

NewEvangelists.org

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Forward

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

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

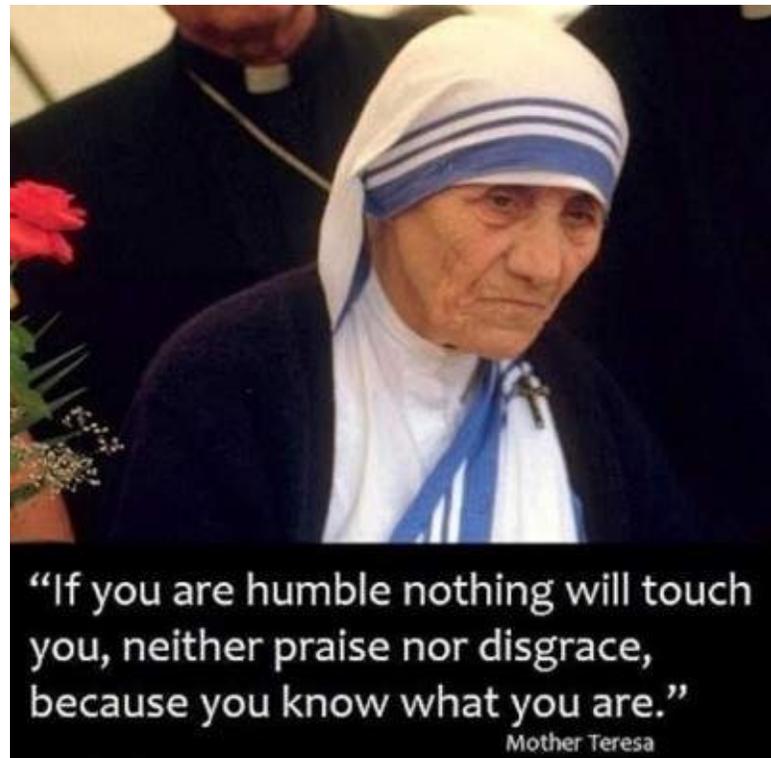
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Humbling Yourself for the Glory of God



Humbling yourself for the glory of God is the goal. Yet how does a person get to that point with regularity? Once again, I draw on Fr. Jonathan Morris, from www.christophers.org to shed some light on the subject:

Fr. Morris says the first thing to do is to ask God for the virtue of Humility, and then to prepare ourselves for receipt of the grace by centering our minds, hearts and actions on others rather than on ourselves; to think less often about ourselves and more often about what we can do for others. I think this is great advice – advice that I have begun to follow myself.

I'll end the discussion on this virtue where I began, with Mother Teresa. Here are her widely publicized *15 Points of Humility*. These suggestions are the best ways for humbling yourself for the glory of God:

1. Speak as little as possible about yourself.
2. Keep busy with your own affairs and not those of others.
3. Avoid curiosity.
4. Do not interfere in the affairs of others.
5. Accept small irritations with good humor.
6. Do not dwell on the faults of others.
7. Accept censures even if unmerited.
8. Give in to the will of others.
9. Accept insults and injuries.
10. Accept contempt, being forgotten and disregarded.
11. Be courteous and delicate even when provoked by someone.
12. Do not seek to be admired and loved.
13. Do not protect yourself behind your own dignity.

14. Give in, in discussions, even when you are right.
15. Choose always the more difficult task.

Mother Teresa was one wise woman! I treasure these *15 Points of Humility* and have begun incorporating them into my life!

As we complete our discussion on the virtue of Humility, we will next venture into discussion on the virtue of Unselfishness. Is Selfish Behavior Harming You? We'll discuss the answer to that question in our next reflection. Don't miss it!

This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/humbling-glory-god/>
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The 6 Most "UnChrist-like" Things Christ Did [at ChurchPOP]

WWJD: What would Jesus do?

It's a great question. Christians are of course supposed to follow the example of Christ.

[See also: [The 14 Most Challenging, Radical, Do-We-Really-Have-To Teachings of Jesus](#)]

There can be a problem, though, when the answers people give to the question are disconnected from Scripture. People can end up just taking whatever *they* would do and then claim Jesus probably would have done it, too. But the Jesus described in the New Testament does not fit well with many of our modern sensibilities.

[See also: [Why We Need the Great Saint of Grumpiness](#)]

Yes, Jesus taught love, mercy, and sacrifice. But these things, if viewed from a contemporary lens, can easily be reduced to a kind of hollow sentimentalism. The Jesus of the Gospels, on the other hand, was deeply serious – both about loving others, and about sin.

So here are 6 things Jesus did that many people today would probably brand as “unChrist-like.”

1) Called people names

You might just want to read all of [chapter 23 in Matthew's Gospel](#).

Jesus gives a *long* and detailed attack on the moral character of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, and he pulls no punches. Among the names he calls them are “snakes,” “brood of vipers,” “hypocrites,” and “blind guides.” Ouch.

2) Offended people without apology

In [Matthew chapter 15](#), some Pharisees and teachers of the law challenge Jesus about why he and his disciples don't keep a certain tradition of the elders. In response, Jesus ignores their question, calls them hypocrites, and points out how they contradict the law of God with some of their traditions.

Then Jesus' disciples come to him and say, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

Jesus' response? He offers no apology, no attempt at clarification, but continues his critique: “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

3) Warned against laughter

A lot of people have heard of the Beatitudes as they appear in [Matthew chapter 5](#): “Blessed are the poor

in spirit... blessed are those who mourn... blessed are the meek," etc.

A similar set of blessings also appear in [Luke chapter 6](#), except that they are also paired with corresponding warnings:

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

All four of these are challenging. But notice that the 3rd one is a warning against *laughing*. Imagine the headlines if Jesus had preached this today. He's probably be branded as some sort of rigid, humorless archconservative.

4) Cleared the Temple with a whip

One of the times Jesus' visited the Temple in Jerusalem, the Gospel of John says "he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money." His response?

So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

It's easy to read over these words quickly without grasping their full import. He made a *whip*, and used it to at least drive the animals out of the Temple, and possibly the people as well (there's ambiguity with the word "all"). He *flipped tables* and scattered people's money around, while he was also driving them out.

This was not just some nice request.

5) Was intentionally opaque in his teaching

Jesus had so many memorable parables. He told them because stories are easier for common people to understand and remember, right?

Actually, it's the opposite.

In [Matthew chapter 13](#), Jesus is asked point-blank: "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" And here's his answer:

Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

In other words, it appears that Jesus taught in parables to make it hard for the average person to

understand. He then revealed the meaning of his parables secretly to his close disciples.

6) Preached graphic depictions of hell

Everyone knows that “fire and brimstone” preaching is ineffective and, in any case, antithetical to the spirit of the Gospel of love, right?

Then why did Jesus preach about hell so much?

[See also: [13 Warnings from Pope Francis on Man’s Oldest Foe, the Devil](#)]

Jesus gave horrifying descriptions of the place. Throughout the Gospels we find that Jesus describes hell as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” a place where “the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched,” a “blazing furnace,” “darkness,” “unquenchable fire,” and “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Several of these descriptions he repeats several times.)

And he constantly warns people from doing things that would get them sent there. So maybe preaching about hell isn’t so bad?

This contribution is available at <http://www.churchpop.com/2015/03/30/the-6-most-unchrist-like-things-christ-did/>
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Why Christians Shouldn't Celebrate Seder Meals [at Catholic Stand]

In sharing what seemed like a simple, informative [item](#) about Seder, I was met with much confusion and a charge of Anti-Semitism. It all began when I posted this [audio](#) on [Facebook](#) last night. With it, I quoted a priest friend:

“The ONLY ‘Seder’ that celebrates the divinity of Christ is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which is the New Covenant Seder instituted by Christ Himself at the Last Supper. Old Covenant Seder does not recognize Jesus as the expected Messiah.” ~Father O.

The questions with which I was met this morning were heartfelt but needed clarification.

“This post only breeds anti-Jewish thinking and does not allow Catholics to ponder the roots of our faith, the richness of our heritage. Jesus longed to eat this meal with us...”

“I think if you are of Jewish heritage then it is not sinful to celebrate the Passover.”

“I’m confused. I grew up with a Jewish mother and a Christian father...I still like keeping some of our Jewish traditions alive, and teaching my kids about them as part of our history and heritage. We are actually planning to drive 4 hours tomorrow to go to my rabbi uncle’s house for Passover so my kids can experience a REAL Passover. This is something sinful? My family is expecting us. Should we cancel? Go to confession? If we have honest Jewish heritage, is that different?”

This column, then, is an elucidation to assist us all in comprehending the significance of our actions within the context of our religious practices.

“Saint Thomas Aquinas asked, ‘Were the ceremonies of the Old Law, the Mosaic Law, ceased at the coming of Jesus Christ?’”

The enlightening answer, given in the [audio](#)? Yes, the Old Law was completely fulfilled and updated, so to speak.

“When we’re dealing with the worship of God our external actions must correspond with our internal beliefs.” ~Saint Thomas Aquinas

According to Father, this can be further illustrated by the way we behave in the Divine Presence, the following of the rubric by priests, genuflection and the laity presenting themselves in their Sunday best when attending the Holy Sacrifice of Mass.

In the days before our Savior sacrificed Himself for us, He and His family were indeed practicing Jews. In this context, the Passover Meal consisted of an animal sacrifice to God. While Jesus celebrated this way with His family (since He was a Jew and had not yet been made a HUMAN sacrifice Himself) this made perfect sense. There was not yet a Savior Who died on the Cross for us.

Now that Jesus has completed what the Jewish people began, we have a New Law and new way to celebrate His completed law as Christians – the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If we go back in time and celebrate what people did *before* the fulfillment of the law, we are denying (in action) that we have a Savior Who completed the Law.

This assertion is not at all Anti-Semitic. This edict is directed at Christians, not people of the Jewish faith. We have much love and respect for the original Jewish people because their faith directly preceded and made possible the fulfillment of Christianity by Jesus. Yet just as people of the Jewish faith have their own religious practices and celebrations, we Catholics wouldn't expect them to practice our Sacraments and ceremonies. We simply no longer practice as the biblical Jewish people did. We aren't the same, yet we are an extended family nonetheless.

Historical Aspects of Seder and Passover

As the [Council of Trent](#) proclaims, Jesus instituted the New Passover – He is the Lamb of God. If some claim affinity to a 'Christianized celebration of the Passover meal, they should realize that the Holy Sacrifice of Mass *is* the Christianized celebration of the Passover meal – given to us by Christ Jesus Himself.

Historically, we must also realize that the [Rabbinic Judaism](#) of today is not the Judaism of the Bible. The Temple is gone and the biblical Jewish priesthood is gone. Not until the end of the first century did Rabbinic Judaism come into existence. This religion is actually younger than Catholicism. So following their worship practices is problematic in this regard as well.

Moral theology books cite a specific (yet commonly misunderstood) form of [superstition](#). The superstition of False Worship – encompassing either the 'false worship of the True God or the true worship of a false god'. Clinging to a mistaken idea that we are celebrating something with which we associate Jesus, then, is a falsehood and encompasses the sin of the specific superstition of False Worship.

We are an Easter people. Our Christian faith teaches us that Jesus came 'not to abolish the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill them'. ([Matthew 5:17](#)) Therefore celebrating a practice that has been fulfilled by Jesus Himself, violates the command to worship only our Triune God. In celebrating a meal that happened before Jesus saved us by His death on the Cross, we are celebrating a pre-Jesus practice. Just as the Sabbath was replaced by Sunday worship, the Lord's Day, we show by our external actions the state of our internal worship.

“The ceremonies of the Old Law, which foreshadow the New Covenant and the joys of Heaven, had to cease at the Advent of the New Covenant and other ceremonies had to be introduced which would be in keeping with the state of Divine worship for that particular time.” ~Saint Thomas Aquinas

Within the beautiful season of the Easter Triduum, we have the fullness of our Catholic heritage, given to us by Jesus Himself. What more could we presume to add?

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicstand.com/why-christians-shouldnt-celebrate-seder-meals/>
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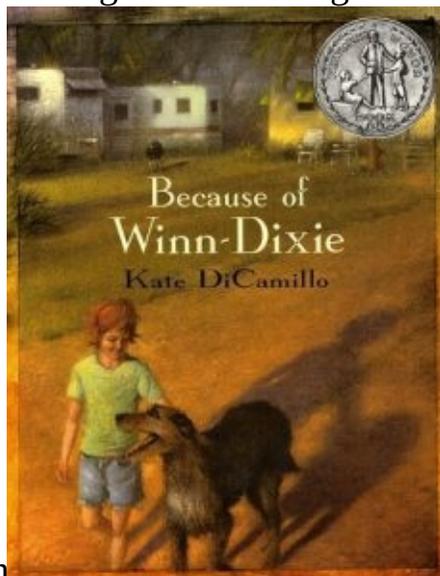
Why Gloria Dump is Everyone's Favorite [at God-Haunted Lunatic]

“But you’re the nicest person I know,” I told her.

“Don’t mean I haven’t done bad things,” she said.

Try this experiment: Approach any random group of grade-schoolers, and ask them who their favorite character is in Kate DiCamillo’s story, [Because of Winn-Dixie](#). Odds are pretty good that most of them – possibly even all of them – will say “Gloria Dump.” At least I know that’s the case among my own kids, and the same holds true for me, my wife, and most adults – why is that?

I remember reading the book to our kids and loving it. And last night we watched the movie again at



Nicky’s request, and it, too, was well worth it. The mood set by both is a gentle one, and, despite real problems – alcoholism, desertion, jail time, and accidental death – there’s a sense that everything is going to be alright.

All the characters are memorable, flawed, and appealing – Otis at the pet shop, Miss Block at the library, Opal’s dad (a.k.a. “The Preacher”) – but none more so than Gloria Dump. “Ain’t that a terrible last name?” she asks Opal when they meet. “Dump?”

The name, though, is in stark contrast to the beautiful complexity and equanimity of the character. She’s blind, yet she sees deeply; she’s a dry drunk, yet her outlook is sober; she’s solitary, and yet her gift of hospitality seems to have no limits. Most of all she’s a peacemaker and a bridge-builder and a sponge for others’ suffering – truly a “[wounded healer](#)” if there ever was one.

Of course Gloria is everybody’s favorite!

As we watched the the movie version of Gloria in action last evening, I kept hearkening back to yesterday’s [Gospel](#), and it struck me as serendipitous that I’d encountered them both on the same day.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you...for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.”

Here's Gloria's take: *"You can't always judge people by the things they done. You got to judge them by what they are doing now."*

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?

"Do you think everybody misses somebody? Like I miss my mama?" "Mmmm-hmmm," said Gloria. She closed her eyes. "I believe, sometimes, that the whole world has an aching heart."

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Gloria Dump looked over at the preacher.

He nodded his head at Gloria and cleared his throat and said, "Dear God, thank you for warm summer nights and candlelight and good food. But thank you most of all for friends. We appreciate the complicated and wonderful gifts you give us in each other. And we appreciate



the task you put down before us, of loving each other the best we can, even as you love us. We pray in Christ's name, Amen."

"Amen," said Gloria Dump.

Gloria Dump, I came to recognize, is who *I* aspire to be: A human being conscious of ones colossal failings who is nonetheless resolved to make amends by, among other things, making room for the failings of others – by learning to love our enemies, in other words, really love them.

As [Pope Francis said](#), **"This is the Christian life,"** and "being Christian isn't easy." The Holy Father continued:

'But Father, to be Christian is to become some sort of fool?' Yes, in a certain sense, yes. It means renouncing the cunning of the world in order to do everything that Jesus tells us to do.

Yes, renouncing the cunning of the world. That's where Gloria Dump is especially inspiring because she spurns pretension and artifice, and is truly intent on being present to all those who cross her path, whether friend or foe.

Can I do that, too? "Let us ask the Lord for the grace to understand what it is to be a Christian," Pope Francis recommends, "to understand the grace He gives to us Christians because we cannot do it on our own."

As Gloria Dump put it, “Amen.”

This contribution is available at <http://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/2015/03/01/why-gloria-dump-is-everyones-favorite/>
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St. Joseph Altar and Feast Day Celebration: 2015 [at A Slice of Smith Life]

This past Sunday, March 22, our homeschool group had our annual St. Joseph feast day celebration that we have been having for about 10 years now. Each year we gather and fellowship with family and old and new friends to celebrate wonderful

[St. Joseph, the husband of our Blessed Mother and foster-father of Jesus](#)

, but our homeschool group celebrates it whichever Sunday is closest to March 19 so the fathers can gather for the celebration as well! This year was filled with a few raindrops, a beautiful St. Joseph altar, and many memories.

For a history of St. Joseph's feast day and St. Joseph altars, be sure to read my post

[HERE](#)

that tells all about it, including black and white photos of when my Dad was a little boy and how he celebrated St. Joseph's feast day with very elaborate and decorative altars.

Here's this year's altar with 3 levels in the background to represent the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The altar is decorated with

[the decorative breads that our homeschool group made](#)

a few weeks prior to our celebration and other delicious food. Each year the host family (Thank you H. family for hosting such a wonderful time each year!) sets up the altar on their back screened-in porch. There was also lots more food for the feast inside their home.

St. Joseph's Altar
2015



The black and white photo above of Mary with the Child Jesus was given as a gift for my friend from her mother when she traveled to Rome. It is a beautiful print with the holy card of St. Joseph and Jesus beside it. This print made the St. Joseph altar extra special. The

[monstrance](#)

in the lower right corner came out so beautiful.



Thanks A.J. for the beautiful, colorful, and delicious cupcakes! They were a hit and added so much to the altar.





The carpenter's square belonged to our friend's grandfather and it always makes the perfect decoration in front of the St. Joseph statue. Another friend made the chocolate birds' nests that were adorable and I hope to make them for this Easter! The colorful fig cookies are a traditional Italian cookie that are a labor of love made by J.H. and family and they are called

[cuccidatas](#)



I made these very easy and delicious Cappuccino Cupcakes. I found the recipe in the

[Country Italian cookbook](#)

. If you would like the recipe,

[contact me](#)

and I will be glad to share it. It's basically just brownie mix and coffee mixed with a few other ingredients. Cool Whip with cinnamon on top. Mmmmm... Chocolate and coffee...a winning combination! They were a hit!



The homeschool family that hosts the St. Joseph celebration told a little bit of history of St. Joseph's Feast Day by displaying this map to show where Sicily is located. Our friend's great grandparents (their wedding photo is in the above picture) were from Sicily and when they moved to Louisiana they started the St. Joseph altar tradition in the state of Louisiana.



Here is J.H. talking about the history of the St. Joseph altars. In the background you can see posters filled with a collage of pictures that my Dad had made from several past St. Joseph feast day celebrations. Thank you Dad!



Here is my father on the far left (and the "official" photographer) and

[HERE](#)

is my Dad as a little boy standing in front of his family's very elaborate St. Joseph's altar.

My Dad is holding the

[Litany of St. Joseph](#)

which is a beautiful prayer that we say as a group each year. A litany is a list of names that refer to a particular Saint.



J.H. filled the tiny white cloth bags for each family to take home with them: Each bag was filled St. Joseph holy card, St. Joseph medal, and a fava bean because

[during the famine in Sicily, families lived off of these types of beans until the famine ended](#)

. Attached to each bag is a ziplock bag filled with samples of the traditional Italian cookies she made with her family.



Here are some of the kids and teens and everyone was able to hang out outside for most of the afternoon even in the drizzling rain that was off and on. Good St. Joseph looked out for us and must have sent a special request to God to keep the predicted rainfall to a minimum. :)



Here is this year's family and friends. Our kids are scattered throughout the group with my husband and me on the far right corner squatting down with our 19 mo. old dressed in red. :)

May the Passiontide, these last 2 weeks of Lent, be a blessed time for you and your family and friends! Wait..... after doing some research about Passiontide I just learned some new things about this time period in Lent through Nicole's blog post

[Celebrating Passion Sunday](#)

and

[from this site](#)

that she refers to in her post. Passiontide is one OR two weeks prior to Easter depending on which liturgical calendar you look at and follow. Hmm...that's interesting!

I just love our Catholic faith because it's like a bottomless treasure chest with gems and rich traditions that always has something new to learn and love!

St. Joseph, pray for us!



This contribution is available at <http://www.asliceofsmithlife.com/2015/03/st-joseph-altar-and-feast-day.html>
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Prayer Edition



I missed the Lenten midway checkpoint. Maybe on purpose. I haven't exactly done a bang-up job with Lent this year. I can't say I mustered any great ambition to kick off the annual forty days of preparation for Easter. I share a bathroom with five other people, have no automatic dishwasher or microwave, and no hot water in the bathroom sink. Don't I sacrifice enough every day?

Uh, no. Not really. Not that those couldn't be legitimate sacrifices, but it would require performing them with the right intention. Which I haven't.

Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving.

The three hallmarks of Lent.

Perennial Lenten seasons of pregnancy and nursing little ones have left me out of the habit of traditional sacrifices. You know, the food-related ones. We've cut out most desserts as a family this Lent, so at least there's that. The most fruitful fast I remember is the year I gave up listening to the radio in the car, instead filling my commutes and errands with silence. I'd considered adopting that sacrifice again, but my time in the car is sporadic these days, and with four children, it's never silent.

Almsgiving has never done much for me. Which probably means I've not been doing it right. We give away a percentage of our income year-round. I'm throwing spare change in the kids' mission boxes, but there are no little "extras" to give up and donate the difference. No cups of coffee or lunches out. We'll make a donation from our tax refund at least, but since I haven't earned an income in nearly ten years, I can't say that giving money feels like much of a sacrifice to me.

That leaves me with prayer, an area where I continue to struggle based on my inability to find a few distraction-free moments during the day. I can make time for almost anything, and I do. My ability to write and do a multitude of other things is only possible because I can do it distracted and interrupted. If I count on prayer time with no distractions or interruptions, I've found that it just doesn't happen. I already have issues with the [all-or-nothing approach](#) to resolutions.

That's a long introduction to five of my favorite prayers. I can't swing contemplative prayer at this stage in my life, but I can rely on these well-loved and treasured prayers.

-1-

A Prayer For My Husband

I came across [this prayer](#) years ago via [Danielle Bean](#). I don't know its source. When I've made a concentrated effort to recite this prayer daily, I've notice improvements in my marriage. It's taped to the wall next to our kitchen sink, and I've ignored it for too long.

-2-

A Parent's Prayer

Our former pastor distributed these prayers on occasions throughout the year. [This one](#) stuck, and it's affixed to the wall beside the Prayer For My Husband. My favorite lines: May I ever be mindful that my children are children and I should not expect of them the judgments of adults. Let me not rob them of the opportunity to wait on themselves and to make decisions."

-3-

Our Lady of Perpetual Help



Our Lady of Perpetual Help

My mother prayed [this prayer](#) as a young woman when she was hoping to meet a man to marry. It worked. She married a man whose last name happened to be Perpetua. More than sixty years after her wedding day and more than ten since my father has passed, she still keeps an image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help on her kitchen counter. She gave me a holy card with this prayer when I was a child, and I memorized it.

-4-

The 23rd Psalm

My mom once gave me a bookmark from our local Catholic shop with this psalm on the back and suggested I memorize it. I did. I still recite it every night before I fall asleep. It has been a great comfort to me in trying times. [Choose your translation.](#) Apparently our Catholic shop sold the King James Version, because that is what I've memorized with its "maketh" and "leadeth."

-5-

The Jesus Prayer

The older I get the more I seek mercy. I learned the [Jesus Prayer, favored by the Eastern churches, a decade or more ago. It's to the point and so short I can say it without distraction or interruption.](#)

Lord Jesus Chris, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

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This contribution is available at <http://carolynastfalk.com/2015/03/24/five-favorites-lenten-check-in-check-up/>
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NH Catholics gather in Concord for advocacy workshops [at Leaven For The Loaf]

Earlier this month came the first “Catholic Day at the State House” in Concord. Judging from the turnout, it won’t be the last.



Bishop Peter Libasci welcomes participants to Catholic Day at the NH State House.

Groups in other states, and even a few groups in New Hampshire, have “lobby days” and advocacy workshops. This is new ground for the Diocese of Manchester. I signed up as soon as I heard about the event, and I was wondering what I’d find when I showed up.

I found a crowd. The enthusiastic response from my fellow Catholics was great to see. It was enough to make me wonder just how many people of faith statewide are waiting for someone to organize a similar day for their own faith communities. I sense untapped potential. Is this something your church or local group could develop?

The ingredients for a good day of advocacy training:

- **A varied group...** Gathering at the Holiday Inn down the street from the State House, the Catholic Day crowd – including Bishop Peter Libasci – filled the ballroom. I shared a table with people from four different counties. I saw people of all ages, from high school to retirement age. Students from Sunapee’s Mount Royal Academy and Manchester’s Trinity High School filled several tables. Dr. Peter Sampo of Northeast Catholic College in Warner accompanied NCC students. I saw a few legislators and activists, but most of the people in the room were grassroots Catholic voters without titles or legislative experience.
- **...with a common goal.** The room was full of people who wanted to learn more about how to work toward public policy consistent with Catholic teaching. The focus was clear.
- **Experts who know their stuff and can stick to a schedule.** We had an embarrassment of riches the other day: Bishop Libasci, the diocesan public policy director, the lobbyist for the Diocese, the current Speaker of the House – and that was even before the breakout sessions started.
- **Specific legislation to target.** Public policy director Meredith Cook made sure everyone knew

about Catholic Citizenship News, which offers weekly updates on the wide variety of bills being tracked by the Diocese. Diocesan lobbyist Bob Dunn cited three bills in particular: HB 151, a “study committee” on end-of-life issues (passed House, coming up soon for a Senate hearing; [Rep. Rowe skewered the same issue](#) when it came up two years ago); the buffer zone repeal, HB 403 (passed House, not yet scheduled for Senate action); and SB 204 (an attempt to repeal the education tax credit; the bill was just killed by the Senate). The state budget, soon to be the only legislative game in town, came up for discussion as well.

- **How-to instruction from experienced people.** De-mystifying the State House was one of the best things I saw happening at Catholic Day. Where to find bills, how to testify, how to sign in without testifying, how to communicate effectively with elected officials (hint: don’t forget the value of handwritten letters and thank-yous): all the things that I take for granted were brand new to many of the people with me the other day.
- **Good breakout sessions.** Choosing only one out of the four was a challenge: Effective Advocacy on the Life Issues, A Dignified Death: Assisted Suicide is Not the Answer, Seeking Peace in the Middle East, and a State House tour were all on the menu.



Guide Virginia Drew describes the Senate chamber during a State House tour on Catholic Day.

There was no House session to observe, thanks to a recent two-day session that wiped out a backlog of bills. I wondered if that would affect the agenda. If it did, I couldn’t tell. There were no gaps in the day’s full and varied program.

Introducing New Hampshire residents to their State House, breaking down advocacy into manageable steps, listening to speakers with experience in government and practical ministries: not bad for six hours’ work. Had the House been in session, and if a hot bill like buffer zone repeal had been on the agenda, everyone attending Catholic Day could have lined the State House halls and given the reps something to think about.

There’s power in numbers, to be sure, but with proper planning, even smaller groups could put on clinics like this. Pro-life civics is a growing field.

Which breakout session did I pick? After almost three decades of going to Concord to testify or write about pro-life legislation, I had never had [a formal tour of the State House](#). Now, I’ve had one. Worth every minute, too.

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## Ecce Ancilla Domini [at Plot Line and Sinker]



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“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord...” Mary’s words in Luke 1:38 echoed loudly in my heart when I found out that I was pregnant for the first time. To say that I was thrilled would be an understatement.

“A sword shall pierce your own soul.” These prophetic words also echoed loudly in my heart when I lost twins early in that pregnancy. And, with the loss, came the realization that being open to life didn’t always mean having a baby in my arms.

‘Openness to life’ is a phrase often used to describe the attitude of those using Natural Family Planning, whether they are avoiding or planning a pregnancy. However, when it comes to actively seeking a pregnancy, another form of ‘openness to life’ comes into play. I like to call it ‘openness to God’s will.’ For, in this openness, a couple truly becomes vulnerable — naked, in essence — before God, exposing them to whatever God allows.

This type of ‘openness’ can mean dealing with a whole range of possibilities: infertility, miscarriage, a baby with abnormalities, a pre-term delivery, a stillborn baby, or a healthy, full-term infant. But, in a sense, this is the same ‘openness’ that Mary embraced when she was informed that she would be the mother of our Savior: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord...”

To illustrate this, here are some examples:

I know one particular couple who tried for many years, unsuccessfully, to have a baby. They went through denial, then acceptance, of their infertility. The wife questioned God. “Why did you give me a godly man if we can’t have children together?” Eventually, they adopted two beautiful girls from China.

In our own case, James and I have had to endure the loss of seven babies through miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy. Some of those pregnancy losses entailed major surgery and, in two instances, I nearly hemorrhaged to death. During one miscarriage, my spiritual director offered these consoling words, “Perhaps God is asking you to sacrifice the joy of holding this child in your arms so that He may quickly hold your child in heaven.”

Several years ago, a woman from our homeschooling community was expecting her sixth child. At 19 weeks gestation, she began exhibiting signs of early labor. Her son was born and only lived for a short time. However, she shared with me that, as difficult as it was to hold her dying son in her arms, she truly felt blessed. The moment her son died, filled with God's grace, she more clearly understood in a small way what Our Lady endured by holding the crucified and dead Christ in her arms.

Six years ago, our close friends welcomed a new child into their family. At birth, their son appeared normal, but as she held onto him in those first few moments, she realized that he had Down Syndrome. When she called me, her voice was so full of love for her child that it was as if she was sharing with me that her baby had brown hair instead of blond. Her 'openness' to the wonderful gift that God had given to her was a testament to her trust in God and acceptance of grace in her life.

Finally, the idea of total 'openness' was illustrated more fully to me a few years ago while I was at the hospital waiting for my youngest son to come out of minor surgery. I watched a mother come into the nurses' station with her toddler in a stroller (who, in my eavesdropping, I had learned spent a long time in the special care nursery). Unable to catch a glimpse of her son, I watched from a distant position as many nurses gathered around the stroller to see the baby, and I could hear his sweet laughter as he reacted to the different nurses and to his mother.

My curiosity could not stand it any longer. I moved closer to see what this baby looked like. As the child came into view, I'm sure I let out a quiet gasp. His skull was misshapen, his forehead gigantic compared to the rest of his head. Immediately, I felt tremendous pity not only for the child, but for his parents. Then one of the nurses tickled him under the chin and he let out a squeal of laughter, a high-pitched, sweet sound. In that moment, I no longer saw someone who was deformed. I saw a little person who was radiantly beautiful; a representation of innocence and goodness. I felt an overwhelming urge to embrace him.

'Openness to life' means accepting God's will for us. If our baby has disabilities, it is important for us to pray for the grace to handle the challenges. If we must endure the loss of a child through miscarriage or pre-term birth, it is essential not to give in to hopelessness, but to realize that God has a plan for each unique human being he creates.

It's not easy for a couple to surrender their life-giving capabilities to God's design and to accept whatever comes from that. True 'openness to life' means becoming like Mary, a "handmaid of the Lord." It means being open to whatever God chooses for us, whether it's infertility or a child with disabilities, whether it's a healthy baby for us to raise, or one for Him to hold in heaven.

Happy Feast of the Annunciation!

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## The Greatest Rescue Mission of All Time [at Third Place Project]



Scene from Disney's "Frozen" – (2013)

When *Frozen* came out last winter, I was a little late to get to see it (I didn't actually watch the movie all the way through until about 6 months after it's release. For a father of two little girls, this may be a serious sin!) I was duly impressed, and I can understand why so many compared the quality of what they had in *Frozen* to *The Lion King* – both movies do an exceptional job at moving their audiences. Both also grab onto core themes from our Christian faith. While *The Lion King* retells the story of Moses (both are princes who flee to the desert, fearing the punishment they are owed for the death of another – and their return is inspired by an encounter with their Father's), *Frozen*, grabs onto the story of salvation history: the story we celebrate over Easter weekend.

In *Frozen*, the elder of two sisters, Elsa, is gifted with a particular power over the cold and snow – a power which can be both beautiful and dangerous. As young girls, Elsa accidentally freezes her sister, Anna's head – an ailment that can be easily cured, but this healing comes with a warning: if Elsa doesn't learn to control her power, she will be overcome by it. In this battle, she has one primary enemy: fear. Responding to this warning: Elsa's parents decide to lock her in a bedroom and tell her to hide her power. (Not sure how this helps her either learn control or avoid fear – and I'm not alone on this, as demonstrated in *To make a long story short*, when Elsa inherits the throne, she is more frightened than ever: and accidentally winds up freezing her sister's heart. The healer who saved Anna before informs her that the only thing that can save her now is an act of true love – and this needs to happen soon, or she'll turn into a human popsicle.

With this being a Disney "princess movie", we all expect that this act of true love would be – as it was for *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* – true love's kiss... but we are treated to a surprise ending where the act of true love is in fact an act of sacrificial love. It is Anna who winds up sacrificing herself to save her sister... ultimately, thawing both their hearts.

The fact is that we see these sorts of sacrificial acts all over the place in movies. In the first part of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf sacrifices himself to battle a Balrog (think: scary demonic looking bad guy). In *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, Spock sacrifices himself to save the Enterprise and her crew; in the rebooted version, *Star Trek Into Darkness*, James T. Kirk is given the opportunity to do the same. I remember leaving of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* thinking primarily of Isaiah's song of the suffering servant – how Batman's willingness to accept the blame & consequences for Harvey Dent's murderous rampage was a very Christlike moment. Consider these words from Isaiah 53:4-6:

***Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him***

***stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***

What all of these movies have in common – *Frozen*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Trek*, and *The Dark Knight*, along with countless others is that they show us an act of heroic sacrifice: where a principal character is either willing (or actually goes through with) the sacrifice of their own life for the sake of someone they love. It echoes not only Jesus' words, that ***“no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends”*** (John 15:13) – but the actions we celebrate today: the greatest rescue mission in all of history.

In the book of Genesis, we hear how God creates us “in His image and likeness” (Genesis 1:26-27) – and then how we misused the gift of freedom He'd given us. You could say that as Adam & Eve ate the fruit, they surrendered to fear and allowed our hearts to become frozen. At that moment God knew that our salvation would be found in a sacrificial act of true love, and spent the entirety of the old testament – spanning centuries – preparing us for something we could never have imagined: that His love has no limit, He would willingly sacrifice Himself, offering an act of true love on our behalf. As we read through the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, along with the prophets – we see God setting the table for His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus Christ descended not only to our level – taking on our human flesh, dealing with everything we have to deal with – but He also descended further, taking on the weight of EVERY HUMAN SIN. That weight meant the pain and suffering due for those sins – and the punishment justly applied for them. And as He cried out “it is accomplished” – He knew He had done everything He could to rescue us from the predicament we had found ourselves in: slaves to fear, our hearts frozen to understanding what love really is... and although I've spent half my life pondering what it means, I still feel like I struggle to find words that do justice to what precisely God has done for us here.

God took one of [the most horrific forms of execution](#) we have perpetrated on one another... and embraced it for our sake. At youth conferences I've heard speakers say it poetically: “*God would sooner die than risk an eternity without you*” and “*your life, your soul are worth the life of God the Son to God the Father.*” There is no greater love, no greater gift that God could have given on your behalf. Make sure you take some time on today to consider just what's going on – because then the resurrection we'll celebrate on Sunday will grow to mean so much more.

In his comments following the Way of the Cross in Rome today, pondering this very reality, [Pope Francis offered a beautiful prayer](#). Consider his words below, as we journey into an incredible weekend in which we celebrate the fact that Jesus undertook the greatest rescue mission in human history – not for a sibling, fellowship, starship, or city – but for an entire people: us.

***Crucified Jesus, strengthen the faith in us so that it not give in before temptations, rekindle hope in us, so that it not get lost by following the world's seductions. Protect charity in us, so that it not be deceived by corruption and worldliness. Teach us that the cross is the way to resurrection. Teach us that Good Friday is the path towards the Easter of light. Teach us that God never forgets any of his children and he never tires of forgiving us and embracing us with his infinite mercy. But also teach us to not get tired of asking Him for forgiveness and to believe in the Father's limitless mercy.***



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# A Night inside the Holy Sepulchre



A true story

*'If you want old ideas read new books, but if you want new ideas read old books'*. With these words my spiritual director gave me – *'Abandonment to Divine Providence'* by the Jesuit French mystic Jean Pierre de Caussade SJ, who died in 1751. The book is perhaps better known under the title- *'The Sacrament of the Present Moment'* more usually used when the book is translated into English, because this title embodies its central idea. I was busy reading the book when I had a message from my old friend Fr Kenneth Campbell, a Franciscan Priest who was born on the Island of Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides. He had spent years working in the Holy Land and had arranged a pilgrimage for Gaelic speaking Catholics. However the Israeli government had suddenly asked him to escort the Canadian Foreign Minister and show him around the Holy Places as he was a Catholic. Could I therefore act as a 'stand in' because he couldn't get back in time to meet the pilgrims at Luton airport? If I could, then after the formalities, I could board the plane with them and have a free holiday in the place that I had always dreamt of visiting, but had never had the time or the money to do so. Reading my 'new' book on the 'plane coupled with what happened next led to one of the most important spiritual insights that I have ever experienced.

On the first day I did the grand tour of all the major shrines in style with Fr Kenneth and the Canadian foreign minister. There are more Gaelic speakers in Canada than there are in Scotland and, as the foreign minister was one of them, he and Fr Kenneth spoke to each other in their common tongue knowing full well that the official car was bugged! When for my sake he reverted to English whenever we left the car, I was amazed to hear the evidence for the authenticity of the Holy Places. After the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD they built their own pagan shrines over them so as to obliterate their memory. However their action did exactly the opposite, guaranteeing their preservation until they were returned to Christianity when Constantine became the first Christian Emperor in 312 and the exact places where Christ had died, and from where he rose again were pinpointed exactly. It was therefore the church of Holy Sepulchre that impressed me most, because it had been built over both – not the architecture, but the whole atmosphere of the place that touched me more deeply than I would have imagined.

Fr. Kenneth, who had lived and worked in the Holy Land for most of his life, seemed to have a key to every place that you really should see, and even to places that you shouldn't! On the night before we left, his famous key opened a door to me that seemed closed to everyone else, and opened to me an experience that has affected me deeply to this day. Although the doors to the Holy Sepulchre are closed every night, and cannot be opened until the next morning no matter what, I was allowed to remain inside for the whole

night, with a room to myself in the Franciscan friary within. I never went into that room. I spent all the time before the midnight office at Calvary, and the time after, alone in the empty tomb.

There was a New Testament open at the place where Jesus was crucified. I read St John's account of his death and resurrection several times over, beginning with the profound and mystical discourse at the Last Supper. What the other evangelists called the death and resurrection of Jesus was referred to as his glorification by St John. The moment of his death was the moment when Jesus was glorified by his Father with whom he was instantly reunited. The passage that told of the water pouring from the side of Jesus was underlined in red for this was the key moment in St John's narrative. Once glorified, Jesus could immediately send the Holy Spirit, who he had promised to send at the Last Supper. The outpouring of this mystical life had long since been likened to an unprecedented effusion of living water, by both the Prophets in the Old Testament and by Jesus himself. However, in the so called 'real time' in which the apostles lived, they had to wait until after the Ascension for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on themselves in the 'Upper Room', on the first Pentecost day.

As I was reflecting on these events, in the Holy Sepulchre itself after the midnight office, I was so overcome by the realization that I was actually praying in the very place from which Jesus had risen from the dead that I began to wish I that could spend the rest of my life in that friary. This would enable me to return again and again, night after night, to what must be the holiest place on earth. Then suddenly, in a matter of moments, I had a spiritual experience that changed everything. I didn't see anything, I didn't hear anything, but the words of God spoke to me in a way that they had never spoken to me before or since. In one sense it was nothing spectacular, but in another sense it irrevocably changed my whole attitude to the Resurrection that I'd believed in since I was a child, but which had never really touched me in the way it touched me that night.

I don't claim that the words came directly from God; they most certainly came from my subconscious, but I'm sure God gave them a bit of a push. The words were these: *'You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. See, here is the place where they laid him. He is risen now. He is not here. He has gone before you into Galilee.'* I changed instantly. I no longer wanted to live in that friary for the rest of my life. The empty tomb suddenly lost its importance, but not its significance. The meaning of the Resurrection struck me as never before, it was as if someone had said "*ephphatha*" and my eyes had been opened to a truth that I had known with my head, but which had never fully penetrated my heart. Although my spiritual understanding hadn't substantially changed, it had been totally transformed in a way that I find difficult to put into words. It was as if I'd spent years looking at the Resurrection from the outside, as framed in a stained-glass window, then suddenly seen it again, this time from the inside with the sun shining through it.

The Resurrection, or what St John had called the glorification, meant that Jesus had been swept up out of the world of space and time in which he'd lived before, not to leave us alone, but to be closer to us than ever before, and as he promised *'even to the end of time.'* Before the Resurrection Jesus was limited by the physical body into which he had freely chosen to enter. His choice meant that he could only be in one place at a time, so meeting him would have been as difficult as meeting any major celebrity in our time. But that's all changed now, because the same otherworldly power that raised him out of this world on the first Easter day enabled him to re-enter it on every day. So now he can enter into us, as he promised, so that he can make his home in us and we can make our home in him. In the words of St Augustine this means that – *'He can be closer to us than we are to ourselves'*. All this could be possible not in some distant pipe dream, but here and now. That's why de Caussade said that *'The present moment contains*

*far more than we have the capacity to receive for it is full of infinite treasures*'. And that's why he called it *'the sacrament of the present moment,'* because it is the only moment where *time touches eternity*.

The existential philosopher Martin Buber tells the story of the carpenter from Lubin in Poland who had a dream in which he saw a vast treasure reserved for him alone. After years travelling the world to find it, he returned home at the end of his life to find that the treasure had been there all the time beneath the hearth, where he had warmed himself before the fire each evening. Like him we can spend a lifetime searching elsewhere for what is here where we are now, wherever that might be – in this present moment. The love, for which we were created and which Christ came to impart, can only be received here and now in the present moment, and at no other place than where we are now. Now is the moment to harness all the time and all the effort that could be wasted searching elsewhere to abandon ourselves without reserve to the One, who first promised, and then sent, the love that can make all things new, beginning with ourselves.

The outpourings of the love of God that flowed from the side of Jesus, did not just happen in the past, two thousand years ago, *it is happening continually*, but we can *only receive and experience it here and now in the present moment*. We can receive it now, because the baptism that once symbolised our personal reception of the Holy Spirit, is not just an event that once took place in the past, any more than the events that happened on the first Pentecost. They both symbolised that the very personal and infinite love of God, is at this moment and at every moment being transmitted to us.

What happened at his resurrection was that the Jesus, who was once limited by the space and time world in which he had chosen to enter, was limited no more. Now his glorified human being continually radiates like the Sun that the early Christians used to symbolize his ever loving presence. He radiates, not so much with light, but with love but unlike the Sun that only shone in the day, his love radiates both day and night, for there was no time when his love could not be received by those who believed in him. That's why the first Christians would rise at midnight when, it was believed, that Jesus rose from the dead, to meditate on his Resurrection, on what it meant for them then, and what it would mean for them in the forthcoming day.

What the risen Christ and his love had meant for them, the love of his Father had meant to Jesus throughout his life on earth. That's why every moment of every day was the moment when he was opening himself to receive God's love in his relentless daily prayer, and in the way in which he served those for whom his Father had sent him. There was no moment therefore in which he was not open to receive the love of his Father. It was therefore in imitation of him, that the first Christians, did likewise. This enabled them to ensure that every moment of their day would be a moment to receive his love. Then this love would enable them to be drawn up into his continual and abiding presence, so that *in with and through him they would give glory to their Father in heaven*, as he did. What they would then receive from God in return would enable them to experience something of that glory for themselves, and then show something of that glory to the world, as it infiltrated and shone through everything that they said and did, as pure unadulterated goodness.

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This contribution is available at <http://blog.davidtorkington.com/a-night-inside-the-holy-sepulchre/>  
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## Implicit Realities in Scripture [at A Faith-Full Life]

There are many implicit realities in both life and the Scriptures. Things that while perhaps not explicitly stated are nevertheless very much true. I would like to briefly touch on several implicit realities found within the holy Scriptures. Let's begin with one that we all can perhaps agree on.

### — 1 —

#### The Trinity

The doctrine of the trinity is one that is not expressly taught by the sacred Scriptures, but rather is a doctrine that developed over time within the Church. While the Ante-Nicene Fathers affirmed Christ's deity and spoke of "*Father, Son and Holy Spirit*", there was no mention of the word "*trinity*" until the late 2nd century originating with Theophilus of Antioch's writings. It is a word that is not found in the bible. Theological concepts such as hypostases, and consubstantial persons forming one divine being, developed slowly and over centuries. Scripture does not expressly contain a formulated doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, according to Christian theology, it bears witness to the activity of a God who can only be understood in trinitarian terms.

We see implicit in Scripture this trinitarian God from the very beginning when we read, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light'*"<sup>1</sup> In St. John's Gospel account we are told that, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*"<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind we see that it is by God's spoken *Word* that all things are created, as the Spirit hovers over the waters. God the Father, Christ the spoken *Word*, and the Spirit of God are all present at creation. This three-in-one nature may even be reflected in the words of God Himself as we read, "*Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;'*"<sup>3</sup> Is God making use of the royal "we" or is there something more implicit in the text? Many of the Fathers of the Church saw even Old Testament elements such as the appearance of three men to Abraham in the book of Genesis chapter 18, as a foreshadowing of the Trinity.

It is in the New Testament however that we see the greatest indications of the three-fold nature of God. The most influential of the New Testament texts which imply the teaching of the Trinity is in St. Matthew's gospel where we see Christ mandate that His disciples baptize "*...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*"<sup>4</sup> The text itself is fairly explicit in nature, and all the more so when we take a look back at Christ's own baptism reordered earlier in St. Matthew's gospel. "*And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'*"<sup>5</sup>

### — 2 —

## Apostolic Succession

*Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”<sup>6</sup>*

Often when we read this passage we immediately appropriate Christ’s words to ourselves as if somehow the Lord was speaking directly to those of us who call ourselves by His name and live here in the 21’s<sup>t</sup> century. And there may be a sense spiritually in which this is the case. But when Jesus actually said this He was speaking directly to His apostles – eleven men. It was to them that he conveyed His divine authority, and it was to them that He directly gave the charge of converting, discipling, baptizing, and teaching the whole world.

Oh yes, and one other thing...it was to them that He promised, *“Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”*

There is something important that we find implicit in this statement. Christ, the God-man, the risen Lord, will indeed still be here when the end of the age comes. But the apostles to whom He made this promise? As martyrs for their Lord<sup>7</sup> they wouldn’t even live full lives, much less be around at the “end of the age” to benefit from Christ’s promise to them. Implicit in this statement then is the expectation that Christ’s promise would extend to their successors. Successors? The bible doesn’t mention any successors to the ministry of the apostles – or does it?

Actually, in the very first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we read that St. Peter stands up and quoting from the Psalms declares,

*‘His office let another take.’ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsab'bas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthi'as. And they prayed and said, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place.”<sup>8</sup>*

Implicit in Christ’s commission and promise to the apostles was the extension of this commission and His promise to the apostle’s successors. Something that they themselves understood very well and carried out through the laying on of hands.<sup>9</sup> It is only in this light of Apostolic succession that His promise to be with them always – *even to the very end of the age* – makes sense.

— 3 —

## Confession

*Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”<sup>10</sup>*

This one actually seems pretty obvious once you read the text. Unless divine knowledge was somehow also conveyed in the authority to forgive and retain sins, Christ's disciples would not have been aware of the hidden sins of others ( Padre Pio notwithstanding! ) unless confession of some kind was implemented. Confession to the apostles (or their successors) would seem to be a necessary prerequisite to the apostolic forgiveness of sins.

We see this implicit reality fleshed out in St. Paul's words to the Corinthians when he writes, *"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*<sup>11</sup> Is it any wonder that the Catholic Church refers to confession as the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

## — 4 —

### The Role of High Priest

This one is perhaps a little trickier, but let's start by defining what a priest *does*. Luckily we can look to holy Scripture itself and read that, *"every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."*<sup>12</sup> Pretty straight forward – no? A priest's duty is to act on behalf of men in relation to God, and to offer sacrifice for our sins.

In the epistle to the Hebrews we see that Christ has become our high priest and is to be, *"a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."*<sup>13</sup> According to the author of Hebrews, *"Those who formerly became priests took their office without an oath, but this one was addressed with an oath, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'Thou art a priest for ever.'" This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."*<sup>14</sup> Christ exists to fulfill his priestly duties forever, and we should remember that a priest's sole function wasn't just intercession but also *sacrifice*. Implicit in Christ's eternal priestly duties is His ongoing sacrificial offering on our behalf.

The fact of the ongoing nature of the heavenly sacrifices is admitted by the Protestant commentator George W. Buchanan. In his commentary on Hebrews, he writes, *"Since the heavenly archetype functions just as its earthly imitation, it seemed reasonable for the heavenly high priest to offer sacrifices in heaven (Heb 8:3-4). These sacrifices, of course, must be better than their earthly counterparts, but their function is to cleanse "the heavenly things" (Heb 9:23). [Protestant] Scholars have had trouble with these passages, because Christ's 'once for all' sacrifice on earth was thought to make all other sacrifices unnecessary. It also seems a little surprising to think of heaven as a place where there would be sin and defilement that needed cleansing. The author of Hebrews found no difficulty with this, however. For him, heaven and the holy of holies were very close together. God's presence and his angels were in both. From the holy of holies the smoke carried the incense from the sacrifices directly to heaven, where there were also a holy of holies, sacrifices, and angels. When Jesus, as the heavenly high priest, passed through the curtain into the holy of holies, which was like heaven, he not only offered a sacrifice, but he was himself the sacrifice (Heb 9:12)."*

Implicit in Christ's ongoing role as high priest therefore is his ongoing intercession *and his ongoing sacrificial offering* to God on our behalf.

We should be careful to note however that this sacrifice is an un-bloody one in which Christ re-presents His once and for all sacrifice to the Father throughout eternity on our behalf. This implicit sacrificial nature of the Mass was understood by the very earliest Christians as we see reflected in the Didache itself, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles written around A.D. 70. *“Assemble on the Lord's day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until he has been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice [Matthew 5:23–24]. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, ‘Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations’ [Malachi 1:11, 14]”*<sup>15</sup>

## — 5 —

### Real Food and Real Drink

This is another one that I actually think is far more straightforward than we give it credit for. When Jesus says, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”*<sup>16</sup> – He means exactly what he says.

His disciples understand Him to mean exactly what he says – they leave Him because they cannot accept this teaching; *and He lets them go!* He repeats this claim over and over within the chapter even resorting to saying, *“Unless you chew my flesh...”* Implicit in this claim is the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This is why St. Paul will write to the Corinthians saying, *“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body of Christ eats and drinks judgment upon himself.”*<sup>17</sup>

Notice what St. Paul *doesn't* say. *“Those who eat or drink in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning a symbol of the body and blood of the Lord.”* Or perhaps, *“Those who eat and drink without discerning the metaphor of Christ in communion will eat and drink judgement on himself.”* No – rather the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is an implicit reality that is taught by Scripture.

## — 6 —

### The Visible Church

There is a tendency among certain Christians to view the Church as something mystical, non-hierarchical, non-localized, invisible. But when we look to the Scriptures we see that Christ views His Church in a very different way. *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*<sup>18</sup>

Implicit in Christ's words is the hierarchal, authoritative, and visible nature of His Church. It is a Church founded by Christ that speaks with *His* authority. If the Church is merely mystical and invisible, how are we to take our problems to the Church for her ruling? What Church? Where?

In the last 500 years we have had any number of men starting their own churches based on their own authority and scriptural interpretation and dispensing their own judgements as they speak on behalf of Christ. If I take my problem to 40,000 different denominations, in all likelihood I will receive 40,000 differing judgements. This cannot be what Christ intended. When Christ commands them to, "*tell it to the Church;*" He had to have had a specific Church in mind.

— 7 —

There is so much truth that is implicit in the sacred writings! These examples serve only to scratch the surface when it comes to implicit truths which can be found in the texts. All too often we read the Scriptures with an eye for only the obvious truths, the *explicit* claims of Scripture, without ever stopping to consider the *implications* that are woven throughout.

Today we have the benefit of centuries of accumulated wisdom from the mind of the Church that we can rely on in order to help us sift through difficult passages and come to a fuller understanding of the Christian faith. We should take seriously the words of the Apostle Paul who writes, "*I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.*"<sup>19</sup>

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1. Genesis 1:1-3a [↔](#)
  2. John 1:1-3 [↔](#)
  3. Genesis 1:26a [↔](#)
  4. Matthew 28:19b [↔](#)
  5. Matthew 3:16-17 [↔](#)
  6. Matthew 28:18-20 [↔](#)
  7. with the exception of St. John [↔](#)
  8. Acts 1:20b-25 [↔](#)
  9. 1 Timothy 1:6, 4:14, 5:22 [↔](#)
  10. John 20:19b-23 [↔](#)
  11. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 [↔](#)
  12. Hebrews 5:1 [↔](#)

13. Hebrews 5:6, 7:17 [↵](#)

14. Hebrews 7:21-25 [↵](#)

15. Didache 14 [↵](#)

16. John 6:53b-55 [↵](#)

17. 1 Corinthians 11:27 & 29 [↵](#)

18. Matthew 18:15-18 [↵](#)

19. 1 Timothy 3:14b-15 [↵](#)

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# The Culture Of "Meh": A Modern Spiritual Epidemic [at Reasonable Catholic]

In their epic [Catholic Evidence Training Outlines](#), Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward address the prevalent spiritual illness of *religious indifference*. The eminent Catholic duo—renowned for their influential work as street apologists, authors, and co-founders of the *Sheed & Ward* publishing house—describes religious indifference as “the belief that *no* religion matters at all.” The indifferent man, according to the apologists, reduces religion to a sort of optional hobby—like stamp-collecting.

On the contrary, Sheed and Ward argue, religion is far from an idle amusement. It is the “first necessity.” Furthermore, they do not say it is the man who rejects it who is the fool but the man who *neglects* it.

It is clear that this virulent spiritual epidemic has spread into modern times. With pinpoint accuracy, Father Robert Barron attributes this cultural state of religious neglect to “a ‘meh’ culture of relativism.”

## ***A Great Paradox***

A great paradox that descends from this prevalent attitude of religious indifference in our culture is that it is often accompanied by an intense repulsion towards *dogma*. Yet “the indifferent” are often severely dogmatic on issues like abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. Religious dogma is condemned not because it is religious but because it is dogmatic; thus, religious dogma is traded for non-religious or even anti-religious dogma. This human inability to escape the self-affirmation of objective truth *in practice* was what led G.K. Chesterton to say:

*“In truth, there are only two kinds of people; those who accept dogma and know it, and those who accept dogma and don’t know it.”*

Thus, to be indifferent is to be dogmatic about being undogmatic without knowing it.

## ***Open Minds***

Religious indifference, according to Sheed and Ward, is usually rooted in either: *the desire to appear open-minded*; or *outright laziness*.



In modern times, claiming religious “open-mindedness” is often just a nice way of professing that no religion is more true than another. At its core this term appears to be more of a rejection than an affirmation, a clever euphemism based more often on a relativistic worldview than an atheist one. Often, for the sake of *reputation*—a highly sought-after commodity in Western culture—the open-minded man of modernity conforms to this odd philosophy founded on the motto, “Who am I to judge?” His personal philosophy of life becomes founded on the multiple contradictory worldviews of his friends and acquaintances, rather than reality. Eventually the “open mind” of the modern man becomes so open that it starts to work against itself, and what it contains begins to seep out; and thus, this aberrant spilling out of the intellect leaves the open-minded man empty-minded.

One might say that this modern “style” of open-mindedness also becomes the kind of self-sacrifice that fails miserably to conform to the life and love of Christ, and winds up as an outright rejection of the one true God on the basis of ignorance. It becomes an explicit failure to imitate Christ—for no person in history held more strongly to religious absolutes than Jesus.

And then there’s the lazy man. It doesn’t take a genius to recognize that laziness has become an extreme epidemic which has metastasized throughout our culture at all levels of society, fed by a “culture of convenience” obsessed with pleasure seeking. The fact is, true religion is hard and it’s results are not immediately palpable. Moreover, and unlike a McDonald’s experience, the effects of true religion are not always immediately pleasing to the senses.

Yet religion is in fact the pathway to the fulfillment of all our desires. It would not be inaccurate to say that religion, properly practiced, “hurts *so good*”; and no truly devout follower of Jesus who has conformed his life to the Gospel would tell or show you anything different (and the best evidence for this lies in the writings of any and every Catholic saint).

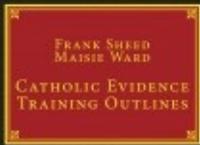
Truly the happiest people in all of history are the saints of the Church, as their lives and the testimony of their contemporaries conclusively attest. The common denominator among this diverse group of holy men and women: true, organized, dogmatic religion.

### ***Made For Meaning***

Man is social by nature. There was never a time in history when he did not pursue friendship as a means to personal fulfillment.

Man is also religious by nature. There was not some singular moment in history when man suddenly “took on” religion for the first time. History clearly testifies that man is made for religion; and particularly

*the religion that houses the Eucharist at its center. Every part of man is thus designed to take him to that supernatural end—that end being, namely, Jesus Christ, and eternal communion with Him. So to be indifferent to seeking religion truth, it seems, is to be resistant to the possibility of discovering one’s essential purpose. This refusal seems more like close-mindedness and very hard work, and less like open-mindedness and laziness.*



Sheed and Ward write:

*“A man may investigate the claims of religion and accept them; he may investigate those claims and reject them; and in both cases he is acting like a sane man. But a man who simply ignores the whole thing is acting like a fool.” (Catholic Evidence Training Outlines, p.158)*

They are then clear in pointing out that religion is, in fact, important to all men because it gives life *purpose*. Victor Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust and a medical specialist, wrote in [\*Man’s Search For Meaning\*](#):

*“Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.”*

This conclusion was crystallized for him in the Nazi concentration camps. Frankl recognized, upon the analysis of his persecuted brothers in the concentration camps, that those who found meaning in their suffering tended to be the survivors of the horrendous tortures of daily life in the camps. Thus he concluded that man’s fulfillment and ability to thrive depended on his ability to find *an existential purpose for his life*.

It would be hard for any person who reflects on Frankl’s work to disagree with his fundamental conclusion — man requires a discovery of true purpose to achieve lasting fulfillment. This seems commonsensical according to experience. Surely, nothing can be properly “used” or properly benefited from without first realizing *what it is for*. To use a razor blade for splitting firewood or a car for a glider, fails to use them according to their final and intended purposes; it is a rejection of their true natures and chaos is the result. The same principle thus applies to life — to live rightly a person must know what life is for. Otherwise chaos ensues.

### ***More Than An Option***

Religion, however, is not just an “option” for purpose-seekers. True religion at its essence is about living according to reality. For if any religion is based on false doctrine, a person would be just as insane to

follow it as to follow no religion at all.

But I think we have good reason to believe that Catholic Christianity is not founded on false doctrine, but rather, that it is grounded in reality. Today, for instance, we have a broad range of good evidence for Jesus' divinity thanks to the work of such scholars as N.T Wright, Peter Kreeft and Craig Blomberg.

This evidence for Jesus' divinity can then be built upon a foundation of compelling arguments for the existence of God, such as the moral argument, the Kalam cosmological argument and the teleological arguments for the fine-tuning of the universe, which have been developed and refined by the likes of Fr. Robert Spitzer and William Lane Craig, among others. Moreover, when such a prominent atheist as Antony Flew changes his mind on God's existence, one might be inclined to see such an event as a testimony to the growing strength of the evidence for the existence of God in scientific and philosophical studies.

Finally, an honest biblical and historical analysis —particularly in light of the writings of the early Church fathers — leaves one with little doubt about the identity of the Catholic Church; and for this reason a “steady stream” of converts, many of whom are non-Catholic clergy, are entering the Catholic Church often as a result of in-depth pre-Reformation and early Church studies.

One can see how the convert Chesterton, in [\*The Thing: Why I am Catholic\*](#), admits:

*“The difficulty of explaining “why I am a Catholic” is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true.”*

But as a former skeptic and fallen away Catholic myself, I have not always been convinced that there are good reasons to believe in the claims of the Catholic Church and its teachings. I am convinced now. Furthermore, I believe that the *best* evidence for the fullness of religious truth lies in favor of Catholicism.

Nonetheless, not all are as convinced as I am. Some remain indifferent, while others are honestly seeking truth wherever it may lead them. Still, however, there is one thing that unites all of us; and that is we are all *committed* to a choice about the reality (or unreality) of God. *There is no middle grounds*, as the great mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, has made clear. We must make a choice — and by “not making a choice” a choice is indeed made. In Pascal's words:

*“You must wager. There is no choice, you are already committed. Which will you choose then?”*  
(see [\*Pensees\*](#), 122-123)

Indifference then is not a matter of earthly consequences but a matter of eternal consequences. C.S. Lewis emphasizes this sobering point in his satirical classic, *The Screwtape Letters*, through the fictional exchange between the devil and his nephew and understudy, Wormwood:

*“I, the devil, will always see to it that there are bad people. Your job, my dear Wormwood, is to provide me with people who do not care.”*

Why would the devil have such an interest in the indifferent? Perhaps because a necessary symptom of the condition is *unrepentance*; and without repentance all men succumb to their sins.

## Next Action



How do we as disciples of the New Evangelization address this issue of indifference? We must [engage the culture](#); not just with good arguments, but with an appeal to the human heart. “Dialogue before debate” is probably the best policy with this particular brand of the lost. In fact, it is usually the best policy with any brand of the lost.

To evangelize the indifferent, Sheed and Ward encourage focusing on man’s intrinsic desire for purpose—a heart issue more than a head issue. Surely no person has been sterilized of their desire for purpose. They just might have given up. It is our duty to engage these people.

And there *are* simple, practical ways to do this.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis suggests quoting the living Word of God as it applies to a dialogue, or sharing one’s testimony if the door of opportunity opens. Even the hardest of hearts was made for the Sacred Heart and for that reason we must not be afraid to “go out” and speak to the critical issues that face us today. [Read good books](#), develop your evangelization skills, learn the arguments and [pray](#).

Most essentially, we must remember that evangelization is all about *invitation*—invitation to truth.

“What is truth?” the man of indifference might ask. To this question our response is key. Fear not, however, for our leaders in Rome have provided us with the master formula for the Christian answer:

*“In Christianity however, Truth is not merely a theoretically defined thought, an ethically valid judgment, or a scientific demonstration, but it is **a Person** whose name is Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of the Most Holy Virgin Mary.”* [\[Where Is Your God?\]](#)

Happy Feast of the Annunciation!

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See also: [Preparing to Intelligently Engage The Culture: A Basic Plan](#).

*Recommended Reading:*

[Christianity for Modern Pagans](#) by Peter Kreeft

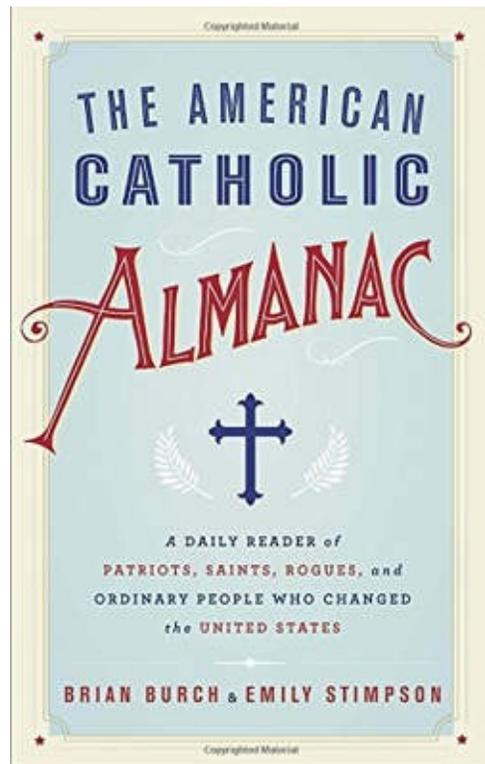
[Catholic Evidence Training Outlines](#) by Sheed & Ward.

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# The American Catholic Almanac - My Review [at This That and the Other Thing]



## About the Book:

They're all Catholics who have shaped America. In this page-a-day history, 365 inspiring stories celebrate the historic contributions of American men and women shaped by their Catholic faith. From famous figures to lesser-known saints and sinners, The American Catholic Almanac tells the fascinating, funny, uplifting, and unlikely tales of Catholics' influence on American history, culture, and politics. Spanning the scope of the Revolutionary War to Notre Dame football, this unique collection of stories highlights the transformative role of the Catholic Church in American public life over the last 400 years.

Did you know...

- The first immigrant to arrive in America via Ellis Island was a 15-year-old Irish Catholic girl?
- Al Capone's tombstone reads "MY JESUS MERCY"?
- Andrew Jackson credited America's victory in the Battle of New Orleans to the prayers of the Virgin Mary and the Ursuline Sisters?

- Five Franciscans died in sixteenth-century Georgia defending the Church's teachings on marriage?
- Jack Kerouac died wanting to be known as a Catholic and not only as a beat poet?
- Catholic missionaries lived in Virginia 36 years before the English settled Jamestown?

### **My Comments:**

I love reading about my people and this book features 365 of them, one for every day of the year. There are men and women, lay and religious, priests and politicians. While a bit heavy on the Irish (but then I wonder, percentage-wise, what percent of American Catholics are of Irish descent) it covers both cradle Catholics and converts (did you know that Buffalo Bill converted on his deathbed). We learn about Stagecoach Mary "a sharp-shooting, whiskey-drinking, cigar-puffing, pants-wearing, punch-throwing, six-foot-tall former slave" who loved the Ursuline Sisters and about Fanny Allen, a socialite who became the first known woman from New England to become a nun.

Each biography is only a page long so it is a perfect book to pick up, read a page or two and then save for later.

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

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This contribution is available at <http://rannthisthat.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-american-catholic-almanac-my-review.html>  
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# Via Crucis - Stations of the Cross - Dulce Nombre parish [at Hermano Juancito]

In the face of a suffering people it is crucial that the Church connect their suffering with the suffering of Jesus.



That's what we did Friday, March 27, in Dulce Nombre, walking through the town, stopping at fourteen stations, remembering the traditional Way of the Cross. Several hundred people came from almost all the villages of the parish.

But the traditional meant remembering the sufferings of the people, the sins that afflict us here in the parish of Dulce Nombre. But we recall not just personal sins and occasions of sin, but the sinful social structure that crucify people and make it difficult for people to live as God's children.

Padre German, the pastor, has asked the communities to bring in crosses with the sins that afflict the community.

Plan Grande had this cross – with sins of indifference to the poor, alcohol and drugs, attachment to money, violence, robbery, disintegration of families, lack of love of God.



San Agustín identified these sinful situations on their cross: adultery, marijuana and cocaine, violence, prostitution, envy,

*caciquismo*

(a single boss running everything).



Montaña Adentro, which has suffered many killings in the last two years, had a simple written poster with these sins: discouragement in religious activities, violence, many poor people, lack of drinking water, sale of alcohol, disobedience of youth in regard to the church.



From Vertientes they denounced many sins: no to drugs and to alcohol; no to violence – let there be peace in our country; let there be no corruption on our country; let people be converted and stop doing evil to their neighbors.



Agua Buena Concepción mentioned only one sin – a major one: inequality.



La Torera is a small community which is just being evangelized this year and has 7 young people who will be baptized in the Easter Vigil. They identified alcohol and weapons of violence.



Dolores had a long list of sins and evils afflicting their community and the nation on their cross: exploitation, low salaries,

*politiquería*

(politicizing everything and being manipulated by politicians), immigration, unemployment, domestic violence, pornography,

*sexualismo*,

alcoholism, corruption, extortion, killings.



Other communities had crosses with these and other sins and evils affecting their lives.

The first Sunday of Lent I had the catechumens identify the temptations that they faced as young people. The papers they had written included temptations to drugs, alcohol, smoking, fighting, robbing, belittling others, angry, money, lying, laziness, and even killing. There were veiled references to sexual temptations. But they also identified what I would call, in the traditional Catholic terminology, “occasions of sin”: cell phones, music, soccer, dances. There were several that identified the eye as an occasion of sin.

The crosses with these sins and evils and the papers with the temptations and occasions of sin were burned outside the church at the end of the stations.



What I found intriguing was the inclusion of all sorts of evils, sins, temptations, and occasions of sin. These included evils connected with religious practice as well as with social ills; sexuality and alcohol and drug abuse were mentioned several times. Violence appeared many times. These evils, sins, and temptations reveal much of what is wrong and unjust here in Honduras.

But for me, one of the most moving moments during the Stations was at the twelfth station: Jesus dies on the cross. There we had people come forward to mentioned those who had been murdered in the past year or so. Montaña Adentro had more than five; San Agustín had more than 14; and there were more from about five or so villages.



The suffering is great. But, as Padre German noted, quoted the martyred Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuría, “We have to be honest with reality.”



But we tried, as we walked the way of the cross, to recall the presence of Christ with us in our sufferings and to offer hope. As we prayed in the last station, “Death is not the final word; there is hope.”

Holy Week is beginning, although the way of the cross is being lived out daily in the lives of the people in our parish.

I pray that hope may triumph – even in small ways.

But, as a believer in a God who became flesh and suffered with us, I believe in Life. But the life that I believe in means that we may suffer but we are called to give ourselves up for others, to seek the good of all – the Reign of God, in religious terms. In this way we try to live the Resurrection.

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As part of our Stations of the Cross, we used this quote from the September 7, 2013 homily of Pope Francis at every station:

"My Christian faith urges me to look to the Cross. How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the Cross if only for a moment! There, we can see God’s reply: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue, and peace is spoken."

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The text in Spanish of the Stations that we used can be found

[here](#)

in a PDF file.

More photos of the Stations of the Cross can be viewed

[here](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://hermanujuancito.blogspot.com/2015/03/via-crucis-stations-of-cross-dulce.html>  
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## At the Door [at Convert Journal]



### A Parable of 3 Men

A man comes to your door. He tells you that he wants to come in and stay with your family.

You do not know him. He is a stranger. Persisting, he explains that he has told everybody about you. Yet, he has not met you personally. Of course, you send him away.

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A man comes to your door. He tells you that he wants to come in and stay with your family.

You recognize him as a friend. You want to throw your arms around him and welcome him — but there is a problem. Despite your love for him, he has arrived dirty and unsuitable to enter your spotless home. You have him shower and put on clean clothes. He is now prepared to join the others and you warmly embrace him.

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A man comes to your door. He tells you that he wants to come in and stay with your family.

You recognize him as a friend. Unlike the second man, he is fully prepared to join the feast. For him, the door is opened quickly and he is welcomed warmly into the home.

### Knocking on Heaven's Door

So it is with Heaven.

#### The First Man

The first man does not know the Lord. He may know *about* our Lord, but does not have a personal relationship with Him. He did not choose to build one. Had he done so, he could have known our Lord and His will. Perhaps he was uninterested or too busy...

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’ Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’

Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

#### The Second Man

The second man knows the Lord! He has been “in regular contact” – praying, listening and obeying, although imperfectly so. When he came before the throne of the Lord, he was not completely ready. As he presented himself, he was not perfect but carried the scars of sin. Yet he came in God’s friendship, free of mortal sin. In God’s mercy he is cleansed by the fire of Purgatory until he too is perfect.

“But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.

but nothing unclean will enter it, nor any[one] who does abominable things or tells lies. Only those will enter whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

But if someone’s work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.

## **The Third Man**

The third man knows the Lord *AND* is ready to meet him! His heart is already pure and the beatific vision awaits him.

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’

## **Which one are you?**

1. Do you know the real Christ or have you fashioned a version of Him to your liking?
2. Do you text, e-mail and call other people more often than you pray?
3. Are your prayers in charity or are they selfish?
4. Do you make a sincere effort to seek God’s will and listen for His voice?

Then the LORD said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will pass by. There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD – but the LORD was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake – but the LORD was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire – but the LORD was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound.

When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. A voice said to him, Why are you here, Elijah?

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The Deacon gave his homily on Matthew 4:14-30, the parable of the talents. He presented the talents as the presence and grace of God, given to us in different amounts.

At the sign of peace I realized there weren't enough Eucharistic ministers so I went up to the altar with my heart open to whatever the Lord wanted to do through me. I received the hosts to distribute, and when Fr. Bob and the Deacon choose stations on the side, I positioned myself at the center aisle.

Toward the end of Communion distribution Fr. Bob came up behind me singing the communion hymn and very gracefully, between communicants, took a big handful of hosts from my chalice. I could see 20 or more people in my line and I only a dozen or less hosts left in my chalice. Would God multiply them? Then the line next to mine ended and the minister dumped a dozen or so hosts into my chalice. I ended up with more than enough.

After the last communicant, I went to the side table by the altar where Fr. Bob was busily cleaning up. I offered him my chalice but he immediately handed me his and directed me to collect the extra hosts. I combined his and mine, looked around but found only empty chalices. As I held out the chalice with the remaining hosts to Fr. Bob, the head minister took it out of my hand and started toward the choir, leaving me holding his empty chalice.

Back in the pew I knelt in thanksgiving and asked the Lord to help me understand the meaning of the confusing emptying and refilling of hosts from chalice to chalice. Was this an illustration of the talents as the presence and grace of God, offered to us in different amounts? I now saw the hosts as his Eucharistic grace and presence. In our openness and flexibility to the will of God we find ourselves receiving and giving away his grace and presence in exciting and unpredictable ways.

We can rethink our attitude toward all our talents and resources and see them as gifts of grace and presence. We are given a particle of God's presence unique to who we are in him. We can't ever understand this mystery of how we receive and give away his presence within us, but we carry it in the sacred chalice of our hearts, ready to share it as we are directed.

Some are given talents for big jobs as evangelists, priests, politicians or theologians. Some use their talents in less visible jobs, confined to a household of children and their local circle of influence. For all of us the mission is the same: to carry his presence into the world with joy.

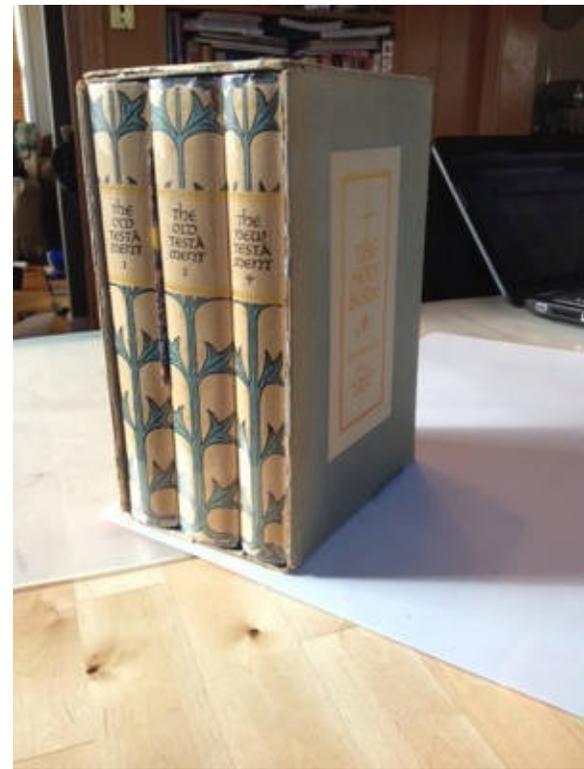
Look around and see how his presence abounds. How have you experienced his grace and presence in the chalice of your heart?

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This contribution is available at <http://joyalive.net/a-chalice-full-of-talents/>  
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## Knox Bible Three Volume Hardcover (1950-1951) [at Catholic Bibles]



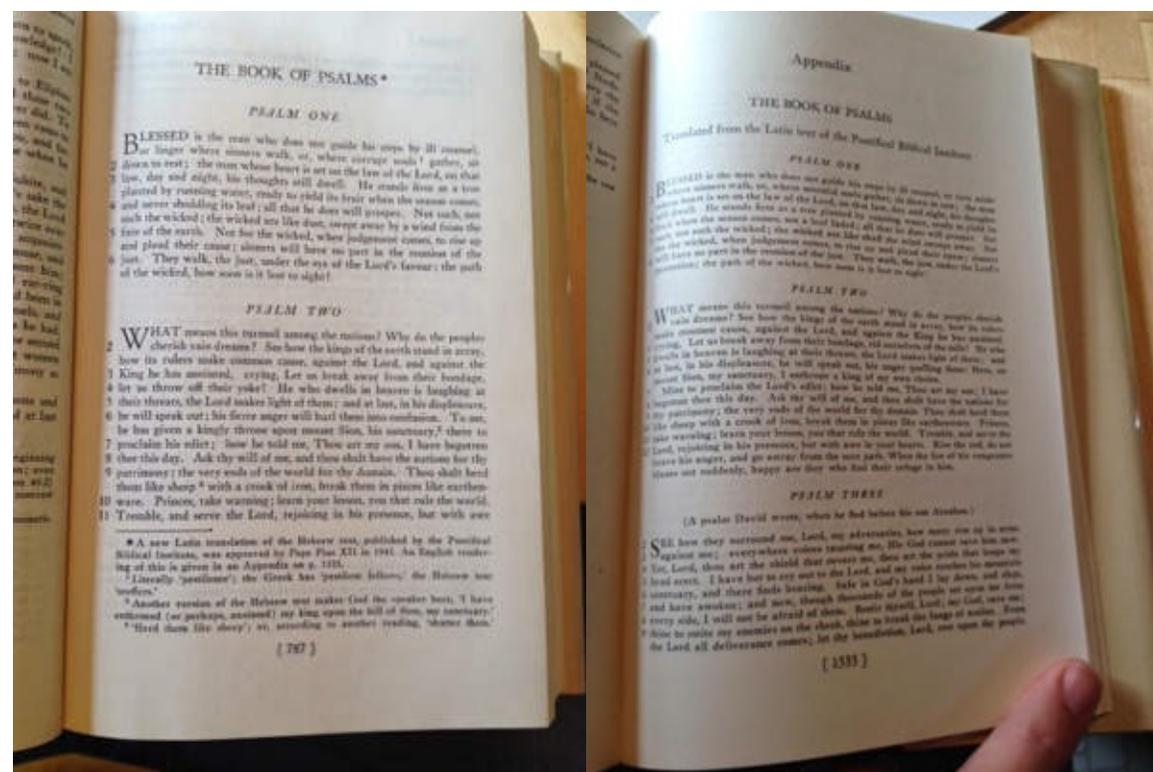
Since the inauguration of this blog, I have had the privilege to get to know some of you through emails, some via Facebook, or others even in person. Recently, one of my readers, who lives very close to me, dropped off a bag of extra Bibles and missals that he was no longer in need of anymore. Thank you Larry! I hope to find a suitable home for them in the near future. (One of them, the NOAB4 already does.)

However, on other occasions, readers have helped me to get into contact with people who were looking to find homes for older, more collectible Bibles. James, who comments from time to time on the blog, graciously introduced me to Fr. Peter. Fortunate for me, Fr. Peter is a fellow admirer of Msgr. Ronald Knox. Over the course of a number of correspondences, I was able to acquire this amazing treasure pictured here. It is a 1950-1951 Sheed & Ward three volume Knox Bible in hardcover. For being well over 60 years old, each volume is in remarkable condition. The pages are as crisp and bright as if they had come of from the printers only a year earlier. Even the original box, though showing signs of wear, is still in good shape and does its job of protecting the three volumes.

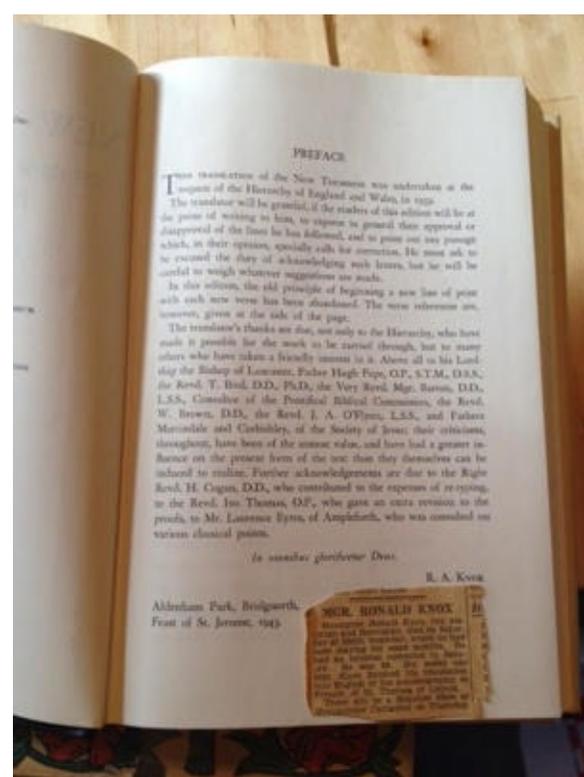


The font, though similar to the Baronius edition, reads a bit better because of the spacing between verses and paragraphs. This certainly has the feel of a readers bible, one which is meant for lengthy reading. There are no extras within each volume of this boxed set, other than a brief translator's note or preface and, of course, the annotations from Knox.

One of the real surprises of this set, which I was strangely unaware, is the inclusion of a second translation of the Psalms. Knox's original translation of the Psalms came from the Clementine Vulgate rendering. However, in 1945 Pope Pius XII approved a new Latin edition from the Hebrew published by the Biblicum (Pontifical Biblical Institute). Knox translated this new edition and it is found as an appendix to volume two of this set. I hope to be able to analyze and compare for you the two Psalters in the future. I can tell you that the Baronius Press Knox Bible utilizes the 1945 Biblicum translation of the Psalter.



Yet, there was another surprise! Slipped in between two pages of the New Testament volume I found a newspaper cut-out of the announcement of Knox's death. Seeing that truly touched my heart. What a treasure, within a treasure. It reads: "Monsignor Ronald Knox, the historian and theologian, died on Saturday at Mells, Somerset, where he had been staying for some months. He had an internal operation in January. He was 69. Six weeks ago Msgr. Knox finished his translation into English of the autobiography, in French, of St. Theresa of Lisieux. There will be a Requiem Mass at Westminster Cathedral on Thursday."



Thank you to James and Fr. Peter.

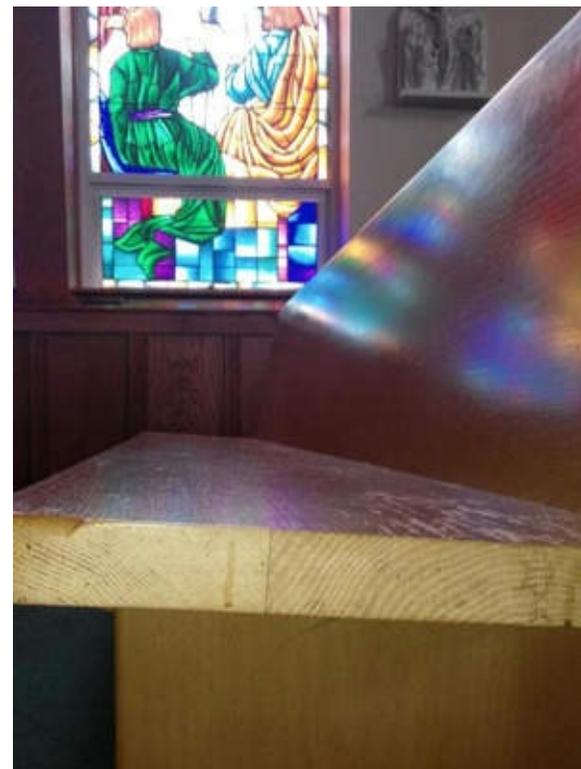
**"What is faith? It is that which gives substance to our hopes, which convinces us of things we cannot see. It was this that brought credit to the men who went before us (Hebrews 11:1-3)."**

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This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicbiblesblog.com/2015/03/knox-bible-three-volume-hardcover-1950.html>  
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# I Have the Perfect Time For You! [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]



I still remember Nina walking toward the pew where we were seated – nearly 25 years ago - with that challenging, inviting, loving, mischievous, welcoming, smile on her face.

“I have the perfect time for you,” she announced.

I glanced quizzically at my wife and silently asked myself, “What is Nina talking about?”

“The 2 AM to 3 AM hour is perfect for you two!” she proclaimed.

“What?”



“You’ll love spending an hour every First Friday morning adoring our Lord! He’ll shower you with immense blessings.”

“But Nina,” I protested. “We both work. How can we get up in the middle of the night and do our jobs the next day? We’ll be exhausted?”

“You won’t have any problems,” she assured us, sealing the deal with a loving hug before she left us to reflect on what had just happened.

Who could say no to Nina? Like Mom, Nina knew best.

Still incredulous that we were getting up in the middle of the night, we went for our initial hour of Adoration the First Friday of the following month. After a while, we sensed a persistent prompting to get out of our pew and approach the Blessed Sacrament. For the first time in our married life, we took turns praying out loud to the Loving Lord who gazed upon us from the magnificent monstrance in which He rested



Our lives were forever changed as have countless other lives – all because Nina had the Faith and courage to invite us to Adoration. This precious gift – once limited to one Friday a month, by God’s grace and the persistent nudging of His servant - is now available to everyone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year!

May this, Nina, my dear friend, be the perfect time for you – that you may be blessed to spend eternity wrapped in the loving arms of the Lord you loved.

Listen closely! You can still hear Nina: “I have the perfect time for you – **Now!** - **Come into His Presence!**

May Nina’s soul and the souls of all the faithfully departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.

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This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2015/03/i-have-perfect-time-for-you.html>  
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## God is in the Cheerios [at The Pitter Patter Diaries]

“A married woman must when called upon, quit her devotions to God at the altar to find him in her household affairs.”

— St. Frances of Rome —



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Lent brings along with it a longing of the heart. For me, it is sometimes a longing to go back to the days when my worship was more pure, and I felt I was more devoted to Christ. Before marriage, I easily spent 60-80 hours a week ministering in His name, and much of that ministry was filled with prayer & worship, Adoration, conversation about Christ and how to know and love Him better, retreats, Mass, devotions, bringing people into relationship with Christ.

At first glance, it seems life sure has changed. A typical play by play of my day now involves getting up later than I should because I've been up at some point during the night due to kid or cat, rushing to get ready, changing diaper(s), getting bottles, brushing little teeth, arguing about breakfast, picking up spilled food, wiping faces, arguing about clothes with buttons and why we can't always just wear pajamas, thinking about what to feed the people in our home, running out the door to rush to work during which time I will wonder about what will face me as I come home. Then on the days I work, I'm rushing out of the office to come home to make dinner, and finally breathe for a moment before bedtime routines start, most of which still involve begging for toys to be put away and not strewn about the floor, several attempts to delay, more drinks of milk and trips to the bathroom, starting bedtime music over, and pleas for more bedtime stories.

Life in these five years has changed immensely. When I saw Brandon's graphic today with the quote from St. Frances of Rome, I exhaled. "Yes," I thought. "She gets it. Now I need to let it sink in more deeply too." I long for quiet adoration, when what the Lord is asking of me is probably more quiet snuggling with the littles. I long to be leading reflections and prayer groups, when what the Lord is asking of me is to be

leading my children in prayer, telling them stories, teaching them to play, laugh, love, and live. I long for mission trips and helping the forgotten, when what the Lord is asking of me is to call my mother and care for my husband, who can go a little unnoticed by me when there are two noisy and needy little people tugging at my sleeve (or more likely my hair). The Lord is, and always has, asked me to serve exactly where I am with whatever He sends my way.

While before it may have been building houses with the poor, it may now be building forts and towers with my children and building a home with my husband that will be our refuge.

If I wasn't already sure that God was trying to get through to me, the song below popped on the radio on my way in to work. I think I've got the message loud and clear - it's just a matter of letting it seep into my soul and become a part of me so living it out is a natural part of life.

Enjoy the video! It reminds me of something akin to a mashup between Sledgehammer and Mario Bros. - ahhh, the 80s...

## **Do Everything**

by Stephen Curtis Chapman

*You're picking up toys on the living room floor*

*for the fifteenth time today*

*Matching up socks*

*Sweeping up lost cheerios that got away*

*You put a baby on your hip*

*Color on your lips and head out the door*

*While I may not know you,*

*I bet I know you wonder sometimes, does it matter at all?*

*Well let me remind you, it all matters just as long as*

*You do everything you do to the glory of the One who made you,*

*Cause he made you...*

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This contribution is available at <http://www.thepitterpatterdiaries.com/2015/03/god-is-in-cheerios.html>  
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## **Infertility, Suffering, and Holy Week [at Tomato's Vine]**

I apologize in advance if this gets rambly, but I can't seem to make my thoughts cohesive. But anyway, this all started with me being part of a gathering today that should have been happy. We were celebrating new life, multiple new lives actually, and I should've been happy for them. But while I might've put on a good face, I wasn't happy inside. I was sad, angry, and heartbroken, for myself of course. I sat there with my closest friends feeling alone, like an outsider, looking in on a club that I don't know I will ever be a part of. I held it together until I got to my car and then broke down.

It felt like a punch to the gut, like all the air had been sucked out of my lungs and I couldn't breathe. The pain, the pain that has been building up for so long, it was unbearable. I cried, and cried out to the Lord in my heart. I told Him, "This is not fair! I've followed all of your rules! I always turned down birth control! We waited until marriage! We've been open to life! We never contracepted! I've turned down all immoral procedures! Isn't that enough? Why am I being punished? I don't deserve this!"

But then I remembered, neither did He.

"But, Lord can't you give me something? If it's not a child, can't you take this pain away? Why does it only hurt more the more I ask for relief? If you won't give me a child or relief, can't you at least give me a better job? Make me productive somehow?"

But then I remembered, He has given me all, He gave His very life for me.

The truth is, I am not innocent as He was, and is. I have sinned many many times, in many ways, repeating them over and over again (looking at you, envy). I don't know if any of those have contributed to my infertility today, but they could have (looking at you, gluttony).

It's also true that the rules God has given me are not for His benefit, but for mine, so that I may not harm myself or others, so that I might not turn away from Him and foreclose the possibility of heaven. And it is by His grace alone that I have not fallen more than I have.

And I have to remember that life is not fair. It has been infected by sin, original sin, that brings death and disease into the world.

As this week focuses so clearly on, Christ, above all, understands suffering that He did not deserve.

Suffering that He willingly undertook for our salvation. Like it says in 1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit."

So, I guess in some way, the sorrow and the pain present in Holy Week is a comfort to me. Like it says in Hebrews 4:15-16 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help."

Christ understands our smallness and weakness, and our pain and suffering in ways deeper than I ever could. He does not leave us stranded, alone, but has suffered with us. And through His great suffering and

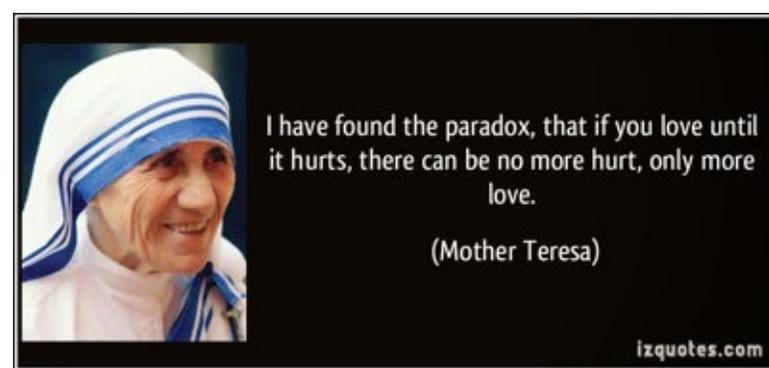
death, we are offered eternal life, which is the greatest gift we could be given.

It brings me to the realization that so much of this pain I am in stems from fighting His will and trying to hold on to what I want. I know, I've posted several times before about surrendering to God's will, but it seems I've never been able to make a whole hearted effort, and I will probably keep fighting His then trying to surrender mine my whole life. I don't know how to let go of what I want the outcome of this journey to be, what I want God to give me.

I know that I need to let it go, to die to myself, to drag this cross of my self will to Calvary and leave it there at the foot of His. I have to die to myself and accept that He is enough. He will give me all I need for salvation, and that is all I need, nothing more. My will is not better. My plan for children may not have anything to do with His plan for me. If raising children is part of my path to salvation, then that is what He will give me, if not, then so be it.

That was so hard to even just to type, but I know it's true. Perhaps there are other souls He will bring to me in other ways to help, I just don't know, and I won't know, probably until it's all over. All I know is that I all I can do is try to take one step closer to Him, and one step closer to letting go of myself, every day until I get there.

It's like this quote of Mother Teresa:



Some day I hope to get to that place where there is no more hurt, only love.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.tomatosvine.com/2015/03/infertility-suffering-and-holy-week.html>  
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# The Via Dolorosa That Is Motherhood [at Only A Mere Woman]

Pain. Heartache. Agony. Not words which one typically associates with motherhood. I, however, am coming to realize how fitting they are, at least for me. Now, before you get all huffy, hear me out. Perhaps I am doing it wrong. I don't know. But it hurts, deep down to my core. Yes, the sacrifices I have to make in order to be the kind of mom I want to be hurt; but that is to be expected. The guilt I feel for failing so very hard (at least to my thinking, at times) cuts deeply. The pain and confusion that comes, when trying to "research" what is the best way to raise children only exasperates the problem. The times when you are tired and at your wit's end, and it isn't even lunch time yet and you just want to throw in the towel, because no one is listening to anything you say, and you just feel crushed inside. When you lose your temper with children who are pretty much angels, and it leaves you so wounded you wonder if you'll ever heal.

It isn't just the tough, hard times that pain me, though. It's when marveling at your two and a half year old, who refused to even hold the mail, because his hands were chocolatey and needed to be washed first, without any prompting from you. It's when the 14 month old insists on hugging during a story, again and again and again. It's their faces when you get them up in the morning. It's the fact that you are still completely their whole world, in spite of the times you've messed up. It's watching them learn and grow and develop, and you realize that one day you are going to lose them to the world of grown ups, and your heart aches at the thought but feels like it's going to burst from pride at the same time.

The weight of the responsibility of teaching these little ones about God. Teaching them how to be more than you are, when you are so very lacking. Being the whole world to two little boys, but having to split yourself between them. Wondering how you are going to manage when Number 3 comes along, knowing you cannot be all things to all children. Knowing how weak I am, how I cannot do it all, on my own. There is so much heartache, so much pain, so much agony.

This is the part where, if I were really good, which I'm not, but if I were, I would tie it all in nicely with it being a fitting crucible for sanctification, and other lofty thoughts of that nature. But, I'm not that good; my brain is empty of deeper thoughts, which is weird. Pregnancy messes with the proper functioning of pretty much everything.

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## Women At Prayer [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

One day several years ago, after listening to my husband complain yet again about his job, I began an innocent and unobtrusive prayer campaign for his fulfillment as the breadwinner of the family.

The

Irish Catholic that I am, I wrote on a note card, "Dear Jesus, please help Doug find fulfillment in his career." and stuck it in my bible.

Forgetting I ever did that, recently as I was reading my Bible, the note dropped out on my lap. A few years ago, he found his present position in a completely different state miles away from home, but being satisfied in his job and having the faculty status as an associate professor and director of a core facility, he has found fulfillment. Proof of answered prayer, even one left to its own for a time. He didn't know I did this for him, I had even forgotten that I did this for him, but at the time and so many times during those unsatisfied years, I had silently prayed to Jesus for his fulfillment.

Thinking about a woman's prayer in the different phases and walks of life, I want to appreciate these ladies and their faith.

### **A Mother's prayer Mother Mary**

is the greatest intercessor for her children. At the foot of the cross, Jesus gave Mary to the apostle as his mother and gave him to her as her child. At that very moment, Mary became our mother too, and like any earthly mother, she is concerned for us and loves us abundantly. I turn to her daily!

A grandmother's prayer adds an extra special fervor for the child that brings them delight and continues her lineage; the layers of love from her own child to the thrill of her child's children, makes her prayers all the more special.

A

### **mom's**

prayer is rooted in her deep and biological connection with her child, even mothers of adopted children form equally deep connections for the children in their care. My prayer life as a mom has always been a challenge, until recently when I learned a huge lesson that while I prayed for my children, I also had to let go and allow God to do HIS work. Letting go and having faith that He loves us and our children has been the lesson I didn't even know I needed to learn until I learned it. As my rebellious child drove away to another unknown place with unknown people, I had to just give her to Jesus and let her go.....THAT was hard, but when I realized that there was NOTHING I could do for her, and that God alone had the controls, it was as if a heavy weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

A popular story about my grandmother during her mothering years, was when my twin uncles tried to stop

a car racing down a hill, instead of watching the ordeal, she calmly went into the powder room in the hall and prayed the rosary until it was over and the twins were triumphant.

The

women in the church, much like Anna of the bible, root their prayers deeply from altruistic love, the desire for good things for others. Their prayers are wholeheartedly given in faith.

The many religious communities' pray constantly, giving their lives to Christ and His Church, for the people of God. Oh, I wouldn't want to even think of our world without these beautiful communities and their prayers for us.

### **A wife's prayer**

Mother Mary must have prayed a great deal for her husband, Joseph, thanksgiving prayers for his obedience and patience to God's will and for the gift of fatherhood that he gave to Jesus. She surely had prayers for his health and for healing during times of trials that he and the family endured and prayers for his strength. She must have prayed a great deal at the end of his life, since we don't know what that was like, surely one can imagine the prayers of a wife for her dying husband.

A wife prays for her husband on so many levels; first for his fulfillment in his relationship with her, then his fulfillment in his career, and also for his relationship with the children. We want them strong, wise, and fulfilled, don't we? My husband has had many trials through the years, including the loss of his father, caring for his aging mother, health issues, as well as family and career. It seems that there are always reasons for prayer, even when things are going well. When times are good, my prayers are more thanksgiving for the many blessings that surround him and us.

Praying during the good and quiet times are easy, if we do it at all, but finding the strength to pray at times of real trial and suffering can be a trial in itself, yet with the inner strength of a woman, she prays on through the ordeal. Mother Mary is the perfect example of that as she watched her only son during his passion and death...Oh; it hurts to think of her during the crucifixion of Jesus! As a mother and a wife, there is always time and need for prayer, always someone who needs extra guidance, strength, and wisdom. But on the outside of the immediate family, we women reach out and pray for those around us and in the news suffering trials of their own.

All I know really about women's prayer is what I know of myself and the women around me. We pray, and pray, and pray mostly without ceasing for those around us that we care about and even those we don't particularly care about, but know they need prayers. All the while growing closer to our Heavenly Father and finding His peace...in letting go and letting Him.

Can we pray for you?

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# Why Pray the Stations of the Cross? [at Theologyisaverb]

**It's Worth Revisiting Wednesday! A place where you can come and bring a treasured post to share, and link-up with fellow bloggers! Co-Hosted with Allison Gingras at Reconciled To You.**

*Though this is a new post, the idea of revisiting the Stations of the Cross is a much needed conversation to be had this Lent. And one that in true Jesuit imagining I invite you to consider:*



This past week as I accompanied my 4<sup>th</sup> grade students, from this past summer, for the Stations of the Cross I began to think...Why do we not do this more often? Here, we have been given this beautiful imaginative way to immerse ourselves in the story of the Passion of our Lord. More than merely listening we are asked to contemplate the scene, and walk in faith with Christ on the way to the cross. As we picture the faces of the crowd, the thoughts of the disciples, and the heart of Christ himself we glimpse the magnitude of the sacrifice of love that has been given to us. If you have never participated in the Stations of the Cross before, all are welcome, just call your local parish for the date and time. This is a graced pilgrimage and one that I hope that you too will make this Lent.



**The First Station: Jesus Is Condemned** – *Tried unjustly for crimes he didn't commit, would we have spoken up for Jesus? Do I speak up for others?*



**The Second Station: Jesus Takes up His Cross** – *Oh the sight of Christ beaten, crowned with thorns, and now asked to carry the cross! Do I seek to feel compassion for those carrying burdens?*



**The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time** – Would I have rushed to His side? Am I a source of strength for others?



**The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Sorrowful Mother** – As a ‘sword piercing her heart’, the pain Mary felt to see her Son had to have been tremendous and yet she was there beside him. Do I meet others in their pain or only in joy?



**The Fifth Station: Simon Helps to Carry the Cross** – Chosen because he was different, Simon was called upon to carry Jesus’ cross. What unique gifts do I have that could serve Christ today?



**The Sixth Station: Veronica Offers Her Veil to Jesus** – This woman seeing a way to help Jesus, in turn leaves with his image on her veil and in her heart. Do my actions today bear the image of Christ?



**The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time** – Weak and weary, the weight of the cross with our sinfulness was greater than anything we have ever known. How does my own sinfulness weigh on me today?



**The Eighth Station: Jesus meets the Weeping Women** – Jesus meets the women with a profound understanding of the pain our sin carries. Do I consider the effects of my sin on others though the things I do or fail to do?



**The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time** – Pushed and prodded on, there was to be no rest for Jesus on the way to the cross. Yet, we find rest in Christ who continually strengthens us and shares our burdens.



**The Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothing-** *Humiliated and stripped of his dignity, oh how our Savior seeks for us to see the suffering of our most vulnerable.*



**The Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross –** *What a cruel scene that lays before our eyes- and yet the love that is poured out as You take on our sins upon Yourself! Help me dear Lord to live this life in gratitude for your sacrifice, help me to love You and your creation as I should.*



**The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross –** *Forgiveness You have given for those who sought to crucify you. Christ forgive me of my sins, and guide me to extend forgiveness to all I encounter in life.*



**The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down From the Cross –** *Holding the body of her Son in her arms, we dare to imagine the loss and pain that Mary felt in this moment. In those times that I have experienced loss, do I rely on the strength of God and my brothers and sisters in Christ to carry me?*



**The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb –** *As Joseph and Nicodemus lay*

*Jesus in the tomb, joined by Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalen we imagine the stone that is rolled into place. For those times we too are asked to place our trust in the events of our lives, unknowing what is to come next we pray for guidance.*



**The Resurrection** – *We know that this last station is not the end of the story- For Christ has risen and calls us all to a new life in Him! Let my life be a witness to his Passion and revealing of his love to the world!*

Peace,

*Elizabeth*

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This contribution is available at <http://theologyisavverb.com/2015/03/17/worth-revisiting-why-pray-the-stations-of-the-cross/>  
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## Hands-full [at With Us Still]

‘Little Bits’ had quite a dilemma on her hands yesterday—or more precisely, *in* her hands.

Looking ahead to the upcoming holiday, Gerri thought it might be fun to give our 14-month-old granddaughter a little practice hunting Easter eggs. So Grandma playfully scattered eight or nine brightly-colored plastic orbs across the carpet...equipped young Hannah with an equally colorful wicker basket to collect them in...and set her loose.



So many eggs...for two small hands...

Quicker than you can say ‘bunny-rabbit’, Hannah had her initial quota—a pink egg in the right hand, sky-blue in the left. But she hadn’t quite mastered the idea of the basket as a potential repository. And soon enough, a look of quizzical consternation spread across her face: *‘Both hands full...so how am I going to grab all the rest of those gorgeously enticing objects still on the floor?’*

After a few seconds, Hannah hit upon a strategy of sorts: She gingerly placed the pink egg down...to pick up a green one. And almost as quickly, she decided this approach was going to be wholly unsatisfactory. *‘There’s got to be a way to increase my take,’* her expression seemed to say.

Grandma came to the rescue, of course—demonstrating how the basket could be used to free one’s hands for more collecting. And Hannah’s heart was filled with delight at the prospect.

By happy coincidence, this little eggs-capade occurred on the [feast of the Annunciation](#)—and so it reminded me of the profound spiritual lesson we celebrate on that date. It is after all (on some level at least) a feast of seemingly impossible expectations.

*How can a virgin conceive...and bear a son? How is it possible?*

Mary herself [asks the question](#). Then almost as quickly, she moves toward her ‘yes!’ – an answer that proves transformative, forever altering the course of salvation history.

Kinda makes you wonder, though: Have we learned much from Mary's example?

What blessings do we forgo...because of the 'certainties' we feel compelled to cling to in our lives?

Do we lead with our 'yes' – or do we tend to approach God...with our hands already full?



Yes, that's Gramps, cuddling with a favorite spiritual guru...

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

*IHS*

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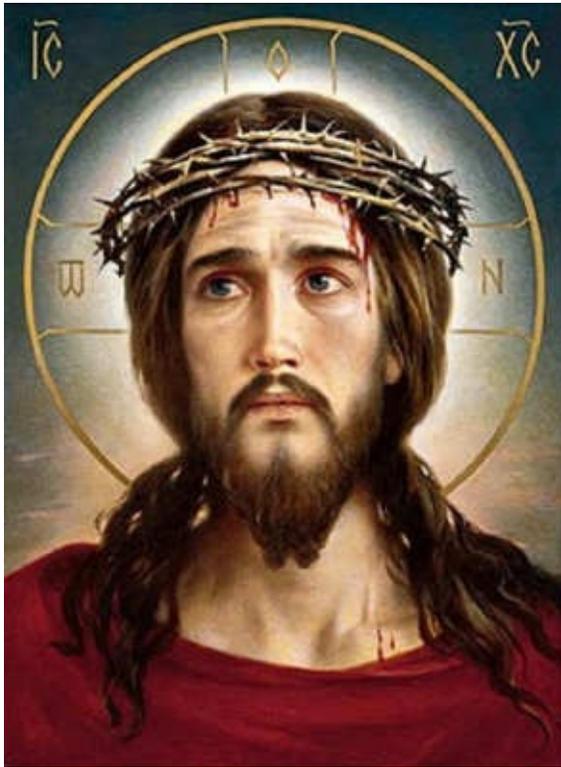
## Jesus Has Few Friends [at A Spiritual Journey]

There's this story about St. Teresa of Avila. Once, when she was traveling to one of her convents, her carriage tipped in crossing a torrential stream and she fell into the muddy water, injuring her leg. Soaked and hurt, she cried to God, "Lord, if this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few!" Humor aside, the Lord still has few friends today. In our present secular societies, people look up to pop stars, rock musicians, sports heroes, those who have glamour, wealth, and/or power. Mother Teresa was inspiring, but how many of us wanted to be like her? The humble, meek, and self-giving image of Christ just does not appeal to the world anymore. Timid Christians ashamed of him are legion. What is certain is that if we ignore the Lord, he will ignore us in the end too. *The worst thing you can possibly hear said to us is "I do not know you" from the one who loved us the most* (Matthew 25.12, Luke 13.27).

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This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfec saint.blogspot.com/2015/03/jesus-has-few-friends.html>  
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## Behind the Name, Beautiful Thorns [at beautiful thorns]



Years ago I went through a severe trial and very intense spiritual warfare. After that happened, I cried out to the Lord and told him, "I just want a normal, leisurely life"! Well, he heard my prayer and he left me alone for the next 6 years. Needless to say, I was miserable! There were no spiritual consolations; I did not sense or hear from the Lord at all during that time. The worst part about it though was my passion towards him was gone! I had no desire to pray or to serve him. I felt like Jesus could have appeared in all his glory right in front of me and I would not have been moved. It was a very scary place to be and even made me question my salvation.

At first I did not recognize that this was an answer to my prayer. When I finally realized it, I repented for praying that way and began pressing in to have God's presence again in my life. I cried out to the Lord and asked for passion to return. I also asked for the intercession of St. Raphael (an Archangel found in the book of Tobit, associated with bringing God's healing). Well, to put it mildly, he heard and answered my prayer. I received a great spiritual and emotional healing. It was more like St. Raphael took a burning coal from the throne room of God and touched my heart with it and it caused me to bawl like a baby for hours.

Since that happened, I have been very careful not to go back to that place of desolation and lack of passion for the Lord. I even told the Lord never to let me go back to that place again and to do whatever it takes to keep me from it. You see, I am human and when given the choice between comfort and carrying my cross, I usually choose comfort. I flinch at the idea of fasting and doing penance. The Lord knows that my flesh is weak so he sometimes gives me what I call "thorns". He lovingly hands me thorns from his crown, an opportunity to share in his sufferings. He does this so I can come up higher and deepen my

relationship with him.

I have not always received these thorns well and out of fear and false humility would tell Jesus in my heart, "Oh, I could never handle even a fraction of what you went through!". I have learned over time however that he knows best and I can trust him. He knows the best and quickest way to transform me into his image and draw me closer to him. When everything is going well, I am less likely to cling to him and recognize my need for him.

When the thorns or trials of life come and when I am not feeling well physically, the temptation is still there to get discouraged and depressed but I am learning to lean back in him and let him do a work in me. When I do cling to him and he pulls me through it, I usually come to a place of greater love for the Lord and others and am able to receive greater revelation. Hence the name Beautiful Thorns!

*2 Corinthians 4:17 -For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!*

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## The Fifth Word of Jesus [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

*“I am thirsty.”* (John 19:28)

It started in the Garden. The savior prayed with such anguish, His sweat mingled with His blood and dripped to the ground. It was in the Garden that soldiers beat Him with their fists, pulled His beard, spit in His face. Then they dragged Him into the city and shuffled Him from Pilate to Herod, and back again to Pilate. They whipped Him without mercy, without hardly giving Him time to catch His breath. Then they pressed a crown comprised of thorns into His forehead. Blood oozed into His eyes and tracked down His cheeks. Mocking soldiers then laid the cross across His shoulders and forced Him to carry it to the hill, the hill that looked like a skull. The hill where He would die.

*“I am thirsty.”*

After all He'd suffered by the time they'd nailed Him to the cross, I do not doubt He was thirsty. I do not doubt thirst consumed Him.

As Jesus groaned through parched lips, someone dipped a sponge in vinegar and gall and brought it to His mouth (Matthew 27:34). The vinegar they offered Jesus was weak wine commonly used in Palestine to quench thirst. Gall was a bitter liquid with narcotic and anesthetic properties. Soldiers often gave it to prisoners about to be crucified as a way to dull their senses so they wouldn't fight against the nails being hammered into their limbs. Sometimes friends gave it to those hanging on the cross to lessen their agony.

When Jesus tasted the gall He turned away. He would not drink the drug. He would finish the Father's plan to its fullest course and its fullest cost. A short while later, someone gave Him the plain vinegar.

*“I am thirsty.”*

Although nailed to the cross, Jesus was the Lord of Heaven. The King of the Universe. He never needed to thirst. Or hunger. Or suffer pain. Yet He demonstrated by His life and by His death a ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness.’ Even on the cross, He would accomplish His Father’s will. That is why His death – and His thirst – serves as an illustration for us.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine wrote, "God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you." And the psalmist wrote: *As a deer pants for the water, so my soul pants after thee* (Psalm 42:1).

Restlessness. Thirst.

We who belong to Christ through our faith and baptism “*have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer [we] who live, but Christ lives in [us]*” (Galatians 2:20). When the Holy Spirit enters our lives He always creates within us a restlessness for God. A hunger for God. A thirst for God. If we are not restless for God, if we do not increasingly hunger and thirst for Him, we ought to wonder why.

*“I am thirsty.”*

Many things at first seem to quench our spiritual thirst, but in the end serve simply to anesthetize us to it. The Holy Spirit spoke of those counterfeit thirst-quenchers as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16). But counterfeits can never fully satisfy. The only place to quench our God-designed thirst, our God-designed restlessness, is at His fountain, devoting ourselves to a daily drinking – a *lifelong* drinking – from that fountain through reception of the Sacraments, daily prayer, Scripture study, and humble obedience to the Holy Spirit.

*“I am thirsty.”*

Nothing but spiritual drink will ever satisfy our spiritual thirst. Nothing.

God created us that way.

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This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2015/03/lenten-series-fifth-word.html>  
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# The MASS is The ANSWER for it is "The Most BEAUTIFUL Thing This Side of Heaven" [at It Makes Sense to Me]

## *IT MAKES SENSE TO ME*

By Larry Peterson

The following is for people of all faiths. It is also directed to atheists, agnostics, and all secularists too.

If you do not believe, you can make a choice and try to see with the eyes of a FAITH that is available to you. If you do not approve, please delete. Thanks---(N.B. I am not a theologian or anything close to it. I am just a blue-collar guy from the Bronx sharing the faith that he loves)

~~~~~

Something deeply mystical happens on Holy Thursday that many people (this may include some Catholics) do not understand. I refer to the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Lent ends when this Mass begins, which is usually in the evening. This Mass commemorates the night when Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist giving us His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity forever. He did this within the framework of what we call the

[Holy Sacrifice of the Mass](#)

We must have the Mass to have the Eucharist. They are inseparable for it is within the Mass that the ordained Catholic priest can consecrate simple bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Make no mistake, my friends, this is not a "remembrance" or a "memorial" or a "tribute". This is the unbloody sacrifice of the Cross being offered again and again and again to God the Father for all of us, for all time, in perpetuity.

We Catholics believe that Christ is TRULY PRESENT on the altar at Mass. These words are from the Roman canon: "

we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty from the gifts that you have given us, this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the holy bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation".

Christ is with us and we, the people, are offering Him to God the Father. Our reward is the Risen Christ given back to us in The Eucharist by our Father in heaven. This is

The Mystery of Faith

and this is what we believe.

The meaning of this is beyond the pale. It transcends human comprehension. For this is when yesterday became today and tomorrow becomes yesterday. The Mass enables us to briefly step into eternity. And

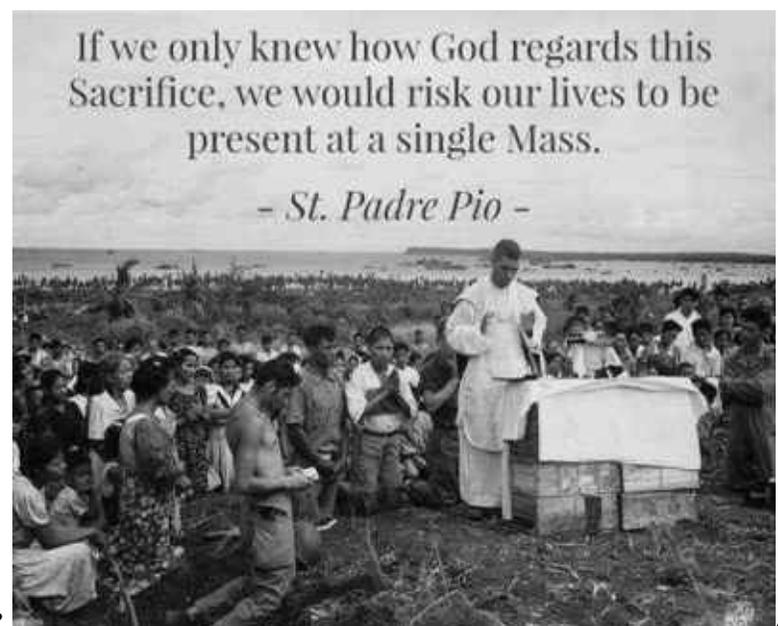
this Holy Sacrifice is being offered somewhere on planet Earth every day of the year round the clock. Imagine that, somewhere, every day, round the clock. It is the most beautiful thing this side of heaven.

I wrote this many years ago and I would like to share it with you.



The Answer

Every minute somewhere Upon this Earth Amid chaos and pain Shadowed by greed and pride Perfection.



While within so many Silent screams resonate fade unheard Pain unanswered Yet each minute A constant Light Always there for us to share Somewhere---The Answer But---choices Perfection unbridled That tells us why And will let us understand If we choose to see this splendid Oblation A perfect purity This gift called The Mass Ignored yet Somewhere each minute For us to share The Answer there The Perfect Love But---choices.

The focus of the Lenten journey is preparation for Easter Sunday and the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Easter morning arrives and we sing out, "Alleluia, Alleluia! Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again." Eternal life can now be ours. All we have to do is follow Him. If you do not know how or where to start, The Answer might be here.

This contribution is available at <http://slipperywillie.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-mass-is-answer-for-it-is-most.html>
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How To Grow Spiritual Friendships [at Association of Pauline Cooperators]

*If you ever find yourself stuck in the middle of the sea,
I'll sail the world to find you.*

*If you ever find yourself lost in the dark and you can't see,
I'll be the light to guide you.*

Find out what we're made of, when we are called to help our friends in need.

You can count on me.

T

he Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a friend as a person whom you like and enjoy being with; a person who helps or supports someone or something. These lyrics from the Bruno Mars song,

["Count On Me,"](#)

is also a definition of friendship—someone who will be there when we are lost, the light to guide us; we can count on them. We have friends we meet with socially, Facebook friends whom we may never meet personally, childhood friends, neighborhood friends, work place friends, etc. While these relationships are important, there is also the need for spiritual friendships, those friendships that go beyond our general interests. A spiritual friend is one whose journey toward God mirrors our own—a companion who shares our faith and our longing for God.



After reading a pamphlet on spiritual friendship, I began to think of how being part of the Pauline family as a Cooperator has helped me to develop friendships that brought me closer to Christ. It has given me the opportunity to develop friendships with the sisters, priests, brothers, and other lay people in the Family. When struggling with a problem, I know I can always call a “Family” member who will be there for me. I can count on them. They have shown their friendship when life events necessitated speaking to or praying with someone. They have been and continue to be lights to guide me.

Just recently a woman I met at a Cooperator Retreat, who is going through the formation program, asked me to correspond with her and share ideas on how to grow in holiness. I was so excited! That’s what friends are for!

In this busy world we live in, what are some ways to find and grow a spiritual friendship? Very often,

they are right in front of us. Here are some ideas:

- Perhaps a co-worker or neighbor will stand out as someone who shares not only our interests but our love of prayer. Pick up the phone and make a lunch date. Too busy? Send an email, Facebook message or old-fashioned snail mail. You never know what will happen.
- Join or start a prayer group. Years ago I prayed for help and support during a stressful health situation with my father. In less than a week a friend invited me to a prayer group meeting. Fourteen years later I still participate, and this group has fostered personal and spiritual friendships for me.
- Our beloved saints can also be our companions along our journey; friends to turn to when we need a helping hand. Like us, they are individuals who struggled and had their own gifts and weaknesses.

Numerous resources about the saints are available:

- The

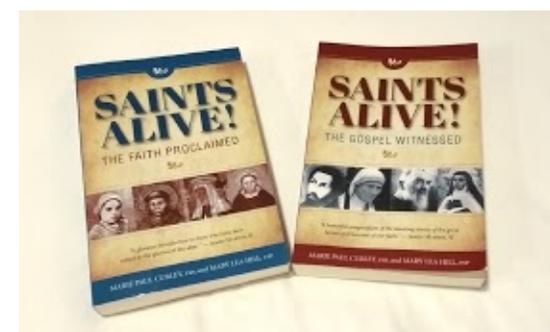
[Classic Wisdom Collection](#)

of books published by Pauline Books and Media is an excellent resource to learn more about our saints. Besides stories about many saints, the Daughters of St. Paul share their stories of how the saints impacted their lives and vocations.

- The new

[Queen of Apostles Prayer Book](#)

, published by Pauline Books & Media, is filled with prayers to the saints for all of our intercessions. Stay open for the ways in which our saints might connect with us. A conversation may suddenly mention the name of a saint you may be praying to or a holy card for that saint might suddenly fall out of a book. We all know about St. Therese of the Little Flower sending roses down from heaven as a sign of her intercession. During Pope Francis' recent flight in January to the Philippines he prayed to St. Therese for his trip and asked her to send him a rose. He did not receive a rose but a picture of her. He commented that, "instead of a rose she came herself to greet me!"



- The two

Saints Alive!

Collection, (

[The Faith Proclaimed](#)

and

[The Gospel Witnessed](#)

) also published by Pauline Books & Media, are filled with stories of men and women who can be our companions along the way. As stated on the back of the book, “this book is a pleasurable way to meet some of the people we hope to live with some day.”

- We members of the Pauline Family, especially, recognize Blessed James Alberione as an excellent companion. We look to him for guidance in the world of social communication. Like him, let us bring the light of the Gospel to others.
- St. Paul, whose extraordinary conversion story led so many people to Christianity, is a personal favorite. He never met Jesus personally, yet “saw” him. Like St. Paul, I want to “see” Jesus. I pray to St. Paul to show me the way to a more personal relationship with Jesus.
- St. Joseph, whose feast day we will celebrate tomorrow, is a powerful intercessor, the “faithful cooperater in our redemption,” as the Pauline prayer manual describes him. With him as our companion, we can imitate his humility and ask him to walk with us in our day-to-day struggles.

Why not use the remaining weeks of Lent to “adopt” a saint or start a friendship with someone to walk with you on your journey? Share with us your story of a spiritual friendship or how you would like to develop one for yourself or another. To quote St. Thomas Aquinas, “There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.”

“Keep smiling, keep shining, knowing you can always count on me, for sure. That’s what friends are for” (Dionne Warwick,

[“That’s What Friends Are For”](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://paulinelaitiy.blogspot.com/2015/03/lights-to-guide-us-how-to-grow.html>
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Dogwood, Daffodils and Waiting [at Conceiving Hope]



*In Jesus' time, the dogwood grew
To a stately size and a lovely hue.
'Twas strong and firm, its branches interwoven.
For the cross of Christ its timbers were chosen.
Seeing the distress at this use of their wood
Christ made a promise which still holds good:
"Never again shall the dogwood grow
Large enough to be used so.
Slender and twisted, it shall be
With blossoms like the cross for all to see.
As blood stains the petals marked in brown,
The blossom's center wears a thorny crown.
All who see it will remember Me
Crucified on a cross from the dogwood tree.
Cherished and protected, this tree shall be*

A reminder to all of My agony.

-Author Unknown

Every group of friends has a

leader

. It's just how people naturally assemble, isn't it? Sure they could be called a motley crew, the dozen of them, but the things that bind friends together were the things that bound them together. You believe in the same things, you answer to the same higher power, you have similar goals.

This group of friends was no different in that respect.

Anyone who has ever been a part of a close knit social group, regardless of the specific links they all share together, knows the dynamics I am referring to here. There is banter and rumor and solidarity and brotherhood/sisterhood. It's just a part of our human journey that we relate to each other this way. *This group of friends was no different in that respect.*

Imagine the chaos that ensues in a group of friends when the *leader* among them is wrongly accused, imprisoned, and convicted of a heinous crime. We see this story play out many days in the news coverage. Some will immediately cast judgment and distance themselves from their own brother/sister. Some will form allegiances and vow to right the wrong that's been done. Others will sit back quietly, maybe spreading rumors amongst the "herd", never thinking about the impact their own actions are having. Bonds within the group will be tested, stretched, and even broken. Some will outright betray their friends for no apparent reason. And yet others will take the moment as an opportune time to assert themselves as *replacement* for the social position within their friend group. These aren't foreign concepts to us. We see this today. We saw it yesterday. We will see this again. It's either human nature or *fallen* human nature, right? *This group of friends was no different in that respect.*

But all the chaos ends - or rather is *suspended* - when the persecuted among them dies. No matter where you are in the social construct, that moment is resolutely silent. Seemingly one struggle ends and another begins. Any hope for redemption from worldly persecution is squelched with the finality of death. People fall into despair. The cycle of grieving begins. We live and breathe this pattern whether we like to or not. No matter how hopeful anyone has ever been for things to be sorted out in a case of someone being wrongfully accused, death offers a final decree for us. We know that death is inescapable in our tangible world and any *real* way to vindicate our brother/sister is now gone. *This group of friends was no different in that respect.*

The moments following a death (and any hope of righting a wrong before that death) are thick with sadness, rife with despair, and filled with everything that hope *isn't*. And that's exactly what Good Friday felt like at the foot of the cross. With the blood of Jesus Christ fresh on the wood, those surrounding Him experienced this cycle of grief. I'm certain of it....because we are all human and we share enough with each other through time and space as human creatures to be certain of what that moment must have been like. *Son of God* proclamation aside, death is something no one had ever conquered, so the finality of that moment would have been palpable. *This group of friends was no different in that respect.*

Perhaps you've realized that we are channeling the experience of the Apostles here (and those among them) as they lived through the terrible and beautiful and confusing Passion of Christ so many years ago. I can only imagine the utter confusion and agony that witnessing the realities that occurred along the Via Dolorosa must have involved.

But you and I live in a world today where these painful footsteps have been transformed into artistic depictions that are merely called *stations*; they are no longer the actual bloody and agonizing footsteps of the redeemer of the world, but more likely detached symbolism. *We* know all about what happened after Christ died. We know that Good Friday wasn't the end of the story. We know death was conquered. And so with our modern ideas of calendrical hope and our Pottery Barn sensibilities for how to celebrate the Sunday ahead, we use Holy Saturday as merely a staging day for a happy holiday yet to come. *A few thousand years is all it took to completely whitewash things, isn't it?*

In that context, Holy Saturday is no longer to us a vigil for the most spectacular accomplishment ever achieved between Heaven and Earth. Just like Good Friday is no longer the day when hope seemingly died..... and like Easter Sunday no longer carries any real sense that the *pearly gates* opened wide for us through the outpouring of blood from the *savior of mankind* with a rebirth of Divine Hope.

We might be the Easter people, but right now we seem to be for sale at the low, low price of whatever the going-retail-rate-is because of our inability to connect with Christ's Passion.

Distance helps us hide from the truth, doesn't it?

So how do we reclaim our Holy Saturday and the vigil of the resurrection of Christ? How do we live the grief of Good Friday in a real way and experience the tension and hope of Holy Saturday and the victory and supreme glory that Easter Sunday should bring us, as a *modern* "Easter people"?

I'm getting to that, I promise. You just have to wait a few more moments. Waiting. Get it? Here, I'll give you a lovely poem and picture to gaze upon while you wait!. ;)



The Daffodils

William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills, When all at once I saw a crowd, A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine And twinkle on the Milky Way, They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay: Ten thousand saw I at a glance, Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
The waves beside them danced, but they Out-did the sparkling waves in glee: A Poet could not but be
gay, In such a jocund company: I gazed—and gazed—but little thought What wealth the show to me had
brought:
For oft, when on my couch I lie In vacant or in pensive mood, They flash upon that inward eye Which
is the bliss of solitude; And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils.

Let's talk a little about waiting. We can all admit that our sense of *waiting* is aligned more with the realities of modern technology than it is with our faith. *Your call is important to us. We'll be with you momentarily.* That's our idea of what waiting is like. It's one dimensional in that we have an expectation the *waiting* ends. And more than that - we expect that the waiting gets us what we want. Our modern ideas of waiting are so attuned to being entitled to answers, that I hesitate to think we have even a surface understanding of what *Holy Saturday* felt like anymore at all. And how is Good Friday poignant if we already know it wasn't as final as it must have seemed in the moment? It just isn't, if we are looking at it all through the lens that we are entitled to easy answers.

The creator of the entire world was brutally crucified and left to die on a splintery, wooden cross because of our inability to conceive of His humanity and divinity.... and here we are as a culture *upset that our call is being answered in the order in which it was received.* The two seem incongruous, don't they?

What if we looked at Easter (and the anticipation of it) through the lens of a more meaningful sense of waiting? What if we used our own understanding of our physical humanity to bring us back to understanding the sacrifice of Christ? What if we were able to own the entitlement to salvation as a victory over death...as children who were purchased at the greatest cost imaginable? What if *something we cannot control, manipulate, or overcome is the key* to our truly understanding Christ's sacrifice? And the key to understanding the reality of the waiting that Holy Saturday brings us...

As an infertile woman, I think I'm beginning to learn a little bit about what being an *Easter people* is all about. Infertility really seems a lot like Holy Saturday to me. Cleansing through anticipation. Hope taught through the tension of waiting. I *think* I'm starting to get it.

And as much as I'm not going to have neat answers for all of the questions I posted above (how Holy Saturday of me...), I'm starting to realize that processing this through my own apparent cross is part of how I'm going to find *my* Easter with Christ. Yes, He already redeemed this. But struggling with infertility and recurring losses seems a whole lot like the reality that Good Friday must have brought to those at the foot of Christ's lifeless body on that cross (Virgin Mother anyone?). *Maybe this is how I find a way to relate to Mary in any real sense?* Maybe making it personal - like the relating to the Apostles that I tried to above - is how we find our way out of all of this being *just* symbolic.

Infertility also seems a lot like the tension that must have been thick in the air on Holy Saturday as all of mankind waited, with fragile hope. And it seems like my own vantage point of what Easter is on the *other side* might be a bit like those dreamy Wordsworth daffodils.



No, I don't think my own journey is tantamount to the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday. I

do

think one of the only graces of looking inward on this Holy Saturday is that I found real pain when I looked there. And real pain seems to be what Holy Saturday is and was about. That, and waiting.

So without any neatly packaged answers, I end this rambling post still waiting. Not for my own reward. But for the resurrection in every way it can find us...

The promise of a joyous Easter awaits, even with the weighty realities of our brokenness. Even with the tragedies that we endure. Through miscarriage, stillbirth, permanent infertility, and all the inescapable brokenness that we experience in life and and in marriage. **There is still a reason to conceive hope. And Holy Saturday is why.**

This contribution is available at <http://conceivinghope.blogspot.com/2015/04/dogwood-daffodils-and-waiting.html>
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Slowly Returning from the Desert [at Cherishing Everyday Beauty]



This blogging hiatus has been somewhat intentional, I'll admit. After my little niece died (a miscarriage), she occupied my thoughts at large which made it difficult-at-best to consider writing about anything else. But I didn't want to write about her any more than I already have because now hers is my sister's story to tell, if she chooses -- not mine. Thus, it seemed better that I take a little break from blogging.

Lent's timing only helped matters in this regard. Out to coffee with a friend, she asked me how Lent was going -- from my perspective. I almost cried. This Lent has not been anything like I had anticipated. Not even close. My journey during this time in the desert has obviously been so different from my sister's or even my parents', but still nearly impossible.

Have you ever lost someone you loved so dearly? What if that person was someone you had never held? What if you had never before encountered her sweet personality? What if that person did not yet have a name?

What if that little person lost was the second one lost in eight months?

Without Faith, this would all be so impossible to endure. But with Faith we have the hope for Heaven and the assurance that we will one day see her and her brother again.

I dropped in this evening to freshen up the appearance around here a little bit. Spring Cleaning has started here (read: I've started... slowly) and apparently once I get started, I just keep going. I figured while I'm here, I should probably say 'hello'. I'm still making rosaries, so if you're interested in them, please feel free to contact me! Meanwhile,

[you can catch a glimpse into the adventures of last weekend here](#)

Please

click the link and share the joy! It's sooo special



(or maybe that's just my experience because the post captures wonderful memories so beautifully).

Hugs to all! ♥ Christ's peace.

This contribution is available at <http://cherishingeverydaybeauty.blogspot.com/2015/03/slowly-returning-from-desert.html>
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The Holiest Day of the Year [at Quiet Consecration]

Holy Week is upon us.

This is both good news and bad news for the practicing Catholic.

Good news? We are about to celebrate the holiest time of the year. Our 'reason to be' is coming to light. We will be celebrating the fact that our God is alive and well and loves us beyond measure. For many it will be a time of coming into full communion with Truth and embracing the total Christian experience - they will become Catholic, and their life long journey will no longer be a lonely one. They will have a family and that family will love them, no matter what foolish stuff they do.

Bad news? It's Holy Week. Satan will be taking every chance he has to attack and undermine us, as individuals and as a Church. He will use others. He will use our own fears and desires. He will trick us into believing lies and that sin is something God wants for us (my favorite phrase I have heard so far around this? 'God is coloring outside the lines for me.') and he will take use the modern world to do his handiwork.

This is, traditionally, the time of year you see the news reports about bad Catholics, horrors of the Middle Ages and corruption in the Church. You will see specials about 'the historical' Jesus and experts will come forward yapping about how The Church doesn't really know what She is doing, the rifts and the fights and the need to let divorced Catholics married outside the Church to receive Our Lord in Communion or for women to be 'ordained' as priests.

The pedophile scandal will be revisited and the name of every high profile priest who ever committed a crime will be paraded before us by the media.

It can be tough to take.

I believe the reason we are attacked as both individuals and as a Church is because we are who we are - we are the last bastion of Truth. We stand as one, we walk together (not always in step, though, because we are a bunch of goofy people after all) and we believe to our core that Jesus' Church is where we are supposed to be worshipping God. We may not always agree politically and sometimes we don't like each other, but essentially we are a family.

And Satan hates the family.

Recently I have been witness to a very loving but scared woman throw her Catholic faith out the window in order to be able to have a boyfriend. She is convinced it is God's Will for her despite it being completely illogical that God's Will for her would keep her from Him in the Eucharist. I understand her fear. I understand her loneliness and her demand for love. I have been there and I have been that foolish in the past.

She is not the first person in the Catholic Church to put her eternal soul in peril so she can have a date to a rock concert.

It does not surprise me that it has happened during this, the holiest time of the Christian calendar. If she is going to fall, it would be now.

The good news? God is scanning the horizon for her, just as the father scanned the horizon for his prodigal son. She may be straying from Truth but she is not out of His sight yet. As long as she is on this side of the dirt (as my ol Daddy used to say) she has a chance to make it right.

What scares me about the situation comes from my own personal experience. I said good bye and I love you to my husband at 4:15 pm on August 7, 1987 and by 5:30, when I got home, he was dead.

Please keep all those who are struggling with the lies of Satan in prayer. Please keep me in prayer. Life is not easy for me - but it is a life that is second to none.

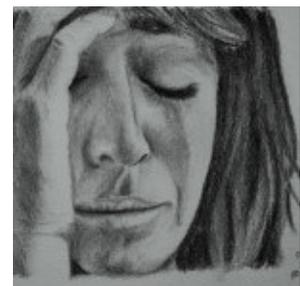
And for that I am eternally grateful.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-holiest-day-of-year.html>
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Leviathan Flees [at Loved As If]

For six weeks, Spring had been bringing fresh, mild days to New York but my body was hunched in the chair, my arms wrapped tightly around me as if to ward off a winter that refused to relinquish its hold; the warm sun had not penetrated the thick, chill fog that hung about me. My eyes had been red and swollen for several days... Ever since I'd written the letter to God... Ever since the words had spilled from my pen: 'They lied to me.'



The letter ended there. Its preamble had merely been an ineffective delaying tactic. And before the ink seeped into the paper, misery unleashed its power, left me with little except wet, salt-stung cheeks and eyes gritty with sand. Warmth fled. Laughter was unthinkable. Only fog remained. It penetrated to my depths, filled every empty space; I was a heavy blob of tears.

"How are you?" my therapist inquired after my hand reached for a wad of tissues to dab at dripping eyes and nose.

My lower lip trembled. The tissues made a quick swipe at my nose. My head shook. My nose sniffed damply and loudly. "I know what it is," I whimpered. My face screwed itself up. The stream of tears burst its banks. Two more damp quick sniffs and then, "I know what I'm so afraid of." My throat swallowed, my chest heaved up and down. "They lied to me," my voice was a hoarse whisper.

My therapist leaned forward, "What do you mean?"

"When they sent me away," more swallowing, more damp sniffs. Pained composure descended for a moment. "Papa sat me on his desk. I'd drawn some maraschino cherries for him. He took the drawing, told me it was beautiful, tacked it to the cork board above his desk," the sniffing came again in short, sharp, moist bursts. My chest heaved out clicking breaths: *huhnh, huhnh, huhnh, huhnh, huhnh!*. The wet, shredded tissues scrubbed at my eyes and nose.

"He told me they were sending me away." My face scrunched up as the words left my mouth. "He said they wanted me to be safe while they found the bad man, the man who hurt me." My hand raised itself up to wipe at the liquid running from my nose. "I told him, 'But I will never see you again.' Papa pulled me against him and said, 'Of course you will. You will be home before you know it.' I shook my head against his chest and cried. My tears soaked through his sweater. I can feel the wool against my cheek. The warm, wet, woolly scent is in my nose," my hand stroked my cheek where it had pressed against Papa's chest.

After another loud sniff, I continued, "I told him I needed him. That I really would never see him again. He said, 'You must be my brave little girl. And I will be right here if you need me.' He held me away and looked into my face, 'If you need me, draw maraschino cherries for me and ask Siobhan to send them. I'll come right away.' He held me close again, 'We must make sure you're safe. And as soon as the bad man is

found, you will come right home.”

My body shook. My hand reached for a wad of dry tissues. My chest tried to pull air into my blocked nose. My arms hugged my body tighter as it rocked to and fro.

“But what do you mean that they lied?”

My forehead scrunched. *Why didn't he understand?* I took a deep breath, “He sent me away from the danger but they stayed and the danger killed them. He *knew* he was staying with the danger. He *knew* they would be killed. But he lied and said I'd be home before I knew it. He told me to send the maraschino cherries but he was dead and there wasn't anybody to receive them. He'd never be able to come,” my voice tried to scream through the dampening tears.

When my breath eased “And Marmar knew too. She cried when I left. I can see her there. She cried so hard, Papa was supporting her. I had told her that I would never see her again just like I told Papa. But she said, ‘Don't worry, my Lyssa. God will take good care of you. You'll be home soon.’ But when I left, her heart was being ripped away and she knew it.”

My chest shook out breaths in short clicks: *huhnh, huhnh, huhnh, huhnh, huhnh!* Except for the wet, clicking noise, the room remained silent.

Finally, my therapist asked, “Did Professor Cumberland learn when they died?”

The tears, though suspended, waited just within my eyes to burst forth again. With a loud sniff, my nose attempted to pull a breath past the congestion, “About three weeks after they sent me away. Probably a little less. They were walking in the park near our home. Someone shot them.” My forehead scrunched itself, “It's as if I can feel what happened to them. Papa was shot in the neck. My head wants to snap to the side the way his must have. Marmar was shot in the abdomen. I can feel a big wound in my body.” Leaking tears quickly reverted to a torrent that weighed my head down and pulled me into a deeper slump.

“Small children often have a close connection with their parents,” he told the top of my head. “It's not unusual that you would feel your parent's deaths. But I think you're wrong. I don't think they lied to you.”

My head raised itself. My eyes examined his face. Another loud, wet sniff brought in enough air to whisper, “What do you mean?” Tears spilled over leaving salt tracks on my dark cotton skirt.

“You're looking at it from a child's perspective. You were afraid you'd never see them again. Somehow, you may have had a strong sense that you would never see them again. But they didn't know. Three weeks isn't a very long time. If your father knew they were in danger, he would have left just as he left South America.” My therapist took a breath and shaped each word clearly and precisely, “Your father loved you. He wanted you to be safe.” My mouth shaped itself into a small O as my head nodded slightly in agreement; the tears had subsided once again. “He didn't set you up to be disappointed. He did what I would have done. He made sure you were safe and that you had a way to contact him.” My mouth widened itself to a pained pout. “He didn't know. Neither did your mother. They believed you were in danger. But there was no reason for them to believe that they were also in danger.”

A hoarse squeak left my mouth, “Really?”

He leaned forward and looked directly in my eyes, “Do you believe your father deliberately set you up?”

Several moist sniffs pulled in air and pushed back tears. “No,” it came out in an almost voiceless whisper. My eyes widened. A pout pulled my lips out. Another sniff came. A few tears tumbled down. My voice sounded high and breathy, “But... I thought... I thought they lied.”

“You were wrong,” my therapist told me.

My mouth twisted itself into a confusion. Tears brimmed my lower lids.

“You were wrong,” he repeated.

My eyes narrowed, my neck twisted my head to one side as if my ears had caught a sound that was nearly, but not quite, audible. The almost sound coursed into my heart. “I was wrong,” I whispered. My barely audible voice released more tears, different tears, tears that washed long-caked debris from my heart.

After repairing my skirt and rinsing my face in the bathroom, I stepped out into the warmth of the Spring afternoon. There was a delicious, green scent in the air. The growing leaves seemed newly cut — laser cut — sharp, clear, in shades of green richer than I had seen before. The late afternoon sky had been washed with clear, soft blueness. Puffy white clouds, tinged with pinks lounged about. My body wanted to float alongside them. My legs, longing to dance, rejoiced in the swishing fabric of my long cotton skirt. My feet raise my ballet black flats in little sweeping kicks. “Is it always this beautiful?” I softly asked my Friend. “Why have I never seen it before?” I breathed in another draught of the sweet air. Hailing a taxi, I settled myself in the back and pressed my forehead against the cracked the window. The taxi’s wheels against the asphalt sang to me with each revolution, *They didn’t lie*.

* [Image source](#).

This contribution is available at <http://lovedasif.com/2015/03/10/leviathan-flees/>
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Hey, You Are in My Seat

It was just another winter day as I made my way to St. Bernard for the 12:10PM Mass. St Bernard's is a beautiful, large church in the middle of downtown and during the week caters to the downtown workers as well as students from the nearby University of Akron.



I don't know about you, but when I go to daily mass, I have my own seat. You might have your regular seat too. It's always there, the same seat in the same row on the same side of the church. It's kind of a comfort to know that I have my seat. But not today!

As I walked into mass I noticed someone in my seat! This church must have a thousand seats, why did this person sit in MINE.

Walking down the aisle I could see a young woman with a book bag. I was certain this was a probably a student praying for a good grade on a test that she really didn't study for!

As I entered the pew, I noticed that the woman was older, perhaps in her early 30's. A little disgusted, I settled in my new seat at the far end of the row as mass began.

Immediately, I noticed that she was new to this church thing. As the opening hymn was sung, she didn't have a songbook. So, being a good Christian, I handed her mine. She smiled a thank you and moved closer to me in the row so that we could both see and share the hymnal. As she did, I realized that this wasn't a college student, but a young homeless woman.

As mass came to an end, we again shared the hymnal, and as I moved from the pew to leave, she stopped me and asked, "Can I tell you something?"

"Sure," I replied.

She slowly began her story, "I'm homeless and I have an appointment at the courthouse. I have to pay a fine of 28 dollars but I was only able to get the money for bus fare downtown. I walked here from the bus station. Since I had time before my appointment with the court, I thought I would come into this church to pray for a miracle."

"Do you see that grey haired woman in the first pew? She saw me crying and came over to me and asked if she could help. I told her my situation and she took out her checkbook and wrote a check to the court for 28 dollars. She told me when the court sees her name on the check that they will accept it." She flashed the check proudly for me to see her miracle and I couldn't help but notice that the elderly woman's

name started with JUDGE!

I told her I was excited that she got her miracle and after a God bless you, and have a great day, she stopped me again.

“Sir”, she said. “I am hungry and haven’t eaten in almost three days. Normally, I would have given her money for lunch, but this happened to be one of those days when I didn’t have any cash with me.

I said, “Walk with me. The University has a café down one block and I’ll see if they have an ATM or take credit cards and I’ll get you something to eat.”

As we opened the door to the café, I noticed an ATM and it was my bank. I quickly went to the machine and got her enough cash for the day. As I went back to the doorway where she was standing, I noticed that she had only five minutes before her appointment. I gave her the money and quickly walked her back up the hill to the courthouse.

As we walked, I could tell that she was crying. When we reached the courthouse she gave me the biggest hug and thanked me between the tears.

She sobbed, “I walked into a church for the FIRST time today to pray for a miracle. And I got two! God is SO great!”

As she walked away, I couldn’t help but think that God had put her into MY seat so that we could share mass and a couple of miracles. I’ve seen her several times at mass since and every time she smiles at me and says, “God is SO Great!”

You know, come to think of it, GOD REALLY IS GREAT!

Note: This post was originally published August 12, 2012. Currently, I am on a brief hiatus finishing my book, *Finding God’s Grace*. During that time, I will feature posts from the past that you may not have had the chance to read. I hope you enjoy them. I’ll have new, original stories in April.

This contribution is available at <http://tonyagnesi.com/2015/03/hey-you-are-in-my-seat-2/>
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An Explanation of the Sacramental Oils

Last night, along with other staff members and parishioners from Saint Mary Magdalene Catholic Church, I traveled across the city of Phoenix to the Cathedral of Saints Simon and Jude for the annual Chrism Mass celebrated by the Bishop of Phoenix, Most Reverend Thomas J. Olmsted. Although I have been to other Chrism Masses in other dioceses, this was the first one I have ever attended in my home diocese. To say it was sacred and beautiful would be the understatement of the year. It was as if heaven and earth united in the Cathedral through the solemn liturgy and sacred music.

Besides the primary purpose of the Chrism Mass, which is the blessing and distribution of the Sacramental Oils, which I will discuss shortly, there is also another purpose of the Chrism Mass – the Renewal of Commitment to Priestly Service. The Bishop asks the priests a set of statements renewing their commitment to the Church. After each statement read by the Bishop, the priests in unison but speaking as individuals respond with, “I am.” The Bishop then asks for the assembly to stand, and together with one voice, the faithful pray for their priests and their Bishop. The prayerful nature of the renewal is quite moving and something every Catholic should experience at least once.

When working at a Catholic parish, a year doesn’t go by when someone sees the sacramental oils in the church and asks why do we have three glass jars of oil. The three oils in the ambry are known as the Oil of Catechumens (“*Oleum Sanctorum*“), Oil of the Sick (“*Oleum Infirmorum*“), and The Sacred Chrism (“*Sacrum Chrisma*“). At the Chrism Mass, the Bishop, the pastor of the particular church, blesses the oils, which will be used in the sacramental celebrations throughout the year in the Church.



According to the Early Church Fathers, an image of God the Father was the olive tree. The fruits that bud from that tree are seen as the image of God the Son. The image of God the Holy Spirit is the oil that flows out in every direction as the purest extract of both the tree and the fruit. When the Church uses the blessed oil in its sacramental celebrations, it represents the outward sign of the power of salvation, which is promised in the Paraclete. It is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies the people of God.

During the Chrism Mass, right after the Memorial Acclamation, there is the *Blessing of the Oil of the Sick*. This oil is used for those individuals that are seriously ill. The oil here acts as a spiritual ointment by which the Spirit heals the body and the soul. This oil is also used for those who are dying. In union with the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, the soul is given the firm and final fortification it needs as it

enters the house of the Father.

Once the Prayer after Communion is prayed, we then have *Blessing of the Oil of Catechumens* and *Consecration of The Sacred Chrism*. Those preparing for Baptism receive the Oil of Catechumens. Just like the ancient athletes who once fought in the arena covered their bodies in oil as to make their enemies unable to grab hold and hurl them to the ground, so too are the catechumens anointed with this oil to remind them that the Christian life is full of struggle, most especially a struggle with Satan and sin. The oil gives them strength to continue in their daily battles.

The Holy Chrism is used in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. Through the sanctifying power of the Spirit, the oil in Baptism symbolizes for individuals the rebirth through water and a share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal missions of Jesus Christ. At Confirmation, the oil reaffirms and strengthens the baptized individual to continue as a witness of Christ to the world. In Holy Orders, the Spirit consecrates the hands of the priest, who will distribute the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist – the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

If your diocese has yet to have the Chrism Mass for this year, I would highly encourage you to attend. It's a great part of the Holy Week Celebrations that the Church has designed for us. Like I said above, the Chrism Mass is an experience that all Catholics should experience at least once, if not many times over.

If you have been to a Chrism Mass before or plan to attend this year, please feel free to share your thoughts and experience in the comment box below.

Source:

The Chrism Mass Missal – Diocese of Phoenix. Monday, March, 30, 2015

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2015/03/31/an-explanation-of-the-sacramental-oils/>
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Are You Listening? [at Declaring the Whole Counsel]

There once was a man who owned a pet store. He did a good job of running it, and was well liked by all in the community. As he grew older, though, he began to lose his memory. He kept forgetting things. At first it was little things that did not matter as much. Then it became a serious problem and some of the animals began to suffer. When one of his employees came to him to speak about the problem, he got angry and fired him. He was unwilling to listen to reason, and insisted it was just a minor issue.

There are times when each of us refuses to listen to good counsel. We get stubborn, or prideful, and decide that we already know what is best. In this morning's gospel reading the Jews are "trying to kill" Jesus because they did not want to listen to what He was saying. This situation is reflected in the first reading from the book of Wisdom. It is there that the wicked say that the "righteous man" is "inconvenient" to them because he "reproaches [them] for sins". We are told at the end of that reading that "their wickedness blinded them" so that they could not see that he was speaking to them for their good.

How well do you listen when someone is encouraging you to faithfulness? Whether it be a homily from your priest, or a friend who is admonishing you about a behavior that is hurting others, how to receive these things? Is it like those in the book of Wisdom, or do you, rather, acknowledge that the person speaking to you may be right? When God is speaking to you, do you try to shut Him out? Certainly, none of us likes being criticized, but an automatic response of resistance is not good for our souls.

There are many different ways that we are "spoken to" that are not verbal though. Sometimes there are circumstances in our lives that we need to pay attention to. Sometimes it might a gentle prodding from a friend. Whatever the manner is, we worship the Lord and Creator of all, so there are no such things as true accidents. God uses our individual experiences to help guide and teach us about how to serve Him. Like last week, for example. I was working "full speed ahead" and really needed to slow down a bit. I was not, however, paying attention to the situation, and then *crash* I got really sick for two days: "OK, so you won't slow down, God is going to make you slow down."

God will never "speak to you" and say that you are supposed to do something foolish or sinful. His promptings are always towards godliness and faithfulness. The Holy Spirit of God dwells within us so that we can find what is good and righteous. That means that we have to be willing to hear what He says. It is a glorious virtue to be able to humble yourself and say: "God, please help me to receive criticism or correction (even when it is overly critical or not delivered correctly) so that I may grow closer to you, and thereby be a good example of godliness to all I meet."

This contribution is available at <http://declaringthewholecounsel.blogspot.com/2015/03/are-you-listening.html>
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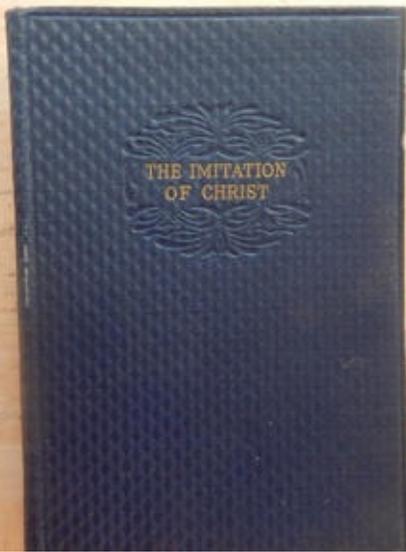
Faith & Chocolate - Goodies to Fill Those Easter Baskets [at Campfires and Cleats]

Halfway through Lentare you planning for Easter morning, Easter dinner or brunch...or maybe creating some decorating and table setting plans? I'll bet you are! The Easter Bunny has long been filling all our baskets with symbols, treats and gifts of the season.....I'd love to share the books and goodies that have been are staples.....and a few that...I hear tell, some kids around here may be receiving this very Easter morn!

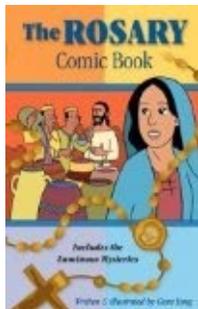
Here's a shot of our Faith Book Basket, which contains a few of these titles, and which we switch up to include new ones as we enter various liturgical seasons.....I'm sure you have many of the same around your house as well! Enjoy ~



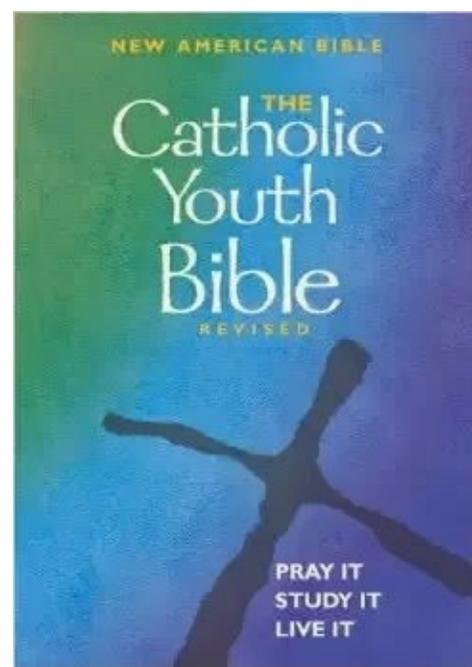
[Initiation of Christ](#) This is a pic of the Imitation that my Dad gave his sister, my aunt, for Christmas of 1938. Yes, that's right! Look at the shape it's in, especially when you consider that Aunt Betty gave it back to Dad to carry with him when he shipped out in Feb 1942 .. It traveled to the occupied Philippines where he spent most of WWII, in the Pacific Theater. It's special to all of us, as you can imagine, not simply for its content, but its history.



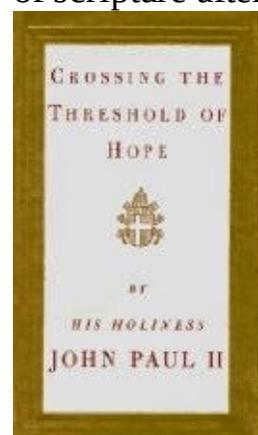
Betty, Mary Kowar (1937)
Dining



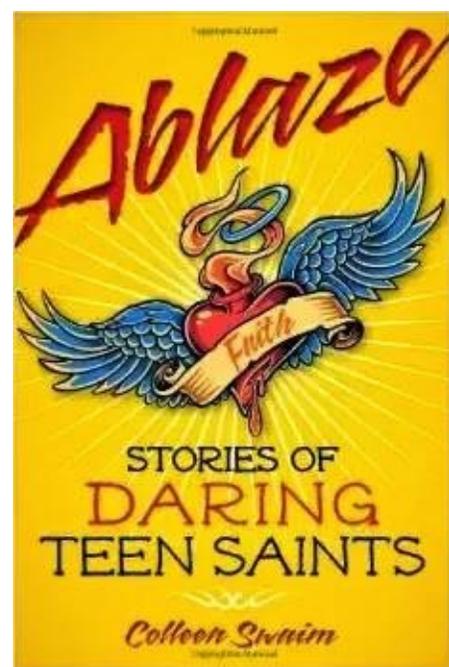
[Rosary Comic Book](#) Even though my kids are older now, we **still** use this as our main source for the order within each mystery. (Ya think we'd have it all down by now wouldja? Nope.) Plus the whimsical drawings are clever.



[Catholic Youth Bible](#) My favorite Bible....and we've tried on a lot. Guidance and "real life" applications of scripture after each Book. Awesome.

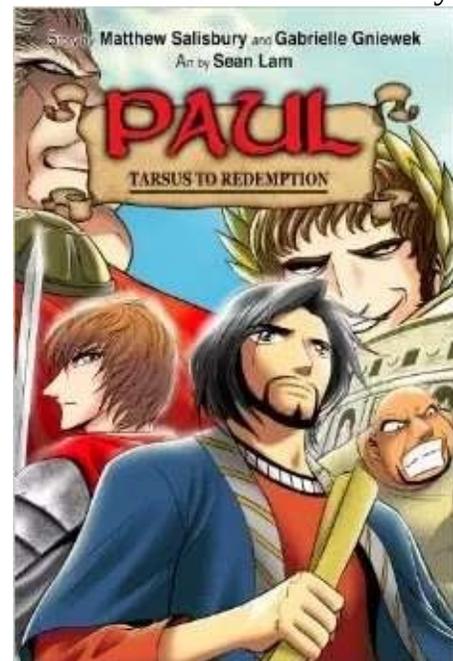


[Crossing the Threshold of Hope](#) I bought this book for my Dad for Father's Day back when..... He read it that day and recommended it to everyone he knew, even passing acquaintances. We all know JP II had an amazing talent for writing and theater arts. But do we have his books on our shelves accessible for our kids? I realized my Dad never got his copy back from ??? and we needed a replacement! I just ordered this one for our Faith baskets!



[Ablaze](#)

This appeared in my kids' Easter baskets two years ago. Since then they've become intrigued even more with saints' young lives. I think the fave for each of my boys was St Dominic Savio. But there are about a dozen stories within and they are all gripping.



[Paul: Tarsus to Redemption](#) For any kids into graphic novels/anime, this is

IT. My boys loved this and wanted more more moreanything about St Paul would do. Great springboard for study of saints' lives.

Chocolate, chocolate and more chocolate !



[Russell Stover's bunnies](#) and [Cadbury's creme eggs](#) epitomize Easter, but you can make your own candies, adding some personalized and home-y touches too! Plus, the Easter Bunny will probably appreciate our assistance...he's got a lot of stops to make on Easter Eve! I've bought [Wilton candy melts in dark chocolate](#), of course, but pastel chocolates make that first peek into the baskets on Easter morn even more festive!



Just for fun~

Here's an olllld pic of the boys' baskets:

easter morn 2007

Some bunny paint by numbers, treats and Bible DVDs

thank you for stopping over and
spending some of your precious time here at my home on the web!

Don't forget to subscribe to Campfires and Cleats

by scrolling to the *subscribe* button at the top left sidebar.

I'd love to stay in touch regularly.

Until next time,

~Chris

My

This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2015/03/faith-chocolate-goodies-to-fill-those.html>

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Praying the Holy Rosary together with intention [at Catholic Deacon]

Today,

via

the blog

The hermeneutic of continuity

(where I went to check out a

["Tour of a Carthusian cell"](#)

), I came across, in another

[post](#)

, a reference to an encyclical letter of Pope St John XXIII-

[Grata Recordatio](#)

, which he promulgated in September 1959, in advance of the month of October, traditionally the month of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Pope St John XXIII

Pope St John began

Grata Recondatio

by making reference to the frequent encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII, which he issued in the lead up to October, exhorting the faithful to pray the Holy Rosary. Of these letters, Good Pope John wrote that they

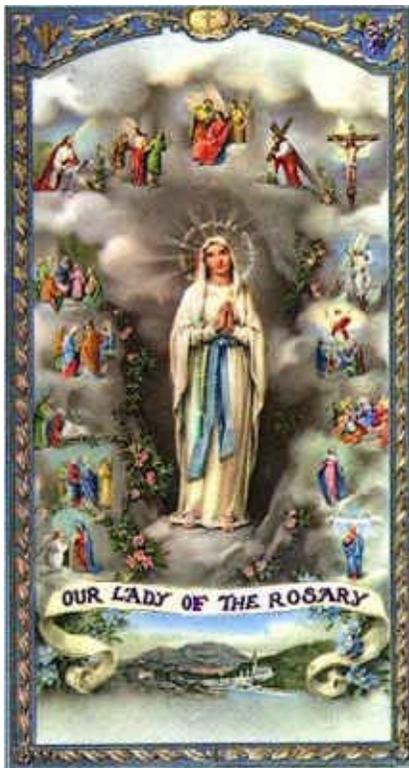
had varied contents, but they were all very wise, vibrant with fresh inspiration, and directly relevant to the practice of the Christian life. In strong and persuasive terms they exhorted Catholics to pray to

God in a spirit of faith through the intercession of Mary, His Virgin Mother, by reciting the holy rosary. For the rosary is a very commendable form of prayer and meditation. In saying it we weave a mystic garland of *Ave Maria's*, *Pater Noster's*, and *Gloria Patri's*. And as we recite these vocal prayers, we meditate upon the principal mysteries of our religion; the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the Redemption of the human race are proposed, one event after another, for our consideration" (par 2)

Grata Recondatio

is a very short encyclical and so easily read. In it Papa Roncalli laid out what he wanted the Church to pray for during October 1959 through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin by means of her Most Holy Rosary. Among his intentions are several that remain relevant today, including this, under the heading "False Philosophies" -

It must also be remarked that there are current today certain schools of thought and philosophy and certain attitudes toward the practical conduct of life which cannot possibly be reconciled with the teachings of Christianity. This impossibility We shall never cease from asserting in firm and unambiguous, though also calm terms. But God wishes the welfare of men and of nations! (Wis. 1:14)



And so We hope that men will set aside those sterile postulates and assumptions, hard as rock and just as inflexible, which rise from a way of thinking and acting that is infected with laicism and materialism, and that they will find a complete cure in that sound doctrine which experience makes more certain with every day that passes. We mean that doctrine which attests that God is the author of life and its laws, that He is guarantor of the rights and dignity of the human person. God then is "our refuge and our Redemption" (par 17-18)

We live in a time when false philosophies abound. One example of this is the persistent attempt to turn

behaviors into "identities" and then assert that those who share a particular "identity" are part of an inchoate "community." The proliferation of these "communities" contribute to the further fragmentation of society. All of this is nothing other than ideology at work. Such attempts succeed because they promise liberation, which is a lie, as many, sadly, discover through experience. We pray and act because we love God and our neighbor and, so, we will what God wills, which is "the welfare of men and of nations!"

While I am writing about our Blessed Mother, it bears mentioning that I am currently reading Eddie Doherty's book

[Matt Talbot: Fighting addiction, poverty, and the turmoil of Irish life at the turn of the century, Matt leads us humbly to the Mother of God](#)

. Yes, that is the subtitle. To give you some idea of the devotion Venerable Matt Talbot had for Our Lady, Doherty relates that he slept on his bed, made of rough, unsanded planks of lumber, "with a statue of the Virgin and Child in his right arm" (69). According to Doherty, Matt "searched all over Dublin for the right [statue], and it had taken a long time find it" (69).

For a shorter take on the life and witness of Venerable Matt Talbot see my teacher and mentor, Msgr M. Francis Mannion's article from last Spring,

["A patron saint for those suffering from alcoholism?"](#)

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2015/03/praying-holy-rosary-together-with.html>
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It Is Good that We Are Here! [at From the Pulpit of my Life]



Today is the 2nd Sunday in Lent. Today's Gospel narrative is about the Transfiguration of Jesus. In the presence of three apostles, Peter, James, and John, the Lord manifested his divinity. It was quite a mystical experience for them. Peter was so terrified that he blurted out, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here!"

These words of Peter inspired my pastor's homily at Mass today. He began by looking at us and repeating Peter's words, "It is good for us to be here!" Then he gave examples of why it is so good. We are here and not some place else. We are not in the Middle East where people who have faith in Jesus are suffering great atrocities. They have been driven from their homes and businesses. Many have had their heads chopped off or have been burned to death. But we are free to worship God as we wish. We are in a safe place. There is relative stability in our lives. Indeed, it is good that we are here.

We are relatively safe in our homes and community. Our pastor is a native of a country where everyday life was dangerous. Anything could happen when one stepped outside one's house. Kidnappings were common. His own sister was kidnapped when she was just 17 years of age. Father G. came to this country to study for the priesthood about two decades ago. He told us how happy he is to be here.

Listening to Father's homily filled me with appreciation for life in the U.S. Yes, it is good that I am here! I pray daily for the unity and common good of this country. I also pray for the end of legalized abortion, a terrible evil, that if eliminated, would make it an even better place to be.

One of my Lenten practices in the area of sacrifice or self-denial has been to go through all the spaces where things are stored in my home and to simplify and reorganize my belongings. Right now I am working in the kitchen. I've gone through the pantry and now I'm going through cabinets and drawers. As I do so I fill bags with trash or with items to donate. I have so much!

This country is rich and prosperous. From this I have benefitted. On the other hand I'm aware of an overabundance. Do I consider those less fortunate? Yes. But I never feel that what I give is enough. I have a sense that God wants more generosity from me in the form of almsgiving. My conscience is provoking me.

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Holy Week Activities [at Busy Catholic Moms]

Holy Week Activities

As we prepare for Easter, let us teach our children of the holiness of this final week between Palm Sunday and our Lord's resurrection!

Here are a few ideas to make your Holy Week more real to your children:



Palm Sunday – Be sure that you pick up some palms for each of your children! As much as it drives me crazy as they try to play with them during mass, I love to have the children take them home.

- I like to make them in to crosses and put them in my children's rooms. They are so proud to display them.
- You can also make your own palms out of some green construction paper and playact how Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey and everyone celebrated, laying palms before him!

Holy Monday – This is the day where Jesus cleared the money changers from the temple, removing what separated or distracted the people from worshiping the Lord. It is also the evening where he stayed with Martha and Mary. At this supper, Mary took an expensive perfume and anointed Jesus feet.

- We too can help our kids get rid of what distracts us from Christ. We can have them help clean out a closet (or just part of a closet). Or the older ones can sacrifice a television show or a video game and spend a few extra minutes in prayer instead.
- The perfume that Mary used to anoint Jesus feet is very strong smelling. And sometimes aromas can be just as powerful as words. Use an air freshener in your house several times on Tuesday or light a candle so that every time you and the children smell it, you remember the holiness of Jesus.

Holy Tuesday – In the readings of Holy Tuesday, Judas is picked out as the one who is going to betray Je



sus. And also, Peter is told that he will deny Christ before the cock crows three times. This one is a little more difficult to share with children. But we may try a few things:

- Make a list of good friends and make one of them a card for Easter, explaining that Jesus disciples wanted to be good friends too.
- Make a list of people that we need to be better friends with and discuss ways to love them more.

Holy Wednesday – This is traditionally thought of as the day when Judas made his deal with the Pharisees for Jesus' life. It is often called Spy Wednesday, but we can turn this around to make it more



meaningful for our children. While Judas did something to hurt Jesus, we can be spies to spread Christ's love.

- Have your children secretly do good deeds for others in their family – perhaps by picking up toys of a sibling or sharing a snack. Maybe even doing chores without being asked!
- You can also drop off those cards that you made to those wonderful friends!

Holy Thursday – This is the day the church celebrates that Christ washed the feet of his disciples. To see this



done at Holy Thursday mass is a moving experience as the priest passes among selected people, washing their feet. It is also the day that the Last Supper is celebrated between Christ and his apostles.

- We too want to serve others like the Lord did so let us head up to the bathtub and wash each other's feet!
- Make a special meal together to celebrate Christ's Last Supper with those he loved so much!

Good Friday – The day the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins. How can we convey to our little ones how momentous this day was – how amazing our Lord's sacrifice!



- Have an age appropriate discussion with your children about Christ's sacrifice for us. With the younger ones, talk about how sad everyone who loved Jesus must have been that he died. For the older ones, go into more detail about how he suffered because he loved us so much.
- Go through the Stations of the Cross – either at home or at the church. It's amazing how much the kids can understand about Christ's crucifixion.
- Make your own construction paper crosses to put up in your home today.

Holy Saturday – A day of anticipation before Easter, we can find ways to relate that anticipation to our



children.

- This is a great day to decorate Easter eggs. As dying them sometimes takes a bit of patience and waiting, we can relate to them the anticipation of waiting for Jesus resurrection.
- We like to put up an Easter tree on this day, but without any decorations yet. The decorations are put out after the children go to bed so they are ready for Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday – Alleluia!! Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

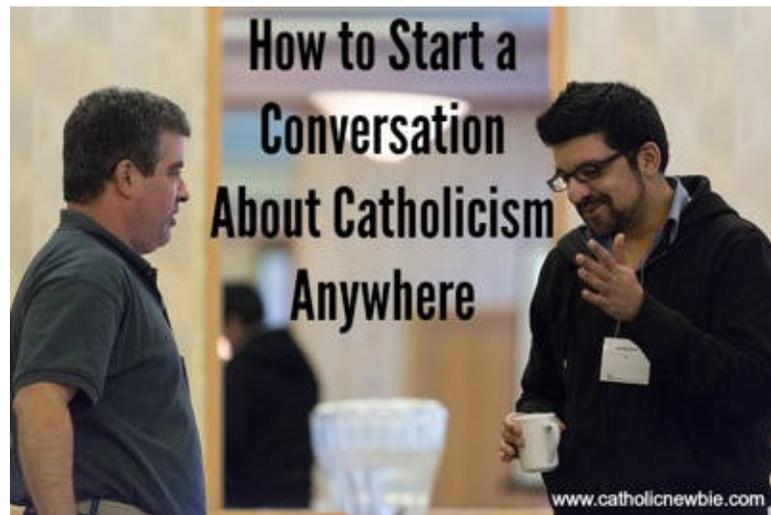
- Attend mass together – even if you have to fight through the crowds!
- Hunt Easter eggs!
- Decorate those Good Friday crosses with white paper flowers!
- Celebrate a special meal with family!



- Praise the Lord!! Have a Happy Easter!

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/our-kids/holy-week-activities/>
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How to Start a Conversation About Catholicism - Anywhere [at A Catholic Newbie]



As Catholics, we tend to dismiss our abilities to evangelize and to “witness” our Christian faith to others. We say we’re not good at it, at least not as good as Protestants, and we certainly don’t want to bash people over the head with our faith. No, we don’t!

But, as Catholics, I’ve discovered several ways to easily inspire a conversation about faith without being so obvious and without bringing out the “brick.” It’s also a way to follow Pope Francis’ theme of leading lives of joyful Catholicism, focusing on the positives of knowing Jesus and not starting the conversation with a bunch of “don’t”s.

Here are some simple ways to get that conversation going so you can positively witness to the faith by sharing your own experience and knowledge:

- 1) **Wear some outward sign** – I wear a Miraculous Medal and a cross. Lots of people wear crosses, so that doesn’t generally open the door to conversation. But my medal — time and time again — has led people to ask me what it is and led to a great conversation about faith.
- 2) **Read the Bible** – Catholic evangelist Hector Molina spoke at my parish’s mission retreat and he inspired this post with a story. He shared that when he’s flying to give talks around the country he has a captive audience of his fellow air travelers. He always carries his Bible and reads it, which often gives rise to conversation about favorite verses and ultimately religion, and even prays his rosary.
- 3) **Pray the Rosary in public** – This one will really get a conversation going and you’ve got to be brave about it! Can you be as bold as Hector and pray the rosary on the plane? If not, try a walking rosary at your local park or public path. Pray the rosary in rhythm to your steps as you carry it. You might not have a conversation by praying but you never know who is watching and what effect it may have on them.
- 4) **Talk about going to mass, reconciliation, Holy Days and more** – Casually mention to your neighbor, or your child’s friends’ parents or the fast food worker, what you’re doing or just did as it relates to church. They just might ask you for more information and give you the opportunity to explain.

5) **Pray before meals** – Of course, you should pray before meals anyway to thank God for our many blessings, but there’s an added bonus. People will notice. I’ve heard so many stories of people commenting to others about how great it was to see someone praying in public. Again, even if it doesn’t inspire a conversation, you never know what impact it might have on someone watching nearby.

6) **Read a Catholic book** – You should also be doing this anyway to grow in your faith! But carry one with you always, so if you have down time, you can pull out the book and read a few pages (side note: great program on How to [Read More Books from Brandon Vogt here](#)). Books are always a good conversation starter. I was at the park one day with my kids and reading St. Therese’s “Story of a Soul”. Boy did that start a conversation with the Protestant man sitting next to me. He did not have a good view of the Catholic church and we discussed the whole idea of “saints.” This was early in my Catholic days, so I’m not sure I had the best answers to persuade him, but I sure tried.

That leads me to my conclusion. When these conversations do start — and they WILL — be prepared! *“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear.” 1 Peter 3:15*

You can prepare yourself by reading great Catholic books, listening to shows on EWTN radio like Catholic Answers, Open Line and [Catholic Connection with Teresa Tomeo](#), which give great explanations for common questions and misperceptions about Catholicism.

Also, consider blogging or journaling so you have fresh in your head stories from your own life about the power of God and God’s graces that have benefited you. No one can argue with your authentic experience. It also helps to know key Bible verses, especially when chatting with Protestants who have a largely Bible-only view of Christianity.

What things have you experienced that unexpectedly started a conversation about faith and Catholicism?

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/start-conversation-catholicism-anywhere/>
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Open your soul in Confession as you would to Me, and I will fill it with My light [at Children's Rosary]



"Today the Lord has been teaching me, once again, how I am to approach the Sacrament of Penance:

My daughter, just as you prepare in My presence, so also you make your confession before Me. The person of the priest is, for me only a screen....open your soul in confession as you would to Me, and I will fill it with My light"

(Diary of St. Faustina, 1725).

This photo was taken just before we began one of Our Children's Rosary meetings. The picture was taken by a child of a child in Confession. Never before have I seen such a beautiful representation of Confession. Indeed the light filling the soul is so beautifully represented streaming in through the stained glass windows upon the child. The screen completely obscures the identity of the priest which is also beautiful as one can more easily envision Our Lord listening with a bent ear to each detail.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we are told that when the priest "celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgement is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner." (Catechism #1466)

We are very grateful to the priests who give of their time to make this sacrament available to so many. In the Archdiocese of Hartford, Connecticut USA, each Monday evening every Church in the Archdiocese is open for Confession between 6-7PM ET. We are very grateful for this precious gift.

This contribution is available at <http://childrensrosary.blogspot.com/2015/03/open-your-soul-in-confession-as-you.html>
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Suffering [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



I'm not really the right person to write about suffering,
because I'm terrible at it.

I should be good at it by now, but I'm just not.

This above picture of Jesus really hit me this past week.

To follow Jesus, like we all *want* to,
literally means to *pick up our own cross, like Jesus!*

You know, to "*follow Him*"?

Like follow the leader and do all He does.

I know there is joy to be found in suffering.

I have not found that joy yet.
I know that joy will come.
Maybe it comes when we die.

I'm a big baby.

I never want suffering, the suffering I'm being given.

(it is a gift you know)

Whether it's someone close to me suffering and I'm helpless to help,

or it is myself, my own inner and physical suffering,

I don't want it.

OH, I tell myself, that *my suffering* is meant for me and

that I couldn't handle anyone else's suffering.

But I still don't want it.

I try to bargain and beg God,

"Please God, let me coast a while with no suffering."

"I'll give up something, I'll sacrifice something, I promise"

"No, please God, not *this!*"



"Really? God, I can NOT handle this! YOU think I can, but I can't!!"

I have tears just typing that.

I'm right back in the emergency room with little Simeon here.

A week ago Simeon ended up with an eye infection that turned into dacryocystitis.

He had a pocket of fluid beside his eye.

This is something that could, I guess happen to anyone at anytime.

Lucky us.

Let me back up here.

Wednesday that week, I took him in because his eye had swollen almost shut.

The doctor put him on some drops.

I gave him the drops for 1 day.

The next day, his eye did not get any better, it even seemed worse.

I took him in again, but it was Friday afternoon by this point,

so in our smaller-ish town, there was no way to get a CT Scan

except to go through the emergency room at the hospital.

so off we went.

They found he did indeed have dacrocystitis, only treatable with

IV antibiotics.

We in our smaller-ish size town

do not have any pediatric ophthalmologists

so they sent us via ambulance to the University of Minnesota Hospital,

because it was very likely he would need surgery.

This long ride has to go down as one of the very most hardest things

I've had to do.

Ride in the front of an ambulance, with a complete stranger,

trying to make small talk, while my baby is in the back,
and all I want to do is cry. And pray.

(not enough seatbelts in the back in our ambulances in our smaller-ish size town)



Here we are at 3 a.m. finally in a room for the "night".

I tell you, watching your child suffer in any way, never ever gets easier.

Never.

It's such a helpless feeling,

as the doctors and nurses are poking and prodding and hurting him,

he looks up at you and you cannot do anything.

It's a feeling of betrayal.

a feeling of abandonment.

I'm right there, telling him they are helping him and that he's such a good boy,

but he's looking at me like, "Why don't you make them stop?"



(waiting for the MRI)

They put him out twice.

Once for the MRI

and an hour or two later for surgery.



Waiting in the waiting room while your baby is in surgery,
is another one of those very hard things.

I cry and pray.

And cry and pray.

I memorize the pictures.



Children are so resilient.

Here he is the night after surgery.



2nd night, still needed to keep a patch over his eye.



His eyes are very very sensitive to the light now.

Mornings and evenings are the worst.

He has a lot of drainage still coming out too.

We go for his 1 week check up Monday (tomorrow).

Hoping all is well and his sensitivity to light gets better.

Suffering has meaning.

It can be a gift.

An incredible gift.

If we just let God give it to us.

Strength, that is.

And maybe some wisdom to better help others.

Maybe it's just GRACE.

Grace to offer our sufferings for others.

Grace to better our souls.

Grace.

There is Grace in suffering.

“It is not so much what people suffer that makes the world mysterious; it is rather how much they miss when they suffer. They seem to forget that even as children they made obstacles in their games in order to have something to overcome. Why, then, when they grow into man’s estate, should there not be prizes won by effort and struggle? Can-not the spirit of man rise with adversity as the bird rises against the resistance of the wind? Do not the game fish swim upstream? Must not the chisel cut away the marble to bring out the form? Must not the seed falling to the ground die before it can spring forth into life? Must not grapes be crushed that there may be wine to drink, and wheat ground that there may be bread to eat? Why then cannot pain be made redemption? Why under the alchemy of Divine Love cannot crosses be turned into crucifixes? Why cannot chastisements be regarded as penances? Why cannot we use a cross to become God-like? We cannot become like Him in His Power; we cannot become like Him in His Knowledge. There is only one way we can become like Him, and that is in the way He bore His sorrows and His Cross. And that way was with love. It is love that makes pain bearable.” Archbishop Fulton Sheen (About Crosses)

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2015/03/suffering.html>
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Giving God a Hug [at Catholic Review]

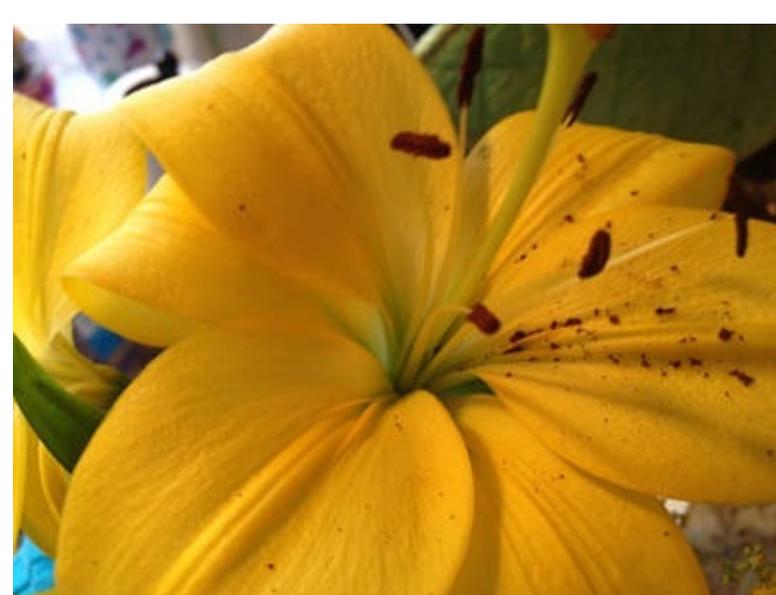
Daniel was sitting at the kitchen table snacking while I cooked dinner.

“Mama,” he said, and I could tell a question was coming. “Any time I give you a hug am I giving God a hug too?”

I hesitated, but just for a moment. I glanced at our little boy, his bare feet dangling toward the floor as he placed his Goldfish in patterns on the table.

“Yes,” I said. “Any time you show love to anyone you are showing love to God.”

Daniel looked up at me and smiled. And, as I boiled water and chopped vegetables, I realized how touched I was by our son’s words.



What if more of us longed to hug God?

What if more of us realized that God was in each person we encounter?

What if more of us tried to connect with God by spreading joy and love to those around us?

How much richer could my Lenten journey be if I chose a simple road map to faith—and clung to these concepts that come so naturally to our 5-year-old?



Naturally this Lent I want to challenge myself in many ways—and I should. And I am having a good Lenten journey. But maybe, just maybe, I should simplify my approach. Maybe I should ask myself more often how I can live out God's love—especially in my own home and family.

And I have to remind myself again and again that although we are teaching our children about our faith, they are also teaching us.



In the moment, as I worked on putting dinner on the table, I knew the simplest way to answer Daniel's question—and to show love to God.

I put down my spoon, stepped away from the stove, and leaned down and gave him a hug.

“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

(Matthew 25:40)

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By

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2015/03/18/giving-god-a-hug>
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Why You Shouldn't Wait [at barefoot and sometimes pregnant]

I was thinking the other day how some people wait to share the good news about a new addition to their family. I was the same way. I normally didn't tell people until I was 12 weeks or so in case the little one died. However, with Joan's passing I am not sure I am going to wait to tell people because you never know how long you are going to have with your child.



It might be 8 weeks in the womb, 16 weeks in the womb, 42 weeks in the womb or even a few hours on this earth. That child that you are carrying in your womb is a person with an immortal soul from the moment of their conception. They are your child, they are someones brother or sister, they are someone niece or nephew, they are someones grandchild or great-grandchild. Just because they only lived for 10 weeks in your womb doesn't mean they are any less a child because they didn't take a breath on this earth.



I completely understand the not wanting to tell people that you are having a child, losing that child and then having to go back and tell all those people that your child died. I really do. I was the same way. I had to do that exact thing 42 weeks after conception.



Does that mean if I get pregnant again I shouldn't tell anyone for fear that it will all happen again? No, it actually makes me what to tell people as soon as I get the positive pregnancy test. I want to share the news and let his/her siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents rejoice with us even if it is for a short time.



If God calls you to endure the greatest thing He can ask of a parent, then give your child a name and celebrate every year their entrance into heaven. You now not only have a child, but you have a little saint in heaven who is praying for you and waiting for you.



I know it is hard. It is really hard. There are still nights I cry myself to sleep for little Joan, but it does get better.

[As I said before once you realize that she not only died, but she also lived you will find greater peace in your heart](#)

.



Your baby is your baby at the moment of conception. Your baby has been your baby for two to three weeks even before you get your positive pregnancy test. Let us let the culture of life shine by letting everyone share in the joy of that life. Even if that life only last for a short time in your womb, it is still a life and worth celebrating.

If you have lost a child before it took a breath on this earth always remember that when you reach your heavenly home, you will find your child waiting there with a bouquet of flowers and saying "Thank you mom and dad for the gift of life."



This contribution is available at <http://bandsp.blogspot.com/2015/03/why-you-shouldnt-wait.html>
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A Lifeboat Tendered to Those Drowning in the Great Sea of the Culture of Death [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Susan Fox

It's come down to this.

What kind of coffee you drink may mean the difference between life and death.

Many pro-life and pro-marriage individuals thoughtlessly walk into Starbucks. But a portion of every cup of coffee you buy at Starbucks goes to fund a corporate assault on marriage and its fruit – human life.



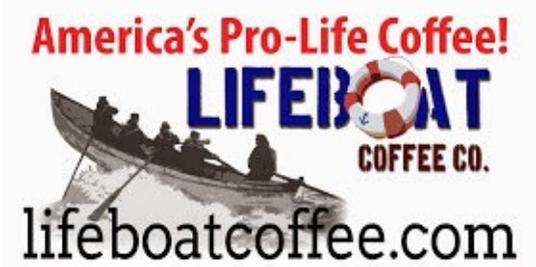
I faced this reality in 2012. Though I loved their coffee, I stopped drinking it. I wrote them a letter: *Dear Starbucks, My gold level card became a green level card, you say?* (That means I hadn't been using my rechargeable Starbucks card that earns rewards.) *While I was once a happy customer of Starbucks, I am no longer.*

I will not stop in any of your stores for a Frappuccino. I will no longer buy your Via Ready Brew at Wal-Mart for my son in college. Anything manufactured by you -- I will not touch. I will not pay for it and I will not consume it in another's home. I have found out that you have legally challenged the Defense of Marriage Act. You have committed economic suicide. Where do you think your future customers are coming from???

At the time I was ignorant of the fact that Starbucks was also a major donor to Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the United States. Not only were they bent on destroying Marriage, the cradle of human civilization, but also the baby in the cradle – human life itself. Ug, that coffee doesn't taste so good anymore.

But once you throw that deadly coffee out the window, where do you get your daily fix? I wandered aimlessly through malls, sighed in frustration at coffee kiosks, stared glumly at the options at Wal-Mart. I tried alternatives at Catholic bookstores, but the beans were frankly old. I never found a good source of delicious fresh whole beans. We went for three years with no fragrant coffee in the house! A kindly priest came to visit, asked for coffee, and he got tea! It was Lent 365 days of the year.

Then a wonderful pro-life family man offered me a lifeboat!



His name was John Lillis. He and his family (wife, seven children and in-laws) started the [Lifeboat Coffee Co.](http://LifeboatCoffeeCo.com) in 2013 out of his home in Omaha, Nebraska.

Every one-pound bag of coffee purchased at Lifeboat goes to fund pro-life causes and parishes -- whichever one the customer wants! My pound of coffee from Lifeboat netted about \$1.25 for Students for Life of America, and unbelievably you can get up to two pounds of reasonably-priced *fresh* coffee with shipping that costs only \$2.99. It arrives in three days. And it is *really good* coffee.

This Lent, I am not fasting from coffee. But as always I am fasting from Starbucks.

So who is the man who started the nation's first pro-life coffee company?



John Lillis is a survivor of the abortion holocaust that began in March 1967 in the state of California. John was born only five months after the abortion law was put into effect, and then he was abandoned in a hospital in San Francisco. Things started looking up then because pro-life Catholics George and Rita Lillis adopted John.

Being pro-life was “kinda in my genes,” John said in an interview with me. Rita, John’s 81-year-old mother, worked as the director of the Respect Life Commission in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. She was a volunteer at Birthright International, a grassroots response to the insecurity faced by many unwed mothers. “I can’t say (count) the number of women that came through our house that had a newborn or were about to have a child, so it was just imbued upon us that was the proper thing to do (support life).”



Then growing up in a Catholic family, there were Rosary prayer walks through San Francisco – “As a young kid that always left a permanent mark on my heart,” Lillis said.

While Lillis never abandoned his pro-life beliefs, he did take a detour out of Catholicism at the age of 16. “I decided I no longer needed to participate in the faith even though I was a product of Catholic schools. We’re talking 1970s, early 80s -- we sang songs about Jesus and had poetry, colored pictures. I’m not

sure what else I might have learned so I kinda quit for a while.”



Fascinating to both Lillis and I is the Cross that San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone has embraced: he is trying to get Catholic School teachers to support the Church’s position that homosexual acts, masturbation and pornography are “gravely evil.”

Fully 80 percent of the faculty and staff at the four archdiocesan high schools have rejected his amended teacher’s handbook, and they have signed a petition to that effect. If Cordileone is successful in his reforms, life stories like those of John Lillis may become a thing of the past. People may actually receive a Catholic education at a Catholic school.

Ironically, it was the Rosary in the context of the staunchly Catholic Franciscan University of Steubenville that brought John back to the Catholic Church in 1993 at the age of 26. After having worked for a while, John wanted to go back to college, but none in the San Francisco area would accept him.

His mother lured him into applying for Steubenville, and amazingly he was accepted. John went and took a peek at the campus before he accepted. “I had not participated in the faith for some time – the only thing that crossed my mind was ‘Wow look at all the beautiful Catholic women that are on this campus. It’s going to be a great place to go!’” As he learned later, grace works through nature.

So he packed up his truck and drove from San Francisco to Steubenville, Ohio. He planned to live in the dorm and immerse himself in campus life and prepare for a Master’s Degree in Counseling. But when he got there, there was no room in the dorm for an older student, so he was given a “\$2 hotel” for three days, so he could look for an apartment.

A guy from New York named David shared the hotel with him, and of course, they shared their life stories. Out of the blue David asked John, “Do you want to pray a Rosary?”

Lillis responded, “Don’t you do that when somebody dies and you go to the wake?” “No,” David said, “You pray it all the time,” and then added, “What harm could it do?”



Put like that John Lillis, age 26, couldn’t say no, and David threw him “one of those powder blue plastic Rosaries that are so famous in Catholic homes.”

He got to the second decade of the Rosary. “It wasn’t quite a Pauline Christophany, but I was zapped by a moment of grace, and I realized everything I’d been doing on my own for the last 10 years was really displeasing to Our Blessed Lord,” John said. “And I started to cry like a little baby.”

“That was just a sign to this guy to say, ‘Okay now you need to go to confession.’”

So John tried, though he honestly believed alarms would go off when the priest heard his confession. He had to go back several times, as the lines were so long. Finally, he got in after waiting 90 minutes.

To his shock, there no longer was a nice little screen to hide behind. “The confessional opens and there’s the priest sitting right there,” John recalls. “‘Hey, come in and sit right down!’ I was like, ‘Whoa!’ So after ten plus years away, I had this wonderful face-to-face confession with a priest who is now gone to the Lord. But all he said to me was, ‘Welcome home.’”

John found within himself a passion to learn “what the Church actually teaches (and) why she teaches what she teaches.” No more songs and coloring books. He wanted the *real* thing.

So began the life of a passionate pro-life Catholic who attends Mass almost daily. He became a Catholic

radio journalist – not a counselor, and joined the Board of Directors for Nebraskans United for Life, the largest pro-life group in the state. He also became a paid lobbyist for the pro-life cause and helped shape several laws in the state of Nebraska.

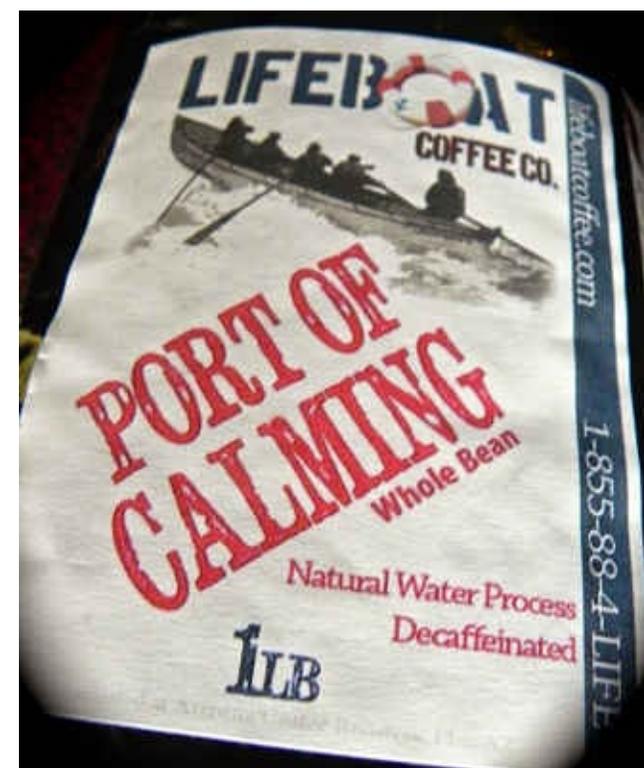
“I worked on creating alliances between pro-life groups and being able to help find funding for pro-life groups,” Lillis said, adding, “I think the funding issue has always been a big battle.”

That’s when the idea for the Lifeboat Coffee Co. came into being.

“We are still in the start-up mode so we are not yet in the black, but it takes two to three years to get a start-up running efficiently,” Lillis said, adding that they hope to be making a profit by 2016.

Still with the intention to donate 10 percent of receipts less shipping to pro-life charities, Lifeboat Coffee is already fulfilling its mission – to provide funding to groups that will work to save lives. They donated approximately \$3,000 to pro-life groups in their first year of operation, 2014. “We just need to increase traffic (sales),” Lillis said, and if they do that, pro-life charities will benefit further.

Parishes or Right-to-Life groups can get in on the charity bonus by putting a passive link for Lifeboat Coffee on their web pages. Coffee purchased from that link will automatically earn the 10 percent reward for the charity that sponsored the link.



Where did the name, Lifeboat Coffee, come from? It grew out of John's life experience. For nothing happens accidentally. God gifts everything providentially. Like St. Don Bosco, who shepherded sheep in his youth, and then became a priest who shepherded boys, Lillis was carefully prepared for his role in life: husband, father, pro-life radio journalist and the mission of selling the pro-life message in the great sea of the culture of death. Growing up, he was a member of the Sea Scouts of America – part of the Boy Scouts, but on the water. Then he worked as an adult in the U.S. Coast Guard.

“One day when thinking about the name, I thought we want to help save lives, what about a life boat?” Lillis said, “It’s just that easy.”

Besides saving the lives of unborn people, he is also saving the souls of us, who must make a discerning choice about where to spend our dollars.

Almost every year, Lillis and his family attend the March for Life in Washington, D.C. So he was there again this year, but the hotel he was staying in did not permit him to serve coffee to the pro-lifers staying there. So nobody could taste Lifeboat, although they got free coffee samples to take home.

“The point is everybody from the director of the March for Life to almost every pro-lifer that had a booth (drank) Starbucks Coffee,” Lillis said, “And I said to them, ‘Do you understand what you just did? You took two steps forward and one step backward.’”

I feel great sympathy for the squirming pro-lifers who had to look the founder of Lifeboat Coffee in the face, while holding their Starbucks latte. Their excuses were “there’s no other coffee.” And when he reminded them of McDonald’s, they said, “If you dig deep enough everybody is bad.”

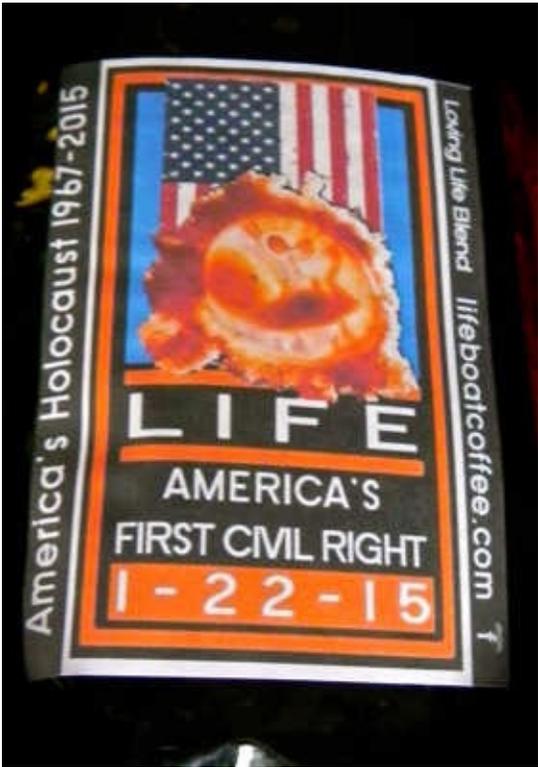
“It was a disappointment,” Lillis said, adding, “You don't have to dig with Starbucks. They are just bad from the get-go.”

But Lillis and those boycotting Starbucks for their pro-gay and pro-abortion stances are making a difference. Planned Parenthood – as recently as 2014 – proudly listed its major corporate donors on its web page, including Starbucks. But that link was removed sometime since last year, and now they only sport a partial list of corporate donors, and Starbucks isn’t on it. Apparently bowing to pro-life pressure, Starbucks decided to hide their involvement with the nation’s largest abortion provider, Planned Parenthood *

However, on the issue of same sex “marriage,” Starbucks has simply become more strident. Starbucks was among the 379 companies who just filed a friend-of-the-court brief with the U.S. Supreme Court, pressing it to overturn a lower court ruling that upheld bans on same-sex marriage in four states.

“They (Starbucks) are technically our nemesis. I don’t really think about them per se. Obviously they are the 800-pound gorilla so it’s hard to beat them,” Lillis said. "But someday -- God willing – there will be Lifeboat coffee shops in cities around the country.”

And that’s the good news. The pro-life, pro-family Lifeboat chain will grow. John is exploring all types of options for selling coffee on the street. On one hand, he could begin a chain of stationary coffee cafés similar to what Starbucks has nationwide. Who knows there may be some Starbucks cafés coming up for sale soon? Or he has looked at partnering with Newman Centers and Catholic groups on campus to put pro-life coffee in the hands of every collegian. One of his most exciting ideas is that of a mobile café.



With a mobile café, Lifeboat Coffee could be at every major pro-life, parish and civic event and “just be there rather than having people trying to find us in one spot,” Lillis said. People could enjoy fresh homemade coffee to drink, buy Lifeboat’s one-pound bags, and take home its pro-life honey. “We might get really radical and put a small 5-pound coffee roaster on the truck, so people can get fresh roasted coffee.”

At one point in his life, Lillis was interested in becoming a priest in a religious order. But another young man made a pass during his last year of summer camp, sponsored by the order, and he never went back.

Perhaps that was for the best because the alternative suits John to a T. I asked him what was the most defining experience of his life, and the staunch pro-lifer answered: Marriage and Fatherhood.

“I’m a command-and-control kind of guy. I’m 6 foot, 2 inches, big broad football kind of guy. I don’t really have a lot of fears. I understand what the Church teaches. I talk about It unabashedly sometimes to my detriment -- people get offended ... But being a better spouse and father is really my biggest challenge and the thing that’s changed me the most,” Lillis said, admitting that he was still growing in that vocation.

“Trying to understand another human being in the way that spouses have to, that has been the biggest dimension in my walk with the Lord,” John humbly admitted.



**Bowing to pro-life pressure, Starbucks apparently decided to hide their involvement with Planned Parenthood. This link of the Family Council, [“Starbucks, and Other Companies, in Partnership with Planned Parenthood”](#) sports a link to a list of corporate donors to America’s largest abortion provider, but when you click the link that says, “Click here to see the list,” Planned Parenthood has removed the list.*

Also please click on the comments below for further listings of companies supporting same sex "marriage" and abortion.

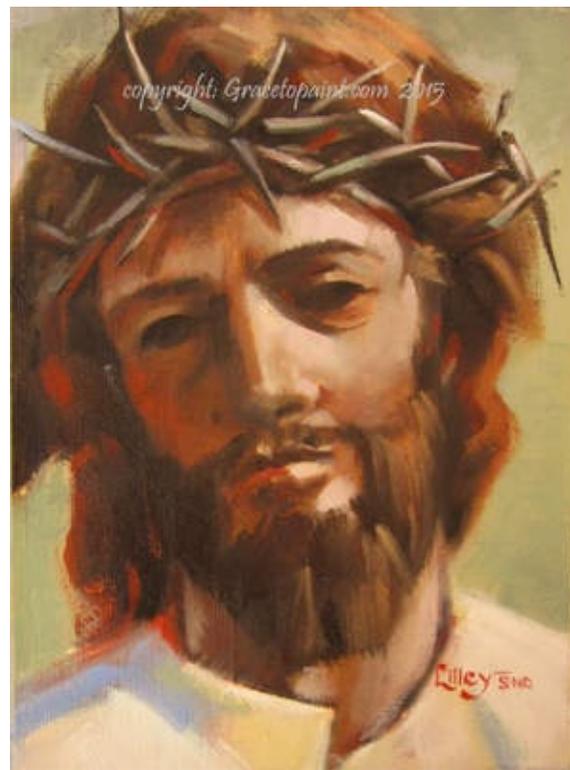
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Man of Sorrows [at Grace to Paint]

by Maresa Lilley, SND on March 30, 2015 · [1 comment](#)

in [Paintings](#)



For Christians everywhere, the holiest week of the year begins. We recall and praise Our Lord Jesus Christ for his passage through suffering and death to resurrection into the New Life he holds for us. Isaiah gave the warning that the messiah would be a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2015/03/30/man-of-sorrows/>
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Holy Week and Pascha with Our Family [at Every Home a Monastery]



The monastery is not on the Gregorian calendar but on the revised Julian calendar for Pascha (Easter) so it isn't Holy Week for us until next week. This left me wondering what I should post about Holy Week, Pascha, and Bright Week exactly because of the different calendars (oh how I pray the day comes soon when we Christians celebrate the most important day of the year on the same calendar). I decided to write two posts with past years pics explaining some of the things we do on these most important days of the year.

I know it is getting closer to Holy Week because everyone is sick of the fasting food we have been eating, and the kids all start to show their excitement in different ways. Magdalena will get all of her outfits picked out for Lazarus Saturday through Pascha, one of the kids will start aggravating another one by acting like they are going to sing Christ is Risen early, Diego starts giving me his requests for which food he hopes I will make for Pascha breakfast (this year it is Chile Colorado), the girls start planning the desserts they will make, Manny starts practicing the music and we all threaten him if he doesn't do it up in the attic where we can't hear we are telling Fr. Nicholas on him, and I start to think about all the details I need to attend to.

Lazarus Saturday/Palm Sunday



These two feast days on the Church calendar are the only two that have the same Troparian sung which is:

By raising Lazarus from the dead before Thy passion, Thou didst confirm the universal resurrection, O Christ God! Like the children with the branches of victory, we cry out to Thee, O Vanquisher of Death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!

These feast days are getting us ready to celebrate Christ's resurrection the following weekend. A small foretaste of what is to come before the sad days of Holy Week.

Lazarus Saturday is traditionally a day when the Church would have baptisms. At Divine Liturgy the Thrice-holy hymn is replaced with, "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, Alleluia" (Gal 3:27) We have had a couple of the kids baptized on this day in years past; it's a beautiful day for a baptism. Every year we go to Divine Liturgy (Mass) for Lazarus Saturday, following we have lunch with the monks and other extended community members and then get to decorating the church for Palm Sunday. When we lived in the desert our friend Tommy would cut down huge palm branches to decorate with. There were some years we all ended up with scrapes and cuts from the sharp parts of the branches. We put large branches around the church and then made smaller ones for the people to hold. This would consist of some palm, pussy willows, and olive branches all tied up together. Now that we are no longer in the desert we don't have the nice big palm branches but have to order palms, we do have pussy willows, but there are no olive trees in Wisconsin, so we use some other greenery.

Palm Sunday is always exciting for the kids, some of the girls make it a point to dress in green and they all love the procession and palm branches.



Holy Monday and Tuesday



I know this was Holy Week, hopefully Lucas didn't fall asleep during Bridegroom Matins! ;-)

“Behold, the bridegroom comes in the middle of the night and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching, and unworthy the servant whom he shall find heedless. Take care then, O my soul, and be not weighed down by sleep that you will not be given over unto death and be excluded from the Kingdom. But rise up and call out: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou O God, by the Theotokos have mercy on us” (Troparion of the First Three Days).

Bridegroom services begin and are among my favorite services. We will try to attend Presanctified Liturgy which is served at 4:30 then go home, eat dinner, and return for Bridegroom Matins and the First Hour at 8 pm

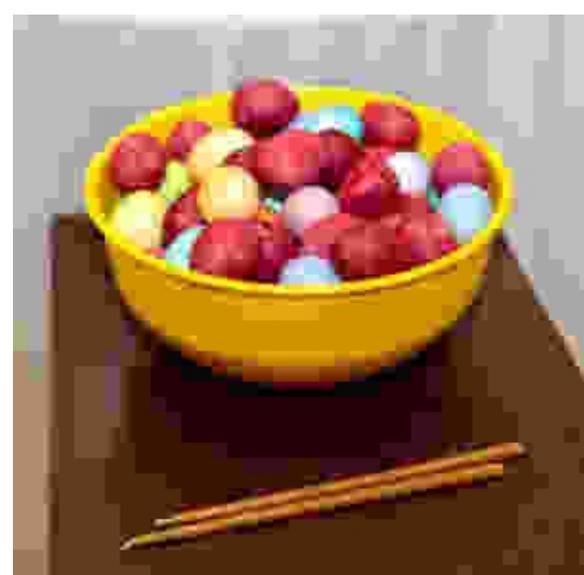
Holy Wednesday

Again there is Presanctified Liturgy at 4:30 and then the Office of the Holy Anointing at 7 pm, which you can read about [here](#). At this point at home I am starting to prep food for Pascha and getting Pascha baskets ready and making sure all the clothes is together!



Holy Thursday

Vespers of St. Basil the Great is served at noon, following we have lunch and then all the kids (and kids at heart) paint eggs and rub olive oil on the red ones (cause Fr. Nicholas likes them to shine!). If we are helping with flowers, the girls and I will decorate the cross so it is ready for the evening. We go home for a rest and are back at 7 pm for Matins for Great and Holy Friday & The Twelve Passion Gospels.





Holy Friday



Vespers of Great and Holy Friday are at 3 pm and then the tomb is decorated for the evening (which we usually help with). At 7 pm is Matins of Great and Holy Saturday with the Lamentations. The most hauntingly heart wrenching service of the year (in my opinion). My girls and any other young girls in the community will get rose petals and toss them at the tomb, representing the Myrrhbearing women. Somewhere in here some more cooking might happen, we have a big feast at the monastery after Pascha Liturgy and then serve breakfast Sunday morning too. So lots of food is made for all of the visitors who come to celebrate Pascha with us.



Holy Saturday/Holy Pascha

More cooking, usually Manny and Fr. Moses will make the Pascha breads sometime in the morning. We have made the traditional braided Greek bread with the red eggs in it and also this wonderful, which has become everyone's favorite. We place one of the breads in our basket to be blessed after the Pascha

service. I also add in some foods we have been fasting from, good chocolate, and Jelly Belly jelly beans. I get the best butter from the dairy up the road (oh how I've missed you Pine River) some delicious cheese from there too, and a bottle of Martinelli's sparkling cider for the kids, and a bottle of wine for me and Manny. One of my best friends back in California made me a beautiful embroidered basket cover that I love.

We also get a little lamp and candle ready so we can bring home the Pascha fire and bless the doorway of the house by burning the Pascha flame over it in the form of a cross.

First service for us is late Saturday morning (11 am) and is our favorite service of the year. We are witnessing the Myrrhbearers coming to the tomb to find it empty and the chanting is wonderful. Here is a clip from youtube of the service: <https://youtu.be/cXtNYDt4RKk>



The reading of the Acts of the Apostles begins at 8 pm. Manny will help with the readings while we are resting and getting ready at home. Prior to this the entire church will be decorated. The dark flowers on the tomb will be removed and replaced with white and yellow flowers and Easter Lilies placed around the church. It is always so beautiful.

And then finally, around 11 pm Matins of Holy Pascha and Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom! This last for a few hours and we sing Christ is Risen a crazy amount of times! When we are finished (sometime around 2 am) we bless the food, baskets, and everyone breaks the fast with a wonderful feast of lamb, cheese, butter, desserts, and other delicious foods. Many years we have seen the sunrise before finally heading off to bed. This year, being so very pregnant I do not plan on doing that! Pascha is always a wonderful time at the monastery, we have visitors come from all of the country and get to meet up with old friends while witnessing the Resurrection of Christ together!









We used to live over an hour away from the Monastery, the last couple of years have been so nice since moving by the monks. It was years of driving back and forth, now we are down the road. Manny always puts in for vacation time for at least Holy Wednesday through Bright Monday. Some years he managed to take all of Holy Week off and even some of Bright Week so we could take a couple of days for a family vacation. These days are the most memorable for our family and mean so much to the kids, Pascha is our favorite time of year. My next post will give details on some of the things we have done to celebrate Bright Week (the week following Pascha).



This contribution is available at <http://www.everyhomeamonastery.com/holy-week-and-pascha-with-our-family/>
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Morning Prayer with St. Thomas Aquinas [at Saints 365]

St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, is well known for his voluminous writings, his mind-bending theological and philosophical insights, and the unparalleled beauty of his Eucharistic hymns. And yet, above all else, Aquinas was a man of prayer - after a mystical experience he had near the end of his life, he declared that all his writings were like "straw" in comparison to this supernatural revelation.

I have to admit, that any attempt I have ever made to pick up St. Thomas' Summa has been met with frustration and bewilderment. I am grateful for those authors who have been able to make Aquinas' teachings accessible. Right now I am working my way through Peter Kreeft's book

[Practical Theology: Spiritual Direction from St. Thomas Aquinas](#)

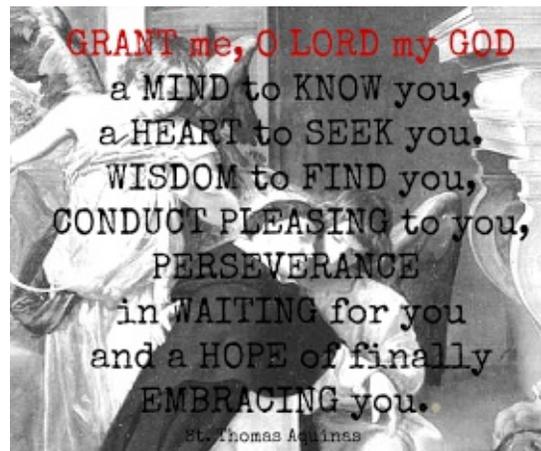
and Dr. Taylor Marshall's book

[Thomas Aquinas in 50 Pages: A Layman's Quick Guide to Thomism](#)

provides a short, easily digested summary of Aquinas.

Having said that, I am grateful that some of the most profound of Aquinas' writings are his heartfelt prayers - and those, coming from his heart, can be understood by the heart of everyone who shares his love of the Lord Jesus.

This is, by far, one of my favorites and one that I say as soon as I open my eyes each morning.



This contribution is available at <http://saints365.blogspot.com/2015/03/morning-prayer-with-st-thomas-aquinas.html>
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Mary Magdalene - Apostle to the Apostles [at Journey to Wisdom]

Easter Sunday

A Reflection on John 20:1-11a, N.A.B.

By: *Larry T*



The four Gospels mention Mary Magdalene (Mary of Magdala) at least twelve times, which is more often than most of the apostles are mentioned. Is Mary Magdalene the sister of Martha and Lazarus? No, the sister of Martha and Lazarus is Mary of Bethany. The Catholic Church celebrates the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene on July 22nd, and the feast of Saints Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany on July 29th.

Was Mary of Magdala a virgin? Possibly. Saint John Chrysostom (349-407 A.D.) and Saint Ambrose (340-397 A.D.) both suggested that Mary Magdalene was a virgin.

Was Mary of Magdala a prostitute? Probably not. Attempts at merging Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Lazarus, and the penitent woman (Luke 7:36-50 N.A.B.) into one person began as early as 591 A.D. However, instructions included with the 1969 revision of the Roman Calendar stipulated that the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene is solely that of the woman to whom Christ appeared and not that of the sister of Lazarus or the penitent woman.

In his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* ("On the dignity and vocation of women", part 67-69) dated 15 August 1988, Pope John Paul II dealt with the Easter events in relation to the women being present at the tomb after the Resurrection, in a section entitled '*First Witnesses of the Resurrection*':

"The women are the first at the tomb. They are the first to find it empty. They are the first to hear 'He is not here. He has risen, as he said. (Mt 28:6) They are the first to embrace his feet.(cf. Mt 28:9) The women are also the first to be called to announce this truth to the Apostles.(Mt 28:1-10, Lk 24:8-11) The Gospel of John (also Mark 16:9) emphasizes the special role of Mary Magdalene. She is the first to meet the Risen Christ. Hence she came to be called "the apostle of the Apostles". Mary Magdalene was the first eyewitness of the Risen Christ, and for this reason she was also the first to bear witness to him before the Apostles. This event, in a sense, crowns all that has been said previously about Christ entrusting divine truths to women as well as men." - John Paul II

In the following reading we see that Mary of Magdala was the first to arrive at Jesus' tomb, and the last to leave. Peter and the other disciple came, saw the empty tomb, and returned home.

- ¹ *On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.*
- ² *So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."*
- ³ *So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb.*
- ⁴ *They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first;*
- ⁵ *he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in.*
- ⁶ *When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there,*
- ⁷ *and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.*
- ⁸ *Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.*
- ⁹ *For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.*
- ¹⁰ *Then the disciples returned home.*
- ^{11a} *But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. – John 20:1-11a, N.A.B.*

Why was Mary Magdalene so devoted to Jesus? Her dedication to him probably began when he exorcised seven demons from her and cured several other women of evil spirits and infirmities (Luke 8:2 N.A.B.). In response Mary and the group of women began to follow Jesus, some supported him financially, while others tended to his needs (Mark 15:41 N.A.B., Matthew 27:55, 56 N.A.B., Luke 8:3 N.A.B.). Does this group of women, led by Mary Magdalene, exemplify the correct response to the Lord for answered prayer and healing? On a larger scale could they represent *wounded humanity* in need of physical and spiritual healing, and having received it from Jesus, remained uniquely faithful to him? That women still remain uniquely faithful to the Lord is evident by the way they continue to minister to his Church through their involvement in various lay ministries and many parish activities.

Mary Magdalene must have watched Jesus perform miracles, exorcisms, and healings. Likewise she would have listened to Jesus' teachings and probably witnessed his confrontations with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes. Her actions at the empty tomb confirms that she and the other women had an exceptional bond to Jesus, and that she was more than qualified to become a foundational character in the earliest Christian community.

The Resurrection is the most important event in Christianity, without it Jesus would have been just another Jewish prophet that had been put to death. God handpicked Mary Magdalene, a woman in a male-dominated world, as his messenger to announce the Good News of the Resurrection to the disciples. This is why Saint Augustine (354-430 A.D.) called her apostle to the Apostles.

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2015/04/mary-magdalene-apostle-to-apostles.html>
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My 'fling' with Planned Parenthood [at Peace Garden Passage]

Last month, a book I co-authored, [“Redeemed by Grace,”](#) launched, and we were thrilled to see the story finally come to light. The title alone invites. Who doesn’t want to read a story about a life changed, a soul redeemed by God?

But the subtitle has produced different responses.

“This is interesting,” a friend said after I gave her a signed copy. She was pointing to the subtitle. I understood. Because while the story is a conversion story at its root, that conversion happened within the walls of the nation’s largest abortion provider. And many are convinced Planned Parenthood exists solely to help women.

Our subtitle hints at a much different reality: “A Catholic Woman’s Journey to Planned Parenthood and Back.” There it is, the raw truth of it, and definitely a piece of her story Ramona Trevino, the author, felt compelled to reveal, for reasons you’ll soon read, I hope.

And yet some will never have a chance to know the truth. While the reaction to our book has been very favorable so far, at least one very dear person in my life won’t crack the cover. It’s a little confounding to me. There are so many beautiful revelations in the story. But maybe it’s just easier not knowing the truth.

It’s interesting to me, being where I’m at now, to look back on my own past affiliations with Planned Parenthood. When I wrote [this post in June 2011](#) about having met Abby Johnson, another former Planned Parenthood manager who had recently published her breakthrough book, “Unplanned,” the comments hinted at confusion over what Planned Parenthood really is.



Roxane Salonen and Abby Johnson, Fargo, ND, June 2011

“Alright, Planned Parenthood is really confusing. Right now, the buzz is that many clinics are closing,” one friend commented. “They say it’s sad because women won’t have the support services they need. That PP provides health care, consultation, and contraceptives. They were on the news last night and specifically said they don’t fund abortions. So, I’m confused. Are we being deceived? and, why?”

Ramona was among those who feels deceived, and, having felt the torment of handing out abortion referrals to many of her former clients, knowing their child’s life likely would end that day, she wants

others to know the truth. Abby Johnson is another who felt she'd been lied to about Planned Parenthood's true intent.

But among the many who have felt deceived by Planned Parenthood, there is another, quieter voice: my own.

You see, I also have a story that hints at Planned Parenthood's untruthful demeanor, and though it's not likely to be full-length-book worthy, it's still a story, and perhaps it matches the experiences of others who have found themselves walking into a Planned Parenthood facility like I did back in the mid-1990s,

I was young and married to a non-Catholic. Though I'd heard the Church's beautiful teaching on life-giving love, and Natural Family Planning, I was scared. I didn't think my husband would buy it, and I didn't have the courage to push the issue. Contraception was so mainstream that I just didn't think I could win that fight. And I wasn't even convinced yet I wanted to.

But a few years into our marriage, I began falling in love with my Catholic faith in a new way. I realized I'd missed so much about what the Church really teaches, and I was thirsty to learn the truth; not as it is portrayed by the world, but from the horse's mouth. I ended up being introduced to Kimberly Hahn's "Life-giving Love," and being blown away. It was so beautiful! And...so counter-cultural. And yet, I was tired of living in the gray. I wanted to embrace all of Catholicism, or none of it. I couldn't turn away so I chose to dive into the deep.

Part of that meant going off the pill, and a yearning to start a family earlier than we'd originally planned. But what about the conception troubles some of the women in my extended family had faced? What if I couldn't have kids?

I think back to that time now and I'm a bit red-faced about it, but how would I have known? Planned Parenthood; the place where I went to get my pill supply refilled. The name said it all, right? They existed to help us plan our family. And finally, we were ready to move forward.

"My husband and I are ready to have a child," I told the Planned Parenthood worker during my routine consultation. "But I'm worried I won't be able to conceive. Do you have any tips on how to increase the chances of pregnancy? I'm already 27 so I really don't want to wait much longer."

I remember her response was one of, well, she seemed a little shocked at my question, as if she didn't hear it very often. By her physical response, I could tell I'd caught her completely off guard. And that shocked me. *Wasn't this...now wait a minute...I'm confused.*

"You know, my daughter is your age, and right now she's in Australia having the time of her life," she finally said. "She's traveling the world, free as a bird. She has the rest of her life to have kids. Are you sure you really want to be strapped down with children right now?"

Was I really hearing this? Why would she be trying to talk me out of planning my family? Isn't that what Planned Parenthood was for? To help when the time came to grow our families? And it wasn't like I was a teenager or something. My heavens, I was pushing 30.

After a while of me persisting in my desire to have some information on upping one's chances of conceiving a child, she retreated to another room, and returned with a dusty, dated sheet that included a

few tips on how to increase the chances of conception. I could tell it was a sheet that didn't come out very often — if ever before that day. “Thanks,” I said.

It wasn't long after that our first child became a reality. How joy-filled I was to realize that we hadn't been given the cross of infertility; that we were able to conceive a child. We welcomed that child, and the other five who followed — including one who died in miscarriage — and never looked back.

But I have looked back occasionally to that moment in the Planned Parenthood office when I realized, like others would, that I'd been duped. The clever wording had been a ruse. Planned Parenthood had no intention of helping to plan and grow my family. Instead, they were intent on convincing me that, despite my very real and natural desire to have children as a grown, married woman, that kids are more burden than blessing, and I was crazy to think of denying myself a truly free, unburdened life. If I just kept popping those pills, by golly, I'd have that. And didn't I want that? Didn't I want freedom?

We're not even on the topic of abortion yet. For that is the deeper layer — the most obvious. But there are other layers just as troubling, if not as blatant, like the one revealed to me, and those that were revealed to Ramona during her time employed by the abortion giant.

No, I didn't experience going through an abortion — thank God — but I've known many who have, and have deeply regretted it. Through my own lived experience, and hearing from so many others whose stories have had much more tragic endings, I know that Planned Parenthood deceives on some layers of their operation. And because of that, I can't trust them on the other layers, either. There's too much evidence against truth here.

That doesn't mean that everyone who works there is purposefully deceptive. I believe many are well-intending, just like Ramona and Abby were when they first accepted positions for the organization. But if an organization is built on untruth, everything it produces will have untruth attached to it as well, in one way or another.

Even if you love and embrace what you think Planned Parenthood is, I hope you will consider reading “Redeemed by Grace.” It's the story of a soul's journey into, and out of, an organization that has helped in the conception of many; not children but lies. Because truth is so vitally important to me, as a trained journalist and a woman of faith, I'd rather risk my reputation to help reveal truth than put other women and babies in situations that can lead to death and darkness, either of the soul or body.

Ramona and I wanted to tell a beautiful story of redemption, but it necessarily had to include troubling facts about her former employer. I just pray that those who have been led to believe this organization is truly at the service of humanity will be open to another possibility.

Q4U: What has your experience with Planned Parenthood been?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2015/03/my-fling-with-planned-parenthood/>
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Dawn of the Living Dead [at GONZO HOMILETICS]

Mary Magdalene wept. Inconsolable. Bereft. Her mind raced. What's going on here? she thought. I think I need to go lie down, put a warm towel across my forehead and drink a cup of herbal tea.

Too much, too soon, too fast, and I can't wrap my mind around it.

They say it is darkest before the dawn and so it appeared to Maggie. She cried, "The Lord is dead." Worse, the body of he who raised her from the gutter was stolen by grave robbers!

She only told the Carpenter that she was a farm girl to hide the truth of her former life of ill-repute. She went off the reservation. How could he who knows all not know about her?

Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.

When he wrote her name in the sand she still bore the bruises on her cheeks from the stones that the hypocrites hurled at her as retribution for her former occupation as an all-night girl.

Every sinner has a future; every saint has a past.

But the Lord, who was kind and merciful, met her where she was. He admitted her to the prestigious College of Apostles. Title IX (9)? I don't think so. He saw something in her that she could not see in herself: mercy, the hallmark of the Christian.

Jesus was down with the women's movement and he commissioned Maggie, formerly of the Jerusalem red-light district, to be the Apostle to the Apostles.

Jew, Greek, slave, freeman, woman. Jesus drew no distinction. He was an equal opportunity Savior.

Maggie was first responder to the Resurrection. She saw and she believed. Now she dared to speak.

What Maggie could not yet understand was that, with the death of the Lord, a new era began in history: the breakdown of the barrier between life and death, truth and lies, love and hate, fortitude and fear. In a word—Resurrection.

The Resurrection is the greatest event in human history, along with the Incarnation that preceded Christ's rising from the dead. God became one of us. Like us, he died. Then he rose. No more fear of death—death was only the beginning. As with an onion, we can peel back the layers with stinging tears but never reach the core. Too much of everything is never enough.

It's a matter of faith, and if we're honest with ourselves we don't have to think too hard on it.

If we believe that God created the heavens and the earth and turned himself into a man to walk but thirty years among us, then it's possible to understand, albeit cursorily, that he raised his Son Jesus from the dead. Let's think on that a moment.

Maggie held great faith in Jesus. He forgave her sins. He raised her up. He revealed to her his plan of salvation.

That morning in the cemetery sealed the deal for this most devoted Apostlette. She didn't just understand. She was convinced. Empowered.

"How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me," she thought.

Tell her story to another Christian. Be all she could be: a messenger. That's what the apostle is born to be.

We are the Apostles of the new generation. We have a story to tell.

The Resurrection is not a question to be answered but a mystery to be solved. I prefer to follow the money until I stand before God who says, "You in your hardness of heart, I told you so, O yee of little faith."

Acceptance of the truth overrides my shameful disbelief.

At sunrise a gravedigger appeared to Maggie, dressed in sheets as white as the woman's face. "Woman, why are you weeping? Why do you seek the living among the dead? Behold, he is not here; he has been raised."

Nolo me tangere. "Don't touch me," Jesus told Maggie, "for I have not yet ascended to my Father."

She longed to cling to him forever.

O-M-G. My Lord. My GOD. "RABBI!" she cried.

"Atta girl. Now go. Tell Peter and his mob to get off their duffs and to start moving. We've got work to do."

"What if they don't believe me?" she asked.

"Tell them to turn off ESPN, put away the Xbox, get out the door, light out, and look around." In other words, preach the gospel.

The conversation with a man she believed to be dead but who was alive enlightened and empowered the mind of this timid woman.

An evangelizer is somebody who fearlessly proclaims the Word of God. Now Maggie was prepared in ways she never thought possible.

Jesus held great faith in her. He saw in her what she could not see in herself.

Despite her incredulity she remembered her Job. "I know that my redeemer lives and in the end he will stand upon the earth."

She was friends with the Woman at the Well, four times divorced, who said, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called Christ; when he comes he will tell us everything.”

Experience is the best teacher. Everything appeared as it was: in Christ.

From beyond the grave the Christ he speaks. To me, to you, to them, to everybody. Everybody needs somebody to love.

The mystery of the Resurrection may never be solved. When we celebrate Easter we stand among the pioneers who lived, loved, evangelized, and were martyred because they believed that the words spoken by Jesus about his passion, death, and resurrection are true.

Questions abound. Christ is the answer. Bank on it.

Neither a wise man nor a fool would die for a lie. The Easter proclamation is Ancestry.com, the story of our forebears who blazed great trails.

The Song Remains the Same. May we remain on the same song sheet.

Augustine wrote, “He who sings prays twice.” Glory to God in the highest! Sing! glory to God!

Maggie was not disobedient to the gravedigger. She ran to Peter and Jon-Boy the beloved disciple who would never die, and told them, “The Lord has risen!”

The men sat up. Then her girlfriends burst through the door, clucking impossible accounts. But their stories seemed like nonsense. The men dismissed them as nothing more than a flock of gossiping hens.

The fishmonger Peter (aka “Rocky”) wasn’t so sure. Maggie and the other women might have been hysterical but something about their story rang true.

The Rock remembered the words of the Savior: the Son of Man must be raised from the dead.

“Let’s go check it out,” Fish said and he and Jon-Boy bolted out the door.

The story circulating from the denizens of the Temple, Caiaphas the high priest and his myrmidons, Saint Paul pre-conversion among them, was that Jesus’s disciples stole the body to claim proof of a resurrection.

According to the coroner’s report of the Jews a body was declared to be officially dead after four days.

Jesus rose on the third day; this was no mere resuscitation. The authorities hired mall cops to stand watch over the sepulcher but when Jesus broke through the stone the hired guns dropped like flies.

Rocky and Jon-Boy arrived at the cemetery and inspected the grave. Maggie’s story was true—the tomb was empty!

The words of Jesus sent shivers up their spine. “The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, who will mock and scourge and spit upon him and crucify him, but on the third day he will be raised.”

He said this that day that he cleaned house on the bankers and merchants in the Temple. “The love of money is the root of all evil,” the Apostle wrote.

Eventually the followers of the Carpenter learned to speak the language of the heart. They reached out to anyone willing to buy the ticket and take the ride.

If they didn’t have money for cab fare then the Apostles gave them a scholarship. Money was no object. Open enrollment. Anyone could become a Christian. It happened to me; it happened to you.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said. To us, too, he issues that challenge. This saying is too hard. Who can accept it? Such is the price of discipleship. It is the pearl of great value.

Don’t quit before the miracle happens.

Rocky failed, he faltered, he denied the Lord. He bounced back. He swallowed raw eggs. Jesus raised him up. The Rock came out swinging again. Then he became Pope.

The Resurrection happened on the eighth-day, a sabbath that never ended. Many fine books have been written in prison. Jon- Boy composed a story based on his jailhouse re-conversion, and an eye-doctor named Lucas penned an epic novel based on the life and times of Peter and Paul.

The Apostles mobilized, marshaled their forces, crafted a message, and took the Word into the streets. Hear the Word of God and obey. Don’t keep it in your sneaker; tell it to a friend.

Disciples preached in the Temple and in the synagogues. To ease the substantial burden laid upon their shoulders, they selected servants, the deacons, to help them do the heavy lifting.

The Apostles worked double-shifts to baptize believers: an Ethiopian eunuch who bathed in mysterious rivers, and they accepted a young man named Paul, formerly of the law firm of Caiaphas, Annas, and Saul.

Blinded by the light of the risen Christ, the zealous Pharisee enrolled himself in the College of Apostles and preached to slaves, freemen, Jews, and non-believers. Ours is a Pauline Church.

Paul’s achievement was substantial. The words he wrote in his letters inspire us still. They form the nucleus of Christian theology.

Always the smartest person in the room, Paul worked with Barnabas, a trust-fund baby and a realtor with a generous heart and noble spirit.

Barnabas and Paul shared a universal vision—all men and women are eligible for the kingdom—but Barnabas’s nepotism caused a falling out and they broke up the act. Que triste.

Paul moved on. “Can we still be friends?” Barnie asked.

“See you in paradise,” Paul replied. Then he moved on. To Rome.

Peter and Paul, and raced toward Rome. In imitation of the Lord they earned the crown of martyrdom, Peter upside down on a cross; Paul by the sword, the privilege afforded him by the bastion of the Beast.

Paul always had a death wish. “Whatever you do, do it for the Lord Jesus,” he said. Paul never minced words. He always played for keeps.

Peter and Paul took up permanent residency in the Eternal City, obtained the crown of martyrdom, and eventually flanked Jesus and God as twin pillars of the Church with the Spirit hovering over them like a dove.

Such was the will of God for them in Christ Jesus. These are the truths of our faith. His Story is our story but the song remains the same: it’s all about Him.

At Easter we celebrate the genesis of our faith. So I enjoin you to offer a joyful sacrifice of praise to the God who raised Jesus his Son from the dead.

Maggie no longer weeps because she knows that her Jesus is alive. Alive, alive, her Jesus is alive.

The Paschal Lamb has been sacrificed and yet we live, no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose again for us. This is our faith. We are proud to profess it.

Augustine wrote, “The Resurrection of Jesus is God’s supreme and wholly marvelous work.”

So here we are now, witnesses to the empty sepulcher, the fruits of our Lenten march to the magical mountain of Easter.

May we live forever in the love of God in Christ Jesus crucified, died, and risen, now and forever, world without end. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

This contribution is available at <http://thegonzohomilist.blogspot.com/2015/04/dawn-of-living-dead.html>
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Thoughts on Holy Saturday [at A Shower of Roses]

Recently, I had the occasion to read a beautiful quotation from Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Christ came to be Father's compassion to the world. Be kind in your actions. Do not think that you are the only one who can do efficient work, work worth showing. This makes you harsh in your judgment of others who may not have the same talents. Do your best and trust that others do their best. And be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.

— Mother Teresa, *In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories and Prayers*

This morning it hit me square in the face as I contemplate which Easter Mass to go to. I generally

try

to be non-judgmental in most areas of my life, but I had not extended that courtesy to the people who put together the Mass at our local parishes. :-)

As I recall, we have gone to the Easter vigil almost every year since I entered the Catholic Church in 1996. Our 4th baby was baptized at that Mass, and we had 2 more after that, so we have

always

dragged 6 small, whiny, sleepy children to this longest Mass of the year! Why? Because it's the most beautiful, and we love seeing new Catholics born into the faith on this night.

But this morning, I found myself suggesting that we go to the earliest Mass of the day---because there is less opportunity for frustration at a shorter Mass. I get so tired of the deviations from the missal where there aren't supposed to be deviations. I get tired of the performance atmosphere that makes the congregation applaud anytime children (even teens) are singing. I get tired of priests not being reverent. Frankly, I get tired of myself, of judging every Mass and decided what the priests, deacons, and musicians did well and what they didn't.

We have a priest friend, a convert like me, who is of the same mind and celebrates Mass exactly the way I would like it, but his assignment is much too far away for us to attend. He says I'll never be happy. And he's probably right, but I hold my breath and say a prayer every year when new priest assignments come out, hoping he'll be transferred to our parish or one nearby!

Reading

[this conversion story](#)

this morning made me realize that while it would be nice for the Mass to be as heavenly as I hope every time I attend, I don't go for that. I'm Catholic because I believe that Jesus Christ is present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, in the Eucharist and that the priest brings Him to me despite his own personal sins or

failings. We all have different spiritual gifts and I really do appreciate the special joyfulness that some priests have (even though they tend not to follow the rules as closely!), and I need to stop being so judgmental. After all, they

have

given their lives for the Church, and maybe those sanguine priests are better at nurturing their parishioners than some of their fellow-priests.

Maybe my time in Mass (and out of Mass) is better spent praying for our priests than griping about their failings. I'm doing my best in my vocation, and I have to trust that they are also doing their best.

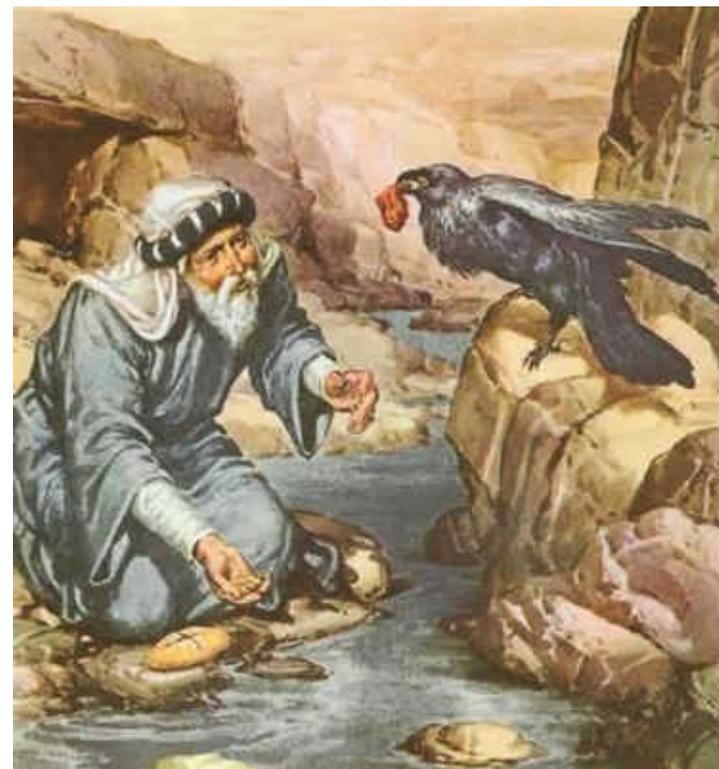
I hope you have had a prayerful Lent and that you are looking forward to the joy of Easter as much as I am.



This contribution is available at <http://ashowerofroses.blogspot.com/2015/04/thoughts-on-holy-saturday.html>
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Brighter Than Expected [at Smaller Mannhattans]



I hope that's kosher

Fun fun fun at the Communion retreat on Sunday with 7 and 8-year-olds. Four groups of 10 or so, 25+ minutes each time. The standard program covered the miracle of the Loaves and Fishes using step-by-step teacher's notecards, and miraculously-expanding big paper-doll type loaves and fish. Pretty neat. Of course the kids already knew the story, so I couldn't see spending the whole time on that one miracle. Plus they already knew other stories that tie into the Eucharistic theme. Why not connect the dots they know, and add a couple while we're at it?

So instead of the prepared program, I presented a stripped-down version of the 6-step

[Bible Miracle Food Pyramid](#)

:

0. What's a food pyramid? What's a

miracle

food pyramid? (2 minutes)

1. Moses, bread and flesh in the desert. (3 minutes)

2. Elijah, bread and flesh in the desert. (3 minutes)
3. Elisha multiplies bread. (3 minutes)
4. Jesus transforms water into wine. (3 minutes)
5. Jesus multiplies bread and flesh; helpers passed out hunks of French bread for some hands-on drama. (6 minutes)
6. Jesus transforms bread into flesh; and wine into blood. This miracle continues even until today in Masses all around the world. (5 minutes)

At each step we reviewed how each succeeding miracle compared to the prior ones. As appropriate, I'd dramatize the stories and draw pictures. None of the four sessions went quite the same.

First time I've worked with kids this young. Their attention spans are shorter than 6th graders', but they think as fast, and threw themselves into it as soon as I got them laughing. Nice gig.

This example is how I typically lesson-plan any new assignment. I consider allotted time, the audience, and what they probably already know. Then I figure how to cover the topic in a way that's fun and stimulating, connects to other stuff, and leads to a bigger Catholic picture. Always: how does this bit we are discussing tie into the rest of the Bible and the Faith?

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2015/03/brighter-than-expected.html>
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Teach... To your Children and Your Children's Children [at A Catholic Moment]



My Mom just had a birthday the other day. She turned 70 (sorry Mom!), and while I'm sure she's cringing right now being a part of this article, 70 is an awesome milestone that should be celebrated, not looked at so negatively as we as a society do so often these days. In scripture, 7 is a number of perfection, so that means that 70 is the decade of perfection, right Mom and Dad? I think so. I look at how she loves her grandkids and while she's not as spry as maybe she once was when she was fielding baseballs in the backyard growing up, she still gets out there with my son, and you know what? Mom has always been Mom, regardless of age or what year it is. She's always been the same person to me.

Growing up, my siblings and I were raised Catholic. My Dad never converted, though he fully supported raising us Catholic and he himself is a very spiritual man. He taught me a ton about work ethic, character, and integrity. But it was my Mom who instilled the Catholic faith, teachings, and tradition in us. And since Monday was her birthday, I'm going to focus on Mom. Don't worry Dad, I'll write about you in August!

My Mom attended Catholic schools growing up and was always close with the clergy and the neighborhood parish growing up in Ft. Wayne, Indiana in the U.S. To this day, if you mention St. Louis De Montfort, she genuflects in honor of the Montfort Fathers (I'm sure she's genuflecting as she reads this).

But Mom taught us what it means to be Catholic, and I'll never forget the first time I mentioned as a teen that the Eucharist was a "symbol of Christ." She quickly corrected me, informing me that it IS the Body and Blood of Christ! Of course we observed Lent, with no meat on Fridays, we celebrated the Sacraments – first communion, confirmation, and also confession every now and then as part of Catechism. There was always some sort of Catholic Diocesan newspaper or magazines around, and I always remember the discussions at the table about God, how science and God can coexist and are related, and discussions of our faith.

I knew my Mom prayed a lot. I knew she would ask for the intercession of various saints from time to time, and I always remember the pictures of Jesus and Mary, crucifixes and other artifacts around the house. One painting of Jesus in particular he was revealing His sacred heart, which happened to be the

name of our small parish church growing up – Sacred Heart.

I wished I had listened more though. I wished I had embraced my faith more. I wished I would have paid more attention and tried more in Catechism classes. I wished I had taken being an Alter Server more seriously, and I wished I would have gotten more involved as a youth in our church. But looking back, my Mom taught me so much about my faith. Stuff that wouldn't surface until many years later. In a way, this is what the readings are about today.

The readings today talk about the Law. God's Law. In the first reading from Deuteronomy, Moses is telling the Israelites that they must keep the Law, specifically the Ten Commandments. If we simply abide by the Commandments, then life is easy, right? Well, it's not that easy. We, as humans cannot live by the Law 100 percent of the time, every day. When sin entered the world, this fact was made known. But then Moses goes on to say, *"However, take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children's children."*

We need to learn from the graces we experience. We need to learn from our mistakes, and we need to learn from those before us. And then we have a duty to teach these same lessons to our children, and to their children, meaning we need to live by example and teach our kids right, so that they do the same, and so on.

In the Gospel today, Matthew writes about Jesus teaching about the Law. By this time, Jesus had been conducting His ministry, and people were excited thinking that He was going to change things on Earth and abolish the law. But in fact, he came to fulfill it. The Law has always been there, from the beginning. Things were in harmony and the world did not know sin, therefore it was simple to abide by the Law. But since the fall of Adam and Eve, humanity had been out of order with God. We were not in communion with Him anymore because our human nature, our tendencies, and our faults worked against us. As hard as we tried, we could not live by the Law. As hard as we tried, we could not be in communion with God. Jesus came to fix that, He came to fulfill the Law by providing us an out – a way we could come into communion with Him despite our sins and our faults.

In the Gospel, Jesus says, *"Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place."*

The Law will never change. It will never subside until *all things have taken place*. These "things" started with the coming of Jesus, His crucifixion and resurrection, on through to today in us following His teachings and having faith in Him, and will end with Him coming again, whenever, or however, that may be. The point is, He laid a path. He laid a framework for how to follow Him, how we as sinners and people who do some not-so-good things can make it to Heaven and be in communion with God.

But there's a catch – we have to pass it on. We can't just try to live it, and be good Catholics and people of faith on our own for our own good. We have to live it, and we have to pass it on and teach it to others – to our kids, and their kids. To our friends, neighbors, and fellow parishioners and fellow citizens.

Jesus goes on to say, *"Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."*

It means we reap what we sow. If we do bad things, live a self-serving life, and teach others through our example, we will receive that in return eventually. If we do good things, try to live a life as nobly and morally as we can, relying on our faith and the Sacraments when we fall, and teaching that to others, then we will receive good things for eternity. It's as simple as that. Life will be rough. We will encounter trials that do not make sense. There will be temptations to make things seem easier. But it's how we work through these times in live our lives, and more importantly what we teach to others that will make the real difference.

It's what we teach to others – through what we say, and more importantly, how we act. It's not until recent years that I really realized the faith foundation I had been given growing up. I did not embrace my faith until many years later. But the foundation that my Mom and Dad helped lay in my faith, character traits and morals stuck, and has lived with me, and guided my actions ever since. None of us are perfect and I continue to make my share of mistakes. But, those things that had been embedded in me from my earliest memories are now becoming clearer. Perhaps it's the fact I now have a son that has really made me think about this, and made me want to be better and live a better example, and to teach him what I've been taught, how to be a good Catholic. This means I have to try to be one myself.

We have a duty. I need to pay it forward. We all do. We have a duty to our families, our parish communities, and the world to teach each other what it means to be a good Christian, a good person, and in our case a good Catholic. But it all starts at home, and in terms of my faith, it started with my Mom. Thanks Mom, and Happy 70th birthday!

This contribution is available at <http://www.acatholic.org/teach-to-your-children-and-your-childrens-children/>
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Not Where I Should Be; Right Where I'm Supposed to Be [at Serviam Ministries]

Written By: Gregory Watson

“In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest” (John 12:24).

Recently, I was at a pub having a couple of beers with a co-worker, enjoying the opportunity to get to know him a bit better in a context that wasn't a noisy woodshop. I was telling him about my faith and my life, and how a guy who'd gone to college to be a protestant minister wound up a Roman Catholic stuck working in a woodshop. My co-worker remarked at a comment that I made somewhere in my various anecdotes that I really don't belong where I am, and that I should be doing something else.

As I've written in the past on this blog, I've struggled with this very easy conclusion that somewhere my life has taken a wrong turn or something, and that I'm not where I should be in life. I've joked in the past with my best friend and fellow convert, that if we were still Pentecostals, we could be raking in the dough as televangelists or something. In our desire for the truth and our obedience to that truth, though, the consequences seem to mean not being where we always thought we should be in life. At Mass yesterday, the deacon who was preaching the homily talked about how we all tend to have dreams, and very often, we reach a point in our life where we realise that our dreams will never be fulfilled in the way we'd hoped. This realisation is what causes that “midlife crisis” so many go through. The deacon made the point that at this moment of crisis, we can desperately cling to that dream and take drastic, unreasonable steps to try to achieve it, or at least something that resembles it—which leads to anger, resentment, and depression—or we can let the dream die, and in so doing, be able to move on and truly bear fruit in our lives. When we abandon ourselves to divine providence in this way, we open ourselves up to God's mysterious action in our lives, and truly make ourselves conduits of grace for others.

I've been blessed to see this truth in my own life on many occasions—the most recent of which was that very beer shared with my co-worker. For you see, we were killing time after work before I took him to an appointment with the associate priest at my parish. My co-worker was going to his first Confession in over twenty years.

No, I'm certainly not where I thought I'd be; but I know I'm exactly where I should be!

Comments

comments

This contribution is available at <http://www.serviamministries.com/blog/not-where-i-should-be-right-where-im-supposed-to-be/>

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The New Covenant [at Bible Meditations]



The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives how to know the Lord. All, from the least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31:31-34 NAB

And [Jesus] did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Luke 22:20 NRSV

We belong to the New Covenant. When our spiritual forefathers broke the Old Covenant, God promised to make a new covenant. More than Ten Commandments on a stone, He promised to write the new law on our hearts. He promised to be our God and all we had to do was be His people, that He would enable all of us to know Him, and that he would forgive our sins.

At the Last Supper, Jesus announced the beginning of this New Covenant instituted with His blood on the cross. He promised that after His death and resurrection, He would send us a Comforter, Counselor, and Advocate. The Holy Spirit within us empowers us to live the New Covenant. When we allow the Spirit to move us, we can live out God's law of love for God, our neighbor, and ourselves. We can connect with God in our hearts, we can accept the priceless gift of forgiveness and know we belong to the Body of Christ.

Prayer: Praise God who does for us what we can never do for ourselves.

Reflection: How can responding to the Holy Spirit's promptings affect your relationship with God, with others, or even with yourself?

The Church and the secular man-crisis [at LMS Chairman]



I blogged

[the other day](#)

about the 'man crisis' identified by the OECD. Now that this bastion of the mainstream has identified the problem, I think we can all talk about it openly. Boys and young men are not motivated to work hard at school and university in the way their fathers and grandfathers were. Given that, it is not too scary to observe that schools and universities have become feminised in certain ways. Boys are less free to be boys; school sports have declined; female teachers don't always understand or sympathise with their male pupils; boys get marked down in their work.

Within the Church, I

[have followed the argument](#)

made by Leon Podles that, over a period of centuries, men are demotivated and excluded by the model of spirituality presented to them, which is somewhat feminine. It is easy to find examples from the 20th century of popular religious art presenting the Faithful with very girly-looking male saints, and feminised depictions of Our Lord. Quite who these was supposed to appeal to, I don't know: these aren't the kinds of men women tend to find attractive, and the same popular art gives us androgynous-looking female saints. But it reflects the idea that the good Christian is

feminine

, in the debased sense of meek and mild. Even the

[Penny Catechism](#)

is at it:

347. What are the principal virtues we are to learn from our Blessed Lord?

The principal virtues we are to learn from our Blessed Lord are meekness, humility, and obedience.

What about courage, justice, and self-sacrifice?

Podles is interested in very long-term trends, but the problem of men just not coming to church, only got going in recent decades, at least in the English-speaking world, and this process mirrors the secular trends. Men actually outnumbered women in American churches as

[recently as 1974](#)

What I said about the problem of secular membership organisations in relation to the Church, I want to say again about the withdrawal of men. It is true that all membership organisations went into decline from the 1970s, but a huge woolly hole in the explanation for this

[is labelled by Robert Putnam](#)

, in his classic book on the subject

Bowling Alone,

as 'values': the change of values over time, and from one generation to the next. The Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant churches chose precisely this moment of conflict about values to announce that they were no longer going to resist the values of the world; no, they were going to do their best to embrace them, to see the good in them, and to give up trying to make their communities visibly different from everyone else.

At the moment of crisis, at the moment at which the Catholic Church was perhaps the only institution with the cultural weight to make a difference, instead of a battening down of the hatches, there was a collective letting go.

It is understandable; they were under pressure. If they had stood firm they would have lost a proportion of people determined to enjoy modernity to the full. But the Church as a culturally and socially visible institution would, at least, have survived. As things have worked out, this does not look like happening.

Liberals will tell you that if the Church had dug in, in the 1960s, it would have collapsed even more rapidly. We can't stop them deluding themselves, but those of us who live in the real world must ask what has happened to groups who bucked the trend at least to an extent, such as the

[Mormons](#)

, and what kind of religious groups have experienced strong growth since the 1960s: Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Pentecostals... Easy-going, liberal religious groups have collapsed, demanding, conservative groups have thrived. The latter even use sacred, non-cradle languages in their liturgy! (Especially the

[Pentecostals](#)

) Could there be a lesson here?

But leaving that aside, the 'man crisis' is in fact an aspect of the transformation of values Putnam refers to.

Since the 1960s men have progressively stopped being respected and rewarded for their traditional role, a role which demanded a huge amount of self-discipline and self-sacrifice from boyhood onwards, and are therefore slowly withdrawing from that role, and from the self-discipline and self-sacrifice it required

. (I don't just mean hard work: actually fighting, saving people from burning buildings, and getting killed, is also part of the package for many men.) They aren't being selfish or childish, they are simply responding to incentives, like rational agents. The attack on traditional gender roles also put huge pressure on the Church's teaching on sexual complementarity. The major Protestant denominations have thrown in the towel, and the more liberal American ones are now demonstrating what happens next: total obliteration. The Catholic Church has held the line on female ordination, but in an attempt to ease the pressure has given a series of other concessions, female Altar servers being an obvious example.

We have the Holy Ghost to thank for the Church's solidity on ordination. But the Church has not been a bastion of opposition to the attack on traditional gender roles, despite the fact that important aspects of them are

[embedded in her teaching](#)

. It has not resisted, in the liturgy, the kind of feminisation which has taken place in the secular world: on the contrary, in many ways it has gone much further. Finally, and as Podles notes, one almost never hears anything positive about fatherhood or masculinity from the pulpit. Men have, accordingly, absented themselves from an environment in which they do not feel comfortable, even as more and more emphasis is placed on the importance of 'reaching out to women'.

To summarise, the kind of serious, hard-working, bread-winning, responsible men who were once the backbone of Catholic congregations, and who once filled Catholic seminaries, have been worn down by the transformation of values and no longer exist in the numbers they once did. The Church is not responsible for this, but on the other hand the Church has done very little to oppose it. On the contrary, the Church's liturgy and parochial structures have been feminised to such an extent that, instead of being any kind of refuge for men, the Church can often seem a particularly unfriendly environment for them.

As responsible men become a scarce commodity, the Church has sent the signal that they are not welcome.

Please note I've not said whether this is a good or a bad thing, just that it has happened. I hope feminists would agree with the historical analysis, and I would expect them to say that any costs were worth paying to overthrow a situation which was inherently patriarchal.

Bear in mind that

men who drop out of the traditional, hard-working, responsible regime are not necessarily unhappy.

The unhappy ones are the ones who work hard and are then kicked in the teeth for it: who find they are

despised, treated as potential child-abusers, and victimised by the family courts. They are, on a much larger scale, like the men who insist on holding doors open and vacating seats for women and who get ticked off by feminists, who say 'I'm quite capable of doing it myself thank you'. That kind of chivalrous behaviour only makes sense if there is some kind of social payoff, in gratitude and respect. If you keep getting (metaphorically) slapped in the face for doing it, the behaviour is quickly rooted out: which is what feminists want.

The perpetual teenager-types, by contrast, can make themselves materially comfortable with an undemanding job, or for that matter on benefits, on the basis that they aren't going to get married and support children, and they are in no way excluded from casual relationships with women. They may not be fulfilling their true selves as Catholics would see it, but superficially they are fine. It is women, who tend to want children, who really get the short end of the stick in the new situation. As the trend continues, they are increasingly having to raise these children

[on their own](#)

. And for all the bravado, that is a tough option.

Feminists reading this may be wondering if, in my view, the Church needs to be misogynistic in order to attract men.

That isn't my view, but then I don't think the Church

was

misogynistic when, in the recent past, it did attract men. There were problems with a popular, sentimental and asexual ideal of femininity (and ideal of masculinity), as I noted above, but that was

not

part of what attracted men to the Church in the old days, on my and Podles' view. What is needed now, to make the Church a comfortable place for men to be, is not misogyny, but liturgy with some degree of seriousness - which is why you find plenty of men at the Traditional Mass - a preaching which allows the masculine virtues their place in the spiritual life, and, ideally, an end to the amnesia about sexual complementary.

Readers will be familiar with the saying: The squeaking gate gets the oil. The people who complain, who organise themselves, who set up support groups and write letters, they get attention, and they have the best chance of getting what they want. That is part of the explanation of the success within the Church, as in society as a whole, of busybodies of all kinds. This simple observation shows up a particular problem for men in the Church and in society.

What we have is a group of people who prefer not to show their emotions, and intensely dislike talking about them.

They don't seek each other's company to share problems, and they tend not to be as articulate as others. Lest you think I am describing morons, let me add that they express themselves, but do so more through actions, than words. Their characteristic virtues include endurance, fortitude, and industry. They are

attracted by the ideal of quiet self-sacrifice. They regard one of their kind, who is always banging on about his problems, as a bit of a weed. They regard one of their kind, who is always talking about his virtues, as a bragging fool.

Men are so much less inclined to visit their GP with mild ailments, that they

[die disproportionately from treatable diseases](#)

.



Dr Helen Smith asks: when was the last time you heard of a support group for men? She thinks men should organise themselves more, in order to demand reforms to child support rules and the like. (Of course, such

[groups exist](#)

, but they are minuscule compared to the 'womens' advocacy' industry.) Various people have suggested, by parallel, a 'men's movement' in the Church, with men's groups and men's spirituality. But most men would rather just slope off to somewhere where they feel comfortable. Maybe the garden shed.

But the Apostles were sent to them too.

For a slightly dyspeptic look at the decreasing attractiveness of marriage, see the Evangelical blogger [Dalrock](#).

This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2015/03/the-church-and-secular-man-crisis.html>
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On The Off Chance You Thought My Life Was Romantic [at We, A Great Parade]

... let me just go ahead and clear that up right here and now. Holy Week myths debunked.

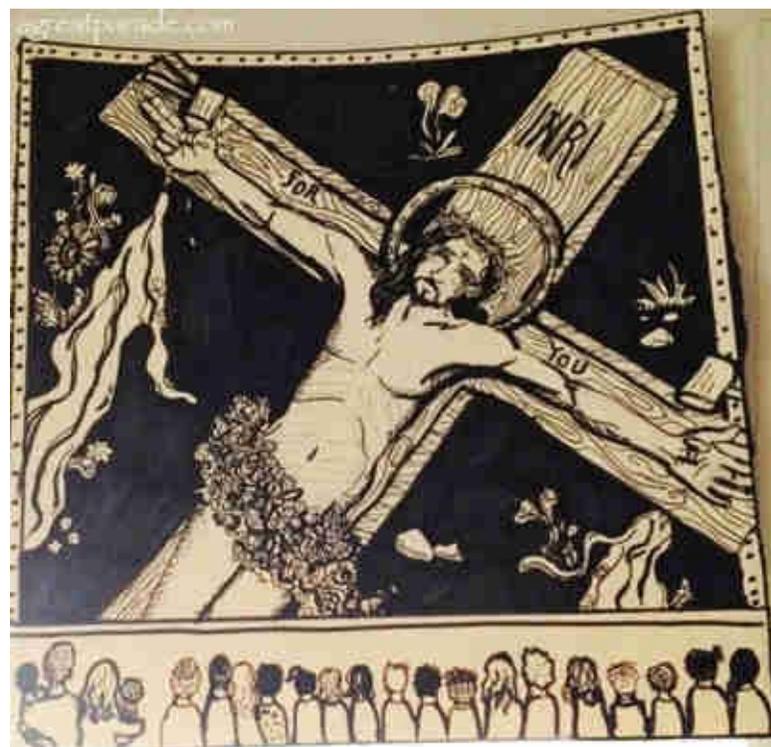
Remember my great

[plans for observing Lent](#)

? Some might say I failed at half of it. Or you could say that plans simply

adjusted

through the course of the 40 days. However you say it, I completely forgot to bury the Alleluia stone, forgot to buy jelly beans for the sacrifice beans to turn into (that one was an easy fix- turns out children accept candy currency of all types), never got past day 2 of cleaning out our clutter, and never made it to a single corporate Stations of the Cross prayer despite the facts that I both LOVE praying the Stations and that our friend made this:



Isn't it breathtaking? Guess who the family on the left is? Guess who only had 1/4 representation at 1/6 of the meetings?

Oh but surely she did better during Holy Week itself.

She didn't.

I had planned to hide 30 pieces of silver (read: nickels) for the kids to find on Spy Wednesday and read

the story of Judas' betrayal. Never happened. I had planned for us to do a family foot washing and read the story of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. Never happened. Sure there are reasons why and they might even sound spiritual if I tried hard enough, but still I'm disappointed.



For the Good Friday service we went at noon to The Chapel in the Woods here in town. For real it is a chapel

in the woods,

you guys. It's amazing. And the service was beautiful, but we spent the entire hour taking turns with each of our very, very loud boys outside in the very, very lovely woods. It had it's stressful moments, but in that way where you look at your spouse with exhaustion and frustration but you have to smile because you know it is so incredibly worth it.

Moving forward. You're hooked, I know you are.

On Friday afternoon our friends came in from out of town and we prepared a Seder meal to eat together. I love the rich history and symbolism in this meal and our families have celebrated it together many times over the years. But this is the first time we've attempted it with four small kids. So just take this:



And add this:



And I think you see where I'm going here.

On Saturday night Eric and I went to the Easter Vigil alone despite Aly's piqued interest when he heard there would be fire. Some kids can handle sitting through a 2.5 hour church service that *begins*

after normal bedtime, but you my child are not one such kid. Easter Sunday mass it is.

Our dear friend and honorary godmother, Cindy, was confirmed at the Vigil and we are so happy for her! She has had one of the hardest lives one could bear and has become one of the most generous, loyal, and loving people I know. She's also a firecracker, and was throwing peace signs in her prayer veil from the front of the church.



A national treasure, that one.

So all that to say, I hope that when you read this blog you see a real life in it's pages. We're real people, with best laid plans and a serious lack of follow through, with gloriously imperfect relationships and experiences. The last thing I want is for this to be another blog that makes you feel crappy about your own life. I want to seek beauty and goodness with you, but I also want to be able to laugh or cry with you when everything comes crumbling down before us.

I also want to add that I don't feel guilty or beat myself up over the ways I fell short this Lent. I left that junk behind a long time ago and don't care to pick it back up again. Also want to clarify that none of that stuff was what I thought I "should" be doing. It was what I

very much wanted

to do, but found myself short of time and energy (or memory) for the follow through. There's always next year!



Wishing you and all the flawed, crazy, lovely humans in your life a very Happy Easter!

It's Sunday!

This contribution is available at <http://www.agreatparade.com/2015/04/on-off-chance-you-thought-my-life-was.html>
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Tell the mystery of the glorious body

Good Friday one year ago: I had no singing engagements. I attended 3:00 pm service with my mother and we sat near the front of the church. Someone sang beautifully and it wasn't me and I was envious.

I couldn't stay standing for very long, and though my pain was minimal it was clear that Crohn's was now causing more than just "a few bad days". During the great intercessions the presider led us through "Let us kneel" and "let us stand" and I did the best I could with [my poor broken body](#).

When the time came to venerate the cross I saw a school-age boy move himself forward with crutches and leg braces and I thought "Don't you dare feel sorry for yourself, Margaret. Don't you dare."

[In January I was admitted to the hospital on a Friday](#). When Sunday dawned and I was still hooked up to an IV I asked a nurse if she could have someone bring me communion.

Emily arrived with long hair, a teenager's nervous smile and a scratched maroon pyx just as the sun was setting. I took and ate. After she left I remembered I was on a liquid diet still and wasn't to have eaten anything.

What was this bread I consumed?

I don't know how our suffering connects us to Jesus through his suffering. I don't know how the Body of Christ, the bread of heaven, nourishes me. I don't know what my brokenness reveals.

What I do know is that it matters. The wounds we carry with us, the scars that seal our skin, those have been sanctified by the coming of Jesus in the flesh and by his true and painful death.



At Holy Thursday mass I breathed deeply to sing the opening song. *And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on.* My belly pressed against my waistband, larger after having two months since my bowel resection, two months of being able to eat. I felt the ache of my most recent surgery, [the one they did to put me back together](#), each time I took a breath.

The opening rite took almost fifteen minutes. I stood the whole time.

*Pange, lingua, gloriósi
Córporis mystérium,
Sanguínisque pretiósi,
Quem in mundi prétium
Fructus ventris generósi
Rex effúdit géntium.*

Tell, my tongue, the mystery of the glorious body and the precious blood. We do not understand that which we proclaim, that's why it is a mystery. I do not know what it means to have a body. I do not know how or why it works sometimes, and doesn't others. I do not know what my suffering has to do with His. But I know that it does, and that it matters.

This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2015/04/03/tell-the-mystery-of-the-glorious-body/>
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Perfect Little Me [at Blogging For A Better Life]

In all frankness, this is a complete fabrication. If it were true, I wouldn't spend so much time thinking about myself. I wouldn't be consumed with thoughts on how to master my own advancement in lieu of what I could do to help lift up others.

I know I'll never become perfect, not here on earth, not in this present form of body and mind. I understand my humanness and I'm quite aware of my own wretchedness.

Perfect little me lives only in my dreams. What wretched me needs is grace and mercy.

Full of Grace, Queen of Heaven, Mother of our God – pray for me.



Our Lady, like the beautiful Mother she is, can ease our aches and pains. She does not disappoint. She tells us that she will not abandon anyone who comes to her, she pleads to her Son on our behalf.

**Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection,**

implored your help, or sought your intercession,

Inspired with this confidence,

I fly unto you, O virgin of virgins, my Mother.

To you do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the World Incarnate,

despise not my petitions,

but in your mercy, hear and answer me.

We live in an imperfect world, where mysteries and questions as to why certain things happen are sometimes unanswerable. But, God who is perfect in every way gives us plenty of help and ample protection. All that is required is that we reach out and ask.

If you find yourself struggling with prayer, turn to our Blessed Mother. Her intercession and grace are there for us, especially when we feel most troubled.

O Mother of the World Incarnate never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession, was left unaided.

In your mercy, hear and answer us.

(
Perfect little me

needs

You

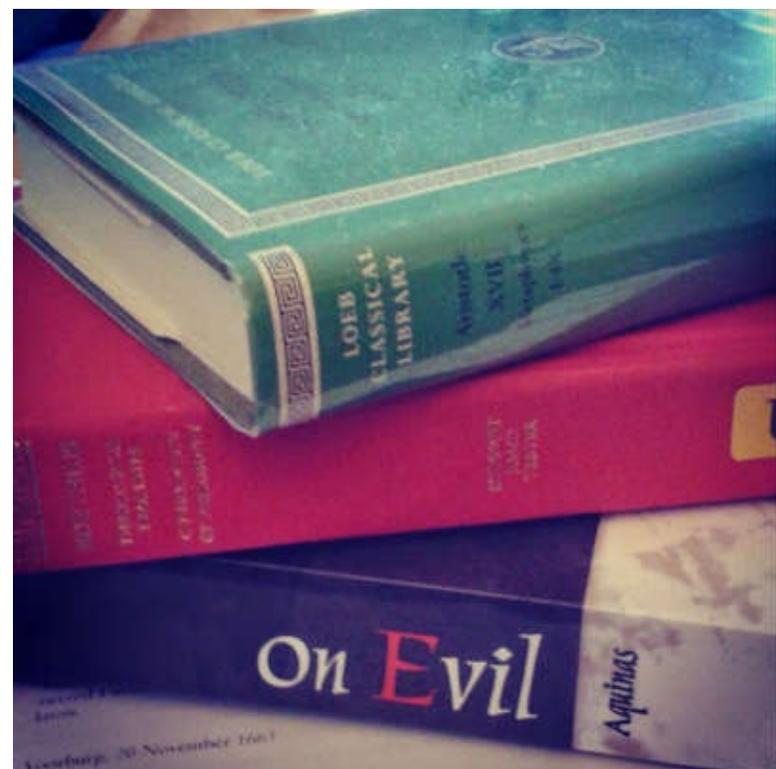
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Does anyone else ever feel this way?

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A Reflection on Habit [at Backs of People's Heads and Baby Faces]



When you are living in poverty you live in a world of subsistence.

You live from paycheck to paycheck (and sometimes not even from paycheck to paycheck), but that's not the only way in which you subsist. You get yourself into the mindset that time is worth more than the material goods of the world.

After all, what are "things"? You can't take them with you.

Better to store up your treasures in heaven than here on earth where the proverbial moth and worm can eat them away. And that's all true.

But does this affect the way that you live in other ways? I think it does.

After all, what you are cultivating is a habit - a habit of good-enough-ness, of mediocrity.

Virtue is defined roughly as the mean between excess and deficiency

and many people take that to mean that you want to have just enough - not too much and not too little. But a mean is sometimes closer to one end of that continuum than the other.

Courage, for example, is much closer to rashness than to cowardice.

What I have found in my own life is that that continuum is really much more like a circle than a line. Excess and deficiency are sometimes so tangled up in one another that it's hard to know where one ends and the other begins.

Really, that's a pretty Aristotelian idea, I suppose:

excess and deficiency are both vices

. To show how this works, let me share a story. (This is autobiographical and those of you who have been poor may recognize this)

There was not enough money to pay all the bills and my kid's birthday was coming. Rather than pay all of one bill and some of another, I decided to pay the minimum on each bill and spend the remainder on a somewhat lavish gift for my child.

The parent-child relationship took precedence over the material goods, and that's good, because I have, in some sense, demonstrated how much my child means to me. Right?

Wrong, because, in the process of providing momentary happiness for my child (because I know that gift will break or wear out), I have also demonstrated how little I consider his overall well-being.

First of all, I neglected to put his needs for shelter and heat first. Secondly, the fact that I had to deal with the stress of not having paid a crucial bill (or even a non-critical one) weighed on me, even though I was unaware of how much it affected me. It affected the way that I parented - I was stressed so I was crabby and depressed which put me out of touch with my child. Thirdly, it showed my child that things are the way in which we demonstrate love.

This is how excess and deficiency co-exist in poverty.

It's not as simple as "Oh, there just simply isn't enough money." It's also, "There's never enough money and I want more."

Slipping from the deficiency of poverty into the excesses of avarice and gluttony is an easy thing to do.

And it's a cruel trick that Satan plays -

the deficiency feeds the sin and the sin feeds the deficiency.

By playing the game, we habituate ourselves to this lifestyle of subsistence where the question is not

"How do I live a better life?"

but

"How much do I need to get by?"

By focusing on the lowest point, we aim for the minimum and achieve mediocrity. And because it's a habit, we tend to stay there.

So, at this moment, I am 8 weeks away from graduation. I have done well. I am a good scholar and will make a fine employee somewhere. I'd like to go to Grad School and get my MA in Philosophy (well, if we're aiming high, I'd like my Ph.D. - but that's truly a pipe dream). The reality of financing it, however, is not so easy. As a woman in my mid-forties, there will not be enough time to pay back the loans I'd have to take out, and the job market is not particularly favorable for Philosophy professors.

As I search for a job, I have been looking for jobs I could fill without too much trouble.

The goal, of course, is to get hired so that I can go to school and have it paid for. But, rather than aiming for the top of my skill set, I have been aiming at the bottom, or, optimistically, the middle. I just want a job - any job - just enough to get by.

I was on my way home this morning when I realized what I was doing.

I am living out the same subsistence habit I developed as a parent.

I have fought to be the best in my studies. I have written from the heart and become a better person for it. I have worked to change my life and renovate my ideas. I have wrestled with my Faith and come out stronger in my love for God than I was before, yet, I still don't trust myself.

That has to change. And it has to change now.

It is important to realize that while God doesn't want me to put material possessions before my relationships, some of those material needs are essential to raising a healthy family. Not everyone is

called to a life of poverty, just like not everyone is called to a life of wealth (and, consequently, responsibility). But, just like the parable of the talents tells us, those who squander their opportunities will have what little they get taken from them and given to another.

God has given me opportunities and talents and I have to trust Him (and myself) to make the most of them.

It's a scary ride, friends. It takes courage to step outside of what you know, to believe that you really could succeed, to believe that God has something for you that is bigger than you can imagine and you

really can

do it.

This contribution is available at <http://peoplesheadsandbabyfaces.blogspot.com/2015/03/moving-from-subsistence-to-success.html>

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These Forty Days [at The Running Hail Mary]

He is Risen! He is not here!



Oh, my goodness, how light my heart is now that Easter is upon us and this Lent, this Lent, this LENT has passed. Lord, thank you for the Lent!

At Mass, on the first Sunday of this season, Father posited, "If we cannot deny ourselves the good things, how can we resist that which is harmful? How can we say no to sin?" Again and again, I reiterated those words to our family, weekly, as much to remind myself of the benefit of sacrifice.

So many fruits poured forth from the sacrifices made, the daily denials of little luxuries or pleasant options, and the extra "things I just don't want to DO".

Self-knowledge is surely one of those fruits. We discover, don't we, where we are weak, how easily we forgive ourselves, and how often we deny Our Lord, failing to even "stay awake one hour". Lord, forgive me in my weakness and self-indulgence.



But He knows we are weak. He knows we fail. At the culmination of all of His sufferings, He saw us, as Father tells us, through the blood and mud and sweat and filth of His terrible via crucis. He trod forward in pain, bearing it for us.



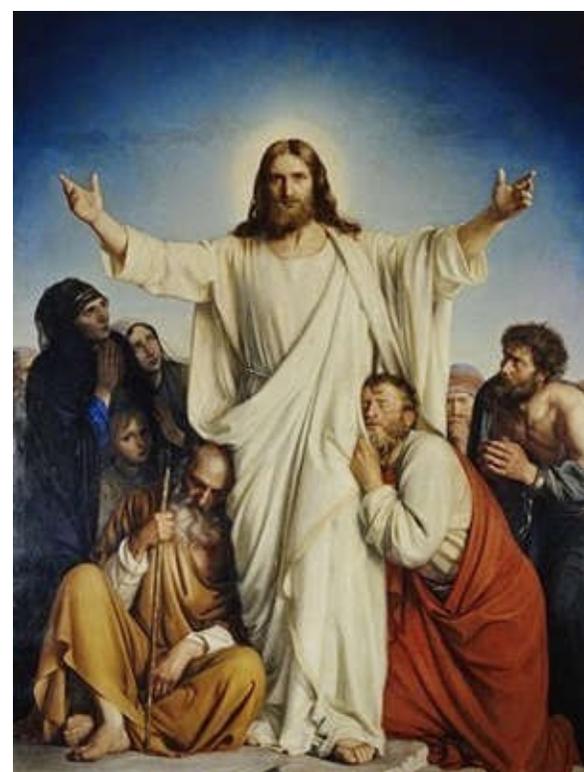
This act of love, this salvation for ME, who deserves none, edifies my soul that my life matters, is seen and noted, and my life is worth His being given, because of His great love. For me. Because He wants me to go to Heaven.

Because then, of His Sacrifice, I chose to offer my Lent for another. The fruit of THIS is - closeness with Our Lord! How much easier is it to bear a suffering when done out of love for another? For the life of their soul? And don't we, then, see why and how Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, bore His ultimate Sacrifice and Death on behalf of His children?

So now these forty days are done. Our Lord is no longer in the tomb. He is Risen in Victory- Victory over death!

We commemorate it every year. Every Lent, every Holy Week, every Easter. And every Easter I am utterly astounded at the relief from penances and suffering (if you could call it that) we attempt to share with Jesus, and the great joy and love unmerited by me that He so freely and willingly bestows upon me, and us all.

My heart is full, because of the parchness of the last forty days. My joy in the Risen Christ overwhelms me! I cry out again and again, "We are the Easter people! Alleluia is our song!".



This contribution is available at <http://runninghailmary.blogspot.com/2015/04/these-forty-days.html>
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From Pain to Peace, Alleluia, Alleluia! [at Making It In Vermont]

We rented a 12 passenger van and traveled for the first time in 8 years to Massachusetts for Easter this year.

I was excited to celebrate Mass this morning with close family at their parish church. We got there early to be sure to get a whole row for our large crew. We found an open pew smack dab in the middle of the church with my seat right next to the center aisle.

Six month old ~P has been notoriously loud and ill humoured at Mass lately. If not all out screaming, he plaintively and loudly vocalizes. Basically it is an aerobic work out trying to keep him happy.

Easter Mass today was no different. Kevin was holding 2 year old ~G who was wiggly and trying to grab the backs of the two nice older women sitting in front of us, but he was at least doing this mostly quietly (and they didn't mind).

The church was pretty packed and ~P started off doing ok while I stood singing the processional hymn, but once we sat for the first reading he started getting unhappy. When he got too loud I took him to the back of the church where I could stand and rock him. Funnily enough four different people sitting in the overflow folding chairs at the back offered me their seats not understanding that I had headed to the back expressly to stand with ~P.

When ~P quieted down I walked as inconspicuously as I could back down the center aisle and joined the family... about 5 minutes later he started up again when we sat down and stopped singing so off I went to the back of the church again to rock him. I did this 3 times. After the 3rd time Kevin offered to switch babies so he could take ~P to the back of the church. I was getting a little tired, so I gladly took wiggly but fairly quiet ~G instead and stayed in the pew.

All Mass I was slightly self conscious of how loud ~P was being and I didn't want to ruin people's Easter Mass, but at least I felt like I had some control over the noise with my rocking, snuggling, and bouncing. Now with Kevin at the back ~P was sounding pretty unhappy and building to a crescendo of wailing. I kept thinking I should go back there and relieve Kevin of his duties, but it was just about time for the consecration of the host (when the bread becomes Jesus) and really wasn't a good time to be heading down the center aisle, so I stayed.

In my angst I heard whispers of, "Let him do it, Kevin wouldn't want you to save him, he can do this." It was so hard to listen to this silent prodding of Jesus, but I stayed put. Believe me, it was physically painful. I don't know how long it was that ~P screamed at the top of his lungs, but by the time we had said the Our Father, shook hands with our neighbors, and said "Peace be with you", a triumphant Kevin sidled into the pew with a sleeping angelic baby ~P in his arms, just in time for us all to receive communion.

My first thought was gratitude for this sleeping/not screaming baby especially at the perfect moment of receiving the eucharist together, then it was happiness and pride in Kevin, and lastly gratitude for the act of faith I had successfully completed. Maybe it sounds trite, but wailing baby to sleeping baby this

morning seemed a glorious triumph.

From pain to peace, transformed like the risen Lord.

He is risen! Alleluia, Alleluia!!

Happy Easter!

Love,

this crazy about Jesus, crazy about her family, crazy about you all lady,

~Lisa

This contribution is available at <http://www.makingitinvermont.com/2015/04/from-pain-to-peace-alleluia-alleluia/>
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I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this I will build... politically neutral universally nice feelings! [at Adult Catechesis & Christian Religious Literacy in the Roman Catholic Tradition]



“I can love Jesus without going to Church.” -any wishy-washy, spineless, pseudo-Christian teenager, adult, etc.

-by [Fr. Dwight Longnecker](#), a former Evangelical Protestant, graduate of Bob Jones University, turned Anglican priest, turned Catholic priest.

Fr. Dwight enjoys movies, blogging, books, riding his motorcycle and visiting Benedictine monasteries. He’s married to Alison. They have four children, named Benedict, Madeleine, Theodore and Elias. They live in Greenville, South Carolina with a black Labrador named Anna, a chocolate Lab named Felicity, a cat named James and various other pets.

“No. Because the Lord Jesus Christ—the only begotten Son of the Father—took human flesh He therefore sanctified the physical realm. Because He took human flesh; human flesh matters. Because He took on physical matter; matter matters. My body matters for it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. My Church matters. The physical church building matters. The One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church—the Catholic Church with all her institutions and history and paperwork and bureaucracy and canon law and dogma—all of it matters. The incense and the candles and the books and the bells. They all matter.

The saints and their suffering matters. My rosary and my books of theology and my Infant of Prague and my plaster St Therese and my Our Lady of Lourdes—soiled and with a hole in her head because a nun from the convent where I got her dropped her once—that matters, and so does my starving neighbor and my friend with a headache and my child who needs a hug and a listening ear. They matter.

And so does the Blessed Sacrament which is the focus of the presence of God in the physical.

...and because of this I kneel to adore.”

To connect and correct

Servant of God, Fr. [Isaac Hecker](#), CSP, was a 19th-century convert to Catholicism who became a priest and founded the American religious order known as the Paulists. He summed it up best. **Religion, said Hecker, helps you to “connect and correct.”** You are invited into a community to connect with one another and with a tradition. At the same time, you are corrected when you need to be. And you may be called to correct your own community — though a special kind of discernment and humility is required in those cases.

Endurance: A Hecker Reflection

“Jesus our Saviour fell oftentimes with the excessive weight of His cross, in order to show us that He has not called us to enjoy success but to support adversity; **to show us that as long as our cross does not exceed our strength, self-centeredness will always find room to conceal itself and live.** It is in the death of our self-centeredness that gives rise to God’s love in our hearts. As Blessed [John of Avila](#) writes, “for it is its (*love-of-self*’s) life that has given death to the love of God.”

Jesus Christ not only enjoined upon us to sell all that we have and give it to the poor, if we would be His disciples, but He said also, **“take up your cross and follow Me.”** **Everyone is therefore supposed to have a cross. To get rid of it is not what the Saviour asks, but to take it up and follow Him.** Ah My Lord, it is not the work of a moment, **not that of a child to take up your cross the weight of which surpasses our strength; to bear it and fall under it, and bear it again, and finally to be mercifully crucified on it.** This is what God asks us to do, for this is what Jesus did and to follow Jesus is to accept God’s invitation to do the same. **It requires much more courage to follow Jesus Christ to the conquest of heaven** than to follow Caesar to the conquest of the entire universe.”

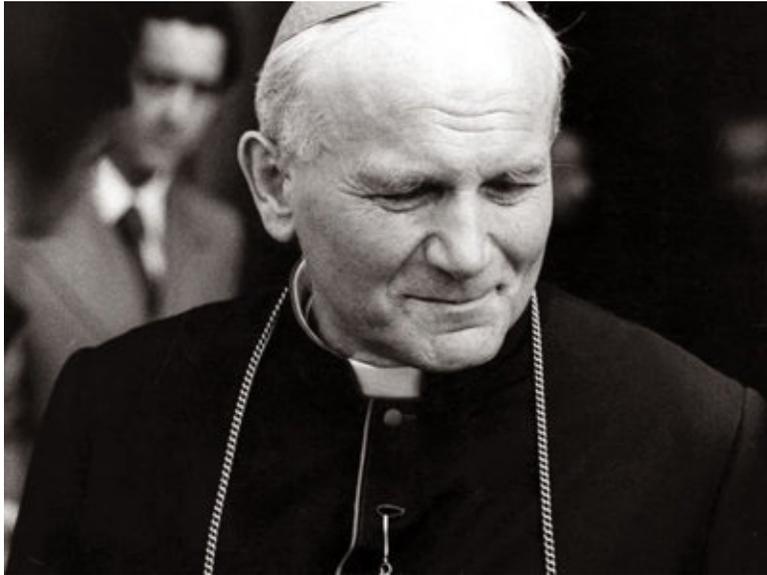
Our crosses **MUST** exceed our own strength. It is God’s will. To show us how utterly dependent we are on Him. Yes, Lord, yes. Thank you for my sweet crushing crosses. They that show me how much I **NEED YOU!!!!** Amen. Amen. Praise Him!!!!

Love,
Matthew

This contribution is available at <http://soul-candy.info/2015/03/sbnr-i-tell-you-you-are-peter-and-upon-this-i-will-build-politically-neutral-nice-feelings/>
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Immediately after St. John Paul II's death, priests, bishops and even the next pope, started to give the deceased pontiff the title of "John Paul the Great." While there are no particular criteria written down as to why a saint is labeled "the Great," there are three virtues he possessed which gave him an extraordinary ability to imitate the example and teaching of Jesus Christ.



At first glance, however, these three virtues do not have any resemblance to "greatness" as the world would see it.

Pope Francis recently commented at a daily Mass homily that, **"the style of the good God is not to produce a spectacle: God acts in humility, in silence, in the little things"** ([News.va](#)). Later on in his homily he refined the point and added a second attribute to God's mode of operation,

one of the three temptations of Jesus in the desert" was to create a spectacle. Satan invites Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple so that, seeing the miracle, the people might believe in Him. "The Lord, instead, is revealed **in simplicity, in humility**" "This is how the Lord acts: He does things simply. He speaks silently to you, to the heart. Let us remember in our lives the many time we have felt these things: **the humility of God is His style; the simplicity of God is His style.**" ([News.va](#), emphasis added).

For John Paul II, while he did speak before large crowds like Jesus Christ, he always acted in humility and simplicity in the midst of all the attention. One tangible example of this is his visit to a rather unknown part of the US, in the middle of the state of Wisconsin.

In 1976, two years before he became pope, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła made an extra visit to a rural farm community in Wisconsin to give a lecture at the local university and to visit Polish farmers. In recounting the visit, a local priest confessed that **Cardinal Wojtyła's "most distinctive characteristics [were] 'his simplicity; his humility; absolutely his humility. It is something that draws you to him.'**" Even Bishop Freking, bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse at the time, saw these two primary attributes of the future Pope and added a third, saying, **"He is first a holy man, a simple and humble man with a pleasant smile."**

So there you have it, **humility, simplicity, holiness.** Three virtues that make John Paul II worthy of the title

“the Great,” because it is those attributes that most resemble the action of God in the world.

Let’s take a quick look at concrete examples of these three virtues in the life of John Paul “the Great.”

1. Humility

First of all, he possessed great humility. Throughout all his life, John Paul II did not “Lord” his power over others, but instead lead with the heart of a **servant**. At the very beginning of his priesthood he adopted the custom of Saint John Vianney of **kissing the ground** of the people he served. When he arrived at his small parish church in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, that is the first action he did when he arrived and he continued this custom throughout his papacy, especially while on his many papal visits. He was a **servant leader** and sought above all things to imitate Christ’s example at the Last Supper of washing the feet of his disciples.

One somewhat humorous example of his humility comes from his visit to **Wisconsin**. While eating breakfast with the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Stevens Point, Sister Carlene Blavat, SSJ-TOSF, remembers an impressive man who cleaned his plate when he was done. She recounts how he “wiped up every last bit of egg and bacon with his bread. His plate looked like it had been washed!” This action seems quite trivial, but the action of wiping ones plate is typically the duty of a servant. In a certain sense, some would think it is “beneath” an esteemed cardinal of the Church to wipe their plate clean.

2. Simplicity

Secondly, John Paul II was a very simple man. During his priestly service in Poland, John Paul II lead a simple life and did not take advantage of the many “benefits” there were to **being a priest in a culture that viewed ordained clergy as royalty**. One example of his simplicity was during one of his parish assignments. The “[n]uns at his church noticed that he wasn’t dressed warmly enough for the bitter Polish winter, so they knitted him a thick woolen sweater. **Within a week, it was gone, because he had given it to the poor**” (John Paul the Great: His Fives Loves, 50, emphasis added).

Another example occurred when he was teaching at the University of Lublin. Instead of accepting his salary, he instead gave it to students who couldn’t afford the tuition. Even his Polish housekeeper was a little frustrated by his simplicity, for she noted that **“he refuses to wear new clothing; he always gives it away”** (Ibid). Even his shoes were run ragged and he never bought a new pair until the ones he wore were completely impossible to wear.

While in **Wisconsin** a host of his offered him tea or coffee, and instead he simply asked for water. She was taken aback by his simplicity and was surprised to see such a high ranking cardinal prefer the simpler things in life.

3. Holiness

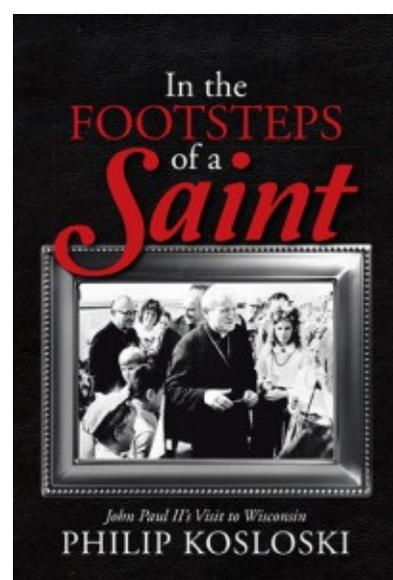
Last, but not least, John Paul II displayed great holiness throughout his entire life. One could always find him in his private chapel, usually **laying prostrate before the altar**. He prayed the Rosary and Stations of the Cross on a daily basis, even while traveling great distances on a plane. Most of all, he had an immense love of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and had a interior magnet for finding a Eucharistic chapel to

pray in.

He also recognized how much he needed spiritual support and always sought the assistance of the sick and elderly. While in **Wisconsin**, he visited two nursing homes, which was quite strange for a Polish cardinal to do while on a visit that lasted just over 24 hours. It was a custom he started as a bishop. After celebrating Mass at the chapel of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Kraków, Archbishop Wojtyła visited those in the infirmary where he said to the them,

“Although I am young and strong, although I fly in airplanes, climb mountains, ski, **I still turn to the weakest, so that by the riches of their suffering they may bring down the strength and power of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of God upon my work in the Archdiocese.**”^[i]

As Pope Francis said, “**The Lord is revealed in simplicity, in humility.**” John Paul II powerfully exemplified those attributes of God and deserves the title “Great,” **not because he was overly pompous, proud or powerful, but because he was humble, simple and holy.**



Find these stories and more in my debut book *In the Footsteps of a Saint: John Paul II's Visit to Wisconsin*. Available online through [Amazon](#) & [WestBow Press](#). [Order your copy today!](#)

In the Footsteps of a Saint: John Paul II's Visit to Wisconsin, is a vivid narrative of the historic days of August 23-24, 1976, but is also meant to be a testament to the shining example of John Paul II's sanctity. He touched and inspired people here by his profound **humility, holiness and simplicity** and his memory will never be forgotten.

^[i] Boniecki, Adam. *The Making Of The Pope Of The Millennium: Kalendarium of the Life of Karol Wojtyła*. Stockbridge: Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 2000, 234.

Saint Gerard Majella [at The Koala Bear Writer]



I first discovered Saint Gerard Majella when I was pregnant with Jade, as I wondered what saints I could ask for intercession during my pregnancy. It surprised me that a male saint would be a [patron of expectant mothers](#)—somehow I expected a woman would be better able to pray for me through this experience that only women have. Then I read his story and put a Happy Saints image of St. Gerard along with a prayer to him in my room, where I [laboured and gave birth to Jade](#) two years ago today.

St. Gerard's patronage of pregnant women comes from a story in which Gerard dropped a handkerchief while visiting friends. One of the daughters noticed this and ran to return it to him, but he told her to keep it.

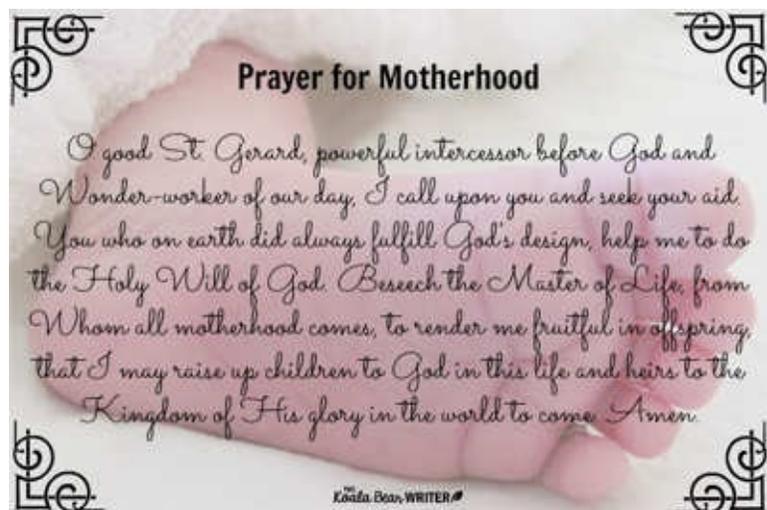
Years later, when she was in childbirth and it was not going well, she remembered this handkerchief and requested her family to get it for her. Immediately her pain went away and the child was born healthy. Word of this spread quickly and other mothers began asking for Gerard's intercession during their pregnancies and labour.

Saint Gerard was born in Italy in 1726, the fourth child of a tailor and his wife. His father died when he was young, so Gerard had to leave school at age 12 to work to support his family—first as a tailor and then as a servant. He tried multiple times to join a religious order, but was refused because he looked sickly. He persisted and was finally accepted into the new Redemptorist order. He was so excited to be a lay brother that he did even the most menial tasks with great joy.

Gerard loved spending time before the Blessed Sacrament, but also experienced depression and doubts about his faith. He often visited the sick and his prayers were known to bring about miracles. Then, when Gerard was 27, he was accused of sleeping with a young woman. The Redemptorist superior knew that Gerard had a good reputation as a prayerful, helpful young man, but he prohibited Gerard from any contact with the outside world. Several months later, the accuser repented and admitted that she had lied about Gerard.

“Saint Gerard meditated on the crucifix. In his meditations, he realized a truth Saint Paul knew: The power of Christ shines through our human weakness. This human weakness is not the weakness of sin, but the weakness of being finite.” ~[The Liguorian](#)

Only two years later, in 1755, Gerard died from tuberculosis. He was beatified in 1893 and canonized in 1904. His feast day is October 16. Today, he is a popular saint for mothers or those trying to become mothers. One mom, who prayed to Saint Gerard when doctors told her she wouldn't have any children, founded [a website](#) dedicated to him which also contains a novena and several prayers.



**Bonnie**

This contribution is available at <http://www.thekoalabearwriter.com/2015/03/saint-gerard-majella/>
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Will the Real Christians Please Stand Up? [at Through the Eyes of the Faithful]

Exactly where in there do we think we finally got it right? There are graphics like this all over the internet, but one of the most heartbreaking places I saw was on a former Christian turned Atheist's blog. He was using an image similar to this one to demonstrate our lack of unity and use it as an argument against Christianity. If that doesn't give us pause, nothing will.

Another question we must ponder here is this: if the Church had lost its way, as the reformers believed it had, and they were merely correcting flaws in Church teaching in order to restore them to the true teachings of Christ, **wouldn't it have stopped with them?** If a wrong turn was set right in the Reformation, wouldn't the divisions have ceased and Christianity continued on its now supposedly corrected path?

But it didn't stop, as we all know. Rather it was much more akin to a runaway train. The divisions continued on and on leaving anyone who disagreed with Church teaching free to reinvent the Faith as he saw fit. Finally today we are left with denominations who stand on opposite sides of even such polarizing moral issues as abortion. When we can argue both for and against an objective evil like abortion with both sides waving the Christian flag, how can we expect anyone to take us seriously?

Is unity the proper goal?

If what I said above doesn't convince you then let us turn, as we always should, to the Lord:

"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me." - John 17: 20-23

We can't read that and not recognize that our division breaks the Lord's heart. It's not an easy thing to face because to realize that our divisions are a problem is to realize that we have a *really big problem*. How many of you are cursing my name right now? Wouldn't it be so much easier to just tell ourselves that things are the way they are for a reason and they were that way long before we showed up so why try to change it? Certainly it would, but since when did God ever ask us to do what was easy? Brothers and sisters, we cannot stick our heads in the sand on this issue.

Where do we start?

Hopefully at this point you agree with me that division in Christianity is a bad thing. So if we decide that this is a problem, how do we go about fixing it? Where does one even start? I think as brothers and sisters in Christ we can all agree that we should all start on our knees. Let us all come to the Lord in prayer and seek His Truth rather than our own. Then let us do what all who have gone astray must: return to our roots. Go back to the beginning and look with a fresh pair of eyes. Read the writings of the Church fathers, those converted, taught and formed by the Apostles themselves and their immediate successors. Consider this:

"It is possible, then, for every Church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the Apostles which has been made known throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the Apostles, and their successors to our own times. But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the successions of all the Churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness or wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For with this Church, because of its superior origin, all Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition." - St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3, 3, 1-2, c. AD 190

These words of St. Irenaeus are taken from his series of volumes called Against Heresies which he was writing against Gnosticism. In this passage we can see how the early Church fathers recognized the authority of the Church in Rome and that other churches could look to her to evaluate the legitimacy of

their belief and worship. Now this:

"The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although she is disseminated throughout the whole world, yet guarded it, as if she occupied but one house. She likewise believes these things 'just as if she had but one soul and one and the same heart and harmoniously she proclaims them and teaches them and hands them down, as if she possessed but one mouth. For, while the languages of the world are diverse, nevertheless, the authority of the Tradition are one and the same.'" - St.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 1, 10, 2

One soul, one heart, one mouth? Does that sound like Christianity today? It surely does not, but it should and I dare believe it can.

These quotes and many more can be found in . In it, Marcus Grodi, former Protestant Minister, talks about the writings of the early Church fathers and how they helped lead him to Catholicism.

Falling Dominoes

You can hardly turn on the news these days without hearing about yet another denomination of Christianity changing its stance on some moral issue such as marriage or abortion. I can hardly go a day as a Catholic without hearing how my Church needs to get with the times. But please, for the love of all that is holy, can we stop and think about this logically? Does God change? Does the Truth change? If we believe in God, and we believe that we are His people blessed with Truth in His word, then we should not be looking to change with the times and we should not be attempting to *correct* God. All around us the dominoes are falling, all except the Catholic Church. Whatever the media might like us to believe about Pope Francis and a new progressive Church, we haven't changed, and we aren't going to. And the reason we aren't going to is simple: we don't think we can improve on the teachings of Christ.

Conclusion

It is my sincere hope that you haven't reached the end of this post thinking it was a shameless pitch for Catholicism. I would be lying if I said I didn't think that the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ, established by our Lord Himself. Of course I think it's the "right" Church. What would I be doing in it if I didn't? What are you doing at your Church if you don't believe its teachings are the true teachings of Christ, right?

Now am I expecting all of you to sign up for RCIA after reading this? Of course not. Will I think you less of a Christian if you don't run out and by the complete works of the early Church fathers? Oh please, let's not set a standard like that or I'm doomed. But I do hope that you are encouraged to do some reading, some watching, some listening. Whatever kind of Christian you decide to be, just don't be an apathetic one. Don't choose your church like a flavor at Baskin Robbins. Study, discern, *think*. Learn about your faith. Learn the reasons behind it. Learn the history behind it. Isn't it worth at least that much?

For anyone who would like to learn more about Catholicism I will post several resources below and you can always feel free to leave questions in the comments or contact me directly. Certainly, there is so much more to say on this topic so if there are specific issues you would like to see addressed in future posts I want to hear from you! I'll leave you with these wise words:

"There are not more than 100 people in the world who truly hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they perceive to be the Catholic Church."

- Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Until next time, may God bless you.

Resources:

[Marcus Grodi's The Coming Home Network](#): a tremendous amount of articles, videos, blog, and you name it for anyone wanting to learn more about the Catholic Faith. There is also a forum and online community.

[EWTN](#): Started by a nun, this is a Catholic television network, plus Catholic radio. You can watch free online, find a radio station(they're also on iHeart Radio), read articles, ask questions, or even buy a rosary(in case I've really convinced you).

[Word on Fire](#): This is Father Robert Barron's ministry. You can purchase any of his books or DVD series here or just read and watch video commentary until all your burning questions are answered.

[Ignatius Press](#): a Catholic publisher featuring books, videos, music, art, and now streaming video

[Lighthouse Catholic Media](#): books, videos, and cds to help you learn about the faith. I especially enjoy their cds because, let's face it, we don't always have time to sit and read.

This contribution is available at <http://eyesofthefaithful.blogspot.com/2015/03/will-real-christians-please-stand-up.html>
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The Greatest New Baby Announcement of them All! [at Veils and Vocations]

The Angel of the LORD declared unto Mary

And she conceived by the Holy Spirit



Thus begins the Angelus, one of my Lenten devotions this year. Can you imagine the joy that Mary felt, despite any concerns she had about being a young mother? I can remember when we discovered each of our pregnancies. The joy, nervousness, excitement, awe. They were each a gift, even those that we had to bid goodbye too soon. The moment of learning of a new little being waiting to be born, is indescribable. Throughout Lent, I have pondered how much more those emotions would be if an angel of the LORD had delivered the news.

Tomorrow is the Feast of the Annunciation. It is only nine months until Christmas, but those original nine months changed the course of history forever. How fitting that in the midst of Lent, while we wait in the desert, we receive the best gift--a royal baby announcement, the heralding of the long awaited Son of God. Our entire salvation is wrapped up and handed to us through Mary's fiat, her yes, her submission to the almighty. Without her acceptance, Easter would never be. She gave her whole self so that God could give all He had--His Son--and welcome us into the Kingdom.

In the coming weeks, I am going to run a series on the Works of Mercy and how we can incorporate them into our daily life, as a sort of baby shower present to our Blessed Mother. She gave her life, so that Christ could give His. In thanks, let us find some ways to give more of ourselves for the least of these.

God bless!

This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-greatest-new-baby-announcement-of.html>
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The Saint Who Was Stolen Twice [at Justin's Corner]



Today is the feast of Saint Patrick (c. 381--456), the legendary Apostle of Ireland and one of the world's best-known Catholic saints. He is right up there with Saint Nicolas in terms of the traditional legends and folklore surrounding his life, the permanence of his impact on Christian culture, and the ubiquity of his popularity among the general public. In fact, as with Saint Nicolas, the legends and culture that have grown up around Saint Patrick sometimes tend to obscure the actual historical facts of his life.

Patrick was not native to Ireland, nor was he even of Irish ancestry. He was born to Scottish parents in pagan Britain, which was part of the declining Roman Empire. At the age of sixteen, he was captured by Irish pirates and sold into slavery in predominantly pagan Ireland, where he worked as a shepherd in captivity for six years. During this period, he underwent a profound change of life and converted to Christianity. He escaped back to Britain, where he heard God calling him to bring the true faith to the Irish people. He was ordained a priest and consecrated a bishop, and then returned to Ireland as a missionary. So we can really say that the Irish stole Patrick twice--first they stole his freedom, and then they stole his heart.

For the next thirty years, Patrick labored unceasingly, often amid great difficulties, to establish the Catholic Church in his adopted country by preaching and teaching, baptizing, ordaining priests and bishops, and founding churches. He was a man of deep faith, profound humility, constant prayer, and great penance to whom God gave the gift of working miracles. According to Fr. Albert J. Hebert, whose research is confined to reliable sources, Saint Patrick raised thirty-three people from the dead during his lifetime. By the time of his death, more than half of Ireland was Catholic. The scope of his monumental achievement is still remarkable today. Saint Patrick built some 700 churches, ordained 5,000 priests, and consecrated 350 bishops. He laid the foundation for Irish Catholicism so well that Ireland has remained a Catholic country for some 1,600 years--more than a millennium and a half. Although today the Emerald Isle is under attack by the forces of radical secularism, pockets of devout Irish Catholics ensure that the true faith will continue to live on in this great country for the foreseeable future.

Saint Patrick was truly one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church. It is plainly obvious that Divine Providence raised him up at that particular time and place to convert Ireland to the Catholic faith. A great saint like this should make us all proud to be Catholic. Yet he is just one of the best known of hundreds and hundreds of saints throughout the 2,000-year history of the Church. It is worth taking time to read at least part of the saint's own autobiography, the

[*Confession of Saint Patrick*](#),

which has survived to our own day and which offers an unforgettable glimpse into the soul of this great man. I have just been blessed to stumble upon this forgotten classic of ancient Christian literature, which deserves to be rediscovered.

Saint Patrick, pray for us!

A happy Saint Patrick's Day to everyone!

This contribution is available at <http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-saint-who-was-stolen-twice.html>
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50 Ways to Celebrate the 50 Days of Easter with your Children [at Children of The Church]



*50 Ways to
Celebrate
the 50
Days of
Easter
With Your
Children*

<http://childrenofthechurch.blogspot.com>

Easter is not just one day within the Catholic Church but instead an entire season! We celebrate Easter for 50 days from Easter Sunday all of the way to Pentecost (the birthday of the Catholic Church)! Here are 50 ways to celebrate the 50 days of Easter with your Family. You do not need to do them in this order or even do them all, but pick a few favorites and have a blessed Easter season!

1. Make a [Paschal candle](#) and light it in your home during prayer time, meal time or even every Sunday during the Easter Season.
2. Display "[Alleluia](#)" somewhere prominently in your home to acknowledge praising God for Jesus's Resurrection!
3. Complete an Easter Calendar where you can follow and count the 50 days of Easter, like the [Garden of the Good Shepard](#) calendar.
4. Continue praying the [Divine Mercy Novena and Chaplet](#) (that starts on Good Friday) leading up to Divine Mercy Sunday!
5. Display a [Resurrection Set](#) in your home
6. Celebrate [Divine Mercy Sunday](#) the Sunday after Easter with a [Divine Mercy Sunday Sundae](#)!
7. Have an Easter Egg Hunt AFTER Easter Sunday.
8. Write a thank you card to your priest for all of the extra hard work that they did during Holy Week and Lent.
9. Fold your palm leaves from Palm Sunday into a [Palm Cross](#) and display them in your home.
10. Watch [The Easter Story](#) with your family!
11. Choose one [Lenten Resolution](#) that you could carryout into your daily life throughout the rest of the Liturgical Year.
12. Make [Resurrection Peg Dolls](#)!
13. Attend a Baptism of a friend or member of your parish.
14. Make [Easter Story Cookies](#)
15. Decorate with white and gold the colors of Easter and bring special flowers like lilies into your home or garden!
16. Make [Garden Stones](#) with all of the Sins that Pave the Way on your Hill of Calvary.

17. Use Holy Water in your home and get maybe even get a special new [Holy Water Font](#) to display in a special location
18. Learn a new prayer for your family to say during prayer time.
19. Include the [Easter Story in Learning Fun](#) for your Children.
20. Drape your crucifixes in your home with a strip of white cloth
21. Make an [Easter Sun Catcher Craft](#) to display on your window
22. Read a [special book about St. John Paul II](#) who had a special devotion to Divine Mercy Sunday.
23. Have a family game night playing [Easter Bingo!](#)
24. Incorporate a [family rosary into your prayer life](#) once a week, once a month or something that works well for your family!
25. Do a fun family activity each Sunday (or pick a special day of the week to do something out of the ordinary!)
26. Learn about the life, miracles and parables of Jesus with the [Parable Pouch](#).
27. Have Fun with Play Dough and this [Easter Play Dough Set](#)
28. Go to Confession or if younger start learning the Act of Contrition.
29. Go on an [Easter Nature Study or Scavenger Hunt](#)
30. Make [Joyful Noise Easter Egg Maracas](#) with left over plastic Easter Eggs and listen to [Making Music Praying Twice Easter CD](#)
31. Learn about a new saint during the Easter Season like St George on April 23rd or St. Gianna Beretta Molla on April 28th! Have a [Saint Playdate!](#)
32. Make a Jelly Bean Jar ([use your sacrifice bean jar](#) if you used one during Lent) and allow your children to earn a Jelly Bean with each act of service or kindness that they show!
33. Incorporate a new Easter story into read aloud or bedtime story time with your children like [The Tale of Three Trees](#).
34. Listen to Easter Music throughout the season like [Easter at Ephesus](#)
35. Memorize a new Bible Verse about the Easter Story
36. Go to Adoration as a family
37. Have a family picnic and enjoy the beauty of new life during Springtime
38. Pray for a member of your church who was received into the Church at the Easter Vigil mass, or invite them over for dinner!
39. Make a [Resurrection Garden](#)
40. Do a fun science experiment making [Crystal Easter Eggs](#)
41. Act out the Easter story with [Peg Dolls](#) or other characters!
42. Create a [Marian Garden](#) in the month of May to honor Mary.
43. Celebrate the [Ascension of Our Lord](#) (40 days after Easter Sunday)!
44. Make an [Ascension of Jesus Craft](#) with your Children
45. Pray the [Novena to the Holy Spirit](#)
46. Learn the 9 fruits of the Holy Spirit with a great [craft!](#)
47. Add red to your Easter decorations to celebrate Pentecost.
48. Have a [Pentecost Bonfire](#) with your family!
49. Make a [Pentecost Cake](#) to celebrate the birthday of the Catholic Church
50. Celebrate and thank God for the beautiful season of Easter and the gift of the Resurrection!

Thoughts on the Good and Bad of Catholic Blogging [at Arnobius of Sicca]

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way... (*A Tale of Two Cities*)

Introduction

Nowadays, the Church is of interest to the media. Unfortunately, they are generally uninformed about our Catholic Faith, and as a result when the Church fathers meet to discuss how the Church should approach an issue, the standard approach is to break it down into “good guys” who support what they approve and “bad guys” who oppose it. (*The Rhine Flows into the Tiber* shows how that sort of thing happened). Because they generally are religiously illiterate, and approach a council or synod as if it was a political debate, their attempts at research tends towards looking up what individual Catholics are writing or saying and use them as representatives of the whole Catholic thinking.

The problem with communications as they advance is it becomes easier and easier for *anybody* to spread their opinions wide and influence people. In 2007, I began a blog which has reached more people during the past seven years than I could have hoped to reach by writing, say, twenty years before. I hope that was a good thing, not a bad thing. But the point is, the individual Catholic can write about the faith as they see it and influence others for better or worse.

The Best of Times, The Worst of Times

I would say this is for good when Catholics use this medium to help people understand the faith and live better in accord with it, to be aware of what is going on in the world and how the Church understands it. During my years I have seen many praiseworthy blogs, dedicated to apologetics or family life—helping people seek to live their lives closer to what God has called them (for example, blogs about Catholic parenting) or is calling them to be (such as blogs promoting the religious life or the married vocation). Such blogs can let us know of things to pray about or work for/against in order to spread the faith. They can help us respond to challenges to our faith, and even convince us to abandon views incompatible with our faith.

But (and you *knew* there was going to be a “but” here), Catholic blogging can be a *very bad thing* when it turns the Catholic faith or a teaching of the Catholic faith into a platform for a rant, or into a partisan dispute where people who disagree with one’s preferences become villains, and there is no sign of Christian charity for the person who disagrees. Even the priest, bishop or Pope is not safe from their judgment, if they do not handle things in the way that the partisan blogger would like. Under such a viewpoint, the Church is broken into heroes and knaves based entirely on how they see the Church in relation to what they *think* should be done. There’s no room for considering whether there is another way of handling things that is still in keeping with the Catholic faith.

A Little Knowledge is Dangerous

What makes this kind of behavior worse is that so much of it is uninformed. The reaction is not merely uncharitable, but sometimes it relies on a personal interpretation of Church documents from a past age, with no consideration as to how the Church teaching has developed between the time of the document referred to and the Papal statement they object to. So, for example, they contrast St. Cyprian's "no salvation outside of the Church" with the Vatican II statements on non-Catholics or non-Christians, alleging that this is proof of heresy—but ignore Pope Pius IX or Pope Pius XII explicitly rejecting the concept that a person not a formal member of the Catholic Church is going to hell.

Another aspect of this is the assumption that because the reaction by the Magisterium is not public, the magisterium is doing nothing. In logic, that's the *argument from silence* fallacy. If a Pope or Bishop or Pastor chooses to deal privately with a Catholic behaving badly, rather than publicly denounce them, that is a pastoral issue. Sure, it is a legitimate problem when an issue is ignored. But often the Church spends time dialoguing with people in error, with the aim of bringing them back into the Church, rather than have them harden their hearts in dissent.

For example, when it comes to concern that "the bishops aren't doing anything," how many people know that Canon Law actually stipulates when public action can take place:

can. 1341† An ordinary is to take care to initiate a judicial or administrative process to impose or declare penalties only after he has ascertained that fraternal correction or rebuke or other means of pastoral solicitude cannot sufficiently repair the scandal, restore justice, reform the offender.

Now I have no doubt that a bishop can be too lenient, just as he can be too harsh. But when you see this, it becomes clear that we cannot assume from a lack of *visible* action that a bishop has no intention to act at all.

Love and Respect is Required

Even if someone in authority is wrong, that does not give a blogger to just tear into him. Charity is required and charity is all too often lacking. St. Thomas Aquinas writes in the *Summa Theologica* (II-II Q33. A4) about how one may correct a superior. He utterly rejects the idea of public challenges and rudeness in doing so. I offer this for consideration:

I answer that, A subject is not competent to administer to his prelate the correction which is an act of justice through the coercive nature of punishment: but the fraternal correction which is an act of charity is within the competency of everyone in respect of any person towards whom he is bound by charity, provided there be something in that person which requires correction.

Now an act which proceeds from a habit or power extends to whatever is contained under the object of that power or habit: thus vision extends to all things comprised in the object of sight. Since, however, a virtuous act needs to be moderated by due circumstances, it follows that when a subject corrects his prelate, he ought to do so in a becoming manner, not with impudence and harshness, but with gentleness and respect. Hence the Apostle says (1 Tim. 5:1): *An ancient man rebuke not, but entreat him as a father.* Wherefore Dionysius finds fault with the monk Demophilus (*Ep. viii.*), for

rebuking a priest with insolence, by striking and turning him out of the church.

Reply Obj. 1. It would seem that a subject touches his prelate inordinately when he upbraids him with insolence, as also when he speaks ill of him: and this is signified by God's condemnation of those who touched the mount and the ark.

Reply Obj. 2. To withstand anyone in public exceeds the mode of fraternal correction, and so Paul would not have withstood Peter then, unless he were in some way his equal as regards the defence of the faith. But one who is not an equal can reprove privately and respectfully. Hence the Apostle in writing to the Colossians (4:17) tells them to admonish their prelate: *Say to Archippus: Fulfil thy ministry.* It must be observed, however, that if the faith were endangered, a subject ought to rebuke his prelate even publicly. Hence Paul, who was Peter's subject, rebuked him in public, on account of the imminent danger of scandal concerning faith, and, as the gloss of Augustine says on Gal. 2:11, *Peter gave an example to superiors, that if at any time they should happen to stray from the straight path, they should not disdain to be reprov'd by their subjects.*

Reply Obj. 3. To presume oneself to be simply better than one's prelate, would seem to savour of presumptuous pride; but there is no presumption in thinking oneself better in some respect, because, in this life, no man is without some fault. We must also remember that when a man reproves his prelate charitably, it does not follow that he thinks himself any better, but merely that he offers his help to one who, *being in the higher position among you, is therefore in greater danger*, as Augustine observes in his Rule quoted above.

Indeed, in Article 7 of the same question, he also writes "*Therefore it is evident that the precept requires a secret admonition to precede public denunciation.*" How often does this happen? Not often—and I fear that the Catholic blogosphere can be one of the biggest transgressors here. Moreover, when we assume our superiority to the bishop being "corrected," and act like we have the right to criticize him, we are usurpers. We don't have that right to behave with public rudeness—even if he *should* turn out to do wrong.

Presumption of Superiority and Lack of Love

St. Paul wrote about love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, and it is a good thing to consider:

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, ⁵ it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, ⁶ it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I believe that when we start from a position of believing we are superior to the priest, bishop or Pope in our knowledge and holiness, we are starting from a position of arrogance and have no love for the person we believe should be corrected. We simply look at such a case as if we were vanquishing an infidel or as

if we thought we were the only ones defended by the Holy Spirit from error.

The other side of the coin to the presumption of our own superiority is the presumption of the other person's inferiority. When we assume we know more than the bishop or the Pope, we are assuming that they are inferior to us in holiness about the knowledge of the faith. Such behavior can reach the level of rash judgment where a person refuses to consider good intentions on the part of the person judged.

We can only avoid this sin by remembering that we are to love those tasked with shepherding us, even if they sometimes act in a way that doesn't make them particularly *likable*.

I think this can only be done if we remember to pray for the person we are concerned with—not pray for in the sense of “Oh Lord, please make this bishop stop being an idiot,” but in the sense of “Lord, bless him and guide him that he may shepherd his diocese well and lead us as he is called to do.” Asking for his good, not for his deposition, will transform us as well as him.

Conclusion: Without Love Our Blogs Are A Clashing Cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1)

I think this is why I am so ultimately troubled by the Catholic blogosphere—the lack of love for those we disagree with or those we believe to be behaving wrongly. People are going to look at our blogs, and they are probably going to judge the Church by their antics. If they don't see the love in our actions, if they instead see us tearing each other to pieces, they'll look at us as yet one more conservative or liberal group (depending on their outlook) to be written off. I think the problem we have to face is that we have sometimes gotten so focussed on looking on those who act differently as an enemy instead of someone to be reached out to in love that we think of our mission as “vanquishing the foe,” instead of “winning over our brother” (Matthew 18:15).

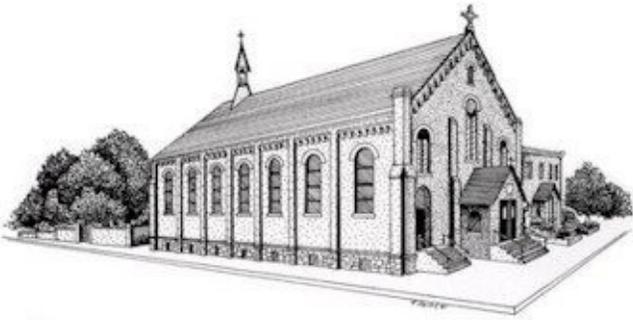
Every person who reads this must consider for themselves whether they need to change and, if so, to what extent. That includes me of course. There needs to be a constant evaluation of conscience by each blogger, eliminating what we perceive to be against what God calls us to be.

Ultimately, I think this is a matter of learning to let go, love those we fear are doing wrong, and trust that God is looking after His Church and will not allow it to fall in ruin. As Pope emeritus Benedict XVI said in *The Ratzinger Report*, we need to remember that it is God's Church, not ours. If we can have faith in God, we can learn to trust that what happens to the Church will not lead to her ruin and it may make us more open to hear what God calls us to do.

I would like to conclude by asking us to reflect on St. Francis of Assisi. He was called by God in a time when the Church was in need of reform. St. Francis answered that call—but he did so with love for the Church, and obedience to the Pope and the Bishop. Let us seek to emulate him—especially if one believes the Church is falling into ruin.

This contribution is available at <http://arnobius-of-sicca.blogspot.com/2015/03/thoughts-on-good-and-bad-of-catholic.html>
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I've been a musician and singer in church since I was 15. Suffice to say that I've been at it for more than 2/3 of my life, even without counting the part where I was a cantor for the responsorial psalm and prayer of the faithful in middle school.



The very first church where I participated as a music minister: St. Bonaventure in Paterson, NJ.

I've never been afraid to lift up my voice and sing in church. Now, I'm by no means a solo-quality singer, but I'm happy to blend in with a group (and ecstatic if I get to sing the harmony part.) So even if I'm in the pew instead of in the choir or ensemble, I'm going to sing.

It's been my pleasure and privilege, for thirty-*mumble* years, to sing and play in quite a number of folk groups, choirs and ensembles. I've seen (and heard) the good, the bad, and the ugly—both while playing and singing and while sitting as part of the assembly.

[Jane the Actuary at Patheos Catholic](#) wonders how to get people in the assembly to participate by singing. It's simple, really. In my experience, people will sing unless they are discouraged from doing so.

How can choirs and musicians show that they don't want the assembly to sing?

- Play the song in a key that's out of reach for all except the deepest bass or highest soprano
- Don't announce the number of the song in the hymnal
- Announce the number of the song, but tell the congregation that they're invited to sing during the refrain only
- Choose music that is not in the hymnal
- Sing the hymn in a language other than what's in the hymnal or spoken in the community (Latin being the exception here)
- Use a different arrangement of a familiar hymn
- Sing familiar hymns whose words have been changed by politically-correct hymnal publishers
- Sing the hymn in madrigal style so that the assembly can't find the melody
- Don't provide a hymnal or worship aid, or leave all the hymnals stacked on the outer edges of 12-seat pews, so that people who forget to grab one on their way to sit down never get one later
- Sing with so much technical perfection that you intimidate everyone in the pews

I have seen *all* of these happen in my long tenure as a musician. And there's no excuse for any of them.

Finally, this is the story of the Music Director Who Caused a Mutiny. During my junior year in college, the music department hired a graduate student to direct the folk group. The position was usually a volunteer one, held by an undergrad music student in the folk group—but they all graduated. We learned a lot of new music that year, which is always good, but most of it wasn't in the hymnal, which is usually bad. When we spoke up to the director about the probability that people in the pews would be discouraged from singing, her response was, “You're performing for God.”

Well, no. **We were *not* performing for God.** We weren't performing for Father, either, nor for the congregation. We were there to lead people in sung prayer, not to put on a show for anyone (even God.)

Our director only showed up at one of the two Masses the folk group played. My friends and I took turns leading the music at the other Mass, and if music that wasn't in the hymnal was chosen, we'd replace it during the Mass when we were on our own.

When our parish merged with a neighboring one in 2008, we were told that people at the other church didn't sing. Indeed, many of them expressed surprise at the level of participation in our original parish. But guess what? It's gotten better! With encouragement, people **will** sing. Even if they're Catholic.

Image source: [St. Bonaventure Parish Facebook page](#)

This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2015/03/03/welcome-to-sing/>
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Meatless Holy Week... [at Our Home... Under Mary's Mantle]

“Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things pass. God does not change. Patience achieves everything. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.” — St. Teresa of Avila

Hi All,

Marque has been traveling a lot during Lent, and we decided we hadn't done enough “as a family” to keep Lent at the forefront. If I am being honest, we just haven't done enough. Life is busy in the Spring, and it is way too easy in our modern culture, to put God and our Faith aside.

It's as if we know He will be there and won't mind. The first part is true, but I believe He does mind. We must keep our Lord's Suffering Alive as a reminder – always in our Hearts.

Sure, my son hates it when I say, “Our Lord suffered for hours on the cross, you can sit still for 45 minutes!” We know these things, yet we forget to act them out. You know?

Anyway... my point of this whole post is that we have decided to have a meatless Holy Week. This is NOT easy for our meat-loving family, so I know it is the right thing. To help, we stopped by Costco and got some fantastic and fun meatless options.

Here is our basic menu plan.

Breakfast Menu: Cereal, Fruit, Yogurt, Eggs, Muffins

Lunch Menu: Meatless Soup, Sandwiches – egg salad or tuna, smoothies, shrimp rice bowls, hummus & pretzel packs.

Dinner Menu:

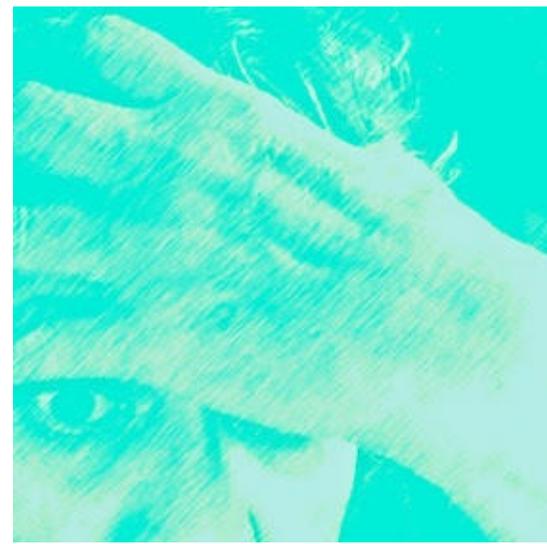
- Sunday – Grilled Salmon & Veggies
- Monday – Pollock Patty Burgers & Salads (Costco)
- Tuesday – Leftovers or Egg Sandwich (baseball practice night)
- Wednesday – Lobster Bisque Soup (Costco)
- Thursday – Fish, Rice & Veggies (baseball practice night)
- Friday – Cheese pizza and salad
- Saturday – Grilled fish & veggies

I am so thankful to serve our precious Lord. He keeps us humble and on the right track.

I hope you enjoy your week and be blessed.

Emily

Lent is almost over... I failed at all of my Lenten practices... [at His UnEnding Love]



In the past,
I would have been so stressed.
I would have beaten myself up
because
I failed.

I did not give to God
what I had hoped to give Him,
and
that was a Lent of
adoration, prayer, almsgiving
and
sacrifice.

But ***God is good.***

He knew I needed to learn some things,

and,

trust me,

He taught me.

One of the first lessons I learned was that,

this was not about me.

Yes, I had good intentions.

Yes, I wanted to succeed,

but the problem was that there simply was too much

ME

and not enough

God.

What I had chosen to do was not for

HIM

but all for me.

I also learned that the root cause of my sinful life has been a
stronghold.

That stronghold is my

PAST.

I have embraced the hurt and pain I felt,

and used it as a reason to sin.

Yes,

I did hurt greatly at one time in my life,

but my sins stem from that.

Not letting go of the pain and grief has hurt me far more than it ever helped.

I also learned,

and this amazed me,

that

I REALLY DO LOVE GOD!

I didn't think I did,

but now I know,

I DO!

I also learned,

and this amazed me, again,

NO MATTER WHAT,

NO MATTER WHERE,

GOD

LOVES

ME

AND HE IS WITH ME UNTIL THE END OF TIME.

The most important thing I learned this season is that life is about

LOVE.

GOD IS LOVE!



"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

John 15:13

And at the Easter Vigil, we will be reminded of this again.

Praise to You Lord, Jesus Christ, King of Endless Glory!

This contribution is available at <http://hisunendinglov.blogspot.com/2015/03/lent-is-almost-over-i-failed-at-all-of.html>
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The Problem of the Spirit [at Travels of a New Christian]



Worrying about evil is, quite frankly, small potatoes in comparison to a much greater human condition that plagues the vast majority of mankind; the absence of any consciousness of the spirit.

We pursue a path of consciousness that solely imbues our intellect and passions as the arbiters of our existence, and in extension, that of God's existence. We actually believe that what we cannot rationalize, at this moment, therefore does not exist, and man's history has consistently demonstrated this demoralizing condition.

Let's look at the Bible for a moment. There is an argument – a position on God's existence – that takes on the rationalization that if the Bible is errant in its assertions or circumstances, then God must not exist. I have to ask the question, "Why?". Critics, for purposes of convenience and certain lack of awareness of spiritual matters, equate what they can see with their eyes and then perceive from paper pages with ink imprints, as somehow possessing some form of power that dictates over God and not under God.

Man believes his intellect and passions should be the sole arbiters of truth. My simple argument against that is man's history. Such a consideration is obviously not true given the results, and to assert that it is our intellect and our passions that has at least gotten us this far, well that I would agree with you. We have obviously put performance aside.

This is all done with the permission of a lack of any consideration that there might be some things unknown that carry more weight than one's own perceptions and reactions. This reminds me of the panic that strangers might have on a rapidly sinking ship; clawing at anything – buoy or anvil – that might retain their lives but for a moment longer. Little is the consideration that God might be a tad more omnipotent than paper pages and ink, and practically no one seems to accept the idea that God exceeds all understanding by the human intellect on all levels. We just continually want to place boundaries; limits to God's overall presence, and control over, the metatheory of all metaphysics. We have to, because without such a rational, the average person would go insane for lack of the only real way to understanding God and His creation; through the spirit. This is The Way that Jesus does talk about, and we so aptly ignore.

The problem of the spirit lies in the fact that what is right there within us physically, and entwined in our consciousness and conscience, is an immaterial presence capable of providing all of the answers to good

and to evil, to being and non-being. That spirit within each one of us is that singular essence that cannot be altered, but it can be diluted. It is right there and we have continual access to it. The problem is that we do not recognize it for what it is. The manner in which our spirit works is seen by us as but a set of behaviors, and as such, we dispense with it as simple human choice; free will. Our spirit is there with the answer, yet we see it as a choice. In so doing, any real, continuing benefit our spirit might provide us is lost in the milieu of other decisions or lack thereof. It is only in our passions that we want to reach out to the spirit for relief, and so we associate the expression of our passions as being of the spirit. Wrong, and so deadly to so many.

St. Paul once wrote:

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ – whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

I applaud Paul for recognizing that, while it would be a fatal blow to Christians if the Christ has not been raised from the dead, it held no logic that God therefore does not exist, but this is exactly how so many of us see the argument. And since one might not comprehend what would clearly be a miracle to a physical human – reanimation of flesh, intellect, and passion – the extraction from such thinking is that what might cause a miracle could not exist either. Tell me, is not the existence of anything a miracle? Just because we can dissect it, does that somehow reduce its miraculous nature? Just because we can awake each morning to it, and it is still there for us, that we should take it for granted and thus less than miraculous? Do you really think everything is that pitiful, that paltry, that meaningless, and that useless? Is that the summation on your tombstone, on earth's, on the universe's? Paul was a Jew first, then a Christian. He was lucky.

I noted earlier that our spirit is entwined within our consciousness and conscience. I want to say a little more on that matter. I said that our spirit can be diluted. What I mean is that when we intellectualize – use reason to excess – and when we rapture ourselves in our passions to excess, we diminish the light that the Christ references. We dilute its efficacy; leaving us to reason that it is indeed our intellect and our passions that will see us through life's path. We literally fear too great our loneliness – one solely brought about by rejecting the spirit within – and thus bargain our existence with the real devil – our intellect and passions – rather than with God. This is the “fallen” man.

God Bless – Reese

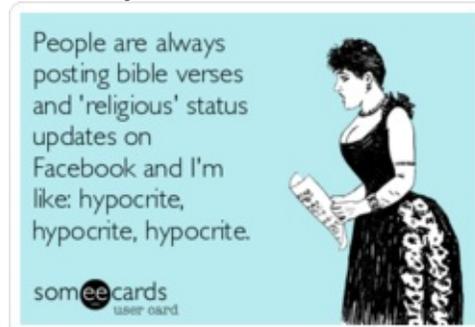
This contribution is available at <http://travelssofarnewchristian.com/2015/03/15/the-problem-of-the-spirit/>
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Hypocrisy may be among the easiest charges any American can let fly at another... [at Brutally Honest]

Hypocrisy is the charge frequently claimed to be the reason why many decide to abandon regular Church attendance or to abandon organized religion altogether. Or more pointedly, to belittle those in the faith who make mistakes or don't live up to perceived standards.

What follows from [Vic Biorseth](#), though dated, is a good related read:

Hypocrisy may be among the easiest charges any American can let fly at another, and get away with it, even when the charge is untrue. For many, hypocrisy has become the replacement red-letter for sin. It is deemed, in many circles, that actual sin is less sinful than the supposed



“hypocrisy” of those who condemn sin, and yet still sin. If you look around you will see that this is true on many levels, and that quite frequently the person who calls someone else, or some other group hypocritical is frequently a fairly serious sinner of some sort, but who seeks to gain a higher, elitist, arrogant and condescending position over whomever he is calling hypocritical.

Regular church goers, for instance, are considered by some non-church goers to be hypocrites, because they go to church regularly, and yet their human imperfections remain visible to their accusers. “At least I don't pretend to be a good Christian” say this level of the masters of hypocrisy. Another way of saying that same sentence is “I am not a good Christian, and the ones who go to church are not much better.” Who's the real hypocrite here? Would it not be more honest to simply say “I am no Christian and I ignore Christian rules of conduct.?” But, you see, it sounds better, and it feels better, to lower others in the estimation of the world, and thus raise yourself in the estimation of the world.

At another level, among the newer Protestant “denominations” of Christianity are those that like to call themselves non-denominational. Some Christians even go so far as to loudly proclaim themselves to be “non-church affiliated,” as if that were a good thing to be. What it actually means is that these “Christians” are not going to be bound by any rules established by any church, and therefore, they can make up their own moral code of conduct. Or, even worse, each “member” makes up his own personal morality. It's very easy to live within the rules when you are the one who makes them up.

...

So a self-interested morality is a short-term, purely survival-mode guide for an individual. But

man is a social animal, and if he wants a better long-term morality for something more than temporary survival, then he needs a non-self-centered set of rules of conduct, if he wants to ever get out of survival mode and prosper. And this is just discussing the worldly necessity for rules that originate outside of ourselves. There is still the immortal soul to consider.

What about God?

Look at history for the story of what happened whenever Western man abandoned God and His law, and what the consequences were. What is often most irksome to me is how many detractors of Christianity refer to how Christianity, or, Christian Society, committed the many atrocities of the 20th century. But the perpetrators were not Christians; they were Marxists, and atheists. They rejected Jesus Christ, and God, and religion in general. Mussolini. Hitler. Stalin. These were certainly among the greatest mass-murderers and brutal conquerors in all of history. They were no Christians, they were atheists; - they rejected Christianity and turned away from it. And we can still see the results.

Is it time for you to come back to church, or are you perfect? Maybe all those church-goers aren't perfect, but then, maybe they go to church regularly in the effort to become more perfect. In becoming more perfect, maybe they help our culture to become more perfect. Where are you in all of this? How do you view the rest of us? And, most importantly –

... what about God?

It's imperative that we who publicly profess faith in God [strive to*] live lives that withstand scrutiny but it's as necessary to acknowledge that our sinful natures will inevitably lead to occasionally falling short.

Those who are quick to judge our hypocrisy should, upon further reflection and deeper thought, see how convenient it is to use those faults as excuses from seeing, and perhaps more importantly, dealing, with their own shortcomings.

God's mercy on all of us.

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2015/03/hypocrisy-may-be-among-the-easiest-charges-any-american-can-let-fly-at-another.html

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I Am Just An Average Girl [at The Veil of Chastity]

[In my last post](#), I encouraged those of you participating in on-line dating to allow for mystery, risk and conquest. I shared how to manage your ‘online footprint’ in order to find out which guys are willing to **slay dragons** for you. I recommended that you **think** like a guy (mystery, risk, conquest) but behave like a girl. Let’s review.

Behave Like A Girl

Here are some ways to allow for the mystery, risk and conquest in the online dating world:

1. If you get the matchy-match notice from the dreaded algorithm.....ignore it. Realize that it is the algorithm contacting you and not a real man.
2. Only communicate with men who are brave and resourceful enough to contact you first. The fact that he reaches out to contact you is a very good sign.
3. Do not view any profiles until the guy contacts you. Then, you may check him out. This will prevent any [Fantasy Relationships](#) taking place in your head.

I also anticipated a protest from you because, inside your head, there may be a belief that **you** have to be the one who is brave and resourceful. Your ‘take charge’ attributes have benefited you in other areas of your life so why not apply these gifts to your **love** life? It is easy to think that you have to **compete** to get the love you need. And, there is a voice inside your head that says, *“I have to make it happen or else it will never happen naturally for me. I am just an **average** girl.”*

An Average Girl

The world puts an awful lot of pressure on us to be a certain way and most of us will never meet those standards. Shiny hair, flawless skin, a perfect smile and a strong, smooth body only belong to a few and because of this, the rest of us think of ourselves as ‘average.’

Do you know what I find to be interesting? If you look around, these, what the world would describe as ‘average’, girls get married all the time. Why is this?

Attraction

I am convinced that in order for a man to pursue a girl, he needs to be physically attracted to her. So, in the online dating world, a guy most likely looks at your photo first and then reads your profile. If there is an interest, he pursues. This might sound like a bad thing if you are an average girl like me.....unless you understand something ~ attraction is dependent upon the eye of the beholder.

You might be thinking, *“That’s your big revelation? I knew that!”* Yes, you do know it. What you may not believe is that there is a beholder who will be specifically attracted to you. Your doubt is normal. But, this ‘eye of the beholder’ concept is the basis for my [Veil](#) and [Superabundance](#) Theories.

Whether your beloved beholder ever shows up is the question we all struggle with (see section below). My point is, he needs to be attracted to you and you want him to be attracted to you. Give him the

opportunity to decide this in his head, heart and soul. Give him the opportunity to decide to pursue you without feeling pressured because you contacted him first. In fact, those of us who are average girls benefit even more by letting him decide these things in advance because the question of attraction in the beholder's eye is already answered with a 'yes!'.

*Beauty lies in the
eye of the
beholder.
- Plato*

He Decides, I Pick

When I was single, I made the decision to let the men come to me. Let them decide to pursue me and then I would pick from that pool of candidates. The biggest benefit I experienced was that the question of “*Is he attracted to me?*” had already been answered and I could proceed with confidence rather than feeling that I had to be perfect.

You see, I didn't have the 'power' that those 'perfect by the world's standards' girls seem to have and therefore I decided to wait for a natural kind of empowerment. The kind of empowerment that comes from knowing that you are being pursued.

Will He Show Up?

I don't know if your beloved beholder will show up. In the same way, I did not know that Gregg would show up. But, making the decision to let my hoped-for beloved beholder come to me naturally **or not at all** resulted in a type of empowerment that is hard to describe. I knew what I needed and I **gave myself permission** to want it, **even if it meant not ever having it**. Does that make sense?

Described another way, it was important to me that I not ever wonder if my husband is attracted to me. I refused to put myself at such a disadvantage.....and this was empowering. But, I had to wait. I had to surrender. I had to accept that he may never show. I had trust that if he never shows up, then that is a better outcome than constantly trying to prove myself worthy and wasting time knowing that things will eventually 'fizzle out' because of a weak attraction.

You can also give yourself permission to do the same because it is in the eye of your beloved beholder that you will be seen as attractive. This attraction will feel very surreal and supernatural. Why? Because it is.

The Supernatural Realm

In order to give yourself this same permission, you have to believe in the **Supernatural** realm. It is in this realm where God fulfills His plan. If your vocation was left simply in the **natural** realm, then I would advise you to do all you can to capture your man before some other girl gets him. Help him, contact him first, call him, email him, text him and chase him. Be the doormat.

But that is not how God designed us women. He designed us to be the receivers and the responders. He

designed men to be the initiators and the pursuers. Therefore, wait for God to infuse Supernatural grace into your man so that he will not need your help. Of course, this can only happen within the Supernatural realm of God's will. So, **stay in His will**. Do not stray from His path.

Once you wrap your arms around this truth, you will have peace while you wait. You will be able to **stop yourself** from initiating contact with men, helping them in their pursuit or becoming the doormat. You will be able to wait on the Lord and His Supernatural Grace. Even in the event that your beloved beholder does not show up, the Lord's Peace and Supernatural Grace will be with you.

I invite you to email me at anytime: theveilofchastity@gmail.com

God Love and Bless You!

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2015/03/09/i-am-just-an-average-girl/>
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Unless a Grain of Wheat... [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

“Unless a Grain of Wheat“

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus.



Unless a Grain of Wheat ...

*And Jesus answered them, “**The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him.** (John 12:20-26)*

My fellow pilgrims in Christ,

The scripture presented above is one that is taken from the Gospel reading on the 5th Sunday of Lent. It’s main intent is to re-affirm to us the main purpose of Jesus’ first coming, that He , like “the grain of wheat” that had to fall to the ground and die in order to bear fruit, also had to die for our sins in order to bring us from the darkness of sin into the light of the Father’s Kingdom – in effect, to bring us from spiritual death to a new spiritual life in Him.

To Jesus, the appearance of people from the Greek culture inquiring about Him, affirmed the leading of the Holy Spirit that His mission to Israel for His first coming was at its end and His sacrifice for the sins of mankind was imminent. He knew that the mission to the gentile world was to be left to His Church. Anticipating the doubts that would arise amongst His disciples, He presents the metaphor of the fallen seed to Philip and Andrew to give them to some understanding of why all this would happen to Him as He yielded His life to the Father as a seed planted, not only to save mankind, but also to bring forth disciples and His Church for the Glory of God the Father.

However, we must not overlook that this comparison with “the seed” is also intended, by implication for each of us believers as well. Notice that Jesus says that He, the One AND ONLY TRUE SEED, must die in order for there to be more seed(s) in His image. He also tells those who would be His disciples (His

seeds) that if they wish to follow Him, by serving Him, they also must die (like a seed), to their carnal self, that is in them, so that their new spiritual self in Him can come forth to eternal life, continuing to bring forth the fruit for the Glory of the Father..

One of the primary intents of the Lenten Season, is exactly to bring us to the awareness of the need for us also to die to our “carnal” self so that HE working in our spirits can continue the work of bringing forth the Kingdom in this world through us His Church.

Understanding this, we need, then, to discern our responsibility to hold that our fleshly “self” has over us and, through sincere confession and repentance decisively yield ourselves to the Spirit of Christ that is in us so that, through Him and His Victory over the flesh, we can exercise the spiritual freedom we have in Him and bear fruit for His Glory!. To Him Be Glory and Honor Forever!

Yes, we who believe in Jesus as savior are all potential seeds to bring forth more fruit. But, unless we as individual seeds are willing to fall to the ground and die to “self” we will not be able to bear fruit for the Kingdom. Unless we yield ourselves like Jesus to the Father’s purposes and to His Holy Spirit so that His “empowering presence” is what takes charge of our lives we are NOT plantable seeds. In order for us to be eligible to be planted as a seed His Word and His Spirit MUST “abide” and be activated in us!

In this regard, Jesus Himself also elaborates about our need to “abide” in Him...



Abide in Me to Bear Fruit

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples.” (John 15: 5-8)

We are given new life in Christ through conversion and baptism, but unless we willingly yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit to conform us to His image, He cannot work in us and through to fulfill the Father’s purpose for each of our lives, that purpose being to bear fruit for the Glory of the Father.

reading an meditating on these, as guidelines for plantable seeds, as we proceed to seek to draw closer to Jesus this Lent, but also throughout the year as we go forth “walking in the Spirit” and not “in the flesh”.)

To the Corinthians – Reverencing and Maintaining Our Union with Christ

“... he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. [Therefore] shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral (carnal) man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Cor. 6: 17-20)

To the Colossians – Our Basis for Living in Union With Christ

Chap. 2: 6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

To the Colossians – How to Let Christ Live In and Through you

Chap.3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

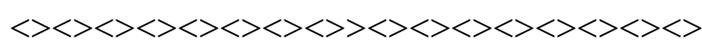
5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



In Joseph and Mary We can find no better example of two individuals who died to their earthly selves in order that the Messiah might be brought forth. You can meditate on their example by reading of their participation in obedience to God's leadings In the gospels of the New Testament.

For now, I only need to point out the Virgin Mary's example of what dying to self entailed:

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary ... **And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."**

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."



“To maintain a joyful family requires much from both the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to become, in a special way, the servant of the others.” St. John Paul II Homily October 7, 1979

On Holy Thursday, the Gospel recalls the washing of the feet of the Apostles by Jesus. He instructs the Apostles to do the same. While there are many truths to be learned from this scene in St. John’s Gospel, we will focus on how this example of service to others can help us in our families.

Family Life, at the Service of Others

We are all called to be a servant to others in our lives, especially within our own family. When we are raising a young family, this is an obvious situation, you have babies, you care for them, they don’t thank you, but you mostly do it out of love and a desire to raise these precious gifts from God as they grow up. A less obvious situation is the out of the ordinary sickness of a family member, perhaps a spouse or an adult child. Another situation that may not be as obvious and perhaps not as common is the care of a parent. Many times in our mobile society, we do not live close to our parents or siblings, we may be scattered across the country and thus this situation of caring for an elderly parent is a remote possibility at best. Many times the care of such a parent who may lose their good health gradually, is a short lived intervention to find a nursing home or assisted living facility to take care of them. This is not how it used to be.

Family life is essentially a life of service to one another. Some in society see this role of serving as a burden to be avoided by making enough money to have everything you want and never have to serve anyone else and instead have everyone serve you. The Lord of Lords, and King of Kings says this is not what will bring us happiness. He says that His way is the best way and that includes being the servant of others, not just sometimes, but all the time.

It makes sense in a way, if we are constantly looking out for the needs of others, we will be less concerned about ourselves and when we focus on others needs we are not as concerned when things don’t go perfectly for us. Benedict Groeschel wrote a book on grieving a number of years ago entitled, [“Arise from Darkness”](#). The main point I remember from this short book, was that the best way we can deal with our own grief is by serving others and helping them through their time of trial.



Service to Others as a Way of Life

When you lead by example and seek to serve others before yourself, your children will notice. But you will not know for certain that your children have learned it until they are given the opportunity to serve on their own. Recently, I asked my 17 year old daughter if she would like to make her Grandfather's day by going square dancing with him since his usual date was out of town. She agreed and has been accompanying him on a fairly regular basis and this has even spread to the rest of the family as my Dad really likes square dancing and despite his health problems, this is one activity that he really enjoys and can still do with relative ease.



A similar situation arose late last year when my father in law was diagnosed with terminal cancer. We spoke with the whole family and asked each member if we should move closer to my father in law to be with him and support him and the rest of the family during this very difficult time. The response was unanimous that we [should leave our home, friends, community and move](#). Each of my children in their own way served their grandparents, many times it was just sitting with them and talking about what was going on in our lives, other times it was doing household maintenance items that my father in law could no longer do himself.

Teaching Your Children to be Servants

You can't give what you don't have and teaching your children to serve others is no exception. If your children see you thinking only of yourself, then they will most likely display selfish character traits. But it is not only you that your children will learn from, it is the media they consume. Many times popular music, TV shows, and Movies depict the main characters putting themselves first and winning over others. While this may be an entertaining story line, it is not what Jesus showed us through his life. While there is victory in the gospel story, it is victory through service to others. Jesus is the model that shows us how to live our lives and the main thread is service to others.

Jesus could have had everything in this life, but God’s plan was to show us how to live and how to be happy in this life. But happiness in this life is not the whole story, by being a servant of others, we prepare ourselves for eternity with God in heaven. Imagine eternity surrounded by other people who only want what is truly best for you. No envy, no jealousy, no scheming to “pull one over on you”. This is definitely not what we experience here on earth, but if you follow Jesus, this is what we are called to share with those whom we come into contact with. You are called to change the world, to bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth in your marriage, in your family and in your community.

This contribution is available at <http://www.yourhollyfamily.com/being-the-servant-of-others/>
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Moral Relativism in the Fourth Grade



Until yesterday, I was pretty neutral about the Common Core, but now I am not, because yesterday I discovered that my fourth grader believes that the statement, “It is wrong to kill innocent people” is an opinion. Likewise with “My mother loves me,” or “My life is valuable, apart from what I might accomplish or earn.” Not truth, but opinion, something subjective that has no truth apart from varying human perceptions. Here’s a fact for you: the Common Core curriculum is spreading moral relativism across the country, even in my kids’ Catholic school, and here’s an opinion: that sucks.

Yesterday afternoon I read a New York Times blog piece entitled “[Why Our Children Don’t Think There Are Moral Facts](#),” by Justin P. McBrayer. McBrayer discovered the following signs hanging in his son’s second grade classroom:

Fact: Something that is true about a subject and can be tested or proven.

Opinion: What someone thinks, feels, or believes.

As a philosophy professor, McBrayer knows that these definitions were bad and aren’t coming from academic philosophers. He also knows that most college students arrive at college believing that moral statements are opinions. He’d wondered where they got this unfortunate idea, which they don’t even truly believe themselves, until he discovered that the Common Core curriculum teaches elementary school students that the only things that count as facts are things that can be proven, and that value statements are by definition opinions. My response to reading this was, “Ah, yes, there’s another reason I am happy to pay Catholic school tuition.”

Imagine my surprise when that evening, I ran across the following in my daughter’s social studies textbook: A fact is a statement that can be proven true. An opinion tells what someone believes or feels. Opinions cannot be proven true or false. Facts can be proven true. Statements with dates and amounts are often facts. Opinions state feelings and beliefs. Words like *better*, *probably*, *should*, and *believe* signal opinions.

Trying to remain calm, I thought, “Maybe her teacher skipped this part.” So I tested my daughter. “Fact or opinion: ‘It is wrong to kill innocent people?’” Answer: “Opinion.”

“How about, ‘It is wrong to hit children for fun?’” Answer: “Opinion.”

If you have kids in fourth grade or older, try this experiment on them. It’s important to know whether your kid thinks basic moral rules are matters of opinion before they become teenagers.

Why are we teaching elementary school children that there are no moral facts, that is, no moral truths? I get the need to teach the distinction between fact and opinion, but why not define these terms correctly? (Borrowing from Merriam-Webster, I suggest “facts are true pieces of information,” and “opinions are personal preferences and judgments of worth that may or may not have a basis in truth.”)

It is amazing how many people espouse moral relativism. Mr. McBrayer’s blog post received almost 1500 comments, and of the one hundred or so I read, about 95% were denials that moral statements could be objectively true. I find this to be fascinating, not only because it’s horrifying that so many people purport to think that morality is a matter of opinion, but because so many people say this and yet almost no one really lives or even speaks as if it’s true. Our experience as human beings just doesn’t support moral relativism. We all reflexively believe that some things are just plain wrong, not just wrong for me or wrong for us. So why not admit to this? Why the stiff-necked aversion to common sense?

Like so many things these days, it’s mostly about sex. In the past twenty years or so, we have started disagreeing vehemently about moral truths regarding sex. When a college student says “morality is a matter of opinion,” they are most likely thinking about moral truths about sex, not about lying, stealing, or murder. Because of the dechristianization of our culture, we do have profound disagreements about morality, and many people have concluded that something that we disagree about so profoundly can’t possibly have a basis in objective truth.

Nor do many people *want* sexual morality to have a basis in objective truth. If it does, then we don’t get to decide what is right and wrong based on what makes us happy. Judging from Mr. McBrayer’s post, most of his readers want to be the authors of their own moral worlds. An understandable desire (and one sanctioned by the Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*), but a deadly one. Just ask Adam and Eve.

For these reasons and others, more and more people have taken to pretending that morality is a matter of opinion. And yet we all still care deeply that the next generation knows that lying, cheating, stealing, cruelty, racism, greed, and a whole host of other things are wrong. So what to do? If you aren’t willing to come out and say these things are wrong in themselves, you have to resort to various versions of “because I told you so,” as in: “Our school is a bully-free zone,” or “In our family we don’t hit,” or “We don’t use those words.” If there are rules that exist apart from us, we are all equal before them, but if not, the only way we can keep order is by giving some people the power to enforce their preferences over the rest of us. If it’s not about law, then it’s all about power.

I don’t think for a second that anyone at my kids’ school means to teach moral relativism. I think they use the CA state textbooks so that the curriculum will line up with the Common Core and what children all over the state are learning. And yet those textbooks, particularly the social studies and history textbooks, subtly but powerfully promote a world view that is antithetical to Christian life.

Since I can't imagine homeschooling, I am going to have to try to do something about this situation. Suggestions are welcome.

This contribution is available at <http://www.mollyoshatz.com/moral-relativism-in-the-fourth-grade/>
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The Value of Suffering? [at Little Steps Along The Way]

The excerpts in italics are from From

Divine Intimacy

Section 127: The Value of Suffering

Suffering is No Big Deal?

What exactly is suffering? Can we only call it suffering when there is some great tragedy in our lives? Some people do not like to call the little pricks of life "suffering," but Fr. Gabriel of St Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. described it this way:

"Suffering is the disagreeable feeling which we experience when something - a situation, a circumstance - does not correspond to our inclinations, our needs, or our hopes, which does not harmonize with them or gratify them, but on the contrary, contradicts and opposes them."

So, we can call "suffering" all those "little" things that annoy us, aggravate us, upset us. We apply the "rules of suffering" to little things as well as big. We miss opportunities of love if we overlook the small opportunities and consider them unworthy of our bearing them attentively.

Suffering Is Evil, Suffering Well is Good

"Suffering in itself is an evil and cannot be agreeable; if Jesus willed to embrace it in all its plenitude and if He offers it to us, inviting us to esteem and love it, it is only in view of a superior good which cannot be attained by any other means - the sublime good of the redemption and the sanctification of our souls."

It seems to me hard to see the value in suffering because I continue to think of the value at the moment, or the value that I can foresee. It's so important to remember that we can't see all that God sees, and He looks not just in this moment but off into eternity, and not just for our individual souls, but at all souls. We have to trust that there is a "superior good" because often we can't see it or foresee it. We can only know it by faith.

"Whereas all men are subject to this misery, the Christian alone possesses the secret of accepting it into his life without destroying the harmony or the happiness which he can enjoy on earth. This secret consist precisely, for a Christian, in attuning all kinds of suffering to his personal aspirations, which for him, can never be limited to an ideal of earthly happiness."

As Christians, we also are called to "look beyond" and not limit ourselves to an "ideal of earthly

happiness." As St. Therese said, "...

When I think that, for a sorrow borne with joy, I shall be able to love You more for all eternity, I understand clearly that if You gave me the entire universe, with all its treasures, it would be nothing in comparison to the slightest suffering

."

What's Love Got to Do With It?

"This harmony is possible for that which appears to be opposition and disagreement from one point of view, often turns into profit when seen in a different lights.....Every kind of suffering can then be made conformable to the highest ideals of the Christian: eternal salvation, sanctity, the glory of God, the good of souls. But this congruity is impossible without love; or rather it will be possible only in proportion to our love, for it was by love alone that Jesus transformed the Cross, a terrible instrument of torture, into a most efficacious instrument for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind."

We cannot will ourselves, force ourselves, to accept suffering generously and graciously. We can't force ourselves to love. We usually grow in love slowly, "...

our love is dilated under an increasingly generous inspiration, unto an ever greater love

." This "

generous inspiration

" is a gift from God that we do not initiate, we merely cooperate with it. And this "mere" cooperation is the work that requires the great work of our will, our faith, our trust, our small "yes" at each moment.

"It is the same for us : charity, the love of God and of souls, will enable us to accept any kind of suffering, harmonizing it with our loftiest aspirations. In this way, suffering finds a place, a very important place, in our life, without destroying our peace and serenity. On the contrary, our spirit is dilated under an increasingly generous inspiration, unto an ever greater love. As a result, we shall be happy, even while we are experiencing pain."

Less of Me, More of You

I suppose that if we can begin to think less of ourselves and more of others, this will help us to cooperate with God's work of love in our heart. A little way to do this is the simple offering, "I offer this up for love of You oh Lord, in reparation for sins, and for the salvation of souls, and unity in the Church." Saying this is an act of the will. Praying helps take the focus off our suffering and expand it to all the others who are also suffering, and to our Good God who suffers so greatly at our separation from Him by sin,

I have "offered up" a lot these past months. The night in the hospital that I couldn't sleep, I never ran out of people to pray for, people to offer the suffering of my pain and fear. The more I prayed, the more people I thought of to pray for. The Lord did dilate, expand, my heart. I can't say I suffered well, I certainly have had no joy in the suffering, I often lack peace and serenity. But peace and serenity are there when I stop to

sit at the Master's feet, to look upon His face, to bask in His presence. It may only be for a moment, but those are really nice moments, even in the midst of everything else.

Read More:

Here are some "offering it up" prayers:

[Morning Offering](#)

or

[Morning Offering](#)

through the Immaculate Heart of Mary

[Prayer for Offering up Suffering](#)

If you want to read more about "offering it up," I suggest:

Maureen O'Shea

["Offer it Up"](#)

Happy Catholic

["Offer it Up? What the Heck Does That Mean?"](#)

Bill Harkens at US Catholic

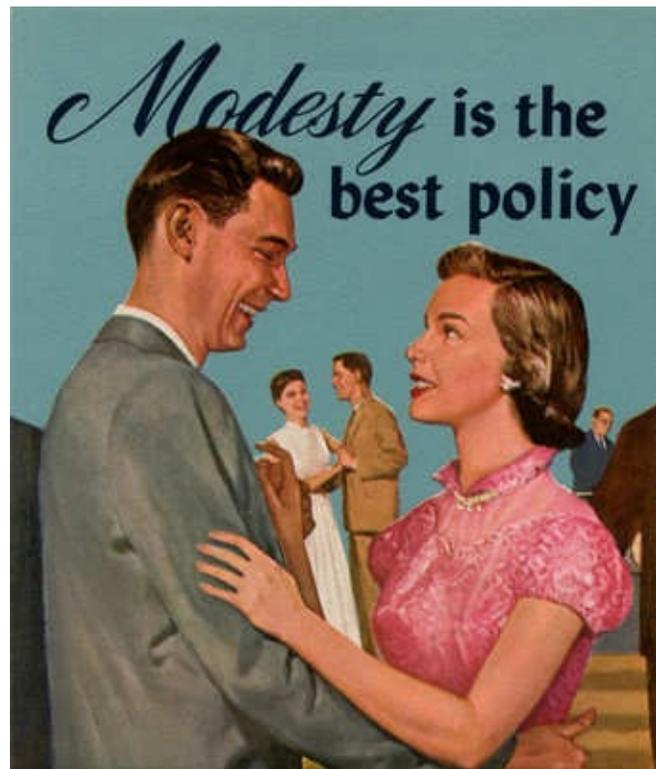
["No Pain, No Gain: Offering It Up](#)

"

This contribution is available at <http://www.littlestepsalongtheway.com/2015/03/the-value-of-suffering.html>
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Is This a Missing Key to Modesty Today? [at Archdiocese of Washington Blog]



We often speak today of the terrible toll that fatherless homes have on young boys. And this is true. Without a reasonably good (even though not sinless) model of manhood and responsibility, many boys lose their way. Fathers also play a large role in disciplining boys, especially as they grow older and become stronger than their mothers.

But missing fathers also bring forth terrible effects on many girls. Women, even young girls, certainly do seek and desire the love and appreciation of men and have a desire to be thought of as precious, beautiful, and lovable. Ideally a father is able to model for his daughter that a man can appreciate and love her for her own sake, apart from merely her physical charms and “curves.”

Learning this seems critical for a young girl, who is then able to discern the difference between this and the love of other men who may desire her in a more sexual way. That they have sexual desire for her is not wrong per se, but neither is it wrong for her to know that she is lovable for her own sake. Simply loving her for her physical charms is lust. True love is loving her for her own sake. And even if sexual attraction is part of the picture, it is *only* part and she can know the difference. Having recognized that a man (in the first case her father) can love her in this fuller way, she is able to insist on it and discern when a young man’s “love” is too narrow.

However, when a young girl does not learn this from her father, she likely still craves the approval of men. But not having learned from her father how to discern the attention of men and not having experienced that she is lovable for her own sake beyond mere physical beauty, she will often confuse the attention that is lust with the love and approval she really seeks.

While I am no professional sociologist, it seems to me that there is a rather strong correlation between the decline of fathers in the home and the rise of immodesty among women. As a man, I find this rise odd and ponder why immodesty is so widespread among women. Why do so many women like to wear short skirts and tight clothes (which seem so uncomfortable) and walk about beaches in a state of almost complete nudity (bikinis)? Something is amiss and way out of balance.

At one level, I have come to discover (through discussions with women on the issue of modesty) that many (especially younger) women really don't have any idea the effect that they have on men. I have confirmed this in discussion with our Sunday school teenagers. In discussions moderated by women, many young girls just haven't figured it all out yet. When asked, "Why do you dress that (provocative) way?" they often say, "I don't know, it's ... like ... y'know ... comfortable??? ... It's like ... cool???"

While some of them may be fibbing, and really *do* know why, I don't doubt that, to some degree, there is an innocence about what they do that needs to be schooled. In the past, fathers could help in this regard. Some years ago I remember a remarkable little passage by John Eldridge, in the Book, *Wild at Heart* that decoded something I have noticed even in the youngest girls:

And finally, every woman wants to have a beauty to unveil. Not to conjure, but to unveil. Most women feel the pressure to be beautiful from very young, but that is not what I speak of. There is also a deep desire to simply and truly be the beauty, and be delighted in. Most little girls will remember playing dress up, or wedding day, or twirling skirts, those flowing dresses that were perfect for spinning around in. She'll put her pretty dress on, come into the living room and twirl. What she longs for is to capture her daddy's delight. My wife remembers standing on top of the coffee table as a girl of five or six, and singing her heart out. Do you see me? asks the heart of every girl. And are you captivated by what you see? (Kindle edition Loc 367-83)

Perhaps it is this innocence that has gone somehow wrong, has been untutored, causing some young girls to dress immodestly. And many of them bring that into adulthood.

But even if their intentions are innocent, it is not wrong to teach girls that not everyone views their display so innocently and further that some boys/men are deeply troubled by the temptation it brings, especially as these girls get a bit older.

There is surely a time to provoke and celebrate a sexual appeal and joy: in the marriage bed. But outside this context, women ought to be seen more richly as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, teachers, and scientists, indeed as whole persons with interests, needs, concerns, and richly varied lives. Fathers can have a critical role in teaching this to both their sons and their daughters.

In the past when I saw an immodestly attired young woman I would ask, "Where is her mother?" Increasingly I also ask, "Where is her father?" She doesn't seem to understand men. She wants the attention of men but in a way that presses all the wrong buttons. Maybe she's never considered that a man can and should love her for her own sake, beyond her physical attributes. Maybe she never had the chance to twirl her skirts before a father who delighted in her but without sexual motives, who could tell her she was beautiful and wonderful without the desire to exploit. Maybe she's still craving this delight but is now twirling her skirts and revealing her beauty to men who cannot, or will not, admire her with such pure motives. And maybe she can't tell the difference between lust (exploitative desire) and love (desire of her for her own sake) because she never had a father, a good father, there to model the difference.

Anyway, I know women are complicated and that I'm probably going to get killed by both women and men for this post. But before you lay me out, consider for your comment why you think immodesty is so widespread in our culture? I would appreciate it if we could avoid the “men are pigs”, or “these young girls dress like sluts” types of comments. I'm looking for understanding more than venting. I know we all have strong opinions about this topic and that some don't believe there is in fact any immodesty at all (even in a tiny bikini (a view I think that requires real denial or serious blindness)). But the point I'd like to ponder is why.

I have written more on the questions of modesty here:

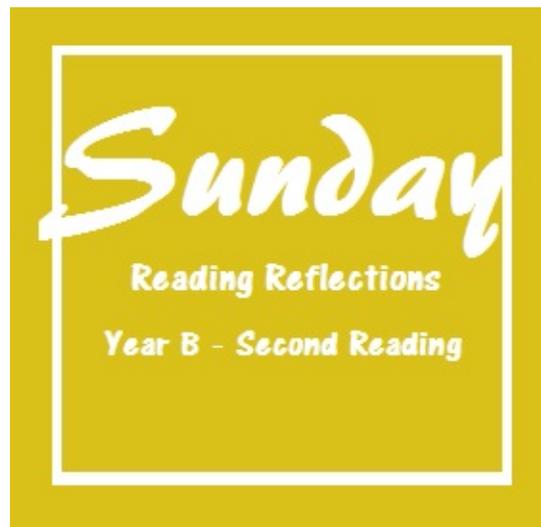
1. [Modesty is Reverence for Mystery](#)
2. [Modesty and Men](#)
3. [A School Finally Cracks Down](#)

This contribution is available at <http://blog.adw.org/2015/03/fathers-and-daughters/>
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Saving Grace [at In Caritas Christiana]

The Resurrection of the Lord



This Sunday, the second reading will be from

[Colossians 3:1-4](#)

. I'd encourage you to read on a little bit, to around

[verse 17](#)

to get a more full understanding of the implications Paul intends for his words here.

The introduction of Grace to a person's life changes him. His entire outlook is modified.

Before, when there was nothing to look forward to after death, he was concerned with the affairs of this world - with the mad scramble for power and money and fame - to amass as much as possible before departing this world. To win the rat race.

After he experiences the Grace of God, he realizes that the rat that wins is still a rat. After he comes to know the story of Jesus Christ, he finds out that there is a promise of something better, after death - the full, glorious, eternal life that mankind was really intended for. What he was designed to experience before the Fall. And he seeks that above everything else.

And in his changed state, he wants everyone he knows to come with him.

He's not really willing to settle for doing this for himself and allowing everyone around him to die in their sins. He becomes infected with a missionary spirit. He experiences such joy in the promise of his salvation that he wants to do everything he can to advance that promise to all mankind.

And it isn't a threat, for him. It's a joyful promise, so spreading the good news is something he loves to do. He wants - desperately - to be about the work of the Lord in his days on Earth, and he will be just as

pleased to go and be with God after those days are done.

The Grace of God changes you. The way you act. The way you speak. The way you think. Everything.

And suddenly a list of thou-shalt-nots doesn't look like a list of arbitrary rules. They become the compass by which we lead a more joyful life than we ever had without them. We rejoice in the Law of the Lord.

Let's Pray.

O Lord of mercy and grace, we remember your mighty work in salvation, accomplished for us on the cross, and made real to us in the empty tomb. We see the stone rolled away and the burial clothes laid aside, and we are amazed and grateful. We praise you for your awesome love in this great act of service to your people, and we give you thanks, O Lord, for your mighty work in this.

This contribution is available at <http://incaritaschristiana.blogspot.com/2015/04/saving-grace.html>
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Eastering [at bukas palad]



Year B / Eastertide / Easter Sunday

Readings: Acts 10.34a, 37-43/ Psalm 118.1-2, 16-17, 22-23 (R/v 24) / Colossians 3.1-4 / John 20.1-9

What if all it took was a minute of hope to free one from death-like fear? A minute of peace to soothe the unbearable pain of suffering? A minute of clarity to pierce the numbing confusion of loss? And a minute of truth to know that the uncertain wait is over, and life can go on better?

These might be some of the experiences Jesus' disciples felt that first Easter morning. The women who went to the tomb might have experienced these: hearing the Angel proclaim Jesus' resurrection, they took a few moments to realize this truth. Then fearful yet overjoyed, they ran to announce this good news to the apostles. Mary Magdalene might also have experienced them: she admonished the gardener for Jesus' missing body but upon hearing him call her name, she paused. Then, sensing in his voice the timbre and cadence of her beloved, she recognized her beloved rabboni, Jesus, risen from the death, and loving her still.

And, yes, these could have also been the experiences the beloved disciple John had as he ran with Peter to the empty tomb that we hear about this morning's gospel story: John looked in, saw Jesus' burial shroud folded up, and, taking a deep breath, believed.

The Gospels tell us that all it took for the disciples to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead was just

a minute, or two. And then, their lives changed forever.

Now, what if all it takes this Easter is just a minute, or two, for you and me -- amidst our Easter liturgies and celebrations -- to see anew what is the unimaginable? To recognize hope alive when all is despairing? To believe even as we struggle to deepen our faith? Yes, to simply look and see and to know again that Jesus is indeed risen and alive?

How can we do this? By keeping alive the truth that Jesus' love doesn't forget but always remembers us. Thus, when we experience the memory of Jesus coming alive in daily life, the power of his Word and the promise of his Resurrection will throb in us as the heartbeat of our lives.

"Do not forget what I have done for you," Jesus said incessantly in the Gospels. Christian discipleship is about remembering what Jesus did for us: that he died to save us from sin and he rose from the dead so that we will live, not die.

This is why when we are overwhelmed by sorrows and sufferings, we should remember Jesus' love. When our lives are not progressing as we hope for or we have meandered into dark corners, we must recall his love. When all we say and do to be good Christians only leads us back to the sin, we must never forget the love of Jesus.

Why? Because Jesus' love is not just that selfless love of dying on the Cross to save us. It is also his hope-filled love in a God who will always forgive us and love us into the fullness of life. This is the kind of love Jesus calls us to also make our own. Why? Because his hope-filled love in God is the way, the truth and the life to our salvation.

At the heart of this way of loving God is Jesus' confident anticipation in God's faithful goodness. Jesus loved like this in the Last Supper and to the end on the Cross. And God loving this confidence Jesus believed in lifted him from the dead into life eternal. Today, we celebrate God's faithful, life-giving love for Jesus meeting and uplifting Jesus' hope-filled love for God into God's embrace. This is why Jesus asks us throughout the Gospels to go and do likewise: to not just love others selflessly in service, but to also love God confidently in hope.

In a few moments, we will gather around this altar, and remember Jesus' love for us. *Take this all of you and eat of it for this is my body. Take this all of you and drink of it for this is my blood, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.* Yes, we will do this in grateful

memory of him whose self-giving in body and blood saved us. But we also celebrate and believe that through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus, risen and alive, God's life is ours, restored and never ever to be broken. These are God's loving gifts of Easter joy and Easter life.

We can remember, celebrate and believe in these Easter gifts because we have already experienced that minute or two when the risen Jesus came to us, called us by name and revealed himself alive for us.

However this happened in our everyday lives before, or today in our Easter liturgy, or in the quiet of each prayer-time, then, like John, in that minute or two, we will always see, know and believe in the goodness of the risen Jesus alive with us and for us. We can make no better response in these graced encounters, then to do what we do at Communion: "Amen," we say with a nod, or a smile, or a heart humbled and grateful upon receiving Jesus.

Our Easter joy and Easter life are meant to be shared, not hoarded or possessed. How can we share the risen Jesus with the world? The answer we give will determine the quality of how we live Easter life and its joy as Christians.

Let me suggest an answer to this question: *by living in the spirit of the risen Jesus generously*. We know what this spirit involves: in that minute or two when the risen Jesus encounters us, we always experience nothing less than Jesus' more excellent way of loving us. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes this way as that that more faithful and selfless way of loving to the end. The risen Jesus returns to us not just to proclaim God's power over sin and death but to also declare his love for us to the end of time.

Today, the risen Jesus invites us to love others like he does: faithfully, selflessly, loving to the end. Then, they too will experience the dawning of Easter in their lives, as we are experiencing it now when we look out and see the Easter light breaking up the darkness of the night. For them, it will not be just a minute or two of encountering the risen Jesus. But like us, it must be the beginning of what the Jesuit poet Gerard Manly Hopkins prays is a new lifetime of "letting Jesus easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cressed east." (*The Wreck of the Deutschland*)

Preached at St Ignatius Church, Singapore

Photo: sunrise at ocnaside beach, victoria, australia by phil thompson (internet)

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2015/04/homily-eastering.html>
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