's self-interest? History has amply demonstrated that man, left to his own desires, has little to offer the world in the role of steward. Left to his own desires, man is but an inept dictator.

This is what brings one to the concept of the "ought"; that internal knowledge of what abides with God's will. This is the library I referred to earlier. We all sense an immaterial pull to God's full range of truths:

"I ought to have done this." "I ought to have done that."

In all things we do, we sense a measurement of either being closer to God or further away from Him, and it manifests itself in how we perceive ourselves, and most of all, in the freedom of our spirit.

Christians naturally seek the spiritual fruits of life as noted in Galatians 5:22:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

The exhortation of keeping “in step with the Spirit” is a direct reference to the over-riding necessity and use of our spirit-within. And there is no coincidence that the fruits of life come from the Holy Spirit and not from a physical source like Santa Claus (as much as we have desired). It is because the only real fruit man will ever pick in his or her life will come from the communion of his or her own perfect spirit-within and the Holy Spirit; all in the quest to find God’s kingdom. Adam and Eve picked no such holy fruit in the Garden of Eden, choosing instead to let their fingers (their intellect) do the walking.

## **The Spirit Immured – The Fall**

And so what is of the greatest curiosity to me if why is there essentially no theology on the spirit-within? If this spirit exists, as Christianity asserts, why is it such a muted subject? We dance much with the Holy Spirit, though as I noted in my last post, a majority of Christians have only a half formulated concept of such a divine entity. Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Charismatics by far understand His presence and purpose more so than other Christian denominations. Protestants refer to Him in polite terms, as do the Catholics, but both diminished His way long ago to the preference for the ritual over the spiritual.

The ritualization of any process only comes into existence when there is scant room for true understanding. Man’s attempt to talk back to God – his theology – is but man’s compendium of what he perceives as God’s existence; at least through the myopic vision of mankind. We learn slowly, very slowly, and most of humanity is left behind in the curial acquisition of introverted theology rather than drawn forward by the extroverted works of faith. What was God-divined was entombed in what Christian theology defines as The Fall, and what God divined for man was His spirit-within; perhaps the only real difference between man and beast. So where is our spirit-within now?

Perhaps no conspiracy that I am aware of holds back the understanding of our spirit-within; though the deception of evil is much stronger than man could ever suspect, and I thus do have my suspicions. I have sometimes thought that there must be a hidden “middle” Testament between the Old and the New; that portion of the bible that tells you what challenges there are on the path to God and how to overcome the deceptions and pitfalls. For it is here, on that path, or in the garden, where evil walks hand in hand with the intellect of man, like a father or mother with their son or daughter, teaching them a way that, if successfully taught, will never lead the child into God’s kingdom. And I do mean taught; a process or work to entomb that which is the light of man – his spirit – and reveal a false light – his intellect – as the sole source of a false salvation. Evil understands that work is always the method of habituation and any lasting condition, and so delights in the belief of those Christians who steadfastly adhere to the concept of salvation by faith alone. “Don’t bother to put your right foot in front of your left, God will do it for you by your mere acknowledgement of Him.”

Sorry for my snark (jab). I am a pessimist on matters of man’s direction, though I might spring from here to a mention of the Lewis Carroll poem, *The Hunting of the Snark*. Give it a read. I will suggest that after all the apparent nonsense of the poem is put aside, there is a clear story of man’s confusion in finding happiness, and his many failures due to his incessant machinations and end-runs to an imaginary end-zone. What better way for Carroll to write on such a thing as happiness except through nonsense. Not that happiness is nonsense, but rather the way in which man goes about hunting for it. The end of the poem is particularly disturbing for the hunters do not find the snark, but rather the boojum.

I asked the question, “So where is our spirit-within now?” and the answer can be revealed by a quote of Richard Swinburne’s, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford. He noted that, “Desires conflict when they cannot be co-satisfied. Conflict is minimized when one of the two conflicting

desires is greatly reduced in strength, so as not seriously to rival the other.” This, to a great degree, sums up the immurement of our own spirit; because our spirit-within is the natural opposite to that which man prizes most, the free will of his intellect. For man’s intellect to rule, it must move the light from upon the spirit to itself, and what better way than entombment behind the stone wall of awareness and acknowledgment.

We speak of and write upon the concepts of free will as if it is something of a treasure. We even go so far as to command that free will is a gift from God that provides for the capacity of love. The verbosity on such a concept is more a dogma of today than a paradigm of the past as we secularize ourselves increasingly through our materialism. Both religious and secular prize the all-giving free will as that diamond midst our ashen selves. I am not going to do battle here with free will. It would be of no use at this time, but let me pose a question:

What good is free will within the context of perfection; let alone sanctification?

If a Christian hopes for heaven, does he or she expect free will to be part of it? What need would there be for free will in such a setting? Christ talks of the kingdom of God as if it is something to be attained here on earth. Well, if that is truth, then would it not follow that the attainment of God’s kingdom is best sought through man’s refrain from all things not of that kingdom; free will included? As Morpheus questions Neo in the movie, *The Matrix*, “You think that’s air you’re breathing now?” To take that question to a higher plane, Morpheus might well be asking why man believes his reality, with all of its physical causes and effects, is even reality. I’ll continue the questions with one more. Do you think God has free will?

Free will is a process of the intellect; not the spirit. While man permeates his world with the idea that free will is a necessity for love, he accepts the permutation of his being by the resultant evil that is spawned by his own free will. Baron of the physical landscape, one’s intellect uses free will to not just survive, but to dominate. And I mean much more than just the domination over other men. It is one’s own spirit-within that receives the bulk of the ministrations of active free will as the intellect struggles hard to preserve what it believes to be its shining chorus; itself. The spirit-within must be diminished and the intellect raised if man is to succeed in his pursuit of physical and psychological self-interest; at least that’s his argument.

Well, I see no valid record that codifies free will as the agent of happiness and love, rather more so I see free will as the harbinger of our subjugation to our own self-interest; Satan as some might say. Now, I do believe that in our physical world, there is a place for free will. The whole matter comes down to our ability to recognize what the purpose of free will is, and therefore understand when to use it and when to not. It might start with the thoughtful comparison of instinct versus free will. Which is quicker?

It is here where one might ask, “Well, what then, if not free will?” And it is here where I might suggest the Catholic response; willingness.

This, of course, is a reference to Christ’s mother, Mary, and her response to the angel Gabriel upon his pronouncement of Mary being impregnated by the Holy Spirit. It is also the proclamation of Mary in the New Testament; her few words and seen actions. There is a message in this scarcity of Mary, and it is written in spirit and not intellect. It is the message that purity of being is to be had through the will of God and not through one’s own determination. It is a message that heaven is to be expressed and served by a common presence; that of one’s spirit-within, for this is as God set forth through His imbuing of a spirit within each one of us. It is with this spirit-within that we are to be of the willingness that Mary naturally

possessed as one with the Holy Spirit, and as the mother of Jesus Christ. That is what happens when one lives by their spirit; they are one with God.

To clarify willingness a bit, let's simply go to the dictionary. Words that come forward are "ready"; duly equipped for immediate action. We see the word "done"; that which naturally is there in completion. We see "given"; the automatic assumption of something. We see "borne"; to hold up. And we see, and of most importance, "used"; employed for a purpose (by God). Perhaps one could argue that free will somehow precedes these conditions, but then I would argue that one is not watching their spirit in action, but rather their intellect. That is a problem for such a debater, for the sanctification of one who has been justified comes as a process that will be measured by the distance in which one relies upon their spirit over their intellect's free will. The more that one turns to their spirit-within in their life's pursuit of service to God, the more all choice and debate falls away to reveal the harmony of willingness in all things physical and spiritual.

It is no small coincidence that Christ addresses the idea of willingness in Luke 17, immediately after verse six, where Jesus talks of the mustard seed and a faith capable of planting a mulberry tree in the sea. Jesus goes on to tell the story of the servant working in the field and then coming home to prepare supper for his master. This is the willingness that I refer to, and yet much of mankind intellectually sees this as a disagreeable servitude. Our society demands an intellectual and physical equality; believing somehow that it will lead to spiritual fulfillment and happiness. This is the great stumbling block.

Above all other things Christian, the reason I am Catholic is because of one simple word; humility. Humility is one's greatest tool in the fine-tuning of the spirit to its rightful condition as the dominant guide for life. It is Catholicism that best puts forth this state of being; just as willingness is a state of being. Humility has little room for free will when it is posed through the sanction and dominant operation of one's spirit. When caused by the intellect, humility is distorted and manipulated like all the other virtues of man; to the purpose of one's self-interest. This is indeed a problem for us, as we all wish some peaceful balance in our lives, but what balance will there be if we do not even acknowledge the spirit within us?

We have chosen some form of neutral, spiritual state of being by accessing what we believe to be a spiritual state through our emotions and desires. This is intellectual gobbledygook. Emotions and desires are of the intellect and not the spirit. In truth, what we do through this deception, is to further neutralize our spirit to an ineffectual existence within us. Once again going to prose & poetry, I might recommend a reading of Edgar Allen Poe's, *The Cask of Amontillado*. It is a most disturbing read that tells me of the evil found in man's intellect, and the intellect's need for the mockery of the spirit (no not the Amontillado). Like the nobleman, Montresor, in Poe's story, our intellect has insidiously entombed the spirit of our being behind a stone wall of deception that appeals to our senses. Our intellect reasons:

"It is best I do this." "Oh, how could this spirit ever understand the realities of the harsh, physical world?" "What good is this spirit in our advance of love when we have our flesh?"

And then there is always the concept that we are victim to, rather than perpetrator of, our own free will, and thus ameliorating the guilt of what we sense for having diminished God's good & perfect gift. Our guilt and shame evaporates as the dew that dries in the morning under the rising sun, leaving us refreshed for the next day with our proud intellect.

**The Way**

It is critical that you are whole in the sight of God, and thus to give the way to God back to the spirit that resides within you. To do so lifts the worship of God to a true act of love. Now there is purpose. God seeks our spiritual love over our intellectual sacrifice and obedience, for it is in that form of love that sacrifice and obedience is ensured, and communion raised to its intended form. God seeks a man and a woman who lives of the spirit and beyond the reproach of free will. Only those without free will live in heaven, and only those individuals whose spirits dominate their lives will have the opportunity of such an eternity. It is through the dominant individuality of the spirit-within that comes the successful communion of man with God and with other men. Christ outlined the mission of the spirit when He clarified the two greatest commandments for the questioning Pharisees. The spirit's capacity for spiritual, and thus physical, communion, and for the supernatural event – through the spiritual gifts – is what Christ addresses as that part of man by which he might find his way to his Lord through the love of God and man.

If we are to attain happiness, it will come through accepting God's will in our lives and using the sweet maturity of our spiritual fruits for the sake of others. The further our spirit-within can dismantle the self-righteous wall of our intellect through our willingness to God's will, rather than through our free will, the greater our potential for sanctification to God's satisfaction. And please understand; it is a wall that must be dismantled stone by stone. It was not built in three days, but in generations of deceit and sin. The only way to vanquish evil is to battle it through a humility held by a willingness to perseverance.

There are many ways for this rise in spiritual maturity to take place, and many have found their pathways. What I am going to pursue in future posts is a methodology that is of the common and the sensible. It is a methodology that will rely more upon natural theology and secular understanding to guide the way into God's service. There are spiritual conclusions to all physical things that will lead men and women into a happiness that is greater than anything the intellect and body might conjure up on its own, and there is much to be said on the mechanics of lifting your spirit to the high plateau that it is so divinely titled to reach.

## **God Bless – Reese**



Happily married to my forever wife, Kathryn, we live in Naples, Florida. We have one son, Miles, who at the young age of twenty-two, constantly amazes us with his maturity, his drive, kindness, and generosity. He listens to God better than I ever had throughout most of my life. I am a designer of homes and furniture; finding my career to truly be my calling, for I am at my best when I am helping to guide a family into their ideal home; surrounding themselves with those things that give them the most joy; encouraging the family bond. The purpose of this blog is to talk about the crossroads between the theistic and the secular worlds. To discuss how these two disparate worlds run parallel to one another for so many good reasons; how they frequently cross one another for a moment and then move away, and how they can entangle like an inner-city highway system. For all such interactions you'd have to believe there would be a fluent, common language by which to communicate and demonstrate respect for all, and yet each camp maintains its own unique language separate from the other, and how the translations we attempt have become so difficult to understand.

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This contribution is available at <http://travelsfanewchristian.com/2014/11/26/the-spirit-immured/>  
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# My Part-Time Ministry: Lunching With Friends [at Peace Garden Mama]

I'm finally going to

call it what it is: a ministry.

Boy that feels good! For years, I've not been giving it its due, but more and more, I am seeing the truth of it, this lunching with friends that I do so frequently.



I've been doing it for many years, even in the years when the kids were little. I would bring them to a drop-off daycare a couple times a month to take time out with friends.

Even in the years I felt guilty about it -- the mother-guilt thing -- I sensed at bottom that this act of leaving the house to spend time with friends was valuable. I'd even go as far as saying it's spiritual.

Finally, I am recognizing it for what it is: part of what God wants me to be doing, and part of the way I can best serve Him.



**It helps to think of**

it in terms of my deep-down yearning to be a nun. I've posted about that several times before, and I'm sure

it makes some giggle. But the yearning helps me think more about my purpose -- what I'm ultimately here to do.

As I've said before, the yearning doesn't mean I believe I've chosen wrong, or that I want another life. It's more of a heaven-leaning desire. The life of a religious sister allows a full-out dunking of spending time with the Lord in a way I am not allowed in my current vocation, but desire. I've been called to something else.



So in the yearning, I step back and ask the question, "Okay, this is where you are, Roxane, where you belong, so in what ways can you go deep to serve God here in this life you are living, versus the dream life you sometimes pine for?"

In pondering this, the regular lunching I do with friends comes to mind. Because what I've found is that when my girlfriends and I take time out of the busy to meet for lunch, it's not just about feeding our stomachs but feeding our very hungry souls. And it's something I couldn't do as a cloistered nun.



**And it becomes a necessary**

mingling of two souls --an effort useful in and of itself.

I think it comes down to this: the gift of time. Taking time out to converse with another soul sister is a valuable endeavor, as important, perhaps, as a nun serving a house guest lunch. It seems so ordinary, but often, when we part, the friend of focus seems changed somehow, and I do, too.

God has called me to be in the world, and so it is in the world, in what would seem a most natural and ordinary act - that of taking time to be with a friend - that I am able to fulfill His purpose for me.

This is a bit of a stretch, you say? Lunching with friends is a luxury, not a spiritual endeavor! Well, I beg

to differ. I've been doing this long enough to know that something more is at work than just an ordinary, and somewhat meaningless, lunch out.

When I jumped into full-time, outside work a couple years back, one of the things I missed most of all was not having the time to lunch with friends. When I did go out to lunch, I needed down time, and space. I craved alone time. And my lunch hours were short. I began to feel the loss of this ministry, and it was a small part of the reason I chose a different route, and am now back at home.

### **Working from home**

comes with its own challenges, but one of the benefits is that it does allow me to have the kind of schedule that accommodates my lunching ministry. And the beautiful thing about this ministry is that, like most ministries, it's circular. My friends, I think, appreciate these times, but so do I. We almost always come away feeling like something important took place, even if that something important would seem invisible to most.

We shouldn't exclude these small, ordinary acts as significant. The kingdom of God is built little by little, one lunch at a time. We need each other, and it's important, especially in this digital world, that we take face-to-face time to be with our fellow journey-women.

Now, to find time to lunch with everyone in my life who matters -- I've got quite a list, I have to say, and I'm blessed for it. I hope the same is true in reverse

### **Q4U: Do you see having coffee or lunch with a friend as the sacred act it is?**

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.blogspot.com/2014/11/faith-family-fridays-my-part-time.html>  
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## An Update on Our Quest for More Perfect Environmental Stewardship [at Super Swell Times]

Awhile ago, I (reluctantly) wrote about our plans to [get right with God and Mother Nature](#). Back then, we were just getting into recycling and considering what else we could do to greenify our house/make better use of God's creation. I figured I'd take some time today to let you know how we've been doing.



A bin this big can hold a lot of beer bottles and newspapers, y'all.

First, we have a recycling bin now. It's pretty gigantic, actually — a full 19 gallons. Since we started using it, the change in our trash output was immediate. Back in the dark era, we had to take the trash out two or three times a week (which is pretty shameful for two people). Now, we're down to once per week — and that's usually only because it's kind of starting to smell.

The recycling thing made me feel really good about myself and our household, so I started looking around for other ways to improve our household management. Here's what we've done so far:



None of mine look this cool.

- We're down to using paper towels only for napkins, The Bunny cage and toilets. Honestly, I'd be okay with using rags for the cage, too but Bret's not into it.
- I've invested in a slew of canvas shopping bags for groceries and errands and stuff. (Except for raw meat, because that's another one of Bret's *things*.) What plastic bags I *do* bring home from the store get recycled the next time I go.
- When we dine out, I think long and hard about what to order — most of the time, the portion sizes are huge, so I've been trying to order things that will taste okay for lunch the next day.
- Instead of buying a petroleum-based (or otherwise wasteful) Advent wreath, we bought some clippings from a local nursery and made our own with ribbons left over from our wedding. Honestly, at the rate we're going through them, we'll be using those ribbons for presents and stuff until our 20th anniversary.

Even though we're making major improvements, I feel like there are other things we could be doing. *What things do you do at your house?*

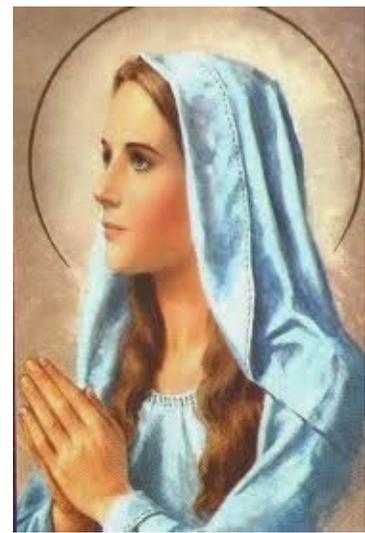
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This contribution is available at <http://superswelltimes.wordpress.com/2014/12/04/an-update-on-our-quest-for-more-perfect-environmental-stewardship/>

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## 3 Thoughts About Wearing a Veil - Is Veiling on Your Mind? [at Designs by Birgit]



The

[Latin Mass Society of America](#)

is once again promoting the wearing of the veil or mantilla on

[WEAR A VEIL DAY 2014](#)

. They have designated this day because it is the Feast of the

[Immaculate Conception](#)

of Our Blessed Mother Mary. The optional, yet beautifully feminine devotion of wearing a covering is making a resurgence in both Britain and America.

In celebration of this opportunity for other ladies to join those of us who also wear a veil, I thought I'd share three of my favorite blog posts on this topic. Whether you already wear a veil, are discerning veiling, or want to encourage others to cover, here you will find some interesting thoughts and facts about his resurging devotion.

### 1. The Insistent Whisper Draws Me to Veil



This was my foray into the serene world of veiling. I had been hearing a quiet whisper in my heart for quite some time. A chance encounter with a friend, who offered to allow me to borrow one of her veils, sealed my determination. You can follow the thought process of my daughter and me in

[Lifting the Veil...Onto My Head](#)

## **2. I'm Veiling and Now Others Have Questions**



After we had become accustomed to wearing a veil each time we encountered the Eucharistic Christ, I sought to answer questions that had been presented to me. Although the format is simple, many adults have told me that it helped them understand the devotion more completely. In

[Veiling and You: 5 Things Catholic Boys and Girls Should Know](#)

you will find some answers and quite possibly think of a few more. Please feel free to comment in the combox. If I don't have the answer, I'll be honored to find a legitimately Catholic resource for you. I had quite a few questions myself and did copious amounts of research.

### **3. Covering Doesn't Mean You Automatically Have the Right Mindset**



In discussing the devotion of veiling with others, I began to ponder what veiling represented in my interior life. Was practicing the devotion having the desired effect on my soul?

### [Interior Disposition: Why Fix Your Hair, If You're Wearing a Veil?](#)

gives some insight into my personal journey and how it has encouraged me to internal piety. Wearing a veil isn't just a random symbol; it's a commitment of soul.

Whether or not you decide to participate in Wear the Veil Day 2014 or to practice the optional devotion from now on, I hope our journey has been helpful. Choosing to veil is a very personal decision - and one that we can walk away from, should it not be for us. The beauty of the veil comes only with the right mindset, devotion, understanding, and desire on the part of each individual lady. I hope never to make someone who doesn't participate feel badly. We are all sisters in Christ!



## In Search of Advent [at Veils and Vocations]

In modern America, the push toward Christmas began before Halloween even ended. In an effort to drive up sales, we are constantly bombarded by advertisements for the next big thing, come September the focus of retailers turns to Christmas. However, what about Advent? It's a time of preparation but not in the sense of running store to store, piling high the latest gifts, and hosting party after party. To prepare for a true Christmas, we must observe a true Advent. Here are our Advent plans in Seven Quick Takes.



*Advent*

1

Find a Daily Devotion

It is important to be in the day, each day and not just plow ahead to Christmas. Having a daily prayer devotion will ground you and turn your thoughts to God not merchandising. I have used various booklets through the years, but this year, I'm trying something new. I have had the book

[33 Days to Morning Glory](#)

for a few years, my problem is always starting on the right day and not getting off track 75% through. So, I have signed up for an

[email program](#)

so I will not lose track and finally make it to the consecration. ( For more ideas, check out

[Catholic Mom.](#)

)

2

## Don't Forget the Children

A devotion for the family is also important. We really love completing our Jesse tree, but I have to admit there were years when we were trying to do five days in one night or only made fifteen ornaments. This beautiful devotion became a source of anxiety, friction, and stress. Then, we discovered

### [Holy Heroes Advent Adventure.](#)

There is so much to love about Holy Heroes (their CD 's are absolutely wonderful!!), but I have to say my favorite is Advent Adventure. No only did we complete the Jesse Tree, but also prayed the O Antiphons, a decade a day, and learned about a new saint and liturgical traditions. Best of all it is free and comes delivered in one email. You do not even need to have Jesse Tree ornaments, printable ones are included in the email. If you have not signed up, please do and also remember Holy Heroes for stocking stuffers and gifts.

3

## Celebrate the Feasts

There are so many wonderful feasts during Advent, but honestly our Church has so many feasts, how could anyone ever say we don't like to have fun. To keep the focus on Christ and the moment, consider celebrating one or more of the feasts with your family. Keep them as simple as you like and remember to add giving and prayer. Here are the feasts we always celebrate, I will post more detailed plans on the day of the feast--still planning

**St Nicholas Day:** A wonderful counter to the Santa hype, this holiday is a beloved tradition for my children. On December 5th, they leave out their shoes before bed. In the morning, they discover some small treats and something big to give away. We strive to spend \$5 or less per a child, but last year they also received \$40 to give away however they pleased. We drink lots of cocoa with candy canes, have a special breakfast, lunch, and dinner, make gingerbread houses, and spend the day making gifts for the family.

**Immaculate Conception:** Not only a holy day of obligation, but a chance to remember the importance of Mary. Celebrate with something white for dinner.

St Juan Diego Day: My children have a special love for Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe. Plan something Mexican for dinner! I have a plan for some crafts and books that I will post soon.

Our Lady of Guadalupe: Have something Mexican, again, and read the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I have many plans for this day, but nothing over the top. We are planning to celebrate in more meaningful but less stressful ways.

St Lucy Day: Cowgirl dresses up and brings us coffee and breakfast in bed. Then, we have special crafts, read special stories, and have a Swedish dinner.

4

Build the Anticipation

We have several traditions to do this. First is our Advent wreath, the children get so excited every time we get to light another candle. We also have a box with small doors,

[kind of like this one](#)

, that we use as an Advent calendar. Each day, a new door is opened to reveal a piece for our feltboard nativity. Half way through, I include a piece of our miniature vinyl nativity to add to the excitement. We decorate gradually, always starting with our nativities and ending with the tree.

5

Sacrifice, Sacrifice, Sacrifice

Like Lent, Advent is a time of preparing the soul. The soul requires sacrifice and prayer, not indulgence. Remember, Christmas is the apex and the big feast, not the entire month of December. Give alms, pray often, and fast from something special. Make it a point to do corporal works of mercy. The more you give, the more you will receive and the less you will desire worldly gifts. Clean out your home as you clean out your heart, choose items to donate and bless someone else. Read

[Michelle's post](#)

on the capsule wardrobe if you need inspiration.

6

Don't shop!

Wait, what? Aren't these the biggest shopping days of the year? What about Nye list and checking it twice? What will the kids think? Hear me out. I try very hard to complete Christmas shopping before Advent begins. The main aim of Christmas marketing is to get you to spend, spend, spend. You are made to feel that the holiday will only have joy if your wallet is empty and then some, but wealth and riches are the polar opposite of the first Christmas. It may be too late to finish before Advent, but take these steps to minimize the damage of Christmas commercialism. Simplify your list, are you buying just to have gifts to give or because you want to bless your loved ones with a gift. Cut back, less really is more! Second, give experiences not things. Plan a day of baking with your daughter, a fishing trip with your nephew, a camping trip with your spouse. Not only will you spend less, but your gift of time will be remembered for decades. I recently read about the idea of picking a special recipe and buying all the ingredients and any special tools needed to make it. What a great idea! Do that for ten years or more and not only will that child leave the nest with a wide repertoire of recipes, but a drawerfull of tools. Third, give the gift of giving. Wrap up a favorite candy bar or snack and make the real gift a gift card to a charity catalog. Our favorites include

[Samaritans Purse](#)

and

[Show Hope.](#)

When you must shop patronize local businesses and Catholic vendors, such as the ones featured on

[Catholic Deals](#)

and

[Shower of Roses.](#)

You can also help support the religious communities by shopping monastery shops. Check out a list of some right

[here](#)

, and

[here](#)

is another favorite of mine.

7

Find Silence

It is in the silence that we find God. Try to adopt a discipline that affords you silence, a precious commodity in modern living. Make a holy hour each week, attend daily Mass, wake up twenty minutes early to pray. Whatever you do, take time each day to breathe and listen to the LORD. Melody at

## [Blossoming Joy](#)

has a lovely post to help you get started. We often lovingly tease my mother-in-law because her church puts the following on their marquee each Advent, "Shhh, It's Advent!" As I get older I appreciate the sentiment more and more, although it is still a funny sign. Enjoy the season and come to Christmas day renewed and full of joy instead of depleted and grumpy. This truly is a joyful time of year, but Advent is only the beginning.

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This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2014/11/in-search-of-advent-in-7-quick-takes.html>

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# Passing the Princess Test [at Onward and Upward]



Question 1: Are you a girl?

Question 2: Have you been baptised?

By listening to

[Father Mike Schmitz' super-awesome, free, online homilies](#)

I have learned that when you get baptised things change. Before baptism you are a "Beloved Creature of God." After baptism you become a "Beloved CHILD of God."

Until recently this wasn't that interesting or exciting a fact to me. But then I got to thinking.

So God is our king. We have Mary for a mom, although not everyone embraces that. Jesus is the "Prince of Peace." Hmmm. What do you call a girl whose father is the king and whose mother is the queen and whose brother is a prince? Duh! A princess!

Remember that we became children of God at our BAPTISMS, so this isn't something just in the future after we die, this is NOW. (If you are not a girl you are welcome to continue reading this article, just substitute the word "prince".)

THE BAD NEWS

This princess business is not all cupcakes and sunshine. We know that in the history books people are always trying to knock off the royal family so they can take over. That is pretty much the case for us, too, while we are still in this world. So think of this life as a big princess test. There are lots of difficulties and trials. Sometimes it seems like the whole universe has got it in for us.

If you pass the test you get to live the really good princess-life with the Holy Family forever with no more bad guys trying to mess you up and steal your crown. (Enter cupcakes and sunshine.) If you fail . . . well, let's just say you don't want to fail the princess test.

Wow. Forever is so long!

More bad news. Even if you pass the test, your job description for eternity will be "Princess." That is only bad in the sense that you never get to be promoted to "Queen". Actually one of the best ways to flunk the princess test is to try to grab the queen or king's crown for yourself. So be a princess and be happy.

IF I AM A PRINCESS, PEOPLE SHOULD TREAT ME WITH MORE RESPECT,

DARN IT!

Yes. But remember that there are three types of people in this world: "Princesses", "Princes" and "Beloved Creatures of God." So we need to be treating EVERYONE with this kind of respect. Princes and Princesses deserve respect because they are part of the royal family and Beloved Creatures of God get respect because the king LOVES them!

THE GOOD NEWS

If you think about it you will probably be able to figure out the right answers to the test problems. (Hint: start by checking out Matthew 25.)

And . . . you have all the help you want passing the princess test! All the people who took and passed the test before you and even the Queen, herself, will be happy to give you the answers needed if you ask them.

You may have heard that it's a killer final but don't freak out. Start studying now and ask for lots of help. The princess crown is yours to lose.

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This contribution is available at <http://onwardandupwardcatholic.blogspot.com/2014/11/passing-princess-test.html>  
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# How to parent your teen -- the manual that made it in the trash [at Mercy Me!]

My son turns 13 years-old on Black Friday. Could there be a more ominous sign than that? While hoards of shoppers are waking up at 3 a.m. to suffer through lines and duke it out for deals, my sweet baby, ever so dear, will be entering the darkness that often accompanies the teenage years.

As if he is already rehearsing for the big day of black, my house has recently been filled with a cacophony of slamming doors, woeful sighs and whispers under the breath that I am pretty sure do not include any sweet nothings. It sounds like a coarse symphony that does nothing to evoke my sympathies.

I called a friend a few weeks ago and in a prayerful plea, asked in the name of all that is holy, all that is sane, and all that is merciful, to lend me every parenting book she owns.

She brought me five.

The small stack of books sat in my office and my younger son asked me why I had so many teenager books. Before I could even formulate a response, he answered his own question — obviously remembering his brother’s upcoming birthday. “Oh yeah, it’s going to be a long seven years...,” he said prophetically.

*Seven years?* Why do the terrible twos get all the notoriety? That’s one measly year and they are still small enough to be restrained.

As I read, I began strategizing, thinking of systems to implement and solutions to employ. I realized that, if necessary, doors could be unhinged. He would inevitably realize that not loading the dishwasher would be to his disadvantage. And, I felt hopeful that discussions could be facilitated without anyone actually dying.

Ah, I was going to be the most brilliant teenage mother ever.

I started writing a sort of manifesto for the teen years. I clicked away at the computer thinking to myself that I was doing the holy work of writing the instruction manual for parenting that I always wished I had.

Although my business interests have never evolved passed retail and at that, only on the paying side of the cash register, I had ultimately written my first business plan.

It read like a contract, with caveats and consequences included for clarity. It featured equations for various if/then scenarios and it clearly proved that my naiveté is boundless.

I actually *believed* that what I had written would be embraced – that is until I proudly emailed a trusted friend with the teen manual, which I intended to present to my son. She is tactful to a fault, so when she suggested that my glorious parenting plan would evoke a middle finger response I was stunned.

*Really?*

I reread my work. *It was so beautiful*. It had italics and bullet points and fancy words like parameters, privileges, outlined and occasionally.

I guess I could see where it was kind of bossy pants-ish, but it did include a smiley emoticon and an *I love you*.

I signed it not with the slang, Yo mama, but with the sincere, sweet, *your mama* that was so obviously *me*.

Later that night, with my two-page, single-spaced manifesto by my side I sat down and spoke with my son. Maybe it was because I was lulled by the soothing sound of the dishwasher that my tween ran without my mention, but I was uncannily calm. We talked about grades, basketball and ways he could earn extra money.

We didn't hold hands, or hug or do anything that would invoke Norman Rockwell to paint us, but we talked. I didn't boss or dictate either, yet I didn't digress from making my expectations clear.

When we finished talking, he kissed me goodnight and there I sat – the manifesto, a mostly-read parenting book and myself.

I thought about ripping up my beautiful plan I had written about how the teen years would unfold in our home, but I didn't have the energy to be so dramatic. I simply folded it into a little square to put in the trash.

I guess what I realized is that maybe the reason children don't come with instructions is because parenting isn't meant to be precise. It might be insightful to read some books, or even to write your own plan about how you intend to parent, but often intentions and plans don't really have much to do with raising children.

Like the rest of us, children are unique and, like it or not, have plans of their own. They will make their own path in the world and it's our job to guide them as they do. It is a delicate balance between letting go and holding on. Sometimes it's letting pieces fall where they may, and sometimes it means picking up the pieces and starting over again.

Maybe parenthood could best be described as prayer – a combination of something we hope for, ask of, praise, repent, and offer thanks. It is an active petition that is said every time we discipline, praise, share affection, or just sit and talk. The prayer does not end, like love, it endures time, tantrums and even teenagers. It is an offering of the best of ourselves so that someone we love can become the best of their selves. It is sacrifice, surrender, forgiveness, and humility.



Parenting may be described as more gut-wrenching than glorious, but it is no doubt the most Holy work we can do.

While my son may turn 13 on a day dubbed Black Friday, it's no coincidence this falls the day after Thanksgiving. After all, he has been a blessing everyday of his life. He is a prayer and a gift.

Of course, I know the years ahead won't be easy, but I can't help but feel excited about all that awaits. The spectrum of joy, discovery and promise that lies ahead is sure to be anything but black.

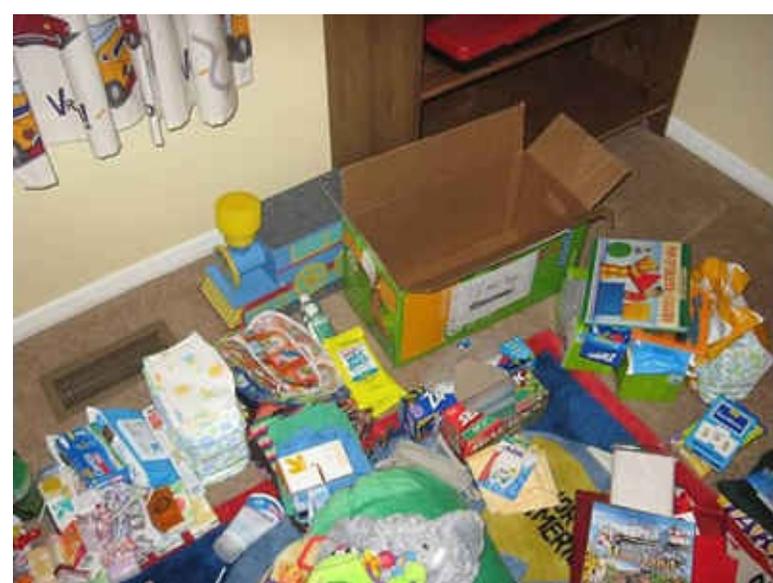




# Reflecting on our Advent journey 5 years ago: Preparing to go to China [at Catholic Review]

*This Advent I am looking back on our Advent journey to meet our first son in China five years ago in December.*

As we counted down to the day we were leaving for China to meet Leo, John and I worried about whether we had what we needed.



We were packing for three different parts of China. It would be frigid in Beijing and warm in Guangzhou and somewhere in between in Changsha.

We didn't know much about our little boy. What size clothes was he wearing? Did he still use a bottle? Was he potty-trained? What kind of toys did he like?

We thought about the trip itself, the language barrier—with our son and with others—and the different world we would encounter, all while becoming new parents. Mostly, though, we wondered about our son.

For the 11 months we waited to meet him, we had prayed that he was getting the love and food and medical care he needed.

Now we were days away from meeting him. So I packed. And unpacked. And repacked.

How do you prepare for a journey to a new country where you will become a parent for the first time? All I could do was think about our little boy, living on the other side of the world. Maybe he knew we were coming. Maybe he didn't. John and I had to be ready to become his parents and meet him wherever he was.

Looking back on that time, I wonder what it was like for St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother as they prepared to make their journey to Bethlehem. They must have known that Jesus would be born on their trip. How could they prepare for that experience, not knowing what accommodations and support they would find along the way?

They faced so many unknowns, far more than John and I did. We had a travel agent and an adoption agency guiding us every step of the way. Of course, Mary and Joseph were welcoming the Son of God. Did that make it easier for them? I imagine they had to trust and hope and talk constantly to God.



What did John and I need? Our passports, adoption paperwork, and a few changes of clothes—and, I would argue, a camera with a large memory card.

But all we really needed were an openness to the possibilities ahead of us, deep love and empathy for our child, and a realization that we could not control this trip.

Today as we look forward to Jesus’ birth at Christmas, I realize that I need to be less concerned with what I’m putting into my suitcase. The gift-buying, the wrapping, the card-writing, the baking, the decorating will happen. If they don’t, Christmas will still come.

The key to a beautiful, fruitful Christmas is not worrying about what I’m putting under the tree, but focusing on preparing myself to meet our Lord and Savior.

*What are you doing to prepare yourself for Christmas?*

***You might also like to read the previous post:***

**and the next installments:**

*11/30/2014 11:36:05 PM*

By

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This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2014/11/30/reflecting-on-our-advent-journey-5-years-ago-preparing-to-go-to-china>  
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## The Bonfires of November [at Mere Observations]

When I was a small boy growing up in a very small South Dakota town I always looked forward to this time of year because of the smells. Autumn just has a certain aroma: pumpkin spices, cookies and caramels, turkey and stuffing. But that's just the food. I'm also referring to the crisp, chilled air of autumn that is all about the earth: the dirt of gardens plowed under for the winter, decaying leaves and moist grass beneath them, and of course, the bonfires.



In our tiny town of two hundred villagers almost every yard contained raked mounds of leaves prepared for the burning. While some of us did carry the leaves into large metal trash barrels near the alley and set them ablaze, I recall, too, the smoldering, smoking leaves burning where they were piled on our lawn. Next to the pile I stood holding a rake that was too big for me, dressed in blue jeans, boots and layers of shirts with a knit cap, sniffing and wiping my nose with the back of my sleeve. My younger brother, aged six, stood nearby with ruddy cheeks, while our youngest brother, aged two, was sitting in the next pile to be burned, covering himself in the leaves recently shed from their trees.

I awoke this morning, refreshed by the extra hour of sleep thanks to the end of daylight savings time, and stood by my patio door with a steaming cup of coffee to watch the yellow, red and brown leaves rain onto our lawn. After praying Morning Prayer I reached for a book I do not read often enough to see if Monsignor [Ronald Knox](#), an Anglican convert to the Catholic Church who lived from 1888-1957, had written something for me to meditate upon before the other occupants of my house awoke and the morning quiet disappeared. I purchased a collection of his sermons nine years ago when Ignatius Press had it on sale and over the years have become an admirer of his prolific and beautiful writing. I wasn't disappointed on this morning. After pulling the heavy book from my shelf and scanning the table of contents I found his sermon for All Souls Day and smiled when I saw that he, too, was thinking of bonfires. An excerpt is below.

\*\*\*\*\*

*But we mustn't forget the bonfire! Don't let us allow November to be ushered in without the bonfire, the natural sacrament of the dying year. The dying year, mark you, not the dead year. The year lies dead in January, under its shroud of white and its pall of black skies; but November is a transition stage between the golden glories of its maturity and the silver fineries of its funeral. And because the year is drawing to its end, we occupy ourselves in tidying up. Those leaves, whose violent emerald colour we welcomed so when they first sprang in March; those leaves, that made such a riot of restfulness over us and around us in the summer; those leaves, that autumn showed us beautiful even in decay, a golden ceiling over our heads till they fell, a golden carpet under our feet when they were fallen; they have lost, now, even the splendours of their maturity; they lie brown and damp underfoot, an unwelcome reminder of our decay. Sweep them up, then, and carry them to the bonfire. For the year is passing, and we must tidy up.*

*Most of us, I suppose, when we were small, didn't care much for tidying up—at least, if we were brought up to put away our toys on Saturday night. It gave a chill finality to the end of the week—almost a premonition of death, that last, solemn Saturday night when all our toys have to be put away. We scoured the room half-heartedly, working under orders; and, when the last dragoon had been restored to his long-lost charger, and the last elephant had folded its reluctant legs into the Noah's Ark, we turned away with a sense of duty done, indeed, but a sense, too, of regret at the law that will not let our games last forever. But the bonfire in November, at the great tidying-up of the year—that was a very different matter! Here was rich, pungent smoke rising, it is true, from a heap of refuse, but how satisfying to the nostrils! How it invited us to rush, breathlessly, through its fragrant eddies. And there was always the chance that you might find a potato or two somewhere, to roast on the embers. That tidying-up was worth having.*

*People are always telling us that our Christian festivals and fasts are only heathen festivals and fasts that have survived with altered names and altered ceremonies; but I take comfort sometimes in the fact that our All Souls' Day, anyhow, is in bonfire month, in November. The ancients, too, had their Day of the Dead; but the Romans and Greeks, at least, the only ancient peoples for whom I can answer, celebrated it in February, and very naturally. For in February the year is dead; bare trees and sighing winds make us think of our end and the short time of our earthly passage. But that is not our Christian tradition. We think of our dead in November, the tidying-up of the year. For, when death separates us from the toys of earth, our souls are still such that there is a work of tidying-up to do. And, as St. Paul warns us, that process can only be effected "so as by fire". There are still the leaves to be burnt.*

[Pastoral and Occasional Sermons](#) by Ronald Knox. (Ignatius Press, 2002) "All Souls", pp. 533-534.



### **Photo Credits**

Photo 1: an angel flowerpot surrounded by leaves in the author's front yard and taken last fall.

Photo 2: Morningside Cemetery, an almost completely forgotten pioneer cemetery in southeastern South Dakota. This photo was taken by the author in March 2005. The bones of my ancestors lie beneath the cold Dakota prairie.

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This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2014/11/02/the-bonfires-of-november/>  
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## We Are In A Spiritual Battle (Whether We Like It Or Not)

Often we think we lead ordinary, simple lives that no one would care about. We go to work, come home, eat and sleep. Our faces will never be on the cover of Time Magazine and our obituary will probably be very short. Little do we know that there is actually a war going on right now for our very soul.



The Fall of the Rebel Angels – Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Saint Paul puts it succinctly:

“Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. **For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.** Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground” (Ephesians 6:11-13). [Emphasis added]

**Yet, why must we “put on the armor of God?” We have never declared war on anyone!** Actually, we did at our Baptism. Here is what our Godparents say on our behalf:

Do you reject Satan? (*I do*)

And all his works? (*I do*)

And all his empty promises? (*I do*)

There you have it. Our Godparents just declared war on Satan! And he is not happy at all. The book of Revelation gives us a more detailed description:

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth.

Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a **huge red dragon**, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days.

**Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon.** The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, **was thrown down to earth**, and its angels were thrown down with it.

When the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, **it pursued the woman** who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where, far from the serpent, she was taken care of for a year, two years, and a half-year. The serpent, however, spewed a torrent of water out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with the current. But the earth helped the woman and opened its mouth and swallowed the flood that the dragon spewed out of its mouth. **Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus.** (Revelation 12:1-9,13-17) [Emphasis Added]

That last line is where Satan declared war on us!

We may not notice unusual things happening in our day-to-day life, but we can be sure of one thing: Satan is doing all he can to take us away from following God's commandments and from bearing witness to Jesus Christ in the world. This is why, we must always be on guard to fight the good fight. In fact, not only does our eternal life depend upon it, but also the [eternal life of our family and the fate of all of humanity](#).

**If we don't fight, we will lose. Just like on the battlefield. If we stand there and do nothing, the cavalry will run us over.**

How do we fight back? Well, that is a topic we will explore in many more articles to come.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.philipkosloski.com/we-are-in-a-spiritual-battle/>  
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# Second Week of Advent: Trust [at The Koala Bear Writer]

Being pregnant over the Advent and Christmas season with all three of our daughters has given me a new appreciation of what Mary went through in [the Nativity story](#). It's an old story, one that most of us are quite familiar with. I'd heard it every Christmas growing up so I kinda stopped thinking about it. Yep, an angel appeared to Mary and then to Joseph, yep, they packed up and got on a donkey and headed for Bethlehem—

**Wait a minute.** Mary was quite pregnant and got on a donkey??? She just up and left her hometown to head to a completely strange new place before she had her first baby??? I'm not sure I could have done that.



Before I had Sunshine, I had so many questions about what to expect because I'd heard so many different [birthing stories](#). One friend of mine had a forty-hour labour; another a forty-minute labour. As I listened to the Nativity story that year, I began to appreciate the trust which Mary showed in following her new husband to Bethlehem.

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” ~[Luke 2:4-7 NIV](#)

Two Christmases later, when I was pregnant with Lily, I again found myself looking anew at Mary's story.

This time, I felt like I sort of knew what to expect during labour—except that I wasn't happy with [my doctor / hospital situation](#). Local policies meant that I couldn't give birth with the doctor whom I liked and trusted in the hospital two blocks away from our home; I had to drive twenty minutes over to the next town to give birth with a doctor whom I'd barely met and didn't like. Once again, I thought about Mary.

**The Nativity story, like so many other Bible stories, feels like a plot outline.** They went here, did this; he said this, she said that, angels sang. With the perspective of motherhood, I began to think more about what Mary thought and felt during that time. Pregnancy, more than anything else, brought me close to [Mary](#) and to an appreciation of her intercession for us. She who had faced so much stress and uncertainty during her pregnancy and birth knew what I was going through and could ask Jesus to give me the grace and strength I needed to face it.

This Christmas, as we face a move to a new town like Mary and Joseph, I'm contemplating the trust which she showed during that time of her life. Trust not only in God, to whom she had said "Yes," but also in Joseph. God spoke to her through the angel Gabriel when He told her she would conceive His son; after that, He spoke to Joseph, telling Joseph where to go and how to keep Mary and baby Jesus safe. Mary had to trust Joseph when they left Nazareth for Bethlehem, and later when they left Bethlehem for Egypt.

So this Advent season, as I face the uncertainty of a move and a new city, I pray that I will learn to trust God and my husband just as Mary did.



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This contribution is available at <http://www.thekoalabearwriter.com/2014/12/second-week-of-advent-trust/>  
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## Moments [at A blessed mess]



I held my baby brother, gave him soft kisses on his head.

Read him stories, made him laugh.

I followed him around the house.

Dressed him in his pajamas hours early because he asked me to.

I put down what I was doing to pick him up.

I want him to know that he is more important to me than

*anything*

I have to.

Mostly I do not him to ever think that there is

*anything*

more important to me than him.

Children are precious, people are precious.

I might only have one chance to prove to some people that they are important to me.

If I say later, like I so often do to my little brother, later will never come.

He will be left with

*never*

.

I only have this moment to show him that I love him.

I want to put people before me, before my silly to do list, before everything else.

Once this moment is gone it is lost forever, so I am going to make the most of it.

*I write this not because I am good at this but because this is one of the major things I fail at, everyday.*

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## St. Peter's Cross and the virtue of Hope [at Est Quod Est]

[I obviously think the relentless captioning of the Joe Biden window photo is humorous](#)

. I wonder if anyone else has noticed what to me was the main feature of the picture.

[Joseph Biden](#)

is the first Catholic occupant of the White House since JFK,

[51 years and a couple weeks ago](#)

. And here he is being presented with an image of St. Peter's Cross. That's

[a Catholic symbol](#)

. Most Protestant Christians don't use it in their art or architecture, thinking it's satanic or too Catholic. So I think that it is significant enough for a sort of meditation.



I imagine that Simon Peter had a look similar to the one in the photo on his face when he was told by the Resurrected Christ that he was going to be crucified. The Catholic Answer's piece I linked to notes "In the ancient world — particularly in the Christian tradition — “to stretch out one’s hands” was a common reference to crucifixion."

And yet it is possible that this thought of impending martyrdom may have given Peter some hope. He had

[denied his Lord in the most cowardly way](#)

just to get out of a little bit of uncomfortable questioning. I imagine that if the servant girl had a Twitter account she might have tweeted something like "That Simon dude is sooooo one of those #jesusfreaks and he smells like fish." As

[Peter wept bitterly](#)

, he may have prayed like mad to get a chance to make up for his denials.

And the answer came during he reinstatement after the Resurrection.

*You're going to get martyred, Peter. It will be excruciatingly painful, but then you get to spend Eternity in glory. You get the better end of the stick—no pun intended—so don't despair, persevere in Hope.*

Despair is a sin against hope, and that appears to be the sin of Judas who hung himself when he became aware of his sin and the consequences. This picture of our Catholic VP and the contemplation of St. Peter's Cross should give hope to Joseph Biden and to other Catholics who have denied Christ by their words or actions, i.e., all of us to one degree or another. There would be nothing funny about a picture of Joe Biden staring at a

[donkey halter](#)

.  
Some of you might say, "Hey! why are you grimmin' us out talking about Crucifixion and Resurrection in the middle of the season of Advent on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception?" Busted — smack me with a ruler, sister. But I did find out that even though the picture has just undergone a type of resurrection on Twitter,

[the picture was taken on September 18](#)

. That is, of course, the feast day of a

[saint named Joseph](#)

who wasn't very bright and had a quick temper. Maybe the Vice President will even learn to fly someday like St. Joe of Cupertino without

[his private plane](#)

and spare a lot of jet fuel.

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This contribution is available at <http://contrapauli.blogspot.com/2014/12/st-peters-cross-and-virtue-of-hope.html>  
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# Merry CHRISTmas [at Journey to Wisdom]

A Reflection on Mark 1:1-8 N.A.B.

By: Larry T

*Prepare the Way for  
the Coming of the Lord!*



In ancient times when kings toured their kingdoms messengers were usually sent ahead to herald the king's coming to his subjects. Local communities, that wanted to stay in the good grace of the king, rushed to repair any rough roads so as to help ensure the king's travel comfort. Similarly God sent messengers ahead to proclaim the coming of his Son.

The book of Isaiah heralded the coming of the Lord in chapter 40, which was written just before the end of the Babylonian exile in 587 B.C.:

<sup>3</sup> *A voice cries out:*

*In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!*

*Make straight in the wasteland a highway*

<sup>4</sup> *Every valley shall be filled in,*

*every mountain and hill shall be made low;*

*The rugged land shall be made a plain,*

*the rough country, a broad valley.*

The coming of the Lord was likewise announced in the Book of Malachi, which was written around 455 B.C.:

<sup>1</sup> *Lo, I am sending my messenger*

*to prepare the way before me;*

*And suddenly there will come to the temple*

*And the messenger of the covenant whom you*

*Yes, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.*

Next, John the Baptist was hand-picked by God to proclaim the coming of his Son. John began to echo the ancient prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi concerning the coming of the Lord somewhere around 28 or 29 A.D. In a manner of speaking, by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and conversion, John became God's spiritual road grader, smoothing out the way for the coming of the King of the Universe:

<sup>1</sup> *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Son of God).*

<sup>2</sup> *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:*

*“Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;*

*he will prepare your way.*

<sup>3</sup> *A voice of one crying out in the desert:*

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord,*

*make straight his paths.’”*

<sup>4</sup> *John (the) Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

<sup>5</sup> *People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.*

<sup>6</sup> *John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey.*

<sup>7</sup> *And this is what he proclaimed: “One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.*

<sup>8</sup> *I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit.”*

As baptized Christians we too are messengers, chosen by God, to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord, chosen to be his spiritual road graders. One of the ways that we can fulfill our prophetic duty is to herald the coming of the Lord by keeping Christ in Christmas.

At stake during the Christmas season is the question of assimilation: to what extent will Christians conform to the non-Christian culture for the sake of economic gain or social acceptance. How many of us are willing to accept non-Christian beliefs as normative, failing to recognize that these values will not stand up to the scrutiny of God?

In the Old Testament, Joshua had a firm answer concerning assimilation by alien cultures:

<sup>15</sup> *If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

<sup>16</sup> *But the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD for the service of other gods.*

As for me and my family, we *will* keep Christ in Christmas!

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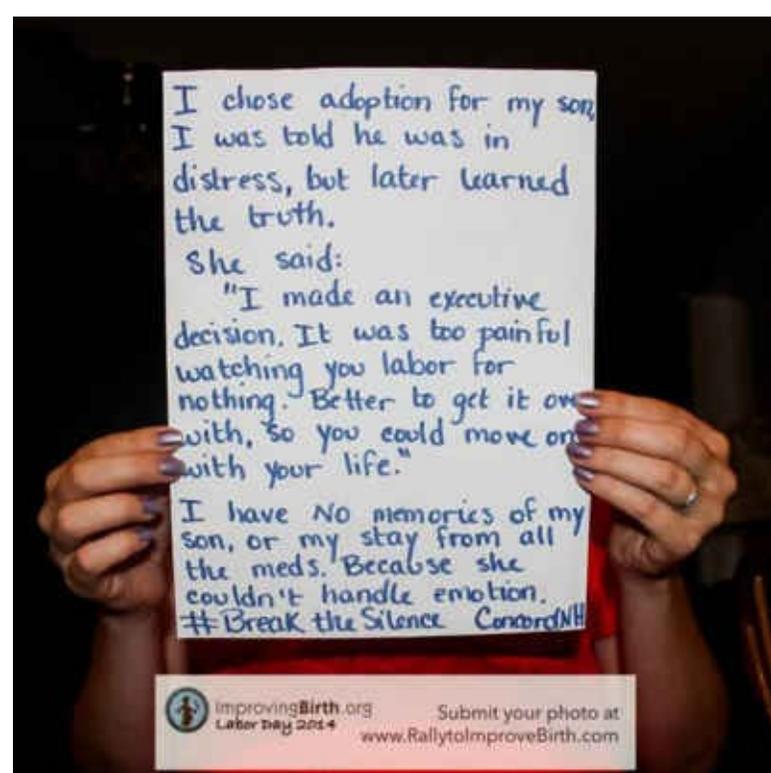
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# Theology of the Body: The Birthing Body [at The True Dignity of Women]

Every year on Labor Day, an organization called [ImprovingBirth.org](http://ImprovingBirth.org) arranges protests and various social media activism events to bring awareness to the state of birth in the US. The US has one of the highest [maternal](#) and *the highest* [infant mortality](#) rate in the industrialized world. An untold number of women carry with them horrific birth stories. Many more women suffer from post-partum depression and psychosis.

I have my [own traumatic birth story](#) to tell, so I have participated in some of these events and I always keep an eye out on what their organization is doing. This past year, they asked people to share their birth horror stories as part of their #breakthesilence campaign.

One woman shared two that I would like to share with you.



Her first child, she was unable to keep, so she made the decision to give him up for adoption. Her caregiver in the hospital could not handle the emotion of seeing a woman labor to give a child up, so she drugged this woman senseless.

What does this say about our world? If the woman was so drugged she doesn't remember a thing, she was probably drugged enough to cause harm to the baby. It is her birth experience, not her caregivers. Are we so self-centered that we can't think of someone else's needs? Furthermore, are we so self-centered that if there is "nothing in it for me" we just want to get it over with? Is that part of the mentality that lets abortion thrive: mothers not wanting to go through nine months of pregnancy and labor in order to give peace and joy to someone else, not to mention the chance to live? This woman did the honorable thing to give her son a chance at a better life, the least she deserved from her caregivers was respect.



ImprovingBirth.org  
Labor Day 2014

Submit your photo at  
www.RallytoImproveBirth.com

An OB I'd never met  
came into my room to  
tell me a VBAC was too  
dangerous. When I said  
I was more worried about  
the risks another section  
would cause for future  
pregnancies, he rolled his  
eyes, chuckled and said:  
"Or you could just stop  
having kids! Don't you have  
enough??" I had 2.  
#BreaktheSilence  
Hanover, NH

One of my favorite stories from my boss at JPII Center is the birth of one of her last kids. She is the mother of 7 children. After every childbirth, she was condescendingly asked about artificial birth control options. After one of the last, she finally just lost it on the doctor. I still haven't heard exactly what she said to him, but I know it wasn't G-rated.

Why do we set the limit at 2? It's usually after 2 that a family gets deemed "too big." Is it because we just don't see many families bigger than two nowadays? Why is that?

In my [Humanae Vitae class](#) this past week we read a part of the letter that talks about how "we know better now the costs of raising a child." What?!?! How insulting is that to our ancestors? Do you think that our ancestors didn't know the costs of having big families? They had to care for and feed all those children. They watched more than their share [die before the age of 5](#).

Just a couple generations ago, [Margaret Sanger](#) watched her mother die from tuberculosis intensified by having a large family and heard the cries of poor women who just couldn't take it anymore. Of course, we all know what her answer to that cry was and I would hope any reader here would know what my opinion is of that answer, but my illustration still stands. These women knew full and well the sacrifice of large families. Our ancestors weren't idiots. Post-modern man, get over yourself!

This seems to be related to the other picture in that we've lost a sense of sacrifice. We're so caught in our creature comforts. Sacrifice has always been difficult for us; after all, it's called sacrifice not plentifulness. As our society has gotten more and more wealthy, as technology has made our lives simpler, we have become less and less willing to sacrifice. We are meant to be a gift to one another. That's what Theology of the Body is all about.

This woman has been a gift to her children. God bless her! She should be admired, not silenced.



# Starting a Prayer Routine [at Between the Linens]



## 1. Chart your time for a week or two.

It is really easy to feel like we have no time or that we are JUST THAT BUSY. [However, the truth is that most people do not naturally use time wisely](#) (Ahem, I love to be so busy that I can't pray but not to busy that I just watched three episodes on Netflix during nap time). Last April after reading Holly Pierlot's book [A Mother's Rule of Life: How to Bring Order to Your Home and Peace to Your Soul](#), I bought her [companion e-book](#) that had tracking sheets available. So, for a week I wrote down what I did each day by the hour. MIND BLOWN. I spent so much time either finding things I needed or "taking breaks" to check social media or Amazon shopping (why it is so easy? oh the mind sucking power of Amazon.). I suggest being brutally honest with yourself. Write down everything you do even if it is checking your phone or watching TV or actually mopping the floor. Moreover, keeping track of what the chickadees are doing at the same time can better determine when they will be best for letting you have prayer time.

## 2. Set an intention, find a book, pick a prayer/devotion, or get a journal.

Look for something that will draw you back again and again. You are going to want to be excited about this time seeking it out each day. I do really well with a specific starting goal like a 54 day rosary novena or picking one book on which to concentrate.

Some great choices for Advent devotions are:

## 3. Pick a manageable time increment to start the journey; five or ten minutes a day adds up to a substantial amount of time over a lifetime.

For a book maybe reading a chapter a day or a set number of pages is less overwhelming. When I was

reading [Louis De Montfort's True Devotion to Mary: with Preparation for Total Consecration](#), I read only 5 pages a day by the 33rd day the book was finished. Once the habit is kept, adding more time can be re-evaluated as fruitful or not. What's important in the beginning is just starting.

#### **4. Have everything you need like your book or journal and pens ready for when you sit down to pray.**

Creating a space for those specific items allows you to quickly get into prayer mode. In turn, you are less likely to forgo your planned time with God because an item is lost. I have an orange bag my husband bought me back in college that I use to store my current books, journals, etc. I find that picking a specific spot also helps with creating a routine. After lunch and our afternoon lessons, I pick up my bag and teacup and sit down on the couch in the living room while the chickadees watch a show or play on their leap pads.

#### **5. Battle Buddy it up.**

Pair up with a good friend that also would like to create a set prayer time. Oftentimes, a friend can help nudge us into better habits by giving us a place to vent, voice our frustrations, find solutions, and keep accountability. Moreover, it's great to have someone to text you a motivational message or call with a reminder when the morning has been spent cleaning poo or peanut butter or whatever that was off of the living room walls to search out God. Moving to Fort Drum two years ago, I found a great faith study group on post. Those first few months allowed me to find new friends, to thrive in a new environment, and to belong to a community of like-minded individuals. If a battle buddy isn't available, pick a Saint!

#### **6. Break out those gold foil stars and a calendar.**

Track your progress each day for a month. It is not wrong to show growth. It is not wrong to feel accomplished at establishing a routine. It is not wrong to miss a day or two. On days that I am not able to pray or make my scheduled time, I write down on the calendar why I was not able to complete it. I usually can "make up" the time later that night (I also write that down) but other times I can't make it up like having a baby in your living room. Life happens, so...

#### **7. KEEP TRYING.**



“GOD  
has not called  
me to be  
SUCCESSFUL.  
He called  
me to be  
FAITHFUL.”

***[Kelly is hosting again! Head on over to read more!](#)***

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This contribution is available at <http://www.betweenlinens.com/starting-a-prayer-routine-seven-quick-takes/>  
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# Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception Solemn Latin Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Toronto [at Servimus unum Deum]



**"AVE MARIA, GRATIA PLENA, DOMINUS TECUM ....."**

Hello Everyone,

What an Advent season miracle that has just happened this past day! The Archdiocese of Toronto, under the holy and considerate leadership of His Eminence, Thomas Cardinal Collins, was graced to have had not just one, or two, but

**FIVE**

Latin Masses on this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Two of these offerings were part of the daily Missa Lectae (Low Masses) offered by St. Lawrence the Martyr, Scarborough, and Holy Family under the Oratorians (11am and 1130am respectively).

**But get this ... THE OTHER THREE WERE SOLEMN LATIN MASSES IN THE EVENING! THREE!**

We are talking three clergy, incense, acolytes with candles, perhaps even a boat bearer and torches at some of the offerings, and beautiful Gregorian Chant and hymns to celebrate this sacred mystery! One was the Oratorians at Holy Family for 6pm, and the other two at the same time, were: St. Joseph's in Mississauga, Ontario with the (likely direction) of the Toronto Traditional Mass Society, and the other, at St. Francis of Assisi for their centenary of the founding of the Parish with assistance from St. Patrick's Gregorian Choir! Both masses were 7pm!

This report will be detailing the efforts and what happened for the centenary Mass @ St. Francis of Assisi at 7pm, as I was involved in assisting the parish and St. Patrick's in the role of first acolyte for the Mass.

***Primer: Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary***

Just what were all these Masses, including those in the Ordinary Form/Novus Ordo about today? Today in the liturgical calendars of both forms of the Roman Rite, was the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

When we talk about the Immaculate Conception, this is NOT the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is easy to see where the confusion lies, as Jesus was "Immaculate" in the sense of being born without sin, and we refer to the moment the human gametes (sperm/sperm and ovum/egg) in biology contact each other to begin becoming a new human life (a fetus) as "Conception," or just plainly that a newborn was "conceived" by giving birth. This is NOT the case here.

The Immaculate Conception actually refers to MARY's birth, in that she was born WITHOUT ORIGINAL SIN. Yes she was essential in Christ's birth, but this feast day celebrates her as the spotless virgin, sinless, able to be the Theotokos (God-bearer), the perfect vessel for Christ.

This fact is of the utmost importance, that Holy Mother Church wielded her Divine Authority, Infallibly through Pope Pius IX, to declare that her Immaculate Conception

**is a matter of dogma, thus every Catholic MUST believe in this teaching, else they separate themselves from the Church. This was declared in the Apostolic Constitution Ineffabilis Deus, which can be viewed here entirely: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm>. The declaration is as follows:**

"... by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own: "We declare, pronounce, and define that **the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.**"<sup>[29]</sup>

Hence, if anyone shall dare -- which God forbid! -- to think otherwise than as has been defined by us, let him know and understand that he is condemned by his own judgment; that he has suffered shipwreck in the faith; that he has separated from the unity of the Church; and that, furthermore, by his own action he incurs the penalties established by law if he should dare to express in words or writing or by any other outward means the errors he think in his heart.

Now that you get what this solemnity in the Church is all about, allow me to report on the preparation and the actual Mass that took place

### ***Preparation for the Mass***

Within a month before the date of this mass, word was spread about this Mass via the parish bulletin, the Archdiocese website, the SPGC associated Facebook page, as well as this blog, and perhaps word of mouth. In promoting this mass, members from St. Lawrence the Martyr's Latin Mass program, St. Francis of Assisi's altar servers, and I as an independent not affiliated with a Latin Mass parish, volunteered to

assist the Lord in service at the altar, as well as another young man who was our the subdeacon, having the appropriate qualifications under the guidelines that exist for the EF.

November 29th, both the choir, and the servers met at St. Francis on that cold Saturday evening to do training for the Mass, via a run through of all major serving roles, as well as training for the subdeacon role for the young man. This training was undertaken by our veteran Master of Ceremonies with the Choir, who also co-ordinates the serving portions of each Mass that SPGC organizes. I was assigned the role of first acolyte, while others were given the roles of 2nd acolyte and thurifer. The practice went smoothly, as all individuals involved have had some or great experience serving in the EF, and/or extensive experience in carrying out those roles or the equivalent of in the Novus Ordo, making the transition quicker and easier in learning the EF.

It was also found out that of all the Novus Ordo Churches (that do not have a Latin Mass or people who come in and do them that) I have been to in assisting the St. Patrick's Gregorian choir,

*St. Frances of Assisi has been the most heavily equipped with liturgical items appropriate for celebration in the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite!*

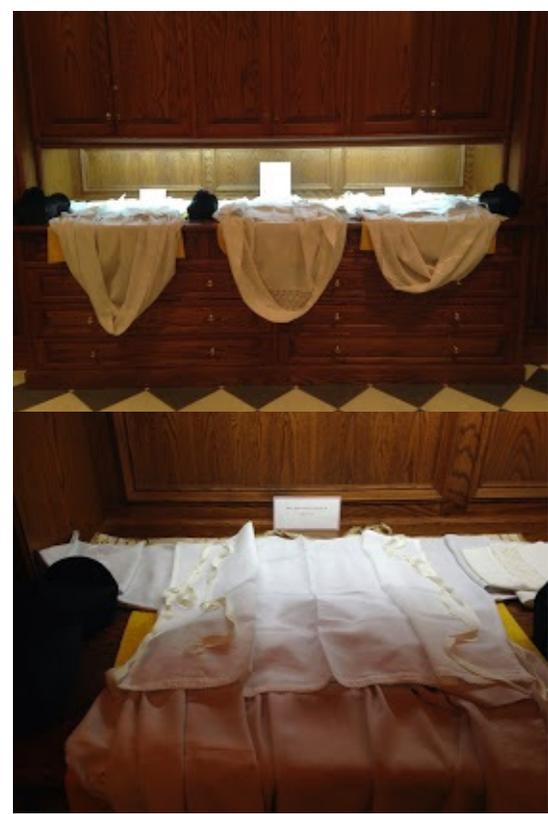
The parish was equipped with: a gorgeous gold, "Gothic" style thurible (you might have seen this in one of my earlier posts) as well as a simpler silver one, both the complex three chain variety; a set of golden and ornate NEW altar candles which are gracious gifts from parishioners of the parish for the 100th anniversary, a Gothic style, framed set of EF altar cards, a complete set of liturgical clothing in white/gold for Solemn Latin Masses in all roles made by nuns from the 1930s (again, you've seen this in an earlier post), lantern-style torches for processions, patens with handles ... I could go on but this blew my mind to know this parish takes its liturgy with respectful seriousness and solemnity.

Save perhaps the 1962 Missal itself, little to no additional items would be needed to be brought in for this liturgy. In addition, the parish had set about to create the booklets for the Order of the Mass, in both Latin-English, and Latin-Italian.

### ***The Solemn Latin Mass of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception***

And thus came the day for the EF Mass for the parish's 100th anniversary this past Monday, December 8th, 2014. Present in the clergy roles were: Fr. Jean-Marie Pilon from the diocese of Peterborough (now headed by former auxiliary bishop of Toronto, +McGrattan) as celebrant, Fr. Steven Szakaczki, Latin Mass chaplain for St. Lawrence the Martyr in the role of deacon (of whom was requested by the parish to assist for the fruition of this EF Mass), and Mr. Bradley Black in the role of subdeacon, having the appropriate qualifications under EF ``customs`` as it were, to be allowed to carry out the role.

Prior to the start of the Holy Mass, the Parish had been set up appropriately for the liturgy. The liturgical objects, both of cloth and metal, had been laid out accordingly. Interestingly enough, our clergy role members has quite a ``welcome`` as can be seen in the layout of their vestments with name cards. It is lovely to see a parish give such organization and attention to our conduct of this liturgy. These might be small details, but every little bit helps, and shows the respect given to our clergy:



**The Subdeacon's Vestments, for Mr. Bradley Black**



**The Deacon's Vestments, For Fr. Steven Szakaczki**

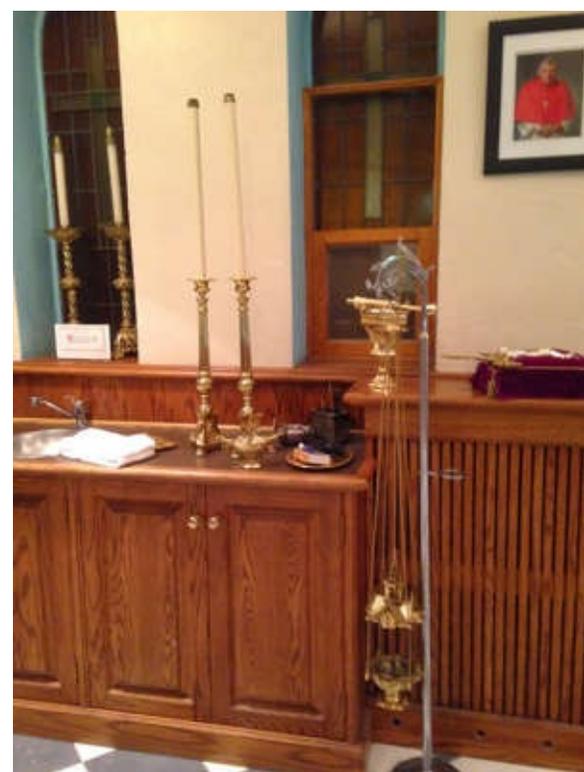


**The Celebrant's Vestments with vesting prayers and biretta, for Fr. Jean-Marie Pilon**



**Close up shot of Fr. Pilon's card.**

In addition, the parish decided to provide ALL of the servers with Solemn Mass surplices, that had a diamond pattern woven in at the sleeves and hems. Further, a multitude of beautiful liturgical items lay awaiting to be used in the liturgy, reflecting the Gothic styled architecture and environment of St. Francis' tradition (albeit with some minor adjustments) as seen here in a couple of pictures:



**There it is ... the Gothic style golden thurible. These are also the two tallish acolyte candles that I and the 2nd acolyte used in the Mass.**



**Prior to Mass, the Chalice is fully prepared, the ciboria, and the cruets from a distance.**



**Here's the cruets close up. Wow! Just look at that stunning detail! This must be brass or gold! They do not make cruets like this anymore!!! Interesting note: There are pegs that you put the cruets on to hold them steady. They have holes in their bottom for the pegs.**



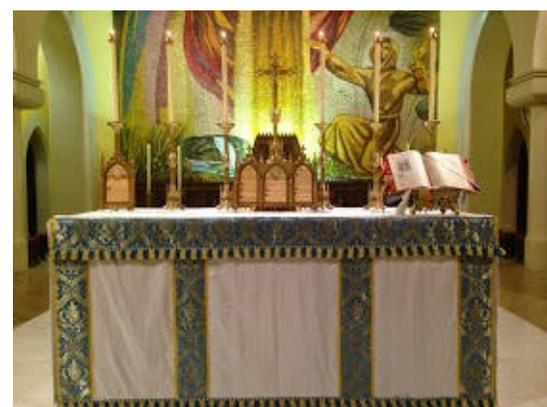
**The credence table prior to Mass, with a veiled Chalice.**



**These beautiful framed Gothic altar cards adorned the altar. This is a full set! Only the center card is pictured here.**



**Does this scream majestic? Again I do not think they make altar Missals like this anymore. Even those you can purchase from FSSP/St. John Cantius are not as ornate as this missal. I think this one even has gold clasps on them.**



**The altar before Mass Begins. Notice the Marian blue "accented" antependium. White, however is the bulk of the colour.**

Prior to the Mass, the parish pastor of St. Francis, dressed in his Franciscan habit with a lacy surplice over his robes, explained to the congregation the difference between the modern Mass and the Extraordinary Form, in both English and Italian (e.g. direction of the priest as ``Liturgical East``, receiving communion ...) Dressed and vested, we then proceeded to do the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite for the 100th anniversary celebration of the parish.

Since the tabernacle was off to the left side of the body of the Church (personally, not in favour of this), we had to make a slight modification, where we genuflected to the tabernacle once we got out of the sanctuary to the left of the body. Afterwards, it was business as usual. During the Mass, all clergy and servers performed their roles reverently and respectfully, showing experience and devotion to the Holy Mass.

It was clear in certain parts (e.g. the Offertory chants) that a sacredness and an ``energy`` or "spiritual uplifting," to use crude modern terms for description, was ever-present during the EF liturgy. For me personally, that was one moment. Another that hit me was in the exit procession, when we all sang the closing hymn ``Immaculate Mary``, whereby at the chorus, congregation and others sang in unison in joyous commemoration of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother. It was purely beautiful and I felt a sense of joy and encouragement, ready to go out into the world post-Mass.

As per my usual reporting, what great tidbits of wisdom was I able to glean from the sermon, given by the celebrant, Fr. Pilon? I will recount what I could from the sermon, albeit I am paraphrasing and missing important linking ideas as well.

- This EF liturgy has many things happening visually, though we might not understand everything.
- To accept or embrace what we are experiencing in the sacred liturgy, implies Faith.
- Last year, it was deemed by then Pope Benedict XVI, that the 2013-2014 liturgical year would be the "Year of Faith"
- Faith, allows us to believe in that which is a mystery or beyond full comprehension.
- ..... (some linking points I've forgotten).....
- In this Liturgy, we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We mistakenly might think it refers to the birth of Christ. It is actually the birth of Mary being conceived without sin.
- Sin, while there is temptation, or influence, or our weaknesses, present, always involves our will to make a choice to do sin.
- .... (some linking points) ...
- When we undertake studies in theology, one area of theology is that of "Speculative Theology." In this branch, we deal with items or concepts that are hard to prove with evidence, but we can use our existing knowledge of the faith or otherwise, to speculate on plausible parts of it.
- We can look at then, Mary`s parents, St. Anne and St. Joachim. As parents of Mary, having such devout faith to our Lord, they would have desired that their daughter would be without sin or temptations in her life, imploring on the Will of God (or perhaps, for his graces???)
- In the throes of love in conceiving the Blessed Virgin Mary, their love would have been pure at the moment of conceiving, susceptible to God's graces and His Will.
- As part of God's Will ... [here Fr. recounted a story of a sermon he gave to nuns in a crowd, habited traditional nuns ...] I uttered three latin words: *potuit, voluit, fecit*. When it came to Mary's Immaculate conception, He was able to, He wanted to, and He did it. This was referring to making Mary sinless as the Theotokos (God-bearer).
- God so knew the value of Christ suffering for us on the Cross as the Word Made Flesh. Thus, he wanted the sinless woman's flesh, to be a part of his own, via Christ's birth.
- .... (other linking points I forgot) .....
- We should follow, likewise in the obedience and devotion to our Lord, like that of our Blessed Mother, on this the Solemnity of her Immaculate Conception.

Once again, another beautiful Solemn Mass, alongside others held yesterday, was done in our Archdiocese of Toronto for this important Solemnity.

Generally, while the congregation did have a fair share of more senior people, it was a age mosaic! I saw

a number of families come for this mass, moms and dads with daughters/sons in tow, some teen, some children, others adult children. I also saw a few young adult men in the crowd on glance, plus old friends! Furthermore, it seemed that many in attendance were not the usual regulars, but St. Francis parishioners! Visually, I'd say that we had over 200 to close to 300 in attendance, maybe a little more. While the bodies were spread out a bit in the pews in the body of the Church, they reached back to the rear of the body of the Church!

The congregation also had the added aids of Latin-English and Latin-Italian translational booklets of the whole ordo of the Mass to help assist them in their prayer and worship. There were also brief descriptors of what was happening on the altar at parts, and cues for standing, sitting, and reverences. Here are snapshots of the beautiful booklet created by St. Francis of Assisi:



Afterwards, I got to speak to a few of those in attendance who were hanging around. They were joyful and happy, after coming away from what we experienced here this evening. One young couple with babe in tow, whose first EF this Mass was for them, described the event as "solemn," even saying it would be good to pass word of these Masses onto their Mother next time one happens! Hopefully they will scour the internet and find this blog, for future listings in our Archdiocese.

Once again, another Mass, with the aid of St. Patrick's Gregorian Choir, was brought to fruition in the Archdiocese of Toronto. This ends their 2014 run of Masses. I was blessed and am thankful to have served in such a reverent liturgy, and look forward to the new year. I do hope we can return to St. Francis of Assisi. What a gem this parish is Little Italy (College St. Area)! Oh if only there was a parish with such beauty AND leadership in my area where I live.

As a final note, I give a huge thank you to St. Francis of Assisi, its current pastor-ship, administration, and all those who helped to make this liturgy possible. I will never forget this, and hopefully, neither will all those who were able to experience this on a winter night. What a liturgically appropriate way to dive into the season of Advent, into the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord on Christmas Day. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel .....

Hope you have enjoyed this report. Due to the amount of photos I took, I will follow up and post the rest when I have time with a separate photo post.

Pax Tibi Christi! Julian Barkin.

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This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.ca/2014/12/report-solemnity-of-immaculate.html>  
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## Christmas Friendly Stores 2014 [at The Crooked Halo]

**BLUE:** An AFA "5-Star" rated company that promotes and celebrates Christmas on an exceptional basis. **GREEN:** Company uses the term "Christmas" on a regular basis, we consider that company Christmas-friendly. **YELLOW:** Company refers to Christmas infrequently, or in a single advertising medium, but not in others. **RED:** Company may use "Christmas" sparingly in a single or unique product description, but as a company, does not recognize it.

American Family Association continually update the list, so check back often.

[AFA site for updates](#)

Criteria - AFA reviewed up to four areas to determine if a company was "Christmas-friendly" in their advertising: print media (newspaper inserts), broadcast media (radio/television), website and/or personal visits to the store. If a company's ad has references to items associated with Christmas (trees, wreaths, lights, etc.), it was considered as an attempt to reach "Christmas" shoppers.

If a company has items associated with Christmas, but did not use the word "Christmas," then the company is considered as censoring "Christmas."

Want to report a company? Send your detailed report to

[christmas@afa.net](mailto:christmas@afa.net)

**Please know that we receive hundreds of reports (emails) each day. We are unable to respond to each one personally, but your report will be read by one of our staff.**

Note: AFA does not list local or regional companies. Only nationally-recognized companies will be listed. This list only reflects a company's "Christmas" advertising and does not take into account other corporate policies AFA may not agree with.

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This contribution is available at <http://crookedhalocatholicblog.blogspot.com/2014/11/christmas-friendly-stores-2014.html>

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# Happy 18th Birthday Madison Marie! [at Afternoon Coffee & Evening Tea]

My Madison is turning 18! I am so very proud of the young woman my firstborn has become. Although the years have run together and somehow taken that precious baby I held so close all those years ago and replaced her with a beautiful, amazing, talented young woman, I do remember many things about the first person ever to call me Mom.

Madison, I remember the exact moment I knew you were to be. I remember kneeling by my bed and thanking God for the gift of your life.

I remember Grandma holding my hand as I labored with you, and the look of worry on Grandpa's face as I left the room for the C-section that would finally bring you into the world. (You even started your life being late! I shouldn't be surprised now!)

I remember standing by your crib with Daddy, thinking you were exactly what I had prayed you would be.

I remember rocking you in your room, thinking of all the fun times we had ahead of us.

I remember your first day of Kindergarten, and how you chose your own outfit and how you would wear your hair.

I remember finding you asleep under the bedspread tent you made, surrounded by all your Barbies.

I remember how happy you were to become a big sister. Every single time.

I remember all these things about the little one that made me the thing I dreamed most of becoming...a mother.

And now, I am making new memories with the young woman that little one has become.

I taught you how to tie your shoes and button your clothes. Now, you teach me how to tie a scarf and wear the right boots with my jeans.

I taught you how to look for the best in people. You remind me to do just that.

I taught you how to drink milk from a cup. Now you teach me all about different kinds of delicious tea.

I no longer stand by your crib, my daughter. Now, when you get in your car and drive off to new adventures, I stand by the door and think you are exactly what I had prayed you would be.

Happy 18th Birthday, Madison Marie. I love you!



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This contribution is available at <http://afternooncoffeeandeveningtea.blogspot.com/2014/11/happy-18th-birthday-madison-marie.html>  
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# A Father's Feelings [at warriorsworlddad]

My wife and I have eight children on Earth and one who was called home before she was born. As such I can realistically talk about the feelings and concerns a husband goes through as he waits for his wife's due date. Will my wife safely deliver? Will the child be healthy? Boy or girl? What does the future hold for my child and what can I do to protect, nurture and give them a boost in this world.

As a human the future is unknown to me. As an adult I realize my child will have successes and failures, good times and bad like we all do. The murkiness of the future is a bit scary and at the same time it is a gift. I would hate to be certain that my child would suffer a horrible end at some point in their life.



It is still the Christmas Season. Our tree is still up. We still turn on our outside Christmas lights at night. The Nativity set is present in our living room. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Magi and the animals all present in a beautiful scene that speaks of Peace and Joy!

Then it occurred to me, "How did God the Father feel during that first Christmas?" I don't often hear people talk about God's feelings. I know He got angry at the world and flooded it. I know He got angry at Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them. He was very pleased with Jesus at His Baptism and His Transfiguration. So we can safely say that God does have feelings. So what did He feel at the Incarnation?

Unlike me, the future is an open book to God. He knows precisely what will happen. The Father knew that thirty three years after the Incarnation His Son would be brutally tortured and killed. Thirty three years for God is an instant. Knowing that, did the Father have warm loving feelings during the Birth of Jesus or did He shudder at the impending sacrifice?

Thinking about questions like these helps me comprehend the depth of God's love for me and for everyone. God is Love is not just some trite saying. God the Father walked the walk knowing the absolute price He and Jesus were going to pay for us. And they paid that price even for those who rejected the offer.

I still love to concentrate on the Peace and Joy of that first Christmas with the Angels singing their praises. But now I also realize the full meaning because God the Father knew what would soon follow. As a father myself I marvel at His sacrifice.



# Healing and Love and Choosing to be a Woman of Grace and Dignity [at Quiet Consecration]

What an amazing Thanksgiving I had!

Despite that fact that my beloved Niners lost a game to the dreaded Seahawks, it must go down in history as one of the greatest Thanksgivings in memory.

My brother and his kids were here. He fried up two turkeys and Mom and I put out a feast that resulted in smiles, laughter and gratitude for elastic waistbands.

I saw the look on my Mom's face as she sat at her table and shared a meal with her only son and her grandchildren and it was all I could do not to stand up and yell, "YIPPEEEEEEE!"

Of course, I doubt they would have noticed other than to just laugh at one more thing...because there was a lot of laughing on Thanksgiving and that is what makes a holiday a holiday.

I have also discovered that someone who does not know me at all has been taking the time to point out my character defects and what I should and should not be doing with my writings to others.

My response? Don't like it? Don't read it. Simple. And if you think picking it apart for someone else is somehow being a good person? Well, you do not share my values and for that I can only say, "Thank you, God".

And finally, I have discovered that the years of therapy I have gone through to help me no longer take actions that are similar to those unsuccessful behaviors modeled to me as a child is paying off. How do I know?

Let me tell you about last night:

I spoke for my 12 Step program last night about 3 hours from home. Driving there was no problem but by the time I left it was raining, hard, and windy. I got on the freeway and took the wrong exit, heading towards the coast instead of inland, and ended up on a curvy, winding, rain soaked and windswept road. There was a line of cars behind me, a six foot concrete barrier beside me, sheets of water coming up and over the barrier and I could barely see. I looked at the white line delineating the shoulder for guidance and despite the line of cars and the dope behind me insisting I go faster I crept along at 35 mph, scared to death this was going to be my last car ride.

Inside, I felt the tension mounting and I wanted to explode - just like my Dad used to do.

I wanted to cuss and swear and threaten and throw a huge tantrum.

Why? Because I was afraid.

I heard the yelling and screaming in my head and I very purposefully and intentionally said to those voices, "No. I will not give in and I will not freak out. I will not throw a tantrum and hold my passenger

hostage". Because I did not give vent, my heart began to pound so hard in my chest it hurt. It was if my body was throwing a tantrum because I had chosen not to give in to the bad behavior that threatened to take control of the situation. I did what I have been taught, however, taking deep breaths and slowing down my heart, feeling myself relax and yet staying alert.

Eventually, of course, we made it out of the toughest part of the drive onto a wide freeway and the bridge that would take us back to the East Bay and, eventually, Modesto. As my heart quieted, the release of tension resulted in a release of sweat. If I am ever missing, give my black and gold sweater to the bloodhound. It should be able to find me in about a minute.

What did I learn?

I learned that the learned behavior of freak out and tantrum taught to me by my father does not have to be my excuse anymore. I do not have to act the fool just because I am hurt or scared.

The passenger in my car said, "Boy am I glad you were driving...you are so calm and cool. I felt so safe".

I thought, 'whose car have you been in?'

But see, what happened is this: because I have taken the time to learn how to be a better Leslie, when presented with a situation that caused intense fear I could very purposefully choose to not behave like an ass. Because I chose to behave with dignity and grace? The person with me felt no fear.

I was able to give to someone else that security I so craved - at that moment, I made someone else feel safe!

So, who cares that someone reads my blog, picks it apart for someone else in an effort to discredit me in their eyes? Who cares that I got lost coming home (and somehow cut 30 minutes off my expected driving time...how the heck did that happen?). Who cares that I am not good enough or smart enough or pretty enough in someones eyes?

I drove home in a bad storm.

And for that?

I am really grateful!

I leave Tuesday night for Ravarano, Italy.....I hope you have a wonderful Advent.....know that Christ loves you no matter what....and thank you for reading my blog.

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## Waiting as we build [at walk the way]

Advent is the time of waiting.

This year I've been waiting the completion of a house in the countryside, so that I can live in the center of the parish of Dulce Nombre where I am helping with the pastoral work. I hope to move in within three weeks.

But waiting is anything but passive – especially when you are building a house.

Waiting means being alert, attentive, watching.

So I've been stopping at the construction site at least three times each week – to check and see that things are going right and that there are enough supplies to continue the construction. I also stop to encourage the workers.

One day I found them building a wall where I wanted an open space. Another day I found them putting the plumbing for the toilet where the sink should have been.

But then there were the days when I found them doing something I didn't expect – but which is really useful.

I even had to trust that the construction supervisor knew what he was doing when he designed the roof – so that, as he told me, that it wouldn't blow off in the high winds.

Every once in a while I would bring the workers a three liter bottle of Coke, as a way of thanking them and encouraging them.

And one day I found that they had put my name in a floor with broken tiles.



Advent waiting might be like that.

We need to check to see that things are going right in our lives.

Have we constructed a wall where there should be an open space?

Have we checked to see that we have not put our priorities where they shouldn't be?

We also need to be open to God's actions in our lives.

Have we let ourselves be surprised by everyday events, realizing that all is not in our hands and sometimes someone else knows best?

Have we let the great builder – or the potter as Isaiah describes God in today's lectionary reading (Isaiah 64: 7) – show us the design that we need and mold us according to that design?

Are we ready for the surprise of God's presence in our lives and in our homes?

Are we aware that God calls us by our name?

And are we grateful for all the work that God puts into our lives, filling them with love?

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## The Man with the Paralyzed Hand [at Bible Meditations]



*Again [Jesus] entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Mark 3:1-6*

What was it like for that man at that moment of truth? By stretching out his hand, he would become an accomplice in Sabbath-breaking. But if he failed to act at that time, he might never have had another opportunity to be healed. Sometimes it's now or never. As much as the man might have preferred to avoid controversy, he wanted something better than his status quo. He stretched out his hand.

What happened to the man after he left the synagogue that day? Did he feel welcome to return on other Sabbaths? Did he stay in the town where he was known, or did he move on to another place to get a fresh start? Did he become one of Jesus' followers, always on the move? Was it challenging to deal with his newly acquired strength? What did he decided to do with it, and how did he make up his mind? We can only wonder.

More important, we can wonder what we would do with the strength we acquire when we accept Jesus' invitation to stretch out beyond our comfort zones. What would enable us to take a stand on some controversy we believe in or to face mindsets that have previously paralyzed us into inaction?

Reflection: The man seized his opportunity for healing, even though it put him right in the middle of controversy. How do you know when reaching for some improvement is worth the risks?

Prayer: Jesus, grant me the willingness to cooperate with your healing action in my life today. Empower me to stretch beyond my comfort zone.

Excerpts from:

“Your Faith Has Made You Well: Jesus Heals in the New Testament”

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## Hearing God's Voice [at beautiful thorns]

Last night I had the privilege of giving a talk at my church on hearing the voice of God in our lives. This is a topic I am very passionate about!



When I was eighteen, I actually stopped believing in God because I figured if there was a God then he should be able to speak to me and since I didn't hear him speaking, he must not exist. At the age of nineteen, the Lord revealed himself to me in a powerful way! I discovered that he does know and care about us on a personal level and he does speak to his people. He saved me from a life of sin and despair and I couldn't wait to show him how grateful I was! I got involved in every ministry I possibly could and became VERY busy. Looking back, I was actually running way ahead of him and there were times he was trying to get my attention but I wasn't listening.

One such occasion that really stands out was a time I was actually praying alone in my room instead of on the go like usual. A word came to me that something was going to happen to my car, it would be on a Wednesday and it would be on the way to church. I thought that was odd because Wednesday was the only day I wasn't at the church. That next Wednesday came and went and nothing happened so I forgot about that word. Shortly after that, the youth minister at the church I attended asked me to be on the leadership team and they were going to start meeting on Wednesdays. I said yes, but did not remember the word the Lord gave me. The first Wednesday leadership meeting day was hectic to say the least. I went to community college in the morning, worked in the afternoon and then was rushing to make it to the meeting in the evening. The church was about thirty minutes away and I was speeding down a busy highway during rush hour traffic, trying to make it there on time. I still did not remember the word that came to me that day in prayer but for some reason I felt uneasy in my spirit so I was praying the whole time in the car. All of a sudden my car went from about 75 miles an hour to 20 in a matter of seconds. I also lost control and my car was swerving all over the road and finally came to a stop on the left hand side. Miraculously, no cars hit me even though there were cars driving on all sides of me. It turns out, the front Axle rod broke off. According to natural law, I should have been hit. Even though that event shook me up, I continued full speed ahead and did not slow down until after I was married and had a couple kids. Through difficult pregnancies and an autoimmune condition, the Lord finally was able to get my attention and began to teach me how to lean back in him, rest and receive his complete and perfect love and grace. You can read more about that

[here](#)

. It is out of this place that I began to hear God more clearly in my life.

The fact that our God speaks to us is one thing that sets our God apart from other so called "gods". Psalm 135:15 says, "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, but by the hands of men. They have mouths but cannot speak..." Our God is living and active! He is more than capable of speaking! Heck, he even brought the world into existence by speaking a Word and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)!

Obvious ways God speaks to his people is through Scripture and through the Church. If you have ever read the lives of the Saints, you know he also desires to speak to us personally. The reasons we often do not hear him are because we are too busy, there is too much noise around us, we do not have our spiritual "antennas" set towards him, and we do not expect to hear him speak to us.

Learning to be still, rest and listen has helped in my ability to hear God in my life. There are many scripture verses about resting in the Lord. Here are a few of my favorites:

*Psalm 62:1 - "My soul finds rest in God alone." Isaiah 30:15 - "In quiet and rest is your salvation."  
Psalm 46:10 - "Be still and know that I am God."*

There are different ways God speaks to his people. It can come from a thought popping into our head that wasn't from us; visions, which can range from an image popping in to your head to a whole scene being played out, like a movie; sudden knowledge, you just know with your "knower"; an audible voice; and dreams.

Personally I have had a lot of fun with dreams. There are several types of dreams a person can have. There are dreams from our flesh that help us work things out in the night. These are usually in muted color. There are dreams from the enemy. Sometimes God allows these to help give us insight into the schemes of the enemy. These are usually in black and white. Then there are prophetic, God-given dreams. These usually stand out the most and have vivid color.

There are several ways you can discern if a word is from God or not. You want to first ask if it lines up with Scripture and Church teaching. You also want to ask yourself if the word is encouraging or is it full of guilt, manipulation or condemnation. Even corrective words should give hope and encouragement. God does not use guilt and manipulation to get his point across.

There are ways we can hear God better in our lives. First we need to know that he loves us and desires to speak to us. We need to rest in the knowledge of his love for us and expect him to speak. Another powerful tool to hearing the Lord speak is opening up our imaginations to him. He gave us our imaginations and he can use them. An example of this is

[Ignatian prayer](#)

in which you place yourself in the Gospel narrative. Often it starts with the imagination but then the Lord can take off with it and show us things. Children have great imaginations so I usually use this type of prayer with my children.

Last but not least, we need to take seriously the things that come to us and God will give us more. One day I was crying out to the Lord and telling him that I really needed to hear him speak to me. He said to me,

"Well, when you are serious, I will speak." I realized after that, that he was actually speaking to me all the time but I wasn't taking his words seriously or listening. He often speaks in a still, small voice and it was easy to dismiss words and images coming to me as distractions. After the Lord spoke this to me I began writing things down that would come to me in prayer even if it didn't make much sense. One example of this was an image of elephants that popped into my mind one day in prayer. I wrote it down in my journal. Soon after that I was outside with my four year old daughter. She looked up in the sky and said, "Look Mommy! The clouds look like elephants!" That evening, I was watching the news and they were talking about a tornado that touched down in a little town in Alabama. They interviewed a little girl who said, "It was as if an elephant stomped on my house." The Lord definitely had my attention and I felt like he was trying to warn me that some "storms" were about to hit our nation. Soon after that I had a dream about 9/11. This was back in 1998. I believe the Lord showed me these things so I could pray for our nation.

The Lord is so kind and merciful and desires to speak to us a lot more than we are willing to listen. If we will put down our iPhones, turn off the television, be still and worship him, he will speak!

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## Synod: Do we really want to give that mouse a cookie? [at Yard Sale of the Mind]



If you give people making up rights a cookie...

**RJ:** So, you think they have enough? [everybody nods] Well, they don't. For humans, enough is *\*never\** enough!

Here I violate my own rule about not talking or even thinking about the late synod, but only at a high, strategic level, to point out something that has gotten far too little attention:

Do you think, does anybody think, that giving in to whatever degree whatsoever, to demands that the Church loosen its moral rules around sex will be enough? That, if the church were to say: OK, divorced and remarried Catholics, it's totally up to your well-formed (?!?) consciences whether you are good to go to receive communion, and, by the way, there are certain aspects of gay partnerships that aren't all bad – does anyone think such actions would calm things down? That, all in all, people would be appeased? That the clamour for the Church to get with the times would subside?

Such a wish, if in fact anyone really entertains it (which I doubt) is so detached from reality and history to be delusional. What we've seen throughout the history of our mainline Protestant brethren is that, once the idea that sex is for something specific (creating families and children) is lost, there is no bottom. Once it is conceded that sex does not find fullness and holiness only within a marriage properly understood, but can have other or no meaning, there is nothing in the way of the worst aspects of the culture we have now.

So, if you like the culture we have now, with its hookups, callousness, shallowness, perversity, abortions and commitment to the destruction of the family, then give that mouse a cookie. Otherwise, try to be as

clear and merciful as possible about what the Church teaches, and has always taught, and leave the rest up to God.

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# Merry Xmas [at Faith of the Fathers]

## *A Brief Explanation of the Original Meaning of Xmas*



Merry Xmas to you and yours.

Yes, you read that right. Merry Xmas to you and yours.

“What is with this guy” you're wondering. “Does he realize what he is doing? Here he has a bunch of Catholic blogs and is saying 'Xmas'! Doesn't he realize what he is saying?”

Yes, I sure do!

A lot of people...*most* people in fact... tend to get very upset when they see the term "Xmas".

*"Xmas? How dare they take Christ out of Christmas, and call it Xmas. After all, Christmas is derived from Christ's Mass, and calling it Xmas is just a blatant attempt to demean what Christmas means. They already want to say “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas”...and now they want to make their attack complete by writing “Merry Xmas”? Well, I for one am not standing idly by while these secular humanists and their anti-Christian cohorts...."*

Whoa there....slow down and take a couple of deep breaths. While you're taking your deep breaths I'll give you a little information so you can get your drawers (that means underwear to you people not from the country) out of a wad....so to speak.

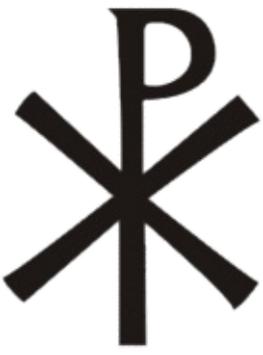
The term Xmas is *virtually as old as Christianity itself*, and *actually* comes from classical Greek. The Roman letter “X” in our alphabet is similar to the Greek letter Chi, which is the first letter of the Greek word Χριστός, “Christos”, which translates as "Christ". The "mas" part is from the Latin-derived Old English word for "Mass". So, the word “Christmas” is actually derived from the Old English “Cristes mæsse”, literally meaning **Mass of Christ**.

“Xmas” (sometimes pronounced éksmæss) *is*, and *was* a very common abbreviation of the word “Christmas”. So there is a *very* common misconception that the word “Xmas” is a secular attempt to remove the religious tradition of Christmas by taking Christ out of Christmas. This is just not the case for the term historically speaking.

According to the “Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage” the early use of Xmas dates back to 1551. Further, it (Merriam-Webster) states that X, Xp, and Xt, all derived from the Greek name, have all been used to stand for Christ- in other words besides Xmas. "Xpen" (1485), "Xpian" (1598), and "Xtian" (1845, 1915, 1940), all meaning "Christian", "Xstened" (1685-86) "christened" and "Xtianity" (1634, 1811, 1966) "Christianity".



Also, you can find the “X” being used in the ancient Christian fish symbol, or “Icthus”, as “IXΘΥΣ”, which is an acronym for “Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior”.



The labarum, more often called the *Chi-Rho*, was rendered by taking the first 2 Greek letters of the name Christ (Χριστός), the "X" (Chi) the "P" (Rho), and is a symbol used in Catholic, Orthodox, and many Protestant Christian churches as a symbol for Christ.

In a good deal of ancient Christian art, “x” and “xp” are used as abbreviations for Christ's name, as well as in many icons and ancient manuscripts of the New Testament.

The use of the term “Xmas” in place of Christmas was also used in letters from Lord Byron (1811), Lewis Carroll (1864) and Oliver Wendell Holmes (1923), in which Merriam-Webster's opinion was indicative of “*well-educated Englishmen who knew their Greek*”.

So, I hope this helps.

I am not going to try to tell you that “Xmas” is not used by those who are trying to offend, as I am sure in *some* cases that it is intended so. Just remember the next time you see “Xmas”, they are still saying Christmas...and still honoring the name of Christ, even though they may not realize it.

Now, you *do* know it.

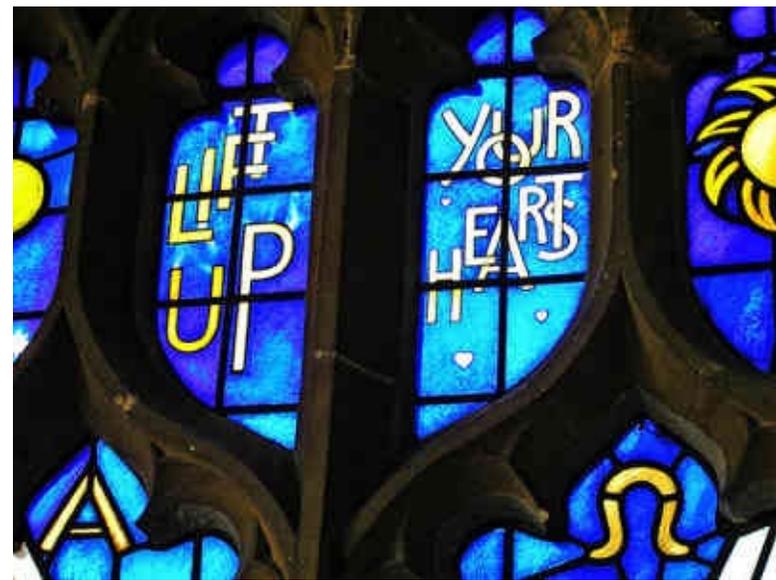
So, Merry Xmas to you and yours!

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## Hearts Aloft! A Reflection on our Mystical Transport to Heaven in Every Mass [at Archdiocese of Washington Blog]



Before November ends and our consideration of the four last things (death, judgement, Heaven, and Hell) gives way to Advent preparations for the the great Second Coming that ushers in those things definitively, let us turn our attention to a short, often-overlooked summons to Heaven that takes place in every Mass. It takes place in a short dialogue just after the prayer over the gifts and before the singing of the *Sanctus*. It is called the “preface dialogue” and it is really quite remarkable in its sweeping vision and heavenly call.

- **The Lord be with you.**
- **And with your spirit.**
  
- **Lift up your hearts.**
- **We lift them up to the Lord.**
  
- **Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.**
- **It is right and just.**

**A fairly familiar dialogue to be sure. But** to some extent, it fails to take wing because of the rather earthbound notion most moderns have of the Mass. Very few attending Mass today think much of the heavenly liturgy. Rather, most are focused on their parish Church, the priest in front of them, and the people around them. But this is NOT an adequate vision for the Mass. In the end, there is only one liturgy: the one in Heaven. There is only one altar: the one in Heaven. There is only one High Priest: Jesus in Heaven. In the Mass, we are swept up into the heavenly liturgy. There, with myriad angels and saints beyond number, we worship the Father through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus. In the Mass, we are swept up into Heaven!

**More so than “Lift up your hearts,” a better translation of *Sursum corda* is “Hearts aloft!”**

**What is the celebrant really inviting us to do?** After greeting us in the Lord, he invites us to go to Heaven! But remember, the priest is *in persona Christi*. Hence, when he speaks it is really the Lord Jesus

speaking, making use of the priest's voice. And what does the Lord really say to us in the magnificent dialogue and preface that follows? Allow me to elaborate on the fuller meaning of this text:

*“Let your hearts be taken up! Come and go with me to the altar that is in heaven where I, Jesus the great High Priest, with all the members of my body render perfect thanks to God the Father! You are no longer on earth, your hearts have been swept aloft into the great liturgy of heaven! Come up higher. By the power of my words you are able to come up higher! Since you have been raised to new life in Christ, seek the things that are above where I am at my Father's right hand. Come up now and enter the heavenly liturgy. Hearts aloft!”*

**Consider this writing of Cardinal Jean Danielou, reflecting on some teachings from the Fathers** about this critical moment of the Mass.

The liturgy of earth is a visible reflection, and efficacious symbol, of the heavenly liturgy of angels. This unity of the two worships is expressed by the liturgy itself in the Preface, where it invites the community of the Church (on earth) to unite with the Thrones and Dominations, the Cherubim and Seraphim, to sing the angelic hymn of praise, the Thrice-Holy. [St. John Chrysostom] says *“Reflect upon whom it is that you are near and with whom you are about to invoke God—the Cherubim. Think of the ranks you are about to enter. Let no one have any thought of earth (sursum corda!) but let him lose himself of every earthly thing and transport himself whole and entire into heaven ... ”* (Chrysostom *Adv, Anon.*, 4)

Elsewhere, Chrysostom remarks that the *Gloria in excelsis* is the chant of the lower angels. Even the catechumens are permitted to join in it. But the Sanctus is the chant of the Seraphim; it leads into the very sanctuary of the Trinity, and thus “it is reserved for the initiated, the baptized” (*cf* Chrysostom, Homily on Colossians 3:8).

The Chant of the Seraphim expresses holy fear. It expresses the awe felt by even the highest creatures in the presence of the Infinite, Divine Excellence. And this enables us to better understand the holiness of the Eucharist ... (Jean Cardinal Danielou, *The Angels and Their Mission*, pp. 64-65).

**Hence** the Mass is never just the “10:00 am Mass at St. Joe's.” It is the heavenly liturgy.

**Until recently, Churches were designed to remind us that we were entering Heaven.** As we walk into older churches we are surrounded by windows and paintings that depict the angels and saints. Christ is at the center in the tabernacle. And all the elements that Scripture speaks of as being in the heavenly liturgy are on display, not only in the building, but in the celebration of the liturgy: candles, incense, an altar, the hymns that are sung, the Holy, Holy, Holy, the scroll that is brought forward in the Book of Gospels, the lamb on the throne-like altar, the prostrations and kneeling of the saints before the Lord. All these things are described in the Book of Revelation's depictions of the heavenly liturgy. None of these things are in our churches or the liturgy for arbitrary reasons.

**Yes! We are in the heavenly realms** and the heavenly liturgy and so we see and experience heavenly things. Hearts aloft!

This video I made some time ago shows forth traditional Church Architecture as a glimpse of Heaven. The Latin text of the music by Bruckner describes how the form of the Liturgy and even Church architecture is set forth by God, who first gave it in elaborate instructions to Moses on Sinai. Here is the text, with my translation:

*Locus iste a Deo factus est* (This place was made by God)  
*inaestimabile sacramentum*; (a priceless mystery)  
*irreprehensibilis est.* (It is beyond reproach)

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This contribution is available at <http://blog.adw.org/2014/11/hearts-aloft-a-reflection-on-our-mystical-transport-to-heaven-in-every-mass/>  
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## I Want to Give Him Everything! [at Small Paul]

Every year just before Advent, I take pause to reflect on how much of myself I have given to God. He has been changing me, at my request, for a long time now. A few weeks ago I realized that I had started to pray for a wife. I believe that this realization was the Holy Spirit was directing me to give my heart to Christ. My prayers shifted back to only wanting God's will (Providence). I do not know if God wants me to be married or single. I don't care.

This morning, in prayer, I realized that the middle of sleeping last night I had awoken halfway, and in a semiconscious state, given my sub conscience to God.

So I ponder, what's next? I have given Him my sinful tendencies, my will, my body, my mind, my heart and now my subconscious (not to mention all of my possessions, friends, family, work, hobbies etc).

In the last three months I have gone through some very stressful situations. My relationship with Christ while going through those situations has allowed Him to teach me many things about myself and Him. The biggest lesson He taught me was about trust and confidence in God. God is my future, my cause, my friend, my will... And I am deeply in love with Him. He has proven to me over and over again that total confidence and trust in Him is the most fulfilling and successful action and state of mind that I can possibly be in. So I ponder, what's next?

I have been following the Holy Spirit's suggestion to observe how Christ runs my life and I am amazed. Even when I sin, Christ living in me points it out immediately and the Holy Spirit pushes me to remorse. Sometimes He helps people with great advice coming out of my mouth or me hugging someone. Other times events happen that seem out of order, but by the end of the day seem to have been orchestrated perfectly. So I ponder, what's next?

I ponder, and I ask God, "Help me give you more. Change me. Direct me. Help me of observed You in me. Correct me. Give me Providence."

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This contribution is available at <http://goingdeeper-catholic.blogspot.com/2014/11/i-want-to-give-him-everything.html>  
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# Advent 2014: How Our Family Prepares [at A Slice of Smith Life]

Christmas, despite what our world tells us, doesn't start the day after Thanksgiving, but rather there is a period of preparation for the Christmas season called

## [Advent](#)

. Advent begins the Sunday nearest to the feast of

## [St. Andrew the Apostle \(November 30\)](#)

and includes four Sundays. So the First Sunday of Advent can begin as early as November 27 or as late as December 3.

(FYI: Christmas "officially" starts on Christmas Day until the

## [Epiphany](#)

, the 12th day AFTER Christmas, and the Christmas season

[traditionally lasts beyond the Epiphany](#)

.)

***Advent is a time to prepare our homes, but most importantly our hearts, for the coming of Christ.***

Below are traditions we have done in the past. I have gradually added on to our family's traditions for the past 14 years and

some

most years we don't get to do all of them. Maybe if you see a new tradition that I have listed, you will feel inspired to include it in your own family's Advent season. We try to incorporate our Advent traditions during our

## [Couch Catechism devotional time](#)

each morning or in the evenings during and after dinner time when my husband is home from work.



### Advent Wreath Tradition

(Shout out to Melissa, our parish youth minister, for the beautiful Advent door wreath that she made and I bought at our church's craft fair last weekend :) )



This Sunday, Nov. 30, 2014, marks the first day of the liturgical year in the Catholic Church with the first Sunday of Advent.

Did you know the word Advent is from the Latin word **advenio**, meaning "to come"? It's hard to believe it is time to prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth! I truly think that one way to keep Christ in CHRISTmas is to embrace the Advent season with all its beauty and meanings.

One of the first decorations we pull out is our

#### [Advent wreath](#)

which we display in our kitchen. After we eat dinner as a family we light the candle(s) depending on which week of Advent we are in. So during the first week of Advent, we will be lighting one purple candle after we

[bless our wreath with a special prayer](#)

Here is a beautiful paragraph I found about the Advent wreath from

["The History of the Advent Wreath" by Father William Saunders](#)

:

*The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent. A tradition is that each week represents one thousand years, to sum to the 4,000 years from Adam and Eve until the Birth of the Savior. Three candles are purple and one is rose. The purple candles in particular symbolize the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and good works undertaken at this time. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, when the priest also wears rose vestments at Mass; Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday of rejoicing, because the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent, when their preparation is now half over and they are close to CHRISTmas. The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of His second coming to judge the living and the dead.*

Here's a cute song to the "Alphabet Song" tune that we have sung while we lit the candles. I got this song from someone on the

[Catholic Homeschool Moms Facebook](#)

page

one year:

Set the candles burning bright.

One by one each week we light.

Advent is a time to wait -

Not quite time to celebrate.

When the waiting time is through,

It's Christmas joy for me and you!

One year our homeschool group made kid-sized Advent wreaths using 1)

[air-dry clay](#)

,

[green Tempera paint](#)

[purple and pink chenille stems](#)

for candles, and

[yellow/orange dot stickers](#)

for the flames.



2) Each child got a ball of clay so they could form it into a wreath shape.

3) Then they painted the wreath green and placed 4 chenille stems ("candles") that I cut 2 inches long. I gave them 4 yellow/orange circle stickers and had them wrap one sticker around one purple candle.

4) The children can "light" another candle by placing a sticker on another purple candle as each Sunday in Advent arrives. So they can count down the weeks until CHRISTmas day with their own handmade wreath.

### **Advent Tree and Wrapped Christmas Books Tradition**

Do you have a collection of your favorite Christmas books that you either own or borrow from the library and read each year? If you want to see all the titles that are pictured below, you can

[Visit My Store](#)

and browse the

["Christmas Books" tab](#)

to see a list of books we enjoy or books I would like to add to our collection. If you happen to purchase anything from my store, I will receive a small percentage at no cost to you. Thank you for browsing

and supporting!

Several years ago I found a great way to read our Christmas books and at the same time have my children anticipate Jesus' birthday.



I wrap up each book with purple wrapping paper. I usually find the purple paper in our local Dollar Tree store. Then beginning the first Sunday in Advent, one child opens one book and we read it as a family. Then on the second night in Advent, our next child opens a book and so on. My children really love this idea of opening their Advent Christmas book. I have a small "Advent tree" in our great room decorated with purple balls and under this tree is where we have our wrapped Christmas books. This small Advent tree goes up at the beginning of Advent and then we buy our real Christmas tree sometime later in December.

I also number the books and put each child's name on the back of the wrapping paper so I don't have to remember who gets to unwrap the next book!

### **Jesse Tree Tradition**



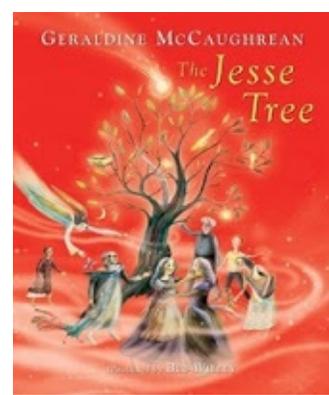
Our Advent Tree is also used as our Jesse Tree and we read scripture as our children put one symbol per night on our small tree. (Pictured above is a picture of our original Jesse tree which was just a branch stuck in a pot of sand and the pot was wrapped with a purple cloth.) Our symbols are made out of paper and our children colored each picture several years ago. I then laminated them and punched a hole to tie a string to the paper. I made copies of these symbols from

[this page on Domestic-Church.com](http://this page on Domestic-Church.com)

. There are so many ways to make Jesse Tree symbols that I have seen through the years (made out of felt, wood, etc.) and I hope to remake our symbols some year or buy some beautiful ones like the Jesse Tree symbols from

[JesseTreeTreasures on Etsy](#)

, but for now these simple paper symbols are working and will do.

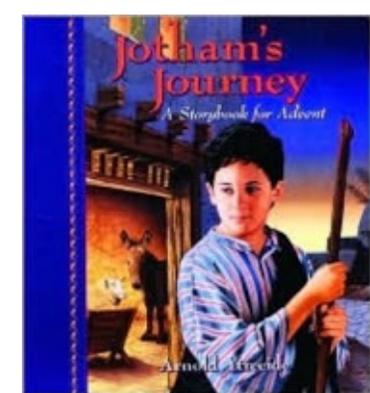


We have enjoyed reading

[The Jesse Tree by Geraldine McCaughrean](#)

in years past and we will continue with this tradition this year. We read one story each night which relates to the Jesse Tree and its symbols

.



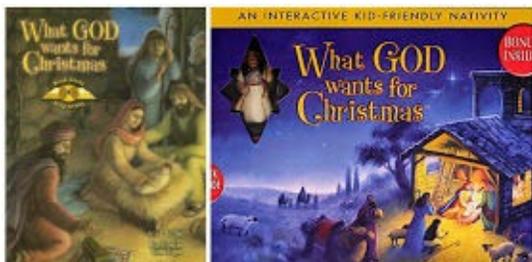
In years' past we have also read

[Jotham's Journey, A Storybook for Advent](#)

with our children, which is a great book that takes you and your family on a journey with characters who are living in Jesus' time. The young characters in the book are my own children's ages and so it is very enjoyable to read for the entire family. We will try to read it with using only the light from the candle(s). It's beautiful to see that as we get closer to the celebration of Christ's birth, each lit candle makes the room brighter and reading easier. I love how this symbolizes how we anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world! For more Advent book options you can

[Visit My Store](#)

## What God Wants for Christmas Tradition



This is a beautiful story that is written in rhyme on each page. For example, the first page tells of the angel Gabriel from Luke 1:26. After each page the book directs the children to open one of 7 boxes which contain pieces to make

[the interactive nativity set](#)

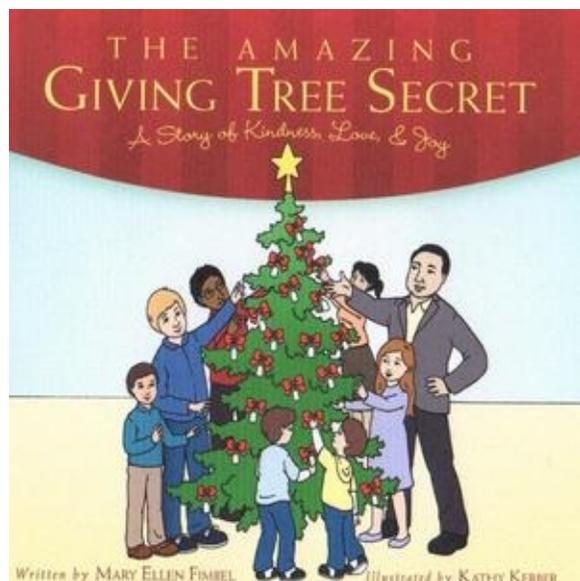
. So in box number 1, they will find a little angel Gabriel figurine to place in the manger scene. The 7th box is when the children discover the best surprise...which is what God wants for CHRISTmas!

The book goes along with the

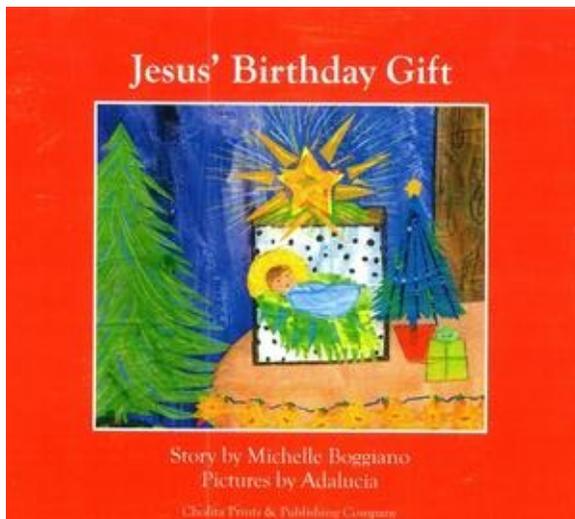
[interactive kid-friendly nativity set](#)

, which has the 7 boxes and the pop-up manger scene. \*Note: I bought this book and interactive nativity set several years ago and it looks like it may be out of print, but maybe you can find used copies.

## Andrew's Toy Box Tradition



Speaking of books, I'm excited to add two more books to our Advent /Christmas reading. The first book titled, [The Amazing Giving Tree Secret, A Story of Kindness, Love, & Joy](#) is written by [Mary Ellen Fimbel](#), who is local author and a member of my parish. Mary is a dear friend and I enjoy listening to all the ways the Holy Spirit worked through her to remember and honor her grandchild, Andrew, who passed away at 6 months old in 2001. The proceeds from Mary's book will go to [Andrew's Toy Box](#), a non-profit, charitable organization founded in memory of Andrew Fimbel, who passed away on February 17, 2001 from Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). The disease is the No. 1 genetic killer of children under two. My children loved this book and with so many giving trees during this time of year, it would be a perfect story to share with your family during this Advent season! Our family and homeschool group also donates toys to [Andrew's Toy Box](#) during Christmas and throughout the year to help sick children smile.



The second book, called [Jesus' Birthday Gift](#) is a treasure also and is written by Mary's sister, Michelle Boggiano. This book is full of beautiful colors and illustrations and has a wonderful message that goes along with the story of Jesus' birth. I also love the fact that some Spanish vocabulary is sprinkled throughout this beautiful story. Proceeds from this book will also go to [Andrew's Toy Box](#).

## Family Fun Bucket Tradition

*Twas the night before December at the Smith house kitchen table....the family was enjoying their Family Fun Bucket instead of watching cable....*



Several years ago a friend of mine made this family fun bucket for our family and it has become one of the best Christmas gifts and a family favorite Advent/Christmas tradition! To read more about the Family Fun

Bucket and how to make your own with free printables, click [HERE](#) where I guest posted at [Upside Down Homeschooling!](#)

## **Advent Adventure Tradition**



A great resource my children have grown up with and love is the

[Holy Heroes](#)

website which has an annual

[Advent Adventure](#)

for families. It is free to sign up and a few times a week our family gets an email with the next day's adventure lesson. My children love to watch the children on the videos and hear the Bible stories and history and traditions of Advent. Check out my post

[HERE](#)

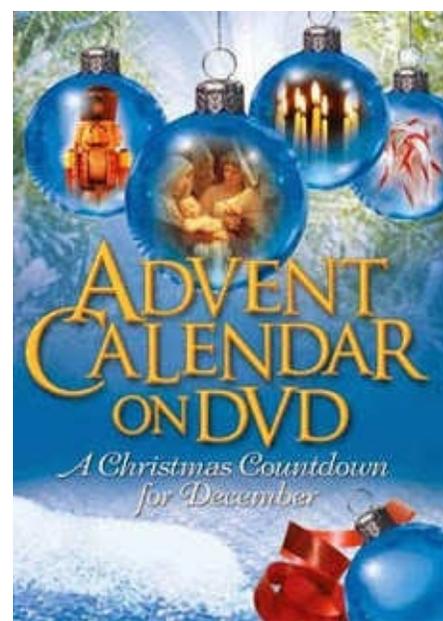
how I met the oldest daughter in the "Holy Heroes" family at a Catholic conference several years ago! :)

So if you are looking for another great way to enhance your Advent season with your family, check out the

[Holy Heroes](#)

website and enjoy your adventure!

## **Advent Calendar on DVD Tradition**



An Advent resource we just bought last year is a DVD called

[Advent Calendar on DVD, A Christmas Countdown for December](#)

. Each day in December there is a short video clip, about 2-3 minutes long, that talks about various topics including Advent history, origins of Christmas carols and Christmas traditions, and just various topics surrounding the Christmas season. It's very interesting and holds everyone's attention, adults and children alike. We also have

[this fun fabric Advent calendar](#)

and

[this beautiful wooden calendar](#)

displayed in our home so our family can count down the days to Jesus' birth.

**Christmas Creche Tradition**



Another Advent tradition we have done in the past is prepare a soft bed/manger for Baby Jesus. I first saw this idea on

[Holy Heroes Advent Adventure](#)

and thought this would be a fun and simple way to have my children prepare their hearts and souls for the true meaning of the Christmas season. You can read more about the Christmas creche, which started with Saint Francis, with the great children's book,

[Saint Francis Celebrates Christmas](#)

. I love

[Nicole's little cradle she uses for her straw bed for Jesus over at Children of the Church blog.](#)

I'll have to put that on my wish list!

At the beginning of Advent we start with an empty manger (empty basket) and have a bowl full of "hay" (yellow yarn pieces).

Then as my children make sacrifices for family and friends (doing their chores without complaining, helping a sibling with school work, doing a kind deed for a sibling/friend, etc), they can put a piece of yarn in the basket. So by the end of the Advent season, the basket will be filled with yarn for a soft bed for Baby Jesus (at least that is the goal : ) )

On Christmas morning, we will place Jesus in our soft manger built with love and sacrifices and display Him under our Christmas tree.

### **Wondering Wise Men Tradition**

Are you looking for a Christian alternative to the "Elf on the Shelf" craze? Jennifer at [Catholic Inspired](#) started using [Playmobil wise men and camels](#) and each day takes them on ADVENTures where her kids find these wondering wise men in humorous situations each morning. She explains it all [HERE](#). Jennifer had a link-up where bloggers could link-up their own Wondering Wise Men ADVENTures and I joined in on the fun! Hopefully, Jennifer will be doing this link-up again this Advent.

Jennifer mentions in her blog post [HERE](#) how I came up with the "Wondering Wise Men" name, while she started this great and fun tradition! Last year, I took my own Wondering Wise Men and placed them around the house for my children to find each day. It was a lot of fun!



Here is one of our ADVENTures last year where my Wondering Wise Men visited [Saint Nicholas](#) on his feast day on Dec. 6. If you are interested in the Saint Nicholas and angel Playmobil set you can purchase it [HERE](#).

During the season of Advent we also try to remember all the special feast days that are sprinkled throughout the month of December. Below is a list of the dates we observe and celebrate and I have linked posts I have done in the past with each feast day in case you want to look ahead. I plan on blogging more about these feast days in December.

You can also

[Visit My Store](#)

to find books about each feast day in case you want to order any.

[My Store](#)

is a work in progress so I'll be adding more items gradually.

December 6:

## [Feast Day of Saint Nicholas](#)

December 8:

## [Feast of the Immaculate Conception](#)

December 9:

## [Feast Day of Saint Juan Diego](#)

December 12:

## [Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe](#)

December 13:

## [Feast Day of Saint Lucy](#)

December 17-23: Last year I also tried to celebrate the Octave before Christmas, the 8 days before Christmas Day, with an "

## [O Antiphons" lapbook](#)

that I started with my children. We will pull out these lapbooks again this year and finish them and learn more about this special time in the Advent season!



The season of Advent is such a special time and I am thankful that our family celebrates the true meaning of Christmas by doing several fun and meaningful Advent activities to prepare for the day when we can sing "Happy Birthday to Jesus!" There are so many wonderful ways to prepare our hearts and homes for the birthday of Christ! I pray my post will inspire you to continue your own traditions or add a new tradition into your home. **What are some of your family's Advent traditions? I'm linking this post to the , which will be happening during each of the four weeks during Advent. Be sure to visit the LinkUp and find out what others are doing in this season on preparation and LinkUp your own Advent post if you have one! Enjoy!**

Last, but not least here's a great 1 minute video about what Advent is not and what Advent is!

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happenings? If not, just enter your email address here and click "Subscribe":

You can also follow my blog page on Facebook [HERE](#)  
Have a blessed Advent season!



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## Esse et Amor (Being and Love) [at Southwest Ordinariate]



In trying to get my poor head around Catholic teaching on marriage and sexual ethics, I have tried to summarise it in the following way:

The understanding of the human person as a creature of God and made in the image and likeness of God is a fundamental aspect of Catholic anthropology (the understanding of what it is to be a human being). Being made in the image of God affords the human person a dignity which is fulfilled in his calling to divine beatitude. He is not just an animal that responds to his natural inclinations but possesses a dignity pointing towards something that transcends those inclinations. As God is Trinity which ineffably expresses

both

Being and Love\*, so the human person is called to find beatitude through

both

life and love, both body and soul. He is a creature of great capacity and potential. In his God-given freedom of will, the human person either does, or does not, conform to this great good that God has promised and is corroborated by his moral conscience. Catholic teaching on marriage and sexual ethics proclaims this great good. To separate the unitive from the procreative, which all forms of sexual immorality do in one way or another, is a sin against the inner life of the human person made in the image of God who is Trinity (

*Esse et Amor*

). To act as if these were separate is to go against God's calling and is opposed to our dignity as made in

the image of God.

Without an understanding of Catholic anthropology the foundational teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage and sexual ethics cannot be understood. While of course someone may choose to accept the authority of the Church, they will not understand why the Church proclaims what she does. When the Church's teaching is challenged, how can someone make a reasonable defence of their chosen behaviour? The proclamation that the two inseparable goods of marriage and sex are the unitive and the procreative, informs all the Church's teaching on marriage and sexual ethics. Every form of sexual immorality is opposed to this integrity of the unitive and procreative. Understanding Catholic anthropology, that human beings are made in God's image and called to Beatitude, is fundamental because the inseparable goods of marriage and sex (unitive and procreative) are reflections of God Himself who is revealed as Being and Love (

*Esse et Amor*

).

IH

\* "Being" revealed to Moses at the burning bush: "I AM WHO I AM"; and "Love" revealed through the New Testament and summed up by St John as "God is Love". These two revelations are the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity.

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This contribution is available at <http://swordinariate.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/esse-et-amor-being-and-love.html>  
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