

NewEvangelists.org

new
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New Evangelists Monthly #27

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Forward

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

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

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

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

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Praying the Gay Away... Or Not [at A Faith-Full Life]

Recently I stumbled upon this video on Facebook and felt compelled to share it with you along with a few of my thoughts. Please take a moment to watch it, it's under twenty minutes – you've got the time 😊

After you've finished watching you can read my thoughts below and then let me know what you think in the comments section – I look forward to hearing your feedback!

— 1 —

First of all, I loved this. Julie was open and honest – she didn't try to sugar coat it or give any easy answers. She was incredibly gracious, even when looking back at years of her life spent in a ministry that she no longer agrees with. She acknowledged her very real desires, frustrations, struggles, doubts, and conclusions.

And, most importantly, she offered hope and a fresh perspective.

Okay, on to a few minor quibbles. I raise these minor points precisely because Julie herself states that, “*There just hadn't been many people thinking about this with very much nuance.*” and I agree. Hopefully I can add a couple of other nuanced points to the conversation.

— 2 —

Quibble #1

First and foremost I think we need to steer clear of defining human beings by their sexual orientation. Julie rather interchangeably refers to herself either as gay or as same sex attracted. I think that a distinction should be made. Human beings are not *fundamentally* straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or any other label we would use based on sexual orientation. You don't have to be a Christian to agree with me on this; consider the quote from Gore Vidal below:

“Actually, there is no such thing as a homosexual person, any more than there is such a thing as a heterosexual person. The words are adjectives describing sexual acts, not people.”

And he's right – sex is something we **do**, not something we **are**. The Scriptures give us a window into *who* and *what* we are in the very first chapter of the very first book of the bible.

God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.¹

We are human. We are created in God's image. We are male and female. We are *not* defined by our sexual acts. I think that Julie would agree with me on this – after all, choosing not to engage in sex doesn't mean that you're not a person! Again, this a minor quibble, but one worth noting. We need to stop having a conversation that is defined by *what we do* instead of by *who we are*. I've written much more extensively on this in another post: [Homosexual, Heterosexual, or Just Plain Human?](#) that may shed further light on the subject.

Quibble #2

Implicit in Julie's experience (and those of her friends) is the idea that one's sexual orientation is a genetically predetermined fact and not the result of, "*childhood baggage*", psychological issues, environment, abuse, etc. It is clear that she comes down on the nature side in the nature vs. nurture debate.



There is nothing wrong with holding this as your opinion, and it may indeed be very true to her personal experience; but again in the interest of nuance, I would like to suggest that the truth may be far more complex than an "either/or" answer. When looking at individuals with same sex attractions as a whole, I think that many different factors would come into play including (and not limited to) all the ones listed above. There are many individuals who have emphatically asserted that they *chose* a gay lifestyle – i.e. that they weren't just born that way. Either way, it's not the point of her talk and it is really a minor quibble on my part, but again I think that we have to be careful to be nuanced and not just slip into discussing all individuals as if they were the result of the same internal/external forces.

The other reason I wanted to bring up this second quibble is to note that there are really two basic assertions that come into conflict in Julie's story.

1. Assertion one is that she was born this way and cannot change. *I want to be clear that I'm not denying this assertion.* I also want to be clear that just because this has been her experience, it doesn't follow that the same is true for everyone who has ever struggled with some aspect of same sex attraction.
2. Assertion two is the perceived assertion of many churches that marriage is the primary goal for all "normal" human relationships.

You can see the obvious conflict between these two. How refreshing is it to hear a Christian state unambiguously, "*I knew that...my starting point was that I loved Jesus with all my heart. And that I was going to follow Him no matter what. I knew that everything about my life was here to glorify and honor God.*" ? I wish that all of us as Christians approached our walk with Christ with the same attitude. Following Him comes first. Obedience comes first. Sacrifice is just part of it. No excuses – no whining.

But there was still a conflict between the two assertions. I was born this way and cannot change – therefore I cannot fulfill the primary goal of human relationships, namely marriage. Julie puts it this way, "*The gospel of Jesus for me had really been married to [sexual] orientation change...and heterosexual marriage.*"

Again, to her credit, she doesn't buy into revisionist theology. Scripture is actually pretty clear. Sex is a good and beautiful thing within the constraints of marriage. Marriage is between a man and a woman. And that's all He wrote.

"There's been this story that was told about love and about belonging, that was primarily found within the context of a marriage, within the context of sexual relationship in a marriage."

Julie correctly recognizes that two things are being conflated here. Sexual intimacy and marriage are being conflated with love and intimacy of a platonic nature. You can be celibate and still love and be loved deeply. You can be celibate and still experience intimate relationships. Just look at Jesus! Would anyone argue that this was a man devoid of deep loving relationships? Devoid of deep personal intimacy? Of course not.

In fact, when the disciples assert that it is perhaps *not* expedient to marry, Jesus replies saying, “*Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.*”²

St. Paul is perhaps even clearer writing,

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So that he who marries his betrothed does well; and *he who refrains from marriage will do better.*³

— 6 —

Debunking False Assertions

Let’s leave the first assertion alone for now, and just agree that sexual orientation may be more nuanced than simply whether or not someone is, “born that way.” The second perceived assertion – marriage is the primary goal for “normal” human relationships – is an interesting one for me. I would agree with Julie that this was very much my experience growing up in Protestant Christianity. Since becoming Catholic however, I have been exposed to a Christian tradition far more in keeping with the teaching of Christ and of St. Paul. A tradition which asserts that marriage, sexual intimacy, and procreation are all good things, but perhaps not the *best* thing. That in certain aspects, and for certain people, celibacy is far better. Catholic history is literally littered with saints who were virgins – celibate and consecrated for the Lord’s work. Priests, nuns, monks, ascetics, and even laymen and women who had forgone one form of intimacy for another which they found to be far deeper, richer, and more rewarding.

We forget that marriage to another person is only one of the options which we see expressed in the Scriptures. That marriage between a man and a woman is itself only a dim reflection of the marriage that takes place between Christ and His Church. That we are *all* called to the vocation of marriage with our Lord – even if we are not called to take a spouse here on earth.

— 7 —

I wholeheartedly agree with Julie’s conclusions and with her call to, “costly obedience” regardless of her sexual orientation. We are *all* called to be chaste regardless of our sexual orientation. We are *all* called to intentional discipleship and costly obedience regardless of our sexual orientation. And for many the call to celibacy is a higher call – regardless of sexual orientation.

Celibacy is not settling for less, but rather denying yourself for the sake of something more! Costly obedience should be the norm in every Christians life, and it should be done within the context of community! Celibacy is, for some of us, a form of costly obedience; but we should all have areas in our life where Christ is calling us to costly obedience. It will look different for all of us, but the call is the same. “*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*”⁴ We are all in this together. We are all a part of Christ’s bride. And we need each other desperately on this long journey in the same direction.

“We can live without sex ya’ll, but we can’t live without intimacy.”

!

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1. Genesis 1:27 [↔](#)
 2. Matthew 19:11b-12 [↔](#)
 3. 1 Corinthians 7:32-28 [↔](#)
 4. Luke 9:23 [↔](#)
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Goodbye Dr. Pepper and Chocolate - Hello Tradition and Sacrificial Grace! [at Campfires and Cleats]

Journeying to the same destination.....entering the dark night of the soul.

Same season, same "rules," same goals.

Different approaches.

Forty seven days of austere. Of sacrifice. Of forfeiture.

Heck, let's face it. Forty seven days of renouncing Dr Pepper?

Now that's self denial....for me. For you? Maybe not so much.

Lent isn't the season of How-To-Be-Perfect,

but rather the season of

How-To-Serve-the-Lord-as-Perfectly-As-I-Am-Able-in-This-Season-of-My-Life.

Sixteen years ago on Shrove Tuesday 1999, I miscarried our first child.

All there was for months, let alone the lenten season, was emptiness.

Darkness, tears, black, confused nothingness.

My mom told me I'd "suffered enough." Giving up chocolate, she asked....

Well, what's the point after you lose a child?

Isn't that ample sacrifice?

But really.....the choice to enter the desert.....

to willingly give, offer, reject is our decision....or not.

And maybe that year, maybe *any* year,

the path to do *more* or *different* is better than doing less.

Than denying oneself.

It may be hard to discern the gentle and the perfect-for-me through our desire to attempt The Best and The Most...you know?

Of course, you *do*.

So that being said, if you *are* looking for one or two, or even a

few meaningful activities to add into your family's repertoire of

liturgical year traditions this Lenten season, you've landed at a treasure trove today!

I'm so so so happy to share my five favorite Lenten blog posts~

So let's get started with the fun, the inspiration and the wealth of tradition:

~ONE~

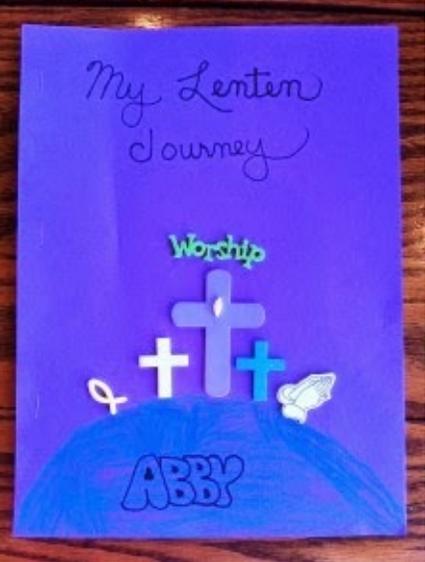
Tracy, of A Slice of Smith Life, shares in



absolutely *everything* you need from magnetic stations of the cross to lenten chains to Holy Week Happenings! Tracy, I think we'll all be over for your Good Friday lunch!!



~ TWO ~



Birgit also discusses her Eggstraordinary Rosary Project and a fun Stations of the Cross activity....

Do. Not. Miss. This!!



~THREE~

is a fun, easy and gorgeous way for kids to make the 14 stations *their own!*



And friends, while I'm sharing Monica's ingenuity, don't miss clicking over to her brand new



Monica is the mastermind behind Equipping Catholic Families and really, the creativity that bursts from her blog is unreal!



~FOUR~

If you're looking for inspiration, quotes, a peek at family liturgical culture,

Emily of Our Home, Under Mary's Mantle

shares a warm, welcoming round up of traditions and reflections

When you read one of Em's blog posts, you're instantly rejuvenated, as if you've shared a cup of tea and a long chat.

That's how casual, yet charming, her style.

suggested things to
GIVE and **GIVE UP**
during Lent

Give thanks	Give up complaining
Give compliments	Give up harsh judgments
Give forgiveness	Give up revenge
Give encouragement	Give up negativism
Give hope	Give up despair
Give attention to virtue	Give up sin
Give time to prayer	Give up wasting your time
Give respect	Give up prejudice
Give help	Give up selfishness
Give time to God	Give up what keeps you from God



~FIVE~

Last but not least, Jennifer of Catholic Inspired, has created a phenomenal 47 page

Journey with Jesus eBooks

Helping kids learn and meditate about Jesus' life. Perfect for Lent or any time!

Journey With Jesus
Daily Bible Readings and Meditations
Jan Lawrence and Jeweller Marie Lawrence

eWorkbooks also available!

which contains a Bible reading for each day during Lent as well as beautiful artwork as we travel through Jesus's life.

Sounds amazing, right?

To make our walk through Jesus' life even more real, Jen is including her [Jesus Tree printables](#) and info, depicting scenes from the life of our Lord.

Look how stunning Jen's family's tree is:



So this would technically make my post SIX faves, not five....

but I have to add in my mega Lent post from last year, which is a round up of so many activities that my kids have done throughout the years,.....



The boys worked diligently on these projects and we actually keep them up year round as solid, tangible symbols of our Faith...and of their childhoods...as they grow older!

I hope you can click over to enjoy the efforts and the reflections at my #5faves blog posts!

Not only are these talented writers, they are also my friends!

So yes, I am very blessed!



Thanks Jenna! Go visit for more #5faves!

Come back next week (and for several weeks after) for my five fave

Doctor Who moments, season by season.

Hey, Doctor Pepper may be off limits, but Whovian wit and epic,

That'll clear it all up. Sort of.

Much love and peace to you all this lent~~!!



thank you for stopping over and

spending some of your precious time

here at my home on the web!

Have you signed up to receive my posts in your email inbox?

If not, just enter your email address here

so we can be in touch regularly!

My Abandoned Lights [at The Cloistered Heart]



Journeying ever more deeply into the will of God, I find doors and rooms and hallways I had not expected. One of these is what I'll call the room of abandoned lights.

What I think of as "my abandoned lights" are various ideas I embraced over the years, attitudes I once considered enlightening and empowering. In time, those lights proved to be no light at all.

Some of these un-lights were initially dazzling. They appealed to my broadmindedness, that modern version of "sanctity" that basks in its politically correct

ed glow.

There was no pesky death-to-self in the world of my abandoned lights. The Cross was not part of the scene. *'There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it leads to death.'* (Proverbs 14:12)

By the grace of God, I cast my unlights aside

[when I met the One Who is Light Himself.](#)

In time, I even began to feel that a large part of the task of a "cloistered heart" is to

[Carry the Fire](#)

into darkness, as well as into areas of "artificial light."

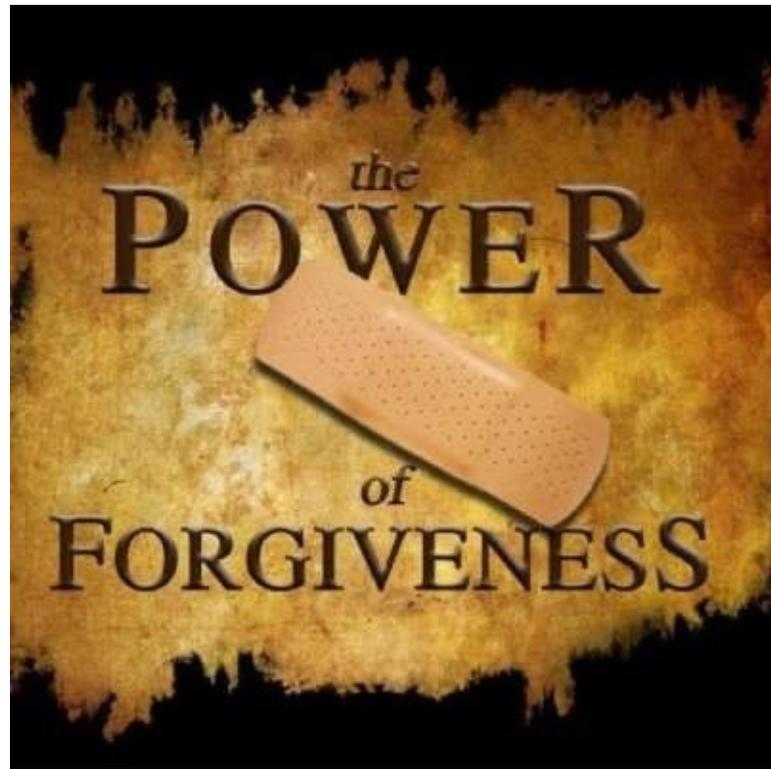
"We can make the mistake of trying to make hard truths so palatable," [writes Dan Burke at Catholic](#)

[Spiritual Direction](#), "that we end up presenting half-truths or even worse, untruths (implied or actual).... Yes, we can and must say 'come as you are'; but we must also proclaim that the God of Love who meets us where we are, loves us too much to leave us there. He calls us to union with Him, where we will find the Truth that sets us free to know and live an abundant life in Him." For a look at some of the un-light we can be tempted to follow, check out this excellent link: **[How the Carmelites Rescued Me From the New Age, by Anabelle Hazard](#)** "God is light; in Him there is no darkness." (1 John 1:5)
"The revelation of Your words sheds light, giving understanding to the simple." (Psalm 119:130)
Painting: John Frederick Peto, Door with Lanterns

This contribution is available at <http://www.thecloisteredheart.org/2015/02/my-abandoned-lights.html>
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Forgiveness - Why Did it Take Almost 40 Yrs?



Forgiveness, when given to others, is done more for yourself, than for the person being forgiven. To forgive someone for an offense committed against you is to release yourself from the bond that the offense has created. I have an excellent example from my own life to prove the point.

When I was a child in grade school, I wore braces on my legs and went through several surgeries because I was born with clubbed feet. Well, everyone knows how cruel children can be, and I suffered from a great deal of taunting and verbal abuse at the hands of several of my classmates simply because of my “difference.” I was an outcast, a “cootie-bug” (remember that one? It was common in my day – maybe I am dating myself). The verbal abuse was so excessive, that I would go home every afternoon and cry, asking my mom why my classmates were so mean to me. This abuse lasted all throughout my eight years of grade school. Naturally, it impacted my self-worth. It wasn’t until I was in my 40’s that I had an epiphany connecting the verbal abuse from my classmates with my need to constantly seek approval from my colleagues at work. I was still that little girl seeking acceptance – always trying to prove my worth. With this epiphany, I decided to finally forgive my former classmates of their cruelty, and with that forgiveness, Christ healed me! I was no longer held bound to the abuse. I was free to be the person I wanted to be. I no longer needed to seek acceptance and approval from my colleagues to confirm my self-worth. In Christ’s healing, He affirmed my self-worth! He has a plan for me, and no verbal abuse, or pats on the back for that matter, mean anywhere near as much to me anymore as doing the Lord’s will does. Christ’s healing, through my willingness to forgive, has set me on the right course for my life.

The ability to forgive is a blessed thing to possess; to be forgiven is even better. We are all sinners in need of Christ’s forgiveness. He’s waiting for you to seek His forgiveness by acknowledging your sins. He is waiting to joyfully forgive you of your sins and to extend His mercy upon you, because He loves you! What are you waiting for? Get to it! Receive forgiveness, mercy, peace and joy – all great virtues to

possess!

We'll discuss how embracing forgiveness makes us like Christ in our next reflection. Don't miss it.

This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/forgiveness-take-40-years/>
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7 Things Not to Do For Lent [at Catholic Stand]

Lent is a time of spiritual self-discovery, renewal, and an invitation to find God's will for us. Through sacrifice, prayer, and alms-giving we are looking to join Jesus in the desert – finding a purer form of ourselves. There are as many opportunities for Lenten self-improvement as there are individual souls. As we enter the second week of Lent, however, we might want to take a look at our intentions and the desired effect on our lives. Are our objectives pure? Do we have the proper mindset to make this Lent a life-altering experience?

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” ([Isaiah 55:10-11](#))

In keeping with the hope of a fruitful Lent, we might consider this list of seven snares to avoid:

1. **Don't use Lent as a weight loss regimen** – Abstaining from delicacies we savor can be a worthy discipline to practice. While better care of the temple which is our body is admirable, selfishly looking for a vanity-based outcome can detract (or eliminate) the purity of our sacrifice. Instead, emptying ourselves and refraining from creature comforts, should make more room for God in our lives.
2. **Don't focus solely on self** – We are called to improve our relationship with God during Lent. An important aspect of the disciplines we practice is to be closer to Him. A pertinent offshoot of applying this objective is to bring the love of Christ to others. We do this through our actions toward them. If we selfishly withdraw without giving thought to being a light to others, we diminish a positive aspect of our call to Lenten love. A virtuous alternative would be to allow true charity to bring us closer to those around us.
3. **Don't be rigid in our intentions** – If we find that our spiritual needs take on a divergent direction, we shouldn't be afraid to redirect our efforts as the Holy Spirit dictates. One of the purposes of Lent is to grow in our faith life and to transform our everyday interaction with God and others. Sometimes our needs or the opportunities to serve God through others present themselves in a variety of ways. Altering course and flexibility, then, become a benefit to our Lenten growth.
4. **Don't hold up impossible standards** – Setting ourselves up with too many strict aspirations may have the effect of needless failure. It's better to achieve a limited number of things well, than it is to aspire to an unrealistic number of goals all at once. A helpful point to keep in mind, if we fall into this trap, is that each day brings a fresh start. Although it may be admirable to strive for sainthood, we must take our human nature into account. When we fail, are we willing to pick ourselves up and start anew?
5. **Don't fail to convert your intentions into a positive outcomes** – Simply doing without isn't a worthy goal. When we empty ourselves of creature comforts, spiritual growth should take their place. Lent is not simply a time to test our willpower; it's a time to become more holy in our emulation of the earthly, human life of Jesus. We are given an opportunity to grow closer to Him.
6. **Don't simply do without for the sake of doing without.** We need to add more God into our lives. As we contemplate sacrifice, prayer, and charity during the Lenten season, we should ask God what

He thinks we should do – what does He want from us? We should have a purpose for our sacrifices.

7. **Don't make your Lenten intentions something temporary** – Lent is a time of making enduring progress in our lives – both spiritually and in regard to neighbor. It's not a time to hold our breath until Lent is over, only to go back to being the same person we were before it began. Allow Lent to bring a richness to your spiritual growth and relationship to God through others.

Each of these seven *don'ts* have a constructive alternative. If we aim for improvement, using a sincere desire to challenge ourselves and to better our lives, we will certainly find a way to achieve our objectives. May we all experience a happy and productive Lent!

“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” ([Matthew 6:7](#))

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicstand.com/7-things-not-to-do-for-lent/>
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Once Saved, Always Saved and Ezekiel [at Designs by Birgit]



As any Bible reading Christian knows, a frequent theme throughout scripture is doing good - not evil. From the Ten Commandments to the Beatitudes, we are given rules and actions to emulate. It can't be a coincidence, then, to consider ourselves purposefully instructed to continue our quest for sainthood. We mustn't slack; we mustn't rest on past laurels - we are admonished to take the path less taken, the hard road.

Remember the young man, who kept all of the commandments but pressed Jesus for the way to Heaven? (

[Mark 10:17-22](#)

)

In keeping with this mindset, I find myself wondering about our Protestant brethren who cling to the 'once saved, always saved' philosophy. That's the point that leapt to mind when I heard the reading from Ezekiel during yesterday's Mass.

"But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does the same abominable things that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, he shall die. "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is lawful and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live, he shall not

die." **Ezekiel 18:21-28**

If we remain kind, I wouldn't mind a charitable discussion on this topic. What say you?

This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2015/02/once-saved-always-saved-and-ezekiel.html>
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A Father After God's own Heart



In the old testament, God said that King David was a man after God's own heart. Wow, what a compliment. King David achieved this goal by uniting his will to that of God. He did this through prayer, through reading scripture and through his every day actions which gave glory to God. During the funeral activities following my father in law's passing, I pondered what it was that he did to have such a positive impact not only on his own children and their families, but on the larger community. There were over 600 people who came out for the rosary/visitation service and perhaps a few more for the funeral mass and then around 150 who made the two hour drive to bury him in his hometown of Shiner, TX. He was a good man, but good men who are 69 years old don't necessarily get 1000 people to come out to celebrate their life and comfort their family. What was it about Jim that made him an exceptional husband, father, grandfather, and friend?

Be a Man of Faith

A father after God's own heart is a man of faith. This faith is not just personal and hidden from the world, it is an active, vibrant and visible faith that is demonstrated in word and deed. When I married into my wife's family I found a faith filled family led by a strong father who was not afraid of the world, but was determined to engage it and do what he could to redeem it. A father's faith is not something that is only visible on Sunday, but something that is lived at home, at work and in your parish. A strong father is one that owns his faith, that is not afraid to go against the cultural norms and actively teaches the faith to his children by his example and by instruction in the way they should go.

During the rosary/visitation for Jim, I was struck by the five men who led the rosary, they were Jim's best friends, and while it was difficult for each of them to lead the rosary for 600 people at the funeral of one of their best friends, I surmise that they did it out of a sense of duty, being there for his family in their time of need. They were inspired by his example of faith and it strengthened theirs. Great fathers surround themselves with other men who are striving to make Jesus the Lord of their life, it is through this support system that they are able to make it through the difficult times and remain faithful. My brother in law told me that his father specifically requested that men be given prominent roles during the funeral services because my father in law believed very strongly that men need to be visible within the Church community and leaders in their faith and within their families.

No man is perfect, and I hope you don't think that Jim Kral was perfect either. We all fall short of the Glory of God and thankfully our God is a loving Father who is always ready to welcome us home when we humbly acknowledge our sins before him and ask for forgiveness. During the last six months of his life, Jim made the sometimes difficult trip to the Church to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis. He was entering the home stretch of his life and he was keenly aware of his shortcomings

and that he was not yet perfectly obedient to God at all times. A father after God's own heart knows that he needs to turn to God daily and ask for his grace and forgiveness. The sacrament of Reconciliation is a sign of humility, a sign that we have examined our lives and know that we are in need of God's forgiveness and grace.

Be A Man at the Service of Others



Faith is more than just a belief system, it must also be accompanied by works of charity. The goal of the Christian faith is to become in a special way the servant of others. This is the command that Christ gave us at the last supper when he washed the feet of the Apostles and commanded they to do the same for others. Fathers in a special way are called to be of service to others in their community.

My father in law did this very effectively throughout his life, he and his wife were members of the leadership team for Worldwide Marriage Encounter providing hope for other couples who wished to make their good marriages great. When one of his God children suffered the loss of their father through



divorce, he stepped in and assisted the mother in providing for her children's material and spiritual needs. Throughout his life he continued to be available to help anyone, friend or family member, if they needed help fixing something, needed a ride to the airport or if they needed someone to stop by on Christmas Day so they wouldn't be alone in the nursing home. We as fathers should always be thinking of how we can help those less fortunate among us. Conventional wisdom would tell us that we need to pay more attention to our own families and that serving others would detract from that duty, but our experience has been quite the opposite, it is very possible to be of service to others without neglecting our primary responsibility to our own family. Our children learn everything from us, and our example speaks much louder than our words.



A Man who Loves his Wife

The greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother. A family is built on a solid foundation, and that foundation is built primarily on a love of God by the parents, and secondarily, a love that [reflects the love of God](#) between the parents. A man who honors, cherishes and loves his wife demonstrates to his family that there are some things that are steadfast and true, that love is stronger than any trial and that a vow is something that should be kept no matter what. My in-laws have told me that their involvement in the Marriage Encounter program saved their marriage and reoriented their family life toward safer waters. Through this renewed focus on making their marriage a great marriage, they became part of a community of families that placed Jesus at the center of not only their marriage, but of their family life.



A Man of Joy

Pope Francis' first encyclical was written on the topic of Christian Joy. He remarked that the best way to attract people to the Christian faith was with joy. My father in law was always smiling and joy filled. This is not to say that he was always happy. During the last few months of his battle with cancer he was in intense pain and suffering which our family witnessed first hand, but his hope was in the Lord and therefore he tried his best to [let that joy show through the pain](#). His hospice nurses, doctor and other caregivers commented several times on his joyful outlook on life despite his suffering and imminent death. It was not uncommon for him to ask a nurse about her family and no one left without receiving a blessing. When we were collecting pictures for the video tribute for his funeral, we had no problem finding photos of him smiling and happy, that is who he was. He would always seek to bring joy into every situation. This decision to be a man of joy was demonstrated during the first meeting we had with the oncologist. During this meeting when we received the grim diagnosis that he would at best live

another 18 months, he was laughing and joking with the doctor and asking her about her family and sharing about his, we even went out for ice cream afterwards.

A joyful father will foster a joyful family. Fathers, do not underestimate the power of your example and leadership. If you live out your life with Christ at the center of your life, your children will too. If you love others and are a man of service, your children will be too. If you demonstrate a commitment to loving your wife no matter what trials may come your way, your children will honor their vows too. And when you come to the end of your days, your friends will surround you with love, provide meals for your grieving family, attend your funeral, speak highly of you, comfort your loved ones, tell everyone how you were their best friend and your children will be proud to call you their father and your legacy will live on with each of your children as they follow your example and raise their children in the same way you did, passing on the values that you held dear, and making the world a better place, one family at a time.

This contribution is available at <http://www.yourhollyfamily.com/how-to-be-a-father-after-gods-own-heart/>
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Don't Take Away His Dragons [at The Veil of Chastity]

A couple of weeks ago, as Gregg and I were driving to work (at 6:00am), I shared with him the latest on what was going on with 'the blog girls' (you). I told him my thoughts on how things have changed in the online dating world. One thing that I am disturbed about is the lack of mystery with today's online dating sites and how I believe this can work against you girls. But, it doesn't have to and that is what today's post is about!

Managing Your Online Footprint

Do today's online sites tempt you to search out, contact and fantasize about the guys on the site? Do the guys have evidence of your searches, the number of times you view their profile and the amount of time you spend on the site? Could guys be turned off by a sense of desperation coming from the way you conduct yourself online? Finally, is your online footprint potentially too big? If so, let's see how this impacts how you are perceived and what you can do about it.

Okay, so from what I understand, sites such as CatholicMatch.com somehow automatically match the boys to the girls. I assume it is the result of an **algorithm** built into the system based on how the person answers a series of questions.

Strike #1

This **Matchy-Match system** is Strike #1 in my book. Why? Because it significantly reduces the need for the guy to be **Resourceful**. Remember my 3 R's? [In this post](#), I said that a guy has to be **Resourceful, Ready and Realistic**. If the algorithm is doing *all the work for him*, then it is weakening his Resourcefulness muscle.

I am fine with a guy using *filters* to find a girl. For example, he can filter by things like location and age. But, then I think he needs to **do the work** associated with the search. Look at photos, read bios/profiles, etc. Put some effort into it!

Instead, the system is all *matchy*. Okay, fine.

Strike #2

Let's accept the matchy-match factor and move on to the next strike: The "**See who viewed your profile**" **function**. Strike # 2. Why? Because, it gives the guy too much information. And, it tempts the girl to initiate contact with a guy just because he viewed her profile (I get email confessions). A girl should fight this temptation to contact these guys. Why? Because if a guy viewed a girl's profile and did not initiate contact with her.....we have to consider that he was not interested. He moved on to check out other girls.

When a guy sees a photo and profile he likes, he contacts her....even if she is out of his league.



WHEN I HOLD A SWORD.

I WANT TO SLAY DRAGONS.

DIYLOL.COM

Don't think like a Girl

It is so easy for us girls to think, “*Oh, he viewed my profile and must be intimidated by me. Let me contact him to let him know that I don't bite.*” That, my friend, is thinking like a **girl**. And, when I presented this line for thinking to Gregg, he said,

“*You need to tell the girls this: **Don't take away his dragons!***”

In other words, you girls are thinking like girls. You are thinking you need to lower the bar and remove imaginary barriers. Instead what you are doing is removing the **mystery**, the **risk** and the **conquest**.

Mystery, Risk And Conquest

A man likes mystery. He likes to take risks. Sure, the girl may be out of his league but that makes it even all the more exciting! It is a **dragon to slay**. Don't take away his dragons by making it too easy.

I know what you are thinking.....“*that won't happen to me. I am not dragon-worthy.*” Well, yes you are. But you will never find out who is willing to slay that dragon for you until you manage your online footprint and for this I recommend you **think like a guy** (mystery, risk, conquest) but **behave like a girl**.

Behave Like A Girl

1. If you get the matchy-match notice from the dreaded algorithm.....ignore it.
2. Only communicate with men who are brave and resourceful enough to contact you first.
3. Do not view any profiles until the guy contacts you. Then, you may check him out.

Why?

The reasons are simple. If a guy checks out your profile but does not contact you after the algorithm does all the work for him matches you.....then he is not interested. If you contact him first, then you are trying to make something happen that isn't happening naturally. Not good. So, if you wait and **only communicate with the guys who contact you first**, your chances of success skyrocket.

The problem with checking out the guys profile before he contacts you is that [The Fantasy Relationship](#) starts to take off. You start naming children and this man, **who hasn't even typed a sentence to you**, occupies your thoughts.

But Cindy!

I hear your protests. The biggest protest in your head is “*I have to make it happen or else it will never*

happen naturally for me. I am just an average girl.”

And that is the dragon I will kill in my next post.

God Love and Bless You!

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2015/02/17/dont-take-away-his-dragons/>
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Pitcherfull [at Smaller Mannhattans]



that's a shapely one

Marriage is a recurring theme in catechism class because it is a recurring theme in the Bible. Typically we cover this story during our trip through the Gospels:

"Master, there were with us seven brothers: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and having no issue, left his wife unto his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? Jesus said, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

Without fail a child will ask me why I won't be married to my wife in heaven- won't we still love each other?

Part of my answer is that post-Eden, marriage lasts until the death of a spouse. But I also want to say something bigger about life after the Second Coming; that is, in the New Jerusalem- like so:

"Somebody tell me what wasn't good in Eden.

Adam was alone!

Yes, and?

God made Eve out of his rib.

Yes, and when he got his missing rib back he was completed, just like I am completed by my wife. Y'all tell me about my wife.

You love her!

I sure do...but why?

Umm, she's your wife?

Well, yes...let's say I love her because she is

good

. Where's that goodness come from?

God?

Yes; tell me about creation.

It was all good!

Yes! So all the goodness we experience ultimately comes from..

.God

. Yes. So my wife is like a book...or a TV...or Elisha's bones...c'mon, y'all know this...

she's a media, cause God goes through her!

Yes, a

medium

, she mediates God to me, like sacraments and all kinds of stuff do. Do I get the full dose of God through my wife?

Huh?

Is all the goodness of God available to me through my wife?

Well, God's bigger than she is.

Yes. But if I'm hanging out with Jesus after the Second Coming, do I get all God's goodness then?

Yes!

And if my wife is there

...she gets it too.

Yes. So is there more love between us now- or in the future?

In the future!

Yes. So if we will have even more love for each other while we're in God's company, how worried are we going to be about how married we are?

Well, maybe you wouldn't care anymore.

Sort of, but not exactly...let's think of it this way: instead of the limited dose of love we get from each other here, we'll experience infinite love in heaven. It'll include all the love we have as husband and wife, but bigger: it will include everybody. Yes?

But aren't you still going to miss being married in heaven?

I don't think so. Imagine it like this:

Let's say I need water to live- without water I'd be incomplete, right?

What?

Can I live without water?

No, you'd die.

Without water would life be good?

No you have to have it.

Yes, so think of my wife, and the love she brings me, as water. I need it. And I'm ok, because I have a pitcher of lovewater right here, next to me, which is...

your wife!

Yes. I hug this pitcher against my heart like Adam's missing rib. And all around me right now in the classroom- is there more water?

There's no water in here.

Right. Except for my pitcher-full.

But eventually my wife and I will die- let's hope we'll both be in heaven, where love might be like an infinite ocean. Now imagine I walk into that sea of lovewater with my pitcher-full. See, it gets deeper and deeper, until...

your pitcher is underwater!

Yes. Tell me about it.

Well, the water in the pitcher is part of the ocean now.

Yes. But the pitcher is still there, and it's still full, right?

Yes, but the ocean is way bigger.

Yes. The lovewater in my pitcher has merged with the infinite lovewater that's all around me

and

my pitcher. My little pitcher-full doesn't disappear: it's just where it was always meant to be. There will be many pitchers, but one water. So what we love about being married today will still be true in heaven and in the New Jerusalem, but unimaginably bigger and better."

BTW, the above is similar to how I answer the question about pets in heaven:

"Everything that you love about your pets (and everything else) will be more fully available to you in heaven; and in the New Jerusalem I would expect to see dogs and trees and all the rest of creation, so be happy."

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2015/02/pitcherfull.html>
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I'm near sick to death of reading about *50 Shades of De-Grey-dation*. For lots of reasons, but mainly because all the attention is overkill for a book that is widely-regarded as poorly-written, misogynist porn. Erin McCole Cupp has [reframed the discussion](#) with a positive spin.

Erin deftly identifies the critical issue for both artists and purveyors of art of all types by sharing this quote from [Pope St. John Paul II's "Letter to Artists."](#) (If you've never read it, this relatively short letter is worth your time.)

"[...E]ven in situations where culture and the Church are far apart, art remains a kind of bridge to religious experience. In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to the mystery. **Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption.**" –Pope St. John Paul II, "Letter to Artists"

During Lent, Catholics often choose to do some spiritual reading. If my guess is correct, most often they choose nonfiction books – books about prayer, lives of the saints, or reflections for meditation. That is a good thing!

But, what if this year, in addition, Catholics sought out some entertainment as well? What if instead of watching the hilarious but morally-bankrupt sitcom you love, you chose to watch a show with themes that uplift and give hope? What if instead of reading an enjoyable paperback that glorifies nihilism, you chose something that recognizes the true, beautiful, and good? What if instead of complaining about what is bad, you supported what is good?

Below are my ten recommendations for novels (written by Catholic authors) that fit the bill. I limited my choice to one book per author, though in many cases these authors have written several books I would happily recommend. Books are from a variety of genres and are listed in no particular order.

1. [I Am Margaret](#) by Corinna Turner
2. [Chasing Liberty](#) by Theresa Linden
3. [Opal's Jubilee](#) by Leslie Lynch
4. [A World Such as Heaven Intended](#) by Amanda Lauer
5. [Rapunzel Let Down](#) by Regina Doman
6. [Rachel's Contrition](#) by Michelle Buckman
7. [Don't You Forget About Me](#) by Erin McCole Cupp
8. [A Subtle Grace](#) by Ellen Gable
9. [Innocence](#) by Dean Koontz
10. [The Lion's Heart](#) by Dena Hunt

[Shameless plug: Next year, I'd love to add my own novel, [Stay With Me](#) (set to be released October 1, 2015) to this list.]

Maybe you've seen Christian or Catholic movies that were cheesy and substandard. Maybe you've plodded through books that read like a thinly-disguised altar call or apologetics course.

People's tastes vary, and so do artists abilities.

I can't guarantee every person will love every book I've listed above, but I will attest that they are not cheesy claptrap.

Yes, sometimes we need to disavow the negative, but we also need to affirm the positive. Give one or more of these books a chance this Lent. Let the true, beautiful, and good fill your imagination.

This contribution is available at <http://carolynastfalk.com/2015/02/17/showusyourlist/>
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Christmas is now officially over with the celebration of the

[Presentation of our Lord or Candlemas](#)

this past weekend.



Today, February 3, is the feast days of both

[Saint Blaise](#)

and

[Saint Ansgar](#)

. This morning our family went to morning Mass and

[had our throats blessed in honor of Saint Blaise](#)

This week has been busy with the launching of the new Saint site,

[SaintNook](#)

, where the Saints are always online! I 'm so excited about

[being part of the team](#)

that is working hard to bring the Saints online in a new, fun way by combining their resources into one corner, or "nook", of the world wide web! Below are the beautiful graphics of the two Saints we celebrate today. If you are on Facebook you might have seen these men floating around on the

[SaintNook Facebook page](#)

or maybe someone shared these on their own pages after

["Liking" the SaintNook Facebook page](#)

February 3



St. Blaise of Turkey

saintnøk

February 3



St. Ansgar of Scandinavia

saintnøk

It's hard to believe that Lent is just around the corner, exactly 2 weeks away! I can't believe it either!

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18, this year. I thought I would gather all my Lent and Holy Week posts here in case you missed a few or are new to my little corner in blog land. Just click on the title of each post to read further. Enjoy!



[King Cake for Fat Tuesday](#)

(Fat Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday): This is the feast before the fast and this post also includes a yummy King Cake recipe.



[Lenten Love Links](#)

: Are you looking for an easy way to count day the 40 days in Lent until Easter morning and have the kids (and adults) in your family show love in Lent? Be sure to check out this post about Lenten Love Links that I pulled together last year from a couple of resources.



[Magnetic Stations of the Cross](#)

: I gave this cross as a gift to my husband's cousin when she

[came into the Catholic Church with my husband in 2006](#)

. When she passed away in 2007, we inherited this unique magnetic Stations of the Cross. This is a bit pricey, but I think well worth the money since my kids love to take turns (sometimes without arguing over whose turn it is!) and place the stations on the cross as we say each Station in our home. We have this cross hanging in our home and use it during Lent.





[Holy Week Happenings: Wednesday: Spy Wednesday and Via Crucis {post 3 of 3}](#): Last year we started a new tradition called "Spy Wednesday" and we visited a local couple's beautiful garden where you can pray the Stations of the Cross as you walk around the long path filled with statues, stations of the cross, benches, plaques, crucifixes and there's even an empty tomb with a stone rolled away at the end of the path. Just beautiful! I definitely plan on going back again during Holy Week this year!



[A Symbolic Lunch for Good Friday](#): This was a new tradition we started last year on Good Friday. It was a lot of fun with our family and my husband was able to come home from work for lunch last year, which made it even more special. I plan to do this again this year.

Tracy

This contribution is available at <http://www.asliceofsmithlife.com/2015/02/christmas-is-over-feast-days-and-lots.html>
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White Bear Man [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



My 10 year old daughter and I hesitated a little before
deciding to leave today for our daily morning walk on the beach.

No sunrise to see, misty rain gushing with high winds,
38 degrees, with a 28 degree wind chill.
(feels pretty dang cold on the beach)

With only 2 more days
here on South Padre Island, we figured we better go.



On days like this, we have the beach to ourselves.

There's something about just being there in God's awesomeness.
(By ourselves)

We stopped a couple times to pick a few shells that caught our eyes.

A man caught up with us and greeted us with the normal,

"How long are you down here for?"

Followed by, "Where are you from?"

This happens daily on our walk,
but this man, wearing a bright white hooded South Padre sweatshirt,
stayed and talked a little longer.
He was from Minnesota like us.

One of the million things I love about being down here
is meeting people from all over and finding out where they are from.

People, for some reason, light up when they talk about home.

We have this instant bond because we've left the snow and cold
in search of warm air and sunshine..

This man told me he was from the White Bear Lake area.

(near the Twin Cities)

After finding out where we were from,
he told me where he was originally from.
(now keep in mind, he's probably in his 70's)

Upon hearing his original city, I said,
"You must be Catholic, isn't everyone Catholic where you are from?"

Ice breaker-conversation starter

I do it all the time.

He told me he is Catholic.

But,

(you knew there would be a "but" didn't you?)

that he disagrees with some things.

And that he doesn't go to church because of it.

I half kidded that It's Lent, and it's the perfect time to come back!

Of course, I had to ask what those things were.

he only told me about one.

(because it was freezing cold, otherwise, I think we'd have talked

for hours, he was really nice)

I thought to myself,

Oh, no he's going to go on about same-sex marriages,

or abortion or Confession or the Eucharist.

But he didn't.

What he disagrees with

surprised me.

He doesn't believe in Hell.

I know there are a lot of people that don't believe there is a Hell,

I'm not sure I've met any of them though.

I've met anti-Catholics, ex-Catholics, Atheists, but not this.

I'm always curious.

I always want to know why.

I always want to try to understand people and why they think the way they do.

He told me he doesn't think God would send anyone to such a terrible place. That, he thinks everyone goes to Heaven, because we are all "wired differently", therefore, because God made us that way, why would he send us to Hell?

OH, you see, how we could probably talk for hours?

He obviously does not read the bible.

(I know, typical lukewarm "Catholic")

If he read the bible, he'd know that God is just.

(I told him God is just)

He'd know that God gives us free will to choose.

He would know there is a Hell.

He told me all the good things he does all the time.

That one time, when he was younger, and working,

he used to deliver sheetrock and he saw a billfold on the side of the highway, stopped and his partner looked at him and was surprised that he was going to return the wallet.

I told him what an awesome example he was to this man,
how that one little thing probably effected him
and has probably made him think more than once in his life.

He told me that he feels the same whether he goes to church or not.

That it is neither good or bad to go or not go.

He feels the same.

How very sad, that he's never been moved by The Spirit.

That he has never felt ON FIRE FOR GOD!!

I told him about Fatima.

I suggested he try praying the rosary for a month.

He said his parents went to daily Mass and prayed the rosary daily.

The grace is there, it's within reach.

White Bear Man has beautiful white hair, a bright infectious smile,
and he made me think he is probably an awesome grandpa!

He needs prayers though, don't you think?

Could you pray for him?

When we parted ways,

He hugged us both!!

He instigated the hugs!

See what a nice, sweet man he is?

Just think what our prayers could do for him.

At this point, the wind had gotten stronger and we decided to go home.

We had walked maybe only a half mile down the beach.
We usually walk about 3 miles total.

God has a plan for all of us.

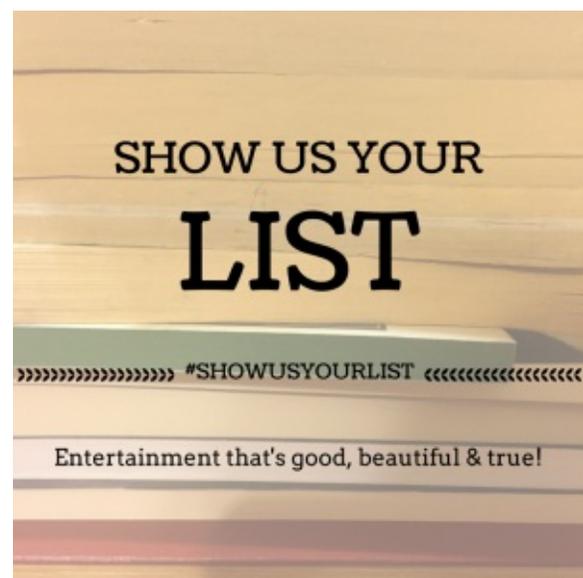
This was no chance meeting.

God knew we'd meet.

And He knew YOU and I would pray for White Bear Man.

On a lighter note: good reading, good viewing [at Leaven For The Loaf]

Rather than wring my hands over the fact that a film glorifying sexual abuse pulled in a gazillion dollars last weekend, I'm going to accept and share a challenge from [Erin McCole Cupp](#): shine a light on quality entertainment. As she says, #showusyourlist. This is for everyone, although she is pointing particularly at Catholics who are fuming at 50 shades of whatever. (Hey! That's me!) Erin complicates matters by making a rule that no non-fiction can go on the list.



So here I go with this Mardi Gras celebration, letting you in on some of my favorite media where entertainment and food for the soul come together. The items are listed in no particular order, and this isn't a comprehensive list (no music listed, for example, because I scarcely know where to begin). Comment below with your own lists, so I can enjoy them & learn from you. All kinds of media are fair game. If World of Warcraft is your idea of edifying entertainment, let's hear about it. Quibbles, comments and disagreements welcome. That's what comment boxes are for.

Movies

Groundhog Day. After countless viewings, I still find it side-splittingly funny, and my heart always glows a bit when Bill Murray finally gets the day right.

His Girl Friday. Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell: what else do you need to know?

Anything by **Alfred Hitchcock** from '39 (*Rebecca*) to '58 (*Vertigo*).

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, The Searchers, Rio Grande, Fort Apache. All directed by John Ford. I'm generally indifferent to Westerns, but these four stand up to repeated viewing. Fascinating characters, good stories, great respect for the land where the stories take place. Every time I watch one of these, I see something new.

Of Gods and Men. I'm stretching the no-non-fiction rule here. This is not a documentary, but it's based on a true story. A small community of Trappist monks in Algeria lives peacefully with Muslim neighbors during the 1990s, until an Islamist insurgency forces the monks to decide whether to stay or leave. Serious stuff here, wonderfully written and acted. The monks' choice and its consequences will leave you thinking.

The Lives of Others. Watch what happens when an East German *Stasi* agent starts feeling sympathy for the people on whom he's keeping surveillance.

The Harry Potter series (but the books are better; see below). Ditto for **Lord of the Rings**.

All About Eve. Bette Davis is at her best. It would be tough to find a better what-goes-around-comes-around story.

A Man for All Seasons. I've seen this performed as a play, but the 1966 film with Paul Scofield as Thomas More takes the prize.

Books

The Thanatos Syndrome by Walker Percy. For that matter, pretty much anything by Walker Percy. *The Thanatos Syndrome* is a look at what happens when people are at the service of "science" and not the other way around.

The End of the Affair by Graham Greene. A spiritually-indifferent woman impulsively calls on divine intervention in a crisis, and she's stunned when she gets it. Now what?

In This House of Brede by Rumer Godden. I've loved this story from the moment I picked up the book from my mom's night table long ago. A forty-something woman, extremely successful by any measure, enters a convent – and not just any convent, but a monastery of cloistered Benedictine nuns. It's a book full of surprises – how the main character gets to the monastery, why she stays, how a community of women from wildly-varying backgrounds come together in common purpose, how even in a religious community human nature asserts itself over and over again.

Ben-Hur by General Lew Wallace. Trust me on this: as splendid as the 1959 movie was, the book has a much richer story.

The **Harry Potter series** by J.K. Rowling, particularly volumes 4 through 7: HP & the Goblet of Fire, HP & the Order of the Phoenix, HP & the Half-Blood Prince, and HP & the Deathly Hallows. I love the characters. I love the language and the vocabulary. The most compelling idea in the whole series – even more than the fight between good and evil – is that those who deny that evil exists might as well be doing evil themselves.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien is far more thought-provoking and beautiful than any high-budget trilogy of movies could hope to be.

Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh is a serious contender for Book I'd Most Like To Have if I were deserted somewhere. A down-at-heel college boy in England is drawn into his best friend's rich and nominally Catholic family between the two World Wars. No cardboard-cutout characters here. Cordelia is

who I want to be.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith. A book about kids, but not a kid's book until you want your kid to know how messy life can be. The book is unsentimental and perfect. When I was a kid, Francie Nolan and I were both bookworms ...and that's how I was drawn into her world.

Death Comes for the Archbishop by Willa Cather. Two dissimilar 19th-century French priests, a most unlikely pair of friends, are sent to what is now New Mexico to re-establish a Catholic presence in a newly-outlined diocese. That tells you everything about the plot and nothing about the story. The story comes in the relationships built by each priest with the local settlers, the established (and sometimes resistant) missionaries, and the regional indigenous peoples.

Online

On Patheos, blogs by [Kathryn Jean Lopez](#) and [Elizabeth Scalia](#).

Anything by [Jay Nordlinger](#).

Right here in New Hampshire is a blog called [New Hampshire Garden Solutions](#) that has some of the loveliest close-up nature photography you could hope to find. A feast for the eyes.

Places

[New Hampshire's Cohos Trail, rail trails, state parks](#) ... we Granite Staters are lucky people.

So ... what's on YOUR list?

First Children's Rosary in Wisconsin! [at Children's Rosary]



The first meeting of the Children's Rosary at St. Mary's Church in Pine Bluff was held on February 6th 2015. This group has chosen to meet monthly on the first Friday. The group leader, Kellie, shared with us a picture from the meeting. She was pleased to report that at least 20 children were able to attend.

Kellie is a home school mom and has been a very involved member of the Children's Rosary even before this first meeting. Kellie and her family initially began unifying prayers on the 13th of the month with our Children's Rosary group that meets in Fenton, Missouri. The later meeting time the group in Missouri had chosen worked out perfectly for Kellie to assemble her whole family to unify prayers with them. The children in Fenton also began praying in a special way for Kellie and her family as they discerned starting a group.

In many ways this new group in Wisconsin represents the ripples of several children's Rosary groups meeting each other and coalescing to bring an even bigger effect. It is so beautiful to see this happening more and more. The blessings and effects from one group reaching that of another. A ripple of good moving gently out in all directions and meeting the ripples created from other little groups in prayer.

As I would find out, Kellie initially became aware of the Children's Rosary from a mom in Pennsylvania who is a member of the Children's Rosary at St. Bernard's Church in Mount Lebanon. So in many ways we are seeing the fruits of our first Children's Rosary groups yielding more prayers and new Children's Rosary groups in new places. How truly beautiful that Our Lady and Our Lord are using the children to be their evangelizers.

To read more about the first meeting of this new group please visit this [LINK](#).



I also would encourage you to see pictures of Kellie's children making cards asking a radio station that broadcasts in Wisconsin to air the Children's Rosary. Link is [HERE](#) (scroll down a bit to see the artists at work). The children and cards are truly so precious. Here is a little preview....

This contribution is available at <http://childrensrosary.blogspot.com/2015/02/first-childrens-rosary-in-wisconsin.html>
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Program Your Brain for Lent [at Suffering With Joy]

February 22, 2015



*I can do all things
in Him who
strengthens me.
-Phil. 4:13*

Don't you wish you could exterminate every bad/sinful habit you have in one second and replace it with virtuous behavior? Unfortunately, fallen body and soul that we are, life isn't that simple. Fortunately, we have solid brain research that reveals some surprising evidence that we can re-program ourselves toward positive, holy thoughts that lead to holiness of action. Lent is a great time to make changes in our brains because we have an extended period of focused spiritual practices that, with the help of God's grace, will move us towards the new man in Christ that is the secret drive of every human heart.

In his February 6 column in *The Mirror*, Springfield/Cape Girardeau's diocesan paper, Father Oscar Lukefahr, CM, tells us how to re-program our brains for Lent based on Bible teachings and the latest findings of science. These are some facts Father notes:

Neural connections in the brain that are most heavily used are reinforced and retained, while those that are rarely used will atrophy.

This is our first clue: abandon and replace our bad, negative thoughts with good and virtuous ones so that the bad will be rarely used and atrophy. Easier said than done, but at least we have a practical starting point.

As life goes on, we develop a network of connections established through experiences, thoughts, feelings, actions, and memories. If we worry a lot, the "wires" that carry negative thoughts will develop well-worn pathways. Each event of worrying smooths out the path along which worry loves to travel.

The same is true of sinful thoughts, such as rash judgment, lustful musings, gossip, foul language, unkindness, and every sin imaginable. Neural pathways provide the bodily highways for sins of the spirit, for bad habits called "vices" in traditional moral theology.

Brain pathways are also created by negative thinking processes like self-pity, second-guessing oneself, and unnecessary self-blame. The emotional pain that follows such negative thoughts also develops its own neural connections that grow stronger with time.

Why is this? Father Lukefahr notes that an expert in brain study says it's because of human history. We'll

recognize it immediately as the result of the fall of man. In the early days after we were expelled from Eden, we survived by hunting/gathering food and avoiding predators, neither of which we would have had to do prior to Adam's sin. If we missed a day or two of food, sooner or later we'd find something and stay alive. But if we failed to avoid a predator, we had no second chances. This living condition created a deeply-rooted negative bias. However, the brain expert says, we can overcome our innate negative bias by learning to focus on positive things.

It's possible, of course, according to Father Lukefahr, to do this by ordinary human effort, but if we turn to God for assistance "the job of rewiring the brain becomes much easier. Most of us have struggled with bad habits, negative thinking, and other such problems. It's easy to get discouraged, but what might seem impossible for us becomes possible when we turn to God."

In the next post I'll continue with the rewiring idea, but first, we need to take stock of our lives so we know what and why we want to rewire.

Where are we habitually dissatisfied with our response to doing God's will? In what ways are we "shooting ourselves in the foot" so to speak? Walt Kelly in his famous comic strip, Pogo, is known for the comment, "We have met the enemy and he is us" and those of us schooled in traditional Catholic spirituality will recognize in this statement one of the three sources of sin, concupiscence.

What am I habitually griping or complaining about to myself or others? Am I trying to control others in order to control outcomes I desire rather than respecting other people's boundaries and daily seeking God's will for me?

Where am I not doing my best in my daily duties and why? How many broken promises have I made and to whom?

In what areas or situations of my life am I frustrated or anxious and why? Do I feel like a failure? Why? Do I accept bullying and constant criticism by others? Why?

Very often our negativity towards ourselves and others is a family practice handed down through generations. My mother was an habitual worrier and I learned it from her. One of the most difficult life lessons for me has been to, as they say in AA, "Let go and let God", or as we pray in the Divine Mercy theme, "Jesus, I trust in You."

Take heart, we have no reason not to rewire our brains to strike the chains of sin and tether ourselves tightly to God. No matter how bad things may be in the state of our souls or in our lives, we can say with St. Paul in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me."

For the second installment on this subject, click [here](#).

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

R. Now and forever!

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

This contribution is available at <http://sufferingwithjoy.com/2015/02/22/re-program-your-brain-for-lent/>
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Cellhouse Psalm [at With Us Still]

Every year on Ash Wednesday, we get reacquainted with the meaty portion of [Psalm 51](#), proclaimed at Mass in response to the first reading.

It's become a favorite of mine in the past couple of years—in no small part because Psalm 51 [served as the trigger](#), more or less, for my blogs of [found spirituality](#).

So perhaps it's not surprising that I found myself recommending the consolations of the Psalm to one of my Kairos brothers during a [reunion at Menard](#) a few months ago.

But here's the thing: Barely did the words "Psalm 51" pass my lips...when the inmate *himself* started reciting its verses aloud...

For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always...

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.

Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.

Clearly, he was a fan of Psalm 51, too. So we talked a bit about our mutual affection for the words of this biblical prayer. He pointed out how the bars of his cell deepened the imagery of the Psalm in his everyday experience: '*I acknowledge my offense...my sin is before me always.*'



True, dat: There's nothing quite like solid ribs of cold, hard steel to remind you that you're a sinner.

But the *blessing* in the psalm, we both agreed, had little to do with the act of acknowledging our offenses. Rather, we reflected about how faithful God had been in answering the *rest* of the prayer: Whenever we took the time to ask sincerely for a clean heart and a steadfast spirit, God always seemed to deliver.

And that makes Psalm 51 a great way to begin our Lenten journey, does it not?

We are invited to dwell, briefly, on the ashes—as a reminder of our offenses and sinfulness. And then we can move on...to pursue and savor the promises tucked into the remainder of this beautiful ‘cellhouse psalm’:

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

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

IHS

This contribution is available at <http://withusstill.wordpress.com/2015/02/18/todays-find-cellhouse-psalm/>
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Stations of the Cross with Children [at Children of The Church]



I know that during Lent and the Easter season that the main thing that I want our children to learn and understand is that God loves us so much that he sent his one and only son Jesus to live in this sinful world and that he then died on the cross for each and every one of us! In order to understand this, we choose to share the Passion of Jesus with our children (even at a young age) and answer honestly what questions they have.

Most Catholic Churches during Lent pray the Stations of the Cross every Friday remembering the Passion of Christ. Usually these services are held in the late evening which means we are not able to go as a family due to

[little ones bedtime](#)

. We think it is very important for our children to learn the Stations of the Cross and hear the story so we are making opportunities for our children to learn in other ways including:

Praying at Home

How can you learn about and pray the Stations of the Cross with your family even if you cannot go to the scheduled time at church? How can you make time and space for your family for this special meditation during Lent?

We first started meditating on the Stations of the Cross in

[Our Little Oratory](#)

at home

[every Friday of Lent](#)

(and our children have enjoyed it so much that they have been asking for it on other days as well!) I got 8x10 images of the Stations of the Cross from

[Leaflet Missal](#)

to display in our space. The visual images are very important for all of us, especially the children to focus on and follow the story. We also have little flip books on a ring from

[Feast and Feria](#)

that follow the images of the Stations of the Cross as well. We sit together and take the time as a family to learn about and pray about the Stations of the Cross.



Teach with Fun Resources

Our favorite Stations of the Cross resources are from

[Holy Heroes.](#)

We have been using their

[Rosary CD's](#)

for about 6 months now in

[our daily prayer time](#)

and love them so much, and this is the first year we are using the Stations of the Cross CD. The

[Stations of the Cross CD](#)

is by far our favorite CD yet from Holy Heroes. The music is beautiful, the sound effects really help bring you into the story of the Passion of Christ and running about 30 minutes long it is the perfect amount of time to hold little children's attention. We have been listening to it before bedtime so the room is dark and the pictures of the Stations of Cross are illuminated by candlelight. Adding this tradition to our home has truly been one of our favorite Lenten activities. There are so many great resources out there, what are some of your favorite ones for the Stations of the Cross?



Pray Within the Community

Go into your parish church or look around your community to see if they have any additional resources for the Stations of the Cross or opportunities for prayer and learning! We are blessed with beautiful churches in our town and surrounding areas that have remarkable Stations of the Cross. Even if we do not go to the specific prayer services we like to bring our young children to see the Stations of the Cross in other outlets outside of our home as well. We live near the

[Holy Family Shrine in Gretna, NE](#)

which is a beautiful church on top of a hillside. We loved going one afternoon to study the images of the

Stations of the Cross and pray.



Our children's favorite resource in the community is the outdoor Stations of the Cross at our parish Church

[St Robert Bellarmine Catholic Church](#)

. We have gone once so far this Lent and hope to go back at least one more time in the next few weeks. We brought our

[Stations of the Cross prayer book from Holy Heroes](#)

and had a short meditation on each mystery and then prayed the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and end with "Lord, by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world". I love that it is outside so we can get some fresh air, our energetic boys have some space to get their "wiggles" out as we learn and we still have the opportunity to focus in prayer!



Lord, by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

I
JESUS IS
CONDEMNED
TO DEATH



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



II
JESUS IS
MADE TO
CARRY THE
CROSS



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



III
JESUS FALLS
FOR THE
FIRST TIME



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



IV
JESUS MEETS
HIS BLESSED
MOTHER



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



V
SIMON
HELPS JESUS
CARRY THE
CROSS



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



VI
VERONICA
WIPES THE
FACE OF
JESUS



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



VII
JESUS FALLS
FOR THE
SECOND
TIME



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



VIII
JESUS
COMFORTS
THE HOLY
WOMEN



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



IX
JESUS FALLS
FOR THE
THIRD TIME



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



X
JESUS IS
STRIPPED
OF HIS
GARMENTS



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.



XI
JESUS IS
NAILED TO
THE CROSS



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.

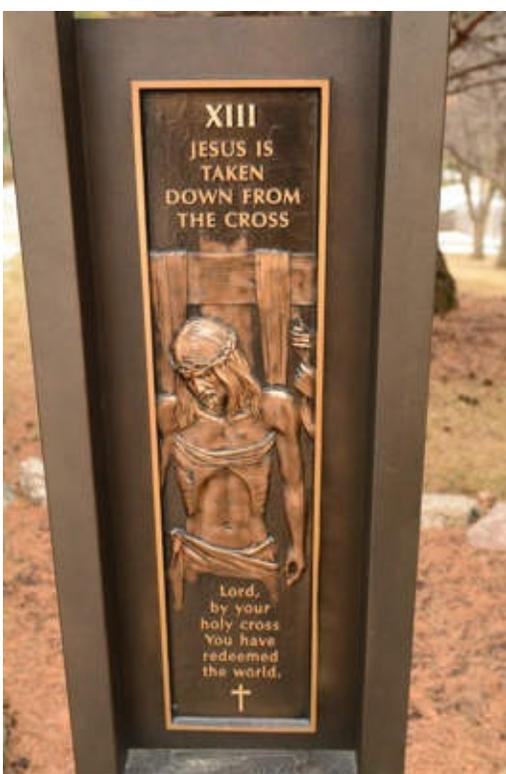


XII
JESUS DIES
ON THE
CROSS



Lord,
by your
holy cross
You have
redeemed
the world.





Reflection:

It is hard sometimes to focus on the pain and suffering of Jesus on the cross. We need to trust in God that through the pain and suffering there is the Resurrection! What suffering and pain do we have in our lives that we need to hand over to Jesus at the foot of the cross? What struggle as a wife, as a mother, as a friend can we ask for help with? What one thing can we do to help our children learn about suffering, one thing to bring them closer to God?

This contribution is available at <http://childrenofthechurch.blogspot.com/2015/03/stations-of-cross-with-children.html>
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Thoughts on Free Will [at A Spiritual Journey]

There are some religions in the world that force others to believe in what they believe in. If you don't go along, you are in danger of being charged with blasphemy and put to death. This made me think why God gave us the free will in the first place. With free will, faith becomes meaningful. If we are forced to believe, then there is no real faith. When Jesus preached his good news, whether we believe in him or not is our choice ~ he never browbeat us. So I see free will as a God-given gift we should leave each individual to exercise freely. To control it is to go against what God has intended. This means that we are to evangelize by example and not by force.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2015/02/thoughts-on-free-will.html>
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Virtual Marriage Retreat [at Conceiving Hope]



Last year on this date, something terrible "finished" [happening](#) in our lives. I'm not going to talk about that today (can't manage it). But it's also my birthday, *so this is my present to all of you*. Ever heard songs from different genres mashed up together that somehow sound good together? This post is going to explore that idea a little bit...matching things together that *should* be entangled with each other. It's kind of awesome how well they fit together thematically too! I *just* wrote about embracing this theme in my life more [here](#). So let's think of this as a great big prayer mash-up for the glory of God in your marriage. And let's give my blog an inaugural dose of that m.atchmaking then, shall we?

For your viewing (and reading and praying) pleasure, I have joined together three online marriage retreats being offered for Christian couples. It would also be a wonderful exercise for engaged couples to participate in, as well as those discerning a vocation to marriage to peruse for prayer ideas! All of these retreats are in celebration of [National Marriage Week 2015](#) on the US side of the pond. Two of them come from the online resource *For Your Marriage* (retreats found [here](#) and [here](#) in their entirety). The third retreat was put together by the *Diocese of Arlington* (found [here](#) on its own) and the video portion features **Bishop Paul Loverde**. This would be a great way to connect better with your spouse (or fiancé) any week of the year, not just this week before Valentine's Day, so if you can't devote time to it right now - bookmark this post and come back to it when you can. *And instead of giving something up this year for Lent, consider adding this kind of marriage building exercise!* It could be a worthy effort for your marriage (or discernment) this year. (more [ideas for Lent](#) here)



S

et aside time each day to dedicate just to being with each other, taking turns reading Scripture to each other, reflecting on your own marriage (or future marriage!), engaging with each other in discussion, and praying together for your intentions. One of the reasons why retreats

work

is because you are pulling yourself out of your normal routine and dedicating time to a specific purpose. Away from all of the computers and cell phones and email and texts (and let's be honest, social media in general)...demanding your time and attention, a retreat has the ability to isolate and recharge and invigorate you. It's the commitment to the information you need to take in, ponder, pray about, and discuss that makes it work. With that said, there's no reason why you can't accomplish this at home, on the road, or even across an ocean via S.kype or G.oogle Han.gouts. Block out time that works for both spouses (Are you both morning people? Take advantage of that and schedule this when it works best for both of you). Play soothing love music in the background while you think of answers to the questions that are asked each day. Try one of the love songs on the playlist I created

for some ideas. Allot at least an hour so that you don't feel rushed to "get through" the material or prayers.



I

n my own marriage, when we don't pray together...we suffer. We fall apart and we

bicker

and get

short-tempered

with each other. And that, of course, leads to trips to the confessional. We thirst for prayer together as a

couple and an absence of it in our lives is palpable. Praying keeps us close to each other and God. It sets our priorities in front of us. So why is it so easy to let other things interfere or distract us from praying together? We all fail at making time to pray and I'm sure we all have

amazing

excuses for why too, don't we?? But we already really kind of sorta know as Christians that prayer can make or break our marriage too. Prayer can turn your

marriage into a

marriage.

We all want those dance moves, right? So begin with prayer

.

Husbands

, this is a great time to grab your wives' hands and lead them in prayer out loud. It doesn't have to be complicated, just

[from the heart](#)

and in the name of Christ.

Wives

, consider ending the retreat with prayer each day, offering God thanks

out loud

for the discussion and time you've had together and for your husband leading you in prayer. These kinds of gestures really help my DH and I to frame our own thoughts and be more intentional about our prayer. They feed the

[language of love](#)

between us. Give it a try! If it works for you, we'd love to hear about it.



H

ere are the daily retreat exercises, videos, and prayers. I have linked the

[USCCB](#)

online text of

[*The New American Bible, Revised Edition \(NABRE\)*](#)

wherever there is a Scripture Reading referenced, to make it quick and easy for you to find each passage and

stay focused

as you go through each day's activities. You should have everything you need to get started already posted below. Consider sitting down with separate notebooks and pens so that you can each jot down your own thoughts during the video, as well as the answers to the questions for each day. Having a record of your retreat will help you revisit these themes later, just like a regular retreat booklet! OK, ladies and gentlemen, cell phones off, all other tabs on your browser window closed, and you are now ready to begin! :)

P.S. (Consider reading the daily marriage tips located

[here](#)

while you are on "retreat" with your spouse and print/cut out

[these prayer cards](#)

to keep with you at work, home, or in your wallet as a reminder of what you are strengthening!)

Day 1

Grace: Today, we ask the Holy Spirit for a deeper awareness of God's unfathomable love for each of us.

Prayer Exercises for today's retreat:

1. What are two concrete ways that the Lord shows His love to you and your spouse?
2. Recall the days when you fell in love with your spouse. What were two or three of the qualities that first attracted you to (him/her)?
3. Remind your spouse of those qualities.
4. Read this reflection and pray this prayer together

[here](#)

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Day 2

Grace: Today, we ask the Holy Spirit for a deeper awareness of our sins, especially those that cause the greatest hindrances to our marriage.

Prayer Exercises for today's retreat:

1. Reflect on any sinful habits, cycles, or traits that get in the way of growing together.
2. Invite the Lord into these areas of your life, as you admit these negative behaviors to one another, asking Him to renew your unconditional love of your spouse.
3. Read this reflection and pray this prayer together

[here](#)

.

4. Read this reflection

[here](#)

or

[here](#)

.

Day 3

Grace: Today, we ask the Holy Spirit for a greater awareness

of God's burning desire to forgive us, and we pray for the grace to forgive one another.

Prayer Exercises for today's retreat:

1. Ponder any areas of "unforgiveness" between you and your spouse or others.
2. Purposefully ask and offer forgiveness to your spouse for all the hurts committed.
3. Read this reflection and pray this prayer together

[here](#)

.

4. Read this reflection

[here](#)

or

[here](#)

.

Day 4

Grace: Today, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us to prize the things of God over material goods.

Prayer Exercises for today's retreat:

1. Make a list of your priorities.
2. Pray with your list. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you determine how to proceed.
3. Read this reflection and pray this prayer together

[here](#)

.

4. Read this reflection

[here](#)

or

[here](#)

.

Day 5

Grace: Today, we ask the Holy Spirit

to release from any fears that keep us from fulfilling God's plan for our marriage.

Prayer Exercises for today's retreat:

1. As you are reminded that the Father has a plan for you, ask Jesus to shed light on fears you have which keep you from fully following the Father's plans for you and your marriage.
2. As you recall each of your fears, pray with the simple words, "Jesus I trust in you".
3. Remember this prayer and repeat it any time you are beset with anxieties and worries throughout the day.
4. Read this reflection and pray this prayer together

[here](#)

.

Day 6

Grace: Today, we ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to make prayer as a couple paramount in our lives.

Prayer Exercises for today's retreat:

1. Praise and thank God, using scripture and/or your own words. Ask Him for everything you need to live a life centered on Him.
2. Considering that prayer entails commitment, establish a schedule for your prayer as a couple, and

choose a method of prayer you each find fruitful (i.e. plan to read scripture together as you have done this week; meditate and discuss your reflections; choose a favorite spiritual book (or even just a chapter) and discuss with your spouse; pray the rosary etc.)

3. Read this reflection and pray this prayer together

[here](#)

.

4. Read this reflection

[here](#)

and

[here](#)

.

Day 7

Grace: Today, we ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to love one another more fully.

Prayer Exercises for today's retreat:

1. Reflect on each of the virtues mentioned in today's readings.
2. Tell your spouse how he/she exemplifies one or more of these virtues.
3. Choose a virtue that you wish to grow in and begin to practice that virtue more intentionally. Encourage and assist your spouse in his/her efforts to grow in holiness.

4. Read this reflection and pray this prayer together

[here](#)

.

5. Read this reflection

[here](#)

and

[here](#)

.

This contribution is available at <http://conceivinghope.blogspot.com/2015/02/virtual-marriage-retreat.html>
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7 Lenten ideas that have nothing to do with candy

I'm reposting one of my favorite collections of spiritual suggestions, full of resources for a fruitful Lent. Rather than try to come up with a new batch of ideas, why not stick with what works?

Lent is one of my favorite times of year. Maybe that sounds crazy, but I love discipline, I love religious practices, and I love times that unite our community. I'm not unilaterally opposed to giving up candy for Lent, but I encourage everyone to combine other Lenten commitments to make the time truly transformative. Some suggestions:

Experience Art

By making time for music, literature, and visual art, we can focus our prayer during the season. Go to a museum, browse photography online, or practice spiritual reading.

The Benedictines of Mary Queen of the Apostles have a new collection of vocal music out for Lent, a companion to their phenomenal [Advent at Ephesus](#) titled [Lent at Ephesus](#). Their Advent album helped center my celebration of that season, and I look forward to using this newest recording in my prayer this spring.

If spiritual reading is your bent, I recommend anthologies of [T.S. Eliot](#), [Mary Oliver](#) or [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#). Their poems have been indispensable on my spiritual journey. If you have other suggestions please leave them in the comments!

Spend time with Scripture

Years ago I bought an [English-language breviary](#) in Rome, and though I don't use it as often as I ought, it comes out every Lent. Every Evening Prayer fills me with psalmody and welcomes me into the prayer of the universal Church.



Many excellent prayer books structure themselves around Scripture. The [Sacred Space](#) books include a daily reading, and the [3-minute retreats](#) include a scriptural nugget. Both of these offer reflection questions as well to guide prayer.

Write

For years I kept a journal that was specifically a prayer journal, until I realized that most of my writing is prayer, regardless of where it is done. Since I am focusing more on my prayer life during Lent, I commit to journaling every evening to process some of the spiritual work that I am doing during the day.

I know a lot of my readers are also writers, and you might feel as I often do, that it is hard to write more

at the end of a day when I have already tried to pound out 500 unrelated words. Tips or tricks for using your words at the end of the day?

Abstain

This is the classic Lenten commitment, by my observation. I see the value in giving up ice cream or candy as a way to sanctify the time, but I have experienced more profound refining by challenging myself to abstain from more detrimental things.

This will be my tenth year giving up alcohol during Lent. Drinking is a significant part of my social (and culinary) life, in a healthy and moderate way. Perhaps booze plays a similar role in your life: it's not overwhelming, but it's ubiquitous. Taking a break is jarring in the best possible way: it is a sacrifice of something I enjoy, it is cleansing, and wrenches me from habit.

Another abstinence challenge is gossip. I have one close colleague with whom I share this challenge during Lent. I don't always succeed in every aspect of my life, but at work I am held accountable by the person with whom I spend the most time during the day. (Confession: we have learned a way around this by occasionally "stating facts" during the day without commentary. This cheat is usually prefaced with "I have to state a fact".)

Add in something good

Bonus points if it's at the same time every day.

What if every morning the first thing you did, before coffee, before a shower, was to drink a glass of water? And what if you set an intention for the day during that time? What if you offered God gratitude for the day during that time?



Another idea: instead of singing happy birthday to make sure you have washed your hands for an appropriate amount of time, say an Our Father instead.

Eat an apple every day. Pray the rosary.

Connect

If you can, make time for people during Lent. Go out for tea after mass. Call an old friend. Listen to an acquaintance or student who has a need to unload.

As people living in community, our relationships are part of what bring us closer to God. We all have relationships that don't build us up, and we often spend so much effort trying to maintain many relationships (hello, Facebook) that we don't deepen the most important ones. I am guilty of this.

Give

Rather than letting solicitations pile up from the handful of charities I support every year, I am making my gifts as Lent begins. I also try to keep a few singles handy so that I can give to the panhandlers I see too

often.



Generosity can be tricky. Everyone is in a different financial position and state in life. One thing I try to keep in mind is God's abundance. God gives and gives and gives. I need to find a way to do the same thing. How does generosity fit into your life?

It would be maddening to attempt to fit everyone of these ideas into my life, but I attempt to keep most of them in my mind as I journey toward Easter. This reminds me constantly that this time is sacred, set aside for my repentant renewal. It's a beautiful time, and I find that God works in me in new ways when I make new habits.

How will you be observing Lent this year?

This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2015/02/15/7-lenten-ideas-that-have-nothing-to-do-with-candy/>

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Raccoon Fever and the Problem of Evil



I know, it's been a while since I have posted anything. Last week was a doozy. My littlest one and I were both sick, I'm guessing with whatever it was he picked up by licking the wall in the raccoon cave at the zoo. (Why?) Raccoon fever, or whatever it was, puts a toddler on a repeating temper tantrum loop and makes me unable to get off the couch for two days. I am grateful that my children all survived last Friday. By the time my husband got home, our home looked like it had been taken over by Valentine candy-addicted squatters. The kids were wandering around aimlessly, their faces smeared with red dye 40 and chocolate.

At times like this I regret moving so far away from family. I envy moms who are surrounded by relatives able and willing to help out. I needed a break. I had just had it with the crying, the clinging, the whining, and the constant spread of germs. Sometimes parenting seems impossibly difficult, so much more difficult than I ever could have imagined life would be before I had kids. The worst thing about a sick day used to be being sick. Hah. The worst thing about airplane travel used to be getting a bad seat or worrying about missing a flight. What was so hard? We had no clue. We were pansies. And really, I still am, despite all the demands on me. How tough does God think I am exactly? Doesn't he know how weak and impatient I am? The kids whine at me, and then I whine at God.

One thing I would like to give up for Lent this year is whining at God. Praying, yes, but whining, no. (The difference has to do with expectations. When I whine, I am feeling emotional about something that's happened that hasn't met my expectations.) I have somehow acquired the expectation that if I surrender my day to Christ, say my prayers, and depend on God, nothing will happen that I can't handle. I won't get too sick to care for my children or get my work done, my kids will not push me past my limits, I will remember all the details I need to remember, and I won't screw up. It should be obvious to me that this isn't true. We are to become Christ, and things certainly didn't go smoothly for Him. It was a story about a martyr in ancient Rome that got me thinking about this, but we need only look to the Coptic Christians martyred last week by ISIS. If God does not hold back the axe from the martyr's head, is he really going to make my sick toddler stop screaming for a few minutes or protect me from cold viruses? Maybe, but probably not, and not just because I ask. God is not a magic wand to wield or a talisman that wards off the bad stuff. God is not mine. I am His.

So what's the point? Yes, heaven, life eternal with God, but in the meantime, here I am in this scary world, not in control, and God, who is in control, might let bad things happen to me or my children. I can pray, but these things might still happen. As I said, it was a bad week. I went straight from a cold virus to the problem of evil.

Just before that week started, I had a moment alone in a chapel, looking at a painting of Jesus on the cross. I was wishing that his suffering felt more meaningful to me, less remote and theological, like a deal made long ago. I thought about how Jesus submitted to the evil of the world, to poverty, pain, loneliness, mockery, indifference, hatred, abuse, and torture, all the things we fear most, all the things that keep us on the run, seeking pleasures, distractions, and security. God submitted to all of it. God Himself. He doesn't wield these things as punishments—he undergoes them himself. He didn't banish evil from this life, but by submitting to it he changed its meaning.

Before Christ, to be poor, lonely, diseased, defeated, unappreciated, or abused meant that you'd lost out. God had deprived you of His blessing. You deserved pity, maybe, but not respect. But then God became all of these things, and despite taking on all of this evil, he remained God and rose again. Because of Christ's passion and death, these evils no longer determine who we are. There is no shame in them, none at all. They aren't the end of the story. They have no power to name us or deprive us of dignity and purpose. We don't have to live in fear of them. Our true home is elsewhere, and there we are named forever as beloved heirs of the King.

Yeah, ok, but last week I wasn't poor, truly ill, or martyred. I was just really, really irritated, feverish, and harassed. Does this really count as suffering redeemed by Christ? Did Christ redeem the suffering of dealing with temper tantrums? Yes. I am going to say yes. Sure, it was momentary suffering. This week the tantrums are gone, I am well, and boy oh boy that kid is cute. Nevertheless, I am not going to toss away the value of my ordinary parental suffering. As parents, our momentary suffering can be funny in retrospect, but that doesn't mean it is worthless or pathetic. Better to "offer it up," as they say, to join it to Christ's redemptive suffering, than to whine. If only I could convince my toddler to do the same.

This contribution is available at <http://www.mollyoshatz.com/raccoon-fever-problem-evil/>
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Reflections on the March for Life 2015 [at Father Souza's Blog]



Travel light.

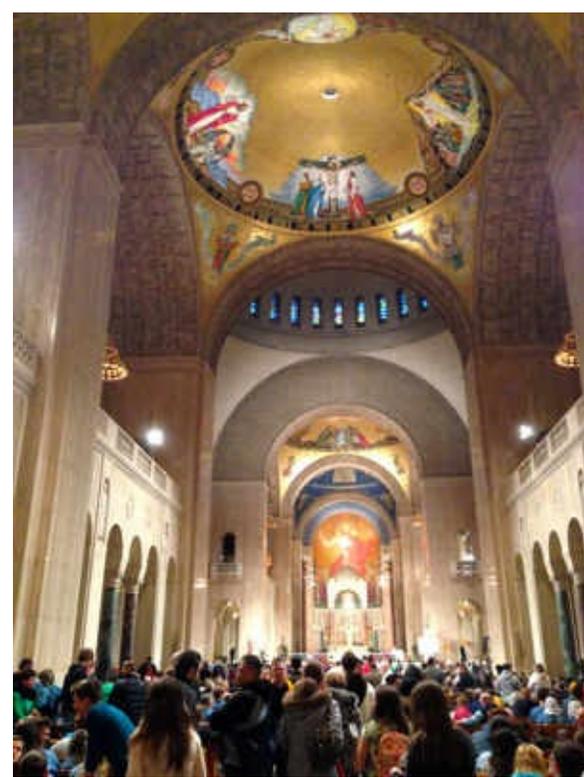


A view of Boston from above.

The Supreme Court of the United States issued its landmark judgment in the [Roe v. Wade](#) case on January 22, 1973 making abortion-on-demand the law of the land. Roe v. Wade is a grave injustice and a cause of shame for our nation. The voluntary termination of a pregnancy can never be ethical or moral because it involves the direct killing of a defenseless, innocent, unique, precious and utterly dependent human person. *Nothing* can change that. It is estimated that over 55 million babies have had their lives terminated since abortion became legal. That's over a million per year. Further, it is staggering to think that 40% of unintended pregnancies end in abortion. The numbers of this holocaust are startling yet there is little outrage or concern in our society.



The National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.



The basilica was already full 2 hours before the Mass!



The priests vested in the back part of the crypt.



I snapped this blurry picture right *before* the procession entered the basilica.



Some of the seminarians.

Several weeks ago, I traveled to Washington, DC for the 42nd annual [March for Life](#). On the eve of the March, Cardinal Seán celebrated Mass at the National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. There were over 11,000 people crammed into both levels of the basilica including 6 cardinals, 44 bishops, 343 priests, 100 deacons and 530 seminarians. Looking out at the congregation from the procession, I was overwhelmed seeing the sea of people. I could feel the boom of all the voices praying in unison as well as a palpable silence when the Eucharist was consecrated. Concelebrating priests were seated adjacent to the seminarians. The seminarians formed a line at Communion time and I was moved by how reverently and devoutly they received Our Lord. Leaving the basilica that night, I not could help thinking I was leaving the building with the highest concentration of love in the country.



A “selfie” with my friend from Lynn, Father Flynn.

The day of the March begins with various rallies and Masses around Washington, including a youth rally at the Verizon Center with about 18,000 people. I joined about a thousand people who traveled with the group from the Archdiocese of Boston. The vast majority of them were either high school or college aged—including a student from Billerica! Before Mass with Cardinal Seán there was a rally that included speakers and music. At one point there was a priest playing the drums and later I saw Mother Olga and the rest of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth singing in front of the crowd.



The beginning of the March.



Crowds.



Crowds.



I ran into a friend from college, Father Daniel Ulishney, who is now priest of the Diocese of Greensburg, Pennsylvania.



The March for Life begins on the National Mall and ends in front of the Supreme Court. This year I did something that I have not done at the March in years past. I lingered in front of the Supreme Court and listened to the testimony of many women who have had abortions and even a doctor who performed them. Each spoke of the pain and regret that they suffered as a result of abortion. Many parts of their stories were difficult to listen to, but at the end of their witness they each spoke of healing. Even in the midst of such darkness, they were insistent that Our Lord offered them hope and mercy. An estimated 400,000 people participated in the March, but the media was more interested in covering a few deflated footballs!



On the day of the March for Life, Pope Francis (@Pontifex) tweeted, “Every Life is a Gift. #marchforlife.” This is a truth that can be lost track of. Our culture frequently looks upon children as burdens, inconveniences, and hurdles to happiness. Anyone who has children or has been around children knows that they make their parents more happy not less. All babies, regardless of the circumstance of their conception or the presence of a prenatal diagnosis, are gifts to be revered. Our vocation as Christians and faithful citizens requires that we defend life especially at its most vulnerable stages. First, we need to

pray with intensity that abortion is ended in the United States and throughout the world. Second, we must engage in the political process so that laws are enacted that respect and protect life.



May our “yes” to life echo Our Lady’s “yes” to life, which gained for us the Savior.

I snapped the photos above with my iPhone. For better photos check out the [Archdiocese of Boston Flickr photostream](#) and the [Boston Pilot](#) photogalleries [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

This contribution is available at <http://fathersouza.com/2015/02/14/reflections-on-the-march-for-life-2015/>
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Bread That Does Not Satisfy [at beautiful thorns]



This Wednesday, February 18th, is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. I happen to love Lent! Lent is a time when we can take stock and reflect on the things in our life that we may be turning to and trying to find satisfaction and fulfillment in other than God. It is a time to do penance and fast from these things.

Often without even realizing it, we turn to "bread" that does not satisfy. "Bread" that the world offers us. "Bread" that leaves us longing and still hungry. Our God is so good and kind that sometimes he allows us to have this worldly "bread" so we can get it out of our system and realize that we do not really want this "bread" and the only bread we really want is HIM. Jesus is the true bread that came down from heaven and the only bread that can truly satisfy the longing in our heart!

Isaiah 55:2 - Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

John 6:35 - [Jesus said] I am the bread of life. he who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

During Lent there is abundant grace available for us to come up higher and grow closer to God. It is a much quicker way to fast and be purged from earthly desires and attachments than to give into them and find out the hard way that they are not going to satisfy. Lent gives us this opportunity.

Colossians 3:1 - So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Let us take advantage of this Lenten season, being willing to be purged from worldly attachments so we can come up higher and be transformed into his glory!

Another Look at Suffering [at Grace of Adoption]



Three days ago I started reading meditations from the book

[Divine Intimacy](#)

, which came highly recommended by several people.

The meditations were written by Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. who was a Discalced Carmelite priest. He had a deep knowledge of the spiritual life and how to grow in closer union with God. He was an expert on the spirituality of many Carmelite saints (St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross) and served as a spiritual director to many. The meditations in the book follow the Mass readings of the older, traditional Roman liturgical calendar.

The meditation for Quinquagesima Sunday, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, really hit home today. I thought I would share, mostly to record these thoughts for my own future reflections.

The meditati

on starts by discussing the sufferings of Christ's passion and the paradox of the cross: the fact that new life and our salvation came from the horrific suffering of Our Lord, which ended in his death on the cross, and resurrection on Easter Sunday. It also reflected on our sharing in Christ's sufferings through our own sufferings and trials. These sufferings serve to refine us and help us grow in holiness.

After reflecting on Christ crucified, what St. Paul called: "A stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles," (I Cor 1:23) the meditation turned it's focus to explain how we can make sense of this suffering. Both Christ's and our own.

This is what really touched me, so I've included part of it below:

"It was not until after the descent of the Holy Spirit that the Apostles fully understood the meaning of the Passion; then, instead of being scandalized, they considered it the greatest honor to follow and preach Christ Crucified.

The human eye has not sufficient light to comprehend the value of the Cross; it needs a new light, the light of the Holy Spirit. It is not by chance that in today's Gospel, immediately after the prediction of the passion, we find the healing of the blind man of Jericho.

We are always somewhat blind when faced with the mystery of suffering; when it strikes us in what we hold most dear, it is easy to get lost and to grope our way like blind men through uncertainty and darkness. The Church invites us to repeat today the blind man's prayer of faith: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The world is often astonished at the sufferings of the good, and instead of encouraging them in their reliance on God, seeks to turn them from Him by urging them to defiance and false fear. Our passions themselves, our innate tendencies towards pleasure, often cry out to us and try, by a thousand pretexts, to prevent us from following Jesus Crucified. **Let us remain steadfast in our faith, like the poor blind man. He was not disturbed by the crowd that tried to keep him from approaching Jesus, and he did not give up when the disciples remonstrated with him and wanted him to be quiet; he only shouted his prayer "even more loudly."**

Beautiful! ...and most certainly convicting!!!

What struck me first was the power of the coming of the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that helped the apostles see the meaning of Christ's suffering, and eventually their participation in it, as they were huddled in the upper room on Pentecost. It is the Holy Spirit that can help me say yes to my cross even when I don't understand it.

Also, I am guilty of succumbing to blindness in the midst of trial. I tend to focus on myself and my pain. I listen to the world encouraging me to seek pleasure and not Christ. This is especially true of this past week, when in the midst of good news on the adoption front, I allowed myself to become engulfed in the darkness that is the pain of infertility.

There is so much to think about in this reflection. I think it will take awhile to unpack the gems within.

Here is the meditation's closing prayer, which is also beautiful:

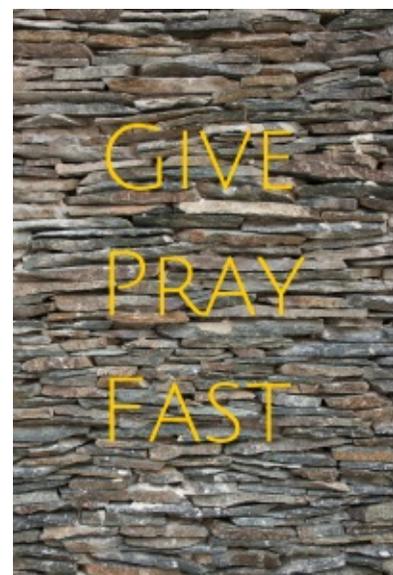
"O my Jesus, the Cross is Your standard; I should be ashamed to ask to be delivered from it. From one evil only I ardently beg You to preserve me: from any deliberate sin, however slight. O Lord, I beg You by the merits of Your Sacred Passion to keep all sin far from me. But as for other evils--bodily or spiritual sufferings, physical pain or mental anguish--I beg Your light and strength: light to understand the hidden meaning which they have in the plans of Your divine Providence, light to believe firmly that every sorrow or trial, every pain or disappointment, is planned by You for my greater good; strength not to let myself be influenced by the false maxims of the world or led astray by the vain mirage of earthly happiness, strength to accept suffering of any kind with courage and love."

- Mary Beth

This contribution is available at <http://www.graceofadoption.com/2015/02/another-look-at-cross.html>
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I Gave It Up for Lent

“Fasting makes sense if it really chips away at our security and, as a consequence, benefits someone else, if it helps us cultivate the style of the Good Samaritan, who bent down to his brother in need and took care of him.” –Pope Francis



Every year my wife, Diane and I, spend a good part of the month of March in Naples, Florida. Naples is a wonderful place, very upscale, with lots of retirees who have had successful careers.

Last year, at Ash Wednesday mass, during the homily, the priest mentioned that he had received several calls in the past few days asking him about the rules for fasting.

“How old do you have to be to not be required to fast?” was the question.

“Well,” said the priest, “it is 59 which includes 99 percent of you!”

He went on to give a great homily on what fasting should be about. At the end of mass before the concluding hymn, he reminded all in attendance that we abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday. He said, “If you are at the Turtle Club tonight for dinner, don’t order the 16 oz. steak!”

That night, we just happened to have reservations at that very restaurant and as we sat waiting for our waiter to finish taking an order at a nearby table we couldn’t help but overhear the conversation.

“I’ll have the New York Strip,” said the elderly gentleman.

“No, honey!” his wife exclaimed. “Father said don’t have the steak tonight.”

“OK then,” he replied, as he looked at the waiter, “I’ll have the lobster instead!”

Apparently, the priest’s message lost something of its meaning in the hours that followed mass.

“Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy.” — Pope Francis

It reminded me of myself as a kid. I'd give up candy for Lent only to gorge myself on chocolate Easter bunnies, peep, and marshmallow Easter eggs from my overstuffed basket on Easter morning.

Or, the time I gave up broccoli and asparagus (I dislike them both) or watermelon, which I love but is out of season during Lent, so no problem!

It's hard to admit, but I seemed to have missed a similar homily years ago.

That is the problem I have with rule-book Catholicism. We are so fixated on following the rules that we miss the reason for the tradition. It has nothing to do with our age or finding the right loop hole, it's about trying to have our best Lent ever!

It's about taking the three pillar of Lent; prayer, fasting and almsgiving, and making them more meaningful in your life.

It's about giving up your smart phone in the evening to spend more quality time with your family.

It's about giving up Facebook and taking that time and read an uplifting book, commit to a daily devotional, saying a rosary, or praying the Stations of the Cross.

It's about giving up complaining, gossiping or meaningless texting and instead, volunteer at the food pantry.

It's about giving up that double mocha latte and donating the money saved to a charity.

Most people give up the same thing every year, and truth be told, if you fit into that category, then you need to do something different if you are going to have a meaningful Lenten season.

Try doing something you haven't done before, something different, something out of character for you. It will have so much more meaning.

Giving up chocolate, soda pop, alcohol, or fast foods may meet the minimum requirements; but we should ask the question that Pope Francis suggested in his Ash Wednesday homily last year, "*does my fasting benefit someone else.*" Then, our Lenten fast won't be all about us, but about being like the Good Samaritan.

Lent begins this Wednesday, let's take some time these next few days and think about what we really want to get from Lent this year. Let's think about how our spiritual life can grow as we prepare to have our best Easter ever.

As Blessed Mother Teresa said, "*As Lent is the time for greater love, listen to Jesus' thirst... 'Repent and believe' Jesus tells us. What are we to repent? Our indifference, our hardness of heart. What are we to believe? Jesus thirsts [even now](#), in your heart and in the poor — He knows your weakness. He wants only your love, wants only the chance to love you.*"

Let's do this together, my friend.

Do We Accept the Change God Gives? [at Arnobius of Sicca]

Doing my morning readings, I came across an interesting thought from a priest, Fr. George Rutler. The thought was that we have a tendency to only accept the changes we want. When we encounter a change that does not meet our expectations, we tend to reject it. I think that's a good insight. We tend to get irritated when things don't go our way, even when we seek to be doing God's work.

Take for example, today's [First Reading](#). We see a beautiful response to God's message sent through the prophet Jonah. The people of a city who oppressed Israel heard the message and repented of the evil done. But Jonah's response (which takes place later in the Book of Jonah) is resentment. God sent him to warn Nineveh of a coming wrath, and then doesn't follow through. Jonah wanted change, but the change he wanted was for Nineveh to be a smoking crater in the ground. Because God did not give him that change, he was angry with God.

We see the same thing during the earthly ministry of Our Lord. The people wanted a Messiah who was going to establish Israel as a kingdom, putting down the oppressors. They also wanted to be personally recognized for their adherence to the law of Moses. But instead, Jesus reached out to sinners, encouraging them to repent and rejoicing in their change of heart. He also warned those who did adhere to the law that they needed the same change of heart that the notorious sinners had. He called on people to love and forgive those who did wrong to them.

Our Lord brought change, but it was not the change the people of Israel wanted so the people did not accept it, or even recognize it (John 1:10-11).

It's certainly food for thought today. We might look at the Bible and think that "those poor Jews just didn't get it, but we would never make the same mistake." But I suspect we are continuing to make the same mistake. Whenever the Church teaches something we like, all is fine with the world. When the Church speaks against the sins we oppose, we feel vindicated. But when the Church speaks about the sins that strike close to home, suddenly the Pope is an idiot and the bishops are liberal/conservative ideologues trying to push political agendas.

We never seem to recognize that change isn't just for the other person. Sometimes, we are the ones that need to change. We may not have flagrant opposition to the Church teachings on abortion or "same sex marriage," that the Obamas, Clintons and Pelosis of the world have. But do we have other areas where we disagree with the teaching of the Church and call that disagreement "not important?" Do we think that only the *other* political party has policies that are wrong? In other words, are we willing to accept God's changing our hearts through the teaching of the Church? Or will we only accept the teaching of the Church when we agree with it?

For example, consider the Pope's call for finding new ways for reaching out to those who are separated from the Church, and how to bring them back in. How many have been scandalized because he did not instead denounce them and tell them they would go to hell if they didn't toe the line? How many have been scandalized when he spoke about the dangers in certain attitudes towards capitalism instead of denouncing socialism?

Or how many people were scandalized by Vatican II and the intent to explain the teachings of the Church to a world which no longer understand them? The expressing the need to peacefully exist with those who do not share our faith while trying to evangelize? How many people look derisively at Muslims and call the Church dialogue with them “*Chriislam*.” Some of these people even want the Pope to call a Crusade against Islam in response to the atrocities of ISIS!

We need to recognize that sometimes the Church, with her authority to bind and loose (Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18), sees a different approach as best serving the mission of Christ. For example, the case of St. Tarasius. The Patriarch of Constantinople in the 8th century AD, he was faced with a government which was nominally Christian and led by men who did not live according to the moral teaching of the Church. (sound familiar?)

Then, as now, the people in government rejected the teaching of the Church, and tried to impose its will on the Church (this was the time of the Iconoclast heresy). Nowadays, the issues are abortion, same sex “marriage” and the contraception mandate. Back then, it involved a case of the emperor (Constantine VI) wanting sanction to divorce and remarriage—namely divorce his own wife and marry his mistress. St. Tarasius refused to be a part of it:

St. Tarasius answered the messenger, saying: “I know not how the emperor can bear the infamy of so scandalous an action in the sight of the universe: nor how he will be able to hinder or punish adulteries and debaucheries, if he himself set such an example. Tell him that I will rather suffer death and all manner of torments than consent to his design.” The emperor hoping to prevail with him by flattery, sent for him to the palace, and said to him: “I can conceal nothing from you, whom I regard as my father. No one can deny but I may divorce one who has attempted my life. She deserves death or perpetual penance.” He then produced a vessel, as he pretended, full of the poison prepared for him. The patriarch, with good reason, judging the whole to be only an artful contrivance to impose upon him, answered: that he was too well convinced that his passion for Theodota was at the bottom of all his complaints against the empress. He added, that, though she were guilty of the crime he laid to her charge, his second marriage during her life, with any other, would still be contrary to the law of God, and that he would draw upon himself the censures of the church by attempting it.

[Butler, A. (1903). *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints* (Vol. 1, p. 466). New York: P. J. Kenedy.]

When the emperor did divorce and remarry, causing scandal and encouraging others in government to follow his example, St. Tarasius did not excommunicate him, despite the urging of some. As Butler’s account tells us:

But Tarasius did not think it prudent to proceed to excommunication, as he had threatened, apprehensive that the violence of his temper, when further provoked, might carry him still greater lengths, and prompt him to re-establish the heresy [Iconoclasm] which he had taken such effectual measures to suppress. Thus the patriarch, by his moderation, prevented the ruin of religion, but drew upon himself the emperor’s resentment, who persecuted him many ways during the remainder of his reign. Not content to set spies and guards over him under the name of Syncelli, who watched all his actions, and suffered no one to speak to him without their leave, he banished many of his domestics and relations.

How many of us would write him off today as a heretic and a sympathizer with those who wanted to change Church teaching? (Some [secular accounts](#) portray him as being silent because he condoned the behavior of Constantine VI—again, sound familiar?) Sometimes the change we want is not prudent and the bishops entrusted to guiding the Church have to make a decision which is unpopular to us.

I think that ultimately this brings us to the considering of Christian obligation. By Our Lord's own command, we are to seek out and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10). He didn't come to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17). This may be hard for us to accept when we wanted a different change than the one God gave us (see Jonah 4:1-3). Thus we have a choice. We can follow Christ's teaching and His Church's, even when it takes us in a direction we don't want to go, or we can act like Jonah and the Pharisees, refusing to accept what we do not want.

But if we do reject the Church making decisions which best fit teaching to this present generation, we may find we are rejecting God (see Acts 5:39).

This contribution is available at <http://arnobius-of-sicca.blogspot.com/2015/02/do-we-accept-change-god-gives.html>
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A Heavenbound Letter to my Mom [at Veils and Vocations]

Today would have been my mother's 63rd birthday. We miss her so much, but she is at the great Heavenly banquet--what a way to spend a birthday!

Dear Mommy, Today is your first Heaven birthday. I wish that you were here. I wish you'd bake your own cake and cook a low fat meal. I wish that you could grow old and then "remember when." I wish you could see my kids sprout up and start to spread their wings. I wish we could go shopping, then stop for a treat and sip and chat about the deals we got, the lovelies we couldn't buy, and all the gifts we still need but don't remember why. I wish that you could set up "Camp Grandma" as you always dreamed, take all the kids cook and bake, craft and swim, sing and dance the day away. I wish that you could arm yourself with every cleaning tool and scrub 76 Sammis ceiling to floor until every inch gleamed, instead of strangers tromping through, and furniture taking leave. I wish that we could have a holiday, crammed in that dining room, kids screaming, endless plates of food, bigger piles of dishes, carols sung too loudly and clearly out of tune, teasing, joking, hugging, laughing, a little bickering, and talk of "Griswold Christmas" past. I wish that you could call me and have so much to say. I wish I knew how I'd miss you when you were still the person I thought you'd always be. I wish you could beam with pride as the children finish their studies to become what they are meant to be, walk down the aisle, then happily become a family of three. I wish that you could tell us about all the things we've found, I know they were your treasures but we don't know why or how. I have so many wishes, but they all are just for ME. How could I begrudge you what you have, where the weather is "picture perfect" and the view "Phen-nom-en-nal!" I miss you and wish so much to have you back, that our Christmas gift could have been a second chance with you but know deep in my heart, you have the best there is, you rest safely in His arms, with Daddy by your side and have a gift I could never give--everlasting peace! Love Always, Sissy



At my sister's wedding, our last big family event with both my parents alive and well!

How the Carmelites Rescued Me From New Age [at Written By the Finger of God]

I lost my marbles between the pages of my first new age book, a dizzying but feel good fiction novel. Naturally, with a few marbles short, I picked up another new age fiction, and this time the confusion blended with some fascination, so that I kept returning to the new age shelf in the bookstore, holding my breath for Oprah's next recommendation.

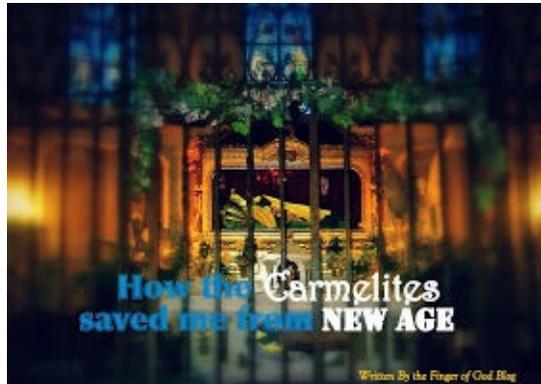
With new age, nothing was labeled sin anymore, and everything mystical that made me feel good and refreshed was the path to my enlightenment/self-fulfillment or evolution, or something exotic sounding like a "higher conscious living." Occult was encouraged; "mystical spirit guides" and psychics were valuable; crystals/fengsui/numerology provided extra luck and good vibes; the earth was Mother, so was God or Mother Goddess; Breathing Eastern style was somehow better; the universe's energy could be harnessed; unlimited power was within me as the "god within"; and I was going to be part of a future "paradigm shift" in the soul of the "one world", a "new age" of sorts. (If you're confused, don't worry, you're not alone, but I hope to straighten it out in a few.)

It never occurred to me to question what the bottom line was that the new age agenda was pushing, nor to ask why there were novel ideas that just smelled shifty... as if they were the repurposed but upside down of Catholic dogma and doctrine. The main thing that appealed to me, and I practiced for years, was transcendental meditation, (a self-hypnosis practice to mimic peace), which was sadly, introduced in my Catholic high school by a Catholic nun. So I dangled between Sunday Masses and new age ideas that were quaking all of the Catechism that I knew.

The suspicious niggling began when I read that the practitioners of sufism (the mystical arm of Islam) magically reach a divine union with God in their souls, which mystical union was allegedly the same as the union describe by St. Teresa of Avila in "The Interior Castle" because all religions are supposedly equal paths to this "energy" (also known as God or universe according to Oprah's gospel).

"How could Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, monism, occultism, pantheism, Gnosticism *all* be true and right when they teach opposing ideologies?," I wondered. Was everything relative?

When I chanced upon a visiting Carmelite priest from India (a friend of Mother Teresa's), I asked him if this Eastern transcendental mediation was the same contemplative prayer of the Carmelites that produced remarkable saints. He said "No." God is a person outside of us with whom we cultivate a relationship through prayer, not an inside source of power to be accessed and released. That's when it became clear as crystal, that new age and Catholicism couldn't ever be compatible.

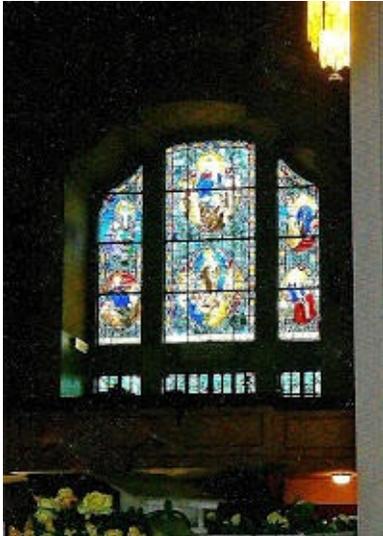


Two roads diverged before me: to study more this Carmelite mystical spirituality I was drawn to or pursue this mishmash of pseudo-metaphysical philosophy of hocus pocus, which still had me reeling in perplexity. (In fact the more I studied new age, the more I was confused. There were so many dimensions and they were all inconsistent.)

I chose to wade into a Carmelite third order and re-donned the brown scapular that I earlier removed for aesthetic reasons. I never touched another new age element. I knew I made the right choice when I later read from an exorcist that the uptick in cases of demonic possession/obsession/oppression could be traced to the proliferation of new age practices. If it reeked of fishiness back then, the stench of sulfuric fire was now smoking behind the door to the flashy new age.

When I fueled on to study more Carmelite writings of the saints (what a terrific library they have), the confusion disappeared. I remembered all the basics I was taught: God created man with free will to choose sin or love; evil began from the rebellion of the angels and exists when men reject God's love; everlasting life comes after death if we make the heroic choice to love (which is essentially self-sacrifice). Union with God is happiness in heaven for eternity, but also briefly on earth when we partake of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. Peace doesn't require self-hypnosis. It comes from simply being in a state of grace –free from mortal sin -- because divine mercy is available to the sinner in the Confessional.

[Read the rest at Catholic 365...](#)



Recommended Reading:

The Story of a Soul, Autobiography of St. Therese of Liseux
The Way of Perfection by St. Teresa of Avila

The Interior Castle by St. Teresa of Avila

The Dark Night of the Soul by St. John of the Cross

The Living Flame of Love by St. John of the Cross

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence

Complete Works of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity

To learn more about the seriousness of the dangers of new age, watch this video by Moira Noonan, a former new age practitioner who required exorcism:

This contribution is available at <http://www.anabellehazard.blogspot.com/2015/02/how-carmelites-rescued-me-from-new-age.html>

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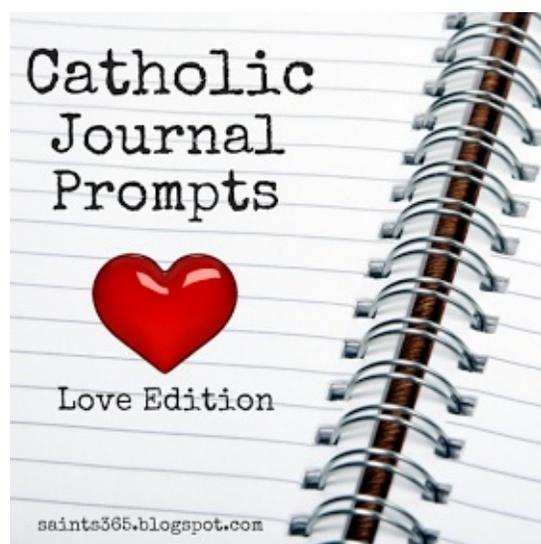
Journal Prompts: Love Edition [at Saints 365]

[Keeping a Spiritual Journal](#)

has been one of the most fruitful practices I have ever undertaken. The ability to articulate my prayers, struggles and victories on paper has added a depth and honesty to my prayer life. An added benefit is in looking back on my past journals and seeing the ways God has worked in my life through answered prayers and unexpected blessings.

However, it is not always easy to journal. In an effort to help my own journaling, and share with others along the way, I am starting something new here at Saints 365. On the start of each month, I'll be posting a list of Catholic journal prompts around a monthly theme. The prompts will be drawn from the scriptures, the lives of the saints and some other personal reflections. Please feel free to share these and add your own ideas in the comments below!

This first month's theme will be on the virtue of love....



Journal Prompts from the Scriptures

In John's Gospel 15:12-13, Jesus says:

"This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Not all of us are called to physically die for another person, but we are all called to die to ourselves each day as an act of love for those around us. Journal about opportunities you have each day to die to yourself.

Meditate on 1 Cor 13:4-7. Substitute your own name for the word love. Ask yourself the questions: where am I doing well and where do I need to grow? Ask the Lord for the grace to work on your weaknesses and fortify your strong points.

1 John 4:18:

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts our fear."

Journal about the things that cause you fear. After you have made your list, ask the Lord to bathe each of these areas in His perfect love.

In Psalm 63:3, the psalmist praises God in response to his love saying:

"Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you."

Journal a litany of praise to the Lord for his steadfast love in your own words.

In John 14:21, Jesus provides the litmus test of loving God:

"Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me."

Do an examination of conscience asking the Lord to help you see the areas in your life where you may not be fully observing God's commandments. Ask the Lord for forgiveness for those ways you have not loved him.

Journal Prompts from the Saints *"We have loved them during life, let us not abandon them until we have conducted them by our prayers into the house of the Lord."*

St. Ambrose's quote reminds us that our love for our deceased friends and families continues into eternity. Journal your prayers for the souls of your loved ones, asking the Lord to release them and the souls who have no one to pray for them from the purifications of purgatory into the glory of Heaven.

St. Catherine of Siena reminds us of the power of God's love saying:

"I (God) can love you more than you can love yourself and I watch over you a thousand times more carefully than you can watch over yourself."

In your own words write an act of surrender to the Lord, giving over your life, your cares, your concerns, your goals and your dreams to him. Allow him to take control of your life, trusting in his infinite and unconditional love.

St. Josemarie Escriva exhorts us:

"Don't be afraid to call Our Lord by his name, Jesus, and to tell him that you love him."

Write a love letter to Jesus - be specific in the ways you love Him and thank Him for the grace of loving him.

One of Blessed Mother Teresa's most famous quotes is

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

I seriously struggle with this quote. It is not easy or natural for me to do the little things, like folding clothes, or scrubbing toilets etc. without grumbling and complaining. In your journal, make a list of the little things in your life that you can transform through performing these tasks with love. Each day, make a concerted effort to approach these mundane tasks with love - journal the results. I'm starting with the dreaded unloading of the dishwasher.....

"Lord, grant that I might not so much seek to be loved, as to love."

With these words, St. Francis of Assisi challenges us to put the act of loving ahead of the benefits of being loved. Ask the Lord to give you opportunities to show love versus seeking love each day - take a checkpoint in your journal each night to see how you did.

Personal Reflections

What is the most powerful act of love someone has ever shown you and why?

Think about a person who really gets under your skin - someone in your life that you just don't like. Ask the Lord for the grace to love that person and specific ways you can demonstrate that love to them. Be sure to journal any ways your relationship changes as a result of this.

In the first century, Tertullian wrote a famous line:

"See how those Christians love one another."

The witness of the love of the early Christians drew converts to Christianity. Reflect in your journal about times when you have witnessed love among other Christians and how that love has impacted your own faith.

Gary Chapman's book

[The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts](#)

lists the following five ways most people receive love: Quality Time, Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, and Physical Touch. In your journal pray about what your spouse and children's love languages are and list ways that you can show them love in those languages.

Alex and Stephen Kendrick's

[The Love Dare](#)

and

[The Love Dare for Parents](#)

This contribution is available at <http://saints365.blogspot.com/2015/02/catholic-monthly-journal-prompts-love.html>
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How's This for Clarity in Preaching? [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

Here is what I am sharing this week:



How's This For Clarity in Preaching? (Originally Posted March 15, 2012)

At some point in the lives of far too many people, they no longer recognize or believe in the existence of sin. They look right at it, desire it, engage in it, but don't see it for what it actually is - a grave offense and injustice to God, an act of immense ingratitude to He Who created them, and a conduit for eternal damnation.

When sin becomes that entrenched, love and zeal for the salvation of souls dictate that sinners be confronted with the Truth and offered an opportunity to see and repent of the sin in which they are mired.

Such was the case in the 16th century when Dominican missionaries in the Americas were unable to convince their fellow countrymen to cease their abuse and mistreatment of the native populations. In order to protect those natives and to save the souls of their abusers, they had to preach the Truth with clarity and with no concern about "hurting" the "feelings" of their listeners. This is how one Dominican preacher confronted that evil head-on:

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. In order to make your sins known to you I have mounted this pulpit, I who am the voice of Christ crying in the wilderness of this island; and therefore it behooves

you to listen to me, not with indifference but with all your heart and senses; for this voice will be the strangest, the harshest and hardest, the most terrifying that you ever heard or expected to hear.... This voice declares that you are in mortal sin, and live and die therein by reason of the cruelty and tyranny that you practice on these innocent people. Tell me, by what right or justice do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible slavery? By what right do you wage such detestable wars on these people who lived mildly and peacefully in their own lands, where you have consumed infinite numbers of them with unheard of murders and desolations? Why do you so greatly oppress and fatigue them, not giving them enough to eat or caring for them when they fall ill from excessive labors, so that they die or rather are slain by you, so that you may extract and acquire gold every day? And what care do you take that they receive religious instruction and come to know their God and creator, or that they be baptized, hear mass, or observe holidays and Sundays? Are they not men? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? How can you lie in such profound and lethargic slumber? Be sure that in your present state you can no more be saved than the Moors or Turks who do not have and do not want the faith of Jesus Christ."

(Homily of Fr. Antón de Montesino O.P. – 21st December 1511 from the January 2012 Issue of *International Dominican Information*)

Certainly, the intrinsic evils so prevalent in our day - abortion, contraception, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia and the active homosexual lifestyle - deserve no less attention and clarity in current preaching than the issues addressed by Father Antón in the 16th century.

So where is that clarity? Where is the concern and zeal for the salvation of souls?

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2015/02/its-worth-revisiting-wednesday-february-18.html>

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Movies for Lent [at Association of Pauline Cooperators]

As I write this blog post, Lent is just around the corner, and by the time you read it, Lent will be here! Lent is a time for walking closely with Jesus. We are invited by the readings at Mass to look deep within to see where we could re-align our life so that it reflects more of his life.

Here at Pauline Books and Media in

Culver City

, we offer monthly Movie Bible Nights. During Lent we offer Lenten Film Retreats at local parishes. Just as we can learn from reading and reflecting on Scripture, a spiritual book, or a life of a saint, so too can we learn from watching a movie and reflecting on it with others. Perhaps a Movie Bible Night or a Lenten Film Retreat could assist you on your Lenten journey. Maybe you would like to lead a Movie Bible Night in your parish or with your family and friends.

Last year, one of our sisters stationed here in

Culver City

, Sr. Jennifer Tecla, prepared the monthly Movie Bible Nights by choosing a theme for the year – “The Social Teachings of the Catholic Church.” She found Scripture passages to accompany each theme and chose a movie that showed the social teachings in action. For example, in November

she chose the Social Teaching about the “call to participation,” and the movie that paired with the teaching was

The Butler.

She then selected the Scripture passage from

St. Paul

’s letter to the Colossians (Col. 3: 12-14).

The format for a Movie Bible Night is as follows:

1. Open with a prayer and the reading of the Scripture passage;
2. Introduce the movie and invite the audience to watch closely for themes on the “Call to Participation” (or whatever theme is chosen for that week);

3. Watch the movie;
4. Take a 10 minute break;
5. Return as a group for a sharing on prepared discussion questions;
6. Close with a prayer.



This year we were invited to lead a Lenten Film Retreat again at
St. Augustine
's Church in
Culver City

. Two years ago we used the movie

The Way,

starring Martin Sheen and written and directed by his son Emilio Estevez. It shows the journey of four pilgrims walking "the Way" to St. James in Campostela,

Spain

. On the first night of the Lenten Film Retreat, we watched the movie together as a group. We also provided a Lenten display of books, movies and music for sale during the retreat. The following four weeks, we returned to

St. Augustine

's for group sharings about the film using clips from

The Way

and prepared discussion questions. The booklet of discussion questions was prepared by Sr. Rose Pacatte. Because these retreat times were in the evening, the parish provided soup and bread. We called it a “Lenten Soup and Cinema Retreat.” Throughout the retreat we provided symbolic items that tied in with the movie such as rosaries, Bibles, holy water, shells, etc. We were also able to offer the retreat in both English and Spanish by preparing the materials ahead of time and having a translator from the parish work with us. This year we will be using the movie

The 100 Foot Journey.

If any of you are interested in leading a Movie Bible Night or a Lenten Film Retreat, please contact me at srmjames@aol.com and we can assist you with details, suggestions, and prepared discussion questions. Don't worry if you don't have a formal media literacy background. A working knowledge of the Bible and of the faith are important. Most people have watched enough movies to offer a thought or two on how a film connects with the Word of God. What's important for you as an organizer is the ability to moderate a discussion or find someone to help you.

What are your favorite movies to see during Lent? Here are some answers from local Southern California Pauline Cooperators:

Maria Siciliano recommends The

Ten Commandments

and

Ben Hur.

She says:

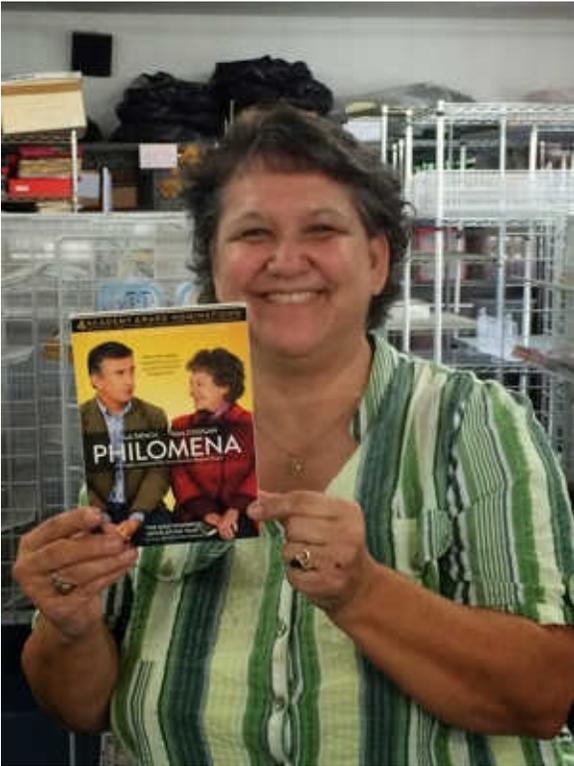
“In

Ben Hur,

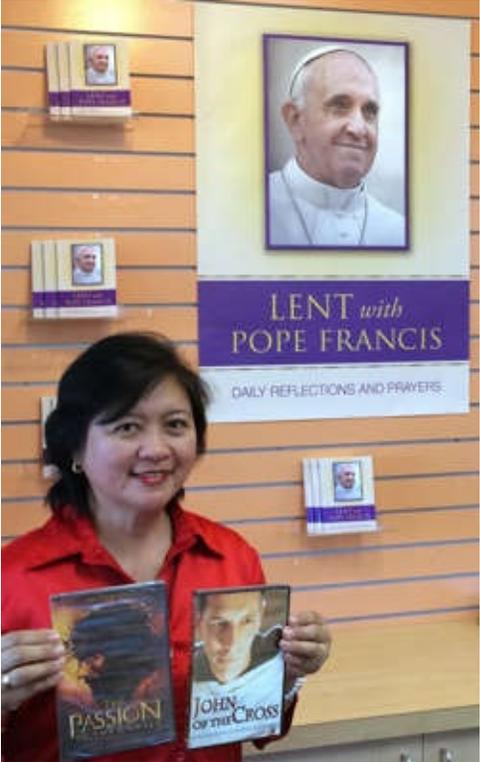
our protagonist, played by Charlton Heston, has a brief and amazing encounter with Jesus on the cross. You can feel the powerful spiritual connection that takes place between them during those moments. Both movies show the power of God over man - even though Moses (in the

Ten Commandments

), initially a powerful Egyptian prince, is cast down when his Jewish identity is revealed. He rises higher than any earthly prince because of the strength and power of God. It's interesting because both stories involve princes (both played by Charlton Heston) who lose their earthly powers, but come back with God's help to be princes in God's kingdom”.



Shellie DiSpirito likes to watch *Philomena* during Lent because it is a compelling story about a mother finding out the truth about her son who was given up for adoption. It is a story of forgiveness and reconciliation. She also recommends *The Time Traveler's Wife*. Shellie says, "I like this story because the main character was able to travel back in time but also return to reality, The movie demonstrates how life goes on in the midst of difficulties."



Irene Inonog loves to watch

Passion of the Christ

during Holy Week each year. She says that it helps her “enter into the experience of Holy Week in a deeper way by reminding [her] in image what Jesus suffered out of love for us.” She also enjoys watching Leonardo Defilippis’ production of

John of the Cross

, because he was a saint who longed to be with God and he endured the dark night of the soul with great faith, hope and love.



Sr. Marie James Hunt entered the Daughters of St. Paul community in 1981 from Alexandria, VA. She received her M.A. in human resources from DePaul University in 2003 and served as provincial councilor of the Daughters' US/ESC province from 2008-2011. She is missioned in California, where she is the manager of the Pauline Books and Media Centers in Culver City and San Diego. Sr. Marie James is also the West Coast Coordinator of the Pauline Cooperators.

This contribution is available at http://paulinelait.com/2015/02/movies-for-lent_18.html
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Of Auto Insurance and Raising Sons: An Open Letter to MetLife [at One Thousand Words a Week]

Kindness to a father will not be forgotten ([Sirach](#)).

Dear [MetLife](#),

My son, Ben, is a resident freshman at Notre Dame this year, and he's not making use of any of our vehicles while living on campus. Consequently, he's not driving at all, and I called you recently to inquire about taking him off our auto insurance policy to save some dough.



Your agent (let's call him "Eric") was very kind – although I thought it was a little strange that he neglected to comment on my son's good fortune at becoming a [domer](#). Regardless, Eric informed me that Ben could not be removed from our policy until he obtains a policy of his own first – a MetLife rule.

You'll forgive me for grumbling a bit – finances are tight these days, both for my son and for us. Still, I guess your rule makes sense, what with your risk/benefit analyses, amortization tables, and the liabilities involved. Anyway, Eric was savvy enough to offer me a conciliatory gesture: A discounted rate for full-time college students who only drive occasionally, mainly while home during breaks. The gesture worked – I was consoled – and I asked Eric to see if our family qualified for the special rate.

When he came back on the line, Eric indicated that he was all set to enroll Ben in the discounted program. "Just a couple questions," he noted. "First, is your son attending a college 100 miles away from home or more?"

Now there's an interesting question.

Technically, Ben is a mere 5 miles away from home – within walking distance really. Unlike most parents dropping their firstborn off at college, I didn't have to take time off from work last fall to make a road trip with a van full of boxes and suitcases. Instead, it was a short ride up Miami Street and then over to Eddy and Notre Dame Boulevard – we were there in 15 minutes. [I dropped Ben off](#), drove home, changed from jeans into Dockers, and headed to the office.

So, no, Met Life, he's not 100 miles or more away from home. Not even close – at least in terms of geography. In fact, when Ben asked me to meet him at Notre Dame's bookstore for coffee last week, it required only a minor detour off my daily commute, and I gladly obliged.



“You buying?” I asked cautiously, after placing my order for a bagel and a schmear. Ben grunted, and the lady behind the counter laughed. I laughed, too, but I still let him pick up the tab.

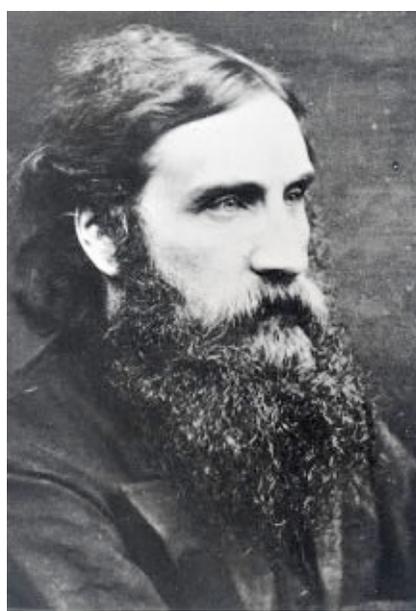
As we ate our bagels and sipped our coffees, we talked. I shared a bit of what was going on at home, but I mainly listened, relishing the exorbitant luxury of a tête-à-tête with my collegiate son. Physics, chemistry, calculus. (Are you kidding me? Way over my head...but do continue.) A seminar on classic literature, plus his work-study jobs and life in the dorm. “And did you see that game last night?” he asked – the [big one against Duke](#). “Here, check out these three-pointers” (photos on his phone) – “unbelievable!”

Then it was time for me to get on to work, and Ben to class. “See you later, dad.” No big deal, right? Almost like he never left home.

Why then, I ask you, the tears as I drove away – where did those come from? Just a few miles from home and work, and close enough to drop by for a chat, but the reality of the true distance between us hit me like a sledge that day. Can you see it, too?

I mean, here we are, MetLife: I'm in South Bend, and my son, grown to manhood, is a student at Notre Dame – just across town, sure, but embracing a life hundreds of miles away from my own. He's learning new things, making new connections, and exploring new ideas well beyond me.

In short, Ben's moving on, declaring his own direction, sifting through the influences from his youth and



retaining only those that meld with his fresh start. How much further away could he be from my day-to-day existence? It could be 1,000 miles – a million even – and it would still be the same.

At least it would *feel* the same – I don't suppose you offer an auto insurance discount for that, do you?

On the other hand....

All this is *precisely* what we signed up for as parents. We love our children, devote ourselves to their formation and upbringing, and then we work ourselves out of a job if everything goes right. “What father is not pleased with the first tottering attempt of his little one to walk?” asked [George MacDonald](#), and then he linked that question with its corollary: “What father would be satisfied with anything but the manly step of the full-grown son!” Agreed.

Besides, in my case? I'm blessed with a full-grown son who *sought out* his dad for a meal and conversation, and so I've *nothing* to be whiny about – indeed, I've got every cause to rejoice! That pause last week over coffee and bagels wasn't just a privileged luxury; it was an incalculable gift of grace and a profound sign of filial love. There might be a yawning gap between our daily lives these days, but it's a gap that my son chose to bridge of his own volition.

So, never mind, MetLife. Leave our policy the way it is. It's a bargain reminder that he's not so far from me after all.

This contribution is available at <http://onethousandwordsaweek.wordpress.com/2015/02/02/of-auto-insurance-and-raising-sons-an-open-letter-to-metlife/>
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What are you asking? [at Declaring the Whole Counsel]

"You do not know what you are asking." This is what Jesus says when the Apostles wanted the highest authority in the Church. Many seek to take control of as much as possible. It is not a bad thing to want to keep your life in control (within the boundaries of divine morality), but we usually do not stop with what is appropriate. We tend to try to control more than our share.

We are called to have self-control, and we are called to take "dominion" over the world. We are not, however, to expect that this means we are supposed to seek to grab as much power as we can. You hear people speak about those who are obsessed with gaining control over others, but in truth every one of us tries at various times to have control over things that are not ours to control. This is because control gives us a sense of superiority, and that effectively feeds our selfish pride.

When James and John's mother asks Jesus to give them authority which is second only to Christ (something like a dual-papacy), she and her sons are told that they do not really understand what they are asking for. We have all heard the adage, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely", but we still find people seeking absolute power (over something) because they think that they are immune to this corruption. Pride feeds pride. In reality they are proving that the pursuit of power has largely the same effects as the possession of that power does; it corrupts.

We all want to be the "big fish" in a pond of some sort. Whether it is your place at work, a corner of your home, or something else, the attempt to have power over something is most often filled with prideful motivations. There are people in every area of society that find something to take charge of, and then desperately seek to keep that control so that they can feed their ego with a sense of "this is mine". Sometimes spouses seek control over each other, parents seek control over their children, employers seek this with their employees, and teachers seek it with their students.

This is likely one of the reasons why so many relationships today are a mess, people find it easy to hate others, and a host of other problems that we see arising in society. Rather than seeking more and more control, we should be seeking more and more humility. If we can attain a greater degree of simple humility in our hearts, we will not strive so fervently for power and control, and when we are put in positions of authority, then we will be able to handle the authority properly.

What power are you seeking right now? Is Jesus saying the same thing to you that He said to the Apostles' mother, "You do not know what you are asking"? Although we often believe that power and authority will make us happy, these things never truly give us happiness. This is so because when someone is gripped in the pursuit of power, they are never thinking about the good of others, and that always is a sign of bad leadership.

Are you willing to give up some of the power you currently have? Are you holding on to it only for your own happiness (it is too easy--and often self-serving--to say it is for the good of others)? These are difficult questions that need to be considered in a healthy self-examination. Lent is the season to look at your own heart in this very type of area. Be cautious about anything you seek to control, and be ready and willing to humble yourself before God; you just may save yourself some embarrassment!

This contribution is available at <http://declaringthewholecounsel.blogspot.com/2015/03/what-are-you-asking.html>
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When You're Still Looking for the Kingdom of God [at We, A Great Parade]

He stopped what he was doing there in the kitchen, there in the middle of our world, and said simply, "I'm sleepy. I'm going to have rest time." My breath caught in my chest but I tried not to let on, tried to just open the door to my bed and watch him crawl in, snuggling into the smells of us. Tried to do it like it was the most normal thing in the world.

Four years into this and he finally feels safe enough to take a nap.

And I'm sitting in the silence bawling like a baby because it's not fair. Because it shouldn't be this way. For any child. But it is, oh it is. The complexities of the human heart and mind know no bounds. We can be safe for years before we believe that we are. Maybe some of us never really do.



I don't know what it's like to work so hard to believe that things like love and trust are real. I'll never have any idea. But I do know what it's like to carry tension in your body everywhere you go, to feel your heart race when you step out in public, to live in hyper vigilance in your own home. I don't have to work hard at all to believe that secondary trauma is real.

I don't know what it's like to have my earliest life experiences mold my brain around fear. My first weeks and months on this earth were filled with comfort, care, and nurture.

But I know he hasn't been the only one that's scared.



I know I've locked myself behind the closet door, sobbing in the dark to a God who I know is there but who won't answer me. Telling Him He made a mistake; that I'm not who He thought I was. That I can't do this, I can't parent this child. I am too broken, too sinful, too full of rage, too untrustworthy.

When I

[say I have been as broken as anyone](#)

, when I

[say I'm just as sinful](#)

, just as messed up, please know that this is not false modesty. It's not even

humility

. Humility would be detailing all of the times I willfully chose not to meet my tormented baby inside his pain because it was just too hard and I was just too tired. But those details are still safely barricaded behind what's left of my pride.

Hopefully someday the barricade will burn. If I know anything about the Consuming Fire, I'm thinking it will.



You've heard of the "fight or flight" stress response, the part of our brain that triggers an instinctive reaction to seek safety from an outside threat, whether by withdrawal or by aggression. Your brain and mine would default to it if we were to be mugged. My son's defaults to it when he walks into Kroger, or when he can't seem to fit in to social mores, or when it's time to take a nap.

All God's children gets their problems but some of us suffer a heck of a lot more than others of us. It doesn't seem fair, but what do we know of fair? There is Good News to be heard, and the Good News is this: the Kingdom of God is for the broken, the hurting, the suffering - these are the ones who get in first. The rest of us get in clinging to their coattails. And that seems fair to me.

It doesn't seem fair, but what do we know of fair? There is Good News to be heard, and the Good News is this: the Kingdom of God is for the broken, the hurting, the suffering - these are the ones who get in first. The rest of us get in clinging to their coattails. And that seems fair to me.

agreatparade.com

I've spent my whole life trying to catch a glimpse of what this Kingdom looks like with skin on; long

before I could even understand it and long after,

[when you would've thought I was running from it](#)

. I've looked for this Good News in 24 hour prayer rooms, on inner city American streets, and in volcano-ravaged villages in Indonesia. But until this little boy cracked me, it was always "us" and "them"- no matter how much I wanted it to be otherwise. I've never been more thankful for anything than I am for the pieces of me that chipped and scattered and are blowing all over Texas. Good riddance to some very bad rubbish. Because now when I look at your face, whoever you are, I can see a bit of myself there too. The Kingdom of God will invite us in together. Never alone.

I don't know what it will be for you. Maybe it will be a little boy with a gap in his teeth and love in his scared little heart. Maybe it will, but probably not. Probably God has a different story for you, and it will be beautiful and it will be ugly and it will be fun and it will be terrible and it will break you to pieces and it will be everything you ever wanted but didn't know to ask for. There is a Kingdom of God for you to see too, loved one. May you never stop seeking to find it.

*All photos by Kathryn Krueger Photography

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How do I evangelize? [at Catholic Deacon]

As we saw the Sunday before last (see

["Who can make me whole again?"](#)

) sin is deadlier than leprosy, as well as deadlier than anyone or anything else that can kill the body. We all need healing. The kind of healing Jesus came to give is the kind He gives to the paralytic man whose friends, at the beginning of the second chapter of St Mark's Gospel (

[2:1-12](#)

), lowered him down in front of the Lord, who then said to the paralyzed and bedridden man, "Child, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). It was only in order to demonstrate that He possesses the power to forgive sin that He physically healed the man, saying, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth" - he said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home'" (Mark 2:10-11).

We read about scenes like the one in which Jesus healed the paralyzed man throughout, not just the Synoptics (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but all the Gospels. Another example that stands out is Jesus casting demons from the Gerasene demoniac in the

[eighth chapter](#)

of St Luke's Gospel. This poor man was naked and "did not live in a house, but lived among the tombs" (Luke 8:27b). When Jesus stepped out of the boat, which made its way across the Sea of Galilee from Galilee to Gerasa, He was greeted by this tormented man. Just as in the synagogue, the Lord is addressed by one of the demons who possessed the man. The demon who recognized Jesus, greeted Him saying, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me!" Jesus, after a brief interrogation, then proceeded to cast them out of the man and into a herd of swine, thus restoring the man to his right mind.

Jesus' manifest power over the spirits caused the Gerasenes to fear Him. As a result of their fear, they asked Him to leave them, which He then set about doing. But the man who Jesus healed asked to come with Him. Jesus told the man, "Return home and recount what God has done for you" (Luke 8:39a).



This man, formerly crazed, out of his mind, who lived naked, dirty, alone, and often chained up, but was now restored, heeded what the Lord told him to do, apparently without complaining, or remonstrating with Jesus: "The man went off and proclaimed throughout the whole town what Jesus had done for him" (Luke 8:39b).

Telling others what Jesus has done for us is the very essence of evangelization, which we often seek to reduce to apologetics, to mere arguments. In

[a homily](#)

he gave back in 2010, George Niederauer, now Archbishop-emeritus of San Francisco, recounted a story about a British working man who was in the habit of drinking all of his wages at the bar, as recounted by Dr. William Barclay, a Presbyterian Scripture scholar, who authored an invaluable, multi-volume commentary on the New Testament:

Consequently, he was behind in the rent, his wife had begun to pawn their furniture, and there was little food on the table. One day he went to a Christian temperance meeting and turned his life around. He stopped drinking. Now there was food on the table and money for the rent. His family was delighted. However, his co-workers were not; they had lost their drinking buddy. They teased him endlessly, and one day one of them asked him sarcastically "Do you really believe Jesus Christ turned water into wine?" The man answered, "I don't know about that, but if you come over to my house I'll show you how he turned beer into furniture!"

Recalling and recounting what Jesus has done and continues to do for me strikes me as a very good Lenten practice.

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2015/02/how-do-i-evangelize.html>
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Friendship - What Does it Mean? [at Quiet Consecration]

2010

Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace,

no one can merit the initial grace

of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity,

we can then merit

for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God's wisdom. These graces and goods are the object of Christian prayer. Prayer attends to the grace we need for meritorious actions.

Recently I have given a great deal of thought to what a true and lasting friendship should be and it occurs to me that it, like anything else in my life, must mirror my relationship with Christ and His Church. I am called to be a complete Christian. I cannot bifurcate my life and only be a Catholic Out Loud when it suits me or when it is safe to be so or when it is easy because everything is going my way. In that same manner, if I am to give myself to someone in friendship I must be willing to let them know the complete me and I must be willing to look at them with the eyes of Christ.

Now, in today's world we are so childish we misinterpret the above sentiment to mean that a real friend puts no expectations on us, does not hold us to any standard of behavior and will put up with any falderrahl and goofiness we wish to dish out. When someone says to us, "Hey, you do not get to do that here!" we are hurt and puzzled. Aren't they are friend? Aren't they supposed to love us with Christian Love and accept us for who we are, come what may?

This attitude of babyish demands for acceptance is perpetrated by Facebook Memes and Pinerest Posts. 'A Real Friend Will Always Be There No Matter What You Do' is the dominant theme, words usually written over a background of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a flowing dress, either standing on a cliff over looking the sea or walking along the beach or a long dusty road. They are usually alone.

I am convinced they are alone because no one wants to be around them.

If the meme does have two humans in it, it is usually a picture of two children around the age of 5.

Our society today has mistaken true friendship for kind of disinterested hedonism. If you are to be my friend then by golly you better accept me for exactly who I am right this minute, and don't you dare put any expectations on me. After all, I am perfect - Mama's little darling and Daddy's little delight. I get trophies for showing up on time and if I want something you better give it to me right now! I am six years old when I am close to 40 and I am whiny and I am demanding that you tell me I am beautiful when my behavior is atrocious.

I just do not think this is real friendship.

If my behavior is supposed to mirror the behavior of Christ, I must be willing to look at what my friendship with Christ is - and Christ puts demands on me. Christ commands me to behave in a certain way. If I do not take certain actions, Christ will claim He does not know me. If I choose to behave in ways that cause Him pain, He will never stop loving me but He will not allow me into His Kingdom.

Why would someone on earth be expected to be different?

If I behave in a way that is contrary to social norms, that causes pain or anguish to someone, that is disrespectful and angry and demanding and childish why in the world would I expect them to allow me to be a part of their life?

And why would I ever think that anyone who did not expect me to live up to my potential and a true Child of God be anything other than a false friend?

Nope, I cannot hold to that idea. I think, and I believe and I live, that it is my responsibility to hang with those who want the best of me. I think I would be foolish to hang out with anyone who rubber stamps my emotional tantrums, my bad behavior, my unwillingness to be a better Leslie one day at a time.

So, for me friendships mean more than just being able to hang out in a coffee shop. I want people in my life who want my highest good.

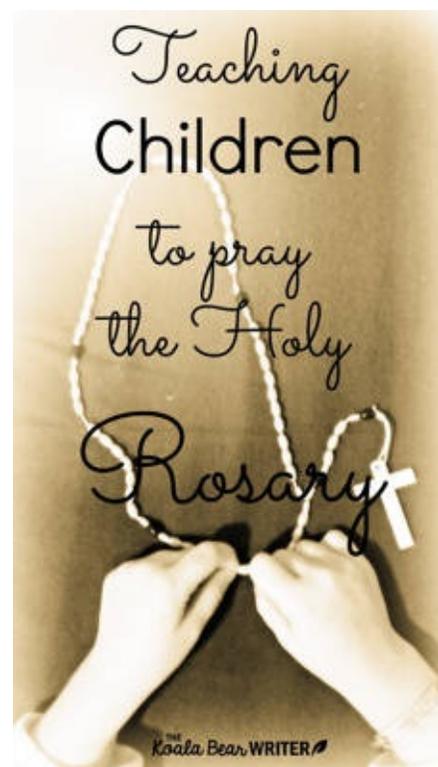
What do you want in your life?

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Teaching Children to Pray the Rosary [at The Koala Bear Writer]

A few months ago, **Sunshine started asking us if we could pray the rosary together.** Since then, we've tried to make it a habit to do a family rosary together every night, even if we only make it through a decade on some nights. Here are some of the things that have helped our girls enjoy this practice.



1. Listen to saint stories.

Just before Christmas, I bought the girls the [entire Glory Stories series](#) from Holy Heroes. We spent quite a bit of time in the truck and I was always looking for new listening materials. The girls loved the new stories. Many of the saints had a close relationship with Mary and talked about praying the rosary or asking Mary for help. In particular, the story of the children of Fatima mentions Mary's request for everyone to pray the rosary.



2. Provide lots of rosaries.

The girls have gotten several rosaries as gifts and have always liked playing with them, though we try to explain that the rosaries aren't necklaces. Recently, I was visiting a friend and noticed that she had a jar of rosaries on her coffee table, ready to grab for prayers. When I got home, I collected all of our rosaries and found a pretty cup to put them in, where the girls could grab them and choose which rosary they wanted to pray with.

3. Teach the mysteries.

The girls have quickly learned the prayers to the rosary, as I did. However, I must confess that I barely know the mysteries. So lately, I've been trying to learn the mysteries and explain to the girls that while we're asking Mary to pray for us, we're thinking about various events in Jesus' life. [The Happy Saints Holy Rosary ebook](#) has helped with this, as the girls can color a picture while we're praying that mystery. The ebook also has large and small prayer cards and posters. I like how easy it is to print whichever posters or coloring sheets I want to use with the girls.

A Happy Saints eBook **The Holy Rosary**

Printable artworks of the Mysteries of the Holy Rosary, including posters, prayer cards, greeting cards, coloring pages and badges for all occasions.

By Victor Teh



4. Pray with friends.

We've had various opportunities to pray the rosary with our friends. Last year we participate in a living rosary at Sunshine's school. We've also prayed together at Catholic family camp or stayed for prayers before or after Mass. It's good for the girls to see others following this devotion, especially when they see other kids their age praying the rosary.

5. Create a shrine.

Sunshine was recently given a small statue of Mary. My husband had already found a shelf for her room, and she decided to make it into a Mary shelf. She keeps her Mary statue, rosary and a candle there, along with a prayer card and a light she made at a church even.

Create a Mary shrine



In Lily's room, we put up another shelf with another Mary statue (given to her several years ago) along with candles. Again, these are great visuals for the girls to look at when praying or just a daily reminder to stop and pray.



6. Develop your own devotion to Mary.

As a convert, one of my greatest reservations about joining the Church was [what the Church teaches about Mary](#). This is completely foreign to [most Protestant denominations](#) and it has taken me a long time to overcome that prejudice. Becoming a mother, and particularly the stress I faced with Lily's birth, helped me draw closer to Mary. Lately, several books we've read have also deepened my understanding of the Church's devotion to Mary and how this can help me draw closer to Jesus.

If you're looking for resources, I recommend [Hail, Holy Queen](#) by Scott Hahn (a Catholic convert), [33 Days to Morning Glory: A Do-It Yourself Retreat in Preparation for Marian Consecration](#) by Michael E. Gaitley (a very readable introduction to Marian consecration which uses the lives of St. Louis de Montfort, St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Mother Theresa and St. Pope John Paul II as examples), and [Mysteries of the Virgin Mary: Living Our Lady's Graces](#) by Fr. Peter John Cameron (an excellent explanation of what the Church teaches about Mary and why it matters).

Do you pray the rosary as a family? What things have helped you with teaching children to pray the rosary?

 Bonnie

This contribution is available at <http://www.thekoalabearwriter.com/2015/02/teaching-children-to-pray-the-rosary/>
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God's House [at Convert Journal]



Last night before dusk, I was a few minutes early at church. A number of small children were leaving CCD (a/k/a *religious education class*) and posing for pictures in front of our patron saint's statue while holding some formal-looking certificate. The children were proud of their accomplishment (whatever it was) and the parents were beaming.

What a happy place! If we think about it, we realize that all of the really important milestones of our lives take place right here at this building. Yet this building is quite different than every other. It is God's house and He is at home.

This is where we come to unite with Him in His once and for all sacrifice which continues for us to this day. Here we join with Him both spiritually and incarnated in the Blessed Sacrament, the source and summit of the Christian life. It is not just the two of us either, but all the faithful: past, present and future. At this place our Eucharistic liturgy joins with the Heavenly liturgy, in the presence of God, together with all the angels and saints. If ever the word "awesome" could be applied, this is it.

The rhythm of our lives plays-out here. The picture taking I witnessed is just a memorable snapshot of a long series, in the lives of those children and in the lives of their parents. For each of them this journey began at their baptisms where they became the adopted children of God, establishing a familial relationship with Him and the entire Communion of Saints.

As the weeks and years pass, we live our imperfect lives, anchored by faith and our continuous response to the calls of conversion and holiness. In a world searching for the meaning of life, we found it — to know, love and serve the Lord. The truth really does set us free. Seeking to know Him, we serve the poor, connect to the disenfranchised, comfort the suffering, go to Bible studies, classes, men's and women's groups, retreats, read scripture and pray... most especially through our participation in the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is there that the bridegroom and His bride the Church are most intimately one in their expression of mutual love. It is from there we are sent into the world to serve Him.

The timeline marches on but we are not afraid. Along the way we are continuously strengthened by the sanctifying grace of the sacraments. The young children in the pictures will soon receive first communion. A little later, they will be confirmed, with new graces complimenting their baptisms and further forming their office as priests, prophets and kings. In a few years, many will also enter into a life-long covenant with another through the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. It will be they who are then behind the camera taking pictures of their own children.

Along the way, our fallen nature allows us to choose against what is good, true and holy. We temporarily leave this place for one of false promises. Our rebellion may be brief or many decades. The Father waits patiently for us to return and the angels rejoice when we finally turn back. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus absolves and forgets our sins, throwing His loving arms around us and welcomes us home.

Eventually, the race will end. We will be gone, temporarily, from our body. Our loved ones will bring us here one last time as the cycle for us is completed. Later that day a new life may be brought into the Church, a couple may become one, or a brother or sister find their way back.

That is what happens here everyday in God's house, this Catholic church and every Catholic church. We are so blessed.

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Unresistable grace [at Bethune Catholic]

For Christmas, my wife and daughter downloaded a bunch of books and stories from Libra Vox for me to listen to on my travels. (Each day have at least a 60+ mile commute each way.) Right now I am listening to Chesterton's **Manalive**. So, I decided I would pray the rosary on my last leg home. Usually I start it at the blinking light in Kershaw. However I was enjoying the book so much, I was seriously contemplating skipping the rosary (just this once-right!) for Chesterton. But he (Chesterton) would have none of it.

Just as I approached the blinking light and eased to a stop, came the words out of the speaker from **Manalive**:

Then he sat staring rather foolishly at the rude lantern of lead and coloured glass that hangs over my door. It is old, but of no value; my grandmother gave it to me long ago: she was devout, and it happens that the glass is painted with a crude picture of Bethlehem and the Wise Men and the Star. ***He seemed so mesmerized with the transparent glow of Our Lady's blue gown and the big gold star behind***, that he led me also to look at the thing, which I had not done for fourteen years. (emphasis added)

I couldn't resist the grace, turned off the CD, and began the rosary.

Oremus pro invicem!

This contribution is available at <http://www.bethunecatholic.blogspot.com/2015/02/unresistable-grace.html>
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Marriage: A Noble Purpose [at Plot Line and Sinker]



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“Blessed are you,

O God of our fathers;

praised be your name

forever and ever.

Let the heavens and

all your creation

praise you forever.

“You made Adam and

you gave him his wife Eve

to be his help and support;

and from these two

the human race descended.

You said,

“It is not good for the man to be alone;

Let us make him a partner like himself”

Now, Lord, you know that I take this

wife of mine, not because of lust,

but for a noble purpose.

Call down your mercy on me and on her,

and allow us to live together to a happy old age.”

Tobit 8:7

This beautiful prayer was the second reading of our Nuptial Mass in 1982 when my husband and I were married. When I first read these words many years ago, they affected me deeply, especially when I learned the history of why Tobias said this prayer.

After losing seven husbands before she could consummate her union with them, Sarah entered into marriage with Tobias. Tobias knew the history and understood that he could die if he married her. But he trusted God, recited the above prayer fervently and went on to a happy marriage with Sarah.

Nowadays, many Catholic couples live together or are sexually active before marriage. As much as they may desire to love one another – and most, I’m certain, really do feel love and affection towards one another – they cannot love each other in the way they are called to: freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully, **truly loving as God loves**. Sexual relations are meant to be the renewal of a couple’s marriage vows. If there is no marriage, there are no vows and there can be no renewal. Essentially, **pre-marital sex is a lie**.

I realize that this may not be an easy thing for engaged couples to hear, especially if they are already living together. But if a couple wants to be close to each other and to God, it is essential for them to live the truth of God’s laws on marriage: chastity before marriage and no contraception within marriage.

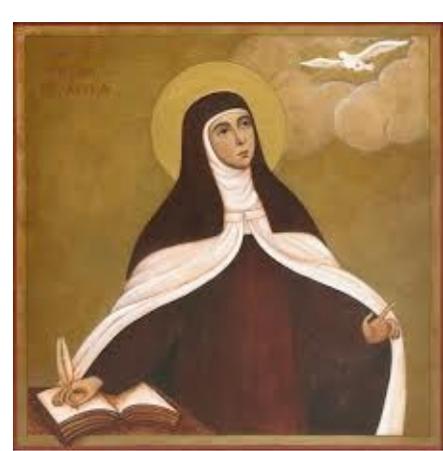
“God help us to love each other freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully. Help us to love and not to lust.”

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Saint Teresa of Avila's Legacy [at From the Pulpit of my Life]



Saint Teresa of Ávila

This March is the 500th anniversary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Ávila, Carmelite nun and Doctor of the Church. One of her legacies to the Church is her teaching about prayer.

In Teresa's final book, *The Interior Castle*, written near the end of her life, she summarized her life of prayer. In it she imagined that her growth in love of God had been a journey from the outskirts of a crystal castle to its center, inhabited by her King. The castle image with its many rooms symbolized her soul. The King was God who beckoned Teresa to come to him and to be spiritually united with him.

Responding to her King's call meant that Teresa first had to leave the dark, cold, noisy place outside the castle, where she spent so much time. Steadfast prayer was the key to unlock the castle door. Once inside she prayed faithfully. Quietly and persistently Teresa traveled through the castle's rooms, each representing a stage of growth in her personal relationship with God.

Initially Teresa's journey to union with God demanded great effort on her part. She had spent nearly two decades vacillating in her commitment to make God alone the center of her life. She longed to be a good nun and to observe the Carmelite rule of religious life, yet worldly interests equally attracted her. Because of her outgoing personality, she enjoyed spending hours in the convent parlor entertaining friends and listening to local news and gossip. She couldn't have it both ways though. "No one can serve two masters (Mt 6:24a)."

One day St. Teresa knelt in prayer before a statue of the suffering Christ. She experienced a transformative grace. When she rose from her knees God had healed her ambivalence. For the remainder of her life Teresa's priority was always to please God and to do his will.

God's invitation to union with him is not for nuns only. All baptized Christians are called to be holy. Like St. Teresa we have struggles in our commitment to prayer. We resist God's grace often when we participate in frivolous pastimes and pursue vain pleasures. What our hearts truly desire is God alone.

We must create a haven of quiet and prayer so as to hear God's voice! Scripture tells us: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (James 4:8a)." God, in our soul's center, calls us to draw nearer. Do we hear? Do we listen?

Try it. God will call your name, and you will hear, "I love you."



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Transfiguration, You and Me [at Freedom Through Truth]

Transfiguration is by definition "a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state."

Father Gordon MacRae, a spiritual adviser, if not director, for many, through the wonders of the internet, a medium that he has never had direct access to, reminds us of transfiguration once again this Lent in his latest posting "

[A Transfiguration Before Our Very Eyes](#)

" over at These Stone Walls.

After the Feast of the Transfiguration last summer, I wrote a post that Father Gordon links today entitled

[Transfiguration Behind These Stone Walls](#)

. I think my posting of last summer provides an interesting backdrop to the further Transfiguration that is transpiring in the hearts and minds of Father Gordon, Pornchai and prisoner residents of the New Hampshire State Prison for Men.

In it I said:

In fact, we are all called to change our form or appearance, to be conformed to Christ in us. Where Christ in His Transfiguration was actually changed and it was visibly obvious to the three disciples present, our transfiguration is more like a very slow metamorphosis and as that, might not be as obvious to those around us, as that of Christ was.

When Christ was transfigured in front of his 3 disciples, and Elijah and Moses appeared, this was a special, once in forever, miracle of God's Grace showing favor not just to his Beloved Son, but also to those who witnessed it, and also to all those who have ever read of it in their bible, or heard the story told at Mass.

Father Gordon describes for us a prison style transfiguration, that he has witnessed, in the care that Pornchai Moontri, his room mate and fellow pilgrim, has given to their friend Anthony Begin.

Father Gordon is often the scribe for us, describing life transforming events that occur behind These Stone Walls. But, imagine the exhilaration that the writers of the Gospels might have felt as they relayed the story of the Transfiguration, or any of the other miracles that occurred in the life of Jesus. It is one thing for us to read a story from the Bible, but it is another matter to witness it, and/or to write it down as told to you by the participants.

Though Father Gordon writes of Pornchai ministering to Anthony, let us not for one moment think that Pornchai and his love for Anthony, and Anthony, who in love has had to receive the ministrations of his friend Pornchai, are operating in isolation, or that Father Gordon is merely a fly on the wall, observing.

Father Gordon has washed both of these men and their feet, figuratively at least, in his prayers and tears, which have flooded the Mercy Seat of Christ. He is after all, alter christus for them, a Catholic priest, living out his ordination in the place and time in which he finds himself.

In the original Transfiguration story, we are told that Jesus clothes became dazzling white, and that his divinity shone through. But, we were not there, and so we have to imagine something that is by its nature unimaginable.

But, Our God knows all this. Who can tell Him anything that he does not know already, and who can counsel Him?

So, he placed his priest Father Gordon in the midst of a transfiguration, a miracle both profound in its scope and exhilarating in its visibility. However, for you and me, as for those who have read the Gospel Transfiguration story, we must take it on faith.

Those who read These Stone Walls have come to trust Father Gordon and his stories and parables as he relates them to us in his inimitable style. In fact, his writings and our readings have led us to a deeper faith, and so when we read that there was a transfiguration at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men, we can picture it, and enter into it alongside Anthony and Pornchai.

Anthony has been transfigured into a man who is ready to meet his Lord and Saviour personally, if that is God's will for him at this time. Pornchai has been transfigured into a man whose love for His Saviour and the Mother of Our Saviour is palpable for us all, even if we do not get to see it first hand. And our Dear Father Gordon bears witness faithfully to all that transpires behind These Stone Walls, and is active both prayerfully and physically in his own journey of holiness and that of his fellow men there.

But, there is more, so much more. If God so loves Anthony Begin that he would give him 3 months as a respite, still in a prison environment, where his body and soul could be ministered to by men the world has cast aside, and the evidence of the transfiguration is profound, then how could God not love you and me and be prepared to use us as mightily as He has used Pornchai in this story, and Father Gordon?

Maybe Anthony has already entered paradise, or maybe not yet. But, imagine the celebration when he gets there, and imagine also the treasures that Pornchai and Father Gordon are building for themselves in heaven for having helped teach the caterpillar that is Anthony Begin to fly like a beautiful butterfly into the loving arms of Jesus.

God is not one to honor persons, but He does honor those who commit to doing His will on a daily basis. Those He can call His own and trust with small things, will receive greater things from Him to use for His Glory and Majesty.

What a marvelous story. Father Jim Williams, who was my pastor for many years in London Ontario was about 6'4" tall, and so was called Tiny by those who loved him. But we was anything but tiny and he told us stories in his homilies that engaged us in our faith journey. He would commence most homilies with the following statement that would immediately grab our attentions. He would say: "I am going to tell you a story, and it is a true story."

Father Gordon has told us a story once again, and it is a true story.

Thank you Father Gordon, and Pronchai. Thank you Anthony Begin for being faithful, and may God grant you rest in this world and eternally as it suits His great pleasure for you.

This contribution is available at <http://freethroughtruth.blogspot.ca/2015/03/transfiguration-you-and-me.html>
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11 Ways to Work the Rosary into your Busy Day [at A Catholic Newbie]

11 Ways to Work the Rosary into Your Busy Day



As we get into the heart of Lent, I highly encourage you to make

praying the rosary daily a priority in your life. If you just don't think you've got 20 minutes to sit down and ask for Mary's prayers as you reflect on the life of her Son, let me find 20 minutes for you :). Keep in mind they don't have to be a contiguous 20 minutes and you don't have to carry a rosary with you. You have 10 fingers, don't you?

Here are 10 perfectly good places you can pray the rosary TODAY!

- 1) **In the shower** – What else do you have to do in the shower? Praying is much better than letting your mind wander. Keep your eyes on the Lord! If you're not done praying by the time you're finished, continue while toweling off, getting dressed and even blow drying your hair.
- 2) **While running** – Do you go running regularly? Make praying the rosary your activity instead of listening to music. There are podcasts, such as on the free Laudate app, that you can listen to as you run.
- 3) **In the car** – It's amazing how I can quickly pray the rosary, just going to and from the grocery, while getting gas, taking the kids to school and more. A few car trips definitely add up to 20 minutes. I use a free CD from CatholicCity, which I pray along with. It makes me feel like I'm praying with a group! See other [free Catholic resources](#).
- 4) **While exercising** – Try the wonderful [SoulCore program](#) that pairs core exercises with the rosary. Purchase the DVD and get two important things checked off your to-do list: fitness and prayer. This program has the approval of Lafayette, Ind., Diocese Bishop Timothy Doherty.
- 5) **While cleaning** – Pray away as you vacuum, fold the laundry, mop, dust, etc. And while you're at it, you can bless those who will reap the benefits of your efforts of a clean home and wear those clean clothes.
- 6) **Taking the dog for a walk** – Do you walk your dog everyday? Make that your time for praying the rosary. Again, much better than letting the mind wander. Keep it focused!
- 7) **At lunch** – Take a daily lunch break and sit quietly to pray the rosary. During warmer months, why not pray outside and enjoy the beauty of Mother Nature that God has gifted us with?

- 8) **Try a walking rosary** (sans dog) – Once a week, consider praying a walking rosary. You hold the rosary in your hand and walk in rhythm to the prayer. Now, other people may see you doing this, so you have to be brave and a joyful witness. A priest in our parish used to do this in visible spots around town and it was incredibly powerful to see him walking and praying in the public eye.
- 9) **As you fall asleep** – I received this once as a penance after confession and what a joy it is to drift to sleep with thoughts of Jesus and Mary on your mind. The only downside to this one is you might fall asleep before you get through the entire rosary! Read [Patti Armstrong's post](#) on what happened when she was too tired to pray the rosary.
- 10) **At church** – It's so powerful to pray the rosary in the presence of Jesus or with others in your parish. Make a weekly date with Jesus to sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament or in Adoration to pray the rosary. Or, if your parish has a practice of group prayer of the rosary, join in!
- 11) **While waiting** – How many times do we wait in a day? Waiting in line at the grocery, at the doctor's office, in the school pick-up line? Work in a decade each time you're in line and you'll be done by day's end.

Any other suggestions for ways to work the rosary into your busy life?

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/11-ways-work-rosary-busy-day-lent/>
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A Different Kind of Mother [at Work And Play, Day By Day]

The Monday before Siena was born, we toured the NICU at St. Mary's Children Hospital at the Mayo Clinic. As a part of that tour, we took a shuttle from one part of campus to another part of campus. That shuttle stopped at the Ronald McDonald House and I had the opportunity to see several families with toddler aged children facing very obvious, major medical issues. I can't even begin to tell you how my heart was drawn to these families that day.

I've always had a heart for children with special medical needs or other struggles, but more in a "love them to pieces" kind of way. Teach them the best I could. Support their parents the best I could. Pray for them when there was nothing else to do. But from a distance. The mothering needed was a different kind of mothering, one I could not understand. Not in a repulsed or pitying or bad way... I just couldn't ever imagine wanting that life for myself or for my children.

But that day I knew that in less than 48 hours, I would know if I was embarking on my own journey with a child with medical special needs. We still didn't know the exact problems, but I was just sure that it would be only her kidneys.....well, maybe her bladder too. They would stabilize her and we would go on to look for the best medical solution we could come up with. Maybe a transplant and then she would go on to live a somewhat typical life. But I knew that if she made it we would be off. Off to prove to the medical establishment just how much they don't know. Teach them not to underestimate any child, regardless of pre-existing prognosis.

And I wanted that.

Like I've never wanted anything in my entire life.

I've seen for years the joy that special needs children bring to their families. I could see it on the faces of those moms and dads and toddlers too. I could feel it... even through their worn, down, tired, anxious expressions. I could see it in the way the shuttle driver interacted with the *regulars*. This was not a life to be feared I told myself. A hard cross to carry, definitely...but not to fear. I would learn how to be this different kind of mother. I didn't need to worry, we would all be ok. Sure a surprise perfectly healthy baby would have been great, I'd even prayed for it, but I knew that it wasn't remotely reasonable to expect that. I just had so much faith, that surely God had an amazing ending planned for this little girl that brought so many people together. That He wanted this to end with a glorious testimony on the dignity of human life. How could He not spare her?

Human beings are so arrogant, aren't we?

I think the doctors knew right away that her issues were much, much more severe than expected. They didn't say so to me, but Tim said from the beginning they were simultaneously trying to deal with the most pressing issues and also diagnose what they could of other things. As it turned out, we didn't end up with much more than a laundry list but even with only external evaluation (plus 1 X-ray) she had a significant list of problems to overcome. When they had her initially stabilized, one of the providers ran down the list partially with Tim and reassured him that none of them on their own was un-overcomable but clearly admitted it was more than a lot for one baby.

How much greater the miracle would have been I tell myself! How much greater the story! The ending!
What would it have taken for us to have our miracle?

The truth is that every death and heavenly resurrection is a miracle of its own. Every. Single. One. God can take us messed up humans and turn us into saints? That's a pretty big miracle when you think about it.

God didn't not provide a miracle.

God didn't not spare Siena.

Perhaps God didn't give me the glorious testimony

I

wanted to share.... the one that was happy and easy and fun to read, with cute pictures of a growing baby to go along with it. But He did give

Siena

a glorious testimony all the same.

Siena's story has the most amazing of all endings.

Much better in fact, than what I had planned for her.

What was best for Siena is so difficult to accept because it is not what was best for me.

I can see that and know that and feel that and hear that and believe it... but it is so hard right now to

embrace

all of that. No matter how hard my life would have been at this point in Siena's life, had she survived, I still wish for it. No matter how hard her life would have been, I still want it back. I don't even know what it would have been, but I feel like I have been robbed of it.

I think God maybe knew Siena would need all those issues just to get through my stubborn, thick skull how much more He needed her than I did. I can't say that I've fully accepted that truth, but I can honestly tell you I'm working on it.

A little bit.

Every day.

The love that grew in my heart for this child, long before she was born, is just as real today as it was then. It may even be stronger. My heart is bursting with love for her that feels like it has no where to go. That if I don't use this love that I will lose it and it will be taken away from me...and that would be an even greater loss. My eyes are burning with tears still yet unshed, that I know will someday fall. Siena still has a story to tell, and every fiber of my being is longing to tell it...even though I often can't find the words right now.

I will love her, and I will cry, and I will tell her story.

Because what kind of mother would I be if I didn't?



This contribution is available at <http://www.workandplaydaybyday.com/2015/03/a-different-kind-of-mother.html>
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Lord, I Just Want You! [at Journey to Wisdom]



A reflection on Psalm 131 by Heidi Knofczynski

"Lord, I do not puff myself up or stare about,
or walk among the great or seek wonders beyond me.
Truly calm and quiet I have made my spirit:
quiet as a weaned child in its mother's arms –
like an infant is my soul.
Let Israel hope in the Lord, now and for all time."
Psalm 131

A while ago, in our usual mad rush to get out the door to school on time, my little preschool daughter had a meltdown over her socks. They did not feel right, and there was nothing I could do to make them feel right.

We were already running late for school, there were no socks that were an adequate replacement for the offensive pair she was wearing, so in frustrations I screamed, "I can't help you!! I don't know what you need!"

Crouched on the floor with tears streaming and fists clenched she took a deep breath, and softly said: "I

just want you!”

Sigh! We were late for school.

She climbed up into my lap and wrapped her arms around my neck , sobbed a little more but very quickly relaxed. She was feeling rejected at school, and had no idea how to handle it. In stead of seeking help, she held in her hurt and fear until she could not hold it in anymore. In reality, she just needed a few words to reassure her of her worth and dispel the murmuring worries in her head about what the other girls thought of her. From there she was ready to go forth, quietly forgive them, and be friends again.

Her response epitomizes to me what this Psalm is getting at.

The world is filled with complex problems that we cannot always avoid. We need to have the childlike humility that can cry out to the Lord in times when the murmuring voices confuse us and breed isolating, prideful self-sufficiency in our dealing with the very real hurts and problems that come our way. "Lord, I just need you" should be a constant prayer that rises up out of our hearts. Especially when we feel attacked and misunderstood and are tempted to justify ourselves with empty accomplishments, and puffed up self-justification. We need to allow Him some quiet moments to reassure us of our infinite worth in His heart and to hush the murmuring voices that confuse and distract us. Peace and forgiveness have a chance when we can become like a child resting confidantly in her mother's arms.

Peace and grace,
Heidi

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Repent and Believe! [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]



Repent and Believe

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

This Ash Wednesday as the priest placed ashes on my forehead and said to me, ***“repent and believe”***, I felt the Lord leading me to share with you some of the thoughts the Holy Spirit has been dealing with me on exactly those themes.

As a son of the Catholic Church I am blessed to be part of a community for which coming to “repentance” is a blessing which has permitted me not only enter and continue my spiritual growth within the community but, because of my ability to express my “repentance” through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, has also opened the doors to a deeper intimacy with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in enabling me to experience a continuing Heavenly Presence in my spirit through my frequent participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

I have been saddened, however, because in my ecumenical apostolate I interact with some of my brothers and sisters who are not catholic and with whom the term “repent” has a somewhat negative sensitivity. Now, I love and respect these brothers and sisters very much because I know they are “in Christ” through conversion and Baptism and are very immersed in putting the Word of God to action in their lives. However, I notice that a certain few of these brethren have a skewed understanding of just what “repentance” entails they find it difficult to let the Grace of Repentance do its full work in their spiritual lives and thus limits them in proclaiming the “Good News” of Repentance and Forgiveness to others.

From their point view, repentance is a one-time act that occurs at conversion when one responds in faith

to the proclamation of the crucified Jesus, the son of the Living God as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and those of all mankind. In their manner of thinking we have all been reconciled by Christ's atoning work on the cross, so once we are in Christ why do we need to concern ourselves further with "reconciliation" if God has already reconciled the world to Himself?

One of the things that they overlook is that even though the Father has reconciled the world to Himself, the fullness of that reconciliation cannot be fulfilled until the other party accepts that offer of reconciliation through repentance, by saying, "I'm sorry, I accept your forgiveness". That is what our repentance accomplishes.



These brothers and sisters in Christ that I interact with, apparently do not comprehend that true repentance is not a "work" of man, it is, in reality, a work of grace, in that it is the Holy Spirit at work in us to bring us to the awareness of our break in fellowship with God and the need to ask forgiveness for our transgressions. It is NOT something we do to merit the Father's forgiveness, rather it is an act of faith to access the eternal forgiveness for sin that was paid for by Jesus' Death on the Cross. Our repentance can be likened to the good thief who was crucified at Jesus' side who in his act of repentance said to Jesus, "... **remember me when you come into your kingdom**" or the like the woman with a flow of blood who, when she stretched out her hand to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, He said to her... **"your faith has saved you"**.

"True repentance" is merely the grace of our Baptism continuing its work in our lives so that each day we may reach out and access the grace of salvation, the atonement for our sins that Jesus died for, and whose forgiveness is in the Father's storehouse of Grace in the eternal realm. Repentance is an act of faith to access the forgiveness we need at the moment we become aware that we need forgiveness.

In other words, repentance is merely our acknowledgement that we need God in our lives and that the life we are living at the moment is separating us from Him. Repentance is any word or action we take to turn to God for help in accessing His forgiveness and returning to Him. It is like the decision taken by the "prodigal son" when he became aware of his dire situation in a pig sty, who said to himself, "I don't belong here, I will return to my father's house even if I have to be a servant to my father".

Although we have all been reconciled to the Father through the sacrifice of His Son and His Resurrection, we can only receive that grace of reconciliation through Faith – and repentance is the expression of faith that accesses the Father's forgiveness. It is the act that Paul was referring to when he exhorted the Corinthian community to **"be reconciled with God"**. In that same letter He had already told them that the Father had **"reconciled the world to Himself"** through the sacrifice of His Son and in his letter to the Romans He also said that **"... there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ"**, so, what could he have meant by exhorting them to "be reconciled", unless he was exhorting them to bring their repentance up to date by repenting for your sins up to "today"?

In further explanation regarding repentance, listen to what Paul continues to say to the Corinthians:

“...we entreat also that you not receive the grace of God in vain, for he says, ‘at an acceptable time I listened to you, In a day of salvation I helped you’. Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 6: 1-2)

“... now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter....” (2Cor.7:9-11)

Yes, **“Today is the Day of Salvation”** for all of us, because repentance, in order to be sincere, is necessarily tied to each of our “todays”. This is so because we humans cannot sincerely repent of our future sins, only our past and present sins can be truly repented at any moment in time. For our repentance, in order to be truly sincere in godly sorrow, it can only be valid in each of our “todays”.

That is why, regarding the Great Commission”, Jesus told his disciples to preach the Good News of Repentance for the Forgiveness of Sins to the whole world ...

...saying to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46-48)

And Peter, himself, in fulfilling the command of the Lord, told the crowd at Pentecost to “repent and believe” so that they, themselves, could then be empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

“This Jesus God raised up, to which we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this, which you now see and hear. For David didn’t ascend into the heavens, but he says himself, “The Lord said to my Lord Sit by my right hand, Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’⁸ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized’, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and [then] you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.” (Acts 2:32-39)

Cheap Grace or Costly Grace?

Dieterich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor and theologian in Germany who died for his faith under Hitler's Nazi rule, contrasted "cheap grace" and "costly grace".

"Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves... the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate... Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."

God invites each of us as his friends to his heavenly banquet that we may celebrate with him and share in his joy. Are you ready to feast at the Lord's banquet table?

"Lord Jesus, may I always know the joy of living in your presence and grow in the hope of seeing you face to face in your everlasting kingdom."



If this brief proclamation has stirred you awareness, let us, then, use this time of Lent as a time of quiet mediation on the Word of God, asking the Holy Spirit make us aware of the places in our lives where we have to yield to Him in repentance so that we may be formed as useful instrument for His purposes and Glory.

Praised Be His Holy Name!

Your Brother and fellow servant in Christ ... Bartimaeus

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Scholastica, Benedict, Mary, Martha and Me [at FranciscanMom]

On this feast of St. Scholastica, Father M. read the Gospel story of Martha and Mary, then began his homily with the familiar story about St. Scholastica's prayer to prolong her brother's visit—which was



answered with a storm so severe that St. Benedict was unable to depart. Father mentioned that Benedict was concerned about following the rules—under the Rule he himself had written—and wanted to end the visit in time to return to the monastery by nightfall. Scholastica, on the other hand, wanted to savor the time of prayer and conversation with her brother, and wanted him to stay. When he refused, she took the matter straight to the top. Benedict realized that the storm was no coincidence, and when he called her on it, she replied, “I asked a favor of you, and you refused. I asked a favor of God, and he granted it.”

BOOM.

Father went on to preach about the Gospel. It's one of my favorite passages—even more so after what was said today. First, he said that it's not a bad thing, in and of itself, to be concerned about serving a meal. That's a great comfort to me, as [I'm all about serving meals](#). But here's the best part: **Jesus wasn't chiding Martha because she was working on serving a meal to her guests. He was chiding her because she didn't take into account Whom she was serving.**

Guilty as charged. Every single time.

I guess that's why I have a soft spot for Martha.

St. Benedict, in his efforts to stay true to his Rule, forgot whom he was serving during his visit with his sister. It took her prayer and God's answer in the form of a thunderstorm to show him that his sister, like Mary of Bethany, had “chosen the better part.”

Sts. Benedict & Scholastica image source: [Wikimedia](#).

The Follow-on Question [at The Encouragement of Scripture]

Perhaps you remember the challenge the religious leaders brought to Jesus. You can find it in Luke 20. They said to Him: “By what authority do you do what you do? Tell us.”

Unruffled, Jesus turned the tables on them and said, *“I will also ask you a question: Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”*

The elders suddenly realized their precarious predicament. If they said John’s baptism and teaching were from God, then Jesus would ask the reasonable follow-on question, “Then why didn’t you believe him?” But if they said John’s teaching was his own, or the teaching of others, the people would stone them because they held John to be God’s prophet.

I thought of that exchange when I read this morning St. Paul’s comment in the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians: *“For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

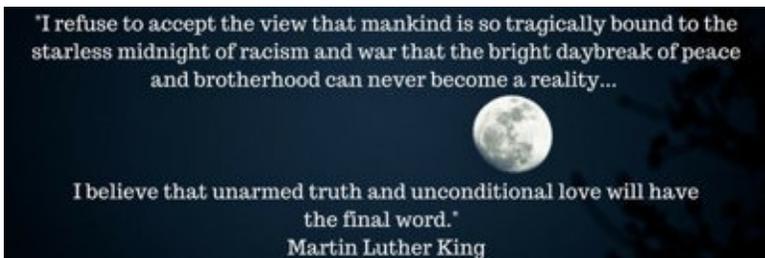
From time to time over the decades I’ve heard some pontificate about the great apostle, whether he got his religious philosophy from himself, or whether he was a little ‘touched’ in the head. Maybe schizophrenic. Or bipolar.

I think we ought to expect Jesus to ask all of us today the same question about Paul as He asked those in His day about John..

And we should be careful how we answer, because He will ask the same follow-on question.

This contribution is available at <http://theencouragementofscripture.blogspot.com/2015/02/the-follow-on-question.html>
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Can I hear my Father's Voice? [at Theologyisaverb]



Can we even imagine a world where none of these exist? In small ways, I believe that we can, because we know the existence of good in knowing God. We have witnessed kindness and compassion, and instances whereby goodness has triumphed over evil. Yet in the kingdom of God, God's goodness and reign is completely sovereign. I am not ready, however, to give up the dream, and diligence toward a world where justice and goodness prevail. In fact, it is in posing this question that I am reminding myself again of that ideal that the kingdom of God reveals to us. In imagining it, it provides the vision to hope for, and the desire to work towards fulfilling it.



With the approach of Lent, I have been giving much thought to our journey of faith as a community, the lifelong invitation of dying to self and accepting a life transformed. The most striking reality is that Jesus also underwent this ongoing transformation of mind, heart, and action (*metanoia*) in becoming more and more who he was intended to be. We know that Jesus

spent countless hours in prayer, and this was time spent in getting to know Abba more intimately, reconnecting with the Spirit, and redirecting his life towards infinite love. In doing so, he could see beyond himself to the poor, oppressed, and those in need of healing. Consciously he then answered God's call to make a transformation not only within himself but in the world.

In understanding the dynamic, ongoing, and transformative conversion of life, we too need to make the *necessary connection* to one's lived experience of faith- as a project of life integration. Simply stated, as Christians our lived experience of faith in the Spirit calls us to continually redirect our hearts, minds and steps towards the values and actions necessary in being followers of Christ and in building the kingdom of God. Beautifully, I do believe we see *metanoia* in community in partaking in the Eucharist. For, here we are invited to bring our brokenness, recommit ourselves to God and the community, and are sent forth to be Eucharist to the world.



Even so, Lent gives us a period of time to reflect on our own desires, to surrender ourselves, and better discern where and who God is calling us to be. Do you feel a spiritual dryness in prayer? Is your day consumed with a laundry list of essential to-do's with your energy and time in short supply? Like Jesus, we need this time with God to hear and become familiar with the voice of our loving Father.

So, in this way, I invite you to consider carving out quiet time and space this Lent to do just that. It needn't be vast, but a committed time each day just to sit, "be still and know that He is God". Pay attention to the stillness, to the absence of your voice, and the freedom found in just being present with God. Feel the Holy Spirit's constant reminder of life in every breath you take.

Thank you God for the gift in rediscovering You. Here in your presence, I know that your love, truth and guidance both for me and for the world are always there to be found..if we truly seek to hear your voice!

The Goodness of "A-Ha" Moments [at bukas palad]



Year B / Lent / 2nd Sunday

Readings: Genesis 22.1-2, 91, 10-13, 15-18 / Psalm 116.10, 15, 16-17, 18-19 (R/v 116.9) / Romans 8.31b-34 / Mark 9.2-10

Have you had an “A-ha” moment? That moment when what you saw, heard or experienced changed your outlook on life or faith? That life-changing moment that altered your sense of identity and purpose?

The “A-ha” moment in Francis of Assisi’s life was when he encountered a leper whom he reached out to in compassion. In this moment, he realized that Jesus was calling him to serve the poor, and not to be rich like his father, a merchant of fine textiles.

The “A-ha” moment in Ignatius of Loyola’s life was when he reflected on the saints as he recuperated from a cannonball injury. In this moment, he realized that Jesus was calling him to be God’s soldier to save souls, and not one to win wars for a Spanish duke.

What about you? Can you remember an “A-ha” moment when Jesus met you, and called you to more Christ-like action?

Our gospel story on this 2nd Sunday of Lent is about an “A-ha” moment in the life of the disciples.

We are all familiar with the story of the Transfiguration: Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain; they see Jesus transfigured; they observe him conversing with Moses and Elijah; Peter offers to build them tents; and they hear God's voice. Yes, in this moment, Jesus' three disciples witness his transfiguration.

More significantly, these disciples themselves undergo a transfiguration. They experience a change within themselves that enables them to hear God's voice announcing Jesus' identity as God's "beloved Son." Their own transfiguration also allows them to hear more clearly the terms of their own discipleship; God asks them to "listen to Jesus."

Their "A-ha" moment is about glimpsing the divine—that God is indeed with them—and learning the truth about being human—that in Jesus they are God's chosen.

Today, we are not just reading about the Transfiguration. We are experiencing the scene unfolding before us; we are witnessing Jesus' being transfigured; we are hearing God's delight in his Son and God's command that we listen to him. Yes, you and I are part of this moment; we are the silent, unmentioned participants in the Transfiguration. And like the disciples, we should be letting God transfigure us in this moment. But are we?

This is the question we must ask ourselves in Lent because Lent is the time for transformation. To answer it, we need to pause and look honestly at the state of our Christian discipleship. How Christ-like is our living and our loving, our praying and our playing, our being in friendship with God and in relationship with one another? If we are honest, I think we will both confess that we can do better.

If the grace of Lent is the promise of being transformed and so transfigured, it calls us to enter more fully into this liturgical moment. Like the Transfiguration called the disciples, so Lent calls us into it not as a calendar time of 40 days but as God's time to redeem and renew us.

The right disposition to enter Lent then cannot be that which we've come to associate with the phrase "carpe diem" (seize the day). All too often we think of Lent as that time we must seize for our conversion. But what use is this attitude if we don't have the deeper disposition to let God change us?

This deeper disposition is described by the main character at the end of Richard Linklater's film,

Boyhood: it is “to let the day seize us, and move us on its ebb and flow.” I see Peter, James and John in today’s gospel story having and practicing this disposition in their lives: they opened themselves to Jesus’ Transfiguration and allowed God to lead them into it and, more importantly, into their own transfiguration. This is the kind of disposition we need to let God transfigure us.

But are you and I open to this moment of Lent and God's plan to transfigure us? Or, are we insisting that we alone must take charge of Lent and control and manipulate how it must fit our plans and our goals?

If we want to let God transfigure us, then, we have to seriously consider our response to the conversion Lent beckons us to.

In last Sunday’s gospel story, Jesus proclaimed that the time of fulfillment is now. Our present time can be one of conversion and fulfillment if we understand that being repentant is about opening ourselves up to God who wishes to set our lives right again. But to open ourselves to God we need honesty to identify the necessary changes we must make, so that we can better cooperate with God’s plan to make us better disciples. I believe this can begin when we say yes to God’s command to “listen to Jesus.” What changes then must you and I make this Lent to truly listen to Jesus?

Becoming more humble is one way. In our first reading, Abraham’s humility to listen to and obey God’s command transfigures his life. It does not lead to Isaac’s death in Abraham’s life but to the perpetuity of life for him through countless descendants.

Today, we are being called to humble ourselves so that we can really listen to Jesus who shows us how to do God’s will, not just for ourselves but also for the community we live in and serve

And why should we bother to listen to Jesus? Because God wants to bless us through Jesus. This blessing will transfigure us more and more into the fullness of God’s image and likeness that Jesus is. Christian discipleship is about growing into Christ-like fullness

And listening to Jesus in humility is the way God instructs us on how best we can be saved, and so realize our truest identity as God’s own. This is why God taught the disciples at the Transfiguration to listen to Jesus.

You and I know that the pressures of life will often keep us from taking the time to stop and listen—to each other, to ourselves, and to God. We are so distracted by so many things in our lives. Yet Lent offers us time to stop and listen to God. It invites us into possibility of being caught up in an “A-ha” moment, or two, each day, and in them, of finding God instructing us to live better and holier lives.

It would be good for us then as each Lenten day closes to name these moments, and to recall God’s instruction in them. And let us also give thanks for them. Why? Because these “A-ha” moments are God’s ways of transfiguring us to better celebrate the coming Easter joy.

My sisters and brothers, dare we miss the goodness of these “A-ha” moments this Lent?

Preached at St Ignatius Church, Singapore

Photo: littlemissmomma.com (internet)

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2015/03/homily-goodness-of-ha-moments.html>
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On A Jet Plane... With Her Five Kids [at Peace Garden Mama]

It's not I but my friend

Sarah who left today. Like, moved, for real and forever, perhaps.

Here we were on Friday in her now-empty, sun-lit family room.



It was her final day in her home, which happens to be just due north of our home, on the other side of the school that comes in between. We just found out, on Friday, that we moved into this neighborhood the same year. Only we didn't know of one another at the time.

Well, I knew of Sarah through her brother, a priest whom I very much admire. I knew he had a sister in town, and that she had five kids, and a statue of Mary in her front yard. But I didn't know she was so physically near to me. I had no idea.

Then last year, at a couple's night out hosted by our church, we landed at the same table. Imagine our surprise when mentioning where in Fargo we lived, we both said the same thing. "We live by (school)." "Really? We do too!"

And then this fall we ended up

in a Bible study together, and that sort of sealed the deal for what has become a flowering friendship built on faith.

Sarah is one of those people that brings life to a room. The two of us often arrived together to our study group. With so many details to tend to before walking out the door, we'd almost always come a little late, flying in together, giggling at our similar habits and inability to be early.

Sarah is the kind of person who, when things get heavy and deep, can immediately bring light and clarity and joy to a situation. It's a gift, and we all knew it, but you kind of take it for granted. You just assume, well, this is the way it will always be. This person will always be around to sprinkle joy like this.

And then the announcement, and the "for sale" sign, and the goodbye party, and the attempt to put on a happy face. Because as Christians, we know that we never really say goodbye, and that it's selfish, really,

to think that we ought to have a person all to ourselves. Especially when someone brings joy, we know well that God is likely wanting them to spread that around a little. And yet, we can admit it. It's still hard. Especially when it's someone like Sarah.

And we both felt and verbalized this, too: a tinge of regret. To think that all those years, we could have been stopping by one another's home for tea, coffee, to commiserate about some of the challenges of being in the club of Moms of 5. Not only Moms of 5, but moms who both experienced a sixth pregnancy after child number two, along with the loss of that third child. And each of us, not knowing of the other at the time, named our child who made that quick trip to heaven "Gabriel."

God's ways are surprising

, and often not predictable. I had been getting to know Sarah more this year, and then, right at the end, in those sacred hours before leaving for good, she opened up her home to me, emptied out the contents of her fridge, brought me on a tour of her empty house, and cried with me over things that are on my mother heart, not to mention rejoiced with me over good things that are happening. It was a meeting that might have seemed too late, and yet it gave us a chance to laugh when her teenage son, promising to take a nice photo of us, decided to click prematurely to get this lovely shot (Sarah is very expressive and uses lots of hand gestures, and I love her all the more for it!):



We could go on mourning lost chances, or perhaps it would be much better to see the blessing that we did meet after all. Because as we hugged goodbye, the moving van looming large and long and sucking the contents of her home to be transported hundreds of miles from our Fargo neighborhood...



...I felt something happening. The deepening of a bond that, though late in coming perhaps, came all the same. And because we live in the age we do, this separation does not have to be so hard. We can stay in touch, continue to share the highs and lows, be comrades to one another in the journey ahead.

I'm trying to focus on that

now. I must. Because saying goodbye is hard no matter what. It just is. But this isn't the end. This is, in a way, the beginning. God found a way to bring us together late, so there must be a reason for that. I am eager to learn what He has in mind for this friendship, even from afar.

Now, more than ever, we're counting on those little ones, those third babies who slipped past us all too quickly, our children we did not have adequate time to love, to be lights to us, and intercede from above. Sarah, in particular, needs a few prayers as she makes this move to her new home in Colorado, where her husband has been already working at his new job for a while now.

I can't help but call upon St. Raphael, patron saint of travelers, to help usher her through. It's a good one to have near for anyone who will be traveling at any point in the future. It is not just about the traveling, but what we're to find along the way and on the other side.

Prayer to St. Raphael for Travelers

"O Raphael, lead us toward those we are waiting for, toward those who are waiting for us: Raphael, Angel of happy meeting, lead us by the hand toward those we are looking for. May all our movements be guided by your light and transfigured with your joy.

"Angel, guide of Tobias, lay the request we now address to you at the feet of Him on whose unveiled face you are privileged to gaze. Lonely and tired, crushed by the separations and sorrows of life, we feel the need of calling you and of pleading for the protection of your wings, so that we may not be as strangers in the province of joy, all ignorant of the concerns of our country. Remember the weak, you who are strong, you whose home lies beyond the region of thunder, in a land that is always peaceful, always serene and bright with the resplendent glory of God.

"Amen."

Ah, Sarah, I miss you already, but I feel so blessed to have known you in any measure. I am already anticipating the next hug with those incredible Colorado mountains that beckon so beautifully in the background!



Q4U: When did a meeting that seemed to come too late become a blessing to you all the same?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.blogspot.com/2015/02/meaningful-mondays-on-jet-planewith-her.html>

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Washing Windows



Sometimes things happen in this world that are confusing, frustrating and downright discouraging. We may feel that God isn't even on our side and prayer is pointless. We can think that what's going to happen is going to happen and we have no control over it – even petitioning through prayer.

To an extent, I can understand where that is true – our all-powerful omnipotent and all-merciful loving God does have our lives in his hand. He has plans for our lives that are better than the plans we have for ourselves. So how does asking for what we need or want through prayer change anything?

What I've figured out is that prayer may not change us or our circumstances but it does change us.

Maybe it's a bit like the windows of my house that I keep looking through. Covered with winter grime, it is hard to see the brightness of the sunshine outside. Washing those windows allows more light, clear bright light, to shine into the house and brighten everything it touches, even if the day is still cold outside.

In the same way, prayer can shine up the window to our hearts. It may not change our situation, but it can change our perspective. It can open us up to God's mercy and grace. We can feel his presence in our lives, even if the world outside is cold and bitter.

Prayer can illuminate how God is working everything for good – for His good. And the beauty of prayer is that others can wash our windows for us. Loved ones' prayers can lift us up and soften our hearts to receive the goodness of God and His graces. When others pray for us, especially in times that we cannot pray for ourselves, all the work is done for us and we have but to receive his love.

May we all scrub our own and our loved ones' windows a little harder during this Lenten season to allow God to shine through the darkness and shower us with His graces.

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/our-kids/washing-windows/>
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As it is the first week of Lent I am congratulating myself on the steps that I have taken to prepare well for Easter.

First I have made the usual meaningful but ordinary commitments towards keeping my Lenten resolutions. Here it is – already day two and so far so good!

Second, I have prepared a new batch of *English Pale Ale* which will be ready precisely on Easter Sunday.



Everything the ambitious Brewer needs including ingredients for an English Pale Ale.

You see, again I need to point out how Liberal Education endows its recipient with enormous power to face crosses and tribulations. It enables one to scan bleak horizons, scope out dark places, examine desert wastes and find the spark of hope, the point of light, the candle flickering ever so faintly at the end of the difficult path!



The Carboy-and everything else- needs to be carefully cleansed.

But in my case, I do not see a flickering candle at the end of this years' Lenten journey. No, I see a burst of glory and the veritable Super Nova, that is Christ's Resurrection from the tomb, and what's more, *I also see* over two cases of a very fine Pale Ale, some of which will enable me to celebrate that Resurrection with more propriety.



My helpers fill the sack-really a very large tea bag- with the crushed caramel malt grains.

Lent was specifically designed for brewing beer. The reason for this is obvious. Beer takes exactly 40 days (more or less) to ferment and grow from a weak sweet slop of "wort" into a fine, noble, life-giving,

heart-cheering, spiritually-enhancing liquid – whose foam raises itself in the glass as does incense in the chapel. Forty days exactly! (more or less)



The crushed caramel grains placed in 2.5 gallons of water at 157 degrees.



Twenty minutes later the grains are removed. Now it is 2.5 gallons of “Wort!”

Of course we fast and pray for forty days first primarily in imitation of our Lord. And then of course we are reminded of all the things that foreshadowed our Lord’s salvific action: the forty years that the Jews wandered in the desert, God’s cleansing of the world with rain and flood for forty days and forty nights in the time of Noah, Elijah’s fasting for forty days at Mt. Horeb, the people of Nineveh who fasted for forty days in sack-cloth and ashes and thus averted punishment, Moses’ fasting for forty days on Mount Sinai.



Now we pour in the absolutely scrumptious Liquid Malt Extract... Yummy!

But the same period of time is also roughly speaking an ideal space for brewing beer, and therefore I think it is obvious that this is a fitting thing for Christians to do in the first week of Lent.



Then comes the Dry Malt Extract... Two bags. This is a sweet Wort.

I haven't thought carefully enough about the spiritual significance of brewing beer. I am certain that St Paul would see a deeper significance than I since he was the master of seeing the invisible things of God through the visible things of this earth.



All that Malt appears to lower the boiling point. We have to be very careful not to let it boil over.



Next Comes the East Kent Golding Hops



Now apparently the [superstitious](#) among us think that Hops brings peaceful sleep, prevents nightmares and encourages “lucky number dreams.” But the liberally educated soul knows better and sees a deeper spiritual significance in Hops. Hops is a “bittering” herb. Hops puts the bitter in beer, and therefore [Hops](#) is an excellent herb to contemplate during Lent. Hops is to beer what salt is to food. And Christians should be the salt of the earth! By a simple extension we might say that Christians are the hops of the earth!



After brewing for sixty minutes, the wort needs to be cooled quickly. Winter snow is perfect – another reason why Lent is a time for brewing.



Steady.... The Wort is transferred to the Carboy.



Now we top things off with some fresh water at about 70 degrees.



Taking the first specific gravity reading- Brewing beer requires no small grasp of science!

You might think that it is a stretch to see spiritual significance in brewing beer. But who can deny the subtle likeness – although through a glass darkly- that the fermentation process has to the development of virtue in the soul. The Wort will now go into a dark place (near my furnace under a towel) where the yeast will gradually disappear and something more powerful will result.



Nottingham Ale Yeast



I can't wait for Easter!

This contribution is available at <http://lionandox.com/2015/02/20/liberal-education-and-brewing-beer/>
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The Assumption of Mary: Is It Reasonable To Believe? [at Reasonable Catholic]



Catholics hold that God permitted Mary, the mother of Jesus, to be taken up body and soul to heaven. This belief is commonly called the the *Assumption of Mary*.

On November 1, 1950, Pius XII declared to the entire Christian Church the following statement:

“...by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that **the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory**” (*Munificentissimus Deus*)

Hence, the age old Christian tradition of the bodily Assumption of Mary was confirmed infallibly by the successor of St. Peter, head of the apostles.

Now let's be clear — this date in 1950 did not mark the “invention” of the doctrine. Rather, Pope Pius XII saw a need to make it *clear* to the faithful what was the constant apostolic teaching and not a doctrine up for a debate. It was a re-affirmation of an antiquity-old doctrine.

But does Pope Pius XII and the rest of the Catholic faithful have reasonable grounds to proclaim such an event as true history? This is what this post is aiming to explore — whether there is good reason to believe that Mary was taken up into heaven, body and soul, at the end of her earthly life.

I have listed what I believe to be eight good reasons to believe in the Assumption. This is not to say that there aren't more. If you wish to add to the list feel free to drop a comment below. If you have disagreements with any of the reasons given, your constructive comments are welcome too!

8 Reasons To Believe The Assumption Is True

1. No Scripture verse explicitly denies the assumption of Mary or the possibility of such an event. A person who subscribes to the “Bible alone” as the rule of faith cannot deny the possibility of Mary's assumption on merely biblical grounds. The Bible is silent on this topic regarding Mary specifically. It is not by the Scriptures alone, but by sacred oral Tradition that Catholics believe this dogma (2 Thess 2:15).

***As a “negative proof” this is not to be considered true evidence FOR the Assumption, but rather, as a response to the charge that “the Assumption contradicts what the Bible says.” (see my response to a great point from James in the “Comments” section below.)*

2. The idea of such an assumption does exist in the Scriptures. “Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death” according to the Old and New Testaments (see Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5). Elijah was also taken into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). Although there is still some discussion on what actually happened here (particularly with Enoch) the best explanation is still believed by many to be that they these men really were assumed to heaven. Lastly, consider the “two witnesses” in the Book of Revelation who go up to heaven “in a cloud” (Rev 11:12).

For a recent article by Jimmy Akin on the taking up of Elijah and Enoch click [here](#).

3. An assumption is not an ascension. The resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven by His own infinite power. Mary was assumed into heaven by God’s infinite power. There is a fundamental difference between these two types of event. Therefore, we cannot say “Elijah *did* assume into heaven” but must say “Elijah was assumed” implying that it was not something he did but something *done to him* by the power of God. Thus both the Ascension of Jesus and the Assumption of Mary glorify God but in subtly different ways.

4. Not all Christian doctrines need to be found explicitly in the Bible. What belongs in the New Testament canon of Scripture, for example, is not outlined *in* Scripture. Therefore, all Christians continue to rely on an outside, extrabiblical tradition — and the authority of the Church — to know what actually belongs in the Bible and what does not. Apostolic oral traditions have been revered as the Word of God since the beginning (see 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 2:15; 1 Pet 1:25). Included in this apostolic deposit of faith that spans two millennia is the Assumption of Mary.

5. If there’s ever existed any creature whose body should be preserved from corruption, it is Mary’s. According to the Scriptures, Mary is “full of grace” (Lk 1:28), favored by God (Lk 1:30), “overshadowed” by the Most High as the Ark of the New Covenant (Ex 40:35; 2 Samuel 6:2-11; Lk 1:35; Lk 1:39-56; Rev 11:19), “blessed among women” (Lk 1:42), the mother of our Lord Jesus (L 1:43) and to be called blessed by “all generations” (Lk 1:38). If God was going to assume anyone into heaven as a foreshadowing of the bodily resurrection that awaits all of us (as we profess in the Creeds), surely, it would be fitting if He chose Mary.

6. With God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). If God can give humans the power to cast out devils and carry out miraculous healings, there is no reason that God could not “assume” Mary, His mother, into heaven. God can do all things logically possible. Therefore, since the Assumption is an act of love by God and thus not contradictory to His nature (1 John 4:8), and since He is all-powerful, the Assumption is entirely within His scope of action.

7. There are no first class (bodily) relics of Mary. In 156 A.D an account of Polycarp of Smyrna’s martyrdom (Polycarp was a disciple of John the apostle) mentions the taking of his bones by his fellow Christians for veneration. His bones, which would qualify as first class relics, were described in this 2nd century account as “more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold.” From a biblical perspective, the veneration and spiritual value of relics is perhaps most explicitly revealed in [2 Kings 13:21](#), when a dead man is revived after touching Elisha’s bones (see also Acts 5:12-15 & Acts 19:11-12) . Even today, the Church venerates first class relics of first century Christians such as Sts. Peter, John, Philip and Paul (this is not an exhaustive [list](#)).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

“...relics are not magic. They do not contain a power that is their own; a power separate from God. Any good that comes about through a relic is God’s doing” (828)

Surely if Mary had not been assumed bodily, the Christian people would have taken great measures to preserve her sacred remains as they did with other great early century Christian figures; or they would have at least made a record of where her remains were. But we have no such thing.

For more on the Christian veneration of relics click [here](#) and [here](#).

8. Early Christians wrote about the the Assumption of Mary.

Timothy of Jerusalem wrote at the beginning of the 5th century:

“Therefore the Virgin is immortal to this day, seeing that he who had dwelt in her transported her to the regions of her assumption” (*Homily on Simeon and Anna* [A.D. 400]).

John the Theologian wrote also at the beginning of the 5th century:

“And from that time forth all knew that the spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise” (*The Falling Asleep of Mary* [A.D. 400]).

Gregory of Tours wrote in the 6th century:

“But Mary, the glorious Mother of Christ, who is believed to be a virgin both before and after she bore him, has, as we said above, been translated into paradise, amid the singing of the angelic choirs, whither the Lord preceded her” (*Eight Books of Miracles* 1:8 [A.D. 584])

This contribution is available at <http://www.reasonablecatholic.com/the-assumption-of-mary-is-it-reasonable-to-believe/>
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Goddaughters, Godmothers and the Invisible String [at Sue Elvis Writes]

My Goddaughter writes wonderful letters, and whenever I see one of them in my mail box, I smile. I rip open the envelope, unfold the paper and words, brimming with personality, jump off the page towards me.

I always intend to reply to my Goddaughter's letters straight away but I never do. I feel bad about this. I imagine Miss Augusta watching out for the postman each day and feeling disappointed when he hasn't got a letter for her. But she won't be sad at the moment. Oh no! She'll be smiling. You see, she should have received a fat envelope from me by now.

I used to buy blank cards and write my letters in them by hand. But these days I write my letters on the computer. Is that cheating? I find it easier. One advantage of computer letters is I can insert photos between the words, which I hope my Goddaughter enjoys. Usually I apply a fancy font to make everything look attractive, print off the pages and stuff them into an envelope, before walking up to the village post office to buy a stamp.

My Goddaughter is very forgiving. She never complains when it takes me a long time to reply. She just keeps on writing to me regardless. I think that's very special. Miss Augusta is special through and through. Whenever I see her, she runs towards me with her arms open wide, and then she gives me the most enormous hugs. She makes me feel very loved.

I intend to watch my Goddaughter grow up. I want to be there every step of the way. And later, I hope to remain part of her adult life. I'd like those lively letters to keep dropping into my mailbox. I want to feel those beautiful arms about me forever.

But even if letters stop flying between us, or we can't for some reason enjoy huge hugs, Miss Augusta and I will still remain connected for always because of an invisible spiritual bond. I'm on one end and she is on the other. And it will always be that way.

Now it is time for Lizzie's favourite part of the story. "Tell me about the bond," she begs. "Tell me about the invisible string."

Auntie Caroline laughs. "All Godparents are joined to their Godchildren by a special bond. It's not really like invisible string.

Joe interrupts. "If it was like string," he says, "you'd keep getting tangled up and you'd never be able to go anywhere without each other."

Lizzie giggles thinking of all the knots that would soon appear if there were a bit of string joining her to Auntie Caroline and Uncle Rick.

(I can imagine Miss Augusta giggling just like Lizzie when she reads those words.)

This Angels story snippet comes from a chapter called *The Mother's Day*. Lizzie's Godmother has come to visit on that special day. Later, Mum thinks about her own Godmother, Auntie Maria.

I'm now thinking about my own Godmother too. I didn't really know her. Her name was Grace: Auntie Grace. I only have a vague memory of what she looked like. I grew up on the other side of the world from her, and only travelled to see her once or twice.

Despite the distance between us, my Godmother's influence will remain with me for the whole of my life. When I arrived in this world, my Godmother thought it was her Godmotherly privilege to name me. She wanted to call me Diane. My parents didn't. But they did add that name after the two they'd chosen themselves. And so I was christened Susan Caroline Diane. Three Christian names. Of course my sisters and brother, in their turn, had to have three Christian names too. A new tradition was born.

Imagine if my first name was Diane.

Lady Di Elvis

Doesn't that sound grand?

And it's grand being a Godmother to Miss Augusta.

I wonder if my Goddaughter likes the grand name I've given her for my story.

This contribution is available at <http://www.sueelviswrites.com/2015/02/goddaughters-godmothers-and-invisible.html>
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Primrose I [at Grace to Paint]

by Maresa Lilley, SND on March 5, 2015 · [0 comments](#)

in [Paintings](#)

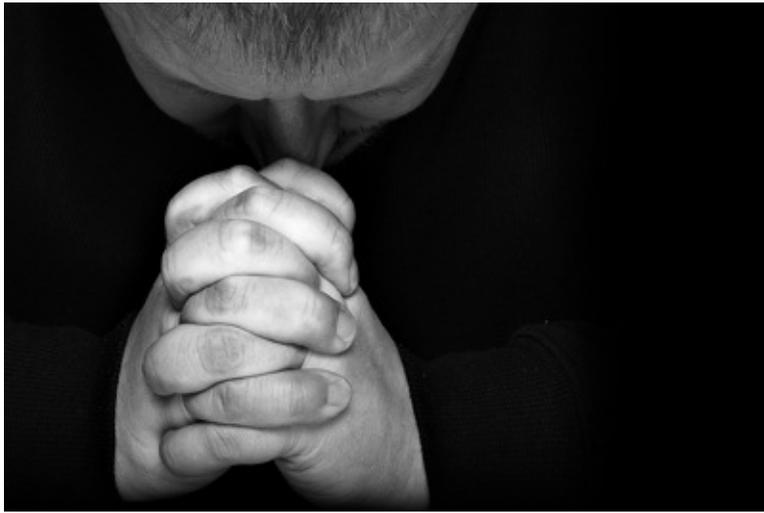


8×8" oil paint on gessoed artist board; use “comment” below to inquire.

This attractive red and white primrose posed amiably for me in a morning session of painting. I could not resist her beauty, nor her fragrance.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2015/03/05/primrose-i/>
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Avoiding Scrupulosity - Mt 7 [at Adult Catechesis & Christian Religious Literacy in the Roman Catholic Tradition]



A healthy, mature Catholic faith requires refraining and protecting oneself from scrupulosity. What is scrupulosity? Read on. Beware of malpracticing, even well intentioned clerics, bishops, Orders, laypeople and groups. They ARE out there. Go where by parish, priest, people, His everlasting mercy and love are embraced, practiced, and offered. **JOY IS YOUR EVERLASTING BAPTISMAL RIGHT!!!!** Especially among the purported faithful. It is their baptismal obligation to ensure this for you!!! NEVER settle. NEVER! He is worth not settling!!! And, so ARE YOU, in His image and likeness. Require you be treated as such. Require it! Always! NO exceptions!!!! NONE!!! The Lord demands, requires, and orders it so!!! Jn 13:34. Loving Jesus DOES NOT mean or ever imply being a door mat, or close, or worse. Suffering is part of life. Pray for those who cause it for you, but abuse is never ok, especially anywhere near or around church, ever.

If you don't feel like you are in the presence of Jesus Himself among others (esp. Christians!), you're in the wrong place! If you're pressured, made to feel bad, instead of being gently counseled to consider your actions and their effect on yourself, others, your soul, your future, its implications if you continue, you're in the wrong place. Trust me. Been around the Catholic block...a little. HEALTHY Catholic clergy and laypeople ARE the majority. Be discriminating in this vital area. The love and mercy of the Lord does not hurt. Quite the contrary. Seek out a healthy and well-balanced confessor. Trust in His (the Lord's, and hopefully, your confessor's) 😊 everlasting mercy. That is not presumption, that is Divine Mercy. Divine Mercy!! Divine Mercy!!! Amen. Amen. Amen. Praise Him! Praise Him, Church!!!

-by Rev. Thomas M. Santa CSSR (*Fr. Thomas M. Santa, a Redemptorist priest, holds masters degrees in religious education and divinity. He is director of Scrupulous Anonymous and president and publisher of St. Louis-based Liguori Publications. His book [Understanding Scrupulosity](#) is available from Amazon.*)

“The Vatican II document “Church in the Modern World”(*Gaudium et Spes*) offers a beautiful image of the center of the human person: “Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: Do this; shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by

God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged.” For each human person, our conscience — the core of our being — can be a place where we are “alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths” (16).

For most people of faith, such an image is appealing. But for some the thought of communicating this intimately with the Lord produces a feeling not of comfort but of terror. Such people are convinced that because of the presence of evil in their life, God must be displeased with them. As a result, any sin — any manifestation of weakness or imperfection, often the most minute and insignificant — becomes their primary preoccupation, and an intimate relationship with the Lord is impossible.

This type of affliction is often called a “tender conscience,” but a more accurate description of people who suffer in this way is that they are scrupulous. Every priest who has ever sat in the confessional is well aware of such people’s spiritual struggle. Indeed, all those in the helping professions — priests, ministers, spiritual directors, and assorted health professionals — have individuals come to them seeking relief from the torment of the “thoughts that will not go away.” The scrupulous conscience is not the place of comfort and sanctuary that the Fathers of the Vatican Council speak about. It is a place of anxiety, frustration, and the never-ending struggle to determine what is sinful and what is not.

For people who have never struggled with a scrupulous conscience, this description might come as a surprise. In common usage, the word *scrupulous* means strict, careful, or exact. For example, we might speak favorably about a lawyer who scrupulously prepares his case so that every detail is studied or an accountant who scrupulously reviews his client’s balance sheet. But in the formation of conscience, scrupulosity is an altogether different thing.

What Is Scrupulosity?

In Catholic moral teaching, *scrupulosity* defines the spiritual and psychological state of a person who erroneously believes he is guilty of mortal sin and is therefore seldom in a state of grace. A scrupulous person has difficulty making choices and decisions even though he desires above all else to please God and to follow God’s law. For a scrupulous person, it isn’t that he doesn’t “carefully attend to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church” (as the *Catechism* teaches), but that he becomes overwhelmed with the details and nuances that may be present in the decision.

An example of the “crooked thinking” of a scrupulous conscience may be helpful. All of us are aware of the need to abstain from all food and beverages for one hour before the reception of Communion at Mass. We are aware that this is one of the conditions the Church expects us to fulfill for the worthy reception of the sacrament. We are also aware that this is nowhere as demanding as the previous prescription for a three-hour fast — or the even older fast from midnight of the night before — that was once part of our spiritual practice. Most of us do not become preoccupied with the prescription because it is so easily followed.

This is not the case for a scrupulous person. One hour is sixty minutes fraught with the possibility of making a mistake. There is confusion over what constitutes breaking the fast. For example, does lipstick break the fast? Or say a piece of food is dislodged from your teeth, despite your best efforts at brushing and flossing, and you inadvertently swallow it. Does this action break the fast? Or perhaps the celebrant is a little quicker today than normal and you are not sure you’ve fasted for the entire sixty-minute period. What to do? To receive Communion may well be to risk sacrilege, the deliberate and unworthy reception of the Body of Christ.

Imagine how a person might feel consumed in this way by the doubt, fear, and anxiety of scrupulosity. One author described the experience of scrupulosity as “a thousand frightening fantasies” and yet another author as the “doubting disease.” Despite a person’s best efforts, despite his absolute commitment to the moral teaching of the Church, and despite his desire to serve the Lord, he is unable to arrive at a point of peace, confident that he’s done as much as can reasonably be required.

Formation Of Conscience

The Vatican Council teaches that, “in forming their consciences the faithful must pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church” (*Dignitatis Humanae* 14). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* takes up the theme: “Man strives to interpret the data of experience and the signs of the times assisted by the virtue of prudence, by the advice of competent people, and by the help of the Holy Spirit” (1788). The informed conscience that emerges from this experience of formation can guide and lead a person on the path to the kingdom. Unfortunately, the *Catechism* does not specifically address the scrupulous person when it teaches about the duty to acquire a well-formed conscience.

That being the case and despite the obstacles, a scrupulous person may well be formed correctly and possess the knowledge of what is sinful and what may not be sinful. In fact, those who minister to the scrupulous find that they are often well versed in the moral law and the Commandments. What seems to be missing is the skill necessary to apply the moral law to the choices and the decisions that are a part of daily living.

How is it possible to know the objective truth yet be unable to apply it to daily life? Psychologists suggest that the key to understanding the scrupulous condition may lie in the childhood experiences of scrupulous individuals. Perhaps there was a rigid and repressive atmosphere in the home or too much of an emphasis on strict adherence to rules. Perhaps the parents were rigidly religious and overprotective. Negative attitudes expressed about God, morality, and sexuality — especially if these attitudes were communicated by authority figures — might also provide some sort of insight into how the condition was acquired.

Recent research suggests that scrupulosity may well be best described as a type of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). People who suffer from OCD experience obsessive thoughts that they cannot control about such things as aggressive acts, recurring thoughts involving obscene language, and constant focus on thoughts of germs and disease. Compulsive acts might include repeated dressing and undressing or the need to repeat certain words or phrases again and again. (Jack Nicholson gave a compelling portrayal of OCD behavior in the 1997 movie *As Good As It Gets*.) Continuing research into the possible connection between OCD and scrupulosity offers the potential for understanding the affliction that can only help future pastoral care.

From a religious viewpoint, the factor that seems most prevalent in the development of scrupulosity is a negative image of God. There is an exaggerated fear of all that is sacred manifested in any encounter with God or the Church. The sacraments — especially the Eucharist and confession — provide the most opportunity for anxiety. Prayer, both private and communal, often causes the anxiety and frustration identified with scrupulosity.

Regardless of how the scrupulous person got that way, the formation of his conscience, even with the best education and training, is a secondary concern — and may even be counterproductive — until the scrupulosity is identified and addressed. The moral freedom necessary to make sound decisions is absent. Since there is not present “ignorance of Christ and his gospel, enslavement to one’s passion, assertion of a

mistaken notion of autonomy” (CCC 1791), perhaps the pastoral concern should not be to form a conscience but rather to help the person be freed from his scrupulosity — or if not freed, at least to experience some relief.

Scrupulous people hopefully realize that it is not because of a lack of effort on their part or because of a lack of commitment to God's will that they suffer this affliction. Although the root cause of scrupulosity is not known, the person who suffers most certainly does not choose it. The fear and the anxiety that scrupulosity produces within the person as he strives to do the will of God are symptoms of the affliction and not an indication that the person is somehow displeasing to God. Because of their suffering, it is not too much of an assumption to believe that the Lord must be preparing a special place for the scrupulous.

The Traditional Pastoral Approach

In order to seek some relief or sense of assurance, scrupulous people often fall into a pattern of constant confession, spiritual direction, or professional counseling. Often the scrupulous person is seeing several people for counsel, each of whom is unaware of the others and is repeating advice and giving direction. More often than not the scrupulous person exhausts the people who are attempting to help. This leads to frustration in the helper and panic in the scrupulous person.

For this reason, a single, trained, patient, and informed confessor remains the best help and hope for the scrupulous person. This approach has as its source no less of an authority than St Alphonsus Liguori, bishop and doctor of the Church, patron of moral theologians — and also a person who suffered from scrupulosity and who is known to have worn out the confessors of Naples in his search for relief. St Alphonsus teaches, “I tell you that you should implicitly trust in obedience your confessor. This advice is given by all of the doctors of the Church and the holy fathers as well. In short, obedience to your confessor is the safest remedy which Jesus Christ left us for quieting the doubts of conscience, and we should give thanks for it.”

Despite the recommendation of the saint, it is often difficult for a person with scrupulosity, even if he recognizes the wisdom of the advice, to enter into a relationship with a single confessor. It is challenging to find a priest confessor who is willing to commit to this kind of relationship, often because of a feeling of inadequacy. Even if a priest confessor can be found, the scrupulous person is often hesitant to commit to one person to direct his spiritual growth because of a fear that he may have chosen someone who is not well trained or who is perhaps too patient and kind.

Regardless of how the scrupulous person might feel, he must force himself to choose this remedy. Not coincidentally, ultimate relief from the affliction of scrupulosity lies in the choice to act against fear and doubt.

Although commitment to a single confessor is of primary importance, another help is available. Understood as supportive and supplementary to the work of the confessor and the grace of the Holy Spirit, membership in Scrupulous Anonymous (SA) is also recommended.

SA has no meetings. It accomplishes its work through correspondence and the mutual prayer and support of its members. The primary vehicle for this correspondence is a monthly newsletter, *Scrupulous Anonymous*. Edited by a priest director, the newsletter is sent free to all who request it. During the more than thirty-five years that SA has been in existence, its members have demonstrated repeatedly that those who follow the direction of a single confessor and who use the monthly helps and encouragement that are

provided in the newsletter can enjoy support and relief in their struggle. Often they are able to escape altogether the torment of scrupulosity.

The SA newsletter, suitable for both those who suffer from scrupulosity and their priest confessors, may be obtained by writing to SA, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, Missouri, 63057. Names and addresses, as well as all correspondence, are confidential.

A spiritual director is a good choice for all people who desire to progress in spiritual growth and development. But for the scrupulous person, such an individual is essential. Scrupulosity is a terrible spiritual affliction that makes it difficult for a person to believe in the mercy and forgiveness of a loving Father. Despite their best efforts and their commitment to moral teaching and the Commandments, scrupulous persons struggle daily on their spiritual journey. Working together with a trained and patient confessor, a scrupulous person can learn to act against his compulsion and slowly come to know the peace and confidence promised to those of good faith.”

You may also enjoy: <http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/scrupulosity-the-occupational-hazard-of-the-catholic-moral-life>

Love,
Matthew

This contribution is available at <http://soul-candy.info/2015/02/scrupulosity/>
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bring into marriage.

Why am I sharing this? I've spent the better part of the last seventeen years working with teenagers. One thing a good number of you are concerned about is relationships – and I hear a lot more regrets about from teenagers about what you have compromised and done in relationships than any other aspect of your lives, hands down. On a weekend when we celebrated Valentine's day – on a Saturday, no less – I'd like to offer you the best two pieces of advice I learned along the way during my decade of dating.

1) Love comes first. I don't mean the butterflies-in-your-stomach twitterpated feeling, or the lack of control that raging hormones can sometimes bring over us... but rather a genuine care and concern for the person you are dating. Dr. Seuss once expressed a beautiful truth in the book *Horton Hears a Who* – that a person is a person, no matter how small. We can talk about the value of each human life – particularly the most vulnerable (the unborn, the elderly, the sick, the marginalized...) – but we ought to always recognize that our dates are people, too. They aren't a prize we have to show off to our friends, gloating that we have someone and they don't. They aren't someone to use to make ourselves feel good. St. John Paul II wrote that every person “...*is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.*”

2) Aim for no regrets. This is easier than you think, and starts by thinking through clearly the purpose you have for dating. Mary Beth Bonacci, one of my youth ministry instructors says that: “***Dating is for dumping***” and that “***Real love means never having to say ‘I’m sorry I messed up your life.’***” She means that ultimately, you date with the idea that you're trying to discover (or discern) if this person is the person – or sort of person – you could commit to love for a lifetime. And at the moment that you realize the answer is no, out of genuine love for the other person, you should end it. (Likewise, if you see that right from the start – no matter how attractive the person is, or what it might do for your reputation, you also say no.) This doesn't even begin to explore those who pressure you for photos or physical gratification... but there's a huge red flag there, too.

The reality is that to be in a relationship – and to feel loved, no matter how flawed that love might be – is a powerful experience. Every one of us wants to feel loved by someone else, and at times, the desire to feel loved can overwhelm every rational part of who we are. But to feel loved and to actually be loved are not always the same thing. Real love is sacrificial, and looks out for the good of the other person first – not hanging on to the “trophy” of a boyfriend or girlfriend, and not trying to use the other person to make oneself feel better. Surround yourself with people who care about you enough to call into question those moments where you're tempted to compromise things for that (fleeting) feeling. Studies say that the average romantic obsession lasts *two years* (often even less time during your high school years) so you need to build a relationship on something much more. What our faith offers us first and foremost is the understanding that we are positively loved by the God who IS love. [*One of the things I learned to look for in the girls I dated was someone who loved God more than they loved me, and though this was the reason one young lady left me for religious life, it's probably the most important advice I was ever given.*]

Ultimately, on the day our relationships end – as most of them do – we want to be able to say that we acted towards our boyfriends/girlfriends out of a genuine sense of love: seeing them always as a person first. The hope is that their future boyfriends, girlfriends, and eventually their spouses – can walk up to us and say “thank you for the way you treated him/her.” After all, this person you are dating is a son or daughter of the almighty God – created in His image and likeness, beloved by Him... just like you are.

Treat them with love now... and you'll be able to say years later that you still love them.

This contribution is available at <http://www.iamthird.ca/still-love-ex-girlfriend/>
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Going Beyond [at Renew The Church Blog]

An internet search for *Rediscover Catholicism* by Matthew Kelly leads to countless glowing reviews of and praises for the book. Many, many Catholics have been greatly blessed and newly motivated in their faith, because of this book. It has proved to be a strong encouragement for Catholics toward a new confidence and a positive attitude concerning their faith, and their Church.

This article, and the next – “Going Beyond ‘*Rediscover Catholicism*,’ Part II” – are written for those who have already read the book and will not need a summary of it to understand what I write here. I write these articles, however, to point out for those who have read the book, that there are some things missing in the book – serious and important things – that Catholics need to know about, concerning the path to the vocation given us all, and encouraged in the book: our vocation to holiness. These articles, I hope, can build upon what began with *Rediscover Catholicism*, and can help the reader progress even further toward our holy vocation.

The Self-Centered Context of our Culture

Christ, and His Church, call us to holiness and to the perfection of charity. Mr. Kelly rightly identifies this crucially important call, our Christian vocation: “Holiness is the goal of the Christian life.” (p. 72) He also rightly places our vocation in the midst of a culture set in opposition to the vocation – a culture having prevailing philosophies of individualism (“What’s in it for me?”), hedonism (“If it feels good do it”), and minimalism (“What is the least I can do?”). (pp. 35-39). Mr. Kelly places strong emphasis on the need for Christian discipline, which opposes the prevailing hedonism, and he strongly emphasizes the need to strive even heroically to advance in the Christian life, which opposes the prevailing minimalism of the culture. That much is good. What remains, however, is the matter of individualism: “What’s in it for me?”

Mr. Kelly appeals to, rather than opposes, this prevailing cultural attitude. This is not bad in itself, because God also appeals to our personal self-interest in calling us! However, God does not stop there, and neither does traditional Catholic spirituality. The book *Rediscover Catholicism* does not clearly help the reader see beyond that initial appeal to self-interest, but Catholics need to know that God calls us far beyond it, to the perfection of charity fitting for the Kingdom of God.

Rediscover Catholicism’s Focus on Self

Mr. Kelly’s most strongly emphasized paths and practices to holiness, surprisingly, are characterized – perhaps unconsciously on his part – not in opposition to but consistent with the prevailing cultural philosophy of individualism, and “What’s in it for me?” The most used measure of all Christian practices that are encouraged in the book, its gold standard of religious or spiritual value for any practice, is whether or not it leads to a “better-version-of-myself.” The self is placed at the center and as the measure of the spiritual life. Some examples:

- Concerning repentance, turning back to God: “at His side I am a better person... when I turn away from God I am turning my back on my true self.” (p. 153)
- Concerning Confession: “The journey toward the-best-version-of-yourself is a journey away from

the defects of the-present-version-of-yourself.” (p. 154) “Confession is an opportunity for you and God to work together to form a-better-version-of-yourself.” (p. 157)

- Concerning prayer: Mr. Kelly recounts his own personal advance in prayer this way: At first, he used to pray for his personal problems, “God, I’ve got this problem... This is the situation... These are the circumstances... Then I stumbled onto the question that would change my life forever: God, what do you think I should do?”
- Concerning participation in Holy Mass: “When you walk into Mass next Sunday, simply ask God in the quiet of your heart, ‘God, show me one way in this Mass that I can become a-better-version-of-myself this week!’... Once it is revealed to you, spend the rest of the Mass praying about how you can live that one thing in the coming week.” (p. 210)

This pervasive focus on the self, on what’s good for me, is summarized well as a spirituality of self-actualization: ultimately, “What’s in it for me?” – the very concern of secular individualism that the author rejected in the secular world. Concerning this “journey of the soul and the quest for love,” as he wrote in the book: “God invites you to embark on the adventure of unveiling and actualizing your unimagined potential.” (p. 123)

Self-Interest in Traditional Catholic Spirituality

It is important to know that the spiritual journey to holiness has been known and recognized by saints, fathers and doctors of the Church from very early days, as a journey in stages. The journey is not one life-long continuous process, as the book *Rediscover Catholicism* presumes. Instead, the journey to holiness is a process including three defined stages that are clearly distinct and different from one another. Recognition of the three stages is essential to any spirituality that reaches to the full attainment of holiness and the perfection of charity. The three stages have been given names, in Catholic tradition, as:

- 1) the stage of the Beginner, or the Purgative Stage;
- 2) the stage of the Progressing, or Proficient, or the Illuminative Stage;
- 3) the stage of the Perfect, or the Unitive Stage.

In the Beginning or Purgative Stage, the soul is self-centered. This is well-described by St. Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153 AD). Thus it is no surprise that a Catholic book on the spiritual journey would begin with the appeal to self-interest that is predominant for all beginners on the journey. But the journey ought not stop there – and neither should the book. We are all called to holiness – to be saints – as *Rediscover Catholicism* rightly emphasizes. But the journey cannot continue as it began – we need to grow beyond the self-concerns of the beginning stage, if we are ever to attain God’s intention in this world.

St. Bernard recognized and described four “degrees” of love, on the spiritual journey. I will outline them here (i):

1. In Bernard’s first degree, the person knows nothing of God. All that he loves is measured by the good it does for him, or the pleasure it brings him. This can include both things and people! He loves things, and he loves people, in the measure that they bring pleasure to him. This pre-Christian kind of love is expected for a child – but tragic in an adult.
2. In Bernard’s second degree, the person discovers God – and learns that God is his greatest benefactor. God can do more for him, and bring him happiness and pleasures, greater than anything or anyone else! And thus he begins to love God, but he loves God for all the good that God can do for him. His love for God is mercenary, self-focused. This is identified with the traditional “Stage of

- the Beginner, or Purgative stage” in traditional Catholic spirituality. This is the *beginning* of the Christian’s relationship with God in Christ: the relationship is expected to grow beyond this stage.
3. In Bernard’s third degree, following faithful discipleship in God’s ways and truth, following faithful walking with the Lord, the person learns of the great good of God in Himself! God is good, beautiful and true – and worthy of love – far beyond the good that he does for the person himself. God is good, and worthy of the greatest honor because of who God is, in Himself. Thus the person begins to love God as God, and not merely as his personal benefactor of the self. In this stage, however, traces of mercenary love still remain, which the person longs to overcome.
 4. In Bernard’s fourth degree, after faithful and zealous prayer, service to God, and longing to give his all to God, the person sees clearly and in its radiance the great and infinite goodness and glory of God, which overwhelm fear and concern for self. The person begins to love others, and even himself, only in God. Whether he lives or he dies, God is good in all His works. God is all, in all. Here, the love of God with one’s whole heart, mind, soul and strength becomes a human reality.

Discipline and Habit

Another very important factor in the author’s spirituality, is discipline: “The philosophy of Christ is based on discipline...” (p. 89) Mr. Kelly points to the saints – one of our most valuable resources as Catholic Christians – as both examples and teachers of discipline on the path to holiness: “Like Jesus, by their example the saints invite us to a life of discipline.” (p. 89) “The saints’ lives were firmly grounded in discipline.” “ They quietly chiseled away at the defects and weaknesses in their character. They became the-best-version-of-themselves.” (p. 91) The saints thus become examples for us, in our quest for self-improvement. Indeed this is God’s concern as well: “The will of God is that you become the-best-version-of-yourself, or in classical spiritual language, that you live a life of holiness and become a saint.” (p. 126)

The author writes that this saintly discipline must become for us, as for them, a habit of life. “Our lives change when our habits change. Think about all the heroes, leaders, champions and saints. What set them apart from their peers? They just had better habits... Their habits were helping them to become the best version of themselves, and they were acquired intentionally through the effort of discipline.” (p. 128) He continued, citing the many beautiful virtues made manifest in the saints, “patience, kindness, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, and love. Or is it their desire to explore their God-given potential?... Or maybe it’s just that they are focused on loving God and neighbor by becoming the-best-version-of-themselves. I suspect it is some combination of all of these.” (p. 132)

The roles of discipline and habit continue, in the book, with a center and focus on the self, as illustrated here:

“Find your place in salvation history. Be a saint. Be yourself. Perfectly yourself.

The best thing you can do for yourself is to become the best version of yourself. The best thing you can do for your spouse, your children, your friends, your Church, your nation, and God is to become the-best-version-of-yourself.” (p. 141)

Discipline and Habit in Traditional Catholic Spirituality

Discipline and the development of virtuous habits – or virtue itself – are also placed, in traditional Catholic spirituality, within a journey of distinct stages. Discipline is crucial in the Beginner’s or Purgative Stage, but virtue is the fruit especially in the second, the Illuminative Stage of the Proficients.

St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized these qualities in the stages which he briefly described, allowing us to see the place of discipline in the first stage, but virtue in the second:

1. the Beginning stage. Beginning the Christian life, the believer finds that most of his concern and effort is made withdrawing from sin and resisting the appetites which drive him away from charity. Beginners need to nourish and carefully foster charity to prevent its loss, and they need to avoid falling back to the ways they have just left. Attacks of temptation disturb the peace of the soul in this stage, but after struggle and perseverance, the believer can give his mind to making progress.
2. the Progressing stage. In this second stage, a certain measure of victory over temptation has been achieved. Most of the effort of the soul is now directed to advancing in virtue, with the concern that charity grow and become strong. This is the stage of those who are making progress in the journey.
3. the stage of the Perfect. In this third stage, which is not static but which also involves progress, most effort is made cleaving to God, and enjoying Him. In this stage are Christians of heroic virtue, who sincerely long to leave this earth and be with Him. (ii)

St. Thomas's separation of the growth in virtue (in the "Progressing", or Illuminative Stage) from the place of discipline (in the "Beginning", or Purgative Stage) is important because of the radical difference between the two stages. This will be investigated next, in "[Going Beyond 'Rediscover Catholicism,' Part II](#)," but after first noting again that *Rediscover Catholicism* assumes a linear and incremental path to holiness, and does not recognize the crucial existence of stages at all.

notes:

- i) see St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Love of God*. This is discussed further by R. Thomas Richard, *The Ordinary Path to Holiness*, (Alba House, 2003) p. 25 ff.
 - ii) St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, Q.24, a.9.
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This contribution is available at <http://renewthechurch.wordpress.com/2015/03/08/going-beyond-rediscover-catholicism-part-i/>
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A Muddy Soul [at Via Dolorosa Per Pax]

Right now at work we are in our soccer unit.

I am fairly certain my whole school thinks they are Brazilian because, across the board, they are obsessed with soccer.

We have these awesome pop-up goals.

One of those awesome inventions that takes a master mind to figure out how to close it.

Yesterday we had brought out one too many goals so a kid brought me the extra one.

He gave it to me and I grabbed the two handles so that I could close the net.

What the student failed to tell me was that prior to this, he had dragged the goal through the mud.

So I now had red clay all over my hands.

Instead of closing the net, I set it aside until the mud dried.

I was not interested more mud than necessary on my hands.

Once the mud was dry and my hands were clean,

I am praising God that He does not do to us as I did with the net.

We get ourselves into so much trouble.

Sometimes we are able to pull ourselves out.

Sometimes it takes a God bigger than ourselves to drag us out of the mud.

But regardless of how we get out of the mud of sin,
the Lord is there ready to clean us off.

He doesn't wait for us to dry so as to keep His hands clean.

He gets right in the middle of our gross attachment to sin.

He takes care of that mud.

We are about to begin the sacred season of Lent.

Many churches are offering Penance services.

Your church is setting up a time for Jesus to clean that mud off of you.

Jesus doesn't treat you the way that I treated the goal.

He does not want you to remain in sin.

He wants you to be free of the sins chaining you down.

There is nothing that you can confess to the priest,

There is no sin that you have committed that Jesus cannot forgive you for.

We just have to seek that forgiveness.

Go ahead.

Let Him get that mud off your soul.

He is waiting for you.



This contribution is available at <http://viadolorosaperpax.blogspot.com/2015/02/a-muddy-soul-wednesday-february-11-2015.html>
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Special Delivery! [at Cherishing Everyday Beauty]



Look at what recently arrived in the mail!

I became attracted to making cord rosaries years ago through my older sister. You might say the craft became contagious, and soon nearly everyone in my family of 8 was busily making and perfecting as many as we could. It was, in fact, my younger brother who actually taught me how to make them. So, gentlemen (if any of you actually read along here), rosary making is as much for you as it is for ladies -- I even know parish priests in our diocese who routinely make these corded rosaries while hearing confessions! Anyway...

This time around, I ordered four different colors.



L-R: gold, navy (which appears greyer in reality), Easter Basket, and Irish Spring. Upon receiving this latest shipment, I lost no time in asking on Instagram if anyone would enjoy receiving a brand new, handmade cord rosary and the response was exciting! So now I'm here to ask **YOU**...





I enjoy experimenting with the cord, as is evident by that second picture. I have several more combinations I'd like to try, as well as some religious medals to attach to a few of them.

If you're interested in receiving your own brand new, handmade cord rosary... send me an email [{{littleflower219@gmail.com}}](mailto:littleflower219@gmail.com) and let's get talking specifics!

I can't wait to hear from YOU!

Mission Possible [at Blogging For A Better Life]

To climb Mount Everest is quite an undertaking and once done an awesome accomplishment. Personally, I've never been to the peak of "the forehead in the sky" as it is called. To be perfectly honest, I've never been remotely close to Mount Everest, a.k.a. earth's tallest mountain.

But that does not mean my mission in life is a walk in the park. As I understand it, God has given us all a mission.

"You will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

(Acts1:8)

If you're like me there are times when this mission of spreading God's word seems just as daunting as trying to climb Mount Everest. Not everyone wants to hear about God and the Bible. Some people don't believe and like to test and throw out questions that cannot be answered by a mere human.

Being human has it's flaws and sometimes we aren't as Holy as we should be, which makes us look like a weak witness to say the least. On top of all this we have our own faith that needs nurturing on a daily basis.

If I had to climb Mount Everest, I would seek the help of one who has climbing experience, and the same goes for being a missionary for God. I look to those with experience in this field of work.

So, for starters, as I go about my quest in life I try to remember this saying from St. Francis of Assisi,

"Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

A smile forms as I put into play this advice from Mother Teresa,

"Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing."

I find inspiration to keep striving towards my goal from J. Hudson Taylor,

“God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supplies.”

God has given us all a mission; we are to proclaim His love and forgiveness by living a Christian life.

Wondering how your mission is going and what ways you play your part as a witness?



This contribution is available at <http://blogforabetterlife.blogspot.com/2015/02/mission-possible.html>
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Book Club "Meeting"

Well, several months ago I said that there was going to be

[a book club here at String of Pearls](#)

and that it was going to start in early 2015. So...I think it's about time I got going on that.

Since my first novel is titled

Finding Grace

, I thought I'd use

"Tuesday's child is full of grace"

(a line from an old nursery rhyme that begins "Monday's child is fair of face") as inspiration for the name of the club, as well as the day of the week on which it will be held. (BTW--thanks to those who voted when I asked what your favorite names for the club would be.) I will use this book club to discuss

Erin's Ring

as well

,

which has no character named Grace in it, but is also--I hope--full of grace for the reader.

Okay, where to start? Well, I'm just spit-balling here...but I thought I'd point out some things that both of my novels,

Finding Grace

and

Erin's Ring

, contain

(and I don't think I've included any true spoilers here, but it might be better to join the club after you've read the books

).

1. A family with lots of boys in it

(five Kelly brothers in

FG

, four McCormick brothers in

ER

--and who knows, maybe that baby Ellie McCormick is carrying is another son?). Hmm...wonder why?



2. A minor character named Harding,

which happens to be my maiden name (the kindly pharmacist in

FG

, the kindly English landlord in

ER

).

3. Lots and lots o' Irish characters!

Folks with names like Kelly, Foley, McCormick, O'Brien, Finnegan, Kennedy, McQuinn...if you're a sucker for an Irishman, you just might like my books. (My mom's maiden name is Kelly; and my husband is just about 100% Irish, on both sides--I never thought the last name Pearl sounded all that Irish, but turns out

[it is](#)

.)

4. Men who are carpenters

(Abe Perlmann in

FG

, Tommy McQuinn and Dan McCormick in

ER

), with comparisons to St. Joseph the carpenter. My husband, you might be shocked--shocked!--to know, is also a skilled furniture-maker and woodworker.



5. Pearls

(Peggy Kelly's trademark necklace in

FG

, the strand that holds Mrs. Driscoll's eyeglasses in

ER

). Pearls are my favorite jewels, as you might have guessed.

6. Reminders of Mary's role as a Mediatrix, along with characters who pray the Rosary.

The daily Rosary has been a part of our life for many years, and we are devoted to Mary, our Mother.

7. An important male character with many of my husband's attributes

--physical and otherwise (Tom Buckley, the handsome, gap-toothed love interest in

FG

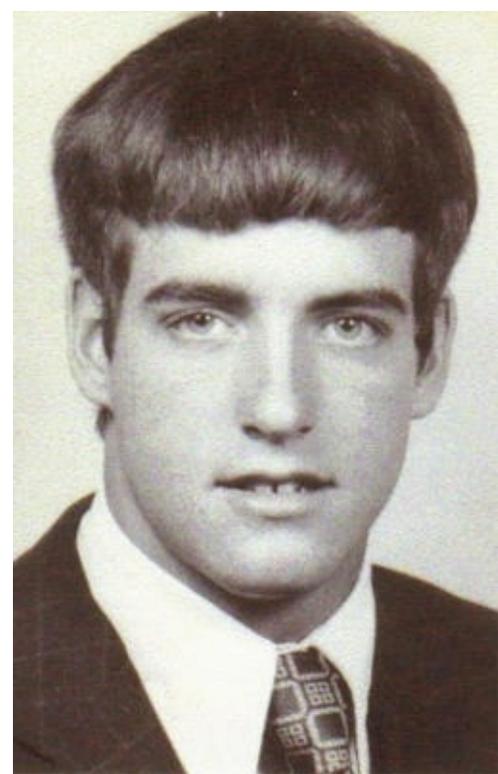
, and Dan McCormick, the airline pilot/devoted husband and father in

ER

--and when I wrote about Seamus Finnegan in

ER

, it was my husband's face I pictured). I read an interview once where an author admitted that even after many years as a writer, her husband still got a little jealous of her male characters. I could never create a love interest for my female characters who didn't have at least a passing resemblance to my guy, so I don't think that's going to happen in our house!

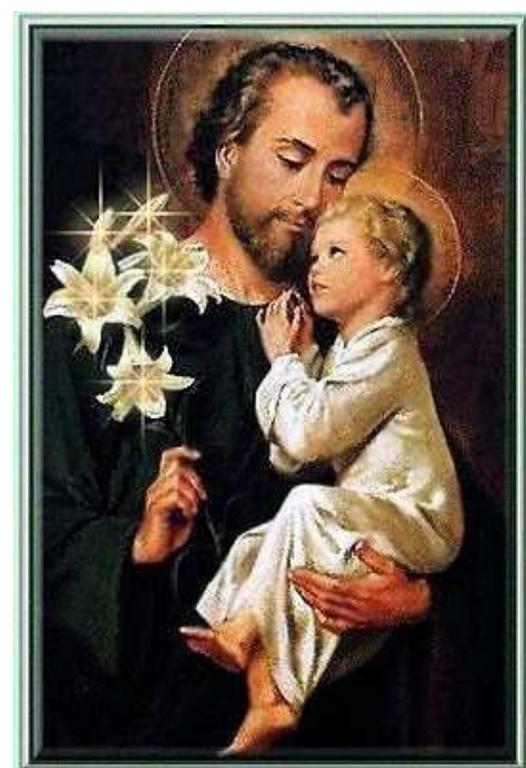


8. Allusions to St. Joseph (see #3

), the patron saint of families (and to whom we Pearls pray, with utmost confidence, for special intentions regarding our various family members--especially the powerful prayer called "The Unfailing Petition to St. Joseph," which was included in

ER

).



9. Information about our dear friends in Heaven, the saints

(there is a lot more of this in

FG

than in

ER

; but even in the much shorter

ER

, the reader learns for whom Saint Aloysius is the patron).



10. A climactic scene involving the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I can rarely receive the graces of this sacrament without tears, always humbled by God's endless capacity for mercy and love. It has the awesome power to heal and console, so I think it is fitting that when my characters have major struggles in their lives, they wind up in the confessional unloading their burdens before God, aided by a holy and compassionate priest.

During some recent airline travels, I started reading a work of fiction wherein the main character is a young woman who pretty much lives to read--she's a quiet type who works in a bookstore and always has a novel going. I find this sort of character in a lot of the novels I read. And it hit me that many people who write novels create characters who are avid readers (and often writers) like themselves. My sweet bookworm Grace fits this bill, always alluding to Mr. Darcy and other favorite characters from her favorite books--and hey, it just so happens that all of her favorite works of literature are mine, too! Who would have guessed? But with

Erin's Ring

I actually managed to create two young female characters who aren't obsessed with reading, like I am. However, Molly McCormick loves learning about history and combing her grandmother's attic for treasures from times gone by...and boy oh boy, does that ever sound like a girl I know very well. (Can writers ever really separate themselves entirely from the characters they bring to life?)

Okay then, that's a good start--don't you think?

If you're reading this, and you've read both of my novels, can you think of any other similarities between

the two? Or do you just have a question you'd like to ask me? Leave me a comment, I'd love to hear from you! And I will respond--that's a promise.

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2015/02/grace-filled-tuesdays-book-club-meeting.html>
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Complaining [at Bible Meditations]



The Lord said to Moses, “Put Aaron’s stick back in front of the Covenant Box. It is to be kept as a warning to the rebel Israelites that they will die unless their complaining stops.”

Numbers 17:10

Complaining can be hazardous to our health. Research indicates that chronic complaining causes physiological changes in the brain. It affects complainers and those listening to them. Chronic complaining leads to stress, which can result in physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach pain, sleep problems, and depression.

Everyone needs to vent at times. We don’t need to pretend things are fine when they aren’t. Keeping complaints locked inside where they can fester isn’t healthy. Naming a problem, sharing it to get it off our chest, and then deciding what, if anything, we will do in response is healthy. On the other hand, habitual complaining damages our well-being.

The Israelite slaves, once freed from Egyptian oppression, were chronic complainers. Granted, they had more to complain about than we do.

- They complained when the Egyptian army was closing in on them. God parted the Red Sea, saved the Israelites and destroyed their enemies.
- They complained about the water being bitter to drink. God made the water fit to drink and led them to a lush camping site.
- They complained about not having bread or meat to eat. God sent quails and manna, bread from heaven. Surely that would cause them to trust God, right? Nope.
- They complained about water again. God had water come from a rock for them. Now did they trust God? No.
- While Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, the people complained, wanted another God and tried to make one for themselves out of gold.
- When they were brought to the Promised Land, they complained because some of their scouts reported that the inhabitants were giants.

The Israelites didn’t enter the Promised Land for 40 years because of their own reluctance and failure to trust God’s providential power despite numerous demonstrations. I used to wonder why they didn’t “get

it” until I started looking at my own reluctance to trust God when faced with problems.

Dwelling on the negative certainly is detrimental to the quality of life over the long haul. It can stem from fear, a sense of entitlement, or lack of faith. If it becomes a habit, it can have a negative impact on our health.

What can we do about it? Habits are learned and can be unlearned. We can pro-actively practice gratitude. It’s amazing how writing down a list of things to be grateful for can turn around a negative mindset. We can invest in spiritual growth through prayer and meditation. We can read uplifting books or listen to uplifting music. We can spend time with people who have a positive outlook. Praising God for His power, love, mercy, and faithfulness can reinforce our trust that our needs will be met.

We can enhance our lives if we choose to let go of complaining.

Prayer: Lord, increase my trust in You.

Reflection: Count your blessings. List every single thing you can think of to be grateful for in black and white, no matter how small. You might start with things that are easy to take for granted until you don’t have them: the ability to see, hear, walk, clean drinking water, shelter, central heating.

This contribution is available at <http://www.biblemeditations.net/archives/2489>
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Lent: giving up and taking up [at Mere Observations]

Repent and do penance. – *Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.*

Lent is primarily seen as a time for giving something up. Pop. Candy. Television. Giving up Facebook has become the popular choice for some.

But Lent is also a time for *taking* something up. Prayer. Reflection. Spiritual reading. Serving others.

I have chosen to give up Facebook and Twitter for Lent. Last night I logged out of both on my iPhone, which is no small task. Facebook has made it very difficult to completely log out and I had to go into my phone's notification settings to delete my account from my phone in order to log out. I chose this road because of what I've seen over the past few months and how it's begun to eat away at me. I've written about it before: the comboxes. Below are a few choice ones I took from an article about Pope Francis and same sex "marriage" on the [Huffington Post](#):

As the French say, 'The more things change, the more they remain the same.' Catholics are no better than ISIS. – David

And that is how a Theocracy begins.... Anyone else recognize that this is just the 'Christian' version of Sharia law? Once religious principles become established as law ... like it has been in much of the Muslim world ... it is a self-perpetuating dictatorship ... and whether it is Christianity or Islam makes NO difference. – Fran

No better than ISIS? Of course, we Catholics recently burned a Jordanian pilot alive in a cage while videotaping it, "randomly" killed Jews in a Paris deli, beheaded 21 Egyptian Christians and to top it off burned another 45 souls alive in Iraq just yesterday. I can't wait to hear what Father tells us to do for Lent. I'm sure he'll tell us just as soon as he receives the marching orders from the pope on the special shortwave radio we hide in our basement and use with our Vatican-issued Decoder Ring™.

No difference between radical Islam and Christianity? Fran has spent too much time swallowing what the president says. Actually, I doubt Fran has spent any time in thought at all and has confused using big words with comprehension and thought.

This is what the Internet has become: a home for uninformed, unintelligent, unintellectual, unreasoned, uncompassionate opinions. Popular jargon refers to them as trolls, for trolls they have become.

(Just got the call from Father. I'm to bring an extra two gallons of gasoline to church tonight. Oh boy!)

Now David and Fran are the outliers, right? Lately I'm not so sure. What was hailed as a tool for opening up lines of communication has become an isolation chamber where we block ourselves off from icky opinions other than our own and those people who are so stupid as to have them. I have friends on my Facebook who I know are anti-Catholic, anti-military, and hate conservatives to their very core thanks to the Facebook algorithm that now allows us to see almost every like or comment our friends make

anywhere on Facebook. And it's painful. Some of these are people I've known since we were kids, or in college. It's hard knowing that I have friends who truly despise the things I hold dear.

I'm Catholic. As such I'm conservative in some things and liberal in others. I'm a white, male business owner who is also a married homeowner. And you're damn right I'm pro-military as I currently have a son who is a Marine. **Oohrah!**

Hence the hiatus and what I've planned to become a permanent vacation. I've even got a timer set on my iPhone: July 20, 2015. I'm only staying that long because I'm the administrator of the page for my son's baseball team and the season will be wrapped up around then. I know I'd written about leaving Facebook several months ago but then I got sucked into managing that baseball page.

152 Days from today I'm walking away from the noise for good. For Lent it's a social media hiatus as well as the comment sections on any article I read.

So what am I taking up? What am I going to *fill* that space with?

For starters I pulled out of the driveway this morning at 6:15am to drive to 6:30 Mass for Ash Wednesday. Yes, while doing so I managed to brush my left-side rearview mirror against the garage entryway and shattered the plastic shell. But now it matches the right-side mirror that was cracked in the car wash two summers ago. I laughed it off however as a sign of the trials and graces to come this Lent.

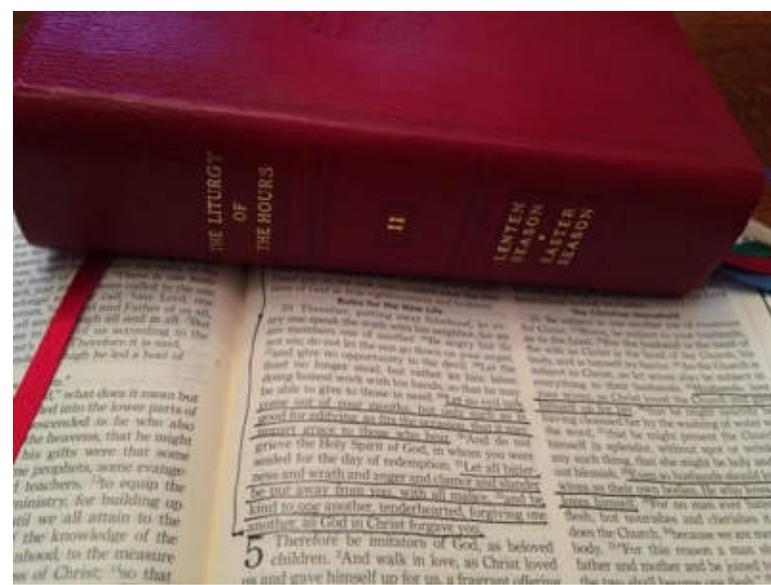
It's time to make the switch to the red book (Volume 2) of the Liturgy of the Hours for Lent and Easter. I did so this morning and was so edified by what I prayed and read that I could double or triple the size of this blog post. I will quote a portion of the second reading from today's Office of Readings, however. It is from a letter to the Corinthians by Pope St. Clement (d. 100 AD):

Brothers, we should be humble in mind, putting aside all arrogance, pride and foolish anger. Rather, we should act in accordance with the Scriptures, as the Holy Spirit says: *The wise man must not glory in his wisdom nor the strong man in his strength nor the rich man in his riches. Rather, let him who glories glory in the Lord by seeking him and doing what is right and just.* Recall especially what the Lord Jesus said when he taught gentleness and forbearance. *Be merciful, he said, so that you may have mercy shown to you. Forgive, so that you may be forgiven. As you treat others, so you will be treated. As you give, so you will receive. As you judge, so you will be judged. As you are kind to others, so you will be treated kindly. The measure of your giving will be the measure of your receiving.*

I'm pausing in my reading of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Strider and the hobbits have just arrived at Weathertop) and am going to read [The Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ](#) by Archbishop Alban Goodier. It contains 36 chapters which means I should be able to read a chapter a day and be finished by Easter. I read the first chapter this morning and it is excellent.

Finally, I'm spending my Lent meditating and chewing over the following passage from Holy Scripture:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)



LOTH, Vol. 2 and my bible opened to Ephesians 4:31-32.

Two simple verses. Thirty words. Each day I plan on reading them 2-3 times and writing what insights I receive.

“...we should be humble in mind, putting aside all arrogance, pride and foolish anger.”

“The measure of your giving will be the measure of your receiving.”

The world (and its internet) are filled with bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice. It’s begun to rub off on my soul and psyche like bug grease on a car windshield when driving the highways on a hot, summer South Dakota evening. Before I succumb to temptation and add to these ills I say enough.

Enough.

He will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never run dry.—Isaiah 58:11, from The Office of Readings for Ash Wednesday (The Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. II)

This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2015/02/18/lent-giving-up-and-taking-up/>
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Laws and rules or God? [at A JESUIT'S BLOG]

The incident that is popularly referred to as “The Cleansing of the Temple” is one of the few incidents in the life of Jesus that is found in all four Gospels. However, there are significant differences in the manner in which John narrates it.

The incident is narrated by John at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. The incident can be divided into two parts. The first part concerns Jesus’ actions in the Temple. The second part contains Jesus’ words about the destruction of the Temple and its rebuilding in three days.

The Cleansing of the Temple takes place during the feast of Passover, a time when large crowds would gather in Jerusalem. A large number of animals would be required for sacrifice as burnt offerings. These facts make the action of Jesus much more radical than in the synoptic Gospels. The people who came for the festival would have come from far distances and would have to buy animals in the precincts of the Temple. And, since Roman coins were not acceptable as offerings in the Temple, money changers were needed to change Roman coins to Tyrian coins, that these could be offered. This means that, by his actions, Jesus challenges the very institution of worship and its meaning.

The focus of the challenge is not so much on the dishonesty of those who sold animals, or on the thievery of the money changers, but on the fact that the house of God had been turned into a marketplace. Jesus challenges the system, the very institution itself. He challenges the authority of the Temple and its worship. That this is the case is clear in the words that Jesus speaks as he performs his action. Jesus does not protest, like he does in the synoptic Gospels, that the house of God has become a *den of robbers*. In John’s gospel, Jesus protests that the house of God has become *a house of trade, a marketplace*. The additional comment in John, which is based on Ps 69-9, serves to strengthen this view: *zeal for the things of God and God’s house will consume Jesus*. His zeal will lead to his crucifixion. The story in John focuses more on Jesus than it does on the Temple.

To the Jewish authorities who demand for a sign authorizing his action, Jesus speaks about the destruction and the raising up of the Temple. The Jewish authorities misunderstand his words. Jesus is referring to the Temple that is his body. “Raise up” refers to the resurrection. This means, therefore, that Jesus’ body replaces the Temple as the new place where God is revealed.

It is with this background in mind that the first reading of today should be read. Jesus has shaken the very

foundations of what the Jews considered the base of their authority. He has acted in a manner that prevented them from offering sacrifice and money offerings on one of the most significant feasts of the year, Passover. The challenge is to a system of worship so embedded in its own rules and regulations that it was no longer open to a fresh revelation from God. This is what happened to the Ten Commandments give by God through Moses. They became ends in themselves. They were multiplied, divided, added to, and subtracted from, until the original meanings and reasons were lost and everything else, but God, took centre stage. The Commandments were given to Israel after God had redeemed his people, through the Exodus. It shows that God now claims the full attention and the complete devotion from Israel. The focus of the commandments is thus, not on the law by itself, but on living a life in which God remains at the centre. The commandments are not a set of rules to be followed to the letter, but a programme for life which, if followed, can result in recognizing God in all things and recognizing all things in God.

Paul realized this, as is evident in the second reading of today. He tells the Corinthians that, if they want to know the meaning of salvation, they must not, like the Jews, look at a set of rules and regulations or, like the Gentiles, go after false gods and idols. Paul tells the Corinthians to continue to keep their gaze on the crucified Christ. Doing so will enable them to see the true meaning of life and will result in every law, every rules, and every regulation, being transformed into love.

Thus, the readings of today challenge us, as Christians, to ask ourselves whether we are closed to fresh revelations from God, as the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time were. They challenge us to ask ourselves if we have made rules, laws, and regulations, ends in themselves. They challenge us to ask ourselves whether our worship, religious practices, and liturgical celebrations have resulted in taking us away from God rather than bringing us closer to him.

This contribution is available at <http://errolsj.blogspot.ca/2015/03/sunday-march-8-2014-laws-and-rulesor-god.html>
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Tribute to an American Catholic Hero [at Justin's Corner]



Today marks the 70th anniversary of

Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima,

the most famous photograph in U.S. military history and one of the greatest photographs of all time. As is generally known, it was taken by Joseph Rosenthal, an Associated Press photographer, on February 23, 1945, during the Battle of Iwo Jima, a key turning point in World War II. The photo, which immediately drew widespread admiration and acclaim and won Rosenthal a Pulitzer Prize, depicts six Marine soldiers erecting a large American flag atop Mount Suribachi on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima in the western Pacific. I have been familiar with this stirring image since childhood, but only recently have I come to grasp its full significance thanks to James Bradley's epic masterpiece

Flags of Our Fathers.

Based on extensive interviews with dozens of war veterans and surviving relatives of the flagraisers, this accurate and classic historical work (which was also made into a movie of the same name) places the famous photo in its proper context by telling the true stories of the young men who raised the flag and providing the essential background details that led up to that dramatic moment. And James Bradley is an amazingly gifted storyteller.

Reading this engrossing book--which almost didn't get written, because the author's heroic father himself narrowly escaped death in battle and refused to discuss his wartime experiences with his family--has given me a whole new understanding of, and appreciation for, this unique photograph, which almost didn't get taken because someone else had already photographed the first flagraising two hours earlier and the press photographers, including Rosenthal, didn't know there was going to be a second and had to

scramble to document it. And I might never have read the book had I not discovered it on a bookshelf during a casual browse at my local Goodwill thrift store last summer. I felt lucky. It was like finding a lost treasure. I wondered why anybody would get rid of a book like this. Once I opened it and began reading, it was hard to put down and stop thinking about. As a result of discovering and reading this book, I find myself in total agreement with G. K. Chesterton that "Everything has been saved from a wreck." (PLEASE NOTE: As can be expected with any frank discussion of U.S. military history,

Flags of Our Fathers

does contain some language and anecdotes that are less than edifying. However, these are detractions from an otherwise magnificent work that I heartily recommend to adult readers.)

Flags of Our Fathers

is certainly a fitting tribute to the self-sacrificing heroism of our nation's Marines in World War II and to the religious and moral values that made America great. But in addition to that, it offers a compelling and beautiful witness to the power of our Catholic faith and its essential role in American life. The author's father, John Henry Bradley (1923--1994), the flagraiser in the middle of the photograph and the only one who lived to see his grandchildren, was a lifelong devout Catholic whose entire life was dedicated to the humble service of others. He never intended to be a Marine. He was a Navy medic who got transferred into Easy Company, the ironically named Marine contingent that stormed the beaches of Iwo Jima under heavy Japanese fire in February 1945. Americans suffered more casualties in the invasion and conquest of that tiny island than in any other battle of the entire war. During that fierce and grueling battle, John Bradley risked his life over and over again to tend wounded Marines. He was awarded a Navy Cross for his valor. In his humility, he kept that prestigious award hidden in a box in his closet for the remainder of his life and refused all interview requests from journalists. John Bradley was more than just an American hero. He was--and is--a true hero of the Catholic Church and a role model for Catholics of every race and nation. Because of that, I believe strongly that his cause for canonization should be introduced. And I hope and pray that his talented son James Bradley, who has been away from the Church for many years, will one day rediscover the priceless gift of the Catholic faith given to him by his saintly father.

This contribution is available at <http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2015/02/tribute-to-american-catholic-hero.html>
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The Beauty of Valentine's Day has been Hijacked by "50 Shades of Grey" [at It Makes Sense to Me]

IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

Valentine's Day has been hijacked by the movie, "50 Shades of Grey". A day that is all about love and romance and flowers and candy and hugs and kisses has been turned into a celebration of deviance and depravity. In fact, the movie celebrates the degradation of women. And it is being glorified and praised as the "great love story of our day. What kind of bizarre and twisted nonsense is this?

Here is part of one advertisement from a company by the name of "pink cherry.com.

"

It is one of many spread throughout cyber world advertising this years preferred Valentine's Day gifts. These gifts are being offered because of the "50 Shades of Grey" book trilogy and movie:

"Indulge in the steamy world of Fifty Shades of Grey, a New York Times #1 Best Seller from new author E. L. James. Explore the possibilities of how both the book and related toys can bring you and your partners to new levels of excitement and pleasure. Let the world of Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele bring you to a place you may have never explored--or only just toyed with. The possibilities are endless---"

This is the blurb from the movie theaters in my surrounding area promoting the film for the Valentine's Day weekend:

SYNOPSIS:

Fifty Shades of Grey is the hotly anticipated adaption of the best selling book that has become a global phenomenon. Since its release, the Fifty Shades" trilogy has sold more than 100 million copies in e-book and print--making it one of the biggest and fastest selling book series ever. Stepping into the roles of Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele, who have become iconic to millions of readers, are Jamie Dornan and Dakota Johnson--

I am a man and I just do not understand. This aberration called Fifty Shades of Grey promotes a debased and contorted view of how love can be. It offers to women the narrative that being handcuffed, beaten, chained and/or whipped (among other things) is sexually stimulating and could lead to a "happily ever after" ending. Does not the independent, supposedly liberated woman of the 21st century find Anastasia Steele submissive, weak and needy? What about her self-respect and dignity? Christian Grey chews it up and spits it out. She is an object to him, not a real person.

Debated as this story is the movie trailer, based on the novel, logged in more than 36 million YouTube views in its first week. Women LOVE this book (over 100 million sold mostly to women) and the movie will pack them in over the Valentine's Day weekend. I do not get it.

To all you women out there let this "old fool" tell you a few things. First of all, a real man will respect you as a woman and a person. He will not try to manipulate you, subjugate you or coerce you into doing anything that you do not want to. (Of course, early on, he will be on his best behavior in his quest to get you to like him. If he is not--RUN.) Secondly, He will NOT demand to constantly know where you have been or what you are doing. Third, he will honor your wants and needs and you will know in your heart if he is "full of it". A relationship is a two way street. A mutual trust and respect must be shared between you. It is the basis of all things going forward.

We are all God's children. Men and women compliment each other. It is NATURAL. It is the way it is supposed to be. Tom Cruise and Renee Zellweger starred in the movie, "Jerry McGuire". At the end of the movie, Jerry (played by Cruise) says to Dorothy (played by Zellweger) "You complete me". It was the defining moment for Jerry and Dorothy. I believe that one scene is what made the film the big hit that it was because, as they embraced and kissed, everyone watching was now able to feel them sharing the love that they had for each other. Those three words summed up the way a permanent relationship between a man and a woman should be. They should "complete each other".

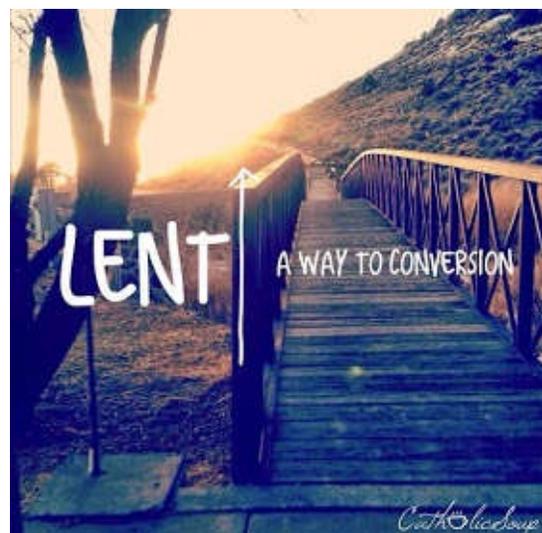
Finally, you might consider that the sex part of the relationship is a perk. It is a beautiful thing to share between two people in love. But it is NOT the "end all" or the most important thing or the only thing. The BEST part of the sex should be after it is over and you can just be together holding each other and feeling the love flow between you. You have shared with each other your very heart and souls. You have completed each other and you did not need handcuffs.

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Nineveh's Lesson [at CatholicSoup]



It always seems like the season of Lent comes at the right time. While the main focus of Lent is to practice fasting, conversion, prayer and simple living, for me it always seems that the weeks prior to the season is the exact opposite. The soul and the senses are restless, we hunger for a temporary satisfaction, lacking in prayer, indulging, doing our own things. But Lent, is a time to change all of that, its a time to see all that we have done wrong even those small things and truly repent and feel completely sorry for what we have done. Lent is a time for conversion of heart, prayer and a time for us to share in the Resurrected Glory of God in the end by defeating sin and conquering death.

I'm always fascinated at how Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. This journey of Jesus marks the start of a 40 day fast, an embarking that allows the Spirit to move in own lives by how we live. It's interesting, because during lent we can see that there is a definite call to repentance. A call to step outside of what we are used to and do something else and give up what we enjoy. It's a call to live outside our comfort zones. The gospel reading today, is the story of Jonah and his pilgrimage to Nineveh to proclaim to the Ninevites that they should pray, repent and fast.

"Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed, when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth"

That was the call, and in some ways, it is a prefiguration of the Lenten call we see even today. It's a call to pray, a call to fast and even more so, a call recognize what we have done wrong and wear the penitential

sackcloth

of our own sin and

repent.

For each of us, Lent should be a time of conversion, prayer, fasting and repentance, just as it was for the Ninevites. It's a time for us to finally say goodbye to those things that we have grown so accustomed to,

namely, Sin. This lent, don't just stop doing what you know isn't good for you, but recognize what hurts you, recognize your sin, [pray to the Blessed Mother to reveal to you your sins] and seek to be wholeheartedly sorry for all those things that keep us from obtaining a perfect relationship with the Father.

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Facing Down Leviathan [at Loved As If]

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (1)

In studying Scripture, I keep coming upon Nachash (Nahash). “Serpent” is one translation. Leviathan is another.

My image of the serpent in Genesis came straight from the pictures in the big, family Bible I first read when I was five. They were supplemented by others from Sunday school books and various paintings. All of them pretty much depicted a big snake with or without appendages. I had only a hazy image of Leviathan. The priest who confirmed me said, in response to my queries, “It’s a primordial hippopotamus.” I was unconvinced. Leviathan was a sea creature and hippos aren’t known for their ocean-going tendencies. Over the past few years, I’ve learned Leviathan, in size, is a more like Jörmungandr, the giant Midgard Serpent. He’s also utterly terrifying. God tells Job:



Lay hands on him;

think of the battle;

you will not do it again!

Behold,

the hope of a man is disappointed;

he is laid low even at the sight of him.

No one is so fierce

that he dares to stir him up. (2)

The serpent in the Garden (Nachash in the original Hebrew) is Leviathan (also Nachash in the original Hebrew) in Job and Ezekiel and in many other places throughout the Bible.

But wait! This all actually has a point that is central to **Loved As If** in which I dive into theodicy and hope I don’t drown.

In a recently published [article](#), my friend, Dr. Randall Smith, following St. Augustine, writes, “the really *crucial* moment in the story—the actual *fall*—occurs when Adam ‘deliberately decides—despite *not* being deceived—to disfigure by sin the spousal fellowship he and Eve had already been given by God.’”

How often have I passed over “Adam was not deceived” (3) because I was bristling about Paul saying woman would be saved through child birth. As I read Dr. Smith’s article, those four words finally resounded through me stirring up immense horror: “Adam was not deceived.” He knew better.

When God places Adam in the garden, He instructs him to “till it and keep it.” What isn’t readily apparent is that God gives Adam the same priestly charge He will later give the Levites who are to tend the Ark of the Covenant:

[B]ut appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings, and over all that belongs to it; they are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall tend it, and shall encamp around the tabernacle. (4)

I’ve seen many depictions of the Israelites in battle with the Ark of the Covenant. Usually the Ark is surrounded by a few Levites vested as per God’s instructions to Moses. But in reality, the Ark would have been surrounded by all the sons of Kohath (5), more than 8,00 men, ready to cut down anyone who came near. And the Kohathites set out in the midst of the hosts of Israel; the Ark is surrounded by warriors. It was just that precious. And so was the garden before it.

But Adam threatens not even the most minimal battle to protect it. So the serpent, Nachash, Leviathan, gets into the garden — as if Adam isn’t there. Nachash questions Eve — as if Adam isn’t there. Nachash beguiles Eve — as if Adam isn’t there. But he is there all the time.

Modern English doesn’t use a plural form of the pronoun “you” so we aren’t aware that in Hebrew, Nachash is speaking to both Adam and Eve when he asks: “Did God say, ‘[You both] shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” And Adam is there when Nachash says: “[You both] will not die. For God knows that when [you both] eat of it your eyes will be opened, and [you both] will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (6) The English translation is painfully haunting when one realizes Adam might have pulled Eve away and whispered to her, ‘God will be along at the breezy time of the day. Let’s ask Him then.’ Instead, Adam remains silent and eats the fruit even though he knows Nachash is lying.

The fall involved neither sex nor eating an apple. The fall actually occurred because Adam decides he’s not facing down Leviathan. Adam balks at suffering and sacrifice. (So does Eve but I’m not telling that story here.) He knowingly chooses himself over God, his bride, and his priestly charge.

For long, I thought suffering came as a result of the fall. I don’t remember a time when I didn’t love God. And I knew (because I had tried) that I couldn’t just will myself to stop loving Him. But I was appalled that God would allow suffering in my life. Suffering came as a result of sin. Why should I suffer for the sins of others? In my mind, suffering was a linear equation: my sin equals my suffering, the only variables were the sins I might commit. I truly felt that I and other innocent people ought to be exempt or at least ought to be given a pass after a certain amount of suffering. I was woefully ignorant.

Suffering was built in from the beginning. It was never something from which I or anyone else could be exempt. The original, deluxe, Imago Dei operating system that was the very life God breathed into Adam could not be fully actualized unless Adam laid down his life for the sake God, Eve, and the garden.

And that’s why Christ is the new Adam. He doesn’t flee suffering. He faces down Leviathan though He doesn’t want to die. He goes to the cross and reboots humanity. His reboot isn’t an undoing of suffering and sacrifice. Instead, Christ restores us to our original factory settings so that we might operate from the

Imago Dei, so that we might truly sacrifice and suffer instead of simply hurting in confusion, so that we too might face Leviathan and lay down our lives for our friends. Christians can now suffer as God had always intended, as Christ did, as Adam did not.

We won't always see that our suffering accomplishes anything. When suffering includes a linear equation, that's only a hint of its fullness. It makes sense that a father would sacrifice himself to save his child. But when we're in pain or foregoing something we want or need for the sake of another, we don't always know how God is working our suffering and sacrifice into the entire program. Then again, it's difficult to understand how Adam's actions can affect all of creation. But for many, it's just as difficult to understand how a few lines of code can wreck a computer. Yet most of us know what a computer virus can do.

In the end, for all our babble about self-worth and self-esteem, we can't really imagine our immense value. When Paul writes, "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God," (7) it's hard to see how "the glorious liberty of the children of God" will restore creation. Just as it's hard to accept that "creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope." (8) Our brains are groggy from living in a world that only recognizes fairly simple mathematics. The immense creativity that allows creation to wait "with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (9) demands well-developed imaginations and hearts.

Christians can catch a peek now and then. Some more, some less. We can trust that creation is waiting for the Adam Christ restored in all those who follow Him to do what the original Adam did not do in the garden. We're not to chase suffering. Masochism is of Nachash and has no place in the Imago Dei operating system. For the same reason, we are not to sacrifice out of pride. But a lot hinges on us. The restoration of all of creation longs for our "glorious liberty."

We obtain that liberty by following Christ, the new Adam. We obtain it by accepting the suffering and sacrifice God allows into our lives. We unleash it's immense power when, through the grace of God, we say, 'This time, I'm facing down Leviathan.' I can't yet say, with some of the saints, that I rejoice in suffering. But I know, when we suffer with Christ, the uncorrupted Imago Dei operating system becomes fully activated and finally, we begin to grow into what God created us to become from the beginning.

(1) Genesis 2:15 (RSV)

(2) Job 41:8-10 (RSV). [Image source.](#)

(3) 1 Timothy 2:14 (RSV)

(4) Numbers 1:50 (RSV)

(5) Numbers 3:29 (RSV)

(6) Michael Barber, *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today*, Emmaus Road Publishing (January 1, 2006). Genesis 3:4-5 (RSV)

(7) Romans 8:21 (RSV)

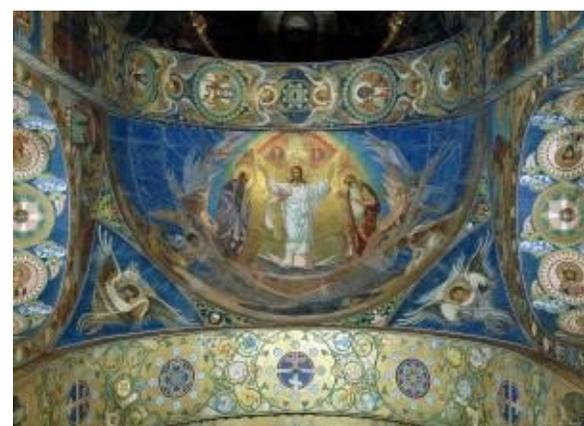
(8) Romans 8:20 (RSV)

(9) Romans 8:19 (RSV)

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The Secret of True Love



Many years ago when I used to run courses for school leavers, I used to begin by asking the boys and girls to tell me when they were last really happy. I remember one boy said that it was when he was fishing with his father, another when watching one of his favorite films, and yet another when he was playing football with his friends. One of the girls loved a day of retail therapy with her mother, another loved playing the piano, not for her exams, but for the sheer pleasure of it. Finally one girl said her happiest moments were spent on holiday with her boyfriend. Strangely enough it always used to take them a long time to see the common denominator – the reason why doing all these different things had given them all so much pleasure. For a greater or less period of time they had been so absorbed in something, or someone else, that they simply forgot about themselves. In the discussions that followed they usually came to the same conclusion, namely that, this happiness could be found and perpetuated more in loving someone else than in anything else.

In the first Christian centuries no one sought to live for themselves, but for God and for his honour and glory alone. All authentic prayer of whatever sort ends up here, as did the prayer of Jesus. That's why the first Christians learnt to seek God not for what they could get out of him, but for himself alone. Seeking God for what you can get out of him was an unfortunate development that came later, thanks to the influence of Neoplatonism. However on occasions, but rarely, you do find expressions like 'sober inebriation' or 'spiritual intoxication' to express interior spiritual feelings that sometimes occurred while taking part in the liturgy or in prayer. You can find words like *Apatheia* or *Ataraxia* too, words borrowed from Stoicism. They are used to refer to the inner peace and tranquility experienced at the outset of contemplation. You find words like *spiritual transportation* too, as these inner states of repose become ever more intense and raise believers up and into experiences similar to those that St Teresa of Avila would later call the *Spiritual Betrothals* or the *Mystical Marriage*. However I have only mentioned them to make the point that they were only very rarely used – Why? Because the whole emphasis of early Christian spirituality was not on oneself, but on God, and on his good pleasure, not one's own. The faithful did not seek out mystical experiences to give themselves pleasure, they sought out God to give him pleasure. Their whole aim and the whole object and direction of their spiritual life was not to seek their own honour and glory, but the honour and glory of God. It was in doing this that they, like any lover who lives for another, forgets themselves. Then, freed from self-absorption and the misery that this brings, they experienced the joy of living for another.

Whenever a person seeks pleasure for its own sake or rather for their own sake, then the happiness that they hoped it would bring usually eludes them. This is what eventually began to happen when, after

several centuries of seeking God for himself, the influence of Neoplatonism began to encourage believers to seek mystical experiences for themselves, for their own personal pleasure, and gratification. When this insidious trend began to infiltrate Christian prayer in subsequent centuries, otherwise good and well-meaning believers were encouraged to adopt simplistic verbal techniques with the promise of instant mystical contemplation.

This did not happen for the first Christians, because they simply followed the example of Jesus that they put into practice every day of their lives. That is why they said the *Shema*, as he had done, three times a day. In this ancient Jewish prayer they continually committed themselves to love and serve God throughout every moment of every day, without any thought of what was in it for themselves. God and God alone was the object of their prayer, not what they could get out of him by way of exhilarating and esoteric experiences. This was true of the other prayers that they learnt from Jesus too.

The Jewish religion is a domestic religion, it finds its deepest realization in the home, in the love that is generated there and the prayer that is shared there. This is still true today as it was in the time of Jesus. It was here that he learnt another form of prayer that perfectly complimented the *Shema*. This prayer was called the *Berakah*. Like all primitive languages a single word contains within it many different meanings that only become apparent as the language develops. This is true of the word *Berakah*. When Jesus made this prayer to his Father it was made to give him thanks, blessing, praise, worship, adoration, and all honour and glory. It meant all these things together. It was learnt in the home and used during meals, especially on the Sabbath, and on the great feast days like the Passover. It was used in the synagogue too and on whatsoever occasion a person felt moved to thank, praise or give glory to God for what he had done in the past, and is doing in the present, and what he had promised to do in the future. Jesus said this prayer with his disciples when they had formal meals together most especially at the Last Supper.

When the bread and wine was first consecrated it was consecrated in the middle of this prayer. That's why, when his disciples continued to do what Jesus had done and told them to do in memory of him, they actually called this new act of Worship the *Berakah*, at least for a time. When the common language of the Roman Empire became the common language of the early Christians, they called it the *Eucharist* after the Greek word for thanksgiving, because no single Greek word contained within it the fullness of meaning contained in the original Jewish word that it was used to translate. This is a shame, because the new word failed and still fails to convey, what is involved in what we now call the Mass. It is the same act of worship that Jesus shared with his disciples that involved giving thanks, praise, blessing, and worship, adoration, and giving honour and glory to God, and receiving his blessing in return, as it still does today. The most perfect and the most profound meaning of the new Christian *Berakah*, that embodies its ultimate purpose, is contained in the last words of this prayer, as it was used by the early Christians, and as it is still used today. The words are these: - '*Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever*'.

Writing about the early liturgy, at the beginning of the second century, St Justin said that the great Amen which was the response of the faithful to these words nearly raised the roof. For these words did not just represent the whole meaning of the Mass for them, but the whole meaning of their existence. The ex-prime minister Gordon Brown was once asked what love meant for him, and he answered by saying that it is when another person's happiness is more important than one's own. It was exactly the same for the early Christians. Their love of God meant that he came before themselves. He came before their own pleasure, their own gratification, before their own happiness, before their own honour and glory. It was for this that they lived and for this that so many of them died, enduring some of the most appalling deaths imaginable. The

Berakah that they had first said with Jesus before teaching it to others, became for them a daily prayer that complimented and completed the *Shema*.

One of the first new prayers or hymns composed by the first Christians, that beautifully includes all the spiritual themes contained in the *Berakah*, was said or sung at dawn every morning. It was used to remind them of the purpose for which they were offering the forthcoming day to God – *for his honour and glory not their own*. This prayer has remained with us to the present day. We call it the *Gloria* which is still recited at the beginning of the Mass. However it was originally recited or sung after communion, as the perfect response after receiving the glory of God within them through Jesus.

The byproduct of such selfless giving of themselves to God, was rewarded by God giving himself to them as he had done to Jesus. Like Jesus then, they began to experience the love of God that St Paul said surpasses our understanding. We are so used to seeing Jesus depicted on the cross that we forget that he described himself as a man of joy, the joy that he promised for those who would follow him. It was this that would enable them to become infused with the inner peace that at all times possessed him. No wonder people flocked to the early Christians, begging to be a part of the brotherhood and sisterhood that they could see for themselves was so alive and vibrant, so full of joy and peace. *This joy and peace was the fruit of the deep mystical experience of God's presence that was generated within them. This experience was not sought, it was the natural by-product of living and loving each day for the honour and glory of God.* Nor was it ever emphasized, it was an intimate and private matter, as is the love that bonds a husband and wife together. They do not talk let alone brag about it.

The experience of true love is only ever given, not to the person seeking pleasurable experiences for themselves, but to the person seeking to give pleasure, fulfilment, and happiness to the one they love. The great mystery of God's love for us is that, although he demands that we love him by giving him praise, thanksgiving, blessing, and all honour and glory, it is not for his benefit but for ours. It does nothing, nor can it ever do anything, to further his own happiness, his own fulfillment, or his own honour and glory. *And herein lies the secret of God's selfless plan for us all. For it is in encouraging us to love him, though he gains nothing for himself in doing this, that we receive everything that we could possible hope or dream for. This is the real measure of the height and depth and the length and breadth of God's love – the love that surpasses the understanding. **Deo Gratias ad infinitum!***

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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

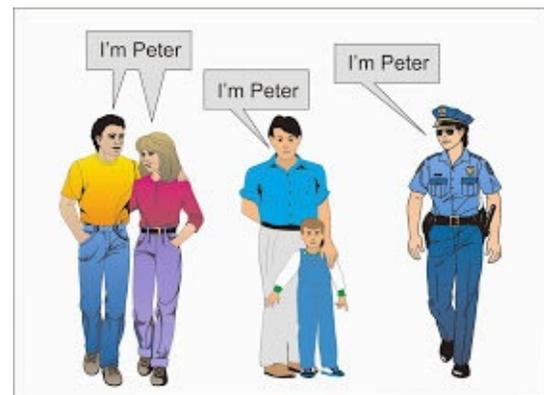
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Lord, I Just Want You! [at Journey to Wisdom]

A Reflection on Mark 9:1-10 N.A.B.

By: *Larry T*



Peter, James, John, and Paul were the four pillars of Jesus' emerging Church. Peter, James, and Paul were ultimately murdered for preaching the Good News. Peter was crucified; James and Paul were both beheaded. Clearly, their faith in Jesus enabled them to face their executions, but why were they so loyal to him? It is true that Peter, James, and John had seen Jesus perform various healings and miracles, but it was probably the Transfiguration of Jesus, the empty tomb, and Jesus' physical resurrection that cemented their faith. The Transfiguration was meant to be a wellspring of power and hope for them.

¹ *He also said to them, "Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come in power."*

² *After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,*

³ *and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.*

⁴ *Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus.*

⁵ *Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

⁶ *He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.*

⁷ *Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; then from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."*

⁸ Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

⁹ As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

What did Jesus mean when he said “Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come in power.”? This statement has been the source of much debate and speculation through the centuries. Just what did Jesus mean? Theologians and biblical scholars do not all agree on the meaning, but some convincingly argue that placement of this statement immediately before the Transfiguration clearly relates it to the Transfiguration event. Following this line of thinking, Jesus promised Peter, James, and John that they would personally witness the coming of the Kingdom of God “in power.”

Then, Jesus led them up onto a high mountain where he was transfigured before them and “and his clothes became dazzling white such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.” The astounding whiteness of His clothing reflected His transfigured glory.

Moses (the lawgiver and liberator) and Elijah (the first great prophet) suddenly appeared and began speaking to Jesus. With one foot in the Old Testament and one foot in the New Testament, Jesus is undoubtedly the new Torah.

Next, the whole Trinity appeared: the Father in the voice; the Son in the man; the Spirit in the shining cloud (C.C.C. 555). With, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” the Father revealed Jesus to be his Son, representative, and revealer, then he gave divine authority to Jesus’ teachings. The Second Letter of Peter to the Christians wasn’t written by Peter, but by an anonymous author. Still, it was based on oral tradition that summarized their Transfiguration experience, so we know that it had a deep-rooted effect on them.

¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.

¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that unique declaration came to him from the majestic glory, “This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain. - 2 Peter 1:16-18 N.A.B.

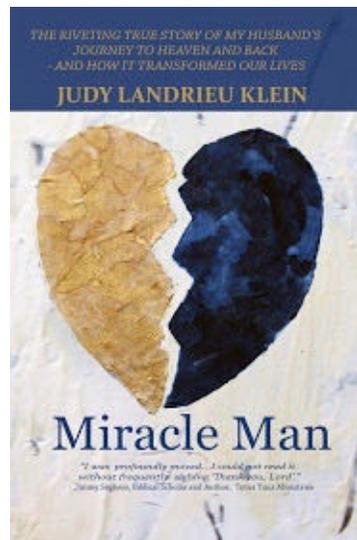
Later on, Peter vehemently denied Jesus three times, so we know his faith was still being formed. Imagine the bewilderment when he ran to Jesus' burial tomb and saw that it was empty. On its own, the empty tomb didn't mean much to him because Jesus' body could have been stolen or it might have even been the wrong tomb. Nonetheless, he was certain that Jesus had died on the cross because one of the Roman soldiers plunged his spear into Jesus' side (John 19:34 N.A.B.). It was only when Peter could see and speak with the physically resurrected Jesus that his faith was completely formed, and he could become one of the four leaders of the early Church.

As we reflect on the Transfiguration of Jesus, we might take the time to relax, take a few deep breaths, close our eyes and imagine that we are walking side by side with Peter. Can you hear loose gravel and small rocks crunch under our sandaled feet as we climb the mountain? We're all gasping for breath and grunting as we struggle to keep up with Jesus. Rivulets of sweat stream down our foreheads into our eyes stinging them. Jesus is suddenly transformed. His clothing is so blindingly white that we can't bear to look directly at him. Imagine our terror when Moses and Elijah magically appear. Moses and Elijah! Have we all died? Panic stricken, Peter foolishly blurts out something about building three tents. Then the cloud appears and we hear the voice of God the Father. In an instant it's all over. What are we thinking as we carefully and silently make our way down the mountain? What just happened? Was it real? Was it a group hallucination?

Peter's spiritual journey progressed from simple curiosity about Jesus to partial faith, then to half faith, and finally to rock solid faith in the Lord. Especially at this time of the year, as we work our way through Lent into and through the Easter season, we should set aside time to walk with Peter through each spiritual event as we just did through the Transfiguration. Be overcome with love for Jesus at the Last Supper as Peter was. Feel our blood pressure skyrocket and our bodies stiffen in rage as we see our beloved Jesus being brutally arrested. Share in Peter's disgrace and despair at denying Jesus. Recoil in horror at Jesus' crucifixion. Sense the desolation of the eleven disciples at Jesus' death. And finally, be overcome with pure joy at being with the resurrected Lord. Peter's spiritual journey is an example for all Christians; his faith journey from beginning to end is our faith journey.

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2015/02/i-am-peter.html>
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Miracle Man - A Book Review [at His UnEnding Love]



I read “Miracle Man” in two and a half days! Normally, books take me a lot longer to read, but I couldn’t put “Miracle Man” down.

“Miracle Man” is the true story of a man named Bernie and the fulfillment of God’s plan for him and his family. Not what was expected or wanted, the journey directed by God affected not only Bernie and his wife, Judy, but countless other lives of people who came to serve.

Prior to the start of the book, tragedy had touched both the lives of Judy and Bernie, tragedies that many people could not survive. Both had lost children, however, in spite of these tragedies, Judy and Bernie stayed the course of their faith and marriage. When tragedy again reared its ugly head, God intervened, and His graces poured forth. Bernie’s heart kept beating in spite for the dire predictions of doctors and medical professionals. Surprise, God was in charge!

At the beginning of this spiritual journey, Bernie was a lukewarm Catholic. Lukewarm Christianity is not what God intended for this family. He wanted them to embrace Him and His plans for them, not in their time or in the way they would have liked, but in His time and in His way. By learning to trust God and follow in His paths, Bernie, Judy, and the rest of the family came to know and love God in ways no one could have ever dreamed. Their love for God touched many lives that would not have been touched otherwise. Their spiritual journeys developed, and God touched their lives.

Always close to death, but surviving, Bernie became known as the Miracle Man by medical staff in the hospitals in which he would be placed. However, this was not the important part of Bernie and Judy’s story. “Today, Salvation has come to this house...” Luke 19:9. The Hand of God reached down and touched the souls of Bernie and Judy and brought forth the best in both of them as they opened their hearts and souls to God’s Love and began to trust Him completely.

As difficult as the journey became, Bernie and Judy’s spiritual hearts were captured by God, and they persevered.

If I had to sum up the important elements of this book in two words, they would be:

Trust God.

When Bernie and Judy began to trust God completely, their lives changed. No, the outcome was not what they wanted, but it WAS what God wanted in the end. Souls were saved. Lives were touched that would not have been changed otherwise. What seemed to be an impossible outcome, was not. God was in charge. Miracles happened. Bernie journeyed to heaven and back. God's generosity could not be outdone. God affected the change. Bernie and Judy accepted God's graces.

As Bernie and Judy learned, one of the greatest miracles comes in not being alive each day, but in living each day to its fullest for the greater honor and glory of God!

I loved this book! God touched my heart through the lives of Bernie and Judy. I learned there is hope in everything that God does or gives. Praise God! Trust God! Hope in the Lord!

This contribution is available at <http://hisunendinglov.blogspot.com/2015/03/miracle-man-book-review.html>
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My Child... The Saint? [at Our Home... Under Mary's Mantle]

Human beings are the beneficiaries of a God whose greatest delight is in giving presents to those who approach. -from [Accidental Theologians](#)

Happy Wednesday!

I had a few moments to myself this morning, to pray and ponder. And I was thinking about a story I recently shared during a conversation with [Melanie Jean Juneau](#). She posted a story called on . In the conversation I shared a story with her about our son, Christopher.

When Christopher was four, I was putting him to bed one evening. And putting him to bed at that age, meant reading the Children's Bible, singing songs (some that we made up), telling stories (that I made up), and whatever else he could get me to do in order to delay bedtime. HA! So annnywaaaay, here is the story (I looked it up in my "things Christopher has said" file):

Christopher blurted out, "mom, men can't marry men and women can't marry women!" I said, "who told you that?" (I know what you are thinking... why that question? Well, at the time, we had a male couple living next door. Wonderful guys... and I didn't know if an ugly neighbor had said something in front of the children outside... I mean, who knows, right?) So he said, "I just know!" I said, "but how do you know, did someone tell you?" He said, (dead seriously), "mom, I was with GOD for a long time before I was with you, and HE doesn't like that!" I said, "God told you that? You were with God?" He said, "yes, before I was with you and dad. I still remember it!"

Of course, my mind was racing. My child REMEMBERS being with God before he was with me? What does this mean? So, I shared the story with a Priest, who said that Christopher was very special and perhaps would be a Priest himself. Christopher stated he wanted to be a Policeman before he was the Pope.. and that was the end of that.

Sure I think of it, from time to time, but do I really GET what he said? Do we really listen to our children and grasp the enormity of what their souls experienced before they came to be with us? God knows them before he knits them in our womb... so was my child really in tune with God before he was born? before he was in my womb? I wonder...

Then I think, what is MY responsibility as the mother of a child who had (maybe still has) that memory? I am not sure it is different than any other parent. You see, I believe all of our children were with God first.

Jeremiah 1 New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE)

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

4 Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 5 **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”** 6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” 7 But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” 9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

You can read the rest here: [Jeremiah 1: 1-19](#)

If we listen to Our Lord... He puts words in our mouths. He guides us. How much more does He guide our children, who are so much more innocent than we are... who are much more open to Him in some ways, because life-experiences have not tainted their thinking? I could go on and on...

My husband and I were stunned that our son said he was with God before us. In fact, my husband jokingly said Christopher should get us the winning lottery numbers in an attempt to make us laugh. lol Sigh. Adults can be so unopened to God in the small things...

In our Catholic Faith, we have many child Saints. Stories are shared about them and what they have gone through... but I wonder, how long did they “know” God? If they knew Him before they were born, is that why they are so special to Him? To all of us? It’s something to think about? I found a great article on Child Saints. I’m sure there are MANY more. [Child Saints As Role Models](#). Check it out.



I would LOVE to hear your stories telling things your children have said to you about God! And, of course, I wonder... will my child be a Saint? I don’t know if he will be a Saint or not. But I’m watching and listening MORE. And God is in control, so.... I just want to do my part.

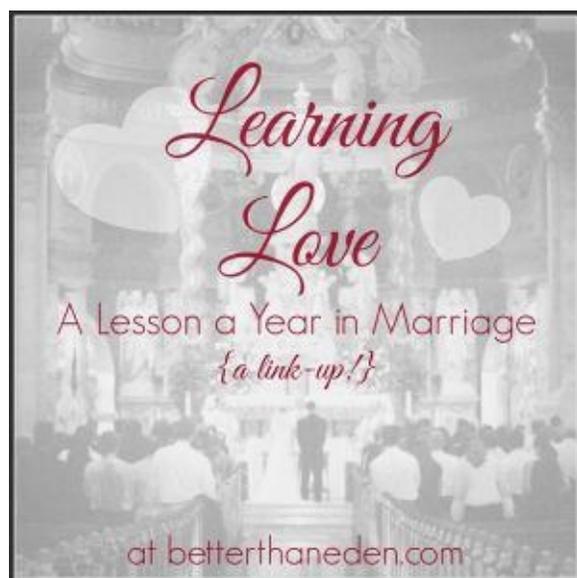
Have a great rest of your Wednesday!

Hugs & Blessings,

Em

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{Head on over to [Better Than Eden](#) to read other lessons in love. }

1. Understanding your spouse's and your personal strengths and weaknesses creates a unique marriage that can not be replicated.

Just like each individual angel could be called a species unto to itself, so can each individual marriage. Normally, people date for awhile or get to spend lots of time together. We didn't; we met in August, dated in Octoberish maybe, and married in March. Then, Jeff left to complete his Army officer school thing. And then he left on a deployment for a year. That first deployment met us at a bad point in our marriage. We had barely lived together and just had our second baby hours and hours away from family. Not to mention we were both still transitioning from college into married, career, and parenthood.

Over this second deployment, we worked out some serious kinks in getting along and living side by side. An important tool that helped us was the [Meyers-Briggs test](#) and [The Temperament God Gave You](#) . Interestingly, we are complete opposites. [INTJ](#) on this side and [ESFP](#) on the Jeff side. Same coin, different side. But inside, same-same (who can name that movie?). Today, Jeff will finally have been home more than gone. It probably won't stay that way, but am taking it.



2. Don't compare/contrast your marriage with any one else's marriage.

Since your marriage is unique to y'all, it doesn't make sense to look at other people's marriages. Asking advice is different from being upset at Timmy and Tina for having some uber getaway to Fiji when they have no kids, no pets, and a trust fund while we get to sit in -40F with four kids who have-played-with-all-the-toys and two dogs who really hate pooping in the cold.

I used to get really upset at Jeff never bringing me flowers after college. A mentor suggested that I start buying myself flowers while out grocery shopping and coming home saying thank you to Jeff. After all, Jeff was working long hard days and sacrificing years of his life for his country. I failed to realize that he was exhausted from going to work at 5 am and coming home to his second job as a father and husband. So, I buy my own flowers all the while thanking God and Jeff for the bounty of love and self'-sacrifice that is my husband.



Yeah, I bought these. And I don't feel cheated out of romance.

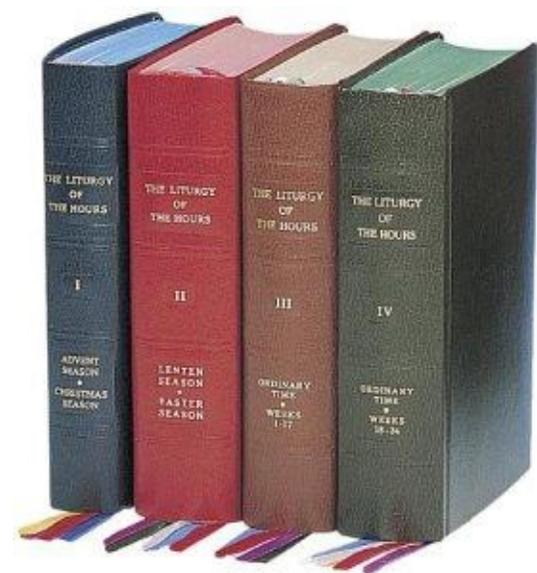
3. Pots of tea and/or coffee with plates of homemade goodies goes a

long way.

Memories abound of nights together with tea and cake. Once we settled together, it was a common ritual of ours to sit on the porch swing with our cups and chatter into humid Mississippi nights. Other times, I set the table with linens and made a proper show of tea time for him making sandwiches and little courses (my mother in law owned a tea house of which my husband has fond memories). I still remember the pride of being a newly wedded wife serving my husband. The excitement that this was my place now beside this man until death separated us. It is a freeing notion that concept of belonging of creating our own life together away from our past. Forging ahead to meet the adventure set before us.

4. Pray together. Every day.

The easiest thing to do. Say a “Hail Mary”, an “Our Father”, or something from the heart. Make the time to have spiritual intimacy with each other. It is the foundation for emotional and physical intimacy. Not to mention, how much you will learn about the secret anxieties and fears or insecurities. Praying with Jeff has softened my heart to his needs and struggles as a man in this world. It’s really hard to stay mad or whiny when He is laying his heart out there in a whispered intention with tears in his eyes.



We have found saying Compline together before bed sets us up for success the next day.

5. Find common activities to do together.

Bubblewitch Saga 2. Reading aloud to each other (currently, Jeff has been kind enough to re-read [The Complete Sherlock Holmes](#) to me). Chess. All things that Jeff and I love to do together. Find an activity or two that brings some fun and light heartedness to your time together. A little competition can liven things up in a rough patch. I'll be honest, we also like creating back stories for our two dogs and cat complete with voices and explosions. An albino monk may or may not be involved. I told you, same-same.

#dorksforlife

6. Do not fear personal growth. You are not the same person (thank you, Jesus) that you were before you got married.

Human beings tend toward the nostalgic. We love to look back and see the rosy past as a time where it was easier or better or less sticky. However, we are here in the now. I am not a twenty-something anthropologist living off of 5 grand a year and getting slackered every Thursday through Saturday. I am a wife, mother, a way better Catholic (oh man, is that the understatement of the year), and not to mention an adult with insurance payments and a [savings account or seven](#) to prove it. To be honest, I don't want to be the emotional mess that I was before I met Jeff. Our marriage saved us both from ourselves and growing together has been bittersweet but WORTH IT. I feel like I have a chance of getting to purgatory and just possibly entering those pearly gates.



Jeff and Leo in 2009. Jeff had finally gotten to see Leo for more than a week.

7. Buy extra socks and under-roos.

Trust me, there will be times when babies are small and whining and dinner has to be made because you know eating is so important to active living that laundry will not get done. Other times, it's a choice between intimate time and chores (psssst. choose the intimate time for your marriage's sake).

This contribution is available at <http://www.betweenlinens.com/learning-love-a-lesson-a-year-in-marriage/>
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From My Archives [at This That and the Other Thing]

I decided it would be fun to dig through my archives and see what I was writing about back in the day. While I am now primarily a book blogger, I didn't start out that way--my title should give you a hit about that. So, what was I writing about in 2005?

I wrote about

[Catholic schools and vouchers](#)

. The voucher program became reality a few years ago and my daughter's school accepts them, in limited numbers. They have helped us fill seats and I think being at our school has been a good thing for most of the voucher kids. On the other hand, schools that accepted large numbers of voucher students, for the most part, have not posted test scores any better than the average public school (and many have done worse).

Also the scores of our local public schools have increased such that most students in our area are not eligible for new vouchers (children already in the program are allowed to continue until they age out of their current school).

[Nursing in Public](#)

was a subject that was important to me in 2005; in 2015 it is an issue from my past.

If I decided to write about

[Today's Sin](#)

today, I'd write the same thing I wrote in 2005.

[I complained about baby items. I wrote about picking a school for my daughter](#)

. She ended up graduating from the magnet middle/high school and I'm quite sure I made the best overall choice for her.

[I wrote about picking a high school for my son](#)

. We ended up at DeLaSalle and it was the worst \$15,000 (two years) I ever spent.

I wrote

[Because of Vatican II or Because of the Times](#)

in response to something Elena wrote; I'm still reading her blog and she is still reading mine. We've "known" each other online for over 15 years; we had little kids then; now I have a college student and one of her sons is engaged to be married.

As anyone along the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts knows, 2005 was the year of Hurricane Katrina. I

wrote several posts about it:

[Katrina Pictures](#)

,
[Mardi Gras](#)

(I argued that we should not cancel Mardi Gras in 2006, and my view prevailed),

[Life After Katrina](#)

,
[Embarrassed by Good Fortune](#)

and two posts about that Christmas:

[The Difference the Years Make](#)

and

[The Dark Side of Christmas.](#)

Back in those days I was using a dial-up connection so pictures were more of a nuisance than they were worth. I got my first digital camera that Christmas and that's what I used to take those very noisy pictures in the Katrina Pictures post. My baby is now ten; my other two are 22 and 19. Still, things aren't that different, are they?

This contribution is available at <http://rannthisthat.blogspot.com/2015/02/from-my-archives.html>
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"I don't believe in the deity of Mary nor the saints" [at Brutally Honest]



Continuing the series of posts responding to [Pastor Pete's numerous objections to the Catholic faith](#) (start at the bottom of the link and work your way up) brings us to this rather common one:

I don't believe in the deity of Mary nor the saints. This one will require further explanation. If a young child asks how God can hear millions of people pray at the same time, our likely answer will be because He is God, He is deity. But I find no answer how Mary or the saints could possess this omnipotent power, except to deify them, which I am compelled to reject.

Let's first begin by stating unequivocally that Catholics don't believe in the deity of Mary or the saints either. From the [Catechism as to the particularity of Mary's humanity](#):

Jesus has only God as Father. "He was never estranged from the Father because of the human nature which he assumed. . . He is naturally Son of the Father as to his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity, but properly Son of the Father in both natures."

[Fr. Joe at Busted Halo](#) expounds:

Devotion to Mary goes back a long way in the Catholic church. But Catholics do not believe that Mary is divine and we don't pray to Mary. God, made flesh in Jesus and present in the Holy Spirit, is the only One to whom we pray.

We do believe that Mary holds a special place among the saints of the church, and that the saints are part of a community of faith and love that doesn't end with death. This "communion of saints" includes both the living and dead. We don't "pray to" the saints either, but we believe that we can

ask those who now live with God to pray for us, just as we pray for persons who have died.

Catholics don't worship Mary; rather, we honor her. We honor Mary as the mother of God, as the first disciple of Jesus, and as the mother of the church. All three of these titles have their origins in the fact that in Mary's life the Word of God became flesh and blood and that is the vocation to which every Christian is called — to live in such a way that God's generous compassion becomes alive in our flesh and blood, in in our words and actions.

We look to Mary as a model in whom we can trust, and as a mother who supports and nurtures our own journeys of faith. Turning to her as the first of Christians, we ask her to pray for us.

As to the question on whether or not Mary and/or the saints can hear our petitions, I found [this from Robert H. Brom, former Bishop of San Diego, that I think answers the question more than adequately:](#)

As Scripture indicates, those in heaven are aware of the prayers of those on earth. This can be seen, for example, in Revelation 5:8, where John depicts the saints in heaven offering our prayers to God under the form of "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." But if the saints in heaven are offering our prayers to God, then they must be aware of our prayers. They are aware of our petitions and present them to God by interceding for us.

Some might try to argue that in this passage the prayers being offered were not addressed to the saints in heaven, but directly to God. Yet this argument would only strengthen the fact that those in heaven can hear our prayers, for then the saints would be aware of our prayers even when they are not directed to them!

In any event, it is clear from Revelation 5:8 that the saints in heaven do actively intercede for us. We are explicitly told by John that the incense they offer to God are the prayers of the saints. Prayers are not physical things and cannot be physically offered to God. Thus the saints in heaven are offering our prayers to God mentally. In other words, they are interceding.

...

Some objections to the concept of prayer to the saints betray restricted notions of heaven. One comes from anti-Catholic Loraine Boettner:

"How, then, can a human being such as Mary hear the prayers of millions of Roman Catholics, in many different countries, praying in many different languages, all at the same time?"

"Let any priest or layman try to converse with only three people at the same time and see how impossible that is for a human being. . . . The objections against prayers to Mary apply equally against prayers to the saints. For they too are only creatures, infinitely less than God, able to be at only one place at a time and to do only one thing at a time.

"How, then, can they listen to and answer thousands upon thousands of petitions made simultaneously in many different lands and in many different languages? Many such petitions are expressed, not orally, but only mentally, silently. How can Mary and the saints, without being like God, be present everywhere and know the secrets of all hearts?" (Roman Catholicism, 142-143).

If being in heaven were like being in the next room, then of course these objections would be valid. A mortal, unglorified person in the next room would indeed suffer the restrictions imposed by the way space and time work in our universe. But the saints are not in the next room, and they are not subject to the time/space limitations of this life.

This does not imply that the saints in heaven therefore must be omniscient, as God is, for it is only through God's willing it that they can communicate with others in heaven or with us. And Boettner's argument about petitions arriving in different languages is even further off the mark. Does anyone really think that in heaven the saints are restricted to the King's English? After all, it is God himself who gives the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Surely those saints in Revelation understand the prayers they are shown to be offering to God.

*The problem here is one of what might be called a primitive or even childish view of heaven. It is certainly not one on which enough intellectual rigor has been exercised. A good introduction to the real implications of the afterlife may be found in Frank Sheed's book *Theology and Sanity*, which argues that sanity depends on an accurate appreciation of reality, and that includes an accurate appreciation of what heaven is really like. And once that is known, the place of prayer to the saints follows.*

Some may grant that the previous objections to asking the saints for their intercession do not work and may even grant that the practice is permissible in theory, yet they may question it on other grounds, asking why one would want to ask the saints to pray for one. "Why not pray directly to Jesus?" they ask.

The answer is: "Of course one should pray directly to Jesus!" But that does not mean it is not also a good thing to ask others to pray for one as well. Ultimately, the "go-directly-to-Jesus" objection boomerangs back on the one who makes it: Why should we ask any Christian, in heaven or on earth, to pray for us when we can ask Jesus directly? If the mere fact that we can go straight to Jesus proved that we should ask no Christian in heaven to pray for us then it would also prove that we should ask no Christian on earth to pray for us.

Here's to hoping Pastor Pete, and others like him, are prayerfully considering each of these responses, not, unless God wills it, so that they might become Catholic but minimally so that they might know more about what has become for me a deep and so very rich faith.

Carry on dear reader.

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2015/02/i-dont-believe-in-the-deity-of-mary-nor-the-saints.html
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The State of Your Heart [at A Catholic Moment]



Well, Lent is here! Wasn't it just Christmas? The older I get, the more I notice how fast time goes by. Life get's so busy, and before we know it, a year has gone by. Also, the older I get, the more and more I think about my own mortality. You see the stories in the news about people being killed, and it makes you think. And then I start to see people my age or not too much older than me passing away, and it starts to hit home. I start thinking more about the inevitable, not in fear, but more along the lines of 'Am I ready?'

If God were to come calling this very instant, would my soul be in the state it needs to be in? Do I carry stains or burdens on my heart that offend God, and that might prevent me from eternal life with Him? Recently, in the United States, the President gave his State of the Union Address, an annual speech he gives about the current state of the country, the good and bad from last year, and his thoughts and plans for the coming year. Well, today kicks off our period of annual reflection – not of the union or any other country, but of our heart. What is the state of your heart?

This is actually what Ash Wednesday and Lent is all about. Today we think about our own mortality, *Remembering that we are dust, and to dust we shall return.* – [Gen 3:19](#).

We are going to die, every single one of us. Are we ready? Is our soul prepared? What is the state of your heart? We use Lent as that training period to get us ready for the big race. We use Lent as that time to wash all the filth and grime from ourselves, much like how we wash the filth and grime from our cars this time of year, after a long hard winter.

We all know that Lent is a time of extra prayer, fasting, charity and repentance, but it's also a time for joy and reflection. We reflect about the previous year, we joyfully look forward to a better relationship with Christ in the coming year, and we train ourselves again on how to be good Christians in a not so good world. We inflict discipline in our lives through more prayer, fasting and charity, with the intent that we become better people. And we reflect on the state of our heart and ask for God's forgiveness.

Today's readings cover all of this, and among my favorite readings in the entire bible is today's psalm, [Psalm 51– The Miserere: Kings David's Prayer of Repentance](#). I love King David. He's one of my favorite people in the Bible because he was a simple guy, and ordinary person like most of us. He was a man after God's own heart, and he was always the underdog, the long shot. He had unbelievable trust and faith in God and through God's grace he did some great things. But he was also a sinner, just like the rest

of us. He lusted after and had an affair with another mans wife, and then he had that man killed. And when the prophet Nathan called him out, he surrendered to God and wrote this psalm of repentance.

He opened his heart up to God and asked for his forgiveness. David was not without consequence for his actions, but God did forgive him and poured His grace out to David. The story of David's repentance is a model we all need to follow. God loves us as much as He loved David; we are all children after God's own heart if we have the faith and trust and love of God that David had.

And you can look to the other readings and see the same theme – it's all about our heart. As the prophet Joel said,

Even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God.

We need to examine our hearts, our conscience, and in true sincerity and sacrifice – return to God. I know for a lot of us, Confession is not a regular thing. I know it is difficult to tell our deepest, darkest sins to someone else whom we do not know. But remember, you are not talking to the priest during confession – you are talking to Christ through the priest, who is *in persona Christi*. And Christ already knows your secrets, He knows what you have done, so there's really no hiding it. There's nothing to be afraid of, and remember, wherever two or more are gathered in Christ's name, He is there. [Matthew 18:20](#). This is why we must go to Confession, it's the only way we truly receive God's forgiveness and grace. And there is not a better time to repent than Lent. Embrace the joy and grace of this sacrament, and as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians today:

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

In looking at the state of your heart though, the only way it truly can be opened to Christ is through regular prayer, fasting, and charity to others. Lent is a time to turn it up. But when doing these things, we need to examine where our heart is, and whether we are doing these for the glory of God, or for ourselves. Are we doing these things for God? Or are we doing them for our own glory and credit? Jesus states in today's Gospel where our hearts should be:

...But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

...But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

...But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.

God sees into our mind and soul and knows where our true heart lies. He knows what our intent and motivation is. What we get out of Lent is what we put into to it. So if we just go through the motions or we are consumed with putting up a front and portraying how holy, generous and charitable we are, then our Lent may not be that fruitful for our soul. But if we truly examine our heart, and spend time reflecting on God's love and our love for God, and work to improve ourselves and praise Jesus through prayer, sacrifice and love of one another, then our Lent can be life changing.

No matter what we've done or who we are, we can open up our hearts to Christ and build a better relationship with Him. Listen to God, and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. So for this Lent, I am challenging myself and all of you, let's examine our heart, reflect upon where we've been, talk to God about where we are going, and strive to be children after God's own heart.

I leave you with this prayer of repentance, taken directly from Psalm 51. Say this everyday, and remember that we never know that day that we will return to dust, so we must always be looking at the state of our heart.

*Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always.
Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight.
A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.*

Amen.

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Moral Relativism and the Dawn of Insanity [at Through the Eyes of the Faithful]

The Logical End of Relativism

What happens when we follow relativism to its logical end? Someone once told me that my faith gives me all the purpose and meaning and black and white lines I need. In a way, he's right except for the fact that he means I believe in it for the purpose of obtaining these things. I believe in my faith because it's true. I know it in my heart as well as my mind and many writers far greater than I'll ever be have proven a thousand times over the logical arguments for the faith. That all goes far beyond the scope of this post, but the irony of my friend's statement is this: we *all* need purpose and meaning and these things can never be found in the realm of relativism.

Let's start with what relativism rejects: absolute truth. Relativism rejects the idea that there is such a thing as objective morality—a definitive set of rules that we all should live by. The Church teaches us that the laws of God are written on our hearts. We recognize that morality and human rights do not come from man but from God. We also declare that human beings are all beloved children of God, made in His image and as such possess inherent dignity. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

"Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone..." - CCC #356

"Because of its common origin the human race forms a unity, for 'from one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth.'" - CCC #360

"This law of human solidarity and charity, without excluding the rich variety of persons, cultures, and peoples, assures us that all men are truly brethren." - CCC #361

"Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life." - CCC #2270

Say, that sounds something like:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." - Declaration of Independence

So on the one side of the morality coin we have absolute truth: morality and human rights come from God and man does not have authority to change it. On the flip side we have moral relativism which tells us that morality is determined by the individual and therefore changes from person to person, culture to culture, etc. This sounds great, it sounds like freedom, doesn't it?

Society: Nobody can force their morality on us, we make our own rules!

Reality: Wait, who makes the rules?

Society: Man does, we don't need a small and petty god to tell us how to be good!

Reality: Okay, who among you gets to decide what the rules are?

Society: We'll vote to choose our leaders and they'll decide the laws for us.

Reality: And how will they decide that?

Society: They can all say how they feel about stuff and then vote on it.

Reality: So, you want people to write laws based on their *feelings*? But feelings are fleeting, unstable, and unreliable. And doesn't this all mean you'll just be subject to the morality of your leaders?

Society: Well somebody has to write the rules you know!

Reality: And what will you do if you don't like the rules?

Society: We'll tell them to change it because we don't like it.

Reality: On what grounds, if everything is relative, how can you argue against how somebody else feels?

Society: That's not fair!

Reality: Fair is a relative term. You lose.

Here's the problem, folks. If our laws and rights and morality don't come from God, a higher authority than man, then we have no rights at all. If our human rights are granted by man there is no such thing as inalienable rights!

inalienable: Not capable of being given up or transferred - Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary

If our rights come from man they mean nothing. Anything granted by man can be taken away by man. But that which is granted by God almighty, man has no authority to take away. In the world of moral relativism, rights are determined by those in power and in the end, might makes right. Translated that means the one with the biggest gun wins. This is where monsters like Mussolini are born and it's only when we are holding fast to absolute truth that we have legs and spine to stand up against them. If you're adhering to relativism how can you possibly argue against anything? Sure you can say it's wrong to hurt people. What does it mean to hurt somebody? Hitler thought he was doing a great service to the world. He thought it was for the greater good and who are you to argue? Does it hurt your *feelings* that he decided to kill people he thought were inferior? Sorry, he and his ilk had different feelings and majority rules you know. This isn't working out like you hoped it would, is it?

If we will simply be honest with ourselves, if we can shake off the fog of our collective delusions we know deep inside that every single one of us has the same voice, the same moral code that comes from somewhere other than silly fleeting feelings. It's the voice that makes us stand up and scream, "This isn't FAIR!" If rape were legalized tomorrow would you throw up your hands and say, "Whelp, majority rules."

"Who am I to judge?" Of course not because everybody knows rape is wrong and it has nothing to do with a majority vote or what's legal and what's not. Our morality, our human rights are not determined by majority or votes. It's time to wake up, my friends. It's time to open our eyes to the reality of the destruction caused by moral relativism in our society. And that will be the focus of my next post. I leave you with the great G.K. Chesterton, and until next time, may God bless you.



This contribution is available at <http://eyesofthefaithful.blogspot.com/2015/02/moral-relativism-and-dawn-of-insanity.html>
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On one day a year, Saint Patrick's Day, people around the world celebrate their Irish heritage, even if they have none. Parades, parties and the *Wearin-of-the-Green* are ubiquitous. It may not be a stretch to state that those who celebrate Saint Patrick's Day the hardest, know the fewest facts about the man and the land that adopted him as their Patron Saint. He drove the snakes from Ireland (likely myth). He brought Christianity to the Irish (partially true).

Patrick was appointed Bishop to Ireland and can be rightfully credited with spreading and securing Christianity throughout the land, but he was not the first Christian missionary to set foot on the Emerald Isle.

There are tales of Coptic monks from Egypt who traveled to Ireland and the legend of a Roman soldier named Althus, who was present at Christ's Crucifixion. He too is credited with first bringing Christianity to the Irish shores. The actual facts are lost in time and blurred with myth. These are illuminated, like the manuscripts, in the book *Sun Dancing* by Geoffrey Moorhouse.

Sun Dancing uses historical fiction to present the life of the men who lived and prayed on the *skeilics*, the precipitous rock islands littered about the coast of Ireland. The first part of the book uses historical narrative while the remainder presents short essays of the men and the culture that have impacted the entire world.

Men sought the isolation of the skeilics to better commune with God. On these pinpoints of land that some saw as the end of the world, Irish monasticism developed. Here they copied the ancient books and developed a way of living and praying. Despite the cruelties of self-mortification, nature and invasion, they survived and flourished. Years later they journeyed from the skeilics and spread throughout Europe the ancient knowledge that would otherwise have been lost during *The Dark Ages*.

The narrative spans the years 588 A.D. to 1222 A.D. and depicts the monks in their beehive-shaped stone huts, in Irish called *clochain*. They survived by fishing and nurturing vegetables from the rocky ground. Their ascetic practices are graphically described and are not to be imitated by the modern reader.

For the modern reveler who raises a Guinness, the Scourge used to subdue the carnal desires will seem alien. Instead of voices raised in raucous song, faces drop onto the cold stone floors in oratories for prayer. For the person who meticulously plans their day, the *peregrinatio*, the traveling where the wind, waves and God takes you, will seem more folly than faith.

Here is Patrick, Brendan the Navigator and Brian Boru. Here is Olaf Trygvasson – the Viking who embraced Christ. Read about the Culdees, the Scoti and the Dancing Sun on Easter Morn.

More than Saint Patrick, the entire scope of Irish monasticism and life in the sixth through thirteenth centuries is presented. Here are disease and monsters, invaders and saints. Here is life lived explicitly on the edge of a cliff looking ever outward and upward to an horizon that the soul not the eyes can see.

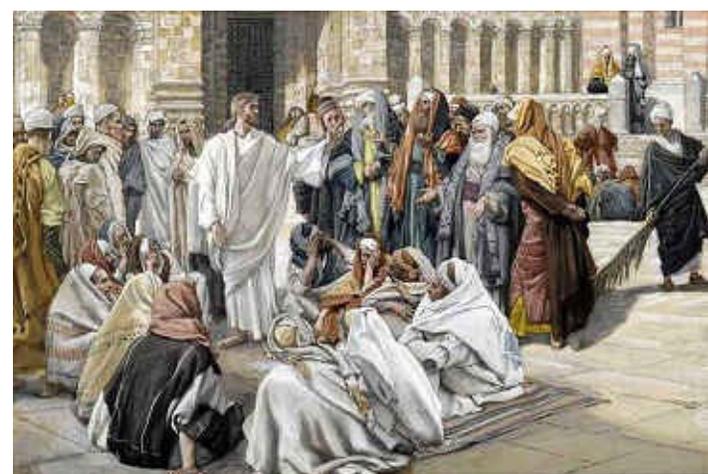
Embrace your *Irish* heritage and drink deep from *Sun Dancing* as from a fine pint.

This contribution is available at <http://blog.catholicwritersguild.com/2015/03/sun-dancing-a-book-review-by-dennis-p-mcgeeahan.html>

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The State of Your Heart [at A Catholic Moment]



This is the tough one. To love ones enemy, and to pray for those who want to persecute and harm you is perhaps the toughest part about being a Christian. Most other aspects of being Christian we clearly understand. Even if we choose not to do certain things or we give in to various selfish tendencies or vices, we usually know what the “right” way is, and how we should live. In most cases, we know what Jesus would do, even though often we choose not to do it. But to love your enemy, especially our enemies who literally try to harm us for no reason other than the fact that we have freedom, or because we are Christian, or to satisfy a sick need they have – how can we love them? This is difficult to understand. But today’s Gospel is all about this, as Jesus says:

But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

I remember the day the towers fell in New York. I remember the day of the bombings at the finish line of the Boston Marathon. I remember countless other terrorist attacks in countless countries, and I remember the mass shootings here in the US at various schools, movie theaters and shopping malls. We hear about the horrific things people do every day in the news, and we see on the Internet and on TV our Christian brothers and sisters, and people of other faiths and nationalities being killed by groups like ISIS and Boko Haram in ways not seen since the first millennium. And yet we are to love these people. This is a tough one.

And you can even take this closer to home and far less sinister – our boss whom we cannot stand who may treat us horribly, or the person who sells us out just to make money or get ahead in life at our expense. Or the spouse who beats us, or the parent who abuses us, or the peer who bullies us. How are we supposed to respond? We love them. We pray for them. Jesus said so.

For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers and sisters only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

The world is full of so many evils. But it’s also full of a lot more good. People forget that. The bad things get publicized, but for every bad thing that happens in the news, there are significantly more good things that happen. It’s just that the good news doesn’t sell. So many times these days I know people, myself included that just do not want to watch the news.

Many times we pretend that the bad things aren't happening. But we cannot turn a blind eye to it either. We have to be aware. We have to hope. We have to pray. We have to think that the people that do the evils in this world still have an ounce of good in them somewhere, and we have to think and believe that things can always get better. We have to try. We have to love. Because if we stop trying, if we stop praying, if we stop loving, then the world wins.

If we only pray for those we like, or those who are like us, or those who only do good to us, then are we really any better? Because if we don't pray for those who persecute us and those who treat us badly, then how can we deserve the prayers that are said for us? Because none of us are perfect. Sometimes we treat people badly too. We may not conduct the atrocities we see on TV, but we often perform atrocities that destroy our families and communities around us. And we need that love and those prayers of the people around us too.

Am I saying that we have to agree, support, and condone the evils that people do? Of course not. And Jesus was not saying that. He's not saying we have to be best friends and that we have to hang out with everyone, even the bad. But we have to have a genuine love and concern for humanity, regardless of good or bad.

And guess what? Some people who do some not-so-good things get a lot of credit, money, and other accolades and perks in life. In a weird way that humanity does not understand, God uses even the bad things and evils in this world for good. And we have to trust in Him and his plan and his commandments. And His commandments tell us that we have to love one another as He loves us.

To love is to understand, and so when these bad things happen from other people, as tough as it is, we need to try to understand why they do what they do, and pray to God for them, for the love of humanity, and ask Him to give us the grace we need to see it His way and try to love as He would love.

It's only through His grace that we can achieve this. Like anything else, we cannot do this on our own and we need His help to truly love those who persecute us. We need to pray to Him to not only help them, but to help us understand, to help us forgive. It's the only way we can only begin make sense of the things that happen in this world, and its the only way where we can truly start to be like Him. It's the only way that we can be forgiven is if we forgive those who harm us.

As I said, it's tough one. But it's one where we cannot afford to try, for the sake of the world, and for the sake of our own soul. We must love and we must pray for everyone – especially those who hurt us, because God so loves us. All of us. It's not easy, but then again nothing worthwhile is.

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Dancing on the Rim [at Dancing in the Rain]

All day long the ball was dancing on the rim. Lots of good looks and almost baskets, mainly, though, the shoot around session consisted of the ball lingering on the rim without falling through the hole. “Aim higher,” an old coach’s words echoed through the barren gym. “Due to gravity, the ball is always going to come down,” he explained. “If you shoot above the rim, the ball has a chance of falling into the hoop; but if you keep throwing up those darts, you are minimizing your chances.” Aim higher? Aiming high isn’t something I usually need to be encouraged towards. Frustrated, I replied aloud, as though he was present, “how much higher can I aim?”

I coached myself through a series of jump shots repeating his words: “aim higher”. As much as my aim was my issue (my sight was at the rim not above it), the change came when I started to use my legs. No longer shooting in the “my follow through is pretty” kind of way, I adjusted so that my legs were bent, locked and loaded, ready to explode. There’s jumping and then there’s exploding. When you have to aim higher you have to not only raise your eyes and expectations but you need to adjust your setup and execution as well.

In the midst of a shoot around it’s frustrating to see the misses linger. But if you’ve ever experienced the buzzer beater not falling into the hole, you know the heartbreak that sinks simultaneously as the hope of winning instantly plummets. In life there are those “could have been” and “almost was” events. The ones you have been training for with dedication and determination only to come up inches short of victory at the finish line. They stretch one’s dedication to say it kindly.

It’s an act of the will to not linger in defeat. Just because I didn’t doesn’t mean that I won’t. It’s a choice to sit out or set up for the next chance. It’s a choice to continue to practice, even when the effort feels it’s done in vain. I may not have sunk the last buzzer beater but in the meantime, I’m going to improve my setup, strengthen my base, and heighten my aim so when the time comes, without doubt, “I’ll make it.”

Verso l’alto,

K.Coop

Because there is NO better movie in all of history!

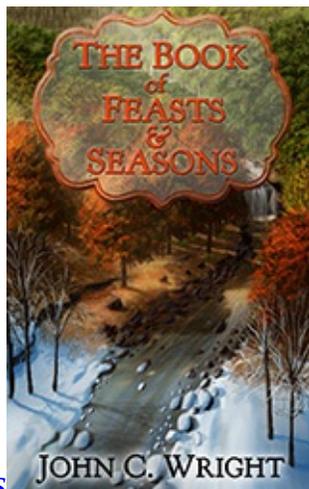
Cause tonight's the night the world begins again

You shattered my darkness
washed away my blindness
now Im breathing in
and breathing out
Im alive again

This contribution is available at <http://dancingintherain401.blogspot.com/2015/03/dancing-on-rim.html>
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Book Review: The Book of Feasts and Seasons [at Yard Sale of the Mind]



[The Book of Feasts and Seasons](#) is a collection of short stories by John C. Wright. Many of these stories first appeared on his blog, and so I had already read them there; one (*The Ideal Machine*) appeared in [the first issue of the Sci Phi Journal](#). A couple I had not seen before.

Short & Sweet: 10 great stories for under \$0.50 each? Are you kidding me? Where do you get that kind of bang for the entertainment buck these days? Go buy this now!

All the stories are very good, several are tear-jerkers in the best sense. They are organized according to the feasts and seasons of the Catholic liturgical calendar, and invite contemplation on how they relate to these. Let's run through them:

1. New Years: *The Meaning of Life as Told to Me by an Inebriated Science Fiction Writer in New Jersey*. This story reminded me of that genre of pop song that tries to see how many pop references it can make in under 4 minutes – we have the author and a famous Sci Fi writer discussing the ultimate meaning of life via references and allusions to dozens of different classic stories. It's funny and fun, even for me, who maybe generously got 25% of the references.
2. Epiphany: *The Queen of the Tyrant Lizards*. Mr Wright's 'let me show you how this is done' rewrite of the very slight and frankly adolescent Hugo-Award winning [If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love](#). There's nothing exactly terrible about the original story, except, perhaps the laughable characterization of the Bad Guys in the Southern bar – gin? – and it's hard to see what in it makes it speculative fiction – mentioning dinosaurs? – but holding this bit of indulgent fluff up as the finest example of speculative fiction in a short story produced over a entire year strains credulity past the breaking point.

Mr. Wright's story is everything *If You Were a Dinosaur* isn't – mind-bending speculative fiction, deft, startling, true to life where it should be (readers of a more historically grounded mind will appreciate the portrayal of the 1950s) and, in the end, emotionally complicated. The only emotional bang in the original story comes from having your prejudices against ignorant Southerners confirmed, if you lean that way. (I imagine Mr. Wright, as a Virginian gentleman himself, took a little umbrage.) Really, the original story expects you to emotionally identify with a woman standing over her dying and comatose fiance and telling

him about her dinosaur-based revenge fantasy. That doesn't exactly fly, emotionally, for an adult.

3. Annunciation: *A Random World of Delta Capricorni Aa, Called Scheddi*. I think you could call this a Creation myth involving crop circles and a slug rabbit. It's even better than it sounds.

4. Good Friday: *The Sheathed Paw of the Lion*. An agent, one of a cryogenically stored team of what are evidently historians, writes a report to the next agent due to be awakened to clue him in on recent developments. The world has succumbed to political gravity, and resumed its rest state of violent tyranny. Well-intentioned aliens respond to a thousands-year-old signal, and come to offer their help. It does not go well. This story is perhaps a little too real, in the sense that the horrible actions of tyrants involved are all too believable. Mr. Wright may not like this comparison, but it brought to mind some of Flannery O'Connor's darker stories.

5. Easter Sunday: *Pale Realms of Shade*. This must be a redemption story, and it is. Even by Mr. Wright's standards, it wanders and twists and ends up far from home – in a good, thoroughly enjoyable way. It starts out as a comic noir detective ghost story, with the detective the ghost who cracks wise like he stepped out of a Raymond Chandler novel. He has solved his own murder – but refuses to tell anyone who did it. His widowed wife begs him, so that she can collect the insurance money. His former partner and best friend (of sorts) just wants to be left alone. With each apparition, the plot thickens until it's a tasty gumbo of various creatures mythological and eldritch, sins and poltergeist, confessions and temptations, and, finally, Easter redemption.

I was reminded of the story arc from C. S. Lewis's [Till We Have Faces](#), which I've long held is his greatest work. In both stories, the protagonists believes themselves to have been wronged, and are slowly brought to see both how blessed and how much a curse they have been. Such a story takes delicate telling, which Wright pulls off in an often amusing way.

I read this out loud to my wife while we drove for a brief President's Day get away. When done, I asked her what she thought, and she needed a minute to wipe her eyes and compose herself. A beautiful story.

6. Ascension: *The Ideal Machine*. Here is a first contact story with a theological edge. What if aliens, vastly our technological superiors to the point where we are less interesting to them than microbes are to us, nonetheless need us to help them work out their redemption? What if they travel for centuries to give us an Ideal Machine, which can realize almost anything you can think of? Who among us could use such a thing for good? This is a very good story.

7. Pentecost: *A Parliament of Beasts and Birds*. [The Rabid Puppies believe this should be considered for a Hugo](#). That would not be unjust. This is an odd, and oddly gripping, story. When it first appeared on Mr. Wright's blog over a year ago (I think) I read it to the kids. When I mentioned I was reading it again, my 10 year old jumped in and started in excitedly with 'that story about....' – he remembered it better than I did.

Animals are left to deal with a world deprived of people – and have some decisions to make.

8. Halloween: *Eve of All Saint's Day*. This brief tale tackles the question: what would we hear if we were really aware of what's going on?

9. Advent: *Nativity*. A man returning from the funeral of his wife in Rome meets a mysterious stranger

who offers him the use of H.G. Well's time machine. Rather than go back a few years to see his beloved one more time, he chooses to confront the God of the Nativity with his questions: Why? This is Wright at his story-telling best. I wept at the end.

10. Christmas: *Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus*. Yes, I guess I cry easily, for I wept here, too. A young mother, alone for Christmas as her military husband is overseas, loses her daughter on Christmas Eve. Both are named Virginia. Her daughter's last wish – to stay up and see Santa – comes to naught as she dies of cancer in the hospital a few minutes before midnight.

The distraught mother wanders into the snowy night, ending up shivering in front of a department store with a most peculiar Santa in the window. It sounds silly to say that she is shown the true meaning of Christmas – but she is. Wonderful story.

Beautiful, fine, superversive stories well worth your \$4.99. Buy them and read them now.

This contribution is available at <http://yardsaleofthemind.wordpress.com/2015/02/25/book-review-the-book-of-feasts-and-seasons/>
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