

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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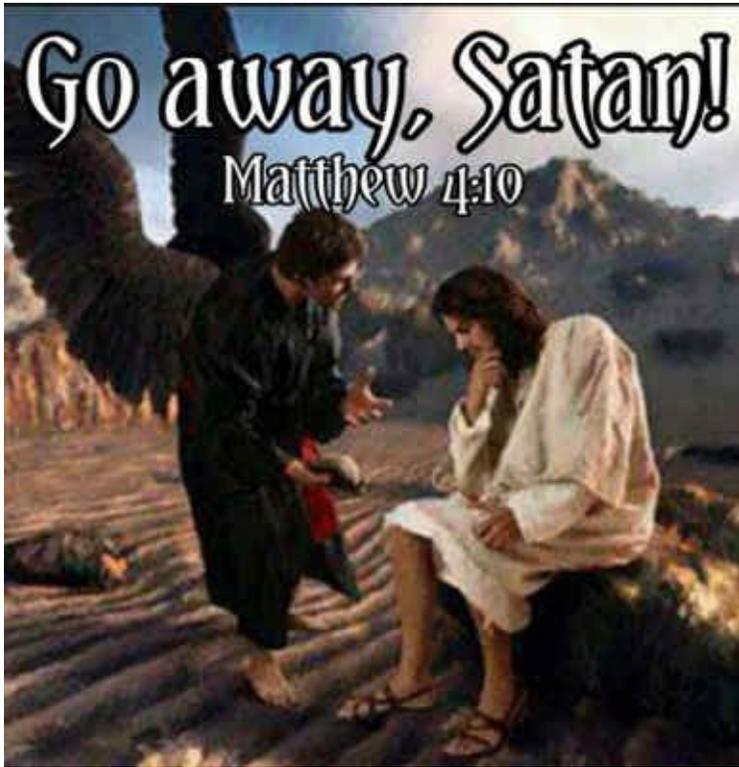
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Devil Knocking: Anyone Home?

Go away, Satan!
Matthew 4:10



The devil knocks at our doors every day! Every time we are unable to resist temptation, we invite Satan to rule our lives. It's that simple. For example, too much of anything creates an unhealthy imbalance, whether it is food, drink, sex, drugs, work, you name it. Worse, if we engage in immoral behavior, we not only open the door, but we set the table for the devil to take up housing and we push God away. So, what is the remedy? Embrace the virtue of self-control. Use your God-given intellect to make prudent choices. The first choice that you need to make is who do you want in your life: God or the devil?

Self-control is difficult to master on one's own. As humans, we have the tendency to sin and move away from God. The devil makes the things that we take to excess look, feel, taste, and sound so good. That extra piece of pie, or one more drink; that extra-marital affair that spices up your life, that additional pain pill to relieve pain, that extra hour or two away from your family to get things done at work every night – you can rationalize it all and before you know it, you are addicted to whatever it was that tempted you. When this happens, you need to make a choice: embrace self-control to break away from sin and return to God, or continue down the path of personal ruin.

If we choose to make the right choices, the healthy choices, then exercising self-control helps us to grow spiritually because we reach out to Jesus. We realize that we need Him to help us fight temptations to sin and conquer addictions.

For myself, I made a decision approximately two years ago to lose weight. I was eating too much for my 5' 2" body. I was 60 pounds overweight. I decided that I wanted God in my life and I definitely did not want anything to do with the devil. So I told the devil to hit the road and take a hike. I made room for God, and only God. I embraced self-control with the help of Jesus. I lost the 60 pounds and, in the process, I have grown spiritually. Whatever demons are interrupting your life, tell them to hit the road, and then turn toward God. Seek His assistance and live a happier and healthier life. Amen!

Once you've turned toward God, what comes next? How do you successfully practice self-control? We'll address the answers to these questions in our next reflection. Don't miss it!

This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/devil-knocking-anyone-home/>
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Ax me I'm Cat'lic [at Smaller Mannhattans]



I had an idea for Easter. You know how folks will come to Midnight Mass and Easter Sunday Masses, but that will be it for the year. They might be inactive Catholics; or not Catholic at all, but they just wanna come and see.

On the Saturday before Holy Week, there's a four-church walking tour here in Greenville, SC. People start at the Episcopal church, then visit the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, and finish up at my parish, St. Mary's. Each church puts on a 30-minute lecture, mostly about its history, the stained glass, the organ, and then there's some time for Q&A before moving on.

I thought this might be a great evangelization opportunity, so the parish Adult Ed czar and I split the time: he covered a bit of parish history, explained the Mary stories depicted in the stained glass, and the history and function of the Stations of the Cross. Then I covered the liturgical function of the church, starting with the Meeting Tent in the desert; running through the Temple and synagogues of Jesus' day; and ending with the church we were sitting in, and how it connected to Heaven per Hebrews and Revelation. So after it was over we had plenty of good questions, some I hadn't anticipated. Once that was done, I wound up discussing more Catholic stuff with a few visitors, including a former Catholic. He was now "spiritual but not religious," and was telling me how Jesus was really conceived out of wedlock by a Roman soldier. I gave him and a few of the lingerers my card, said hey email me and we can have lunch if you want to. I was satisfied that the liturgical pitch went over well.

So I was thinking wow, some of these visitors were way plugged in- and that likewise, many "Creaster" (Christmas and Easter) visitors might respond to some non-threatening evangelization, too. I got permission to be a one-man evangelizer at the 9am and 11am Easter Masses. I made a lapel-sized sign that read "Ask Me Anything After Mass," and did door-greeting which I would have done anyway, I think it's gracious. My intent was to make it easy for non-Catholic visitors to get answers to any questions they

might have, make a personal contact with them.

Turned out be a total dud!

First, I knew most of the people, by face if not by name. Second, as far as I could tell, everybody was Catholic. No Midnight Mass seeker-types. And the only questions I got were harmless ones about the parish, where are the bathrooms, etc. asked by out-of-town Catholics. Oh well.

But it was a good experience. Acting on an idea on short notice was energizing. And I learned some stuff I didn't expect to.

I intend to do a modified version at Christmas, and (maybe) get at least 2 more people to cover the other two entrances to the church. It's a long time 'til Christmas so there's no rush. Like the Church herself, it pays to take the long view- but not a view so long that nothing happens.

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2015/04/ax-me-im-catlic.html>
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Genderless "Marriage" Threatens the Foundation of Civilization [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Lawrence Fox

The fruitful bonding between man and woman is the most fundamental form of original justice.



Justice is the promotion of the proper order of things. In a just society, human beings have a harmonious relationship with one another -- male and female, Creator and creation all work together and flourish.

As a result of this form of justice, society exists. Families are formed, tribal bonds are established, and nations arise. Civilizations were created from this original justice – the fruitful bonding between man and woman.

Several years ago, I was listening to two lawyers debate the legality of California's Proposition 8, which amended the state's Constitution in 2008 to re-affirm marriage as a form (thing in itself) consisting of one man and one woman.

Proposition 8 was a grass root response of the voters of California to reject outlaw courts legalizing same sex "marriage." Thirty-three other U.S. states passed pro-marriage amendments and legislation. All these states rejected the notion of courts arbitrarily equating the act of sodomy between two men or two women as a form of natural justice.

The American people's fervent response in favor of traditional marriage was ethnically and religiously diverse and quite prescient. Africans, Caucasians, Hispanics, Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons all fought side by side to preserve the fruitful bonding between one man and one woman as an original justice.

They recognized that courts demanding the recognition of same-sex coupling would completely trample the consciences of individuals formed by natural law (reason) and religion (faith). The rights of children

to be conceived naturally and raised by father and mother would be eliminated.

The plethora of lawsuits brought forward by LGBT lawyers against photographers, bakers, fertility specialists, and



owners of social halls in the last several years has proven the electorate correct. The increase in bizarre forms of surrogacy resulting from homosexuals attempting to legitimize their lifestyles by manufacturing children is already poisoning our society.

Throughout human history whenever the fruitful bond between male and female was broken, other forms of injustices grew -- patricide, matricide, infanticide, fratricide and in some cases the complete disappearance of whole civilizations. Spartans decided that the elements of war were perfect, and everything else subservient. Hence they promoted homosexual unions among themselves to the denigration of the original justice of the male female bond.



Shortly after that, their society was gone. Families no longer bonded. Eugenics invaded their thinking, and their imperfect infants were killed. Everything became the property of the state. And then the state disappeared.

This is what is facing America today. Same sex “marriage” is an attack on original justice. It is an attack on the nature of man himself, and the harmonious relations between male

and female, man and creation, and man and Creator.

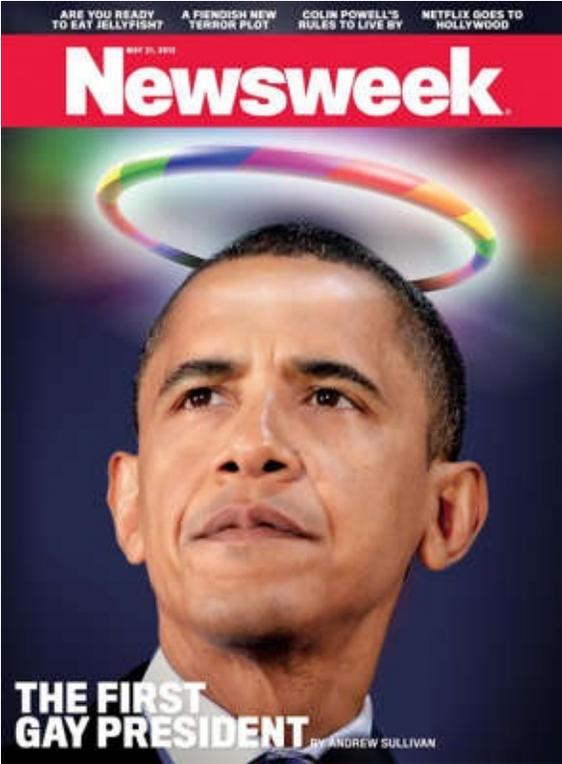
It seeks to establish as normative the unfruitful bonding of men and men to the exclusion of women. And it establishes the unfruitful bonding of women and women to the exclusion of men. Eventually, this attack on original justice will permeate all of our society, changing the way man will view himself.

Everything will be legally open to reinterpretation and abuse.

We will exit history the same way that the Spartan did. Spartans loved war. We love technology, which allows us to recreate ourselves. It makes us younger, changes our gender and manufactures our children, and puts to death the unwanted products of our lust. Our society is rapidly approaching a state of extreme injustice – technologically savvy with no human dignity.

Sadly, it seems the grass root electorate supporting traditional marriage might as well have saved their breath. They are largely ignored now as the U.S. Supreme Court reaches a final decision on the issue of same-sex “marriage” due in June.

This is how it came to be.



The “First Gay President” Barack Obama (a distinction made by Newsweek Magazine) instructed his Attorney General, Mr. Eric Holder, NOT to defend the U.S. Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Defense of Marriage was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by Democratic President Bill Clinton in 1996. It allows states to refuse to recognize same-sex “marriages” granted under the laws of other states.

The Attorney General, who is legally required to uphold laws passed by Congress, would not come to the defense of states whose laws were attacked by LGBT lawyers in unruly courts. Obama, who supposedly majored in constitutional law at Harvard University, identified the complete overthrow of traditional marriage as “justice.”

According to David Axelrod, Obama secretly supported same sex “marriage” prior to his running for President. He was



advised to hide this fact so that the black electorate in the Bible Belt would show greater enthusiasm for his candidacy. His so called “evolving position on gay marriage” was a manufactured lie.

A court here and a court there demanded same sex coupling. I am always dismayed by the inability of seemingly good federal and state leadership to annunciate the absolute hypocrisy of courts on these matters. The courts argue that they are implementing “a living document.”

Americans believe in a living document, it is called the “Amendment Process.” Such is constitutional, and not lawless. The states amended their constitutions to demonstrate Marriage is an institution, which existed prior to the sodomy-driven courts. It was and is a universally recognized institution between man and woman even in the most remote jungles of the world. The marriage between a man and a woman has been the foundation of surviving civilizations.

Judges do not have the power to make any document “living.” That is one of the biggest lies forced on Americans in the past 40 years. Judges don’t make law. They adjudicate existing law.

Lawyers debating the legality of Prop 8 are arguing that the amendment process is not constitutional unless the results are rubber-stamped by lawless black robes. Irrational judges now enslave the electorate under such a system.

One of the lawyers I heard debating Prop 8 said marriage was expressed in diverse forms throughout human history, including arranged marriages, polygamy, incest, common law, and communal sharing of women within primitive tribes. It was argued that few cultures maintained the “ideal” concept of marriage, that is a monogamous lifetime union between one man and one woman.

Since marriage within human history was fraught with inconsistencies, the notion that people in California or any state for that matter would seek to preserve a standard for marriage seemed unconstitutional to these justices; and, in fact, it seemed like an attack on the ever-evolving “Equal Protection under the Law” in the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

It is my understanding that a man cannot enter into a marriage with multiple wives and that bigamy is a crime in all 50 States. Currently, a man cannot enter into a marriage with his mother, sister, or daughter. Incest is a crime in all 50 States. It is only logical based upon the irrational musings of the lawyer supporting same sex “marriage” that all such prohibitions against sexual vagrancies are unconstitutional.

Every American is free to share domestic interests with other adult persons. Marriage laws are not unjust; instead the moral sensibilities of so many Americans have changed. The honest observer recognizes that the demand for same-sex marriage flows -- not from the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s -- but from the culture of death.

Under the guise of human rights, the government promotes abortion on demand, contraception, no fault divorce, pornography, doctor-assisted suicide, drug legalization, and the wholesale manufacture of children apart from normative conjugal relations between a man and a woman. The consequence of such moral collapse is now summed up by the statement “Let everyone choose for themselves what is marriage.”

When the good polygamous people of Utah in 1852 asked the U.S. Government to grant them admission to the Union, the government said that Utah had to outlaw polygamy, fundamentally establishing the fruitful bond of one man and one woman as a standard expression of social and moral justice. The Obama Administration, progressive legislators, and the courts -- demonstrating an abysmal hatred for U.S. History -- ignored such a fact.

I was waiting with bated breath for the lawyer in support of Prop 8 to state, “Yes, the institution of marriage has experienced various forms throughout human history. Yet, in spite of pressures, which obscured virtue and diminished justice, it is self-evident that the bonding of man and woman heroically remained the essential form of marriage.”

Further, I hoped he would say, “Arguments in favor of ‘state sanctioned sodomy’ do not preserve equal justice under the law, but instead discriminate in marriage against the male

(lesbian coupling); the female (homosexual coupling), and the child, who no longer has the right to a

father and a mother.”



In other words, I hoped the lawyer would say, “The bonding of man and woman as a micro-foundation for the existence of society is still necessary in America and that such an experiment as same-sex “marriage” cannot be implemented by un-elected judges, who won’t be around to live through the consequences.”

When I hear people argue, “Same sex marriage does not impact my marriage,” I lament that another couple has publically admitted that they are fundamentally cohabitating, and they wasted their money on a marriage license.

The advocacy of this new social madness through the lawless courts has precedence.

The Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Warren Burger in “*Roe Versus Wade*” legalized abortion in 1973 based on the fact – in part -- that the Roman Empire sanctioned abortion prior to its collapse. It never occurred to the Burger Court that the Roman Empire also sanctioned human trafficking, human sacrifice, and the murder of philosophers and Christians – also prior to its collapse. In other words, the court interpreted the U.S. Constitution as embracing the barbaric practices of ancient cultures.

It turns out that Supreme Court Justice William Blackmun -- who wrote the *Roe v Wade* majority opinion in support of abortion -- was in favor of abortion on demand due to his daughter’s college experiences: “My daughter found herself pregnant while in college and due to the scarcity of legal abortion, her education was interrupted,” he said. My response would have been “Judge, what does your daughter’s pregnancy have to do with interpreting federal or state constitutions?” The answer is nothing.

Federal judges are overthrowing state constitutions on the issue of abortion and same sex “marriage” because judicial interpretation in our time has nothing to do with reality.

The foundations of post-modern American constitutional law are rooted purely in sophistry and solipsism, which maintains that truth exists only in the will of the subject and not in the concrete reality of the

existence of the object.

Look at this statement made by Justice Anthony Kennedy in 1992 in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey*: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

A spoiled child lives within Kennedy's definition of liberty. Tragically, as the Supreme Court listens to arguments in favor of same sex "marriage," it is Justice Kennedy, who will become the swing vote on the court.

This is the same court, which said in 1973 that each person can determine for himself who has the right to live and who doesn't. Now they are trying to define marriage the same way – allowing each person to define marriage to utmost limits of his own imagination.



This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2015/04/genderless-marriage-threatens.html>
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Same Sex "Marriage", Natural Law and the New Apocalypse [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

"He shall turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the hearts of children towards their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse." (Prophecy of Malachi verse 24)

On Oct 6, 2013, the people of the state of Colorado woke up, rubbed their eyes and found out same sex "marriage" was now a reality.



Truly their surprise was justified, for the legal arrangement came in through the Kitchen -- *Kitchen v Herbert*, that is. The Tenth Circuit Court approved a lower court's determination that Utah's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court nodded and winked: None of my business. And so Colorado and five other states in the jurisdiction of the Tenth Circuit Court suddenly had legal same sex "marriage."

When the same thing happened in Washington State, my elderly cousin Bob grumbled to me. "Susan, I can now (legally) marry a man, smoke dope and kill myself." Thirty-seven states have legal same sex marriage, most through similar judicial shenanigans. Only three states in the Union have approved same-sex "marriage" by popular vote.

"We have won the argument over marriage. We have won 34 statewide elections (in favor of) traditional marriage ... even in liberal states like California.. Yet our votes are overturned by a combination of black-robed elites, craven corporations who have turned on their customers, the mainstream media, and cowardly GOP politicians," wrote Austin Ruse, President of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, in *Crisis Magazine*.

As in most states, the people of Colorado did not vote for same sex "marriage." Colorado forcefully banned it from our state constitution in 2006 by a double-digit margin in favor of [Colorado Amendment](#)

Eighteen black robes forming a meathead court imposed the institution on us while deciding a case for nearby Utah.

Through deliberate neglect, the U.S. Supreme Court blithely overturned our state constitution without even hearing from us.

I live in Colorado. My rights have been trampled upon.

“Utah's prohibition on same-sex marriage conflicts with the United States Constitution's guarantees of equal protection and due process under the law. The State's current laws deny its gay and lesbian citizens their fundamental right to marry and, in so doing, demean the dignity of these same-sex couples for no rational reason. Accordingly, the court finds that these laws are unconstitutional,” so droned the imbecile court.

In fact, the court said prohibition of same-sex marriage failed a *“rational basis review.”* Rational? If it was rational, why didn't our founding fathers mention it? Ironically, the Tenth Circuit Court failed my mother's *“rational basis review.”* If she were still alive today she would say, “Susan, those people don't have the sense that God gave a goose!”



Mankind has lost his bodily and spiritual identity. God made us a community of persons – male and female. *“In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created.”* (Gen 5:1-2) But we are busy -- busy throwing out the other half of our human identity. We wish to live in isolation, not as a man, but as a segregated half of humanity -- either male or female. And the ultimate goal of the genderless identity movement is nothing short of the end of the human race.

“I grew up in an atmosphere where adult sexuality was a measure of people’s worthiness,” said Rivka Edelman in a Supreme Court filing on same sex marriage. Referring to her mother and her three same sex partners, she said, “Their sex and identity meant everything. To them heterosexuals meant nothing – breeding, low-level amoebas splitting in their conservative bedroom communities. Our house was overrun with newly minted lesbians planning their divorces and alimony strategies.”

Now on April 28, the U.S. Supreme Court will hold hearings to decide same sex marriage for four other states, Kentucky Michigan, Ohio and Tennessee. This very likely will be the case where same sex marriage is nationalized.

The two women asking for legal marriage in this case have become the poster-child for gay “parenting.”



[April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse](#) are raising four special needs kids between the two of them and would like the same legal rights as any parent. God bless them.

Now come [six adults](#) raised by people who self identify as homosexual to say that same sex “marriage” is an injustice to the children of such a phony union. They are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, long associated with the demise of empires that became corrupt.

They are injecting real rationality into the discussion. Same sex “marriage” is supposed to rectify an alleged injustice against homosexuals, but in fact creates a new injustice. Marriage comes with the right to have children. People of the same sex cannot of themselves create children. They are not structurally designed to do so. They must raise **your** children or use surrogates to make them. Both acts are unjust. In fact, the six argue that same sex marriage legalizes trafficking in women and children.



Pope Francis is not silent on this matter. He has condemned genderless marriage at least three times, most recently in [March](#), and at his regular [Wednesday audience April 8, 2015](#), he defended the children caught

in these unions and in divorce: *“Children also pay the price for immature unions and irresponsible separations: they are the first victims; they suffer the outcome of a culture of exaggerated individual rights, and then the children become prematurely precocious. They often absorb the violence they are not able to “ward off” and before the very eyes of adults are forced to grow accustomed to degradation.”*

The pope refers to the upbringing of self-identified “strange man” Robert Oscar Lopez and Rivka Edelman, raised by a “Jewish lesbian mother and her partners,” who are leading the charge to defend children before the US Supreme Court on April 28. Lopez calls himself a “strange man” because his



mother and her same sex partner raised him. Married now to a woman, he once only knew how to act like a woman and prostituted himself to men. He healed himself as an adult by pursuing a relationship with his long estranged father. Lopez and Edelman call themselves COGs, Children of Gays. I call them children raised by unchaste adults.

The two have just produced Jephthah’s Daughters: Innocent Casualties in the War for Family Equality. It’s an aptly named book. Few probably remember Jephthah, whose story appears in the book of Judges. Eager to overcome the stigma of the bastard son, he rashly vowed to God he would sacrifice whoever greeted him at the front door of his home if only he could win victory over the Ammonites. He won, but when he returned home, the one who loved him best -- his only child, a daughter – greeted him before any others. And with great sorrow, Jephthah killed her.

“Until now courts presumed that whatever gay couples wanted automatically would benefit the children placed in gay couples’ homes. No serious discussion has occurred in the courts with the focus on points where children and their gay guardians have divergent or even conflicting interests,” Lopez argues in his brief before the Supreme Court.

He argues that until now the courts have only heard from children who were still under the thumb of their same sex parents. And unfortunately children growing up in those segregated same-sex environments fear accusations of “homophobic.”

What is clear from Jephthah's Daughters, which covers over 70 cases of same sex parenting, is that children's feelings in these situations are repressed because of their adult care giver's sensitivity to any mention of the opposite sex parent. "One COG, a boy conceived in the 1990s by a surrogate contract with a gay father, was taken to a lesbian psychiatrist who told him that his aching sadness on Mother's Day was the result of homophobia. He was told to apologize to his gay father for having confided in the lesbian psychiatrist about his anger over not having a mother," Lopez said.

"Gay marriage will allow adults to acquire custody of other people's children and deny those children connections to their original father and mother," Lopez added. He is particularly sensitive to people's ethnic origins because he is the "son of a Puerto Rican lesbian and a Filipino man." And Rivka Edelman is Jewish. "Gay marriage targets **children** of gay parents for discrimination," Lopez concluded.

"Children learn to role play the part of living dolls," said Rivka Edelman, who used her real name, B.N. Klein, in the court filing, "Our parents used us as little display objects. We existed only to make our parents look good, to feed the insatiable egos that were our parents. Does that sound like a happy childhood?"

"A child is neither a constitutional right nor the natural consequence of same-sex sexual relations, and a marriage license does not change biological reality. The impact of forcing children to attribute their filial affections to non-parents is damaging to all involved, but women as a class bear the hardest burden," Edelman continued.

"When gay men want children on demand, such a system requires women to either hyper-ovulate and sell their own genetic material or to carry children and then dissolve the natural bond between them and their offspring," she told the court.

"Surrogate mothers' other children must witness their mother being used as an incubator and their sibling being sent away and sold. When lesbians want children on demand, there is a loss imposed on the child and the excluded father."

"Gay marriage imposes unequal burdens on women and denies women equal protection under the law," Edelman said, adding that superovulation drugs used to get a woman's egg have been linked to death and cancer. "Industrialized procreation is harmful to women. This is a multi-million dollar industry gearing up to create a sub-caste of breeder women."

Though she claims to have zero interest in any religion, Edelman came to the same conclusion as the Catholic Church: “Children are not a right.” And I would add: “They are a gift to marriage.”

What is interesting about this whole mess is that while trying to protect so-called rights of same-sex couples, the courts go on creating injustices. Not just the surrogate mothers whose wombs are rented to homosexual couples, not just the



children raised by same sex strangers, but also the institution of marriage itself and religious freedom are threatened, Jephthah Daughters reveals.

Statisticians and sociologists studying the effect of legalized same sex marriage in Spain concluded it cheapened marriage. There was a real decline in marriages after it was instituted. And in one year there was a 75 percent increase in divorces due to the law. But the group most affected were people who were married less than a year – their divorce rate went up 330 percent! The researchers attributed it to creating options – same sex marriage and easier divorce -- which “trivialized marriage.”

In Canada, the religious persecution from instituting same sex marriage was felt immediately. Civil marriage commissioners who refused to preside over such arrangements lost their jobs, and the Roman Catholic Knights of Columbus were fined for refusing to rent their facilities for post same-sex “wedding” celebrations.

Speech is no longer free in Canada. “Many of those who have persisted in voicing their dissent have been subjected to investigations by human rights commissions and proceedings before human right tribunals,” said Professor Bradley W. Miller in his paper, “Same-Sex Marriage Ten Years on: Lessons from Canada.” He added that those who are poor or poorly educated and without institutional affiliation have suffered the most. They have been forced to pay fines, make apologies and undertake never to speak on such matters again. Miller’s paper was quoted in Jephthah’s Daughters.

In the United States, persecution has already begun. And the little people have been the hardest hit.

Wedding florists, photographers and Christian bakeries have been fined and forced out of business. This is an amazing amount of injustice coming out of an institution that is supposed to rectify an injustice!

But there's a reason for that. My husband, Lawrence Fox, knows the answer: "Any time you do not use something for its natural purpose, you create injustice."

So according to Natural Law, each thing has its own natural purpose. Go get yourself a delicious dessert – how about a brownie? Hold the brownie to your eye. Can you taste it with your eye?

Ouch! The brownie hurts in my eye. That's an injustice! Eyes can't taste things. The purpose of the eye is to see. Look at the brownie. Can you see it? Yes, I can.

So now pop the brownie in your mouth. Yum. Guess the purpose of the mouth. No injustice there.

Now let's look at marriage. What is the purpose of marriage? I know some young Muslim guys on Twitter told me its purpose was pleasure. It's true that's part of sexual relations. But if that's the only purpose of sex, then injustices crop up like prostitution and rape. Those are injustices created when the sexual act is not used according to its proper natural purpose.

In marriage, however, [two people are able to form a very strong personal bond](#) to last a lifetime. Children are a natural consequence of this kind of pairing. And a strong bond between two structurally complementary adults allows the children to grow up in a secure and loving environment in which they know their own identity. They know who is their mother, and who is their father.

No injustices result from this pairing unless the parents get a divorce. This "*irresponsible separation*," as Pope Francis told us, causes children to "*suffer the outcome of a culture of exaggerated individual rights*." As in the case of same sex "marriage," the children's needs are put aside to satisfy the selfish desires of adults. (I understand some divorces are necessary to protect the wife or child from abuse.)

It's true that homosexual unions do form bonds on a natural level because of the bonding hormone Oxytocin, which is released in the sexual act. But two people of the same sex who care about one another are friends. Introducing sexual activity into the friendship creates an injustice – just like sticking a brownie in your eye. "Those who share a vested interest in vice falsely claim the fair name of friendship,

because one who fails to love is not a friend,” according to Aelred of Rievaulx, who wrote “Spiritual Friendship” in the 12th century.

“But when so much sweetness is experienced in such empty friendship, which lust pollutes, avarice corrupts, or wantonness defiles, just imagine the sweetness to be experienced in this other friendship: the more righteous, chaste, and open it is, the more it is carefree, enjoyable and happy,” he wrote, taking aim at same sex liaisons. I can’t tell you how many modern accounts I’ve read of young men who left the homosexual lifestyle and reunited with one of their lovers as a chaste friend. They said they were much happier in the relationship when sex was not involved.



And that’s why we call “sin” missing the mark. A same sex couple aims to love each other, but they miss the mark by introducing sexual activity into the relationship. And the children caught in these homosexual households suffer enormously. Mainly, a same sex union creates a highly sexualized environment, and children's innocence is violated. Now the "children" have grown up and made their voices heard. I wonder if the people who advocate for same sex “marriage” will listen?

“My home life was not traditional nor conventional. I suffered because of it, in ways that are difficult for sociologists to index. Both nervous and yet blunt, I would later seem strange even in the eyes of gay and bisexual adults who had little patience for someone like me. I was just as odd to them as I was to straight people,” Lopez opined in a recent article in Life Site News.



“Life is hard when you are strange. Even now, I have very few friends and often feel as though I do not understand people because of the unspoken gender cues that everyone around me, even gays raised in traditional homes, takes for granted. Though I am hard working and a quick learner, I have trouble in professional settings because co-workers find me bizarre.” Lopez and the other children raised by same

sex partners say that the damage done to them, as children, will haunt them to the end of their lives.

I highly recommend reading Jephthah's Daughters. You will never again just shrug your shoulders and say, "Well what they do in their same sex relationship is none of my business."

This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2015/04/same-sex-marriage-and-new-apocalypse.html>

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Of Saints, Suffering, and Scleroderma [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



In my flesh I complete
what is lacking in Christ's afflictions ([Col. 1.24](#)).

“Hello, Faddah!”

I'm guessing it was probably the first time Pope John Paul II heard *that* one in the Vatican's audience hall. It was my sister, Adeline, who was visiting Rome with my mom and dad many years ago. None of them were Catholic at the time, but my pastor had helped them secure an invitation to a general audience. Although my family had tremendous respect for the Pope, they went to the audience mainly as tourists – devout evangelical tourists, to be sure, but tourists all the same.

Following his remarks and a blessing, John Paul made his way down the center aisle, nodding and smiling and embracing the faithful as he went. My sister, right on the center aisle, was distracted as she gathered up belongings. Suddenly she felt a stillness overcome the crowd around her – she turned. The Holy Father was passing and looking directly at her! “I had no idea what to say,” Addie recalls. “The only thing that came to mind was that line from that movie we watched as kids.” She meant [Going My Way](#), and the scene where Tony Scaponi, a neighborhood ruffian, guiltily addresses Fr. Fitzgibbon (Barry Fitzgerald). “Oh, hello Faddah!” Tony tosses out with a breezy hand gesture, trying to deflect attention from a stolen



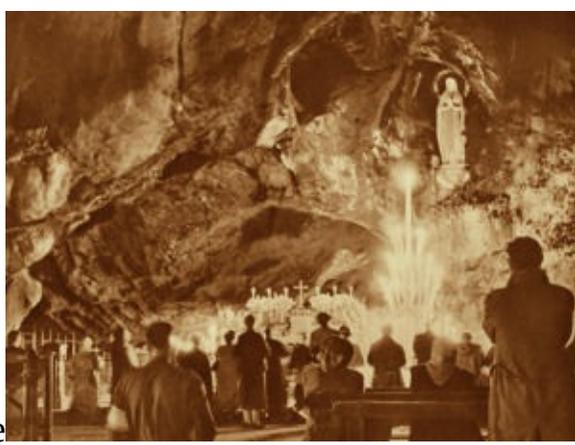
turkey. My sister in Rome, suddenly confronted by a pontiff, stole Tony Scapioni's line, channeling a bit of in the process. "The Pope paused and smiled," Addie remembers, "and then he looked at Mom."

I'm told Mom was crying – weeping openly, if I know my mom – and John Paul reached out to clasp her hands. They were hands gnarled by disease, hardened and bandaged and pockmarked with lesions. Vulnerable, hurting hands, belonging to a vulnerable, hurting invalid who'd prefer they belonged to someone else.

Sclerodactyly is what the docs call it, a thickening of the skin on the fingers. Plus, my mom suffered from Raynaud's syndrome (acute sensitivity to cold and limited circulation in the extremities) and calcinosis (scattered deposits of calcium in superficial tissues). All of these are common symptoms of [scleroderma](#) – a terribly disfiguring autoimmune disease that mainly affects the body's connective tissues, namely collagen. The immune system goes awry and attempts to fend off nonexistent threats by producing more collagen than necessary. This results in characteristically tough, stiff flesh, especially in the hands and face. In fact, the word "scleroderma" literally means "hard skin," and my mom had it bad.

My mom's (and our family's) journey with scleroderma started back when I was in high school. It was summer, and I was on a church work trip to [Voice of Calvary Ministries](#) in Mississippi, working on a farm in rural Mendenhall and rehabbing houses in Jackson. One afternoon I was napping after a long day of yanking out nails and hauling refuse, and I lay on the floor surrounded by fans, hoping for relief from the heat. I woke to someone jostling my arm, and I looked up into the face of a VOCCM staffer. "We got a call from Colorado," he said. "Your mom is sick – real sick. I'm to have you call home."

I got hold of my dad at Boulder Community Hospital. "She's OK, Ricky," he said. "It was a perforated ulcer, and they're dealing with it. But there's something else." I was still a bit groggy from the nap and the heat, and I tried to focus as I heard Dad pass the phone to Mom. "The doctor thinks I have something called scleroderma," she told me. "It's why I'm having pain and numbness in my arms, and my fingers are getting so stiff." She told me not to worry. "Just pray for me, Ricky," Mom asked. "Pray for healing."



No healing came despite loads of prayers, not to mention countless doctors and specialists and experimental treatments. You see, there *is* no healing for scleroderma, but rather only symptom management and “optimizing” one’s quality of life. Mom couldn’t buy that, and she was determined to prove the experts wrong. Acupuncture and biofeedback and herbal remedies led to a trip to China and a world-renowned natural healer. No luck. At one point she considered visiting Oral Roberts’ [Prayer Tower](#) in Oklahoma to plead for God’s mercy and a miracle. Even Lourdes wasn’t out of the question – no small thing for my staunchly Presbyterian mother. She had great faith, and she never stopped believing that she’d be completely healed of that nasty disease.

Yet time went on with no relief in sight, and Mom began to express her faith in anger. “Why isn’t he *doing* something about this,” she’d fiercely exclaim. “What’s taking him so long?” She refused to allow some illness to keep her from her busy life: Typing and clerical work for the high school, playing the piano and organ, caring for her family, home, and beloved pets. In time, though, as her rigid, curved fingers grew increasingly immobile, she had to accept the limitations her condition imposed on her. What’s more, there were indications that the disease was progressing and was beginning to affect her internal organs.

Mom sought out comfort and palliation where she could find it – prayer meetings, support groups, and, of all things, a Benedictine abbey just a couple miles down the road. By the time her scleroderma was becoming a mortal challenge, I had become a Catholic in Chicago, and I would spend a lot of time at [St. Walburga’s Abbey](#) on my sojourns home to Boulder. Eventually my mother’s curiosity overcame her anti-Catholic scruples, and she agreed to accompany me to the Abbey every now and then to find out what it was all about.

On one of those occasions, she met Sr. Augustina, a hardy German nun who served as the Abbey’s baker. Sr. Augustina herself was burdened by physical infirmity – a pronounced kyphosis, or curving of the spine, which, combined with her diminutive stature, meant that she could look most adults in the eye only



by straining her neck upward. Nonetheless, Augustina was inevitably cheerful and generous, and if her health bothered her, you'd never know it. Always quick with a wink and a mischievous grin, she was also known to keep bags of her homemade cookies at the ready for distribution to visitors, especially children.

For my mother, Sr. Augustina was an especially welcome relief, and they became friends in no time. It was an odd friendship, I suppose – a cloistered Benedictine nun and a Protestant suburban homemaker. As far as I know, Mom never went to Mass at St. Walburga's, nor did she participate in the Divine Office or any other formal spiritual exercises. She just went to chat with Sr. Augustina, and the nun would hold my mom's hands and stroke them. On the surface, they had little in common beyond a shared faith and the experience of physical ailment, but that was plenty. Tears flowed abundantly, as did the prayers I'm sure.

“Almost always the individual enters suffering with a typically human protest and with the question ‘why,’” Pope St. John Paul wrote in *Salvifici Doloris*. “Nevertheless, it often takes time, even a long time, for this answer to begin to be interiorly perceived.” And what are the outlines of that answer? The Pope offered [insight](#) that is both compassionate and revolutionary:

It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption.

Still, my mom wouldn't have been interested in the Pope's insights. All she knew was that she was suffering and afraid and angry at her God. That's why Sr. Augustina became such a treasured confidant, for her calm, soothing demeanor assured Mom that, even though the disease wasn't going away, there was still meaning in life – that Mom wasn't, and would never be, irrelevant. If nothing else, Mom's reception of the ministrations of others made present the reality of Christ in yet another little corner of the world. And that's precisely in line with the [vision](#) of Pope John Paul who was well aware that the suffering person

feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others, and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ *transforms* this depressing *feeling*.



In a way, Sr. Augustine helped my mother – and those around her – to see that God wasn't in the business of *choosing* saints to endure hardship. Instead, He allowed hardship in general to help make us *all* saints and, in so doing, save the world. “Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world's Redemption,” John Paul [notes](#), “and can share this treasure with others.”

And this treasure-sharing happens even when we resist it and rebel. He's no idiot, this God we worship. The second Person of the Trinity is intimately familiar with corporeal existence and pain and agony, so He is aware that suffering, physical and otherwise, stinks. Sure, we want to get healed, and He gets that. Saints, though! Saints! We follow a crucified God, so how can we be surprised that suffering is part of what draws us closer to Him. It's what shapes us into what He would have us become: Holy, despite our flaws and weaknesses, conformed to His likeness through our own versions of His Cross. Crucified! And so, saints!

My mom, a resolute Calvinist steeped in solid anti-Catholic Masonry, fixed her eyes on the beaming face of a saintly Pope and sobbed. They stood there for a moment, the Vicar of Christ and my ailing Protesting Mom, a tiny, tight circle of revelatory love. No words were exchanged, but the communion I'm told was palpable. Then, the Pope released Mom's hands, gave her a blessing, and continued on his way.

Mom died within a couple years of that encounter with John Paul, and then the Pope died a couple years after that following his own valiant struggle with chronic illness. Maybe their paths have crossed on the other side – who knows? If so, I couldn't pick better background music for that moment than the Wesleyan [hymn](#) we sang today at Mass:

Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Thanks, Mom, for your example of courage and perseverance. Rest in peace.

A version of this essay appeared on [Crisis](#).

This contribution is available at <http://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/2015/04/19/of-saints-suffering-and-scleroderma/>
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Lunchtime [at Cherishing Everyday Beauty]



I've nearly completed my first year of teaching. Praise and thanks be to God (meant to be read with immense gratitude for the year. Surprisingly, no sarcasm intended *winks*). "Journaling" as a first-year teacher didn't really happen here on the blog primarily because I have been so busy learning. I think teachers and parents alike can understand that sentiment. Nonetheless, there are a few things that I would like to share before the next two months are over and my first year of teaching officially complete.



One of them is about lunchtime. When we returned to school for the year last August, I was a newly-minted college grad and first-year teacher yet undaunted by the impending learning curve that awaited me and excited to gain experience + celebrate the Liturgical year with children (because that's what you do in a Catholic Montessori school + atrium). Still -- as a fairly shy introvert -- I cherished and looked

forward to every moment of my daily lunch break because I knew I

needed

it, even if the morning had not left me feeling completely drained. I know parents don't get such breaks, so I determined to enjoy my place as teacher for this moment in time ;)

At first, I ate my lunches in the solitude of an outdoor picnic. But as cooler weather began to force me inside, I began having lunch in the staff lounge (for good reason, we actually call it the "Haven"), even though I knew this would mean less personal time. I was nervous because I knew this meant I'd have to interact minimally with the Elementary students and slightly more with their teachers. But, as I try to approach all of life's circumstances, I chose to embrace and make the most of it.

I began having lunch almost daily with our Elementary Catechist. Her sweet personality and quick sense of humor quickly put me to ease and it did not take long for our lunches together to become one of my favorite parts of the day, nor for her to be counted among my favorite people. For months we have enjoyed each other's stories, recipes, quick-to-laugh reactions to each other's jokes, and even occasionally poked fun at each other if the right opportunity presented itself. We've exchanged prayer requests, given each other retreat recommendations, and discussed books that we both have read. This dear woman is old enough to be my mother and we've formed a friendship that is dear to me as the day is long.

Now Springtime has blossomed in Virginia and the warm weather invites me back to my outdoor picnics. In some sense, I'm thankful that heat and humidity are staples in these parts around this time of the year because they will entice me back to the Haven to enjoy lunch again with my sweet friend. Meanwhile, I remain grateful that food invites fellowship and forms dear friendships while quiet picnic lunches in the shadow of Our Lady's statue provide an excellent mid-day relief and a perfect spot to pray at least part of a rosary as time allows.

Wishing you and yours a beautiful Springtime

! ♥

This contribution is available at <http://cherishingeverydaybeauty.blogspot.com/2015/04/lunchtime.html>
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The Lamb's Supper Is Not A Buffet [at A Faith-Full Life]

When it comes to a buffet, what's not to like? Self serve, all you can eat; just meandering down the buffet line and picking whatever strikes your fancy. Eat what you like, leave what you don't, and above all – don't stop until you've gorged yourself! If there's a dining experience that's more thoroughly all-American than the good old fashioned all you can eat buffet; then I'm certainly not aware of it!

— 1 —

More and more, however, it seems as if people are approaching religion and spirituality with the same “buffet” mindset. They pick and choose, take what they like and leave what they don't. This brilliant cartoon by Cagle sums it up rather nicely:



— 2 —

Unfortunately, more and more Christians are also approaching their faith in this way. All too often, people select churches based on issues that fundamentally come down to personal preference. What religious experience will be the most enjoyable for me? Which church has the best ministries and programs for my family? The best worship band and music? The most charismatic and engaging pastor? The best coffee bar and baristas? The most comfortable seats and best audio/visual experience? Social media sites?

Truly, we are able to gorge ourselves at the buffet of religion in a way that was unthinkable in years past. I stumbled across one church which promoted 208 separate ministries on it's website, including 125 outreach programs (balloon art or DJ anyone?), and 53 separate ministries dedicated to individual sports! Don't believe me? You can check it out here: [Ministries – The Rock Church](#)

I'm honestly not trying to come off as snarky or condescending – it comes naturally for me so I don't have to try 😊

Look, I appreciate that we all have unique talents and interests, and that our faith *should* inform every aspect of our life including our recreation. I get it.

The problem is this. Our religion has become recreation, our faith has become fad, and we ourselves have become people *of* the world rather than people *in* the world. We have forgotten that we are not of this world. [\[Tweet This\]](#)

— 3 —

This “buffet” mentality within Christianity can be especially prominent within certain Protestant movements, but it has also sadly found its way into the Catholic Church. Today too many Catholics seem to think that they can come forward to the altar table, to the very supper of the Lamb, and then pick and choose what they partake of. Receive Christ fully present in the Eucharist, body, blood, soul, and divinity? Yes please! Follow the Church’s teaching on contraception? No, thank you very much!

But the truth is, this “buffet” mentality is antithetical to an authentic Catholic faith! When I was received into the Catholic Church two years ago, I was required to make the following profession, “I believe and profess *all* that the holy Catholic Church teaches, believes, and proclaims to be revealed by God.”

Not some. Not just what I agreed with.

All.

This profession is obviously not one that should be made lightly! It is for this reason that the Catholic Church will typically require adult converts to attend almost a full year of catechetical instruction in the form of RCIA classes (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) prior to converting. If you are going to profess to believe *all* that the Catholic Church teaches and proclaims to be revealed by God, then you had best know what she teaches!

— 4 —

But it’s not just Catholics who want to be able to pick and choose when it comes to the bountiful table with which the Church presents us. Many of my Protestant friends and family struggle to understand why they are not allowed to receive communion within the Catholic Church when attending Mass with us. “*Aren’t we Christians?*” they will ask. “*Don’t we serve the same Lord? Don’t we share many of the same beliefs?*” Some of them even share our belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and ask, “*Shouldn’t our shared beliefs mean that we can partake of the Lord’s Supper together?*”

Many of them are deeply hurt and offended by the Church’s unwillingness to allow them to partake of communion. Others come forward anyway to receive communion against the wishes of the Church. Frequently they perceive this rule as displaying a lack of charity, humility, or ecumenism on the part of the Catholic Church when nothing could be further from the truth. Much like Christ Himself, His Church extends an invitation to *everyone*, inviting *all* to attend the supper of the Lamb!

But – *and here’s the catch* – the Lamb’s supper is not a buffet!

— 5 —

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who

are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.’ But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”¹

— 6 —

There is a great paradox at work in the parable above. Although everyone is invited to the feast, there are still rules which are enforced by the host. The guests must be willing. They must be worthy. They must be properly attired.

There is a very simple answer to those who struggle with understanding the restrictions which the Church places on who can, and who cannot, receive communion. To partake of the Eucharist, to participate in the sacrament of communion – *you must be in full communion with Christ and His Church!*

It’s really that simple.

- If I am a Protestant and not in full communion with the Catholic Church – if I cannot say that, “*I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church teaches, believes, and proclaims to be revealed by God.*” – then it is a scandal and a sacrilege to profess full and complete communion when there is not.
- If I am a Catholic and not in full communion with the Catholic Church – if I cannot in good conscience affirm that, “*I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church teaches, believes, and proclaims to be revealed by God.*” – then it is a scandal and a sacrilege to profess full and complete communion when there is not. [Far too many Catholics fall into this category, privately (or publicly) disagreeing with the Church on matters of dogma and moral teaching. They profess that they must be true to their conscience without understanding that it is the job of holy mother Church to help them properly *form* their conscience. It is not our job to attempt to mold the Church to our own opinions, morals, or societal norms; rather we must allow the Church to mold and shape *us* – a lesson we should have learned after witnessing the results of the Reformation.]
- If I am a Catholic who is not in full communion with Christ due to unconfessed mortal sin in my life – then it is a scandal and a sacrilege to profess full and complete communion when there is not full communion.

— 7 —

I, like many, have been guilty of at least one of these offenses in my life at some point and have had to repent. “*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. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”²

The Church, much like a loving mother, wants for her children to be well fed. But much like any loving mother, she will require them to eat their vegetables with their meal, and require them to finish their dinner before dessert. She will remind them, in other words, that the Lamb’s supper is a family meal – not a buffet. That all are invited, but that there are house rules. She will remind them that the guests must be willing, they must be worthy, and they must be properly attired. And then, she will feed them a meal the likes of which they have never seen and could never have dreamt of!

!

1. Matthew 22:1-14 [↔](#)

2. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 [↔](#)

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With Eyes of Mercy [at Third Place Project]



We have a big year coming up. Starting this fall, the Catholic Church will be celebrating a “jubilee” year focused in particular on the mercy of God. Jubilee years find their origin in the book of Leviticus (25:8-13), and usually focus on forgiveness, pardon, and growing closer to God. Jubilee years have been celebrated every 25 or 50 years for the since the 1300’s, the last of which was the great Jubilee of the year 2000. That celebration followed a three year preparation looking at the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This Jubilee, on the other hand, is an “extraordinary” celebration (as it deviates from that 25/50 year schedule) – and will focus on one of Pope Francis’ favorite themes: *the mercy of God the Father*.

If you’re looking for specifics: the “Jubilee of Mercy” will begin on December 8, 2015 (the feast of the Immaculate Conception), and will close on November 20, 2016 (the Solemnity of Christ the King). The opening and closing of the Jubilee year will be marked by the opening and closing of a “Holy Door” at St. Peter’s Basilica – [the open door being a sign of our openness to God’s action in our lives](#).

Mercy has a variety of definitions. Some would contrast justice (getting what we deserve) with mercy (getting what we don’t deserve). Others might comment that it’s being released from a debt – moral or financial. [Dr. Marcellino D’Ambrosio defines mercy](#) as “*love’s response to suffering*.”

I’d recommend that you read [the official announcement \(the “Bull of Indiction”\)](#) from Pope Francis, which explains both the Pope’s goals and specific details of what’s coming. This Papal bull begins with a strong statement:

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. (Misericordiae Vultus 1)

This same document describes the motto of the holy year as: “***Merciful like the Father***” (MV 14). Scripture is ripe with images and passages which direct us back our merciful Father, none more clearly than the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) – a story whose central character may more appropriately be the Father, who lets his younger son waltz out the door with his inheritance,. This same

Father waits and watches so that he can see his son “while he was still a long way off” (Luke 15:20), and eventually, He celebrates his son home. Later, He goes out in search of the older brother (Luke 15:25-32), who is incredulous at the mercy and generosity shown towards his younger sibling.

Jesus told this parable to help us better understand the mercy of the Father. But above, the Pope didn't just say that Jesus *told* us of the Father's mercy... he said that Jesus IS THE FACE of the Father's mercy. He's placing mercy at the very heart of our Christian belief – expressing that Mercy is (MV 2):

...a word which unveils the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity...

...the supreme act by which God comes to meet us...

...the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life...

...the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness...

It's exciting to consider that the coming year is going to be all about unfolding these deep messages. We see in mercy who God is, why God became one of us, the means by which we are able to be in relationship with Him, and a mandatory part of being a Christian. The Pope says that: ***“Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us”*** (MV 9). We see this in the very words of the Lord's prayer “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive...” – as well as in the parable of the unforgiving servant (see Matthew 18).

Mercy is also at the heart of the Church – Church which exists not to stand in condemnation of the world, but rather to show and share the mercy of God without reservation. Perhaps some of my favorite words from the Papal bull are found when the Pope describes the integral role that mercy plays in the life of the Church:

The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of one's self. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident... wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy. (MV 12)

The coming year will be an adventure. We'll hear from the Gospel of Luke (that's where we'll be in the cycle of Sunday readings) -and Luke is often referred to as the “evangelist of mercy”, as parables like the lost sheep, coin, and son are all found in his writings. There will be invitations to go to confession (and especially to return, if you've been away for a long time.) There almost certainly be events, activities, web materials, videos, books, homilies, and the like – all which will invite us to reflect on the abundant mercy of God... and which invite us to follow in the footsteps of the prodigal son, and to return home from whatever distant country we may have found ourselves in.

But it doesn't stop there: we are also to be agents of mercy – as this is not a gift we are supposed to keep to ourselves. We are to be sent to others to freely share the mercy that we have received... and Pope Francis has some suggestions on how we might do that:

Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead. (MV 15)

It's going to be a heck of a year. And I look forward to all we will learn and discover together about the love with which God the Father continues to love us (whether we deserve it or not.)

More information on the coming Jubilee can be found on [the official website for the year of mercy](#), as well as [this document](#) from the Pontifical Council on the New Evangelization. The council points out that ***“mercy is a theme very dear to Pope Francis, as is expressed in the episcopal motto he had chosen: ‘miserando atque eligendo’... one possible translation of this motto is “with eyes of mercy.”*** The same document also mentioned that ***“in the English edition of the Apostolic Exhortation [Evangelii Gaudium \(the Joy of the Gospel\)](#) the term ‘mercy’ appears 32 times.”***

This contribution is available at <http://www.iamthird.ca/with-eyes-of-mercy/>
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The Traditional Mass and Africa [at LMS Chairman]



Today I am publishing a Position Paper for the FIUV on the Traditional Mass in Africa - subsaharan Africa. Go over to

[Rorate Caeli to read it](#)

. Here I am going to add a little extra commentary.

I am sure there will not be lacking people who will tell us earnestly that the Traditional Mass is not appropriate for conditions in Africa, because the Traditional Mass represents a form of religious culture - European religious culture - which is alien and incomprehensible to Africans, by contrast with the Novus Ordo.

It is true that the Traditional Mass was formed in Europe, but the progressives don't seem to have noticed that the same is true of the Novus Ordo. The difference is that the Traditional Mass formed in Europe a long time ago. How does this difference cash out?

Well, the late Antique and early Medieval Europe which produced the EF had a great respect for the supernatural; it had a great sensitivity to the reality of the sacred, of sin, and of evil - including of witchcraft; it was comfortable with ritual; and it was concerned with tradition, the ways of one's ancestors.

The Novus Ordo is a product of a culture which is uncomfortable with the supernatural, and with ritual; a culture which regards liberation from tradition, from the ways of one's ancestors, as the key to authenticity and freedom (whateve that means); which cannot bear to think about the reality of sin; and which regards evil, and witchcraft, as a joke.

So, obviously, the Novus Ordo is bound to be more suited to the cultural conditions of Africa... right?

Wrong. The reality is that, unfortunately, the Novus Ordo looks very much like the other aspects of modern European culture which have been arriving in Africa since colonial times, which are not respectful of

authentic African culture. Alongside Hollywood films and consumerism, the Novus Ordo reflects the passage through European thinking of Rationalism and Romanticism. Insofar as one can see it as a good response to the cultural situation of modern Europe - and this is presumably the idea - then its attempt to make Catholicism less shocking and uncomfortable for people who don't understand the concept of the supernatural and instinctively reject the idea of tradition, it is addressing a situation totally removed from the situation in Africa. For most African Catholics, it is an answer to a question which is not being asked.

Back in 1970, with hindsight, the Novus Ordo was imposed on a Catholic population in Africa with very limited exposure to the European ideas to which the liturgical reform was responding. Perhaps - the progressives will say - the situation is different now, now that many Africans have mobile phones. And in any case, the great advantage of the Novus Ordo is its great flexibility, which facilitates inculturation.

Well, how are Africans, in a religious context, responding to the new conditions, and how does the Novus Ordo and the TLM fit in with this response? One of the things we have learnt - or should have learnt - from the revival of Islam is that lightbulbs and cars and even Western-style universities do not necessarily blunt the appeal of traditional spirituality. In Africa, in fact, we find two different responses: the embracing of the new, of European and American influences, and a reaction against them.

In the first case we find (as well as simple materialism) Evangelical groups which reject everything African, and embrace a spirituality based as closely as possible on American models. This is the opposite of inculturation; it is the apotheosis of the foreign as superior to everything African.

In the second case we find the traditional religions, syncretistic cults, and the problem of 'dual allegiance': nominal Catholics who consult the practitioners of traditional religions, voodoo and the like, when they feel like it. The feeling here is that the old African way is superior, more powerful, and more deeply rooted.

The infinite flexibility of the Novus Ordo is not necessarily an advantage in this situation. The Church is being attacked from two, opposite, directions: by Evangelicals, for making too much concession to paganism; by syncretists as not being sufficiently magical or deep. The variety of liturgical forms found in Catholic churches can easily give the impression that the Church does not have anything coherent to say in this debate, and has no effective defence against either side.

What the Church needs, in fact, is a form of worship which is clearly not pagan, but which still answers the spiritual needs of people who feel the pull of paganism. A liturgy which creates a sense of the sacred, of entering into the

mysterium tremendum.

What can too easily happen is just the opposite: a 'banal on-the-spot-product' (as Pope Benedict described it) with pagan ceremonies inserted into it at intervals, as we have all seen with Papal liturgies. African Catholics could be forgiven for thinking, in a liturgy like that, that it is the pagan stuff which is powerful, which connects with the transcendent, with the spirit world, and not the Christian stuff. That, obviously, is a disaster, even leaving aside the whole question of liturgical abuses.

What I would like to emphasise finally is that, however narrow-minded some of the missionary priests of old might have been (and by no means all of them were narrow-minded), having a totally Catholic but spiritually impressive liturgy like the Traditional Mass can today give priests and people the confidence

to incorporate African customs into the life of the Church, without exposing themselves to the polemics of the Evangelicals or to any kind of syncretism. It is a great sadness that Africans should feel they have to abandon their indigenous names, music, or art, in order to become Christian: this is something Pope Paul VI spoke firmly against in 1967:

'an African man, when initiated into the Christian religion, is by no means forced to repudiate himself'. Cultural self-repudiation has never been the Church's demand of converts. The Traditional Mass is not part of the problem with inculturation, but part of the solution.

This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2015/04/the-traditional-mass-and-africa.html>
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Baptism by immersion only? [at Catholicism and Adventism]



Early Christian painting of a Baptism – Saint Calixte Catacomb – 3rd century

Adventists baptise only by full immersion (submersion), and they don't consider other forms of baptism to be real baptisms. They also don't baptise infants, but that's another story for another day.

As with the Sabbath, Adventism's doctrine is based on selected texts and not the entire biblical picture. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, recognises all three modes of baptism depicted in the Bible. We baptise by immersion (single or triple) and by pouring, and while we don't baptise by sprinkling, we recognise its validity.

In a typical Adventist discussion, like the one I had this week on Facebook, you'll be presented with only those passages in the Bible where people were baptised in rivers, and only those passages that depict baptism as a symbolic burial.

The Catholic Church acknowledges these passages, but doesn't read more into them than they actually say. And we read the rest of the Bible too, and find other texts there that indicate that immersion is not the only valid, biblical form.

Considering that there are several denominations that baptise by immersion only and don't recognise anything else as a real baptism, it's surprising that there is not one single passage in the Bible that shows a single case of baptism that was definitively done by full immersion. Only indirectly, through St Paul's analogy of burial, do we get confirmation that baptism can be done by full immersion.

Texts supposedly proving full immersion baptisms

Let's look at the common texts showing baptism in rivers:

Matt 3:16 (KJV) – And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him

Nothing in this verse says Jesus was fully immersed. He could have had water poured on his head, and then gone out of the water onto the river bank. The phrase “*went up out of the water*” can be performed whether one was fully immersed or only standing in the water. All we can tell from this is that Jesus was in the water – we cannot tell how deep.

John 3:23 (KJV) – And John also was baptizing in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized

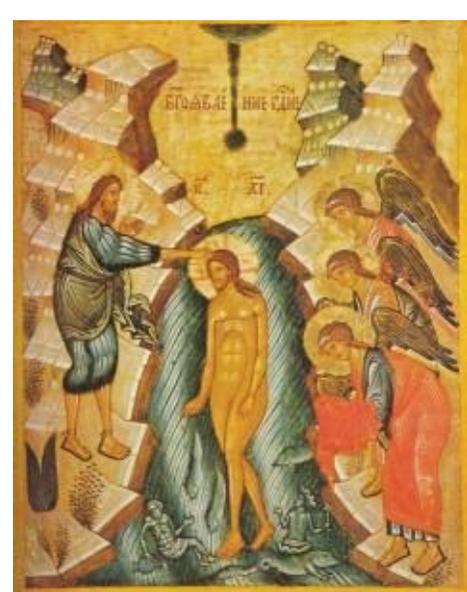
Nothing in this verse says anyone was fully immersed. Just because there was water, doesn’t mean that they were fully immersed. The phrases “*much water*” and “*fully immersed*” do not mean the same thing.

Another passage that people present as proof of full immersion is Acts 8:38-39. Yet the funny thing about this is that the verse attributes the same degree of wetness to the person performing the baptism as it does to the person being baptised.

Acts 8:38-39 (KJV) – And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Here again we have two people going “*down into the water*” and coming “*up out of the water.*” If you read the text, you’ll see that the eunuch went down into the water, and came up out of the water. This Adventists interpret as being fully immersed. But if you read carefully, you’ll notice that Philip also went down into the water and came up out of the water. They both did! Does that mean Philip was also fully immersed?

Some Adventists seem to think that going down into water and coming out of it again is an absolute indication of full immersion. Not so, unless Philip dunked himself as well.



Baptism of Jesus – Orthodox icon

Baptism as a burial with Christ

Let’s look further at what baptism means:

Adventists quote verses like Romans 6:4 and Col 2:12 to show that baptism is likened to a burial. But they ignore the other analogies made in Scripture. Catholics believe in the burial symbolism too, but we read the whole Bible, not selected parts, and find more.

Adventists also quote 1 Cor 10:1-2 (KJV) – Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea

They forget that during this baptism, the Israelites were not immersed in water at all. The sea parted and they walked through on dry land. At most, they were sprinkled with spray being blown in the wind.

Baptism as washing

The Greek word for “*baptise*” is βαπτίζω (*baptizo*). Are there times when “*baptizo*” is used for washing without immersion? Yes.

Luke 11:38 (KJV) – And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first **washed (baptizo)** before dinner.

In that verse, “*washed*” is “*baptizo*” – and Mark’s parallel passage (Mark 7:3-4) shows that the Jews didn’t fully immerse before eating – they washed their hands.

Mark 7:3-4 – For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they **wash (nipto)** their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they **wash (baptizo)**, they eat not. ...

In Mark, the first “*wash*” is the Greek “*nipto*” and the second wash is “*baptizo*“. The Jews washed their hands before eating – they didn’t fully immerse themselves.

So there we have it – “*baptizo*” can be used to mean “*wash*“, and the Bible does use it that way.

One could argue that baptism was done by immersion of the hands. However, that is not the way Jews did it. This is how they do it:

“Contemporary practice is to **pour** water on each hand three times for most purposes using a cup, and alternating the hands between each occurrence; this ritual is now known by the Yiddish term *negel vasser*, meaning nail water. This Yiddish term is also used for a special cup used for such washing.”

– Wikipedia, [Ritual washing in Judaism](#)

You can find the same information here: [Hand Washing](#) (MyJewishLearning), and this video – (Jewish Pathways, on YouTube).

Baptism as sprinkling

Hebrews 9-10 show us a fascinating comparison. Like in the rest of Hebrews, the Old Covenant is compared to the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, there were various ritual washings that took place – washings of people and washings of things. The washing often took the form of sprinkling of

either water or blood.

Hebrews 9-10 starts off by talking about the Old Covenant, and then gets specific – and speaks of washings, using the Greek noun βαπτισμός (baptismos).

Heb 9:10 (KJV) – Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers **washings (baptismos)**, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.



Baptism of Christ – Francesco Albani

The author of Hebrews then goes on to describe various washings (and sacrifices). After describing what took place under the Old Covenant, he shows what happens with the New Covenant. The passage starts off with washing, shows three types of sprinklings as examples, and then ends off in the next chapter with washing by pure water and sprinkling of our hearts (Heb 10:22, shown below). What a way to describe baptism!

These washings were types of baptism. Verses 13, 19, and 21 show us the washings. All three are done by sprinkling. Do you get that? All three types of washings (baptismos) mentioned are done by sprinkling!

Heb 9:13 (KJV) – For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh

Heb 9:19 (KJV) – For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people

Heb 9:21 (KJV) – Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

There is a Greek word for sprinkling – “*rhantizo*” – which is used in this passage where you see the English word “*sprinkling*”. But the fact that “*rhantizo*” is used in this passage as a subset of “*baptismos*” is very telling.

Heb 10:22 (KJV) – Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts

sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Purifying is symbolised by baptism, which brings forgiveness of sins. Yet in the Old Testament, blood was sprinkled on the altar for the forgiveness of sins, and the ashes of the heifer were mixed with water and were called the waters of sprinkling which purified the unclean. So baptism is symbolised by sprinkling too.

When are our bodies washed with water in a religious sense? Only baptism. In baptism, water washes our bodies outwardly – so here we see that baptism is a symbol of washing clean. In baptism, our hearts are inwardly made clean – and here we see that baptism is compared to sprinkling.

You'll probably notice that Adventism has problems differentiating properly between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant – this leads them to a [very problematic view of the Sabbath](#) as well.

Other passages of relevance:

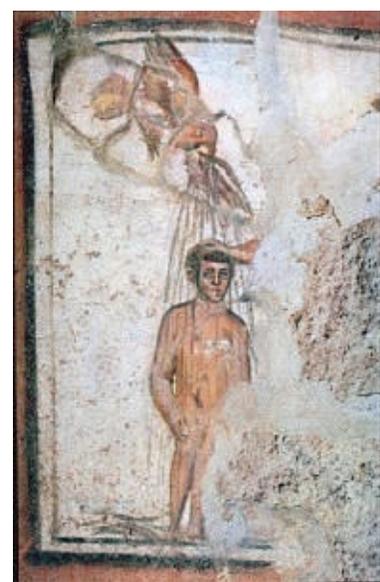
Ezek 36:25 (KJV) – Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

What does baptism do? It makes us clean. How is it symbolised in this verse? By sprinkling.

Numbers 19:13 (KJV) – Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him.

How does water make people clean in this verse? By sprinkling. What does baptism do? It makes us clean.

Baptism as pouring



Baptism – Fresco on the catacomb of Saints Marcellinus and Peter, Via Labicana, Rome, Italy

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is compared to the Holy Spirit being poured out. And think of the tongues of fire (Acts 2:2) – they were not fully encompassed by flames, but rather touched by tongues of fire.

Mark 1:8 (KJV) – I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 2:17a (KJV) – And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh ...

Acts 2:38 (KJV) – Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Here baptism is compared to pouring – the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Being baptised by the Holy Spirit is the same as having the Holy Spirit poured out on you.

Acts 10:45-48 (KJV) – And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Here baptism is again compared to the gift of the Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit is poured out, and the reference to baptism is clear. The baptism with the Holy Spirit was by pouring, so why not also with water?

Problems with sufficient water

Many of the baptism events recorded in the New Testament show situations where bodies of water large enough for full immersion would have been scarce. Inside a prison (Acts 16:33)? Hardly. 3000 people all at once (Acts 2:41)? There was not a water supply big enough to cope with that – and even if there was, the Jews would not have allowed their water supply to be contaminated by 3000 bodies being fully immersed in it. And they would also have chased the Christians out of the temple if they had tried using the Jewish ritual baths for this on such a scale.

Conclusion:

The Bible clearly has baptism shown as burial, washing, pouring, and sprinkling. That should be enough for any Bible-believer who isn't clinging to his/her traditions. Baptists – well, they'd have to give up their name (although the original Anabaptists used pouring and sprinkling as well as immersion); Adventists are distant relatives of the Baptists, and cling to any difference they have with the Catholic Church and her teachings and practices. [I've got another post about some of the irrational arguments they recently put forth in the discussion I had.](#)

Adventists cling to their traditions on one extreme – full immersion. What if a finger was not immersed? Is the baptism valid? What if a hair was not immersed? Is the baptism valid? It's silly. It's hair splitting.

Quakers cling to their traditions on the other extreme – they don't need water at all.

God gave us baptism with water. But he didn't specify how much. God tells us in the Scriptures that baptism is a type of burial, a type of washing (and washing and purification includes sprinkling according to the Old Testament and the book of Hebrews), and a type of pouring. God tells us that we are baptised in the Holy Spirit – and that the Holy Spirit is poured out on us. That's a strong comparison – baptism and pouring are the same with the Holy Spirit, so why not with water?

So those who fully immerse baptise validly. Those who baptise by pouring also baptise validly. And those who baptise by sprinkling (which Catholics do not do) also baptise validly.

Are you a Bible-believing Christian? If so, you should accept what the Bible says about baptism – burial, washing, sprinkling. Are you an Adventist clinging to your church's traditions? If so, stop rejecting what the Bible says and believe ALL of what the Bible says instead of those verses selected for you by your pastors and teachers.

Further reading:

[Catholic Answers Forum – Baptism: Sprinkling or Immersion?](#)

[Catholic Answers – Baptism: Immersion only?](#)

[Laughable arguments – baptism, immersion, and Adventists](#)

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Leaning In



Last Thursday was Take Our Sons and Daughters to Work Day. My daughter accompanied her dad to work and had a fabulous time. I don't think she saw her day at work as a window onto her future life as an engineer or corporate titan. She didn't think of it as being about her own identity or plans at all, as far as I can tell, but as a chance to see her dad at work. She came home glowing with pride in him. She told me all about how well he ran a meeting and how everyone there knows him.

According to Sheryl Sandberg's [Leanin.Org](#) nonprofit, we got this day all wrong. What should have happened is that she should have gone to work with me, because instead of opting out, I should have leaned in to the assistant professorship I used to hold. By now I'd have tenure and she could have seen how powerful, successful, and valuable her mom is. I would be out there striking a blow for all of womanhood, moving the needle one notch closer to the dream of perfect gender equality. Even better, her dad could have been coming home early that day to take her brother to his tennis lesson, since I would be too busy leaning into more important stuff. According to the Lean In folks, who used this day to offer tips on promoting gender equality, we totally missed the boat on this one.

I haven't commented on the Lean In phenomenon before, because it didn't strike me as being interesting or innovative at all. What I took to be the logic behind the idea seemed self-evident: if you really want to succeed at a career, then you'll have to commit to it. Well, duh. But you see I was wrong. The actual logic is this: you *should* want to succeed in a career, because that's what really matters in life, so women should commit to that, and men should commit to making it possible for them.

This way of thinking isn't actually about the individual preferences of real women, particularly mothers, [the majority of whom do not want to work full time](#). It's also not about helping families to spend more time away from work. It's about evening the playing field of the meritocracy. It's about making sure we are all, men and women, mothers and fathers, playing the same game by the same rules so that everyone can have an equal shot at the corner office. It's a plea for gender sameness, which is a very different thing from gender equality.

[An article in USA Today](#) quotes Sandberg: "Equality begets equality. When kids grow up in equal homes they model it more so. As fathers are becoming more active, I think workplaces will become more understanding."

My family is all about equality in the home. We live out the belief women and men are equal before God.

My sons don't get more attention, stuff, or acclaim than my daughter does. My husband deems my work, most of which involves caring for our children, to be of equal (or even greater) value than his work, most of which involves providing for our family. We honor and respect each other as children of God, none of us more valuable or less valuable than any other human being on this planet. Our children are being raised to be free to follow their deepest callings, whatever those may be. We teach them that men and women are equal, different, and complementary. We need each other's gifts to make us whole.

I don't think this is what Sandberg means by "equality begets equality." Not at all.

What she actually means is that sameness begets sameness. The idea here is that kids will see that mom and dad are pretty much interchangeable. They do the same things and have the same sorts of priorities, drives, and goals. Mom and dad are both oriented toward worldly success, so they outsource what housework and childcare they can (to the less successful, that is) and divide the rest equally so that no one gets stuck with it. Seeing all this sameness and dedication to worldly success, the children will get it. They will understand that being female or male is irrelevant to one's highest purpose in life, which is to succeed in the world at large. We're all here to help each other go as far as each of us can go up that ladder of success. That's the vision.

I'm not buying it. You see, I want more than success for me, and I want more than success for my children. I don't want us just to be as successful as we can be. If that's our goal, how will we know when we've reached it? How will we know when we are good enough, when we are worthy of love and acceptance? What if we fail—does that mean we are worthless? Success, like happiness, is a fine thing, but a horrible goal. Need we really wonder why there are so many teen suicides these days? We are teaching the children of this manic meritocracy of ours to stake their worth on something transitory, superficial, and terrifyingly scarce.

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber wrote, "Success is not one of the names of God." When I first heard this, it floored me. Success is not one of the names of God, and yet I used to worship daily at the temple of success. Success is not one of the names of God, but it is the name of many an idol, and certainly the one that's most honored in the household envisioned by Sandberg.

As for me and my house, we won't chase after success. We will lean in, yes, but we'll lean into love, grace, self-sacrifice, duty, virtue, and above all, into God. We will lean into the only lasting source of peace and joy there is. Nothing else can bear the weight of our hopes.

This contribution is available at <http://www.mollyoshatz.com/leaning-in/>
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I Give You My Blessing... [at His UnEnding Love]



I remember a scene from my childhood. I remember when my mother and her siblings would leave the company of each other, before the good byes were said, they would go up to each other, make the sign of the cross upon the forehead of the person to whom they would say good bye, and give them their blessing. The words might be, "God bless you."

Or

"Via con adios."

(God be with you.)

Or

"God be with you as you drive home."

We children were simply blessed with the words,
"Be good to your parents."
That was only if we could be caught near an adult.

The voice of the blessing is profound.
Words of blessing can be silently prayed,
But
These words gain strength when they are spoken aloud
Because by speaking these blessings aloud
God is publicly invoked.
When there are two or more gathered in prayer,
I AM in your midst.

When God is in our midst,
The blessing gains strength and power.

The power of the blessing is great.
When we invoke God and ask that s/he be blessed in a profound way,
God hears our prayer.

To bless means to invoke divine favor upon someone.
We are not just asking God as an intercessor to grant a petition,
We are invoking God to bless them,
To make them holy,
To make straight their paths.
We are asking God, as did prophets of old,
To lay His divine hands upon this person
And bless them with great spiritual gifts.

His ways are not our ways,
And
His thoughts are not our thoughts,

We don't know how God will accomplish what we ask of Him.
Perhaps our blessing to another person might be,
"May you be abundantly blessed by the Love of God."
God will bless this person with His love,
But the outpouring of His Love might be in the form of a serious illness.
God might have been waiting to bless this person with an illness to sanctify him or her.
God's intent maybe to purify that person through suffering or sorrow.
Whereas, we might have intended to bless them with the joy of the Lord,
God saw His chance to bring this person closer to Himself through suffering.

In spite of this possibility,
Never hesitate to bless someone.
When you pray for blessings upon a soul,
You are helping to bring them closer to God.

I met a priest at a funeral who greeted everyone this way,
"May the peace and love of Jesus always be with you."
I wasn't sure how to respond, so I said,
"And with your spirit."
Now, I wish I had blessed him praising his priestly vocation.

Blessings don't have to be complicated.
They can be a simple phrase such as,
"God be with you today and always."
Or
"May God bless you."

If you want to get a bit more complicated you can,
But in my experience I have found that simple blessings do not pull people out of their comfort zones.
When people are comfortable,
They can respond more easily.

"Thank you,"
They might say,
Or
"God be with you, too!"

"Blessing upon blessing.
Grace upon grace."
Traci M.

There is great power in a vocal blessing.
Ask God,
He will invoke His power
And
Bless, Bless, Bless.
Don't be afraid to ask.
Blessings bring great sanctity into our lives.
Bless.
Make Holy.
Invoke God to bring His favor upon others.
Bless.
Bless.
Bless.

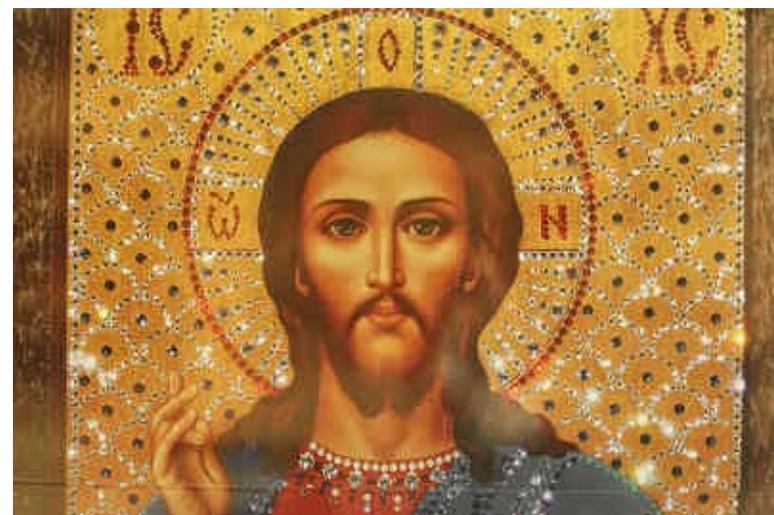
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Praying: Kataphatic or Apophatic? [at Theologyisaverb]



How do you pray? Do you find your prayer overflowing with images, thoughts and conversations or instead find yourself wrapped in silence surrounded by God's awe inspiring presence? While at various times we may find ourselves practicing both of these, understanding the shape your prayer takes helps us to simply understand how we personally connect with God.



The first form of prayer, *kataphatic*, is my own prevailing mode of prayer. At times our prayer begins in seeking God, in a desire to feel the immanence and closeness of God when our mind seems busied with the affairs of this world. In these moments, as I reflect on the presence, ministry and Passion of Jesus, as Word revealed, I recognize that I am being beckoned closer. In an instant, behind closed eyes, I am enveloped by the sights, sounds and scripture intended to speak to my heart. Aware of my own transgressions and surrendering, I find myself humbled by the love and grace so undeservedly but gratuitously given. A beautiful intimate conversation ensues, an exchange of wills- that of mine for His and a resolve to change.



While other times our prayer can be an exercise of self emptying and centering (*apophatic*), as Christ in the desert, in a desire to rest solely in God's presence. Using a simple centering prayer, perhaps one word only, we can become immediately aware that there is no need to seek God for he is already here beside, within, and all around. Here, in this moment, we feel that images are incomplete for the magnificence of God simply transcends everything that we have ever known! Not an end but a beginning, in our seeking to understand God further, we realize that whatever our perceptions of God are that the Divine Other is so much more! Here we find a quiet contemplative aspect of our prayer whereby we are drawn into indescribable amazement at the mystery of God. When words are few, "How great Thou art!" sums it up pretty well.



On a very personal note, growing up without an earthly father figure in my life, I have often visualized Jesus welcoming me as a child to come and just "be" near to him. Amidst fields of tall grass, on a warm summer day and a light stirring breeze there is peace and joy. More than anything I could have ever asked for, this relationship has taken away the painful loss that I believe otherwise would've felt incapacitating. As an adult, I still experience this joyful purely childlike prayer, most often in those moments when God understands that I am most in need of a Father. And yet I find that as I have grown older so too have my conversations with Christ. In the desire for greater understanding, and the fullness of the gift that God has given through Christ, our responsibilities as a disciple continue to grow.



In a beautiful affective way, our experience of God’s love from both modes of prayer can be felt so strongly, that it seemingly overflows out from our prayer to praise for God and others. For through our daily activities, we are continuously invited to recognize God’s creative handiwork in the world around us, and celebrate its discovery in those we encounter. It’s a visible joy that sparks others to notice and ask, “So, what made you so smiley today?” It’s a deep sense of compassion that calls us to extend that love and mercy to those most in need. Be careful though, you’ll find its authenticity contagious and truly the best witness of faith that you can ever hope to give!

Peace,

Elizabeth

This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2015/04/27/praying-kataphatic-or-apophatic/>
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What Shall We Do? [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness . . . [and] they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:18-22)

The Babylonian army – God’s instrument of judgment – amassed on the horizon. And I know how Habakkuk must have felt as he watched events unfold before his eyes. The Old Testament prophet lived at a time when rebellious priests soothed the peoples’ conscience, telling them what they wanted to hear: *God only demonstrates love, not wrath; mercy, not judgment. God’s commandments were more metaphors and recommendations than requirements of obedience and holiness.* They all – leader and laity alike – preferred the wide and broad path of their culture’s changing norms, instead of the narrow path of God’s unchangeable commandments.

And now, God’s patience had run out.

As in Habakkuk’s day, many 21st century religious leaders have become cozy with the culture. From their stunning silence and sometimes their actions, they seem content to shepherd their flock along the wide and broad way, rather than guide them through that narrow gate spoken of by Jesus (See Matthew 7:13-14). They tell their flock what they want to hear: *God is a God of love, and not also of wrath; of mercy and not also of judgment. God’s demand for holiness and repentance are metaphors and not ominous warnings of disaster on the impenitent.* They proclaim “false and foolish visions, and have not exposed [our] iniquity so as to restore us from captivity” (Lamentations 2:14).

Solomon observed a timeless truth: *Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil* (Ecclesiastes 8:11). But many of our leaders and laity alike have forgotten that God’s patience does not necessarily mean approval, and His patience is not without limit.

When Israel set its rebellious course, God prepared their judgment. And all Habakkuk could do was watch and wait for disaster to fall: *I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us* (Habakkuk 3:16).

God does not change. He is the same today as He was when Habakkuk fruitlessly begged his nation to repent and reconcile with God. And unless God’s people – perhaps especially our pastors, priests, deacons, and bishops – take His commandments seriously, we will inevitably find ourselves like Habakkuk, without a choice but to wait for judgment to fall.

But . . . these words of promise also remain timeless – and full of hope: *[If] My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

What then shall we do?

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Agony in the Garden: How I Spent Holy Thursday [at FranciscanMom]

On Thursday, Hubs had his 30-month/30,000-mile checkup at the cancer center.

That's always a tense time. The doctor he was supposed to see had already rescheduled the appointment once, so we'd spent an extra two weeks wondering whether Hubs still gets to consider himself "healthy."

The cancer center is an awful place. Don't get me wrong; they give terrific care. But from the second you pull off that busy Philadelphia street onto the winding, tree-lined driveway, you enter into that world of clenching dread. It's impossible not to. Every person, every family, in the place is dealing with their own personal hell.

A cancer center on any day of the week presents many, many versions of agony in the garden. On Holy Thursday, that was all I could think about.

As we sat in the waiting room of the imaging center (watching Rachael Ray wave around "chicken cutlets" of the non-edible variety and wondering why she didn't just stick to cooking on her show) someone called our name. Someone we knew. Someone whose husband has been battling a very aggressive cancer for nearly two years now. Someone whose husband is in great pain.

We moved to stand near them in another part of the waiting area where there was room for his wheelchair. We hugged them, and listened, and all talked about our kids (because that's what parents do) and waited together until Hubs' CT scan was done and we had to go downstairs to see his doctor and get the results.

In the next waiting area, more agony. A family sitting together in a corner—husband, wife and adult daughter, chatting quietly in another language while an elderly man sat nearby and struck up a conversation with them. Turns out, they'd gotten good news that day. He shared that his wife wasn't going to be able to beat this, that she wouldn't even let him in to see the doctor with her.

And then he rejoiced with them—total strangers—on hearing their good news.

How much grace does it take to be able to do that?

I was practically in tears, in the waiting room, overhearing this.

We finally saw Hubs' doctor. He got his all-clear for the next six months.

I am grateful. I am relieved.

But it's hard to celebrate Hubs' good news when so many of the people we saw there that day would not be receiving a similar prognosis. It's hard to rejoice when someone we know is in pain.

Father, if you will it, let this cup pass away...

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First Things First [at A Spiritual Journey]

Before we ask the Lord to have mercy on us, we should repent our sins and be ready to be merciful to our brothers and sisters.

Before we ask the Lord to grant us peace, we must be willing to do his will.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2015/04/first-things-first.html>
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As I drove to the Mount St. Michael campus on Saturday, March 25, my mind was on my two talks on sharing your faith story for the Women's Forum. All week, with expectant faith and exuberant joy, I anticipated sharing my witness and some tips for sharing faith stories.

My mental review of my presentation was interrupted by a strong impression – not a voice, but an idea not my own: I was not going to Mount St. Michael to give a presentation but to launch a new ministry.

This impression was not the first time I felt the Lord directing me to launch a ministry in my covenant community of 150 families. In the 1970s, in the height of the renewal and before our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters formed a separate group, we had more than twice that many families. At that time, the Lord seemed to direct me to ask the leaders if I could create a newsletter for our community. They welcomed the idea immediately. We published an 8-page newsletter. In a few years we were mailing a publication of 16 to 24 pages to an international mailing list.

In 2006, it was time to replace the newsletter with a [website](#). An Internet instructor took the lead as Webmaster and trained me as Website Editor. That training prepared me to launch [JOYAlive.net](#) three years ago. Through these ministry experiences I've learned that:

God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Cor 9:8)

With so much on my mind, the thought of another ministry made me dizzy. It shouldn't have been a surprise. Earlier God had planted the thought of giving talks to Catholic groups. I'd practiced my conversion story for our parish Book Study Group, videotaped it for the [CatholicConference4Moms](#) and prepared an RCIA version for a parish in Naples, FL.

How well I know that a full-blown ministry is different than tiptoeing around the diocese speaking to a handful of parish groups when you have time. Ministry is commitment. You need resources. Time. Money. A support group.

Yet here I was on my way to share my heart with the 30-40 women who were coming that day. Forty years ago I committed to serve them and all my brothers and sisters in our covenant community. They are family. From twenty or so parishes we gather on Sunday afternoons to praise and worship, pray and learn

together. Most of them attend daily Mass, and many of them are leaders in their parishes.

The Women's Forum was beneficial to the women who began writing their faith story and then sharing it around their table with others. Yes, and I courageously announced the launch of the new Sharing Your Faith Ministry, surprising the women leaders.

As I walked down the hall on my way out I was happy that my message was welcomed with enthusiasm. Several leaders of parish groups stopped me to ask for help in taking the tips I gave for sharing a faith story and adapting them to their groups. Other women are finishing their stories to publish on the community website or JOYAlive.net.

When God initiates a project, he provides whatever it takes to complete it. God was providing the support group. For him, I could manage the time. The money would work out.

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil 1:6)

I'm not sure what next step to take, but I'm sure if I keep moving the direction will emerge from mistakes and false starts. Prayer support is vital, so I invite all you readers to participate in this new ministry by praying for discernment. I invite you to share the joy!

What advice can you give me on approaching parish leaders to introduce a workshop on Sharing Your Faith Story? What other recommendations can you give me?

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Photo by Alice Clauss of Terry McDowell, facilitator, Nancy Ward, speaker, and Gretchen Montgomery, music minister, at Women's Forum. MSM, 4-25-15.

This contribution is available at <http://joyalive.net/sharing-your-faith-story-ministry-launched/>
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Joy is Strength! [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday, May 3, 2015

A Reflection on John 15:1-12 N.A.B.

By: *Larry T*



Lily B. is the most fulfilled and joyful person that I have met in recent years. She is sixty-something, a grandmother, a very plain woman who wears very simple and modest clothing. Her face is always lit up with joy, inner peace, and serenity. Anyone who has personal contact with Lily will go away thinking *I want some of what she has*.

Early Christians called themselves simply “the living”. Lily would have fit right in with them because she has found what all mankind is desperately in search of - life itself, full, and eternal life.

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday Jesus promises that if we remain in him our prayers will be answered (v.7), we will bear much fruit (v.8), our purpose of glorifying the Father will be fulfilled (v.8), we will experience divine love (vv. 9-10), and have fullness of joy (v.11). Remaining in Jesus brings joy and eternal life.

¹ *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.*

- ² *He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.*
- ³ *You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.*
- ⁴ *Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.*
- ⁵ *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.*
- ⁶ *Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned.*
- ⁷ *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.*
- ⁸ *By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*
- ⁹ *As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.*
- ¹⁰ *If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.*
- ¹¹ *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.*
- ¹² *This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. - John 15:1-12 N.A.B.*

When does eternal life begin? The three most common answers to this question are either, I don't know, I'm not sure, or immediately after death. Pope Benedict XVI points out: *"Eternal life is not – as the modern reader might immediately assume – life after death, in contrast to this present life, which is transient and not eternal. 'Eternal life is life itself, real life, which can also be lived in the present age and is no longer challenged by physical death. This is the point: to seize 'life' here and now, real life that can no longer be destroyed by anything or anyone."* - Pope Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth.

This sense of eternal life is spelled out very clearly in the raising of Lazarus: *"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."* (John 11:25b-26a N.A.B.). When Jesus said to his disciples, *"In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live."* (John 14:19 N.A.B.), he revealed once again that his true disciples "live" beyond the mere fact of existing. They find the real life that all humanity is desperately pursuing. This knowledge filled the earliest Christians with joy and is why they called themselves "the living".

St. Teresa of Ávila, the 16th-century Carmelite nun and reformer, herself spoke out against deadly serious Catholicism. “A sad nun is a bad nun,” she said. “I am more afraid of one unhappy sister than a crowd of evil spirits...What would happen if we hid what little sense of humor we had? Let each of us humbly use this to cheer others.” This Doctor of the Church, and eminent teacher of the faith, continually endorsed humor. More recently, Mother Teresa said, “Joy is prayer; joy is strength; joy is love; joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls.”

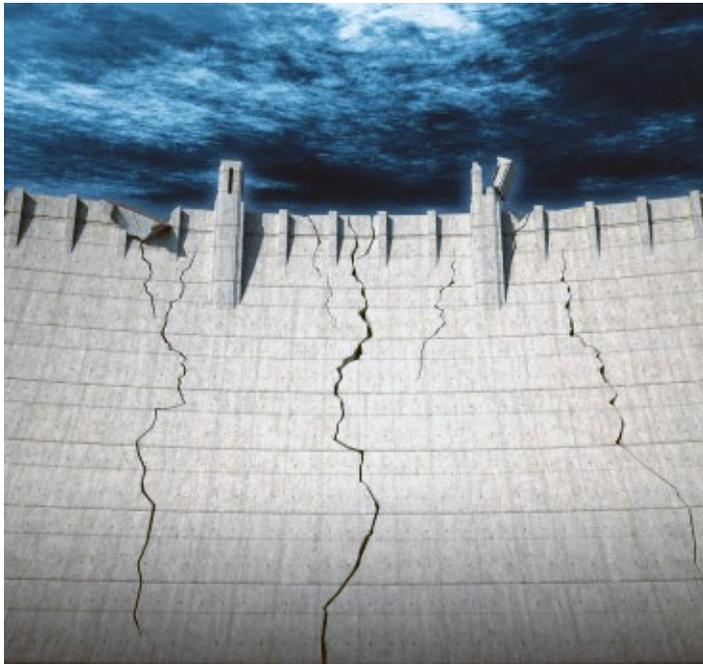
Remaining in Jesus means keeping his commandments including loving one another as he loves us. It is through this relationship with Jesus, who is Life that we become “the living”. This leads us to joy and eternal life because everything will be as it should be; there will be a sense of rightness in our lives. Although it is a life-long struggle, we have Jesus’ assurance (v. 7) that our prayers for strength will be answered.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) the French philosopher and Jesuit priest said, “Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God”.

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The Breach of Equality [at Travels of a New Christian]



The concern for the rights of women has been, and still is, a central issue in our American society in 2015. Amongst the many “rights” that have been identified as critical to the freedom of American women, is the right to self-determination of what a woman can do with her own body; to include the aborting of a woman’s own fetus – a human life – should she believe it to be a burden and an inconvenience to her future decision-making.

And with a similar rise to national attention, the rights of homosexuals have also come to dominate the attention of the American society. The cause is similar: the right to self-determination of what a homosexually-oriented person can do with his or her own body; without restrictions from the societal and political opportunities of open and endorsed relationships in which the legal status of marriage brings with it.

I used the term “homosexually-oriented”, for as to this date, there appears to be scant information that informs us as to what physical factors are specific to homosexuality. While the encompassing layout of human genetics clearly orients mankind as a heterosexual creature – a necessary state for its existence – there appears to be little that genetically orients a person to homosexuality. To this date, no specific gene or gene group that renders a homosexual person has been realized.

In the case of women’s and homosexual persons’ rights, a strong call is being made to the American society that breeches the normalcy of equality and demands not only the rights as outlined, but also the respect and recognition of dignity from those who might disagree with any aspect of said rights. The American society is to unilaterally endorse and embrace a woman’s right to kill her future offspring, and likewise to unilaterally endorse and embrace a homosexual’s right to both legal and spiritual marriage; an institution whose history is solely concerned with the procreation of man. This is the breach of normalcy of equality: the demand that a person not only comply physically with a legal status regarding equality, but that a person conforms their preferences – their thinking – with that same legal status. It’s not enough to comply, one must conform.

What has been inviolable in American democracy is the absolute condition of human consciousness; that inner or self-knowledge of oneself, that self-determining governance of the human mind, and the conscience that unfolds with human consciousness. No real democracy violates human consciousness, though it does hope to affect human conscience, so that all persons governed by democracy might enjoy the opportunity to obtain its common fruits.

In America's past, the framework for such efforts have always been built from an original premise; the sanctity of human consciousness and its singular right to free will of the mind. Its basis has been the recognition of absolute morals and natural laws that preclude the relative societal trends of behavior that would otherwise destabilize a democracy as a form of successful governance.

A democracy, by its nature, is a relative form of governance, yet its very existence is fully reliant upon absolute premises of human conduct. A democracy works under the assumption that its citizens should conform their activities within a scope of behaviors that have set boundaries. This is done through an attitude of compliance, yet it is clear statistically that there is a mean or an average to those behaviors; a central, absolute set of ethics and morals that demote compliance and endorse conscience.

In breeching the normalcy of equality – the denial of one's foundational right to their own consciousness and its associated conscience – certain aspects of the campaign for women's and homosexual's rights have fashioned a Mobius strip that threatens their overarching purpose; the commonality of all men and human under the standard of human dignity.

That Mobius strip begins with the central tenant; that self-determination (free will) supersedes common good (absolute will). In the case of women's rights, it is the belief that a woman has the natural, societal authority to kill its own unborn child in the pursuit of its daily preferences. In the case of the homosexual, it is the belief that the framework of the evolutionary, procreative effort of the human species – marriage – is subject to the daily preferences of human endeavor and pleasure by individuals not participating in that evolutionary cause; procreation. The first case is literally anti-procreative, and the second case impotent. This all implies that today's American views procreation more as a commodity than a necessity; certainly a fatal assumption to any species and culture. From this central tenant comes a force that has the capacity to turn upon its creators; employing its own logic to do so.

We see already one consequence of legalized abortion; the preferential selection to abort the unborn female because of her sex. Prenatal screening detects gender, and legalized abortion permits gender discrimination, and our society cannot pass legislation that prohibits aborting an unborn female without denying a woman's right to self-determination, as well as endorsing discrimination against the unborn male.

This may well hemorrhage over to the homosexual cause also, for should there, in the future, be determined a "gay gene", or a set of conditions that promote a statistical occurrence of homosexuality, then would it not be sensible to predict a significant discrimination against carrying an unborn homosexual to full term and birth; all perfectly legalized? The very device employed to permit self-determination becomes the means by which to legally discriminate against women and homosexuals.

What I am chasing, through more logic than emotion, is the idea that paradoxes, such as the one outlined here, might well be markers for us to look hard at, and to consider that the premise that led to the paradox might well be flawed. If you built a car without brakes, can you then expect it to fulfill its purpose?

I believe the activists who promote such paradoxes are well aware of this dilemma to their ideological pursuit; which is why we see such a dramatic dogma towards the conformity of mind I referenced earlier. As genetics and man's incremental evolution towards a better condition opposes those behaviors of mankind that run contrary to natural law – and anything contrary to procreation is contrary to man's existence – then it is left to psychological indoctrination, coupled with an immediacy of need, to promote an illogical position. This invariably precludes democracy and ensures some form of rising fascism.

My argument is not anti-woman or anti-homosexual, rather it is one based upon a single assumption; that all of life is sacred, and this sacredness is found in the recognition and submission to well-founded principles of natural law, observation, assessment, and reason. To say that an unborn life is a human being and is due respect is not to disrespect and despise women. To say that marriage is a genetic, evolutionary condition whose primary purpose is to ensure the survival of a species, is to assert homosexuality as nothing other than a human statistic of the species, and therefore and quite obviously a participant in human dignity.

But, when any group within a democracy demands the possession of societal resources – in this case the lives of our unborn and the genetic institution of marriage – so as to disorder their purpose within a society, then I believe it should be called out for examination. And so I have.

God Bless – Reese

This contribution is available at <http://travelsfanewchristian.com/2015/03/11/the-breech-of-equality/>
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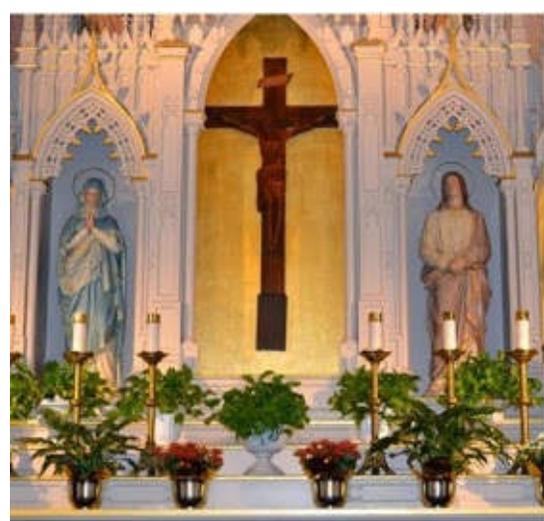
Seeking converts is solemn nonsense? [at The Shield of Faith]

Our Lord emphatically used the active verb “preach;” he did not call for some kind of passive evangelization, yet this is what our recent Popes have embraced.

"Proselytism is solemn nonsense, it makes no sense. We need to get to know each other, listen to each other and improve our knowledge of the world around us."

"The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by “attraction”:

“On the other hand, this unity [of all Christians] does not mean what could be called ecumenism of the return: that is, to deny and to reject one's own faith history. Absolutely not!”



Vatican II scrupulously avoided language such as “a return to Peter's fold.”

As explained by Cardinal Avery Dulles, “the Council implicitly taught that the united church of the future” will not result from the submission of other churches to Roman Catholicism.

“Vatican II . . . distanced itself in two important aspects from the type of Catholic ecumenism now described [that is, the effort to bring other churches and communities to the obedience of Rome]. First, it linked the concept of union to that of reform. Scrupulously avoiding language such as a 'return to Peter's fold,' the Council recognized that in its present form, Catholicism suffers deficiencies in behavior, ecclesiastical discipline and even the formulation of doctrine, and that, therefore, the Catholic Church, as a human and earthly institution, needs a continual reformation.

“Second, Vatican II recognized that the life and truth of Christ are acting in other communities and that, consequently, these should not consider abandoning anything that the grace of the Holy Spirit has wrought in their hearts. On the basis of these two principles, one may sustain that the Council implicitly taught that the united church of the future will not emerge from the submission of the other churches and their absorption by Roman Catholicism.

“The longed for *Una Sancta* can be a joint creation that simultaneously completes and transforms all the churches that rejoin it. The Catholic Church, without dissolving herself in any way, would modify herself

by entering this more encompassing unity.”

This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2015/04/seeking-converts-is-solemn-nonsense.html>
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Nihonga, Nicodemus and me [at With Us Still]

‘Word’ guy that I am, I sometimes find that the *stories* artists tell are more engaging than the works they create.

So it was yesterday when I [happened across the tale](#) shared by artist Makoto Fujimura on YouTube. He describes his struggle — not just to master, but even to attempt — an ancient Japanese style of painting called *Nihonga*. Stunted by a sense of unworthiness, his creative spirit was freed by an unexpected encounter with Christ.

But here, let Makoto tell the story...

I really felt for Makoto when I heard his words: *‘I didn’t have a place in my heart to hold the beauty, the very beauty I was creating...’* It reminded me a bit of Nicodemus, the Pharisee who [came to Jesus at night](#)... desperately trying to understand the attraction of the itinerant teacher and preacher. Nicodemus had heard stories, no doubt...but there was still something he just didn’t quite *get* about Jesus. And he certainly didn’t understand the notion that he had to be *reborn*.

Nor did I, until this date — April 14 — back in 2001. It was a Saturday morning – Holy Saturday that year. And as it happened, I was in church along with the rest of the RCIA group from our parish, preparing for the Easter Vigil.

As morning prayer got under way, I remember noticing that Jesus was not there in the Eucharist (the days of Triduum, of course, are the one time during the year when the tabernacle is empty, like the tomb).

But then, suddenly, Jesus was there...filling my heart with a sensation unlike any other I had ever felt before. It was as if I could hear him speaking my name: Jesus had come into my heart, just for a chat. Just to say hello. Just to waste a few moments with someone he loves.

I opened my eyes...and I started looking around at the people gathered in the pews, wondering if they were feeling what I was feeling at that moment...

Wondering if Jesus had spoken to them, just as he had spoken to me.

Wondering if they knew that – right then and there – we were standing on holy ground. The Lord was with us!

I wondered...but you know what? I did not speak about my experience in that moment. I dared not speak. Part of me, I suppose, dared not believe it was real.

Another part of me was inclined to hoard...to keep this little personal chat with Jesus to myself. I had the absurd idea that if I didn’t share, it somehow made me special.

Still another part of me knew all too well that, with my soul steeped in sin, I was not worthy of the

Master's love. I had not earned it.

And so it happened that I did not speak about my close encounter with Jesus for many months after that Holy Saturday morning – not even to Gerri, my Paradise Partner. I just couldn't find the words.

Since then, I suppose I've changed a bit. I've found a place in my heart *'to hold the beauty,'* as Makoto Fujimura might say. And I've come to see that day — *this* day, April 14th — as kind of a second birthday for me.

Like Nicodemus, I had approached Christ while still very much in darkness. And much to my surprise, I heard Christ calling me into a deeper relationship, and calling me to share what I discover with those around me.

This blog — With Us Still — is one fruit of my second birthday. Today, with the benefit of 14 years of hindsight, I've actually begun to appreciate the brokenness I felt back then, as I sat mutely in the church pew. Or more precisely, I've come to appreciate the grace and forgiveness that have helped me to see I don't have to be perfect. Nor do I have to earn God's love.

It's there for the asking.

And it's always *been* there — for Nicodemus, for Makoto Fujimura and for me.



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

IHS

This contribution is available at <http://withusstill.wordpress.com/2015/04/14/nihonga-nicodemus-and-me/>
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Indiana -- "The Crossroads of America" in its Crosshairs [at Association of Pauline Cooperators]



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last Thursday, Gov. Mike Pence of Indiana signed into law SB 101, a state level application of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act. In his

[press conference](#)

, he cited both the precedent for such legislation set by 19 other states in recent years, as well as his perception of the need for clear safeguards to religious liberty in the state of Indiana.

“The Crossroads of America” is now in its crosshairs. With the exception of Arizona, no other similar legislative processes have caused such furor. It seems that this law differs from other states’ laws in a few ways, notably as it is applied not just to individuals, but to businesses. So, while nothing in its language even mentions same-sex “weddings,” opponents construe from it an intent to protect defendants who not only withhold products and services for such events on religious grounds, but who also deny gays necessities like health care, employment, and housing.

Actually, the bill was designed to defend the right to freedom of religion from unnecessary government intrusion. This right is protected not only by the First Amendment, but by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. Since in 1997 the Supreme Court ruled that this Act is to be applied only on the federal level, states must decide to apply it within their jurisdictions. Hence Indiana’s proposed legislation.

The state’s dust-up occurred when influential LGBT individual and business advocates nationwide threw their financial weight behind the opposition. The damage they threatened against Indiana’s economy has now moved the State Congress to propose an amendment to the law specifically prohibiting perceived gender-based action by individuals or businesses. If the “fix” is passed, it would mark the first time in U.S. history that the issue of sexual orientation is integrated into legislation designed to protect religious freedom. Because such a “fix” would render religious freedom law ineffectual in practice, several

[analysts and religious leaders](#)

decidedly oppose it:

“All citizens should oppose unjust discrimination, but sexual orientation and gender identity laws are not the way to achieve that goal....These laws create new, subjective protected classes that will expose employers to unimaginable liability, and would increase government interference in labor markets....

“It would also threaten the freedom of citizens and their associations to affirm their religious or moral convictions....Sexual orientation and gender identity laws would treat expressing these beliefs in a commercial context as actionable discrimination” (Ryan T. Anderson, [The Daily Signal](#)).

That said, we might well question ourselves about our attitudes toward those whose sexual orientation or religious convictions differ from ours. Not too long ago, when we still had a Pauline Books & Media Center downtown San Francisco, a gay couple came in shortly before Christmas looking for a Nativity set for their home. While I regretted seeing them live their friendship in this way, I don't think it ever crossed my mind to refuse my service in protest.

We would have had no problem selling the crèche of their choice to someone else. So my attitude, like that of us all at PBM, was purely a matter of remaining true to our mission of evangelization. I was called to image in myself what we offered on our shelves. Lecturing them wouldn't have accomplished anything. Since they were only occasional church-goers, I encouraged them not to be strangers—an invitation that would have fallen on deaf ears had I snapped the tenuous thread that connected them with the Church. People have walked away from the Church for less.

Except when faced with aiding and abetting a criminal, we have no way of knowing, much less of controlling, what people do with what they buy. God hasn't appointed us to police people's wrongheaded choices. He puts up with an awful lot of them, including ours, not withholding his good graces from anyone. Can't we?

“It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law” ([Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons](#), 10).

In their

[joint statement](#)

on SB 101 the Catholic bishops of Indiana wrote:

“We urge all people of good will to show mutual respect for one another so that the necessary dialogue and discernment can take place to ensure that no one in Indiana will face discrimination whether it is for their sexual orientation or for living their religious beliefs....The rights of a person should never be used inappropriately in order to deny the rights of another. We are called to justice and mercy” ([Indiana Catholic Conference](#), April 1, 2015).

This Sunday, dedicated to Divine Mercy, Pope Francis intends to officially announce a special

[Jubilee Year of Mercy](#)

, Dec. 8, 2015-Nov. 20, 2016. Can we bring to this jubilee the summons of Indiana’s bishops to “justice and mercy” as we pray for a change of heart for us all regarding this issue?

Resources for clarity...or more questions:

- Indiana Catholic Conference, Statement on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act

<http://bit.ly/1aiWVEo>

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- Chris Good, “Religious Freedom: The Difference Between Indiana’s Law and All the Others,” ABC News, April 1, 2015

<http://abcn.ws/1PhWOtf>

.

- Tony Cook, “Gov. Mike Pence signs ‘religious freedom’ bill in private,” Indy Star, April 2, 2015

<http://indy.st/1E2txyi>

. The article contains the governor’s full statement.

- Ryan T. Anderson, “Indiana Has Changed Its Religious Liberty Law. Here Is What That Means.”

The Daily Signal,

April 2, 2015

<http://dailysign.al/1DZ2JyV>

.

- Catholic News Agency, “Troubled by Indiana reaction, Christian leaders stress gravity of religious liberty,” April 6, 2015

<http://bit.ly/1N65WCt>

.

- David von Drehle, “The Battle of Indiana,”

Time,

April 13, 2015: 28-35. Because it went to press before the latest developments in the case, this treatment is best understood in the light of the more recent coverage listed above.

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The Anchoress:

March 30, 2015

<http://bit.ly/1yU5aNn>

and April 2, 2015.

<http://bit.ly/1PibJ6C>

(Indiana SB101), April 1, 2015

Photo: Vintagejhan, Wikimedia Commons.



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This contribution is available at <http://paulinelait.com/2015/04/indiana-crossroads-of-america-in-its.html>
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Entitlement Should Not Be a Thing [at Tactical Catholic]



Today is Free Comic Book Day. So, I took two of my kiddos to the comic book store. By the way, if you're reading this on May 2, there is still time to get to your shop and take advantage of this really cool offer (at least one free comic book and usually great deals on other stuff). Back to my story. So, I was at the comic shop and I was super excited to know that there was a Captain Canuck as well as a Doctor Who comic in the freebie list. I was walking around and looking at the books, both free and non, and then I heard something irritating.

Ugh! Your free wi-fi signal is too slow. This is really bad.

I thought to myself, "This is a public commercial property. They are under no obligation to provide you ANY wi-fi, and you are complaining about the speed? Don't you have a smartphone in your hand...the kind that requires a data plan?"

This woman and her husband walked past the cool cosplayers in their hand made outfits (really good job, folks!) to the rack containing the selection of free comics. The owner explained the rules to a group of us who had walked in. Everyone gets a free comic just for breathing and being inside the store. If you purchase \$4 of merchandise, you get one of each of the free titles. That means 50 comic books for \$4. Can you guess where this story is going?

Ugh! That is ridiculous. You mean they are not all free? I have never had to pay for any of the comics on free comic book day. The other stores don't make you pay to get more than one [Yes, they do]. We have done this for years and they never made us pay. Are you serious?

Hulk.....anger.....rising.....Must.....not.....smash.....larynx.

The more I listened to the lame rant of this lying "customer" the more I suspected that she was likely going to each of the area comic stores to get additional copies of the comics for resale later. That made me a little angry, but I also thought to myself, "Wifi Lady just has to pluck down \$4 (buy the new Iron Fist) and she gets 50 COMIC BOOKS FOR FREE! So if she goes to the 3 local stores that I know of, for a mere \$12, she can walk out with 153 COMIC BOOKS. Greed much, lady?"

After that rant, the lady and her companions took their one free book each and departed. Guess \$4 was too much to pay for 51 comics. I just consulted my calculator. That comes down to 7.8 cents per comic!

Guess what we did. We bought some comics. In fact, my son bought 3 books anyway and got one for his sister. So we left with 53 books that my kids (after I filter the stack) can share. I also learned that Q from STNG will be coming to the Memphis Con in November.

There is a disease in this country (possibly others, but I only really know about ‘murica) called entitlement. Here, that means that men, women, and children are being taught that they are owed something for which they themselves did not work, toil, or prepare. They merely want it and expect someone else to provide it. Entitlement is closely related to greed, sloth, gluttony, and consumerism. All are disordered and sinful. They fail to take into account the feelings or work of another in order that they may mindlessly consume, in this case, comic books. The disease of entitlement runs rampant in America. In fact, in some areas of our country, entitlement is used as a means to build a dependent class of society, a voting block that has been indoctrinated to believe that apart from the government’s hand they can do nothing. Entitlement unchecked grows like a cancer. It fuels illogical resentment and creates enemies out of everyone.

What can we do to stop this?

It starts at home, and by “home” I mean wherever you happen to be. You can be at Wal-Mart, your house, your office, or the ballpark. Start with yourself and your own attitude towards goods and services. Know and appreciate the things you have and the means by which they arrived at your disposal. Refuse to abuse goods and services. Say THANK YOU. Don’t be a butt to persons. In fact, be a good tipper and a courteous customer. Teach your kids the value of goods, services and the virtues of a hard day’s work. Be a good example of hard work to your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, and especially your family. We can do this.

Don’t be like the wifi lady. Be better than that.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, I think I’m going to write a note of thanks to the owners of my local comic shop.

This contribution is available at <http://tacticalcatholic.wordpress.com/2015/05/02/entitlement-should-not-be-a-thing/>
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Pay Attention! [at Declaring the Whole Counsel]

I was saying Mass the other day, and suddenly I got distracted by a commotion at the back of Church. It was nothing particularly out of the ordinary--distractions happen--but this one caught me more than normal. It was not the distraction itself that concerned me though. It was the fact that I realized afterward that I had been saying one of the prayers from rote memory. Bad enough, right? Then, the worst happened. I realized that I was not sure if I had said the previous paragraph, or if I had skipped it in my distraction.

There was a moment of significant nervousness. I thought I had said the prayer completely, but I was not sure. It is not right to skip

any

part of the Mass, but I also did not want to repeat a prayer that I had already said. Distractions during Mass are going to happen, and many of them cannot be avoided. Intentionally allowing ourselves to be distracted in the Mass is, however, a sin. In fact, that is the main issue with the admonition from Vatican II for the laity to be "actively participating" in the Mass: engage in heart, mind, soul, and body (and do not let things pull you away).

Although some things are out of our control, we can avoid many distractions if we merely put an effort into it. There are a number of reasons that someone may choose to be distracted. First, it could be from simple apathy: "I don't care about the Mass, and so I am looking for something to keep my attention". Second, it could be from ignorance: "I don't understand the Mass, and I don't want to make the effort to understand it." Third, it could be that, in spite of a desire to pay attention, we have become so busy in our lives and have become so overloaded with constant stimuli, that the Mass appears boring to us (because there are no explosions, car chases, or alien space ships).

Each of these reasons is problematic in itself, but for those who are trying to be faithful to God, the third is likely the most common. Let us consider this one for a moment. It is not just adults who are plagued by this, but children as well. In fact, I would venture a guess that this is the reason why most children say "Mass is boring"--they have been inundated with video and audio stimuli until they expect it to flow constantly for them. Have you ever seen little children who sit quietly during Mass and actually pay attention? They do exist, but they are few and far between. The ones I know of, generally have very little electronic video stimulation in the rest of their lives.

Whatever the reason may be, we are each responsible to focus in the Mass. We are called to "active participation" from the beginning until the end of the Mass (and Mass is not over until the priest says "the Mass is ended" so you are not supposed to leave before then!). With this in mind, we need to be thinking of distractions not merely as an annoyance, but rather, as an enemy to be fought. The devil does not want any of us to engage fully with the Mass, because he knows (even though he hates it) that we will grow closer to God if we do.

The worst possible solution to this problem is found when priests (!) or liturgists (!?) choose to seek ways to make the Mass more entertaining. This is done through various video screens (with power point presentations for the homily, or showing the words of the hymns), or through changing the decor to make it

more like a modern art studio (yuck), or even by using pop music in the Mass. The problem here should be obvious; when someone is eating junk food and avoiding healthy food, you do not remove the vitamins and minerals from the healthy food and replace them with sugar and artificial flavorings! You are not helping someone grow in their faith by taking all the challenge out of their spiritual growth.

We can debate the statistics all day, but we all must admit that modern society (in America and her clones) is drowning in electronic video. Some statistics say that people spend an average of 14 hours a week on their cell phone (including texting, talking, apps, etc.) and another 34 hours a week watching some form of TV. Others point to 20 hours a week online (including in the workplace), and finally (for both adults and children) another 20 hours a week playing video games. If we remove 8 hours of sleep per day that leaves about 22 hours in the week where we are not fixated on some kind of sensory overload. How does that compete with the single hour on Sunday for the Mass? Which one will have more influence on you?

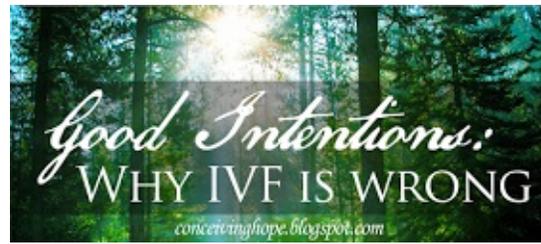
We have dulled our senses to the point where we do not even realize just how deep we have sunk into this problem. The solution is not to change the Mass, the solution is to change our behavior and break the addiction (though mild, that is a good word, since it is like a drug) to the video screen. I used to be hooked years ago on video, and though I still do use the computer and watch an occasional DVD, I have worked to drastically reduce this influence in my life--it was not by my strength, but by God's. In fact, my phone does not even do texting nor does it have any apps. No these things are not evil in themselves, but then neither is candy, and I do not want a steady diet of either one. As the Apostle said, we should "not be enslaved by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

More to come...

This contribution is available at <http://declaringthewholecounsel.blogspot.com/2015/04/pay-attention.html>
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Good Intentions: Why IVF is wrong [at Conceiving Hope]



If you are just joining the discussion, this is the 7th and final post in a series on infertility. You can read from the beginning by visiting the anchor post [HERE](#). I write from a Christian perspective and everything that you will be reading here will be in line with the teachings of the catholic church. I am not capitalizing "catholic" because I mean that word to be "universal" as it relates to all Christianity and I want that to be apparent in my writing here. We need to see this from a larger context and the synonym for "universal" will help us get there better. With that said, I personally profess a Catholic faith and my perspective as a Christian will be apparent in this post. I hope that regardless of your faith, you will seek to join in this discussion with charity as we explore this topic further. There is a tremendous amount of value to be had from having non-Christians in this conversation, so I very much welcome that vantage point and any questions that ensue).

I'm going to start off by saying that I've bitten off more than I can chew here and I know it. But at the beginning of this

[series on infertility](#)

, I promised you concrete answers to big questions. So as the last post for this series, I definitely saved the

big kahuna

to share with you here.

So let's just dig in and figure out how to process this topic one piece at a time, shall we?



*Conception of the
Human Person*

{Where Science and Religion Agree}

Infertility Awareness Week invariably begins and ends with the voice of

in vitro fertilization

(IVF) bellowing at the top of the crowd. In fact, there is hardly a catholic Christian voice to be heard in the discussion. And when there is, you'll find wild disagreement amongst the denominations (and even inside the same denomination!). What we're going to discuss here is why IVF is wrong and why it's wrong for everyone, Christian or not. But before we can do that, we have to lay some common ground that will carry us through the logic.

First, let's agree that life begins at conception. Want a scientific source for this fact? Here you go:

“Fertilization is the process by which male and female haploid gametes (sperm and egg) unite to produce a genetically distinct individual.” Signorelli et al., Kinases, phosphatases and proteases during sperm capacitation, CELL TISSUE RES. 349(3):765 (Mar. 20, 2012)

It is a fact that all mammalian life begins at conception. Everything after that moment is considered a phase of growth, from the moment of the first cell division through infancy. And since we're talking about IVF in this post, let's use an expert in that technology to fact-check ourselves on this before we go any further:

“The zygote is human life....there is one fact that no one can deny; Human beings begin at conception.” Landrum B. Shettles, M.D., P.h.D., first scientist to ever succeed at in vitro fertilization.

Next, let's agree on the real definition of infertility. I've already written

[a post about how to define infertility](#)

, so let's use that as our reference point to orient ourselves: Any couple who has not achieved a pregnancy after 6 months of fertility-focused intercourse, or any couple who has not achieved a pregnancy after 12 months of randomly timed acts of intercourse, is considered to meet the medical definition of infertility. There is a quite a bit more to it, but that's the simplified version we'll be using for this discussion on IVF.

Last, let's agree that truth is

not

a subjective topic. Truth is

objective

, which means that there is one truth that is the same for all people. The basis for right and wrong do not bend by circumstance or feeling or population. Truth, in terms of science, is an agnostic principle. It has nothing to do with any religious belief at all; it has more to do with the basis of philosophy, which is inherently agnostic to religion. When we have a conversation that is dependent upon a specific culture, society, or historical context...then you are talking about relativism, which is subjective. But given that we defined life scientifically as a very black and white physiological occurrence above (i.e. everything before conception differs from all the phases of life growth after conception), there is no gray area left for relativism (or subjective reasoning) left in the conversation.

Alright, I think we're ready for an ordered conversation, regardless of your vantage point!



Begotten, Not Made

{The Christian Perspective}

In Christianity, we are taught that men and women are

begotten

, not made. We hear it in common prayers in many denominations all around the world, as well as in professions of faith in several Christian churches. Right there in that one phrase, we instantly see a reference to scientific truth about human reproduction. Begotten is the past tense of

beget.

Men and women bring about human offspring from sexual intercourse: this is how a child is begotten. Christians believe in the scientific definition of human conception, because these truths are written into the Scripture that they follow.

Now where does technology fall into this, you might be asking? We're specifically talking about infertility this past week, so it's important to understand this discussion in the context of that cross. This is where the conversation usually turns to medical interventions, what it considered licit, and what a couple may objectively do with an act of intercourse in the effort to beget a child. It's not necessarily a conversation where we look at what each denomination

allows

or

disallows,

so much as it is a conversation where we notice the inconsistency in Christian awareness on the topic of how to approach infertility. Truly, there is one Christian vantage point. There is one immovable truth. It's the same truth we find in science: Objective Truth. And our belief in God roots us in this kind of truth in a way that nothing else can. It's not a stretch to say that all Christians believe the same thing here. So let's explore that with a specific focus on how IVF is the same thing for all of us. And let's discuss why IVF is wrong for all Christians, based on our belief in objective truth, not the opinions of men. And when we enter into that discussion, we'll be asking a lot of question about

why it matters

one way or the other. There are a lot of reasons, and we're not going to be able to cover all of them. I hope to present at least a few compelling biological and spiritual reasons here though. And I hope we keep coming up with more meaty questions about IVF as a result of the discussion here.

Why is natural uninterrupted intercourse so important in the process of making a child? Why would

someone want to say

no

to a medical advance that allows them to work around the cycle of fertility that a woman and a man share together in the pursuit of creating a new life? And why is there an ethical debate about the entire topic? Let's see if we can answer those!



Killing Babies

{How IVF Works}

Let's all get a little more familiar with exactly what IVF is and how it is performed:

In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a process by which human life is created outside of the context of sexual intercourse. It occurs in a lab and in a glass petri dish (

in vitro

literally means "in glass"). IVF requires that a technician hyper-stimulates a woman's ovaries with hormones in an attempt to harvest multiple eggs during one cycle, which is something that the human body does not naturally do on its own. The administration of hormones is intense and a woman risks the loss of her ovary in the process of hyper-stimulation. Once there are multiple eggs to harvest, the technician must also have a semen sample to work with, which is something the man provides independently via an act of masturbation. (

The fact that the sample is usually collected by an act of masturbation, which is an act that degrades the human dignity of a man and turns him into an object, is a completely different topic for discussion, but suffice it to say that we can't condone this as Christians.)

Once both gametes have been washed and prepared, the technician will choose which sperm and which egg to use, and complete fertilization and wait for cell division to occur under microscopic observation (and often microscopic time-lapsed video). Now remember what we said earlier (all human life begins at conception)? That means that even if only one egg was fertilized with one sperm, a human life was created at the moment that happened. The baby exists in that petri dish from that moment, waiting for all the phases of growth that come after that moment. Christians believe that a human is assigned a soul from the moment life begins... so in a very real way, we must acknowledge that indeed a soul lives in that petri dish.

Now without any further action on anyone's part, the baby will eventually be unable to sustain its cell division and growth in that dish. It will certainly die. IVF is a process that seeks to harvest many eggs and many sperm. The fertilization process isn't done one at a time. They perform these fertilizations in batches, doing several at a time. Then they wait to see which ones "take". Yes, that means that they wait to see which children die and which survive. There is no effort or technology that exists that can prevent the

death of these embryos....so the death of

some

children is something we have to accept in every single act of IVF. Yes, the labs use "therapeutic cultures" to try and aid rapid cell division, but no, they don't have a way to save the embryos that slow their growth or stop altogether. We've not even gotten to the stage where embryo transfer happens, and we already have dead babies.

Now this is the part where religion takes a hard stand. If every child has a right to life and a right to be born, how are we saying that the ones we just sacrificed in the petri dish for the good of another....got that benefit? The answer is that we have to pretend it's not a human being and dismiss it's human dignity in order to ignore this scientific fact. We have to tell ourselves that it was acceptable for a certain number of children to be killed in order for one to be able to transfer into the uterus. Or we have to pretend they aren't children at all,

but we know they **are** with scientific certainty

. When we make these shortcuts on dignity and we talk our way around these embryos not being children, we are saying that a child only has worth and value if we subjectively say it does. This is the moment where most Christians, upon learning about how the process works, will turn away from IVF. We need to remember that an IVF clinic is not going to use terms like "dead babies" with its cash paying (or worse, insurance paying) customers. They will

wash and prepare

the language they use with their customers just as carefully as they

wash and prepare

the gametes for fertilization. When we turn the prospect of creating human life into a business transaction, we can expect to lose the weight and burden of the truth in the process. That's something we definitely see in the IVF process, and that's why it's an unacceptable option for Christians (and every other kind of human).

So back to our process explanation: With several children

dead

, and at least one (if not more) experiencing rapid cell growth, the technician knows that it is important to get the embryo out of the petri dish and into the woman. They prepare several at once so that they don't have to hyper-stimulate the ovaries more times than necessary, because of the severe health and injury risk it poses for the woman. Modern IVF rounds will limit the introduction of more than one embryo into the uterus at a time, but it's fair to say that previous IVF procedures used to attempt the implantation of multiple embryos with each transfer. The hope is that at least one embryo will successfully implant in the lining of the uterus and continue to develop and grow. When the process fails and the child does not successfully implant, a miscarriage occurs. Yes, it is often too small to visualize among the lining and embryo that shed. It may simply look like a normal menstrual period to a woman who has undergone IVF.

And in fact, the language used by an IVF clinic will often

wash

away any acknowledgement that a baby died, preferring to express that the "IVF round failed" instead. The dehumanization in the language is essential to keeping the customer. Again, we have to dismiss the dignity of the child and call the miscarriage a "failed IVF attempt" in order to avoid seeing it as a death. But since life began at conception, it is indeed a death. There was an embryo growing before the transfer, and it was unique and distinct from its mother and father (and indeed every other human that has ever existed), and the loss of it represents something that can never be repeated.

If the process succeeds however, one or many embryos will implant and gestate. It is important to mention here that the success rates for IVF are determined

only

on the basis of which embryos make it to the developmental phase where a heartbeat can be observed on ultrasound. The success rates on IVF are

not

based on live birth rates. A baby is often able to have a heartbeat visualized at 6 weeks gestation, and given that most miscarriages occur in the first trimester (before or at 12 weeks gestation), none of the massive number of miscarriages (likely to occur on their own, or more likely to occur because IVF actually predisposes you to miscarriage) are ever taken out of the IVF "success" rate. When you are quoted how successful IVF is, the percentage is inflated to include....wait for it....a lot of dead babies. This is the third time we're dealing with and talking about dead babies in the IVF process. (There are fourth and fifth times, and we won't go into them here, but there is a high rate of late term loss, stillbirth, and infant death associated with IVF as well, so just know that as well.) And of course, the so-called end of the process that most people desire is the live birth of a healthy baby. IVF is limited in its capacity to provide that to parents, when compared to the large number of children it provides only death for....and if we had the capacity draw up percentages and rates, I believe people would be appalled at the truth.

In fact, even the co-discoverer of DNA (James Watson) had a conversation with IVF pioneer (Robert Edwards) about this topic, at the outset of the entire IVF process: "You can only go ahead with your work if you accept the necessity of infanticide. There are going to be a lot of mistakes. What are we going to do with the mistakes?" No child is a mistake, but this perspective explains why so many babies are killed in the process of performing even one round of IVF.



Christian Teaching

{The Dignity of Life}

Now let's shift gears a bit back to infertility and Christianity. It is a completely natural and totally legitimate want for a man and a woman to try to find ways to overcome their infertility. And from a

religious perspective, Biblical Scripture tells us plenty about the topic of infertility in a variety of male and female figures. In fact, the many books are filled with different accounts of infertility at different maternal ages. And further, Christians are taught that the sorrow a woman feels at the pain of infertility cannot be diminished or erased, even by the love of her husband. It's such a lasting hurt that it can pull at the very seams of a marriage. It's very easy for an infertile couple today to relate to those stories and the pain those Biblical women feel. But instead of looking back thousands of years, let's explore something we can relate to even more: modern approaches to infertility treatment in the context of religion.

In 1968, there was an encyclical written that was entitled "Of Human Life" ([*Humanae Vitae*](#)).

It specifically addressed the principles of Christian marriage, the responsibility of parents in bringing children into the world, the responsibility of scientists in approaching medical interventions through a Christian moral compass (to do no harm and to not circumvent the natural marital act of intercourse), as well as a need to avoid all direct abortion and sterilization for any reason.

Then in 1987, there was an encyclical written that was entitled "The Gift of Life" ([*Donum Vitae*](#)).

It specifically addressed the morality of modern approaches to fertility treatments and procedures. While agnostic to the technology itself, the document did outline methods of infertility treatment that were decidedly immoral. Likewise, it also explained that some methods are completely moral. Right there, we have a Christian source for the fact that infertility treatment itself is not the issue. It's the manner in which it is accomplished. It concluded that some methods are moral, while others—because they do violence to the dignity of the human person and the institution of marriage—are immoral. *Donum Vitae* reaffirmed an obligation to protect all human life when married couples use various technologies to try to have children. Without questioning the motives of those using these techniques, *Donum Vitae* pointed out that people can do harm to themselves and others even as they try to do what is good, that is, overcome infertility. The fundamental principle which the Church used to assess the morality of various means of overcoming infertility was a rather simple one, even if its application is sometimes difficult:

Donum Vitae

teaches that if a given medical intervention helps or assists the marriage act to achieve pregnancy, it may be considered moral; if the intervention replaces the marriage act in order to create life, it is not moral. That is to say, there is a valid Christian source that defines IVF as immoral. And of course then there is an entire publication

just

about bioethics called

[*Dignitas Personae*](#)...

Even if we ignore all of the many writings about ethics, fertility, infertility (and the morality of its' treatment) provided to us over the years from the Christian perspective, we know what feels right and

what doesn't. When we put the gift of a child on a throne so tall that we are willing to do anything to worship it, we will talk ourselves into any means to achieve that "height". When we ignore our conscience—the voice of the Holy Spirit telling us what is right and what is wrong—we are turning our back on God's Divine Will for our lives. We are saying "your plan didn't work for me" and "we've got a better idea". When we place ourselves in the position to act as gods like this, we aren't living a faith that can be described as Christian at all. Rather, we are making ourselves a deity, and hoping there is a place for us to find forgiveness in our former belief system.

Many people will argue that their pastor, priest, minister, or reverend will give them

permission

to undergo IVF and they use that as their Christian basis for doing the invasive and deadly procedures. I would offer that we need to inform our own consciences in accordance with God's will more than we need to seek permission of clergy on the complexities of medical procedures. When we ultimately know the science already, and we ultimately have a gut feeling that removing the marital act of sexual intercourse with our spouse from the creation of life is wrong, there is no answer that a leader of a church can give us that will make it

right.

We cannot project the responsibility of our own actions onto the permission we sought from someone else who is not the creator of human dignity and life itself. God is in charge of the creative process, and we're not to tamper with it or replace it, which is exactly what IVF does. We have an internal intuition about what crosses the line and we know that IVF is

playing

God. There is no way to find permission for something immoral and a case for IVF can never be found moral based on the scientific realities of how it is performed, what it accepts as

collateral damage

(i.e. the destruction of life being acceptable in the attempt to create life), and the weight and burden that it places on our Christian hearts in the form of

culpability

and being

complicit with an intrinsic evil

(i.e. the destruction of life for the purpose of elevating our own will above God's).

With that all said (and yes, I realize this subsection alone could have spanned an entire book and I've barely bitten off enough in just a few paragraphs), let's look towards the scientific realities of human reproduction and see if they provide some clarity to us on why we don't want to interfere with conception, but rather treat underlying health conditions. We will find a lot of truth in God's design for us there and it will help us to answer some of our bigger questions on why we don't (and can't) avoid the natural act of

sexual intercourse in the creation of our children.



The Hormonal Connection

{A Look at Female Anatomy and the Male Gamete}

Now we're back to asking why, from a scientific perspective, we want to avoid making a life in a petri dish. You have to understand a good deal of anatomy and physiology in order for the science to make sense though, so we're going to delve into that now.

The human body has many organ systems. They all operate by communicating with one another, powered by the brain. The way organs communicate with one another is through the production of hormones. Think of them as the "Marco - Polo" messengers of the body. Now let's talk about that in specific regard to human fertility in a woman. The brain can release one hormone to prompt the growth of ovarian follicles...and then the ovary releases another to say when it's ready to ovulate. That messaging ping-pong keeps going until the body is regulating things seamlessly throughout the entire process of the menstrual cycle.

Let's be more specific though: In the beginning of the menstrual cycle, when the anterior pituitary releases FSH to stimulate the theca interna cells of the human ovarian follicles, estradiol is released as a response. Estradiol acts to do several things, but for the purposes of this conversation, we're going to stay focused on one particular action of estradiol: stimulation of the tiny crypts in the cervix. That job is by far one of the most germane to this IVF conversation...and actually, to the conception of all human life (through a natural act of intercourse).

Here's why you should care about this minutia, even if you aren't science-minded! When estradiol reaches the crypts of the cervix (yes the cervix is its own organ, and yes it has little cavern-like crypts in it), some of the receptor cells on the walls of each crypt respond by producing mucus. (

side tangent: each crypt is responsible for producing a different kind of mucus, if you can imagine that!)

In the beginning of the menstrual cycle, that mucus might look sticky and pasty and cloudy white in consistency. Under microscopic observation, you'd see what looks like a traffic jam in Naples at rush hour (pictured below, right). Sperm cannot penetrate this kind of mucus. Given that it weeps out of the cervical opening, this is what sperm would come in contact with first in a transmission of semen in the vagina. It will essentially act as a genetic "plug" to prevent any sperm getting further towards their intended destination.

As the month goes on, cells of the cervical crypts will respond differently to the hormone secretions. Some will begin to create a very different kind of mucus. In fact, the higher the estradiol production gets, the more this mucus will resemble egg whites in consistency. Under microscopic observation, that mucus will resemble an 8 lane highway in Los Angeles with NO TRAFFIC ON IT. There will be neatly packed bundles of

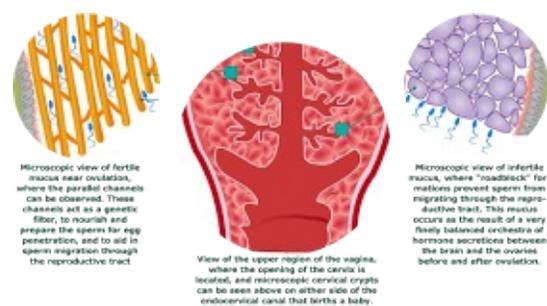
channels

in the mucus and they will be evenly spaced. The biological purpose of this is to act as a genetic filter

for sperm (pictured below, left). While it facilitates the easy transportation of sperm into the uterus, nourishes the sperm, and helps sperm mature....the most important function may be that it prevents the malformed sperm from even getting into a channel.

Given that a normal healthy male provides about 500 million sperm in each transmission of semen into the vagina during intercourse, there are bound to be plenty of

irregular sperm that are produced, and this genetic filtering action is necessary. The body filters it very differently than a human technician can. You see, the vagina is naturally a very acidic environment. Cervical mucus is naturally alkaline. It is the combined pH that the mucus makes as it weeps into the vagina that creates a hospitable environment for the sperm to survive, be nourished and prepared for egg penetration, and transported farther up the reproductive tract. Take a look at these three illustrations to understand and better visualize the qualities of the mucus and the basic anatomy of the cervical crypts that we've just been talking through.



So with all of those details established, any sperm that are eventually allowed to have

a chance for fertilizing an egg...must have the capacity to fit in and adeptly swim through the channels of the fertile mucus (pictured above, left). And the egg they are searching for is undergoing many changes at the same time.

Each month, a handful of follicles (and the eggs inside them) are stimulated to grow. One follicle will grow more rapidly than the others and become dominant. The body actually selects this dominant follicle for ovulation of its egg, and the remaining follicles that had been growing on the ovary that cycle will shrink and die. The egg inside the dominant follicle will ripen, and the body will allow it to continue in the process towards ovulation by sending a message to the brain to make that happen. Current medical science doesn't understand why the body chooses a certain follicle to release a certain egg. But since the body is in charge of that decision, logic would hold that the healthier egg (or some unknown metric of egg superiority, perhaps one involving the hormone reactive cells in the follicle itself?) will get a preference over the other follicles that were allowed to begin to mature that cycle. This is the cyclic nature of the pre-peak phase of the menstrual cycle, to be repeated until menopause, in every human woman. Given that a woman has a finite number of eggs from puberty through menopause, the number of eggs stimulated each

cycle is important. It is not a renewable resource in the same way it is for the man.



{Connecting the Pieces}

So why do you care? Let's think back to the section above where the IVF procedure is detailed. Technicians stimulate

massive quantities

of eggs with intense levels of hormones. Technicians choose the egg to use. Technicians choose the sperm to use. There is no mucus travel to mature or choose the sperm. There is no regular hormone maturation of the follicle, its cells, or the egg and its cumulus. There is no genetic filter being used to select the best sperm. And in fact, the number of eggs that die after an ovary is hyper-stimulated is

significantly

larger than what occurs naturally. This means that a woman's reserve depletes exponentially quicker when she undergoes just one IVF cycle.

With IVF, you are depending on a technician to make the choice of who gets created, without the benefit of the natural process. There is no amount of "washing" that replaces what cervical mucus should do. Did you know that the mucus actually creates such dramatic changes in the head of the sperm as to make it able to penetrate the outer membrane

of the egg more readily? Not every sperm is capable of penetrating the egg, nor would it, given the chance to try naturally! And more importantly, since the female body is not choosing the egg, the egg you get might have been one that your body would have discarded for an important reason. And the sperm that is injected directly into the egg's nucleus... might have never had the capacity to penetrate the egg on its own for some sound biological reason. Circumventing the body's process through the use of IVF fundamentally changes who would be created for that couple. And in the meantime, several children are

killed

to do so.

IVF is wrong because it cannot exist in a vacuum of perfection where children are safe from the harm of it. IVF is wrong because it cannot treat the underlying causes of infertility that make the body unable to support, create, and carry children. Infertility is a disease and there is ALWAYS a cause for it. IVF ignores the cause. IVF ignores the disease. And children die because of it. IVF ignores the important messages that your body is sending you through symptoms that can tell you what is wrong. IVF is wrong because it encourages doctors in their training to circumvent the natural reproductive system instead of learning how to fix it. IVF exists for the purpose of profit and not for the purpose of creating life. IVF is

wrong because it demeans the life of children for the purpose of selling children at a profit. IVF is wrong because it pretends to promote science, but fails to live up to the simple truths that the science speaks. IVF is wrong because it objectifies and reduces the marital act of sexual intercourse between a husband and wife into the chromosomal

property

of the man and woman, as a commodity to be bought, sold, frozen, and traded.

Let's talk a little about freezing too: Freezing embryos is immoral. Some Christians will say that they don't intend to implant more than the woman can carry, that they intend on using only their "marital gametes" for the process, and that they are committed to "freezing the leftovers" for future implantation to avoid killing any children. When we recognize that an embryo is a living human being, there is no question on morality: we can NOT freeze living human beings in any good conscience for any reason. It's wrong. It crosses a line. And we need to recognize that freezing embryos increases the death count. Not every embryo will survive the freezing and thawing process. Even when scientists and technicians and doctors are as careful as possible and avoid any mistakes in the process, there will still be multiple baby deaths.

More importantly, there are more effective ways to treat infertility. There are moral and ethical ways. Christians have better options than the seductive, dehumanized lure to IVF. And all of the better approaches to infertility actually achieve

better results

and

higher rates of pregnancy than IVF

.

*(Did you know that of the estimated 9 million women suffering from infertility each year, the CDC estimates only .44% will give birth as a result of any form of ART, not just IVF...?) **There are better ways of achieving healthy live births than IVF (or any form of ART)!***

I'm going to talk about a few of them in the weeks to come. One of them involves NaPro.Technology. but that's not the only option. So between now and when I finish those posts on what the better options are, feel free to use the resources on this blog to help you find a doctor or surgeon nearest to you that can help you using NaPro treatments.

When we commit to caring SO much about children that we are willing to sacrifice for each one of them, we will shine a light on the truth about IVF. When we commit to living the Christian values that we espouse, we will shine a light on the dark truths about IVF. When we commit to researching the anatomy, physiology, hormonal biochemistry, and overall scientific truth about human reproduction and human conception....we will realize that what IVF does is sell us lies, half truths, and a marketing package of "hope" while it kills our children and demeans our human dignity in Christian marriage.

You simply can't be pro-life and also be pro-IVF.



Lies and More Lies

{The Pitfalls of Awareness}

Now let's get back to the beginning of the conversation where we talked about how Infertility Awareness Week becomes largely a discussion amongst and for IVF and other artificial means of creating children. In my anchor post on this series, I talked about how we wouldn't discuss awareness much here. If you are infertile, you are

well

aware of that painful fact. But more importantly, infertility brings on its heels the hope of every desperate man and woman who craves tangible growth in their family. The temptation to do IVF lives around every corner. You can ignore your health problems and have a baby for \$\$, they tell us. And the misinformation and dangers that are a part of the process are clouded from those who so desperately need the truth in order to be able to make an informed decision on what is best for their family.

IVF clinics will cajole suffering parents into committing to 10's of thousands of dollars worth of medical treatment. And with no guarantee for a child, the product that is sold becomes "false hope". And with the dangers that are involved in hyper-stimulating a woman's ovaries, she risks losing organs, internal bleeding, hormonal psychosis, clinical depression, and an inability to receive any other kind of infertility treatment in the future, among other things. IVF clinics will sell married couples (and single women too!) a dream about how beautiful their family can be. Just pick a gender, they say! Just pick an eye color, they say! Avoid genetic mutations and health conditions, they say! There is no end to the way that an IVF clinic or doctor will try to sell you their product. They are salespeople first and foremost and they depend on you buying their pitch. And even if they don't go in for the "hard sell" with you in your situation, they won't be sharing the entire truth with you about the nature of the procedure. In truth, no one needs IVF. It's not effective or affordable, and it doesn't treat the medical issue that your infertility actually is. And no amount of dead children can be accepted for the possibility of the birth of one.

Furthermore,

the entire approach of IVF is wrong

. When we condition ourselves to think that treating the health of a woman is secondary, or even something to be ignored, we are preparing ourselves for lives that will be filled with poor medical care. And indeed, we do more than expect poor medical care when we do that - we lower the bar for what people should strive to in medical treatment across the entire spectrum. From patients to doctors, IVF tells us that true health isn't a priority. Treating the underlying medical condition becomes something that doctors *used* to be trained to do. IVF teaches us that substandard medical care is really the gold standard. Just ignore the problem and try to circumvent it with drugs and brute force! Because the new standard of care involves nothing short of manhandling the female menstrual cycle into submission with intense hormone therapy, among other things. Did you know that almost every single person who has ever undergone IVF is hormonally in danger of miscarriage from the moment they undertake treatment? It's

because the IVF process itself actually induces an unnatural luteal phase defect. When you hyper-stimulate the ovaries, you are causing a condition of estrogen dominance...and that leads to poor progesterone production from the corpus luteum (which is the organ that develops from the burst follicle that is responsible for the maintenance of the pregnancy through the production of progesterone!). We're not talking about

minor

things here. And we haven't even begun to discuss (nor will we have time!) the increased risk for ectopic pregnancy because of the hormonal changes and how they impact the velocity of egg and embryo travel in the tubes!

It's not even possible to count the number of people who have been lied to about the situation involving their infertility, promised that they'd never have children any other way by technicians (not even doctors!) in white lab coats who never even tested the underlying cause of their infertility. In truth, the only thing most reproductive endocrinologists will do is test you for "fitness to undergo IVF". In fact, they have partnerships with those who provide the services (or they do it themselves - even more convenient!), and their only goal from the beginning was to fit you into an IVF category. That's not medical care....that's the medical equivalent of used car sales.

It makes you think a lot about the lies of the

abortion

industry, doesn't it? When your health is secondary, you will never receive unbiased, sound medical advice. Much like an

abortionist

will happily perform an abortion on a woman who isn't even pregnant (yes, this happens), an IVF specialist is willing to do whatever it takes to get you to sign on the dotted line for an expensive IVF cycle, regardless of the cause of your infertility. Poor egg quality? They'll tell you that you'll never conceive with your own eggs, but there is a way to successfully treat this condition without IVF. Poor ovulation? They'll tell you that you don't ovulate, but there is a way to treat that condition too without IVF. Poor luteal phase? They'll tell you that you aren't capable of carrying a baby to term, but there is a way to treat and heal your luteal phase without IVF.

None of these scenarios require IVF

In fact, IVF and abortion are pretty easy to lump together for other reasons too. They are financially connected, so the corollary I'm drawing here isn't even a stretch. Implant a baby with IVF that isn't what you want? Abortion or "reduction" is the first thing you'll be told to do. When we treat a baby as a dehumanized "product of fertilization", it's easy to treat it like something that can be gotten rid of without any moral obligation. And speaking of morals, both IVF and abortion are about the same. Children are not a choice once they have been conceived. They are the voiceless among us, and within us, who don't get to plead for their dignity and rights to life once we have perverted the process by which they came into

being. It's enough that any Christian should turn their back on IVF as an "option". There is nothing innocent about IVF, those who provide it, or those who support it - just like there is nothing innocent about abortion, those who provide it, or those who support it.

Lastly, I will share that

all children, regardless of how they are conceived, are precious

. When we talk about the sin of the process, we are not attaching that sin to the innocent child involved. I just wish that children were not dangled as luxury items in the faces of infertile couples through the process of IVF. And I wish that Infertility Awareness Week was not such a playground for all of the Christians among us who pretend they aren't supporting the killing of children. You can't partake in IVF and have zero child deaths on yours hands. And any live birth resulting from it cannot replace or make up for the number of children who were sacrificed for it.

Your IVF money supports an industry that considers a certain number of child deaths

acceptable

and the use of

abortion

to be routine. Your IVF money supports the freezing of

excess

embryos, denying those children their right to be born or live a life. Your IVF money supports the degradation of the family by removing the natural construct needed for conception. Your IVF money supports all of the horrific research done in the name of "science". Your IVF money may even get you a medical error, a switched embryo, or a life-threatening medical condition. Even when your IVF money gets you a baby, your hands are not clean. And as Christians, that is an unacceptable prospect. We answer to a higher calling, and we should fear God's judgment of how we "accepted his children lovingly into our families". As scientists and those of sound logic and reason, we recognize that IVF is a for-profit industry, like all corporate ventures, and that the integrity of science is easily perverted by the sway of profit. As biologists, we recognize the need for the natural process to culminate in a human conception, instead of circumventing the process in a way that encourages injury and death. And as women, we recognize that any medical treatment or technique that ignores the primary cause of an underlying condition or disease.... is not a risk we should be taking. And more importantly, it's not medicine.

Thank you so much for reading and I look forward to a wonderful discussion with everyone on this topic. And thank you for reading along with this series on Infertility. You all have blessed me a hundred times over with the thoughtful comments, messages, and private emails that you have sent. St. Gerard, pray for us.

This post is the seventh (and final) in a series on infertility. If you'd like to read from the beginning, click on the picture below to read the original post in the series where all of the posts will be linked.



This contribution is available at <http://conceivinghope.blogspot.com/2015/04/good-intentions-why-ivf-is-wrong.html>
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"Relief" [at Campfires and Cleats]

Joining with Kate's tribe of #fmf writers over at [Heading Home...](#)

Just focus on "relief," set a timer for five and.....go!



Good grief, RELIEF is anything *but* what I feel right now.....

Because decluttering, disposing of, donating, organizing for six hours yesterday yielded so little "thinning out" as I look around. REALLY? Come on. Seven hefty bags of stuff vacating the house *doesn't* make a difference? But I've come to recognize..... houses are bought and lived in. Homes need to be made. With our hearts and gentle touches...after the purging of all that extraneous of course. And so I keep at it. I will. Right after I hit publish. I mean it.

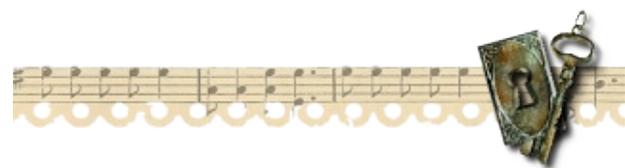
Because that quick visit to the dentist to have a thirty year old <small > and crumbling filling refilled yielded news that the tooth next door needs a root canal....REALLY?? And how does that happen to someone who brushes after <most> meals and flosses twice a day? And here's what I'm never doing again: Listening to the dentist when she says, "Hey this is a super small cavity. You don't even need to be numbed for this." Ok. Why not. How bad can it be? Here's how it went: Marathon Man, anyone? You know what I mean, right? Please tell me you know what I mean. Never again... and judging by friends' reactions when I shared on FB, most are with me!

Because I cannot look past the blood money that is exchanging hands within the walls of my parish church and though our pastor has become part of the fabric of our lives for the almost nineteen years that we have been parishioners, I need to go beyond and to a "higher" level to seek cessation for the [parish support of an American institution that is irrefutably linked to the abortion industry](#) and it pains me. I like to be anonymous. I like not to make waves or cause tension. But this, I can't watch any longer. Something needs to be done and I'm counting on the Bishop...and if not him, then the Pope, to be the change that needs to be.

Because algebra. And homeschool paperwork. And history. And literature. And knowing that time is short and there's much to learn and how do you fit it all in? hmmmmm.

Because life and balance and covering bases and not dropping the ball and laundry and recovering peace during waves of strife. Because strife does come, does it not, into every family at one point or another?

Because Him. "I can do all things in him that strengthen me" and because this I need to remember. <Phil 4:13>



And my time's up...that was SO not relevant to *relief* was it?

Come join us for others' #fmf posts over at [Kate's](#)

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

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

If not, just enter your email address here

so we can be in touch regularly!

This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2015/04/relief-five-minute-friday-41015.html>
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In Mary, heaven breaks through [at walk the way]



Thursday and Friday in New York City I visited the Cloisters and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC. This time I was stuck by several images of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

In the Cloisters I came across a few images of the Virgin Mary, including one of my favorites – this Burgundian wooden statue made between 1130 and 1140.

What always struck me is that Christ is headless – incomplete – yet he is sitting on the lap of the Virgin Mary, the Seat of Wisdom.

But this time I noted another image from Spain, from about 1280-1300. What struck me is that both Mary and Jesus are smiling.



There is a deep joy that the unknown artist captured,



the joy that is, as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, “that deepest freshness deep down things.”

Also in the Cloisters, in a series of carvings of the lives of Jesus and Mary, there is this image of the Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth, depicting the scene from Luke’s Gospel.



Note that Elizabeth is gently touching the womb of her cousin.

Today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art I got a new perspective at a painting I had seen before. It helped that I was there with two friends, who are sisters, and their children.

The painting comes from Florence in the early 1400s. Mary, with people at her knees, is touching her breast and saying to Jesus: “Dearest son, because of the milk I gave you, have mercy on them.” Jesus, in turn, asks the Father: “My father, let those be saved for whom you wished me to suffer the passion.”



What strikes me in all of this is how very human these images are – but how they open to all of us the transcendent nature of all that is. They show us that heaven breaks through in all creation.

This contribution is available at <http://walktheway.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/in-mary-heaven-breaks-through/>
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The resurrection and our response: Easter [at Fr. Ben's Biblical Blog]

: “I’d get the [blank] out of here! There is no way I’d be a priest!” Perhaps I could continue to be Christian with its altruistic and service-oriented norms, but a celibate priest? No wife and kids?! That’s where I would draw the line!

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

Yes! He did! Bodily...physically. It’s not scientific, it doesn’t make sense. It’s a mystery of faith. But he did. History tells us so.

How do we know? First, remember that Jesus was the only founder of a religion that claimed to be God. Buddha didn’t claim that. Neither did Mohammed. Jesus claimed over and over again to be God! The last thing Jesus could have been was simply a good person. He either was whom he said he was—God—or a liar, or a lunatic. Let’s assume for today that he is who he said he is—the Lord. So if we really believe he was God, yes, he could have and indeed has risen from the dead!

And there are eyewitnesses to this. Every Gospel account records the reality of the resurrection. And, by the way, there are more copies of these Gospels—as well as second copies and third copies—than any other ancient historical document! This in itself says, “Hey, this is important stuff!” Every Evangelist describes the resurrection.

The women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome—saw the empty tomb. So did Peter and the beloved disciple John. So did the apostles. Remember the famous story about doubting Thomas? He said that unless he touched the nail marks in Jesus’ hands he would not believe. And Jesus appeared to Thomas and Thomas touched the nail marks...and believed!

Here is how we are responding to this great claim at St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Columban Catholic parishes. We are called to love God and neighbor. These are the two great commandments of our Lord.

Jesus also said about his ministry—“*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*” We follow suit. We are called to look for those on the fringes of society—the poor, hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, homeless, ill, imprisoned and destitute.

And Jesus’ last command—“

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...” We are called to make disciples—those who are willing to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We need everyone chipping in to help fulfill our mission. Whether you were here yesterday, last week or it’s been since Christmas or even longer, we want you here. This is your home and family and you are welcome to come as you are. You are not, however, welcome to leave home as the same person!

We gather as a parish family to rejoice in the truth of the resurrection. We pray for the grace to love God, love our neighbor, seek the lost and make disciples. The Lord is risen, alleluia. The Lord is truly risen,

alleluia!

This contribution is available at <http://frbensbible.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-resurrection-and-our-response-easter.html>
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Assumptions tell a Different Story



Catholic Spirituality – Scripture *and* Tradition.

Forty years ago I was challenged by a Canoness. I had just finished a weekend course on personal prayer at the retreat centre that I ran in North London when the Canoness struck. She wasn't just any Canoness, but a Canoness of the Holy Sepulchre. Her dedication to liturgical prayer had made her somewhat dismissive of personal prayer which she felt was all well and good for the laity, but not for semi-contemplative nuns like her, whose spiritual meat and drink was primarily and almost exclusively 'the prayer of the Church' - the corporate expression of the faith of the community.

Shortly after I had founded the retreat centre, where I had given the course, I went to Franciscan Italy to prepare myself for the task ahead. I spent some time in the hermitage of Fonte Colombo high up on the hillside overlooking the Rieti Valley, where St Francis had completed his rule in 1223. It was here that I first came across the words of the great Franciscan reformer, St Bernadine of Siena. So that nobody would ever forget them, he had written these words in capital letters around the sanctuary where the liturgy was celebrated each day. They were meant to remind his friars of an important spiritual truth that they would teach to others. The words were written in Latin, but anyone with a smattering of the Romance languages would be able to understand them – "*Si Cor non orat, in vanum lingua laborat.*" – "*If the heart does not pray, then the tongue labours in vain.*" These words were a constant reminder for his followers for generations to come, and not just for Franciscans, but for Jesuits and for Carmelites, like St Teresa of Avila, and St John of the Cross, and for other orders too too, and for all who looked to them for inspiration and guidance.

The simple but profound meaning of these word was well known to the first Christians in the immediate aftermath of the Resurrection. They not only knew their profound meaning, but they prayed privately and personally at least five times a day, as Jesus himself had been taught to do by Mary and Joseph, according to the ancient Jewish custom. It was here that, like Jesus before them, their hearts were set afire with the love of the Father that they expressed together when they came to celebrate what later came to be called the *Divine Liturgy*, most especially in what we call today *the Mass*. The Mass is the peak of the holy mountain which is the liturgy, but there is no peak without the mountainous work of offering our daily love to God through personal prayer and the service of others that is its fruit.

Sadly this is a truth that has been long forgotten by many, including the Canoness. *“I have read the new testament from back to front and many times over”*, she said, *“But I can find no evidence there for the personal daily prayer that you have been advocating in your talks. Admittedly,”* she conceded, *“there is mention of Jesus praying at the beginning of his public ministry, and at the end in Gethsemane, but there is nothing to justify the sort of daily private prayer that you have been talking about this weekend, apart from a couple of occasions when Jesus went alone into the mountains for prayer.”*

No matter what I said, I know I didn't convince her because she had fixed ideas in her head that reason could not remove. Let me explain what I tried and failed to explain to her, because our spiritual life and wellbeing depends on it. If you love good food you will undoubtedly be a devotee of Delia Smith, Mary Berry, Nigella Lawson, Gary Rhodes, Rick Stein or some other master chef. No matter whether you read their books, listen to them on the Radio, or watch them on television, they all make an understandable assumption about their fans. They, not only assume that they have ovens, but that they know how to use them, and that they use them often, perhaps many times a day. In short they assume that they know how to cook. It was exactly the same with all the writers of the New Testament.

They assumed, no, let me put it more strongly, – they knew that their readers all prayed regularly every day, as they did themselves. They did not therefore detail when they should pray, because everybody knew. Nor did they detail how everyone should pray or the prayers that they should use, because they all knew that too. It would be stating the obvious. Nor did they have to describe endlessly how the love that they received in prayer would enable them to love others as Jesus had done before them. Nor, for that matter, did they have to keep underlining how these, their daily efforts, would become the offering that they made with their brothers and sisters at the weekly Mass. This is why for Catholics it is not just the scripture, but the scriptures and tradition that conveys the teaching of Christ to successive generations.

You don't have to tell fish how to swim, it's what they do. You didn't have to explain how to pray to the first Christians. It was what they did, it was the living environment in which they lived and moved and had their very being. Read the New Testament with what I have just said in the forefront of your minds and you will be able to understand them in a new way, a far more profound way than ever before. However if you re-read the New Testament while practising a daily prayer life, similar to that of the first Christians, you will, not only understand them in a new way, but much more. For the Holy Spirit, who inspired the scriptures in the first place will be inspiring you too. This will enable him to lead you on, and into, the One whose life, death, and resurrection they have been written to glorify.

The essence of the ancient Jewish prayers were still used by the first Christians after the resurrection, but they were transformed. The prayers that had once been **said with Jesus** before the sending of the Holy Spirit were now prayed **in, with and through Jesus**, into whose mystical body they now lived and moved and had their very being. The inner dynamic power and vitality on which the early liturgy depended was the quality of the daily prayer and service of others during the previous week that was offered at Mass in, with and through Jesus to their common Father. However, what is supposed to be a liturgical climax, can turn out to be an anti-climax, if those who come to Mass bring nothing to be offered, because their previous week had been barren and bereft of trying to practise the two new Commandments that Jesus gave us. Our daily endeavour to implement them is the offering that we bring with us to offer, through Jesus at the weekly Mass. If we come with nothing, then we receive nothing, and the Mass becomes meaningless, *not in itself*, but for those who bring nothing to offer when they enter the church.

In the same way the local gymnasium has within itself the power to transform our physical health, but it

becomes meaningless, if we only go there to socialise, to chat with friends, and drink coffee. It becomes meaningless not in itself, but for ourselves, if we do not participated in all that it offers us. We may go regularly, but unless we actively take part in all that it offers it will do nothing for our physical health and wellbeing. No matter how regularly we go to Mass, if we do nothing to participate in the Mass then the Mass will do nothing for our spiritual health and wellbeing either. I don't just mean by the way in which we listen to the prayers, the readings, and answer all the responses, I mean very much more than that. I mean by the way we offer all that we are, through all that we have done in the previous week. The Mass is not magic, but the mystical embodiment of all that Jesus offered to his Father from the moment he was laid in a wooden crib to the moment he died on a wooden Cross. This offering is continually made present to us through his sacramental presence, so that we can unite our offerings to his and receive in return something of what he received from his Father immediately after the Ascension.

When, at the end of a series of apparitions to three young girls in Northern Spain, one of the girls asked Our Lady to take them back to heaven with her, she looked at the girls and said with a rather sad smile, *'But whatever for, for your hands are empty, you have nothing to bring with you'*. She would say the same to us if we come to Mass with empty hands without anything to offer, with and through her son. Renewal in the Church does not primarily depend on a perfectly designed liturgy, but on the quality of the spiritual lives of those who participate in it. Let us suppose that I had a magic wand and I could wave it to give everyone the liturgy of their choice each time they went to Mass. It might be the new liturgy as introduced by the Second Vatican Council, with a perfect translation of the text and with all the rites and rituals perfectly designed to satisfy everyone. On the other hand it might be the old Tridentine Mass in Latin that so many of us were brought up on, or a grand sung high Mass with music by Parousia, Palestrina and Purcell, or the mediaeval Mass that was so loved by some of the greatest saints that have ever lived, or the ancient Mass known to the Fathers of the Church, which was said in Greek long before the introduction of Latin. Or what about Mass according to the Chaldean rite said in Aramaic the language that Jesus himself would have used at the Last Supper.

Believe me the introduction of any or all of these rites in themselves would do nothing to change us personally, or the Church to which we belong, unless they were animated and inspired by the same profound 'daily liturgy of spiritual endeavour' as practised by the first Christians, in imitation of how Jesus prayed, and served the neighbour in need throughout his life on earth.

It is not the outside of the cup that matters, but the inside of the cup, the intrinsic quality of the personal spiritual life of those who participate in the liturgy. Get the first right without the second, and you have a recipe for the disaster that St Paul predicts in his letter to the Corinthians (*Chapter 13*). Love's endeavour is the offering that makes the Mass what Jesus wants it to become. If you take that away the gongs may boom and the cymbals might clash, but nothing else will rise from us to give glory to God in heaven or on the earth that he created.

The famous Jewish Philosopher and mystic, Simone Weil said that – *'a person is no more than the quality of their endeavour'*. It is this *spirit-filled endeavour*, demonstrated in the personal prayer that we have made, and in the good works that we have performed, that we offer through Jesus to the Father when we take part in the Mass. Many years ago I failed to convince a Canoness, about the absolute importance of personal daily prayer as practised by Jesus himself and his first disciples. I do hope that I have managed to convince you, because without it we cannot practise the first commandment properly, nor therefore receive the grace to practise the second.

I hope too that it has enabled you to see how the fullness our faith can only be seen and understood, not by the scriptures alone, but by the tradition that we have inherited too. The first Protestants derided good works, and that included personal prayer, because they couldn't see this. Both the scriptures and tradition are important for they both illuminate each other. Our total commitment to both makes us what we are, not just Christians but Catholics, the true living descendants of those who lived, prayed, suffered and died with Christ, in the immediate aftermath of the Resurrection. To dismiss or to belittle the importance of daily personal prayer is to be Protestant, to proclaim and live it is to be Catholic.

This contribution is available at <http://blog.davidtorkington.com/assumptions-tell-a-different-story/>
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Doubting Thomas, belief, unbelief, certitude, defeasibility [at Catholic Deacon]

In our Gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter, which is Divine Mercy Sunday, taken from St John's Gospel, Jesus says to "Doubting Thomas," "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (

[John 20:29](#)

).

I'll be honest, people who claim and act as if they have no doubts frighten me. They frighten me whether they believe in God or not. I sometimes wonder, "Don't aggressive atheists ever doubt their unbelief?" On the whole, believers seem pretty straightforward in admitting that we sometimes doubt.

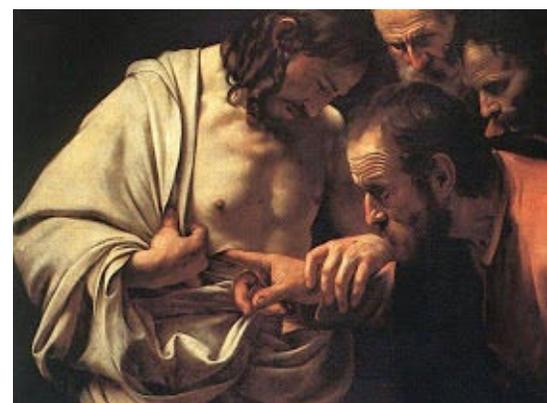
In his posthumously collected and published work

[On Certainty](#)

, Wittgenstein made an important distinction "between the concept of 'knowing' and the concept of 'being certain.'" He goes on to note that this distinction isn't really a significant one at all, "except where 'I know' is meant to mean: I

can't

be wrong" (3e). Hence, when Von Balthasar, Giussani, Ratzinger, et al. insist that faith and reason work together to help us arrive at knowledge, they are not making a mistake by including faith in their epistemological assertions.



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, by Caravaggio, ca 1601-1602

In his book

[The Religious Sense](#)

Giussani gives a rather detailed example of how it is we employ what can really only be called "faith" to

grasp even everyday things that we would not hesitate to say we "know," even while admitting there is a possibility we're wrong. Giussani rightly points out "that man can err using the scientific, philosophical, or mathematical methods" (22). His point is that making a mistake when employing one of these methods does not necessarily invalidate the method being employed. One the things about which Giussani was fervent is that faith, too, must have a method. Such a method is not something esoteric, or even really unique to believers.

The late Michael Spencer, better known, perhaps, as the

["InternetMonk,"](#)

or, simply "IMonk," once confessed: "I wonder if God exists. I sometimes see the universe as an empty place. Oh, I frequently see it filled with the glory of God and singing his majesty with all its created energy. I'm often filled with the assurance of faith. But not all the time. Sometimes tragedy, emotion, age, disappointment, depression, dark moods....they visit me and I doubt. I wonder and question. This is my human experience. God gives me faith. My humanness still gives me doubt."

Some knowledge claims can only be sensibly arrived at by the use of what is called

defeasible reasoning

. Defeasible reasoning is a certain type of non-demonstrative reasoning. By non-demonstrative is meant that one does not arrive at a complete or definitive demonstration of the knowledge claimed by employing defeasible reasoning. When it comes to God, when it comes to the great question of being (Why are there things rather than no-thing?), so painstakingly retrieved by Heidegger, how could it be otherwise?

Very often it seems to me that unbelievers claim to have much more certitude than most believers would ever dare claim. Personally, I don't think that kind of certitude has much epistemic warrant. Rather, I think the mystery of being requires a lot of humility for believers and unbelievers alike.

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2015/04/doubting-thomas-belief-unbelief.html>
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Grasping the Big Picture of the Bible [at A Catholic Newbie]



As a Catholic newbie, getting to know the Bible was high on my priority list, and I do feel like I'm light years ahead of where I started two to three years ago. Simply going to mass weekly (if not daily) and reading the daily readings, as well as subscribing to FlockNote's free daily [Gospel emails](#) has helped me get familiar with some key stories, especially the New Testament.

But all this reading the Bible in bits and pieces, while it has its place and is wonderfully meaningful in itself, makes it difficult to consider the Bible in context and take a look at the bigger picture. What is the overall story of the Bible and how does it play out from the Old Testament to the New Testament?

I picked up a book from Lighthouse Media recently called [Bible Basics for Catholics](#) by John Bergsma that gives a wonderful big picture look at what the Bible is trying to convey from start to finish. And this book was incredibly eye-opening for me (and a quick read, I might add!).

While the Catholic Church does a great job with the readings of the day in selecting Old Testament verses that relate to New Testament verses to show you the parallel, this book really brought many of those similarities, comparisons and foreshadowing examples to light in a wonderfully simplistic summary. The author even uses stick figure drawings to help you visualize the progression of the Bible.

So, what's the Bible all about? [Hector Molina](#) says it's really a love story, a love story between God and his people. Bergsma shows you how this "love story" really plays out as a "covenant story." The Bible, in one way, is really the story of God making various covenants with his people, who so sadly break them time and time again. Jesus brings us the final, once and for all, covenant, and in fact, He is the covenant itself.

I know you probably knew this covenant idea already, but what this book does it show you how Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets and more all foreshadow Jesus, and it reveals many of the signs, symbols and passages that prefigure Jesus' coming. The book also provides a historical context, considers the meanings of the original Greek words and truly brings a depth of meaning unlike anything I've yet to read.

As one example, did you know that at the traditional Jewish Passover Jews would drink four cups of wine? At the Last Supper, Jesus only drinks three cups of wine, according to the Gospels. But he completes the Passover ceremony on the cross when he tastes of the bitter wine offered to him, making it

the new Passover and completing the covenant.

Remember when Jesus said he would not taste the fruit of the vine again until the Kingdom of God comes, yet tastes it on the cross? This always thoroughly confused me. Have you ever considered he drank of the wine then to signal the Kingdom of God had come? This is the kind of cool stuff that you'll learn.

Here is a link to this book on [Lighthouse Catholic Media](#) and on [Amazon](#). Let me know what you think!

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/grasping-the-big-picture-of-the-bible/>
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They Found an Empty Tomb [at From the Pulpit of my Life]



Empty Tomb by George Richardson

Had you accompanied Mary of Magdala or Peter and the beloved disciple to Jesus' tomb with iPhone or camcorder in hand, what might you have recorded? Most likely it would have been an image like the one above, because the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid to rest after his crucifixion and death was found empty, except for the cloths that had covered his body. There has been no scientific evidence of Jesus' Resurrection. Nevertheless, Christians believe Jesus rose and lives. Easter's gospel narrative states that the beloved disciple was the first believer in Christ's Resurrection.

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed (Jn 20:8).

He believed without seeing the risen LORD. What caused him to believe? Besides the grace of God, biblical scholars speculate that there was some detail about the burial cloths that convinced him.

Christians have believed in Jesus' Resurrection for more than two millennia. This belief is not irrational, but is based on eyewitness accounts of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances. The oldest written record of some of those appearances is from St. Paul who wrote around 20 years after Jesus' death.

... I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter] then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred bretheren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:3-6).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "The Resurrection of Christ is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ." Christ's rising from the dead is God's affirmation of all that Jesus did and taught. It is so central to our faith that we celebrate Easter for eight days, and Eastertide spans fifty days.

Rejoice in our risen LORD!

May you enjoy many Easter Alleluias!

Note: This was first published in the Easter week bulletin of my parish.

This contribution is available at <http://www.fromthepulpitofmylife.com/2015/04/empty-tomb/>
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NFP, kids and common sense [at Miss Em]

I am a Catholic and a staunch pro-life advocate. I come from a big Catholic family *12+* and I love kids a lot!

I believe in what the Church teaches about kids, NFP and all of that. Only sometimes it is not easy to understand it all. In particular there was one thing that really bothered me.

Just a confusion of sorts I really did not know how I felt about it at all or even what to think. Hence I went to the expert aka. my Mom and proceeded to have a very awkward and honest conversation with her.

It went something like "Umm Mom I know the Catholic Church teaches to be open to life but what about families whose parents suffer from things like depression that make it difficult for them to be fully there for their kids?"

I was talking about those situations where the couple is materially prepared to have kids etc, they can care for them in all but one aspect that huge emotional commitment of having the full capabilities to love and care for them. With any mental illness like depression it can cause the parent to not be able to care for their kids emotional needs and let me tell you that is a HUGE deal!

I was nervous asking my Mom about this because I know she worries that she makes sure she spends time with each of us on a somewhat regular basis. *obviously different for those of us who live outside the home.*

Still I know of a situation where this occurred to a friend of mine and she suffered as a result of her parent's detachment because of her Mother's severe depression.

My Mom's response "Then it is up to the healthy person in the marriage to make the decision that is best for them family and in this case without the emotional resources to care for them that would be to practice NFP to space the kids, avoid pregnancy etc."

It makes perfect sense, The Catholic Church is not oppressive is someone genuinely cannot handle it-then use common sense! The Catholic Church wants healthy people making healthy and holy decisions.

Secondly, God always provides.

I know this from my personal life I have had more *parents* than most people with less siblings than I. People who stepped in and who were exactly who I needed in my life at the right time.

God provides and sometimes he just provides you with the common sense and wants you to go ahead and use it.

The Prodigal Son and Mercy Misunderstood [at Arnobius of Sicca]

Doing my morning readings/studies, I noticed a trend of mercy and love in the varied works I read (Scripture, Patristics, Catechism, Saints, Church documents) that are synched together like well crafted gears (which makes sense, considering Who designed the system). It starts with God's love for us, even though we misuse our free will for evil. God wants us to be reconciled to Him and [He pursues us](#) to bring us back to Him, knowing what will make us truly happy—though He never violates our free will. Even in the Old Testament, so often misinterpreted as having a harsh and vindictive God, shows God pleading with His people to cease sinning and turn back to Him so He can forgive them and give them His blessings.

Unfortunately, our responses do not match His generous and unselfish love for us. He calls everyone to turn to Him and follow Him, but it seems that we want to put conditions on that call. Those conditions either want to limit the requirements for us personally being His followers or put limits on who else can turn to Him. In other words, we can sum these two mindsets as:

1. "I want God's mercy without having to be sorry!"
2. "I don't want *those* people here unless they're as good as *ME!*"

Both positions make a mockery of God's mercy and create a perverted image of God that non-believers can point to and mock. (And I should note here that it is quite possible for us to be in *both* categories at once).

"I Want God's Mercy Without Having To Be Sorry!"

Loving and following Our Lord requires changing our lives in order to be like Him (John 14:15, 1 John 5:1-5). God created us to seek out the greatest good—Himself. He gives us free will because He wants us to love us by His own choice, not as mindless drones. He has designed us in such a way that living in accordance to what is good benefits us, and living in opposition to that good harms us—even if it pleases us in the short term. Understood like that, people who want the Church to change her teachings are wanting the impossible. They want what God has forbade as evil to be redefined as good, as if the labels of good and evil were arbitrary decisions a human being chose to apply to behaviors at a whim.

Sin is something real. It destroys our relationship with God. It can condemn us to hell. It is something so serious, that Our Lord died on a Cross so we could be saved from it. His action is a gift we can either choose or reject. Accepting His salvation means we need to turn our life around and live as He calls us to live, and when we fall into sin, we need to change direction and turn back to God, trying to the best of our ability to stop doing what separates us from God, praying for His grace to do so, and making use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

That behavior is exactly the opposite of the person who demands that the Church change her teachings. That's not *metanoia*. That's demanding that reality change to suit the individual—in other words, putting the self above God and saying, "I'll follow God, but He (or his Church) has to change to suit me." It's as if the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) returned home and expected to be treated as normal, like nothing ever happened, thinking he was still entitled to the Father's inheritance, despite the fact that he'd squandered it.

What they want is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called [*cheap grace*](#), which wants the benefits of Jesus dying for us without the call to take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24-27).

The thing is people who are becoming increasingly hostile to Christian teaching—especially those who try to claim that it is against what Jesus would want—is that such hostility fails to understand what the mercy of God is. This mercy is creating a way for each sinner to be brought back to God. This way is *not* mean that anybody who thinks “Jesus was a nice guy” is allowed to do whatever he or she wants to do. This way is making it possible for the sinner who repents to find forgiveness for his or her sins.

We see this in the Gospels. Sinners who have done wrong change their hearts and their ways and find forgiveness. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to go and sin no more (John 8:11). We are to go and sin no more. If we do sin and again break our relationship with God, He has created the Sacrament of Reconciliation (John 20:23) that our relationship with God [*may be healed anew*](#) as often as we seek Him with a sincere heart. THAT’s mercy!

“I Don’t Want *Those People Here Unless They’re As Good as ME!*”

In *one* sense, critics of the Church have it right. There are people who do act judgmentally towards sinners. They are people who get scandalized when the Pope reaches out to an atheist or someone flaunting their same sex behavior. They get scandalized when bishops speak about treating illegal aliens with human dignity. They believe the proper response to the sinner should be strong warnings and excommunications, assuming all people who have a sin they do not are people of wickedness, worse than them and therefore not welcome in the Church.

What we’re doing here is seen in the parable of the merciless servant (Matthew 18:21-35), the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) and it’s the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). It presumes that so long as we are not as bad as the people we presume are worse than us, we have no reason to change our behavior. It presumes that we should be praised and those not like us should be condemned.

The problem with that view is it overlooks the fact that we are in the Church and trying to live faithfully in the first place because of God’s grace and the people God put into our lives to bring us about. It also overlooks the fact that we are not perfect people, but still sinners in need of salvation. But mainly it overlooks the fact that Jesus did die so that we might be saved. So every person—the illegal alien, the pro-abortion politician, the same sex activist—falls into the category of people we need to be reached out to. Even when we are spurned and hated, we cannot give upon trying to reach out to them. Even the penalty of excommunication is aimed at showing the sinner the need to turn back and repent—it is *NOT* intended to be an amputation of a sinner to be eternally cut off from God.

Ultimately, this mindset forgets Jesus’ words to St. Peter about how many times we are to forgive. Seventy times seven—that *doesn’t* mean a limit of 490 times but always (Matthew 18:21-22).

It’s Not About “*The Other Side,*” It’s About Us.

Of course, people get defensive about such things. It’s easy to see such behavior in *others*, but if someone dares say our own behavior is going wrong, we get outraged and point to the behavior of others. This is why I said above that it is quite possible for us to be in both categories at once. We are shown that our behavior is wrong and we start getting angry: *How dare you judge me! I’m much better than*

those people!

But that's to miss the point. None of us here can claim to be without sin. So we cannot look down on others who are in sin. They are our brothers and sisters who need our love even as we stand up for the truth. On the other side, none of us can claim that we know better than the magisterium what the teaching of the magisterium *should* be. So maybe we're not openly supporting changing the Church teaching on sexual morality—but are we willing to be obedient to the Church on her social teaching? Or is our approach *Mater Si, Magister No?*

Essentially, we need to be certain that we are open to the Church and willing to obey her, and at the same time, be willing to reach out to the sinner. We must neither refuse to repent nor refuse to reach out, even if the person we reach out to refuses to turn back to God. That's the message of Pope Francis, the message of the Church and the message of Christ.

This contribution is available at <http://arnobius-of-sicca.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-prodigal-son-and-mercy-misunderstood.html>

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What is a Hypocrite? [at Quiet Consecration]

HYPOCRISY. A form of lying in which a person pretends to have virtues or moral qualities that are not possessed. Its motive is pride and its malice depends on the gravity of the pride and on the evil consequences that follow when people take one to be morally good and, perhaps, entrust one with confidences or responsibilities that are not deserved. **It is not hypocrisy, however, to be on one's best behavior with those whom one justly wishes to impress favorably. Nor is it hypocrisy when a person, because of human weakness, fails to live up to his or her own principles or profession of faith.** (Etym. Latin *hypocrita*, hypocrite; from Greek *hypokritēs*, actor, hypocrite.)

As usual, Catholicism takes into consideration the entire person - a holistic approach, so to speak - allowing for problems, mistakes and sins that everyone of us are subject to every day of our lives. Rather than simply dismissing someone who has fallen, The Church reminds us that we all fall short of the goal at every day. We may do really well for awhile. We may resolve, when we fall, to never EVER do whatever it was we did again. However, unless one is determined to never interact with another human being or animal, the chances that we will fall flat on our faces again are pretty high.

Because of this, I hesitate to call people who go to Church every Sunday but who fail to be perfect Monday through Friday hypocrites. I certainly reject that label for myself and anyone I love. I know how many of us face every day determined to do better than we did yesterday. I know how many of us make the same mistakes over and over again - myself included - and when I apologize one more time it is not because I am a hypocrite; rather, it is because I am a human being.

Of course this does not excuse any bad behavior. When I am wrong, I am wrong. I accept that, accept the responsibility and make my apology with sincerity. I accept whatever punishment God or the law of the land prescribes and I try not to whine about it. After all, I brought it on myself. If I have a penance to endure, I must endure it.

More importantly, however, is this: I must be willing to try and live up to what Jesus taught us. How often must I forgive? Seven times seventy, and that does not mean I whip out a calculator and start keeping score. It means I must continue to forgive as often as my Father in Heaven forgives me, and last I looked He does not keep score.

Damn hard, too. I am a score keeper by nature. Being Italian *and* Irish, I am genetically predisposed to keep score of all the hurts and bruises and scrapes and twists and turns caused to poor little me over the years. Shoot, when you come from people who a) have a saying of 'Vengeance is a dish best eaten cold *and* b) are still mad about a battle that they lost 800 years ago trust me you would keep score too.

That being said, I made a decision over 20 years ago to try and be a better Leslie one day at a time. No matter how many times I fall down, no matter how many times I am hurt and no matter how many times I **cause** hurt, I am determined to make it to Heaven some day. I am not going to give up.

Today, because it is Good Shepherd Sunday, I keep thinking about what St Thomas Aquinas taught about Jesus' saying, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me". He wrote (and I am paraphrasing) that the word 'know' implies not just a surface knowledge of our existence; rather, it means that He really *knows* me. He knows how I think, how I feel, my defects and my strengths. He knows me, and he LOVES me, He accepts me for who I am while still expecting me to do the best I can to fight my own fallen nature.

Jesus loves me for the willingness to fight myself....and He forgives me, seven times seventy....which is what I need to do in order to NOT be a hypocrite.

SO....if you are afraid that falling down again and again but still wanting to be a member of His Church means you are less than perfect, don't worry.

You are less than perfect.

Sit next to me.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2015/04/what-is-hypocrite.html>
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Thankful [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



It's so hard to catch up after taking a blog absence, so I thought I'd update with a "**Thankful**" post.

I'll have to update more again soon hopefully.

We have been busy doctoring, schooling and trying to get our home ready to sell.

Thankful for Easter!

God is so Good and Merciful!

Thankful for my beautiful children.



Thankful for my wonderful husband and our marriage.

(yes, my boobs are that big)

That tan I got in Texas? Yep, it's gone.



Thankful for silly kiddos,
(planning on re-staining our porch this next week)



Fun Easter cakes



And homemade pretzels!



Thankful I still have littles.

So very **Thankful** for that.

They bring so much joy

and

boy am I going to miss it when they are not little anymore.



Thankful for almost 9 year olds that are still little and big at the same time.



which means they still enjoy the little kid things.



Thankful we keep it simple, just the cheapest egg coloring kit there is and good ol' crayons!



Thankful I got to spend Easter with my family
Since we are moving, I'm trying to enjoy these "last" things.
Thankful for my sister Brenna.



And my whole family.



Here we are in order of age.

I'm the oldest, my brother John is 1 year younger,

my sister Brenna is 9 years younger and Jordan, the baby, is 16 years younger.



Christine asked me if I had a "Bubba"

I was like, "???"

Thankful she brought me one!

Speaking of Christine

(not sure if she wants me to link her or not!!!?)

She's an ol' lady now...

Her birthday is this Sunday.

(she's like 2 years older than me!)

Happy birthday friend!!



Thankful for my bookend boys.

My oldest is now 15

Gosh that time flew by.



Our Hobbit cake!



His fun "teenager cake"!

I love how the girls are like, "Are you going to share?"



Thankful he's *only* 15.

I still have a few more years with him here.

He's an awesome kid.



So is this little stinker.

We started potty training a couple weeks ago,

but the kid would not go potty at all.

Like, he'd go 12 hours without going potty and be in terrible pain.

SO

we just wanted him to go.

Anywhere.

So we went back to diapers.

In which, he had a hard time even going in his diapers at first.

Then, he'd tell me every single time and want me to change it right away.



We used up the rest of our diapers and ran out today.

He seems excited to be wearing underwear and understands

we have no diapers.

But

he hasn't gone potty since his last diaper around 1pm.



Thankful Wal-mart sells markers for pretty cheap.

I found this in the cupboard, in our "marker box"

All the lids off every single marker.

Some of the markers were smashed flat and all (yes all) of them were dried out.

"Not Me" did it.

He lives here and he does everything.



Thankful for Nutella smiles.



Christine showed how Ava is biking on her own now,
so we figured we better get our 5 year old a bike!

(all our old broken down bikes went into the dumpster)



And of course if the 5 year old gets a bike,
the 3 year old needs one too!



Thankful for beautiful sunsets seen at the top of our stairs.

I love this house.

I will miss this home so very much.



Happy weekend everyone!

May the joy of Easter and God's Divine Mercy fill your heart!

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2015/04/thankful.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

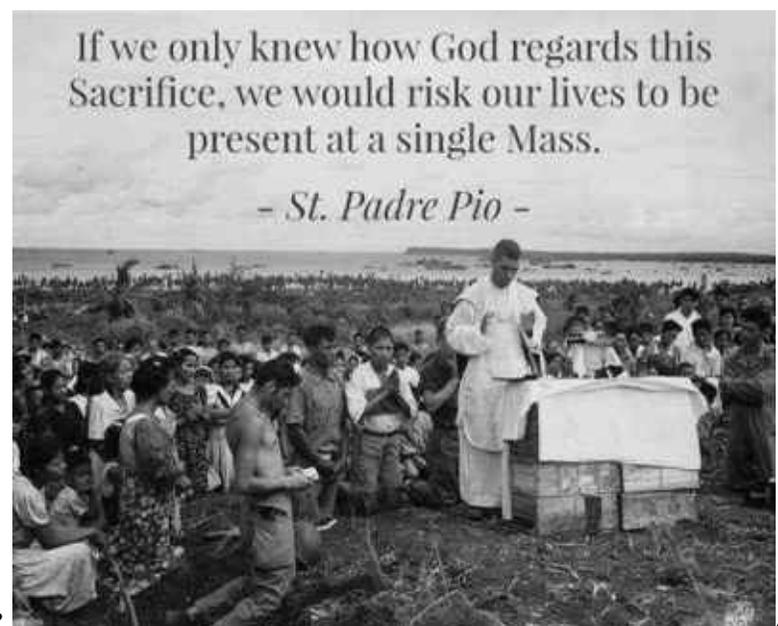
this Holy Sacrifice is being offered somewhere on planet Earth every day of the year round the clock. Imagine that, somewhere, every day, round the clock. It is the most beautiful thing this side of heaven.

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.

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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 strong is your faith? [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

You've heard of the woman, desperate for a cure, who knew that just touching the cloak of Jesus would heal her from years of medical abuse, ignorance, and pain. In that one instance she was cured, was it her actually touching Jesus' cloak, was it Jesus, or was it her faith? "Your faith has made you well..."

Another example of this is when Jesus said to the blind man in Mark 10:52 "Go your way, your faith has made you well." This man heard of Jesus' and began crying out to Him, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" His faith was strong enough to believe that Jesus could heal him and give him his sight.

"Go your way, your faith has made you well."

Where is that kind of faith today? Do you have it? There is so much sickness, sadness, and evil around us everyday. I know that it has been hard on us lately in the Pillar household with our youngest stretching her newly-turned 18 year old wings in ways that has both her parents, brother and sister in shock and awe. I have never prayed as much and as desperately as I have during these past 4 months. These things can really shake one's faith for sure! From the pulpit, from the Bible, from Jesus Himself, we are told that we are not alone, that He will never leave us.....but why do we feel so helpless and abandoned sometimes?

Pope Francis, on April 19, 2015 during the Regina Coeli: On Being Witnesses to the Risen Christ, said this:

"Today begins in Turin that solemn exposition of the Holy Shroud. I too, God-willing, will go to venerate it on June 21st. I hope that this act of veneration helps us all to find in Jesus Christ the Merciful Face of God, and to recognize it in the face of our brothers and sisters, particularly those suffering most."

Not only Christ, but others around us can lend support and encouragement when we are at our deepest low trying times. Like the two examples above, there's always someone with a stronger faith that can help strengthen the faith of those around them. They found the proof in their lives they needed to have such faith. but it doesn't just happen, one has to want it and search for it. It is up to us to seek and recognize the face of God...the Merciful Face of God, and we can find Him in our brothers and sisters, in our crazy upturned lives, God is there and everywhere for us!

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This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2015/04/how-strong-is-your-faith.html>

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HTTP/1.1 200 OK Server: nginx Date: Sat, 09 May 2015 15:49:21 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Transfer-Encoding: chunked Connection: keep-alive Vary: Accept-Encoding Vary: Cookie X-hacker: If you're reading this, you should visit [automattic.com/jobs](http://automattic.com/jobs) and apply to join the fun, mention this header. X-Pingback: <https://melaniejeanjuneau.wordpress.com/xmlrpc.php> Link: ; rel=shortlink X-ac: 1.dca \_dca

# Protestants' Reactions to a Catholic Writer [at joy of nine9]

I am proud to proclaim

I am a Catholic.

A saved, born again, Spirit filled, lover of Jesus

who expects to be accepted

by Protestant lovers of Jesus

because I am a sister in Christ.

BUT, my culture and way of expressions seems odd to Protestant ears,

So I am misunderstood.

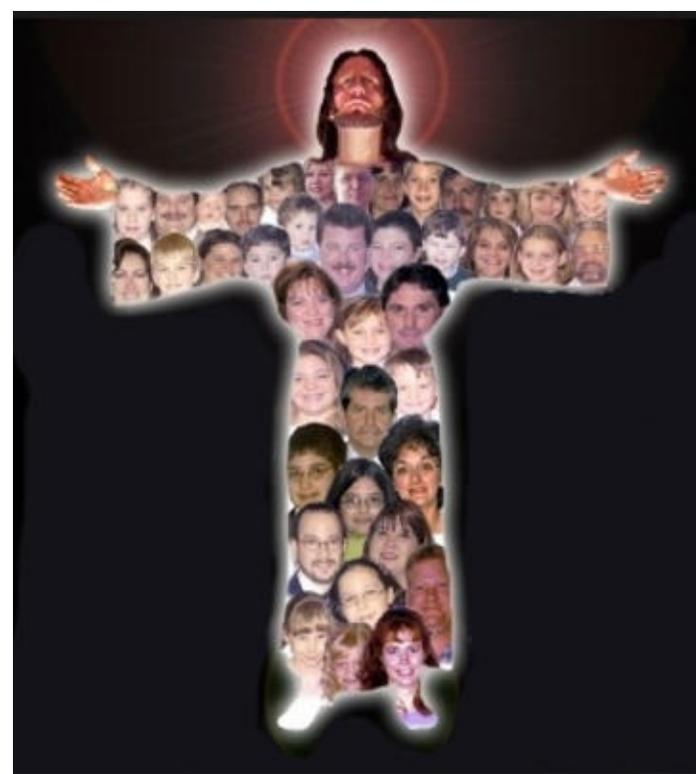
Perhaps in the Body, the Protestants are the feet and mouth carrying the Good News

and as a Catholic I am an ear.

I might not look like I belong but trust me,

although I look foreign I AM part of the same Body.

May my small acts of unity reverberate throughout the entire Mystical Body of Christ.



Before I discovered Catholic sites, I posted on secular and Protestant sites. I felt I had to hide my Catholicism. When I finally wrote about my Catholic faith, I was immediately grilled and interrogated by shocked readers and co-authors. Yet God had His own agenda and through the moderator, forgiveness and unity began. Of course, the site decided to simply ignore my Catholicism and centre on my love of God.

When I discovered Catholic sites and was accepted as a writer, I was thrilled to finally be free to write about my faith without filters. Of course Protestants and agnostics sometimes still take a swipe at me but I feel I am defending my faith on my territory. Of course, the tears still come at times because I know exactly how they feel about the Catholic Church. I too once reviled Catholics and thought they had corrupted true faith in Jesus.

It really does take divine revelations to break down the ingrained prejudices against Catholic tradition. I am a convert only because of divine intervention. My sister and I met the Lord when we were 16 and 17. She became a Protestant Missionary and I became a Catholic mother of nine. She prays for my salvation because she knows about my deep relationship with Mary.

## **Prayer**

My tears and pain are my silent prayer, whispered from the depths of my spirit as I choose to let the pain flow from me to the heart of Jesus. I cannot change people. Only He can open eyes. I yearn for the day the God reveals His Mother to our Protestant Brethren.



## Reflection

“WE can be right.

We can be dead right and

bring death to all those around us.”

( Jean Vanier, founder or L’Arche)

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This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanjuneau.wordpress.com/2015/04/12/protestants-reactions-to-a-catholic-writer/>  
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## Grace Hurts [at Adult Catechesis]



Like Dietrich Boenhoffer, I hate cheap grace. I do. I despise it. It's a sham, a phony, a charlatan, a hypocrite – like me.

**“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, (it is) baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”** { p. 43-4}, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Boenhoffer, 1937.

**“All my requests seem to melt down to one for grace,”** -Flannery O'Connor, 1962

What did Flannery O'Connor know about suffering and grace? At the age of twenty-six, Flannery would be diagnosed (like her father before her) with systemic lupus erythematosus (“lupus”), a disabling rheumatologic condition. Through chronic pain, recurrent illnesses and medication side effects, Flannery would write with keen insight, acerbic wit and devout Catholic faith. Thirteen years later, she would die. She was only thirty-nine years old. Flannery O'Connor knew suffering and she knew grace – a mean grace.

**“All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful.”**— Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, 1948-1964.

**“I think there is no suffering greater than what is caused by the doubts of those who want to believe. I know what torment this is, but I can only see it, in myself anyway, as the process by which faith is deepened. A faith that just accepts is a child's faith and all right for children, but eventually you have to grow religiously as every other way, though some never do. What people don't realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross. It is much harder to believe than not to believe. If you feel you can't believe, you must at least do this: keep an open mind. Keep it open toward faith, keep wanting it, keep asking for it, and leave the rest to God.”**

**“This notion that grace is healing omits the fact that before it heals, it cuts with the sword Christ said He came to bring.”**

**“[The trendy “beat” writers] call themselves holy but holiness costs and so far as I can see they pay nothing. It's true that grace is the free gift of God but in order to put yourself in the way of being receptive**

to it you have to practice self-denial.”

Mt 16:24

Love,  
Matthew

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# Latin Mass Sub-topic: The "Straw" Subdeacon [at *Servimus unum Deum*]

Hello everyone,

It seems that a curious topic of minutiae has been finally answered with regards to Latin Mass enthusiasts: The "Straw" Sub-deacon.

For those of you wondering "What?" the Sub-deacon role in the Solemn Latin Mass is the lowest of the three clergy member roles in terms of "rank." It was part of the "major orders" back when the minor order/major order system was a regular part of priestly formation (now mainly part of Extraordinary Form seminaries only). When you are at a Solemn Latin Mass, the "clergy" member on the lowest step is the sub-deacon. You can also identify them a good portion of the time by the dalmatic with one horizontal band on the back, making a "H."

Usually, a priest or a deacon fills the role of the deacon and/or the Sub-deacon. However, Sub-deacon isn't apparently restricted to what we now consider modern Holy Orders (deacon and higher). Apparently, laity can be a sub-deacon in certain conditions in what is called the "straw" sub-deacon. WHAT?????

To answer this question fully, I have no choice but to use an article on what I classify as a Radical Misrepresenting Traditionalist website, *Rorate Caeli*. Since they are anal about their citing of their works, the article used is titled ""Straw" subdeacon PCED letter." Though I will not hyperlink to them to give them blog hits. Go find the article yourself.

Basically, there are some instances where a suitable person of the old major orders was not able to be a sub-deacon. Under the old rubrics and rules surrounding the 1962/Tridentine/Mass of St. John XXIII, a person in minor orders who has reached the order of acolyte (the highest of the minor orders) was allowed to

*act*

as a "straw" sub-deacon in the Latin Mass for these emergency cases.

The acolyte, however, would have a number of his functions as sub-deacon not performed during the Mass, due to not being in the major orders:

- The sub-deacon would NOT wear the maniple
- The sub-deacon does not pour water into the chalice at the offertory, but must let the deacon do so
- SD does not touch the chalice *infra actionem*, nor cover it with the pall, nor uncover it
- After communion, SD does not purify the chalice, and the priest must do it instead
- After the priest purifies the chalice, then SD covers the chalice with veil and burse and transfers it to the credence table.

With the advent of

# Summorum Pontificum

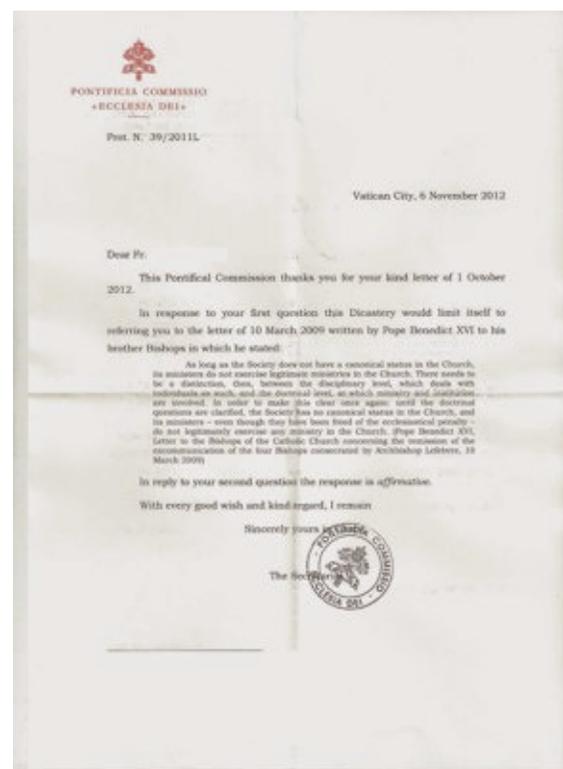
bringing the Latin Mass back into the life of the Catholic Church on a

public

scale, questions have arisen as to what qualifies a layman or a seminarian in training in regards to this "Straw" subdeacon? Thanks to a "Michael" of

[the St. Bede liturgical studios early in 1992](#)

, the questioning of another individual, and a Rorate Caeli author (New Catholic?) in 2012 and 2013 respectively, this matter has been answered.



Source: <http://www.nowyruchliturgiczny.pl/2012/11/papieska-komisja-odpowiada.html>

in response to the question

*: Do the decree of Sacred Congregation of Rites (no. 4184) and the decision of Pontifical Commission 'Ecclesia Dei' (no. 24/92), concerning the possibility of serving as a subdeacon during the Mass in forma extraordinaria, apply also to diocesan seminarians (who are not seminarians of the institutes erected by Pontifical Commission 'Ecclesia Dei') who wear clerical clothing?*

Prot. N. 29/2011 L.

Vatican City, 15 April 2013

Dear 

This Pontifical Commission thanks you for your kind letter of 10 December 2012.

In general, this Dicastero does not respond to the private questions of individuals.

However, this Pontifical Commission would limit itself to saying that the function of Subdeacon can be legitimately assumed by an acolyte suitably instituted by a Bishop, but with the particular appropriate ritual differences.

With every good wish and kind regard, I remain

Yours Sincerely in Christ,



**Source:** Rorate Caeli article "Straw" subdeacon PCED letter." The role of the sub-deacon, according to PCED can also "... be legitimately assumed by an acolyte suitably instituted by a bishop, but with the particular ritual differences."

With these two letters from the PCED, this does leave a good swath of room for the sub-deacon position to be open for certain lay members to do it. Basically, I can foresee two types of laymen being able to do the sub-deacon role where no ordained deacon or priest is available:

1) The lay member is a seminarian in formation (as per the 2012 letter) who has progressed to a suitable point in their studies (e.g. 2nd or 3rd year) whereby they would have received equivalent to what would be those ranks in the old minor/major orders system pre-*Ministeria Quaedam* of August 15, 1972.

So essentially, that leaves us with some options for the application of *Summorum Pontificum*/the Latin Mass in modern day, post-Vatican II legislation, to fill the role of the sub-deacon.

### *Personal Commentary on the Subject*

In the Archdiocese of Toronto, there is currently NO formal institution of lectors and acolytes. I would say this is likely, as per the majority of dioceses world wide, due to a lack of education and knowledge about current Church law and legislation of minor orders and the 1972 document on such, *Ministeria*

*Quaedam*, by Paul VI. Seriously, every diocese should have institution for adult lectors and acolytes. Not to mention rigorous training programs for both!

In terms of my personal Latin Mass experience, I have witnessed the usage of the straw sub-deacon in the Latin Mass, according to current, existing legislation. In the example of the

[December 2014 Solemn Latin Mass I served alongside St. Patrick's Gregorian Choir](#)

, the "Straw" Sub-deacon option was used to allow for the position to be filled. The layman in the position of Sub-deacon had fulfilled the requirements of the position under the PCED, having undertaken time and studies at St. Augustine's seminary (with possibly some form of "liturgical promotion") equivalent to what an acolyte of the pre-Vatican II minor orders would have had. He was properly trained in his role, including the restrictions in being the ``straw`` Sub-deacon, and carried out his role according to the EF guidelines.

Pax Tibi Christi, Julian Barkin.

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This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.ca/2015/04/latin-mass-sub-topic-straw-subdeacon.html>

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# The Power of a Smile

*“Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.” — Mother Teresa*



Last night, I was looking through some pictures from our recent visit to California. It was a trip to see our 10-month old grandson, Nico. I noticed that in every picture he had a big, slobbery smile. And, as I looked at the pictures, I couldn't help but smile too!

I recalled that I smiled the entire time I was in California and Nico's smile had a lot to do with that! And, the pictures make the smiles return.

You see, smiles are contagious. No matter how you are feeling at the time, seeing someone smile (especially babies) will make you smile as well.

When we are feeling happy we smile, that's true. But smiles work both ways. When we see someone smiling, we smile, and even if just for a moment we feel happy.

*A glad heart lights up the face, but an anguished heart breaks the spirit. —Proverbs 15:13*

Smiles are very powerful. Research indicates that people who smile a lot live longer and look better. Portman Healthcare's research says that in addition to living longer, smiles help reduce pain, strengthens our immune system, reduces stress, and makes us more successful.

Some friends will say that they have nothing to smile about. Their problems are too big and complicated to crack a smile. They live with a dull sense of despair. But, you can help.

Your smile can be the spark that helps turn thing around. Your smile can help cut through the despair.

Years ago, while working in my first job, I asked a successful, older fellow worker why he was so successful with women. He wasn't that good looking, he was bald and overweight, but he was always smiling and surrounded by pretty women.

He said, “Smile at the pretty girls and it will make you feel good. Smile at the not so pretty girls and that will make them feel good. So, smile at all the girls.”

Today, years later, I can extend his thoughts to include everyone. “Smile at everyone you meet and it will make you happy. They will smile back because smiling is contagious and it will make you happy. So, smile at everyone!”

*“The expression one wears on one’s face is far more important than the clothes one wears on one’s back.” – Dale Carnegie*

Want to live longer, have a better marriage, be more successful, reduce pain and stress, and strengthen your immune system? Then, start with a smile.

Say Cheese!

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## **Disturbingly Peaceful [at Blogging For A Better Life]**

Has the thought ever crossed your mind that you might be getting too complacent in life?

If so, maybe its time for some breathlessness to blow into your being, one's faith cannot survive sitting still, it needs to be stretched and pulled in this and that direction.

Perhaps, it's time to pray, asking Jesus to give us strength, courage, and hope where we need it most. Praying to be lifted to new horizons. Praying to find peace in our lives.



**“Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we sailed too close to the shore.**

**Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life, having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity, and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.**

**Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas, where storms will show your mastery, where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizon of our hopes, and to push us into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.**

**This we ask in the name of our Captain, who is Jesus Christ.”**

We need faith that grows in leaps and bounds, unrestricted even in disturbing ways. It is when we can say,

*“my cup runs over”*

and

*“my plate is full”*

that we will find peace.

Perhaps it’s time . . . time to pray . . .

**Disturb us, Lord**

. . .

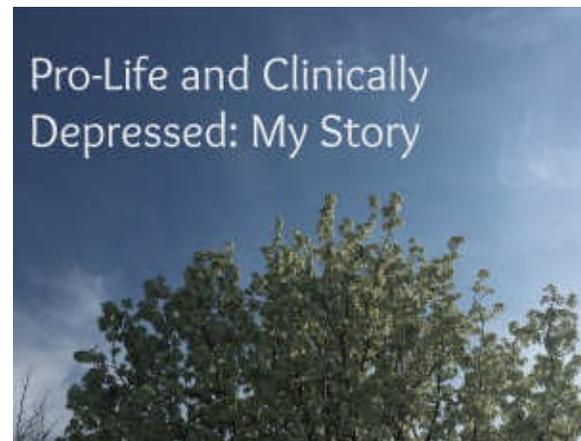
*(Photo credit courtesy of Cullen O'Donnell)*

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# Pro-Life and Clinically Depressed: My Story [at perfectlytara]



My husband and I are pro-life in all of the “traditional” ways. We pray for an end to abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. We oppose the death penalty. We believe the Church’s teachings when it comes to being open to (new) life and [despite our struggle with infertility](#), follow Her guidance on assisted reproductive technology.

More and more, however, I am realizing that a call to be “pro-life” means much more than these things.

My family has an extraordinary history of clinical depression. I can only think of 2 members out of about 25 who haven’t been treated for a depressive disorder. My depression has manifested in various ways, in everything from an eating disorder to postpartum depression to anxiety.

To live with depression you must **choose** life. This is not to say that a person chooses to be depressed, or simply making a choice will snap you out of a depressive episode. That isn’t the case at all. Depression is an illness with very real and very dangerous symptoms that needs to be treated professionally.

There have been times when it has been all I can do to get out of bed and move to the couch. There have been weeks when I couldn’t even bear to talk to my husband. There have been months that went by in a haze – months that I don’t remember at all.



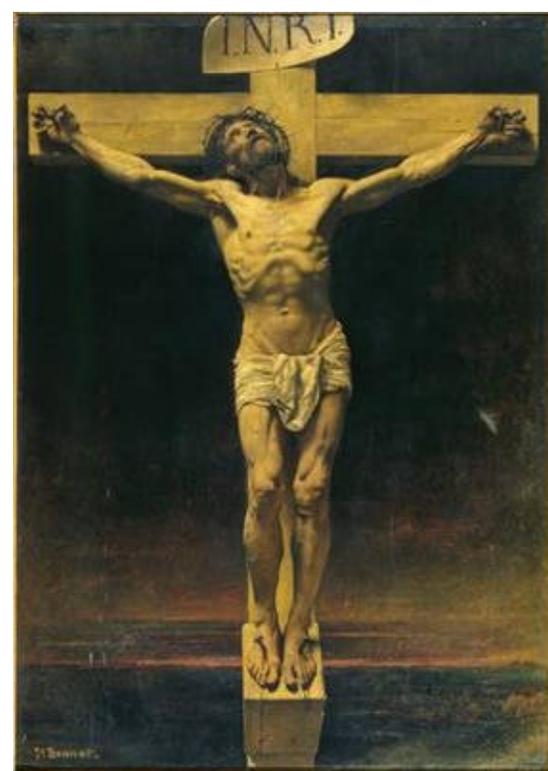
Unfortunately, many of my earlier moments with my daughter are hazy due to the fog of postpartum depression. Luckily, we took lots of pictures.

It is during these times that **my husband must choose life**. He chooses life on my behalf by getting me the help I need, by being patient, and by shouldering the burden of work in our family. **He chooses me in my sickness because he knows that this life we are building together – this sometimes horribly painful, broken life – is worth living**. He knows that during the times when I can't see it myself, he must see it for me.

During the good times – the healthy times – I must choose life. I must choose to be open and vulnerable with my husband and family. I must choose to let them know the things that I need them to do in the bad times. I must choose to take medication, to do really, really hard work with therapists to learn my triggers and the signs that an episode may be on the horizon. **I must choose life in the good times so that I can survive the bad.**

I do truly mean survive. [Depression is an illness that kills, and it kills often](#). The pain of depression results in the loss of far too many beautiful people. This burden of choosing life in the midst of depression is hard work. It's hard work for me, and its especially hard work for my loved ones. When I am depressed, it is easy to say that things would be better if I wasn't suffering, if a depressive episode wasn't always looming in the future, if I didn't choose life. It would be easy to say this, but it wouldn't be true.

I choose life because I believe that every life even those filled with incredible suffering, has value. I rest in the promise of the Lord that suffering can be sanctifying and that He is with us through it all. This is the life God has given me, and I will choose to live it to the fullest.



As Christ did during his suffering, I will choose to endure and focus on the Lord.

Your life has value. If you struggle with depression, please

[get help](#)

This post is part of a link-up with [Blessed is She](#). Hop over to read other beautiful reflections on the theme of “life”.

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This contribution is available at <http://perfectlytara.wordpress.com/2015/05/02/pro-life-and-clinically-depressed-my-story/>

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## Finding Our True Self [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]



Finding our True Self

### *Finding Our True Self*

***“Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us ...***

***that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.***

***The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.***

***Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”*** (1 Jn. 3:1-2)

***therefore ...***

***“...Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life [your true self] is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory....*** (Col. 3:2-4)

***And, so that ...***

***“... you [may] be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ...put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”*** (Eph. 4:23-24)

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the human realm an inferiority complex is defined by some as:

***“An inferiority complex is a lack of self-worth, a doubt and uncertainty, and feelings of not measuring up to standards. It is often subconscious, and is thought to drive afflicted individuals to***

*overcompensate, resulting either in spectacular achievement or extreme asocial behavior. The term was coined to indicate a lack of covert self-esteem. [ For many, it is developed through a combination of genetic personality characteristics and personal experiences.” (as excerpted from Wikipedia)*

In the natural world an inferiority complex derives from a form of the sin of pride. That is, when this problem is manifest in us, it is because we are focusing our attempt to assess “who we are” on what we think that others think of us. We normally react to this deviant self-centered form of self-analysis by overcompensating in our response to others in a social or worldly activity or venue. It also usually results in a self-demeaning valuation of ourselves, usually resulting in a depressive attitude which further complicates our own well being.

If we fall into such a situation in our lives we definitely need spiritual or psychological counsel.

However, what I wish to discuss with you today is NOT this type of inferiority assessment that come from determining our own adequacy by comparing ourselves with our peers, but rather an inferiority that comes by comparing ourselves with the Holiness of God to the point that it deters our being able to enter into an intimate personal relationship with Him because we feel we are NOT “holy enough” to approach the Divine.

In this discussion it is my intent to demonstrate to you from the Word of God that our true self-worth is in Christ and that the only way to find our true self, our spiritual self, is to “die to our natural self” and yield ourselves to Him for as the scripture says.... **“our lives are hidden in Christ and when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory...”** (Col. 3:3-4)

When we begin to truly “live” in the “spiritual” realm we have a tendency to bring our “natural” baggage with us – we assume that our natural reaction to worldly events are applicable responses to events in the spiritual realm.

Nothing could be farther from the truth! That is why, in order to be truly active in spiritual things our mind and soul must undergo a transformation. The Father, Himself tells us that ” His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts.” So, if our desire is to grow closer and closer to the Father through Christ, we must permit the Holy Spirit to renew our minds through His Word so that we may understand the Father and his calling and purposes for us!

In the world we strive for acceptance by others based on our own performance or traits that we deem to be acceptable by our peers. Likewise, we think that in order to be loved by others we need to “do something” or have standing as “someone” in order to earn their love.

We incorrectly bring this mentality into the spiritual realm by incorrectly thinking that, in order for God to love us, we need to “earn” His Love through our “good works”. And, extending that attitude, we also think that we cannot approach God’s throne through prayer because we are not “holy ” enough and therefore we look for a “holy” intercessor to pray for us to be able to access God with our petitions.

What we forget, is that, we who are truly converted and baptized Christians are the Father’s Children in Christ and, that in Him, we are New Creation and co-inheritors with Christ of the Father’s Kingdom. We approach His Throne, not in our own righteousness but with the righteousness of His Son, whose Spirit dwells in us. When we are in Jesus, the Father does not see our old “carnal’ self, for that self was



failings, the Holy Spirit will continue His work of molding us to the image of Jesus, whose spirit dwells in us, for the Glory of His Name! –**“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”** (Rom. 8:35). The answer is that Nothing and no one can separate us from His Love! Praised be His Holy Name!

<> **As His Children, we are His partners in bringing forth His Kingdom**

... we are not only inheritors of eternal life in Heaven with Christ, but are also given the opportunity to be partners with the Father in bringing forth His Kingdom in this world so that His will may be accomplished here as it is in Heaven.

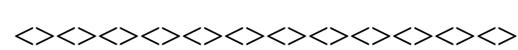
**“Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”** (James 2:5))

**“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is....”** (Col.3:1-2)

**“I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.”** (Phil. 4:13)

<> **As His Children, we may approach His Throne without Fear**

**“...For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”** (Heb. 4:15-16)



As His Children we must come to an awareness that He desires nothing more than, through intimate and personal dialogue, to maintain an active, living relationship with us in every aspect of our lives. Yes, brothers and sisters it is time we understood what it really means to be “Adopted” Children of the Father so that we can also come to understand who we are in Christ and thus become aware of our NEW SELF IN HIM! praised be His Holy Name!

**First of all** we must realize that without the sacrifice of the Father’s Son we would be spiritual orphans, without a spiritual parent, without a spiritual inheritance, destined to Hades for eternity to serve, Satan , and live a life of despair an torture without end.

**Secondly**, we must realize that just as pride brought Satan’s downfall, so also the human original sin of pride will bring us to our downfall unless we die our self-willed human tendencies and turn to God salvation. Through Jesus’ sacrifice, the Father offers us, eternal life with Him as our Father, as well as deliverance from the sin and its consequences – a deliverance only for those who believe in Him and accept the Gift of Redemption from sin and its consequences. But if we persist in thinking that our salvation depends on our own works and performance, are we not still simmering in the filthy trap of human pride and rejecting God’s sacrifice of His Son for us?

Think now, if we live our lives as self-centered narcissists – living only for ourselves – and spitting in the face of our Savior and Lord, are we not glorifying Satan and dishonoring Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross? If our lives are centered only on ourselves and not on God our Creator are we not only idolaters but also blasphemers of the Holy Spirit who presents us the Word of Eternal Love that delivers us from the consequences of our blasphemy? (see Heb.10:29)

***As a third consideration***, is it not, then, time to lay aside that carnal form of thinking, that leads us to all sorts of pride-filled attitudes, including that of spiritual inferiority, and humbly accept the infinite and merciful gift of redemption that is being freely offered, by putting aside that old nature and putting on our new nature as that of adopted children of the Father? A nature so overcome by the Father’s Love that our only focus is on Him and Him alone. A focus that transforms us so that His Love and His Love alone rules over our hearts so much so that we lose any awareness of our old selves and desire only to fulfill the Father’s purposes in our lives.

How are we then to respond to this message of love? Listen to what the Apostle Paul proposes to us: ***“... the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*** (Rom. 13:12-14)

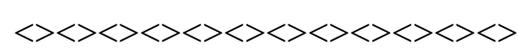
### ***Putting On the Lord Jesus Christ – our New and Spiritual Self***

I conclude my exhortations by presenting you the message that the Apostle Paul gave to the Philippians regarding emptying themselves as Christ emptied Himself, so that the Holy Spirit may be His Work in them and thus begin placing the conformance of their “self” to that of their Savior and Lord ...

***“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.***

***Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

***Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”*** (Phil. 2:1-16)



*May the Lord Bless you and empower you as you come into your true “self” in Him! Praised be His Holy Name!*

*Your Brother In Christ ... Bartimaeus*

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[\*It All Begins with Relationship\*](#)

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## Can You Be a Feminist and Not Be Pro-Life?

I'm a pro-life feminist.

I'm pro-life *because* I'm a feminist, not in spite of it. Feminism, by its own logic, should be the greatest pro-life movement but it's not. For me though, I don't see how you can be feminist and *not* be pro-life.

**Abortion kills unborn children.** These children are human beings. They are alive and they are human. They are deeply dependent on their mother's bodies but this doesn't make them any less alive or any less human. Feminism holds to the sacrosanct dignity of all human life.

*So how can you be a feminist and not be pro-life?*

**Abortion kills unborn children who have no rights and no say.** Their lives are ahead of them but they can't defend themselves. As women, we have been and in many places still are treated as property for another to dispose of. Feminism defends the life and dignity of even the weakest, even the unborn.

*So how can you be a feminist and not be pro-life?*

**Abortion kills unborn baby girls simply for being female.** Sex-selective abortions are commonplace throughout the world, including in many Western countries. They've led to [disturbingly unbalanced gender ratios](#) in countries like India and China. Feminism values the life of all women, no matter their age.

*So how can you be a feminist and not be pro-life?*

**Abortion pits mothers against their own unborn children.** Rather than offering the help and support vulnerable women need to continue their pregnancies and raise their children, abortion offers a cruel "way-out". It feeds the lie women have to choose between having children and having the quality of life they deserve. Feminism supports women and their children by seeking co-existence, not unilateral destruction.

*So how can you be a feminist and not be pro-life?*

**Abortion tells us that women are valued for not being men.** Our cultural narratives tell us that pregnancy is a burden and our social structures *make* it a burden and a hardship. Why? Because what men don't do doesn't matter. If men could have babies, pregnancy would be a promotion and abortion would be unthinkable. Feminism values women for what makes us women, including (but not limited to!) our ability to bear life.

*So how can you be a feminist and not be pro-life?*

**Abortion isn't pro-choice. Women have abortions because they believe there is no other choice.** Feminism wants to give women better choices, choices we actually want to choose. Abortion is anti-woman, anti-choice, anti-life and anti-human.

It's a sign we as a society have *abandoned* vulnerable women, not liberated them.

So I ask you, how can you be a feminist and not call yourself pro-life?

If you're interested in learning more about pro-life feminism, check our [Feminists for Life](#), [New Wave Feminists](#), or this fantastic piece from America Magazine, [The Feminist Case Against Abortion](#).

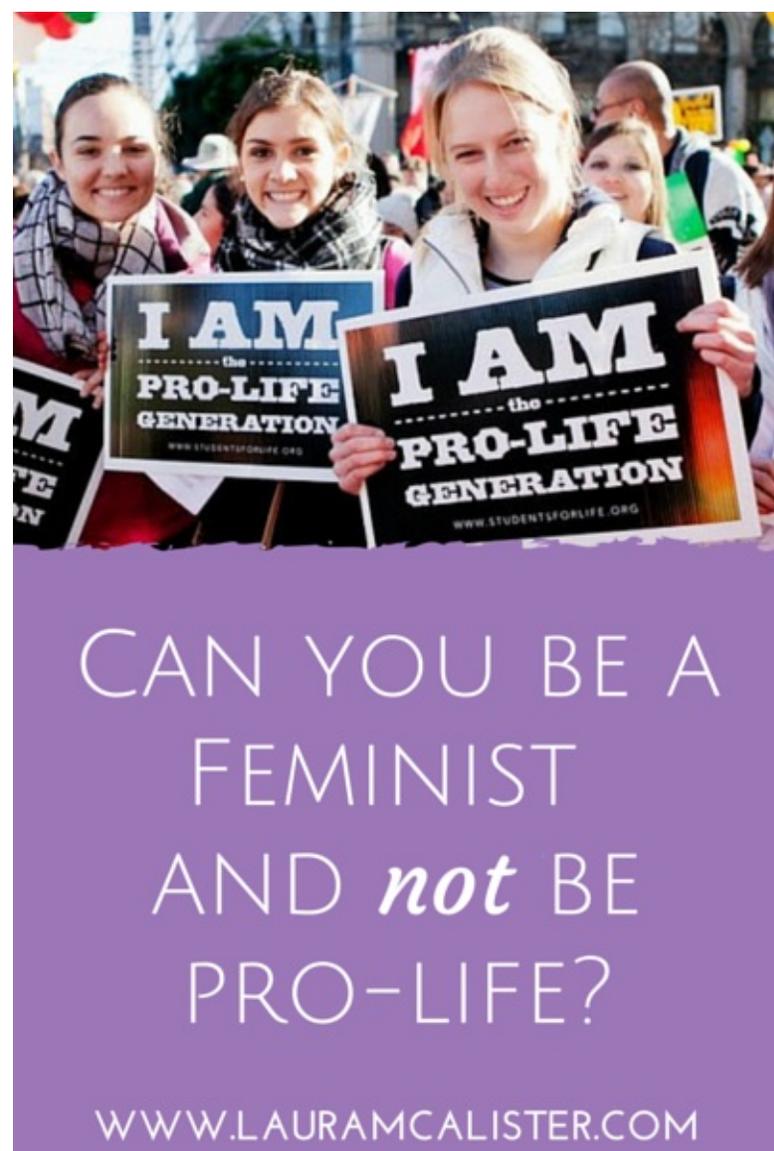


Photo credit: image [via Secular Pro-Life](#)

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# I Finished My Catechism Challenge, Now What? [at Miss Alexandrina]

[May 3, 2015](#) by [Alexandrina Brant](#) [Leave a comment](#)

Around the end of 2013, as I really entered my catechesis stage and began to inject faith not only into my life but to *be* my life, I decided I was going to read the Catechism of the Catholic Church from beginning to end, one or more paragraphs a day, no matter how long it would take. I've had some blips along the way (as have we all!), but I strove on reading when I could...and I stumbled on the Amen almost-prematurely.

I've given myself a few days for the inevitable to sink in around my academic work and blog planning (and the Tea Incident of destroying my laptop): I have no more Catechism challenge. No more daily routine. No more *set* plan through which to experience God.

Eep.



Firstly: Hooray! I completed what I set out to do!

But I'm left with something of a hole in my plans.

It would be easy for me to say that I should present myself with a new challenge, something based around reading The Bible every day, perhaps, or going through the Sunday missal. To add something into the space where my Catechism challenge was. But I don't think these as challenges would be beneficial.

Let me expound. Reading the Catechism on an (almost) daily basis massively strengthened my relationship with God. It's not something that I'd want to revert to the way it was, even in the few years before I was confirmed. Yet, I don't want to set myself a challenge; I don't want to use that label when it comes to The Bible, the Most Sacred book, I still see the importance of daily prayer and time for God alone, but I don't want to feel so guilty if I miss a day through not-remembering or a change of location. I think that is reducing it to a task-and-reward relationship— if one could even call that a relationship at all.

It's not a question of *what* I should do, but *how* I should be living my life in a more Christian fashion. Only reading something would no longer be helpful to the way I live my life as a Christian; now I must further put into practise what I have been taught.



## So What's the Rush? [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

Many professing to be Catholic - even among those who attend Sunday Mass regularly - have lost the sense of the Sacred and their belief in the Real Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

The many reasons for this are beyond the scope of this brief reflection.

Let me mention just two (1) the misuse of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist whose assistance at Mass should be restricted to those very rare occasions “whenever the number of faithful wishing to receive Communion is **so great** that the celebration of Mass would be unduly long (emphasis added); and (2) the failure of so many of us to spend sufficient time in thanksgiving and conversation with the Lord whose Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity we consume.

Since reception under both species is neither required nor recommended for frequent use, can anyone truthfully say that their Sunday Mass would be unduly prolonged if there were no Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist? What is so wrong about extending the time during which silent conversation can take place between we sinners and the Divine Physician now present within our fleshly temples?

Many have forgotten or never experienced days gone by when distribution of Holy Communion to crowds far larger than are now found at most Sunday Masses was more efficient and reverent as communicants kneeled at the altar rail and the priest was the one who came to them.

What is the rush to turn away from our loving Lord while He still remains physically within us? Should we not act as caring and adoring hosts and hostesses to our Heavenly Guest by continuing silent and prolonged interaction with Him after Mass instead of joining the stampede out of the pews? Can we not postpone unnecessary, loud, and idle chatter with those around us until we exit the Church building? The behavior I am suggesting is intended to be the norm, not the exception, in our parishes. Is that the reality in yours?

It's time to take an honest look at how we treat the King of Kings.

May the following observations from *The Sacrifice of the Altar* written by Father Federico Suarez cause us to better appreciate the magnificent Gift we receive in the Eucharist, to treat our loving Lord with the attention, love, reverence and respect He deserves, and to receive the full impact of the transforming

graces He desires to shower upon us:

*“We read in the Gospel of Saint John that when Jesus went to Bethany, to the house of his friend Lazarus, one of his friend's sisters, called Martha, busied herself about the house. The other, Mary, gave her entire attention to the Lord. It seems that this was by far the more commendable kind of action: if you receive a friend as a guest into your house, you look after him - that is, you keep him company and converse with him. You do not leave Him in the sitting room, or anywhere else in the house reading the newspaper to amuse Himself until you have time to attend to Him. Without doubt this would be a dereliction of good manners. And if the person were of such importance that the mere fact of his coming to your house would be regarded as an honor far surpassing your condition and deserts, the discourtesy would be tantamount to a gross insult.*

*There is no doubt, then, that when we go to Communion we know very well that the guest we receive is Jesus Christ our Lord. And we also know that as long as the accidents of bread remain unconsumed, the Lord is present really and sacramentally within us. This being so, and our Lord (who is none other than the only-begotten Son of the Father and himself true God) having deigned to come to visit us in spite of our unworthiness, the least we can do is to bear him company and converse with him: that is, we will give him our undivided attention. ...*

*Although...the priest after the purification of the chalice and before the last prayer usually interrupts the conduct of the Mass for a few minutes, so that he himself and those others who have received the Sacrament may give thanks for a space, it is also best not to be in a hurry to part from our Lord, but to remain for some time recollected after the end of Mass.*

*We are, for these moments, in a sense like monstrances that hold the most precious treasure: Christ is alive within us, given that the sacramental species take several minutes to disappear completely. It is, after all, a courtesy dictated by love and gratitude to keep Our Lord company and, as Saint Teresa says to enter into our soul with Him as Mary did when she received Him in Bethany, and to carry on a conversation with Him. For this we ought to make an effort to maintain a minimum of recollection, subjecting the senses so that they do not be dissipated. In order to concentrate on what is important, we should withhold our attention from outside things so as to center our thoughts on the Guest we have just received in our soul... “*

Hopefully, Father Suarez's words will prompt each of us to ask ourselves some frank questions: What kind of host/hostess have we been to our Eucharistic Guest? Have we, do we, take Him for granted? Are we satisfied with the way we keep Him company and converse with Him and the manner in which we

conduct ourselves while in Church and at Mass? Should we resolve to approach and treat Him differently?

The journey toward restoring a sense of the Sacred within our Church buildings and greater awe and amazement for the immense gift of the Eucharist begins one soul at a time.

Are you ready to take that first step?

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This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2015/04/monday-musings-so-whats-rush.html>  
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## Face 2 Face with Who I Was and Who I Want to Be [at Making It In Vermont]



~Photo with one of my sons in front of our family picture wall.

I had a very startling encounter earlier this week. It has been swirling around my head for days making me dizzy. How do I write about it, what do I say, what does it all mean? I was confronted blaringly by thoughts of the woman I was, the woman I am, and the woman I hope to be...

We took all seven kids with us to our two year old son G's ear check up over at the University of Vermont Medical Center on Monday morning thinking we would make an excursion of it and visit the Fleming Museum next door afterward. It was only \$10 admission for the whole family. Quite a deal for a family of nine.

We had two strollers going while the older four boys walked with us. The double stroller for our 3 year old and 2 year old and I had ~P, the 6 month old, in his baby car seat in another stroller. Thankfully he slept for the first 45 minutes. We were quite a sight, but the boys did great, all but one older boy who for whatever reason was grumpy for most of the visit, though by the end the tide of his mood had turned. Kevin was wonderful talking to them about various paintings and artifacts/periods of history.

We visited room after room, civil war artifacts on display, a mummy with an accompanying x-ray that showed the skeleton that lay inside, earthen bowls and arrow heads from Native Americans, a gorgeous classical marble sculpture of a seated woman, larger than life with carved gauzy flowing fabric, an animal pelt, and soft touchable skin.

There was a [Norman Rockwell painting](#). It was from the cover of the Saturday Evening Post of a crying baby pulling the hair of her babysitter. We had a pamphlet that showed the actual picture that was printed in the Post based on the painting and the boys had a great time telling us what was different from the actual painting (they had erased the pulling of hair so the baby was just crying, the doll no longer had missing eyes and was pink instead of blue, etc.) But the story behind how the picture made it to the Fleming was the best I thought. Norman Rockwell had given it to a whole school class who had written

to Rockwell with a collection of \$48 included to buy a painting of his as a memorial for a classmate who had died of Leukemia. He sent this original painting as a gift not accepting payment for it. The Fleming has it now on permanent loan.

My experience with art this day was similar to last month's walk through [Burlington's South End Art District](#). Here I was again confronted with the Lisa of eons ago. Studying paintings while trying to keep 6 month old ~P happy after he woke from his short nap and make sure we didn't lose any of the older boys, I didn't really have time to concentrate on the art work deeply, but I enjoyed being there none the less. So different from years ago when I would visit museums and could focus totally without anyone needing my direct attention and guidance.

And my lens has changed too. I am no longer an aspiring artist. I am a mother, a wife, and most defining, a woman on a quest to know and love God with all her heart and all her soul. My art now takes a humble 4th in my life and is more likely to reflect the desire to be filled with Christ's light.

Even more so than that day a month ago, there was a collision of worlds within me.

It happened in the last exhibit hall, the multi-media exhibit on Picasso and his *Demoiselles D'Avignon*. I entered the room with my husband and 7 sons only vaguely aware that the content may be a bit tricky with the boys, but I trusted the historical importance of it. I was a little thrown when reminded by the introduction printed on the wall that the women portrayed in the painting were prostitutes. I had forgotten or not really thought of this fact in a long time. There is a lot I haven't thought about in the history of art in the last 12 years.

The boys weren't reading the intro anyway, so we forged on without explanation. Some of the older boys had fun in the first section of the exhibit where wall sized projections of art that inspired Picasso's painting were available to view. Using a device in the center of the room the boys could wave their hand over it and scroll the images and click through to navigate to different images. They had fun manipulating the technology more than exploring Picasso's inspiration I think.

By this time baby ~P was in my arms, happy to be picked up out of his car seat. One of the older boys kept track of the stroller for me as I left them playing with the virtual computer.

In the next space we saw recent art that took cues from the Picasso painting. I passed by what looked like a male version of *Demoiselles D'Avignon*, but chose not to give it much attention. A life size photograph of two women mimicking the poses of two of the women in Picasso's painting was next, one of the women sported a tattoo on her lower back placing it in the 21st century. Instead of looking straight at us as in the Picasso, the women in this photograph looked off uninterested. It felt voyeuristic. I left it feeling slightly uncomfortable.

I didn't linger long on any of the artwork in this exhibit, honestly. By the time I made it to the last room, I was getting hungry and my internal "the kids have been behaving, let's not push this expedition too far" clock was just about to go off. I entered the last section of the exhibit with one of the middle boys and little ~P.

Turning the corner a sculpture made up of a trio of identical women 8 inches or so tall sat on a pedestal about 5 feet tall. They were cast in bronze.

The three identical figures were seated with legs spread wide and at the center of each spread were jagged lines evocative of sharp teeth, their faces evocative of Picasso-esque masks and woman after woman after woman extended an arm with a middle finger blaring at the end of it.

It could not be more “I am woman hear me roar.”

And yes I was shocked and taken aback, just as I think the artist intended. I was the perfect spectator in a way, hidden from shock value for so long in my little life as a mother and Christ follower.

I was horrified when my son, my innocent son, looked at it and tried to understand what was going on. All I could say was “crazy huh”? or something equally unimpressive (really I can’t even remember what I said). I was just relieved and thankful when he quickly moved on.

After horror though I was confronted almost immediately with the thought: “This was me, I could have easily made this piece or something like it twenty years ago.” Actually I had, at least something with similar content and meaning, one in painting and many in poetry.

Ha, what the heck has happened to me? Worlds were colliding I tell you!

I spotted a woman in her early twenties who worked at the Fleming seated in the corner keeping an eye on the exhibit, most likely a student at UVM. I felt so stirred up I had to talk to someone. So, with baby on my hip, I went over to tell her how funny it was to see this piece and know that twenty year old Lisa could have made it and how today I saw it so very very differently. At first she completely misunderstood me and shared that it was her favorite piece at the Fleming as well!

I tried to correct the misunderstanding and share my point of view, but I don’t think I was very successful. I’m pretty sure she saw me as a failure of feminism. To her I had fallen so far. She kept saying I should research what the new wave of feminism was about. And surely she is right, and I may. But knowing that that sculpture was her favorite piece... well it gives me an idea that the new wave of feminism isn’t perhaps so new.

I just don’t see strength in images like that any more.

I think the best I can do is compare those three women sculpted in bronze projecting what is meant as power and strength and confidence, to what I know of Mary.

I am still on a journey getting to know the [Blessed Mother of Jesus](#). I admit to kind of ignoring her most of my life and not really understanding her place. She always felt strangely irrelevant, even though I lived with her presence in statue form for years above our kitchen sink, and on my mother’s bedroom dresser. Mary was with her son in a glorious stained glass in my childhood church by the sea . I saw her around, knew who she was, but had no relationship with her.

Over the last few years my heart has softened towards Mary.

Love for my own mother helped. Since my mom passed away I find myself telling people about her so they can share in even just a tiny bit of who she was in this world. This wonderful lady accepted me unconditionally, nurtured me into my early twenties and beyond, past the time when her presence on this earth was done. Her lessons of love have lived on in my heart.

If I love and honor my mom and enjoy sharing her with others, how much more must Jesus want us to know and honor his mum, the woman who experienced the crucifixion of her son and savior, the woman who encouraged the apostles after Jesus ascended into Heaven after his 40 days here, the woman Jesus left with the Holy Spirit to strengthen the apostles and the new church.

So finally I talked to her, I asked for her to let me get to know her. I asked Mary to pray for me, to bring me closer to her son. I prayed the rosary with her, saying her prayer and meditating through it on the days of her son's life. And bit by bit I have grown closer to her. She has become my role model. I have called her Mother (as my earthly mother is Mom).

There is so little written of Mary in the Bible. Her strength is so humble, exalted by her son, ready and waiting for us to ask her in. She is there to encourage and nurture, not pointing towards herself, but pointing towards her son, our salvation.

It is her strength I want to exemplify for my sons. My seven sons.

Mary: waiting, quiet, peaceful, loving, mother, leading us to our best, comforting us in our weakness, mothering not just to her son, but mother to the world.

I do not want my boys to look at images like those three bronze women and think that this is what being a woman is all about. I don't want them to see a woman objectified either by turning the objectification on herself in a false strength or objectified by the world. I want them to see her innate worth, yes, under God.

Yup, I could have made that art, but each day God is remaking me, remaking me so art like that doesn't feel true anymore and instead feels like a stain on my soul. I want to protect who I am becoming and who my boys are becoming, so they, too, are sensitive to goodness and kindness and truth. So that if any of my boys meet that brazen woman (so like my young self) some day, full of misdirected fight, that they will wait patiently avert their eyes while she closes her legs and gets dressed, puts down her outstretched arms and tucks those fingers comfortably into her coat pockets. They can then walk beside her in friendship, kindness, and love, giving her the dignity she is fighting for, the dignity we all deserve.

I want, hope, and pray they will treat her the way Mary's Son has treated me.

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Ahhh this was a hard post to write. I hope I did it justice.

Love to you all, thanks for taking the time to read it.

~Lisa

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This contribution is available at <http://www.makingitinvermont.com/2015/04/face-2-face-with-who-i-was-and-who-i-want-to-be/>  
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## Receive and Let Go [at bukas palad]



Year B / Eastertide / Fourth Sunday (Vocation Sunday) Readings: Acts 4.8-12 / Psalm 118.1,8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29 (R/v 22) / 1 John 3.1-2 / John 10.11-18

Consider how mottos impact the way we live:

“You’re a great way to fly”: and so, the Singapore Girl makes sure your SQ flight is memorable.

“Be Prepared”: and so, boy scouts and girl guides live in readiness to do their duty.

“No pain, no gain”: and so, many athletes spend hours training to excel in sports.

“By giving mercy and by choosing”: and so, we better understand why Francis proclaims God’s mercy to the saintly and the sinful.

These mottos of a business, a uniform group, of athletes and a pope tell us something about how mottos encapsulate the beliefs and ideals each of them holds dear. Their mottos guide them to live and work, to play and pray. Mottos are helpful: they are like a GPS or a compass that enable one to find her direction, and finding it, to steer herself towards her desired destination.

What is your motto in life and faith? How is it guiding you?

Today is Vocation Sunday. It is a good day to reflect on these questions about mottos and our Christian vocation. What is the Christian vocation? How are we living it? Are we guided by a motto as we live out our Christian vocation? Whose motto guides us? And if the risen Jesus did leave us a motto for our life

and faith, for our Christian vocation, what is it?

The word “vocation” is too often mistakenly associated only with religious life and the priesthood. Christian married life and Christian single life are also worthy vocations in our Church.

“Vocation” is a word society also uses to describe how some work are not jobs or tasks but a calling: teaching, nursing, cooking, painting, even parenting come to mind.

If so many things can be called vocation, what then is really at the heart of vocation? Vocation is not about doing, as it is about being. It is about living in a particular way and for a specific purpose. For Christians, it must be about living with God and for God. As Christians, we understand “vocation” as living in holiness to praise, reverence and serve God. We do this best in community, and by caring for God’s people.

Being holy is living with God and in God’s ways. But how are we to be holy?

The Greek word for “vocation” gives us one answer: “klay’-sis” means a calling, a summons. For Christians, vocation must be about listening to God’s call, responding to it, and living God’s call fully in our lives. The Gospel writers in particular use “klay’-sis” to describe God’s call to humankind. This is why Jesus calls us to God through his preaching and teaching, his healing and caring.

But what are we to trying to really hear in God’s invitation to us? It is this: God’s motto for us to live life fully and happily.

And, in today’s gospel story, Jesus invites us to discover again this motto to help us understand and live the purpose of Christian life.

Jesus compares the good shepherd to a mere hired hand. The good shepherd cares about the sheep; he lays down his life for them. The hired one is mainly interested in getting paid; he cares for himself and runs away when wolves attack, leaving his sheep in danger.

Aren't you and I sometimes like the hired hand? Don't we put our own wants and preferences ahead of God's desires for us and of the hopes others have in us? I suspect we do this because we feel we have to hold on tightly to various handles for the good life. Handles like career and assets to assure us security in life. Handles like looks and honors to protect our reputation. Handles like money for home and education to safeguard our families. Even handles like giving enough to charity, making enough sacrifices, saying enough prayers to ensure we will get to heaven.

What do you and I own that we cannot lose? I suspect much; and so, we grab our own handles tightly to hold on. The more we do this, however, the more we take the road downwards to become like the hired hand: not just self-centered but also irresponsible towards family and friends, employees and superiors, the poor and the needy, God entrusts into our care.

If the hired hand had a motto, it could well be "Grab and Keep." This is why Jesus offers us the counter example of the good shepherd; he lives and serves by a different motto.

The good shepherd knows his sheep intimately; this is why he can lay down his life for them. His sheep are not his possessions or handles to grab and keep. Rather, they are like handles he is called to open; indeed, his life is a calling to attend to these sheep who are like handles to doors he must open to new rooms and new possibilities. And don't shepherds who are good open gates and fences to lead their sheep out of the paddocks to greener pastures, to better life? Their lives are at the service of those they serve. This is what the vocation of shepherding is about.

How can the good shepherd do this? Because at the heart of shepherding is real love.

Real love lets go, receiving humbly, giving humbly.\* There is nothing to grab and possess about real love. Instead, it is about receiving and letting go. Real love – which is rooted in God's Love – is what empowers the shepherd to love his sheep into his self-sacrifice for them. Such love recognizes that all one has received comes from God as gift, and that it becomes truly one's gift when it is given away. The good shepherd knows this. We know this kind of love too. Isn't this the Christian love you and I wish to have and to practice in daily life?

The motto of the good shepherd then is "Receive and Let Go."

I'd like to suggest that this is the motto Jesus wants us to remember from today's gospel story but, more so, to live each day of our lives.

Why? Because this motto will help us to love, like the good shepherd does: selflessly sharing what we have received from God. This is how we can better live holier lives in God. But this is a dangerous motto to live by: it will ask us to die to ourselves, to those parts of us that grab and keep.

I'd like to believe Jesus lived out this motto: he received life and love from God, and on the Cross he gave them away for us to have God's life and love. If we live by this motto, our vocation – whatever form it takes – will truly become Christ-like. Yes, Christian vocation must be about letting go of what we have first received from God so that someone else can also have life in God.

This is why the Good Shepherd can risk his life for his sheep. And this is why we must dare to waste our redeemed lives in Jesus on others who are in need of Easter life and Easter joy.

Then, you and I, and all we share our Christian life and faith with, will truly come to know the richness of the gift the good shepherd's motto is. And it is this: that *it is only in dying that we are born into eternal life.*

\*Inspired in parts by John Foley, SJ

*Preached at St Ignatius Church, Singapore*

Photo: [www.thebridgemaker.com](http://www.thebridgemaker.com)

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This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2015/04/homily-receive-and-let-go.html>  
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# Confessions for kids [at Blog of a Country Priest]



A couple of my parishioners made their first confession this morning. Many more will make their first confession next term.

It's never easy preparing children for confession. I know this not only as a confessor, but because I remember going to confession when I was a kid. There are three pitfalls:

1. Some children are speechless. They don't know what to confess!
2. Some children confess sins they've made up. I remember doing this myself!
3. Some children confess sins which aren't sinful. This relates, I think, to a child's very *penal* view of justice. "If Mum cries bitterly when I accidentally break her great grandmother's china vase, that must be a terrible sin. But everybody else at school makes fun of the weird kid I pick on, and I've never been in trouble about it, so it's not a big deal."

The key, I think, is to teach children to practice good examinations of conscience. I'm trying something new this year, which I learned from a good friend in Melbourne who is something of an expert in children's catechesis.

You start with an empty chest. I was advised to find something substantial, which indicates to the children that this is something important. Something which needs to be taken care of. Something which is sacred.



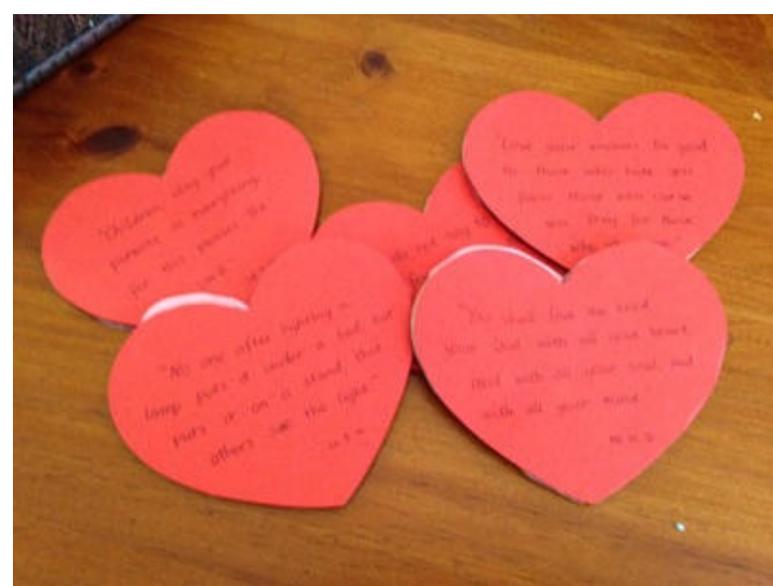
I found this on eBay — \$20 for three of them!

When I showed the chest to the children, I asked, “What do you find in a chest?”

“Treasure!” they exclaimed.

“That’s true,” I said. “But I’m thinking of a different sort of chest. What do you find in *your* chest.”

“A heart?” they ventured. Right!



Cor ad cor loquitur — “heart speaks to heart”

I bought ten timber heart shapes which fit into the chest, and then I had pieces of cardboard stuck to either side. On one side, I had written sayings of Jesus and other scripture verses. A few examples:

“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” *Col 3:20*.

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, that those who enter may see the light.” *Lk 8:16*.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” *Mk 12:30*.

The children and I then discussed these verses, and what they teach. Based on that discussion the children themselves had to come up with some questions which apply the teaching to their own lives. The corresponding examples:

- Do I listen to my Mum and Dad? Do I do my jobs?
- Do I hide my talents? Do I share my talents?
- Do I pray and listen at Mass? Do I pray the rosary well?



An examination of conscience for children, by children

Although I had ten timber hearts, the children and I only prepared five of them. The other five can be done later, with their parents, or by themselves.

Now here's the best bit, which engages [the wholistic principles of Sofia Cavalletti's Catechesis of the Good Shepherd](#). Whenever they prepare for confession, the children take the hearts out of the chest and read the scripture verses to themselves. Then they hold each verse against their chest, and pray that the Word of God will enter into their heart. It's very evocative of Cardinal Newman's episcopal motto: *Cor ad cor loquitur* — “heart speaks to heart.”

I suggested to the children that when we prepare ourselves for confession, we have to use our hearts *and* our minds. In the second part of the exercise, the child turns the heart around and reads the questions. Since our answers won't always be the same, and since sometimes the answer will identify something which is sinful, and other times it will identify something which isn't sinful at all, we have to use our minds to tell the difference.

If their answers to the questions identify something in their lives which they do think is a sin, they can write it down on their list which they bring into the confessional. If they're not sure if something's a sin, they can write it down and mention it during confession, and the priest will be able to help them decide if it's a sin or not.

The Holy Spirit definitely helped out during this lesson. I had planned to have all the cardboard shapes

cut out and attached to the timber shapes before I arrived, but as often happens in parish life, I didn't get the time. So although I had very neatly cut out the *red* shapes for the scripture verses, I hadn't cut out the *pink* shapes for the questions. Instead, the children cut these out, somewhat more roughly than I would have.

One of them then observed that the red hearts, which looked perfect, were like the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The pink hearts, which looked a bit misshapen, were like *our* hearts. That was a great observation, which of course I immediately developed. "That's why we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation! So that our hearts can become more and more like the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

That's the take home message I hope the children received. Confession isn't simply a matter of reciting a list of bad stuff done in the past. It's about renewal and conversion — leaving the confessional with a new heart, and leading a holier life.

As I said, the children made their first confessions, and received their first absolution, after this morning's Mass. Afterwards one of them was heard to announce to his grandmother, "I feel light as a feather!" Deo gratias!

H/T Mishel.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.acountrypriest.com/confessions-for-kids/>  
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## What Purgatory Might Be Like [at beautiful thorns]



Last night a group of us that meets at our church was discussing Purgatory. The Catholic Church teaches that this is a state of being purified after death for those who are already saved, before entering heaven. This got me thinking about what it might be like. People always talk about the pain and suffering that people experience in Purgatory. I think that pain is due to the fact that they are closer to God than they were here on earth. Our God is an all consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). He purifies us with the fire of his love that burns away the impurities in our heart.

Here on earth we can have the tendency to try and "hide" from God like Adam did in the garden. When impurities (fear, sinful thoughts and tendencies, wounds, shame, unforgiveness, and disturbing memories) come to the forefront of our mind and heart, we often have the natural inclination to stuff it down and escape. We drown out those thoughts and feelings by using our phones, turning on the television, sitting at the computer, busyness, etc.

I believe the pain of Purgatory is that we no longer have those idols to escape to. We are closer to God, his eyes are on us, our hearts are laid bare, we have nowhere to run, and we must receive his purifying love! The amount of time it takes for this to happen in the afterlife depends on how much we surrendered to this process and his love here on earth. He desires to perfect us in his love and transform us into his image!

One way I view Purgatory is based on an experience I had several years ago. I saw an image of the Lord's eyes. They were periwinkle blue and see through like glass. They were beautiful beyond description and when he looked at me they seemed to pierce right through me and my heart was laid bare. I asked him how to back up my experience with scripture because the only scripture I knew of that described his eyes was from Revelation 1:14 - "His eyes were like blazing fire." He lovingly asked, "Can't you just take things at face value?" but then he answered my question and asked, "What is the hottest part of the flame?" I then realized that the hottest part of the flame was the bottom of the flame which is periwinkle blue.

The next several weeks proved rather challenging and were bittersweet as memories from my past started coming to the surface and the Lord came into those memories with his purifying work. In much the same way as gold is purified in the fire, the dross in my heart came to the surface and needed to be skimmed off. This is not necessarily a fun process but necessary to become more like Jesus and become brighter so his glory can shine through us.

I hope that I can get to the point where I am able to fully surrender to this process here on earth and some day people will be able to look in my eyes and see the love of Christ looking back at them!

*Hebrews 4:12 - "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.**"*

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This contribution is available at <http://www.beautifulthorns.com/2015/04/what-purgatory-might-be-like.html>  
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## Will This Season of Marriage Last Forever?

On Sunday, my husband and I will celebrate our eighteenth wedding anniversary. I write that with disbelief, not because I expected our marriage to fail, but because the years have a way of slipping by with increasing velocity.



Our wedding day, 1997.

A couple of months ago, we had a rough day. Neither of us go for superstition, but that Friday the thirteenth lived up to its reputation. It began with an argument and tears and culminated in a rescue mission when my husband had locked himself out of his car on the opposite side of the city. (A mistake I'm more prone to make than him.)

What should have been a twenty-minute drive to unlock his car turned into an hour-long trek due to an interstate accident at rush hour. As I sat in bumper-to-bumper traffic, my head throbbed, the result of my daylong efforts to stem the tears I wanted to cry.

The problem that day was multifaceted: a combination of job stress, home stress, anger, spiteful behavior, and the perennial failure to communicate. Married eighteen years and dating for four years before that, you'd think we'd have mastered the simple art of talking by now, but, no, we haven't.

As I waited in traffic, a song I'd never listened to came across the satellite radio: by Big & Rich. Was this written for us?

**This life's like a rip tide and we're barely hanging on  
Caught up in the worry, and always in a hurry and losing what we're all about.**

Seven pregnancies in ten years. Supporting six people on a variable income. Debt. Complacency. Busy schedules. Nothing out of the ordinary. But with nothing to do but think as I stared at a sea of bumpers ahead of me, I wondered if that's what our marriage had become: ordinary.

I miss extraordinary. I miss that falling-in-love rush. (Nice that it comes at the beginning of a relationship to ensure all that bonding, but five, ten, fifteen years in, you could really use a booster shot.)

Having had just one night alone together (that I wasn't in active labor) in the last twelve years made running away together sound SO good. Not that I don't love my children and my life with them, but a brief reprieve from responsibility to just BE with my husband sounded heavenly.

I recall all the months of anticipation leading up to our wedding as I looked forward to being united to my husband in every way. The fun and excitement of sharing a bed, a home, a life. When did it turn from joy to stress? When did it become okay to be too tired or too busy to connect with my husband, emotionally, intellectually, and physically?

Life intrudes with responsibilities, duties, and diapers. Oh, the thousands and thousands of diapers.

I went into marriage with my eyes wide open, well aware of my husband's faults. I'm sure that he, too, knew mine. It's as if the duties and diapers and the mortgage and the mayhem take those faults and intensify them with the heat of a thousand suns. That's the kind of crucible life is.

Our situation is hardly unique. This Brad Paisley and Carrie Underwood song caught my ear not long after the Big & Rich song above. (Yes, I've gone country.)

I recall a justified ribbing from friends after my then-boyfriend/now-husband and I engaged in a very public display of affection at a Sting concert early in our relationship. Let's just say no one's given us a hard time for PDAs in recent years.

The truth is, this worn-out, stressed-out season of our marriage isn't any less of a marriage than the googly-eyed, PDA-filled love fest where it all began. To everything there is a season. Flaring tempers and rough patches aren't a death knell for marriage. Marriage isn't all about sunshine, bowls of cherries, and self-fulfillment. Sure, we all want to have great, happy, and satisfying marriages. I even attempted to share some of the knowledge we've gleaned over the years in [this post](#). But marriage is more.

[This post by Eve Tushnet](#) is a must-read for avoiding the trap of thinking of marriage as something to be worked at rather than something to be lived. There are low points when you may wonder, "[Did I marry the wrong person?](#)" If you and your spouse have hit bottom, please read [this encouraging post](#) by Hallie Lord, my go-to on conjugal wisdom. (Here's Hallie's take on a similar theme; [another reason](#) I so enjoy her take on marriage.)

The beautiful thing about seasons is that they change. While the highs of newlywed naiveté last only a season, so, too, do the lows. But you have to endure the cold and darkness of winter to enjoy the rebirth of spring. Sometimes you'll go through all four seasons in one day! (Two Sting references in one post. Is there an award for that?)

After the overlong Friday the thirteenth "rescue mission," I scrambled to put dinner on the table before driving my oldest child to his first middle school dance. On the way, we talked about school dances and the various boys on whom I had crushes. On the cusp of entering his teenage years, he's about to experience that bittersweet season of first crushes and loves that seems to me both like yesterday and eons ago.

I'd like to say that Saturday, the fourteenth, Valentine's Day, was a smooshy lovefest. It was nice enough, but two days later my husband and I argued above the cries of a toddler. In bed. At midnight. And said things we'd later regret.

I'd like to wrap this post up with a neat bow, but nothing about marriage is necessarily tidy or neat. Instead, I'm going to steal some words from one of the characters in [Stay With Me](#). Brash Abby is an unlikely source of marital wisdom, but she shares what she knows with her sister Rebecca:

“. . . marriage isn't the happily ever after. It's the rocky, brush-covered path that'll get you there. You're going to trip and fall. You might even take a side trail that gets you lost and confused, and you'll have to fight your way back. Every last vice, fault, and rough edge will be exposed, but you'll never have to travel alone, and if you hang in there, it'll perfect you like a refiner's fire.”

Here's to eighteen years of a lifelong journey. There's no one I'd rather have as my traveling companion than the man I married.

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This contribution is available at <http://carolynastfalk.com/2015/04/13/will-this-season-of-marriage-last-forever/>  
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# Magnificat (Canticle of Mary) [at Breviary Hymns]



The

[\*\*Magnificat\*\*](#)

is the

[\*\*Canticle\*\*](#)

of Mary from

[\*\*Luke 1:46-55\*\*](#)

. It takes its title from the opening line of the

[\*\*Latin Vulgate\*\*](#)

translation by

[\*\*St. Jerome\*\*](#)

: "Magnificat anima mea, Dominum" (My soul doth magnify the Lord). From earliest times, it has been used as a hymn in the Church and is perhaps the oldest Marian hymn. In the Roman Breviary it is sung at Vespers (Evening Prayer).

Magnificat (Tone 2, D, g.)

MAGNIFICAT (from the Latin Vulgate)

Magnificat ánima mea Dóminum.

Et exultávit spíritus meus: in Deo salutári meo.

Quia respéxit humilitátem ancíllae suae:

Ecce enim ex hoc beátam me dicent omnes generatiónes.

Quia fécit mihi mágna qui pótens est: et sánctum nómen eius.

Et misericórdia eius in progénies et progénies timéntibus eum.

Fécit poténtiam in bráchio suo: dispérsit supérbos mente cordis sui.

Depósuit poténtes de sede: et exaltávit húmiles.

Esuriéntes implévit bonis: et dívites dimísit inánes.

Suscépit Ísrael púerum suum: recordátus misericórdiae suae.

Sicut locútus est ad patres nostros:

Ábraham, et sémini eius in saecula.

Glória Patri, et Fílio, et Spirítui Sancto,

Sicut erat in princípío, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculórum. Amen.

Contemporary English Version: "Holy is His Name" by

[John Michael Talbot](#)

Song begins at 3:20

CANTICLE OF MARY (from the Divine Office)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:

the Almighty has done great things for me,

and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him

in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,

he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,

and has lifted up the lowly farmer's foot.

He has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel

for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

the promise he made to our fathers,

to Abraham and his children for ever.

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## Unequally Yoked [at Conversation with Women]

When my husband and I got married we were both Catholic, but we weren't fully practicing the faith. Not only were we not well formed, we didn't know it. My husband and I went to Mass on Sunday occasionally, if it was convenient, and also on Christmas, Ash Wednesday, and Easter.

One Sunday, we arrived at Mass and found there was a new pastor. This pastor's homilies were like nothing I had ever heard before. In fact they made me angry! I didn't speak to the pastor, didn't even shake his hand on the way out the door, but for some reason I felt like I was arguing with him and so I started going to Mass every Sunday to continue the argument.

Each Sunday I would go to Mass and I would leave angry because I had just been informed of yet one more thing that I was doing wrong. I was overwhelmed with all of the rules. I was also skeptical of the pastor. I thought, "He can't possibly know what he is talking about. He must be some kind of Catholic wacko." I started researching and I didn't have to dig very far to find that my pastor knew what he was talking about.

As I sat in that pew week after week I discovered that there were many areas of my life that were not in line with Church teaching. I had walked in the door pro-choice, pro-contraception, the list goes on. I found out that I was wrong.

Many other parishioners left. Several of our neighbors started shopping for a new parish with softer homilies. Some went to neighboring parishes; others went so far as to leave the Catholic Church. My husband found the difficult homilies amusing. When I tried to engage him in discussing our faith and what we should do, he would say, "Whatever you decide is fine."

I decided we would stay. Somewhere deep inside I knew that this wasn't about shopping for the right message so much as it was about finding the truth. My only explanation for this is that God, in His great generosity, must have given me a huge dose of grace. I began to change. I studied Catholicism. Everything I learned made so much sense that I couldn't help but to grow in my faith. I fell in love with Holy Mother Church. I began going to daily Mass and volunteering in earnest. I was disappointed that my husband wasn't interested, but I didn't let that hold me back.

My new faith and his disinterest started to put stress on our marriage. It became really clear to me one Valentine's day, when I received a Valentine's gift basket from a girlfriend of mine. When my husband saw it I asked him to guess who had given it to me. "Probably Father Jones or Deacon Smith or the Youth Minister," he said and walked out of the room. I was stunned. He proceeded to tell me how tired he was of my life revolving around God and the Church. He thought at first that it was a phase and that he just had to wait it out, but it was pretty clear that it wasn't ending any time soon. He was tired of it and he wanted it to stop. I was no longer the person he had married.



I was devastated and yet it was clear to me that he felt jilted, like I had dumped him for God. I could understand that. My husband had been the center of my universe and now God was, and rightly so, I thought.

I sought counsel from a priest during confession and he told me that perhaps my cross right now was that I needed to tone things down a little. He didn't mean for me to be less faithful. He meant that I should tone down my outward expression of the faith to give my husband a little space. This was my cross to bear. I left the crucifix on the wall but pulled the holy cards from the refrigerator. I cut back on my volunteer responsibilities. As I considered my primary vocation as wife, I realized that God didn't want me to neglect my spouse in pursuit of my faith.

There was however, one area in which I couldn't compromise. We were contracepting. Very early in my conversion process I stopped contracepting and at that point my husband chose to continue. This was very painful for me. I had learned of the beauty of the marital embrace and all that God had intended for it—that it be a complete gift of self. I yearned to give myself to my husband. And yet each time we came together I made my desire to be open to life clear and each time he denied me. The act that was supposed to be unitive was tearing us apart. I found myself wishing for a marriage “do-over”. It was humiliating to go to confession and confess my participation in my husband's contraception. I was hurt and angry at my husband.

I finally realized that my wish for a do-over was nothing more than a pity party. I started to treat my husband with charity, not because I thought he deserved it (to the contrary, I thought he was being quite a jerk) but because I loved God. I began Natural Family Planning (NFP) on my own. My husband would have nothing to do with it. I began to refuse him on fertile days (not because I was opposed to conceiving but because history had proven that he would contracept). He continued to contracept on the other days but I found much peace in my own practice of NFP.

This went on for 3 years until I became pregnant and subsequently miscarried. My husband had surprised me by welcoming the pregnancy, and then was greatly disappointed and saddened as well. This loss was a turning point for me. I was done. I told my husband, “No more contraception. I won't participate.” I had been patient and prayerful for 3 years but now I was done. I prayed for God to please pick up the pieces of my marriage and hold us together and mercifully He did.

Since that day my husband has never contracepted.

Several years have passed. I am at peace because my husband's concession has allowed me to live in alignment with my faith. I continue to tone down my outward expression of my faith, and my husband is slowly but surely growing in his faith. We both have a long way to go, but praise be to God at least we are heading in the right direction!



## Searching for sunken treasure [at Peace Garden Passage]

It was my sixth-grade teacher who first taught me this: that everyone has good in them, no exception. It's just that in some, she said, we have to dig a little deeper.

That stuck with me, and yet how easy it is, in the day to day, in the divisiveness of this world, in the mix of misunderstandings and misfires, to forget.

Recently, I was reminded all over again, and the way I heard it this time made my heart leap.

I've been studying the book, "Consoling the Heart of Jesus," by Father Michael F. Gaitley this year. And in the most recent chapter, he arrested my heart in the way he explains the message of mercy. He talks of two outlooks we can employ in approaching people in our daily lives: the merciful outlook and the judgmental outlook.

The merciful outlook, he says, "aims to discover the other person as a unique member of the Body of Christ." We are able to see in another, if we gaze at them this way — as Christ does — "an utterly unique fact of the mystery of Christ." Everyone, without exception, can be looked upon this way; the saints have been exceptional at it. "To know and love Christ is not only to know and love Christ the Head but also to know and love his members."

But there are limits to this merciful look, he goes on to say. "It's not our job to see in the other what the other's own inner eye sees. In fact we can't do it. Our gaze can't penetrate to the inner sanctuary of another's conscience, and we ought not to try...Another's conscience is sacred space the Lord himself guards."

Fr. Gaitley explains the danger of trying. "Just as the merciful outlook can give life and draw out the good, the judgmental outlook can draw darkness out of the other and even destroy him."

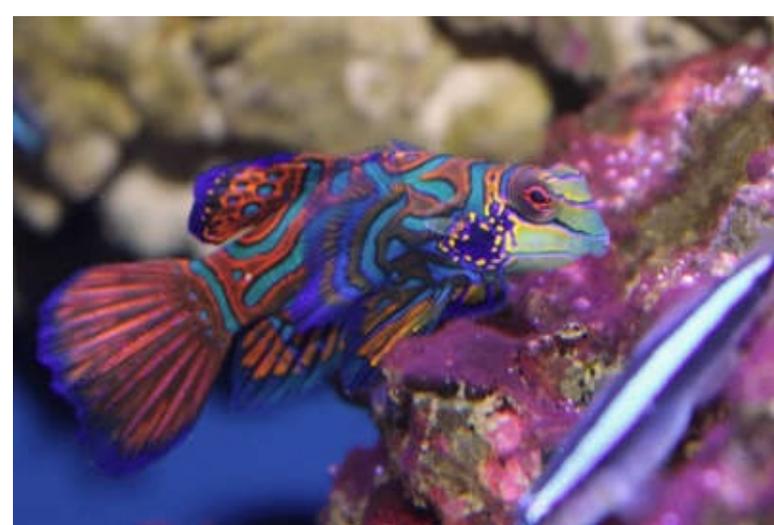
When we look at others with the judgmental outlook, he says, we abandon our part in the Lord's patient and loving strategy.

Is employing the merciful look always easy? No, Gaitley admits. But we must try, if we are to truly live in the light of the Lord.

In rare times we are obliged to confront our fellow brothers and sisters in their sin, but those times are the exception, not the rule, Gaitley explains. More often, our responsibility lies in what he calls "deep-sea diving."



“In overcoming temptations to go from the merciful to the judgmental outlook, it’s good to be like a deep-sea diver who searches for sunken treasure,” Gaitley says. “Such a diver knows there’s treasure down there, and he goes for it. Sometimes he has to swim through dark, murky water and even fend off underwater beasts, but he keeps going. He knows the treasure’s worth.”



The merciful outlook doesn’t pretend that sin and annoyances don’t exist, he adds. It simply makes a strategic choice to go past them. It chooses mercy over justice, and trusts in the power of mercy to bring an even greater good out of evil.

And I say, wow, and yes, and let’s do this. What if we all did? What if we all donned our diving gear at the beginning of every day, intent on searching for buried treasure in everyone we encountered? Can you imagine the gems we’d find? I’m excited just thinking about it.

What do you say? Will you join me in jumping in?

Q4U: What treasure have you found in another this week? How does Father Gaitley’s idea of merciful and judgmental outlooks strike you?

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# Altaration -- The Mystery of the Mass Revealed [at String of Pearls]

The world has undergone some frightening alterations.

Recently

[here at the blog](#)

, I told you about college scholarships that are being awarded to high school students who write the best essays explaining how human beings are destroying the planet and therefore how urgently government control is needed to curb population. Those scholarships are being awarded right here, in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave--not in some communist country overseas.

The group responsible is Negative Population Growth, and it's holding a carrot before American kids, trying to lure them with the promise of thousands of dollars in prize money. Like the evil queen's apple in

*Snow White*

, there is hidden poison in that carrot; but many will look upon this group's scholarship offer as a good opportunity for our young people.

The world is in an altered state, my friends, where bad is good and good is bad.

As if brainwashing high school-aged kids about the supposed evils of allowing man to "go forth and multiply" (as he was instructed

*by God*

) isn't scary enough, there is also a children's book out there on the subject of abortion, called

*Sister Apple, Sister Pig*

, wherein the wiping out of unwanted offspring is painted as a good choice for families. In this book, youngsters are being given the insidious, soul-killing message that human lives can (even

*should*

!) be snuffed out at any time, for any reason...and that this is a good thing. The aborted sister of little Lee is described as a "happy ghost," and Lee surmises that his mommy and daddy had to get rid of her so that there would be plenty of food for the rest of them, and so that his sister and he wouldn't fight and make their parents mad.

Children's books that paint abortion as a dreamy, happily-ever-after fairy tale...yes, the world is indeed in an altered state. It is a world that I hardly recognize anymore.

When I first heard about this diabolical book, I logged onto Google and typed "children's book about abortion" in the search bar

in order to read more about it--to, as my husband and I call it, "research the enemy." When I did so, I found another incredibly disturbing site: there was one of those question and answer forums, and a teenager had written, "I'm a 10th grade student and I have to write a children's book about abortion for my English class." He went on to ask if anyone had any advice on how to proceed with his creative writing assignment.

Lord help us all,

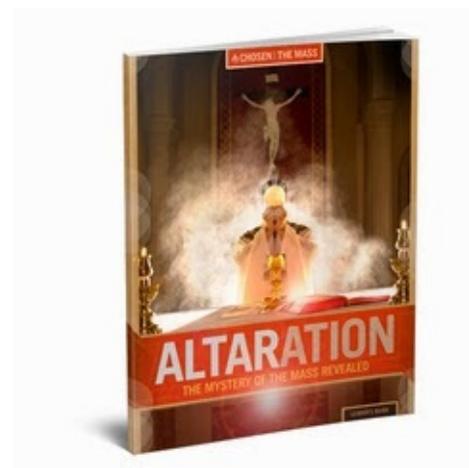
*that*

is what constitutes a school assignment in the Brave New World we inhabit!

**Yes, Lord help us all. He is the only one who can**

. Young people these days need to know Christ better, to understand that it is only through Him that we can ever be saved. Even practicing Catholics (not just young ones, but those of my generation, too, whose formation in the Faith was far from adequate) need to know and love Him better, to more fully understand the Mass and all the graces it provides, to truly comprehend the awesome, life-giving (life-altering!) power of the Holy Eucharist.

Luckily, there are groups at work fighting against forces like Negative Population Growth and the abortion lobby--fighting those forces by providing much-needed teaching materials that should be in the religious education classrooms of Catholic high school students everywhere. Over at Ascension Press, they have created a DVD series for teens called "Altartation--The Mystery of the Mass Revealed."



Here is the powerful trailer for "Altartation":

If you're interested in ordering the "Altartation" DVD set and other educational materials that go along with it,

[click here](#)

I'm hoping to get ahold of a copy of the complete set myself, and when I do I'll give it a thorough review.

But after having seen the trailer, I feel confident that I can recommend "Altaration"--to Catholic educators, to parents raising young people in a world that has undergone disturbing alterations, and even to Grammys like me, who are concerned about the faith formation of their beloved grandchildren. I commend Ascension Press (who also produced the

["Chosen"](#)

series) for the beautiful evangelization tools they're providing for our teens. May God bless their efforts, and may this series lead many souls to become true soldiers for Christ in this world...and ultimately, to Heaven!

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This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2015/04/from-ascension-press-altaration-mystery.html>  
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## Hide [at Loved As If]

O LORD, how manifold are thy works!  
In wisdom hast thou made them all;  
the earth is full of thy creatures.  
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,  
which teems with things innumerable,  
living things both small and great.  
There go the ships,  
and Leviathan which thou didst form to sport in it. (Psalm 104:24-26)



“You made a sea serpent to play in the sea!?” My hands waved spasmodically. Involuntarily, my shoulders shrugged. My head shook of it’s own accord. “If someone asks, ‘Why did You make Leviathan?’ You’ll answer, ‘The sea was big. I decided it could use a creature that would like to play in it.’ Again, my hands jerked up. “That is what it means to be God! In a nutshell. You make things for the joy of making completeness.”

Suddenly, I was aware of a hugeness and a hollow feeling filled my tummy, “It’s scary. I’d almost like to hide. Little Anthony’s monsters in The Twilight Zone episode, [It’s a Good Life](#), comes to mind. Except he wills nothing good. He makes everyone pretend to be happy or else...

“But You make sea serpents so they can play in the sea. And You make humans to be happy. If we’re not, Your deluxe *Imago Dei* operating system causes us to long and reach for happiness. We can refuse happiness. But the longing remains even if we close our hearts to it. You have never let me stop at being unhappy, never let me fashion my unhappiness into a cross that You never gave me to bear. You haven’t made life easy but You have pushed me to reach for happiness in the midst of difficulty. Not complacency but the unbridled joy because living is so grand, my life is so grand, You are so grand.”

The immense hollow had become strong, warm arms holding me, “It’s still scary. (You do make sea monsters to play in the sea.) I still have an initial ‘maybe it would be better to hide’ feeling. You are beyond me. You are so far beyond me, I can’t begin to comprehend. You make sea monsters so they can have fun in the sea. Wow! Just wow! Then again, the sea is big...”

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Every Friday, 100s of bloggers set a timer, write for 5 minutes, and then post the results. We don’t edit or concern ourselves with whether our writing is flawless or worthy to be seen. We expose our incomplete, unpolished thoughts and words to each other and our readers. Kate Motaung at [Heading Home](#) provides the prompt on Thursday evening. We all link our posts there and tweet them with the hashtag #FMFPparty.

Join us.

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This contribution is available at <http://lovedasif.com/2015/04/24/five-minute-friday-hide/>  
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## Prosfora and Playdough [at Every Home a Monastery]



### Prosfora Bakers: Holy Fathers Spyridon and Nicodemus

I needed to bake prosfora (communion bread) today because the monks will have Divine Liturgy tomorrow. I will usually bake enough prosfora for a week at a time, sometimes I will bake enough for two weeks. Most Saturday nights I am in the kitchen baking prosfora. The temptation to bake a huge batch for the month so I don't worry about it comes to mind sometimes. But I know it is better for me to take it a week at a time and not think of baking prosfora as a task I just need to check of my long list of to-do's. I won't use the mixer but kneed by hand and think of prosfora making as a privilege and not just another job to do. This helps me to look at all of life like this actually. The making of prosfora is special but that doesn't make the rest of life not special too. Life is sacred and as Christians we have God dwelling in us at all times, all of life is sacramental.

So of course I am getting the dough going and Marina (7) comes along and asks if she can help. I instruct her to change her shirt, pull her hair back in a ponytail and wash her hands well. Once she is ready I let her knead. I asked her if she remembers what to do. She said, "Yes, I knead the dough and say the prayers." Once she was finished she reminded me that I had promised to make playdough awhile back. Oh yes, that's right. I did promise and kept postponing it. Well there is no time like the present so I said okay.

Of course, everyone wanted to make their own batch of dough to play with so we we moved to another table and ended up mixing up enough for everyone to have their own. What is it about dough that kids just love?! It's like when I bake prosfora, they all want to help with the kneading.

My dining room table covered in dough and dye wasn't what I had planned for the night but I am glad Marina mentioned it. The kids are having fun and enjoying playing with the dough and each other. The prosfora is baking in the oven and life is as it should be. I am glad my kids will have memories like this. There is bread we made baking in the oven which will become the body of Christ at Church tomorrow, and dough we made for fun. This is an ordinary, everyday, sacred, holy goodness kinda evening.



Salvador making pizza with his playdough.



Marina having fun with her playdough!

Speaking of children and prosfora baking, have ya'll read *The Woman and the Wheat* by Jane G. Meyer? It is a favorite in my house. A lovely story about a woman farmer who is a communion bread baker. She grows the wheat and uses it to make flour and then bake the prosfora for church. My children have all enjoyed this story. Here is a link to the authors site with info about the book and also an audio recording of the story: <http://www.janegmeyer.com/books/the-woman-and-the-wheat/>

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This contribution is available at <http://www.everyhomeamonastery.com/prosfora-and-playdough/>  
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# Flight Night [at GONZO HOMILETICS]

HOLY THURSDAY—EVENING MASS OF THE LORD’S SUPPER



*Old School:* Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

There are two kinds of stories. Someone goes on a journey. A stranger comes to town. Often these storytelling techniques occur simultaneously. What would a destination be were it not for the journey?

For instance: years ago, the kind words of a Cuban rosary warrior named Rosemary Sharpe spurred me to begin anew my journey to the priesthood.

One morning I was praying in the chapel when she approached me and said, “You should be a priest.”

I felt irritated that she interrupted me. I was quite pious during my early days of discernment. “You must have me confused with somebody else,” I replied.

“You look holy,” she said.

Now I was sure that she was crazy. *Muy loca*. “*Senora*, you don’t know me very well.”

The following Monday found me sitting in the vocations office. “Discernment,” the vocation director told me. “Start shopping around. Otherwise you may never know where the path in life that God has planned for you.”

So I began my search. And now here I in one of the finest Catholic parishes I’ve ever encountered, Saint Thomas Aquinas Church and Saint John Church and Student Center in East Lansing, Michigan.

This morning at the Chrism Mass in the Cathedral my brother priests and I renewed the promises we made at our respective ordinations.

We do this on Holy Thursday because it was on this night that Jesus gave us the Eucharist and, by extension, the ministerial priesthood.

The priesthood and the Eucharist are inseparable, which is why we must not only pray for more vocations to the priesthood but we must also put the question to men in the pews: Have you ever thought about becoming a priest?

Rosemary Sharpe, bless her heart, was a little loca, but because she asked the question, I came a priest. *Gracias.*

To that I say, “It happened to me, it could happen to you.” If it happened to ME it could happen to anyone!

None of us priests are worthy to the calling, but we follow the call nonetheless. That's one thing I learned from the time I spent with the Jesuits.

It's not just because I'm broken, flawed, skewered, and filled with fear and trembling, like Saint Paul wrote. It's because I rise each morning and choose to take up my cross, neither an obstacle nor a stumbling block but a signal leading me forward.

Another Jesuit told me, "Not everything bad that happens to a person is a cross." Divorce, broken shoelace, bankruptcy, breakup, losing a job, winning the war, losing the peace: they only add weight to the cross we carry.

I can't NOT take up my cross. Why? Because I AM my cross, and will live with and carry it until the day I die. The priest is nailed to his own cross as was the Lord.

Jesus could have come down from the Cross—his enemies derided him to—but he remained on the Cross to consummate the covenant of the Eucharist.

The cross stands revealed as the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. And the cross is the key that gate which barred Adam and Eve from the Garden.

Everybody who knows me personally knows that I don't fly. It's not because I fear falling from the aircraft. Rather, I'm claustrophobic and sitting in a giant steel tube hurtling through space at five hundred miles an hour and thirty-thousand feet above the earth is an unpleasant experience; it's worse than trying to fold a fitted sheet.

"Airport logic," I refer to it as, and it mandates faith.

But when I accepted that God was calling me to become a priest I boarded many flights because I was on a mission issued to me by the Mysterious Stranger. A journey. I wanted to reach my destination as fast as I could. Five hundred miles an hour wasn't fast enough for me.

The ancient Israelites were kind of like that, but not really. Enslaved in Egypt for 430 years they weren't too cool with Moses when in the middle of the night he commanded them to leave the only homeland they had ever known. But Moses wasn't the type of man who took "no" for an answer. The meekest man on the face of the earth, he possessed a iron will, was more hard-headed than the stone tablets dropped on his head atop Mount Sinai.

So he roused them from their beds, told them to suit up, show up, and shut up, for they were about to witness an event the likes of which they had never seen before, a marvel that God commanded them to commemorate for eternity. They, too, played a major role in Salvation History.

In short, Flight Night. The Passover. The firstborn of the Egyptians struck down by creeping death, who spared the Israelites because they painted their doorposts with the blood of lambs. We, too, are saved by the blood of the Lamb. Chosen, called, sent, and saved.

On my U.S. vocational tour I flew to New Orleans to visit the Society of Jesus. Don't call us, we'll call you, I was told. Fair enough. Bright guys, these Jesuits were. I guess that I never felt smart enough to join a religious community full of brainiacs and they helped me to affirm that truth. The Order of Friars Preachers too.

I took another flight to Washington, D.C. and spent time at a Franciscan friary. That didn't feel right either. "What's the problem?" my spiritual director asked me.

To which I replied: "How could I live down for the rest of my life being known as "Friar Tuck" ?

Onward. Journeys shape and enhance our identity, change and challenge us. God set me on the road to paradise. In the other direction, the road to perdition. I stood at the crossroads.

The Israelites never could imagine at the outset that God called them to be a special people who belonged to the invisible presence that vanquished their enemies, parted the Red Sea, and gave them the Ten Commandments.

In time they grew to love, serve, and fear God and his servant Moses.

They could look back and realize that God's plan for them was greater than the slavery under which they suffered in Egypt for hundreds of years.

Paradoxically submission no longer meant enslavement but freedom. God empowered them. Christ does the same with us through his Body and Blood.

There is power and wisdom in the Cross. Best to keep moving. A moving target is hard to hit.

The Passover of the Lord established an eternal relationship between God and his children. Jesus put a new spin on that, extended the covenant to include all nations on earth. Open enrollment. Membership fees can seem costly but the benefits are out of this world.

As with Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, it is the Eucharist that forms us, shapes our identity, and provides *viaticum*: food for the journey. Jesus is the mysterious stranger who commands us to keep the perpetual memorial of the night he gave us the Eucharist and established the priesthood.

If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow. As I have done for you, you also should do for one another. (Jn 13:15)

For a while I was still up in the air about priesthood. But I felt determined to push things as far as possible. Once more I decided, "I'm leaving on a jet airplane." This time I regretted that decision. Terror in the skies. I can't do anything on an airplane except pray. No in-flight movies, reading, or chatting with other passengers.

The last final time that I boarded a plane – July 2009, to return from Mexico City to Boston – was the worst flight I ever encountered.

The craft climbed to more than 40,000 feet to avoid turbulence but she pitched and jumped and rocked for hours. Many airsick bags got soiled.

I knew I wasn't the only passenger on board praying. But I had faith. I thought, "Nothing's going to happen." The words of Elwood Blues came to mind: "We're on a mission from God."

We have now begun the Sacred Paschal Triduum, the most holy moment in the long, strange trip that is Christianity, a never-ending voyage across the sea of tranquility with occasional turbulence.

We've followed Christ through the desert for forty days of Lent and are prepared to press on along the journey to inconceivable heights to which Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, and tomorrow, leads us. Destination: Easter, the Resurrection. I know that we are near.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people special to God in ways not even the Israelites could have imagined.

There is reason for the season. The Lord has commanded us to keep the faith and to sacrifice him on the altar, to take the Word into the streets, on the road, on the highways, the byways and aboard Jet Blue.

Jesus is God’s gift to us but in order to keep that gift we have to give it away.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Please put away all electronic devices and fasten your seat belts until we’ve reached cruising altitude. When it comes to faith, the journey is as important as the destination.  
Destination: salvation.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

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## The Firsts and the Lasts [at Afternoon Coffee & Evening Tea]

When I was expecting Madison years ago, I received a milestone calendar to mark the important "Firsts" of her first year. You know...her first smile, her first tooth, the first time she rolled over, and the first steps she took. I was vigilant about anticipating these major moments in my baby's life, and was so excited each and every time I got to document one on her calendar. They even had cute little stickers to add! I was so excited to watch as she moved through the year and accomplished all these "firsts". It was the same with my Peyton, Rhett, and Flynn. Well...maybe the documentation slacked off a bit...but I still anticipated each and every "first" of my sweet babies.

Lately, as my baby approaches Kindergarten, I am thinking less about the "firsts", and more about the "lasts". The "lasts" sneak up on us, and we often don't even know that they occurred until afterwards. A few weeks ago, when Flynn took my hand to go up to receive Communion at Mass instead of lifting her arms to be picked up, it hit me. I had carried a baby in church for the last time. And I hadn't even known it. When Madison was little and still in her crib, we had her big girl bed all ready for her. One day she simply stated she wanted to sleep in it. As excited as I was for her, I cried myself to sleep that night. That very morning, I had walked into her nursery and saw her smiling face and watched her jump up and down holding the crib rail that she had chewed on while teething. I had lifted her out of that crib for the last time. And I hadn't even known it.

When Peyton was little, every morning while Rhett napped and Madison was at school, she and I had coffee and toast. We would sit together in a big chair. She had milk and I had coffee. We shared toast, and she would always take the last sip of my coffee. One day, I got up from that chair and put that coffee cup away for the last time. And I hadn't even known it. When Rhett was a baby, he had a favorite book. It was called Big Farm Tractor. Every single day, we snuggled in the rocker in his room and read that book before his afternoon nap. One day I closed that book and set it down. I tucked my little boy into his bed for his nap for the last time. And I hadn't even known it.

I didn't know when I changed a diaper, or bought formula, or gave a bubble bath or carried a baby up the stairs or pushed one in a stroller that it would be the last time I would do it with that child. Or with any child of mine. And I am so thankful for that. I don't think my heart would be able to stand knowing that those simple moments of mothering were ending. As much as I realize that a large part of mothering means letting go, I still resist and mourn change. As much as I anticipate those "firsts", I dread the "lasts". I long to hang onto childhood. It is beautiful and safe and cozy. But as my dear friend Tara reminded me...these moments can be sweet too. And I realize that these "lasts" mean something else. They mean new "firsts".

The last time my Flynn had me carry her in church meant that the next week would be the first time she would walk herself. And she was so proud to do so. The last time I drove Madison to work meant that the next time she would drive herself. And she was thrilled to do so. Mothering is indeed letting go. And learning to embrace it. One "last" at a time.



One of my favorite parts of mothering each and every child...pushing a stroller on our morning walk.

Here is my baby Flynn just a few short years ago all ready for our morning walk. : )

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# Mothers Earth and Babies



"All the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God."

Psalm 98:3

Today, it's "Earth Day" around the globe. Frankly, I never think about it until the actual date (April 22nd) when various stories come on the news or my Facebook feed. So yes, I was reminded of this special day first thing this morning. The [first Earth Day was 45 years ago](#), and has been commemorated in schools, businesses, municipalities, and now social media in growing ways every year.

I confess to a personal love/hate relationship with Earth Day. Perhaps because of how it has often been presented, perhaps because of the one presenting it. I'll try to explain.



First, I love the Earth. It is my home, for now. God did an amazing job when He created this globe! I love sunsets, mountains, blue skies, rushing rivers, sandy beaches, and majestic trees. I think horses are beautiful, otters are adorable, and elephants are amazing. Even though I cannot walk well and my scooter cannot climb mountains, I do enjoy being outside to breath the fresh air and [listen to the sounds of locusts and birds](#). There are more reasons to love God's beautiful creation than I can count!

While growing up, my siblings and I were encouraged to play outside. That was years before iPads and Instagram, but even so, we learned early on that the earth is a fabulous playground. We didn't travel a lot, but we did camp out often at an [area conservation club](#). I remember fishing for blue gill with my dad and a few tumbles down the best toboggan hill around. I have many wonderful memories! I am mindful of a beautiful passage in the Book of Daniel, which is recited on Sunday mornings in the Catholic Church's Liturgy of the Hours. It is a long but beautiful canticle of praise sung by the three men (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) who were thrown in the furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar, but were saved by God through one of His angels. I'll include just a few excerpts here. *Note: These verses are not found in non-Catholic texts. For the complete text, [click here](#).*

Sun and moon, bless the Lord;

praise and exalt him above all forever.

Stars of heaven, bless the Lord;

praise and exalt him above all forever...

Let the earth bless the Lord,

praise and exalt him above all forever.

Mountains and hills, bless the Lord;

praise and exalt him above all forever.

Everything growing on earth, bless the Lord;

praise and exalt him above all forever...

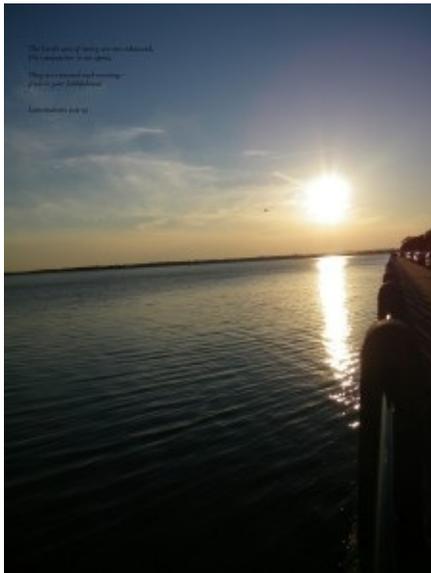
All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord;

praise and exalt him above all forever.

All you mortals, bless the Lord;

praise and exalt him above all forever.

What I find beautiful and important in this canticle, is that it places the focus of praise and worship on the Creator (God) not the creature (earth.) We must direct our thoughts to Him Who made us and all the beauty that surrounds us.



Sacred Scripture is filled with references to the wonder of creation, and in the Book of Genesis we read how God commanded man to take care of it. This is no little thing. He gave them...and thereby us...dominion over the plants and animals...but that doesn't mean we get to misuse these gifts. It is all about stewardship. The Merriam-Webster dictionary says that stewardship is "the activity or job of protecting and being responsible for something." That is what God expects of us.

Carelessly polluting water and air is not responsible. Tossing garbage on the ground is not only lazy, but careless and inconsiderate. Planting certain crops or chopping down forests without a plan for appropriate future use of that land could be detrimental in the long run. So when it comes to the decades-old motto of “Keep America Beautiful,” I am all on board. (Though currently I stink at recycling.)

But here is where I struggle. Many in the Earth Day cheerleading squad are quick to cite “overpopulation” as a major contributing factor to environmental problems. While Earth Day is just 45 years old, the overpopulation myth has been around for much longer. How often have we heard that having more than two kids is “selfish” or “irresponsible?” I know someone who actually had a bumper sticker that said “Thank you for Not Breeding.” And we must not forget the forced one-child-policy of China which has continued beyond its original 10-year term. All of these things are very sad to me. In fact, many countries have fallen below replacement birth rates: having fewer babies while people live longer means that the elderly are often not cared for, and some cultures could literally die off.

Just as I have no way of knowing whether or not an unborn child will become another Mother Teresa or Bonnie Parker of Bonnie & Clyde fame, I have no idea whether or not that same child will dump trash in the river or come up with a new technology to clean up rivers. The point is, the birth of a child is not what destroys our planet. The birth of a child is ordained by God, so it is intrinsically good. What destroys our planet is bad (i.e. sinful) human behavior. Some people, yes some Christians, treat our planet with horrible disrespect. I realize there is an entirely separate issue here, in terms of the role of governments and businesses. But regardless of where we stand on those issues, as individuals, most of us can do better.



Our one year old great-niece, Reagan, on Easter morning.

I also struggle with the emphasis on protecting various species *while we permit the legal killing of our own unborn offspring*. Save the whales, but not the human babies? Protect rare insects and lizards, but not mothers and babies headed into abortion clinics? People who destroy bald eagle eggs can be severely punished under the law, yet doctors can dismember unborn humans under the guise of “choice.” That is the ultimate tragic irony. I am grateful that some people feel called to educate us about environmental stewardship. I simply pray that their eyes would be open to the most amazing creatures on Earth.

Ultimately, my thoughts on Earth Day center on the beauty of human life...the best part of God’s creation! We are the ones made in His image! We are the ones given the responsibility to be good stewards! We are the ones designed to be with Him for all eternity!



My mom, Kathleen, me and my husband, Bruce

I heard about a young priest saying to some kids years ago, as he picked up a handful of dirt behind the local parish school, “This is not your mother.” That still makes me laugh! I will try to do more to treasure this planet, in obedience to the One Who formed it. But even more, I will treasure my mothers... the woman who gave birth to me and the woman who gave birth to Bruce. I will treasure my son Gabriel...even though he is no longer here physically. I will treasure the dignity and beauty of each new life conceived, and pray that all unborn boys and girls are given the chance to be born and allowed to



enjoy the rest of creation which God has made for their pleasure!

May this day, and every day, be a time to celebrate the Creator of us all!

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## Green Lawns

Have you noticed that it's mowing season? With the periodic rain we have been getting, the lawns are



growing faster and mowing has become a weekly chore. Some people put it off for weeks, letting the grass turn into a small jungle. Others seem to have competitions with their neighbors to see how frequently they can mow. Dandelions attack lawns that have not been weed treated and others don't have a blade of grass out of place. Some people mow regularly but only trim the edges every other time. While others edge so much that their grass looks like it's had a bad haircut. Some water weekly and even have sprinkler systems, while others watch the sky for rain. We could spend hundreds on turning our grass into lush green lawns, manicured into perfection.

In the same way, we can look at our own spiritual lives and see the time we put into it reflected in our fruits. We can sometimes let our spiritual life get out of control, with no direction and just an occasional prayer thrown up here and there when we need a parking place or are running late. We can allow weeds of negative thinking and judgment of others and ourselves populate our lawn and take the beauty away from the green grass. We can focus on the main part, but then forget those still noticeable edges when we allow our self-discipline to wane. We can become too focused on the work that we forget the beauty or we can become too critical of ourselves that we turn our once green lawn into choppy edged grass.

What we all need is the shower of God's love to nurture our green lawns. Whether that water comes from God alone, like the rain from the sky, or from the love of family and friends, like a sprinkler, or even from grace from within like a built-in sprinkler system, we all need to be open to God's love. No amount of lawn chemicals, fertilizer or mowing can make a lawn, or soul, as beautiful as God showering his love into our lives and being open to the growth that comes from it.

May we all become lush green lawns of God's love!

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Attitude, we all have one. Our approach to a person, situation or event usually has a great influence on how it will turn out for us and everyone else involved. One bad attitude can wreck an entire party. The same thing can happen within our homes. There is one chapter in the book [Arms of Love, by Carmen Marcoux](#), that shows how one person who “woke up on the wrong side of the bed” can have a profound negative effect on the whole family, but it also shows how one act of kindness can turn it all around.

## A Tale of Two Attitudes

When we had a much smaller family, only 4 children, we went on a family retreat. At this time, we were a very young inexperienced family who had a very challenging 3 year old daughter in addition to two older daughters and a newborn baby boy. This 3 year old daughter was just a little too capable for her age and our level of parenting ability. She could climb anything, open child proof pill bottles and we were constantly telling her “no” and “stop that”. Our approach to parenting this child was to control her and keep her from making our life difficult. This approach was killing us and our daughter, it was not fun for anyone and was a source of tension within our family.

When we arrived at the retreat center, we met the staff and volunteers that would lead us through the family retreat. One guy noticed the strained relationship we had with our daughter and without saying a word he showed us a different attitude we could take with her. Instead of constantly stopping her from helping, he gave her jobs to do that would channel her energy into something productive. Instead of viewing her enthusiasm as something to be stopped, it was something to be guided and nurtured. We immediately noticed what he was doing and watched with amazement at how effective it was. We adopted his approach and the results have been impressive. Once we changed from being focused on how difficult her actions made our lives and started to look at how best we could help her to be the best she could be, she became a source of joy and an asset to our family. To this day, she is one of our most independent and capable children. There are very few tasks she is unable to accomplish and instead of making our lives difficult, she makes them easier, much, much easier.

## The Other End of the Spectrum of Life

We are currently living through a similar situation on the other side of the circle of life. We have parents who are getting older and are having health problems. The symptoms of the health problems make for an unpleasant situation for everyone. Loss of independence, the ability to feel good at all times and needing to be assisted to accomplish tasks which used to be easy, is enough to make everyone miserable especially the aging parent.

There are two ways we can approach such situations, we can focus on how it affects us or we can look at

it from the other person's perspective and try to enter into the very real struggle they are experiencing. We are self focused beings, we are born selfish and we spend our whole lives trying to get rid of that natural inclination. When someone we love experiences a loss of ability due to health problems we have two choices, we can become frustrated with them for not being able to do what we were used to them being able to do, or we can empathize with their struggles and do whatever we can to ease their burden.

The main obstacle to the second approach is that it necessarily requires change on our part. We may not be able to maintain our normal schedule due to another person not being able to focus on the task at hand that needs to be completed prior to leaving the house. We may have to forgo participation in our social activities because we need to care for someone who can't care for themselves any longer.

I know a woman whose husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer and while there was much for her to suffer personally, she made the decision to drop out of all her regular activities and care for her husband full time no matter how difficult it was and no matter how thankless the job was. When people are sick and hurting both physically and emotionally, they often say mean things, become impatient and demanding. It is easy to focus on how these undesirable behaviors are wrong and how much they hurt you. However, it is virtuous to put yourself in the shoes of the cancer patient and realize that they are hurting way more than you are. We are called to empathize with the sick and dying and to do what we can to lighten the burden they are carrying even if they don't appear to appreciate it. Our attitude is key, we can view each situation positively, or constantly complain about how awful our situation is and how difficult it is. Having a positive attitude in the midst of great suffering, our own or the suffering of another, is very powerful and can have a profound effect on everyone we interact with including the person for whom we are caring.

## **Living Life with a Focus on Others**

Not all of us will have to deal with a spouse who dies from cancer or has to live with dementia or some other irreversible mental health condition, but we will all have situations where we can choose to focus on the needs others instead of ourselves. Each day we can practice putting others first, and ourselves second, isn't this what Jesus did for us? Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins. The people he suffered for didn't deserve it, most didn't thank Jesus for it and some even actively participated in his suffering and death. He could see past the outward actions of them and even cry out from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing." We are called to do the same.

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## Habakkuk [at Bible Meditations]



*“Even though the fig trees have no fruit and no grapes grow on the vines, even though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no grain, even though the sheep all die and the cattle stalls are empty, I will still be joyful and glad, because the Lord God is my savior.” Habakkuk 3: 17-18*

Surrounded by violence, cruelty, and signs of coming destruction, Habakkuk trembled with fear. Even so, he chose to trust that God was in charge and would act when the time was right at the time He chose. Habakkuk’s testimony to joy isn’t based on circumstances but on who God is.

Our savior is bigger than any circumstances we face. Like Habakkuk, we can choose to praise God no matter what. While that might not change our circumstances it certainly can change our experience of those circumstances.

Once during an MS attack, physical pain made it impossible for me to function or even think clearly. I felt swamped in misery until a friend suggested spiritual warfare might be tempting me to despair. A new awareness switched on. I began to look at my situation from a different point of view. Alone at home, I turned on the radio. A song came on about praising God whether times were good or bad. “My heart will choose to say, Lord, blessed be your name.” I sang along at the top of my lungs. A sense of victory flooded me. I didn’t have to be bullied by my circumstances. I could choose to praise the Lord no matter what. Nothing had changed, but everything had changed. I felt free.

Of course we all feel sad, or frightened, or hurt sometimes. We’re human. God gave us our feelings for a reason. We don’t have to pretend we aren’t in pain when we are. But while happiness is fleeting, joy runs deeper. Good times come and go. Just like Habakkuk, we have the freedom to be joyful anyway because our eternal God and savior remains.

Prayer: I will be joyful because God is bigger than my circumstances.

Reflection: When has God gotten you through a challenge you couldn't manage on your own? Were you able to see Him working in the situation at the time or only in looking back can you see it? How might that help you in future challenges?

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## "Father, Forgive Them..." [at Saints 365]

These three words, uttered by the Lord as he hung in agony on the cross, present one of the most challenging aspects of being a Christian. It is difficult for us to forgive - it is not natural and our whole selves bristle at the thought. When hurts run deep, the idea of forgiveness seems to be an insurmountable obstacle. Our bodies tense up, anxiety and anger rise within us -...they hurt us.....they don't deserve our forgiveness....these are the thoughts that race through our minds.

And yet, forgiveness is exactly what Jesus asks us to do. Each time we profess the Our Father, we recite the Lord's conditions for forgiveness:

*forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*

. Our very prayer can be the words that pass sentence upon us if we are caught in the chains of unforgiveness.

What to do if we deeply desire to follow the Lord, and yet are struggling to forgive those who have hurt us? First, we must realize that forgiveness doesn't imply that what has been done to us is right. So often we hear this exchange when a wrongdoing has occurred: "

*I'm sorry." "It's ok."*

Forgiveness does not say "

*It's ok.*

" Forgiveness says,

*"What you did to me was wrong and I am choosing to forgive you for that wrong."*

As he hung upon the cross the Lord never said what was being done was "ok" - instead, he chose to forgive those who were persecuting him, ridiculing him, torturing him and humiliating him. He chose to forgive all of us, whose sins he bore as he died.



Father Cantlamessa, in his 2015 Good Friday, describes the model of forgiveness that Jesus has set for us saying:

He presents his disciples with an example of infinite generosity. To forgive with his same greatness of soul does not entail just a negative attitude through which one renounces wishing evil on those who do evil; it has to be transformed instead into a positive will to do good to them, even if it is only by means of a prayer to God on their behalf. "Pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44). This kind of forgiveness cannot seek recompense in the hope of divine punishment. It must be inspired by a charity that excuses one's neighbor without, however, closing one's eyes to the truth but, on the contrary, seeing to stop evildoers in such a way that they will do no more harm to others and to themselves.

One of the surest signs that we have forgiven someone from our heart is that we are able to pray for them and ask our Heavenly Father to bless them.

Finally, Father Cantalamessa explains how the Lord would answer our cries that forgiveness is impossible saying:

He (Jesus) would answer, "I know, but I died to give you what I am asking of you. I not only gave you the command to forgive and not only a heroic example of forgiveness, but through my death I also obtained for you the grace that enables you to forgive. I did not give the world just a teaching on mercy as so many others have. I am also God and I have poured out for you rivers of mercy through my death.

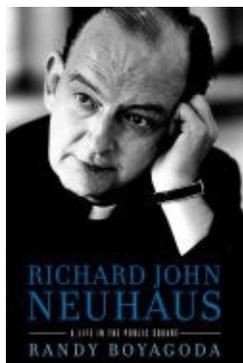
We need the grace and the mercy of the Lord to follow any of his commandments, but most especially the one to forgive. As we meditate on the mystery of Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection, and as we prepare to celebrate the great feast of Divine Mercy, let us ask the Lord for the grace that only he can provide to truly forgive those who have hurt us. Through that act of forgiveness of those who have deeply hurt us, we will experience the "freedom of the children of God" - freedom from anger, bitterness and resentment. We deserve that freedom; Christ died in agony to win us that freedom; he will give us the grace we need to live in that freedom.

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## Man, the Worshipping Animal [at My Path to Faith]



Fr. Richard John Neuhaus is probably best known to Catholics through his work with EWTN, especially as a commentator during their coverage of the death of Pope St. John Paul II and the conclave which followed soon after, a conclave resulting in the election of Pope Benedict XVI. They may know him as well as for his work as the founder and publisher of First Things magazine. Yet, there is far more to Neuhaus' life and career, and the entire story is skillfully told in a new biography by Randy Boyagoda, [Richard John Neuhaus, A Life in the Public Square](#). Whether familiar with Neuhaus or not, readers will find Boyagoda's book provides an astonishing wealth of detail, not only about the subject, but also the historical context in which Neuhaus lived and worked, from his time as a committed civil rights worker and anti-war protestor during the 1960's to his role as occasional, sometimes controversial, advisor to President George W. Bush in the first decade of the 21st century. To many readers, much of his life story may come as a surprise, perhaps even a shock, but the story is interesting and important. The extent of the causes he engaged in, the friends and enemies he made, and the things he achieved, is astonishing.

The book is organized as a chronological narrative of the events of Richard John Neuhaus' life, taking him from his birth in 1936 in Pembroke, Ontario where his father, Clem Neuhaus, was serving as a Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor, to his death in 2009. In his early teens Neuhaus was sent off to a Lutheran boarding school in Nebraska, a school he was asked not to return to after just one year, the result of a few youthful indiscretions. After leaving Nebraska, Neuhaus lived with relatives in Texas and the book details his adventures shooting jack rabbits and being a teen age gas station owner liked to brag about being the youngest member of the Cisco Chamber of Commerce. All during this time, however, Neuhaus displayed strong, active interests in Lutheran theology and ecclesiology, philosophy, and whatever else happened to strike his fancy, despite having dropped out of school entirely. After a year in Cisco, Neuhaus, realizing that any career he would want to pursue required an education, applied to a small Lutheran college in Austin, Concordia Lutheran College, being admitted only after bluffing admission authorities into waiting for evidence of his nonexistent high school graduation papers to arrive in the mail.

After graduation from Concordia in Austin, Neuhaus attended Concordia– St. Louis seminary, the most influential seminary in the Lutheran Missouri Synod. At St. Louis, he fell under the influence of Arthur Carl Piepkorn. "Pieps," as he was known on campus, was a prominent professor, one with known "Romish" sentiments, and a man of great influence on Neuhaus. Piepkorn accomplished this by providing Neuhaus with "a catholic-framed Lutheran ecclesial identity integrated with intellectual sophistication and ordered to and by a joyful love of God and the Church." Boyagoda goes on to say that many of Neuhaus' fellow students at the seminary were convinced that Piepkorn was so catholic-minded that he

“wore a Roman collar with his pajamas.” Among the entire faculty of this most prominent Lutheran seminary there is little doubt Piepkorn exerted the strongest influences on Neuhaus during his seminary career, even to the point of Neuhaus picking up the use of a breviary for his daily prayers.

Once he finished seminary, Neuhaus was assigned, perhaps as a punishment for his association with the “Romish” Piepkorn, as pastor of a tiny church in upstate New York, where he spent a year. Then he was transferred to the church that became his home, in one way or another, for the next twenty years, St John the Evangelist Lutheran church in Brooklyn. It was here that he would begin the career that would make him famous and influential, as political activist, Lutheran pastor, and finally, editor and publisher of First Things magazine.

While at St John the Evangelist, Neuhaus became active, and gained a level of prominence, in the civil rights and anti-war movements, working with people like the Berrigan brothers, William Sloane Coffin, and even Martin Luther King himself. However, the unrest and outright violence triggered at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, which he participated in, marked the beginning of his disillusionment with the left. It was from that event that he began the long process of disengagement from these leftist associations, leading ultimately to his conversion to Catholicism, to the priesthood, and to the founding of First Things.

The process took time after that 1968 awakening but quickened during the 1980s, when Neuhaus came into contact, especially through his ongoing engagement with pro-life issues, with prominent Catholic officials, including Cardinal John O’Conner, (then) Fr. Avery Dulles, and even, in a minor way, Pope St. John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. It ended in 1990 when Neuhaus began First Things and entered the Church. He was ordained a priest a year later, having been personally formed under the tutelage of Fr. Dulles.

Neuhaus’ journey from activist liberal to renowned “theo-con” was remarkable, as was Neuhaus the man. Boyagoda paints a picture of a man with an outsized intellect and a lifetime of singular accomplishment. It isn’t surprising that Neuhaus also had some of the flaws typically associated with such people. To all who came in contact with him, Neuhaus was clearly a man of great intellect, huge ambition, strong, domineering personality, with the ego to match, who tended to dominate any room he entered. He also didn’t mind enjoying a good cigar and a sip of 18 year old Scotch along the way.

Having said this, I wonder if his human failings, the untamed ego, over arching ambition, and domineering personality are traits that merit the attention Boyagoda gives them. Do those human failings, while interesting, really affect our assessment of a life dedicated to ensuring that the voice of faith be heard in the public square? If I have a complaint about Boyagoda’s book, it’s that I think these personal traits sometimes appear out of any context within the narrative, at the expense of conveying more substantive details of Neuhaus’ life and work.

Neuhaus considered himself throughout his career, as both Lutheran pastor and Catholic priest, to be a Christian and a patriot, in that order. It was his lifelong concern that the voice of those of religious faith be heard in the public square, not as the dominant voice, but certainly as an equal part of the national conversation of ideas. This is an important message in a age when the popular culture is doing all that it can to silence those voices. The emphasis on Neuhaus’ personal failings is regrettable because the attention paid to these minor faults distracts from the important, lifelong, theme of Neuhaus’ thinking, neatly summarized by R. R. Reno in the April, 2015 issue of First Things: “What will endure is Neuhaus’s constant reminder: Man is first and foremost a worshipping animal, not a voting animal. Rendering to God what is God’s matters most. The rest is commentary.” To miss this point is to misunderstand Richard John Neuhaus.

One other minor criticism concerns a sometimes disjointed narrative. For example, Neuhaus spent his early years in Pembroke, Ontario and his early life in that small Canadian town is covered in the first three chapters, which conclude with a brief allusion to events to come in Neuhaus' life. At the start of the next chapter, we find him attending boarding school in Nebraska, where one of his sisters lived. How, and why, was he sent there? Why would his parents send him so far away from home at such an early age? There's no explanation, leaving the reader only to question. Another, more glaring, example: given the time spent on Arthur Piepkorn's early, strongly Catholic, liturgically based influence on Neuhaus, the reader expects Piepkorn to have played some part in Neuhaus' ultimate decision to become Catholic. Yet, this connection remains undrawn, and once Neuhaus leaves the seminary, Piepkorn drops from view, the reader can only guess how Piepkorn contributed to the formation of the future Fr. Neuhaus, as he must have done.

Despite these few quibbles, Richard John Neuhaus, *A Life in the Public Square*, is a worthy endeavor and deserves attention. The book is backed up by meticulous research, is well written, suffering only a few minor flaws. Boyagoda offers his readers critical background in trying to appreciate all of the various forces of upheaval spawned during the unrest of the 1960's and later years, and the efforts of one man to participate in and shape those forces according to his deeply Christian, and finally Catholic, point of view.

FTC Disclaimer: "I received this book from [Blogging for Books](#) for this review."

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# Suffering With Joy

April 18, 2015



Since I am a supporting friend of people going through very difficult life situations and experiencing a great deal of turmoil, I thought Father Jacques Philippe's book, [Searching for and Maintaining Peace: A Small Treatise on Peace of Heart](#) would be a help to me and them. This is indeed a great treasure full of short meditations from Scripture and words of the saints and I recommend it to anyone who wants to help himself or others through the sometimes very rough patches of life, especially when tempted to despair and give up on the spiritual life.

We are simply not going to be able to overcome the evils of hard times without a strong spiritual life, and yet the first thing Satan tempts us to abandon when suffering greatly is our relationship with God. Just because we may be up to our derriere in alligators doesn't mean we should abandon God who is the very One to help us drain the swamp.

I found particular inspiration from meditation #8 on Psalm 23. Father Philippe says in regard to this prayer that

...God leaves us wanting for nothing. This will serve to unmask a temptation, sometimes subtle, which is very common in the Christian life, one into which many fall and which greatly impedes spiritual progress.

For example, I lack good health, therefore I am unable to pray as I believe it is indispensable to do. [Change the word "health" to any other perceived detrimental situation.] Or my immediate family prevents me from organizing my spiritual activities as I wish. [Operative words: "as I wish."] Or, again, I don't have the qualities, the strength, the virtue, the gifts that I believe necessary in order to accomplish something beautiful for God, according to the plan of a Christian life. [Operative words: "I believe."] I am not satisfied with my life, with my person, with my circumstances and I live constantly with the feeling that as long as things are such, it will be impossible for me to live truly and intensely. I feel underprivileged compared to others and I carry in me the constant nostalgia of another life, more privileged, where, finally, I could do things that are worthwhile. [I, I, I, I...]

We often live with this illusion. With the impression that all would go better, we would like the things around us to change, that the circumstances would change. But this is often an error. It is not the exterior circumstances that must change; it is above all our hearts that must change.

Happy are those hearts purified by faith and hope, who bring to their lives a view animated by the certitude that, beyond appearances to the contrary, God is present, providing for their essential needs and that they lack nothing. . . . They will see that many of the circumstances that they thought negative and damaging to their spiritual life are, in fact, in God's pedagogy, powerful means for helping them to progress and grow.

The essential question to be asked in hard times is, "What is God teaching me here?" We can fall into the "if only" trap all too easily, filling ourselves with desires which on the surface may be laudable but upon closer examination reveal that we are not accepting God's will for us at this time.

For about 15 years now I've been asking God to give us the money necessary to move out of this diocese. I gaze enviously at the neighboring Tulsa diocese where the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter has a parish, the Benedictine monks at Clear Creek have a thriving foundation, and the bishop is doing all sorts of things to stir up the spiritual life of his flock and ask, "Lord, why can't You get us out of here and let us move there? If only I could be there my spiritual life would be so much easier. . . ." Whine, whine, whine.

Last fall in front of the Blessed Sacrament I got my answer. The spiritual situation in this diocese is improving somewhat but God made me understand clearly that all pain, suffering, and longing is given to me to endure for the sake of the diocese I'm in – the old saying, "Bloom where you're planted," we have heard. That "Aha!" immediately freed me. I have my purpose, my assignment. He wants me to witness here and He will take care of the rest. Why He kept me in the dark for so long is gradually becoming clearer, but it is all part of His plan for me and everyone else I come in contact with, and for the spiritual growth of this diocese.

**The fundamental problem is that we employ too much of our own criteria as to what is and what is not good and we don't have enough confidence in the Wisdom and Power of God.** [Bingo.] We don't believe that He is capable of utilizing everything for our good, and that **never, under any circumstance, would He leave us lacking in the essentials – that is to say, lacking anything that would permit us to love more.** [That is the bottom line, isn't it?] Because to grow or to enrich one's spiritual life is to **learn to love.** Many of the circumstances that I consider damaging could, in fact, be for me if I had more faith, precious opportunities to love more: to be more patient, more humble, more gentle, more merciful and to abandon myself more into the hands of God.

Let us then be convinced of this and it will be for us a source of immense strength: **God may allow me to occasionally lack money, health, abilities and virtues, but He will never leave me in want of Himself, of His assistance and His mercy or of anything that would allow me to grow increasingly ever closer to Him, to love Him more intensely, to better love my neighbor and to achieve holiness.**

What more could we possibly ask?

Image: The Good Shepherd, 19th century Russian icon, private collection, via Wikimedia

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

R. Now and forever!

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

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# 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!

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## JL Seagull [at Grace to Paint]



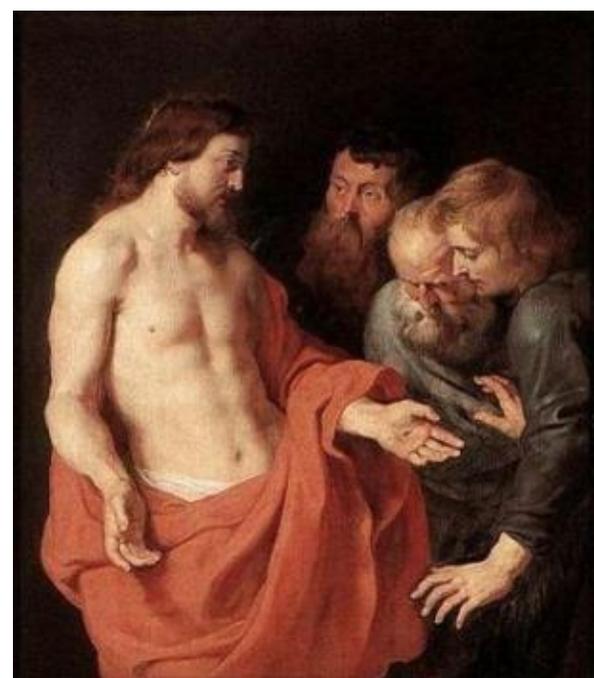
6×8" oil paint on primed canvas sheet; use "comment" below to inquire.

Back in the 70's, Richard Bach published his fable: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. I delighted in the theme of breaking out of the ordinary to pursue the higher and more perfect, which Jonathan does by practicing higher and swifter flying and diving over the ocean. Leaving other gulls to forage for garbage on the shore, Jonathan sought higher skies and deeper, vaster blue waters. I must read this story again someday!

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# There's No Doubt [at A Catholic Moment]



I love this Gospel reading today. It is my favorite in the entire Bible because it truly resonates with me in that I was, and many times still am, a *Doubting Thomas*. For the longest time, really up until just a few years ago, I wanted proof that everything in the Bible, including Christ's life and resurrection happened. I wanted definitive evidence, proving everything, from finding fragments of Noah's Ark on a mountaintop in Turkey, to finding where and how the Red Sea could have possibly been parted, and my personal favorite – the Shroud of Turin. Was this really the burial shroud Christ was buried in and that he was resurrected in? If they could just prove that any of these things were real, and we had indisputable evidence, I would believe. I needed to see it. I needed to touch it.

There were times growing up where my Mom called me her Doubting Thomas. I love science, and I love facts, and so I wanted to see proof. But I eventually came to realize that God had been showing me proof for many years, I just failed to see it. He is all around us. Christ is real and He is in our hearts, our flesh and blood because He became flesh and blood and sacrificed that blood for us. By doing that, God and humanity became one again. We became whole.

I've only begun to examine the tip of the iceberg on this, and sometimes I am still that Doubting Thomas. We all are. Many times we still doubt Christ's presence and that He is real, and His ability to change our lives. We get so caught up in the world today and our everyday lives that we fail to believe, and we forget the signs and proof that we've seen in the past, and we seek more proof from God. We fail to believe at times.

But this story of Thomas is much deeper than simply "*believing because we have seen.*" Thomas was a great apostle and is a great saint, but he served a purpose here in John's Gospel – a purpose that has really helped to define our faith. This story of the resurrected Christ appearing to the disciples and this dialog and interaction with Thomas demonstrates how we need to approach and believe in Christ.

Christ is God in human form. He is God that the disciples were able to hug, and laugh with, and see, and touch. And so when Christ asked Thomas to touch His hands and touch His side, it was not only to prove

to Thomas that the person in front of him was the resurrected Christ, but it was also to offer proof to future Christians including us today, that Jesus is real, that He is God in the flesh. And as Saint John writes in his first letter today,

*“This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood.”*

He came through water and blood. *And blood.* He was a real person, a real body that shed blood and died for us. And so by telling Thomas to touch Him, Christ is telling us also that He is God that we can see and be touch, and most importantly that we can consume and come into communion with, and become one.

When Thomas does this, and truly sees and feels our Lord in the flesh, he exclaims *“My Lord and my God!”*

This was a special grace Thomas received, and we can experience the same exact thing every day. We can see and feel and consume Christ every day at Mass in the form of the Eucharist. He may not look the same, but it is the same experience. We receive the same grace and witness Christ’s existence every time we go to Mass. And when we encounter the Lord in the Eucharist, that is how we should greet Him every time – *“My Lord and my God.”* Thomas taught us this.

But we have to believe. We have to believe that bread and that wine is Christ, that it is the Lord our God and all His grace and knowledge and understanding. We must believe – without seeing. That is the second lesson from the Gospel today, that while it IS Christ in front of us in the Eucharist at Mass, and in the monstrance at Adoration, we have to *believe* that, without seeing. We were not there at the Last Supper. We were not there at the crucifixion or when they laid Him in the tomb. We did not see Jesus rise from the dead, and we did not see Him appear to Thomas.

All we have to go on is what the disciples have to tell us and that great people like Saint John wrote down in His Gospel. We didn’t see any of this, but we have their words and the words and experiences of all the Saints since then to tell us that, yes, Christ is real, and it did happen that way. As Catholics, we know that Christ is there in front of us because it is too perfect. The Church teachings, the tradition and liturgy, and the Sacred Scripture are perfect. The Catholic faith is perfect. We as people are not perfect, and unfortunately we mess things up from time to time and often give things including the Church a bad name and reputation.

But our faith is perfect, every aspect spawned from the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is our proof. That despite all the trials and tribulations, our faith and the Catholic Church has stood for 2000 years. Something must be right about this. We must be on to something. This is our evidence, that Christ is real, and that amidst all the evils of this world and all that we have been confronted with as Christians and as Catholics, we continue to persevere.

But we have to listen to Jesus as he talks to Thomas today, that we have to *believe*, even though we may not see. We have to *know*, even though we may not understand. We have to *trust*, even in times of uncertainty. And we have no reason to doubt that Christ is there in front of us at Mass, and that he becomes part of us when we consume Him at communion, because the proof is there. It’s all around us. It’s been written down and passed on over the ages, from people named Peter, and Paul and John and the Saints and holy men and women ever since. And it’s in the story about Thomas. John was there. He saw it. There’s no doubting.

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## Perspective: Families [at Yard Sale of the Mind]

Our age, the final (one hopes) expression of the Enlightenment, is addicted to the idea of novelty, in the sense that all new ideas are presumed to be good ideas. The necessary corollary is that old ideas, even those that have existed for thousands of years across hundreds of different cultures and through countless political and social upheavals, are bad if they contradict what is understood to be a new idea.

This is what Progress means to the modern mind: the overthrow of established ideas and the practices those ideas engender in favor of new ideas. We don't know, yet, what practices the new ideas will engender, because that takes time. We are always to plunge ahead, under the tacit assumption that whatever new practices arise from new ideas will necessarily be good.

This state of affairs, this seemingly eternal state of crisis and brouhaha wherein no old idea is ever considered good and settled, flows both from and toward a certain constellation of issues:

– The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Is New Idea A better than Old Idea B? All moderns in every case I've ever come across seem to believe that the goodness of New Idea A is luminous, that only a fool or a blind man or, most especially, someone motivated by evil would dispute it. But if it is indeed a new idea, then it has no track record – there's no pudding. The only way to find out definitively is to see what practices idea A results in.

So, for example, there are old Christian practices around sexual propriety, whereby men are to be respectful and protective of women, and women are to be supportive and deferential to men and where marriages are sacred and permanent. The old idea upon which these practices were built is that people – men, women and children, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak – on the one hand, exist for their own sake – we are not means to an end – and on the other, exist to love, honor and serve our Creator.

Since God is Our Father, the old idea goes, a human family is a reflection, however dim and imperfect, of the Divine Love. The family shows us how we are to treat each other (as brothers and sisters). The family is the fundamental ordering principle of a good society.

Here we need not consider if this idea of the person being of infinite worth regardless of their sex or status in life is true or not, or if God is a Father or even exists, but merely note the historical fact that it was held as true by great swaths of peoples across great areas of Europe and the New World for many centuries. It is a common theme throughout art and literature in the West, and had to be paid at least lip service by anyone hoping to rule. In practice, it meant that even a king was held to a standard, whereby he had no absolute right to the lives of his subjects and indeed no right to interfere in their family lives. Compare with, for example, the emperors and kings of the east, for whom their subjects were mere personal property.

– Western societies as they now exist were created and sustained by families. This is also a simple historical fact. Within a family under the Christian model are a set of obligations and what we might call rights. Like the king or lord, the father is preeminent but his authority is not absolute. He does not own his wife and children, and in fact is supposed to be ready to lay his life down for them if required. His wife and children are every bit the child of God he is, and his authority extends only as far as is required for

him to fulfill his duties toward them. In the same way, the duties of wives and children are built upon the idea that they are participating in the family and, indeed, in their own salvation – they are never a means to an end, but their lives are an end in themselves.

It hardly needs mentioning that these ideals are rarely approached in real life, but they do provide a measure and corrective: there are some things a man may not do, and the ideal has the power to draw actions towards it.

These are the old ideas and the practices that spring from them that the new ideas must of necessity overthrow. We can see the new idea – family is whatever we say it is; relationships of all kinds are whatever they say they are; obligations are only what we choose to accept for however long we choose to accept them. What we cannot see, yet, are the cultural practices that will result from them. We see, now, only the cultural chaos – what, if any, practices will be sustained through generations we won't know until they happen – assuming, of course, that the new ideas really are new.

– Like families themselves, societies built on families can endure a lot of shock and stress without breaking. Thus, they have so far endured a couple of centuries of ever escalating attack by those who would reform society on some foundation other than family. (1)

What that new form looks like is unknown, and cannot be known until it happens. It has not happened yet – we live in a house built by others upon principles modernity has rejected. (2) We cannot know if a society worthy of the name can be built on the every-growing rights of individuals with ever-shrinking obligations. It has never happened, it is truly a new idea. All societies so far have been built on some form of family structure, expanded to tribe and nation-state, or reduced to a totalitarian individual or group. In each case, obligations are understood, either in taking care of one's own and taking up arms for the whole, or in doing the bidding of a divine king of some sort.

Christianity, which happily found itself among the Greeks and Romans, did not have to reform either fierce tribalism or divine kings right off the bat. (3)

– Progress looks a lot like a return to tribalism. The irony here is that an endless focus on ever-growing individual rights leads, in all cases, to the rights, responsibility and value of individuals, where these exist, being replaced by group rights, responsibility and value. A man is not judged responsible for his own actions, but rather from what are believed to be the actions of his group or class. If his group is understood to have suffered oppression, then he is a victim and his every action good; if his group is judged to have committed oppression, he is guilty no matter what he personally has done. Thus Che Guevara, a psychopathic mass murderer, is a \*good\* guy; while Mother Teresa, as a member of a oppressive patriarchal church, is a bad guy.

Revolutionaries don't have the stomach or time for individual judgement. They've got a brand new world to create, a just world in which the means they use to get there – blanket condemnations of entire classes of people – would be, one imagines, the ultimate horror. To save the village, one must destroy it.

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It is merely insane for the Supreme Court to assume to decide on whether marriage is a right granted by the state, to be defined by the state. Many imagine government springing up from disassociated individuals consenting to be governed, who then get to decide on each and every association in their

lives, including some they choose to label marriage. Like the world on the backs of 4 elephants, this assumes it's turtles all the way down. Or rather, that this brave new world can exist without any ties with the real, historical world it wants to destroy and replace.

Every man is a son; every woman a daughter. We come from some discrete place and time, from among particular people with particular habits and traditions. None of us chose any of that, yet they make us who we are. Some of us will enter into marriage and raise children, regardless of the extent to which we have agreed to be governed, if at all.

Marriage is to form families that sustain and pass on culture – and make government of, by and for the people possible.

1. The seeds of these attacks were planted in our country with her founding – the ‘all men are created equal’ concept assumed an ideal man as a patriarch – and indeed, almost all the Founders were family men. In this context, voting is a duty – a very much secondary duty – exercised by a man who is responsible, or hoped some day to be responsible, for a family. But since the founders assumed family to be a permanent feature of the social landscape – I think the current state of affairs would have been simply unimaginable to them – they did nothing to spell that out. Under the dominant Protestant Sola Scriptura logic that flows through the veins of our nation, it was only a matter of time before the founding concepts were reinterpreted to mean something else entirely. In the same way that Calvinist Pilgrims became Unitarians, logical gravity when applied to the texts out of context made the unencumbered individual the sacred unit, and attempts to build a society on that concept.

2. This idea of forms emerging from ideas over time is ancient. Hegel formalized it, envisioned it as driven by a peculiarly changeable God; Marx comes along and imagines the Dialectic as somehow both mechanical yet intentional, which is pretty much the definition of magic.

3. Rome and Athens were both built on families and the obligations those families demand. What makes them different from mere tribalism is the recognition that the city-state and nation are greater than the family in many respects and make legitimate demands beyond what the family may demand. The relationship was reciprocal, not subordinate: the family did not derive from the state, but the state arose to protect the interests of the families on a larger scale. Families created and sustained the state. Tribalism, when Christianized, can only imagine the state as an extension of a family, with its internal hierarchies of personal duties and obligations – feudalism.

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## Acknowledging the Presence of God in the Home [at Equipping Catholic Families]

...another venue for the little [Wooden Painted Saints](#): my old Architecture School models that have been kicking around from one basement to the next ...for 20 years!



We're in the midst of a couple family projects and I came across my Architecture School models from my thesis project completed this week in 1995!

I have probably whined and complained about my five years in Architecture School. My happiest year... was by far my fifth and last year. Bill and I were married and after a gazillion little details God worked out, we lived together in an awesome little apartment. Bill managed to take a leave from his full time job, took his GMAT and was accepted into the Masters of Business Administration program at the University of Ottawa...in the same city where I was finishing up my degree!

As well as having my new spouse/favorite roommate of all time, I enjoyed hand-picking my favorite prof as my thesis advisor. I also welcomed my good friend and University Chaplain Fr. Roger as my spiritual advisor for my thesis project. After four years of studio projects tailored to the interests of professors, I was able to design my own project program for this fifth and final year.



For the first term, I measured and drew the only formal drawings in existence for the [St Benedict's Retreat House](#) in Oxford, Michigan. As crazy as it sounds, this awesome building was built without formal construction drawings, under the direction of a partly-blind, extremely talented architect Bill Wizinski.

I remember returning to school after the Christmas Break, more than a little concerned that I didn't have a proposal for my thesis project for my final term!

Newly immersed in married life and looking ahead to what I hoped would be a house full of kids, I decided to try to reconcile Studies in Architecture with a growing desire to draw closer to God and practice His Presence (inspired by Brother Lawrence and continuing talks with Fr. Roger).



My final thesis project was entitled: **Architecture and Spirituality: Acknowledging The Presence of God Within the Home** and the concept actually unfolded during my prayer time, the night before I was to meet with my Thesis Advisor.

My Thesis Advisor...was likely not actually Christian. We never really talked about his Faith, but I was grateful that he was respectful of mine. That alone seemed pretty rare within the climate of Architecture School.



I built models, hand-drafted my drawings, created photo-collages of my model on the site and met regularly with my thesis advisors, delving into spatial design...and the spirituality of Practicing the Presence of God!



The house design included dedicated space in the form of chutes, channels and light wells, further articulated by carefully chosen building materials. The (titled) tangible circuit of space would impact surrounding rooms through light and shadow and sounds of the elements (rain/wind) and offer reminders of God's Presence, hopefully impacting behavior and prompting prayer throughout daily life.

Sadly, when we built our 600 square foot addition to our current (and forever!) house, the reality of construction costs set in. Unsurprisingly, we were not able to incorporate fancy materials or tithe a 10% circuit of space acknowledging the Presence of God through shadow and light, but we have plenty of Sacred Art and statues throughout our house. We also have plenty of Catholic craft projects and programs circulating the house...and it's often the younger kids who latch onto them and remind us to use them!



## 1995 Portfolio

And now, rummaging through boxes of cardboard models from Architecture School, it would seem that we have an endless playground for our little [Wooden Painted Saints!](#)



I could never have known...exactly 20 years ago this month, how these models would come in handy!



How do YOU use your College degree in real life?

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This contribution is available at <http://www.equippingcatholicfamilies.com/2015/04/acknowledging-the-presence-of-god-in-the-home-architecture-thesis-20th-anniversary.html>  
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## Dauntless [at Catholic Girl Problems]

Spring Retreat for the youth group is two weeks from yesterday, and as usual, I am speaking.

I also haven't prepared a single word.

Hence, this blog post. I am hoping some good, old-fashioned free-style writing will spark some ideas or inspiration on the chosen topic...the movie, *Divergent*. Based upon the popular book series, the film tells the story of a futuristic society divided between five "factions:" Abnegation (the selfless), Amity (the peaceful), Candor (the honest), Dauntless (the brave), and Erudite (the intelligent). Upon their sixteenth birthday, each person must undergo a series of psychological tests to determine which faction best suits them. Those unsuitable for any of the factions have no status of privilege in society, while those possessing qualities of *all* the factions are deemed "divergent..."

And are the most dangerous to the established order.

We chose *Divergent* for the retreat theme not only to appeal to the teens' interest (the film is a hit among young and old alike), but also to demonstrate how a holy existence requires *all* the virtues... "divergence" from the norm of society, which (speaking modernly) does not value virtue very much. Our fearless leader (a.k.a. the Youth Minister) chose to divide us adults via the various factions, which we will attempt to present to the teens as entertainingly as possible. For some reason, out of all the factions, she chose to make me "."

"dauntless." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*: **very brave** (adjective).

Yeah.

The movie depicts the "dauntless" as wild, fearless fighters dressed in black and constantly on search for the next adrenaline rush. Jumping from building to building, chasing choo-choo trains, and running through the streets (often to the terror of lesser, weaker factions) comprises much of the dauntless day. When not reaping havoc, the faction can be found training to reap *more* havoc – punching punching bags, throwing knives, and kicking each other's butts while fellow dauntless cheer ringside.

And I am to depict these qualities.

God has quite the sense of humor.

I suppose there is a smidge of dauntless within me, though. While I never once threw or received a punch (well maybe once, when I was seven), I had to be brave in other ways. When I was in grade school, I remember walking the halls on Ash Wednesday – forehead smudged with black – amidst the revilements of my peers, and I refused to wash the mark off. While nothing compared to the courage of the martyrs, the social suicide was akin to life-or-death to my twelve-year-old ego.

Now I am older, wiser, and seeing a bit clearer. The blissful ignorance of youth has faded with the past, and the future stares me dead in the face. While I am no clairvoyant, I see darkness for the Church...a darkness which is nearer than we think. I see [religious persecution](#) comparable to the persecution of early Christians, and which is already reared and ready for takeover. I see a slow and steady regression back to the upper room, where the Apostles hid for fear of execution, and for one reason alone...

The Apostles were Christian.

We celebrate Mass openly and freely...for now. Once upon a time, Christians were made to celebrate secretly, as being openly Christian was considered a direct threat to the established order, a grotesque violation of Jewish law, and punishable by death. Through the Holy Spirit, however, the Church enjoyed centuries as the cornerstone of a healthy society. God was the center, and anyone who rejected Him was considered a threat.

Nowadays, the opposite is true.

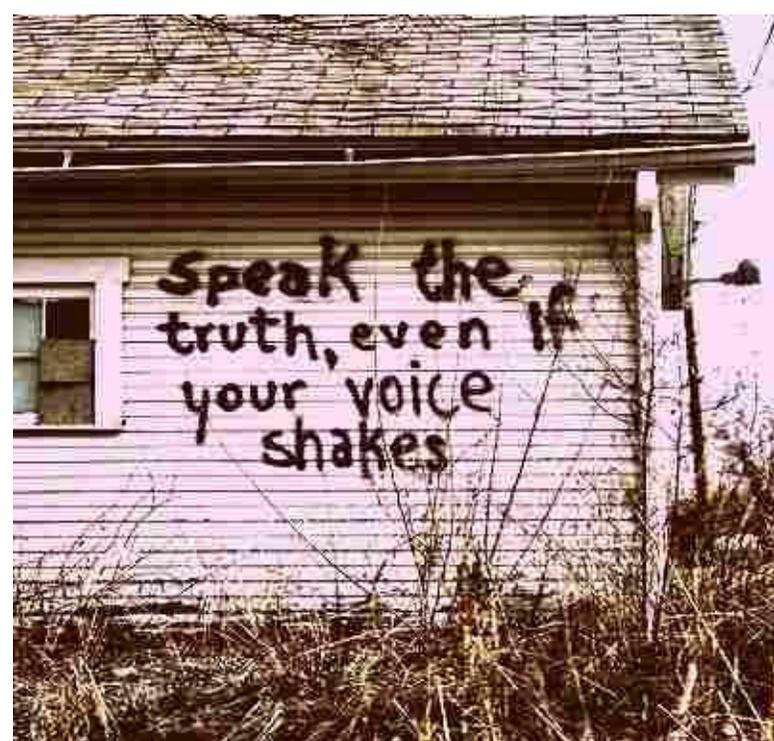
Atheism is rising, and along with Atheism, evil. Selfishness (the dogma of Satan) reigns while selflessness (the dogma of love, a.k.a. God) suffers...and people wonder why God “doesn’t seem to care.” We argue “*if God exists, why does He allow such suffering?*” Perhaps He would ask you the same question? Perhaps He *does* care...

And where God goes, the Church goes, for as the Lord said, “*The servant cannot be greater than the master.*” We live in a world which embraces promiscuity, rejects life, and praises self. Christians are forced to violate conscience via laws passed down through government, which once vowed to never interfere with citizens’ religions. Over one million babies – made in the image and likeness of God – are [slaughtered](#) per year to cater to the ever-rising human desire to “do as thou wilt...” the mantra of [Satanism](#). “Spirituality” has replaced religion, and hatred of Christianity (especially the Catholic Church) has become the last acceptable prejudice.

Yes, dear reader...we are not far from celebrating Mass in hiding again.

Whenever I see a child at Mass, I see a tribulation saint, and I pray he or she receives the strength – the *dauntlessness* – to stand strong against whatever threats await. I sound dark and dreary, I know, but ladies and gentlemen, no longer can we exist with our heads buried in the sand. Take off the rose-colored glasses, and see the world around you, what the populous embraces (and rejects), and pray God graces you with the wisdom necessary to navigate these rough waters.

Everyone is hungry for purpose, but no one so much as the youth. I want these teens to understand the threats which await them along the road of life, and I want to equip them with them tools to fight. I want each to grasp how vitally important he or she is to the Kingdom, and how the world desperately needs the power God placed within them. No longer am I satisfied sugar coating life, for forewarned is forearmed. Where the saints and martyrs laid down their swords, these teens must pick them up. The fight which faces them is no work of fiction, and the reality stark.



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# Catholic Survival Guide in a Troubled Marriage [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

When we experience trouble in Marriage, it is difficult to know whether it is still possible for God to help us save our Marriage or whether it has already died. God is eager to help us discern our state of affairs beginning with our own state of soul. It is a miracle of God's power and love when a man or woman who had become completely absorbed in their own concerns - ambitions and fears - turns again to God and once again or perhaps for the first time finds joy in God while at the same time experiencing distress over the trouble or signs of breakup in their Marriage.

Each person makes choices every day. The married man did and still does. The married woman did and still does. We spend much of our lives driven by ambition, insecurity, or fear or any number of other passions, but a driven life often doesn't pay close attention to anyone else. Ineffectively absorbed in our own concerns we become handicapped and perhaps incapable of selflessly loving others. A driven human being develops hardness of heart, a condition that even God finds difficult to penetrate. God must be patient and wait until life's difficult and painful circumstances crack the hard shell of that heart, which is now a broken heart, and only then can God's love begin to seep through the cracks and finally enter into that heart to bring it back to life.

God designed human beings and marriage for each other. In God's design of human beings, a man and a woman can freely come together to be joined together by the power God entrusts to us to love the other as we love our self. The gift of Marriage is manifest when the man loves the woman before himself and when the woman loves the man before herself. They each take responsibility for their own life to care for their own life, to keep themselves healthy and energetic to be able to love the other well, and in time, to love the children entrusted to them by God and to love them well, as they need to be loved.

in the beginning, when the devil tempted the man and the woman, they gave in to the temptation to become selfish. The consequences of their sin is that the man became insecure in his work and in his relation to the earth and to the world. The man throws himself into his work, becoming obsessed with success and ambition and at the same time fearful of failure and of losing everything and afraid of dying. When he looks into his wife's eyes, it is no longer clear whether she respects him and supports him. For her part, the woman became insecure in her relation to others and in her relationship with her husband. She clings to her husband in a way that seems to him exaggerated, or nagging, and he pushes her away, and in time he stops loving her as she needs. When she looks into her husband's eyes, she no longer feels assured that he cherishes her.

To this day this remains the situation of humanity both within and apart from marriage. When the man or the woman remain obsessed with their wants and fears, they become incapable of truly loving the other and treat each other as objects to be possessed, forces to be controlled, resources to be managed, but not as precious persons to be loved and cared for. No marriage can survive such conditions for very long, when one or both no longer really listen to the other, no longer give their undivided loving attention to the other.

The most precious and valuable thing we have is our life, our attention, our genuine interest. As we give our undivided attention and wholehearted interest to others, as we invest ourselves in the other, as we

encourage the other and value the other despite their shortcomings and faults; we allow God's power to flow through us and give life to the other. When we keep our attention to ourselves or invest it in things, the flow of God's power, life, and love stops, and we begin to dry up. We no longer give life to the other, and we end up sucking life out of the other, using the other, trying to extract from the other the vitality that we can only truly find in God. In effect we expect other human beings to be god, but it is impossible for them to be god, because like us they are only human. Only God can be god for us.

It is a fact that many people leave their spouses and get out of their marriages primarily for self preservation once they feel that the marriage has become lifeless and a drain. God doesn't approve of marriage breakups, of spouses turning away from one another, of giving up on the other, and of living only for themselves. At such times God can only weep for us and with us. Jesus showed us God's way by allowing his life to be drained out of him to the last drop as He hung on the cross. He accepted to suffer the full consequences of all of our sins in order to reverse the tragic fall of humanity and show us the way back to life, back to God the Father, back to paradise.

Some troubled spouses remain in their dried up marriage and accept to suffer being drained by the other because they count on God to replenish their life every moment of every day. They pray for their troubled spouse and hope they will accept to also turn to God for life and let Him renew them and restore their ability to stop thinking only of themselves and begin again to love the others, their spouse and their children if they have any.

Reader, if your spouse has left you or there are signs that this is about to happen or may happen, I have no idea whether this tragedy can be reversed or stopped. What is at stake is your free will and the free will of your spouse. Unlike taxes, love cannot be extracted by legislation or by force. Love can only be freely given. You can pray for this, but even God cannot force your spouse to do something if your spouse doesn't really want to do it. No one can force another person to act against their will, except through violence or by imposing one's will on the other by force, physical or psychological constraint. This can never be love but only exploitation. It would be dangerous to yourself for you to insist on something against your spouse's free will.

At all times but especially under trial it is very good and life giving for us to turn to God and ask Him for forgiveness, love, and life. I am glad every time that someone is able to accept grace and comfort from God, especially when under such difficult situations in their marriage.

However, as long as God is not real to us we spend our lives relying only on ourselves. We don't let God help us. We refuse his guidance and light. We live in darkness. Marriage is real when the man and the woman make themselves a gift for the other. Their life is a treasure that they freely choose to offer each day to the other out of love. This requires taking attention away from my own wants and giving my attention to the other, caring for the other. This has become so difficult because we no longer live in a Christian society. Society has become pretty much pagan because people live pretty much only for themselves, and by themselves, without God. When we are surrounded by selfishness, it is even harder to be selfless and loving.

Every human being struggles with this because of the original sin. At the beginning, the man and woman turned away from God. They stopped trusting God to give them all they needed. They began a new thing, trusting in a stranger instead of God, the tempter instead of the Creator. The tempter suggested they

shouldn't trust God to give them all the good things they needed and wanted. He tempted them to think that they should stop relying on God and just grab for themselves whatever they wanted. He told them that they didn't need God to tell them what is right or wrong, that they could just decide for themselves and by themselves and be like gods.

That is how the first man and woman began deciding for themselves what is right and what is wrong. The creation had been a beautiful work of order and harmony, peace and love, goodness and beauty. They disrupted that harmony by pushing God away. They lost God's love and trust because they stopped trusting and loving God. They lost each other's closeness because they refused to accept responsibility for what they had decided and instead they blamed someone else for what they had done wrong. They became separate from nature because they stopped caring for it and began thinking only about themselves. This continues to be the situation of humanity, of the world, of planet Earth. This is why in our day humanity is endlessly at war, destroying the environment, and killing off so many creatures. This is why we cannot save ourselves, why we need a Savior, why we need God.

We need God every moment of every day for everything. We need the light God is offering so our mind can begin to see things clearly and understand what is really going on in us and around us. We need God's presence dwelling within us to see where we are going and what God is doing.

We need the love God is offering so we can stop trying to squeeze love from other human beings. If we let God love us and learn to love Him, then we will let Him fill us with his love to overflowing and in this way we will know happiness, but no human being can "make us happy" and we ourselves can "make happy" no one. God designed human beings with a huge space inside us to welcome the presence and love of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We cannot understand that because we cannot understand God, who is a divine being, completely different from us and from all that exists in the visible universe. God is a single divine being, but in God there are three divine Persons who live in perfect communion, harmony, love, and peace. God's simple desire that we exist is what is keeping the universe and us in existence. God is bursting with the dynamic energy of divine love, and it is from God's abundant life and energy that the universe was born and continues to exist. God created us in his own image and so we are most human when we accept to live in love and community, letting God's love fill us and move us to love Him back whom we cannot see by loving others whom we can see here on Earth and by accepting to be loved.

As we allow God to bring our will into harmony with his, we allow God to dwell in us and we begin to dwell in God. We live as children of God when we use our freedom to put our trust in God and let Him guide us along the path of our daily life. To become fully alive we need to continue to put God's will first, ahead of our own will, God's great will ahead of our small limited will. This feels impossible because we cannot follow God by our own efforts.

We need the presence, the power, the light and guidance, the love and peace that the Holy Spirit brings. We need to confess our sins to God through Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation... this is a powerful way to practice surrendering our will to God. We need to do this as often as we notice that we have significantly turned away from the Lord.

Then as we participate in the Holy Mass each Sunday and even during the week, at each Mass we offer God our self, our life, all that we want and fear, all our responsibilities, all our weaknesses, and all our

desires along with the bread and wine, and we let Jesus unite our offering of self with his, our spirit with his. Then, at Holy Communion the heavenly Father gives us his answer to our offering, our sacrifice. His answer is his gift to us forever the same, Jesus his Son, so that Jesus may slowly transform us and, with our daily consent, enable us to resemble Him more and more, and enable us to live our life as He did while He was on Earth. Jesus alone can enable us to live fully here and, when it is God's time, in Heaven.

There is nothing more delightful on Earth perhaps than people who trust in God together and share their lives together: husband and wife, parents and children, relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, cities, nations.... That is the kingdom of God: people who come to know that God is real, who experience God's love for them and accept that love including his forgiveness and mercy, and who begin and continue to know God's will and try to do it with his help, who discover God's ways and ever ask his help to walk in them.

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This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2015/03/catholic-survival-guide-in-troubled.html>  
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# Sign the Pledge in Solidarity to Defend Marriage [at BIG C CATHOLICS]

We stand together in defense of marriage and the family and society founded upon them. While we come from a variety of communities and hold differing faith perspectives, we are united in our common affirmation of marriage.

On the matter of marriage, we stand in solidarity. We affirm that marriage and family have been inscribed by the Divine Architect into the order of Creation. Marriage is ontologically between one man and one woman, ordered toward the union of the spouses, open to children and formative of family. Family is the first vital cell of society, the first government, and the first mediating institution of our social order. The future of a free and healthy society passes through marriage and the family.

Marriage as existing solely between one man and one woman precedes civil government. Though affirmed, fulfilled, and elevated by faith, the truth that marriage can exist only between one man and one woman is not based on religion or revelation alone, but on the Natural Law, written on the human heart and discernible through the exercise of reason. It is part of the natural created order. The Natural Law is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., referred to as a higher law or a just law in his famous

*Letter from Birmingham Jail*

Marriage is the preeminent and the most fundamental of all human social institutions. Civil institutions do not create marriage nor can they manufacture a right to marry for those who are incapable of marriage. Society begins with marriage and the family.

We pledge to stand together to defend marriage for what it is, a bond between one man and one woman, intended for life, and open to the gift of children.

The institutions of civil government should defend marriage and not seek to undermine it. Government has long regulated marriage for the true common good. Examples, such as the age of consent, demonstrate such a proper regulation to ensure the free and voluntary basis of the marriage bond. Redefining the very institution of marriage is improper and outside the authority of the State. No civil institution, including the United States Supreme Court or any court, has authority to redefine marriage.

As citizens united together, we will not stand by while the destruction of the institution of marriage unfolds in this nation we love. The effort to redefine marriage threatens the essential foundation of the family.

Experience and history have shown us that if the government redefines marriage to grant a legal equivalency to same-sex couples, that same government will then enforce such an action with the police power of the State. This will bring about an inevitable collision with religious freedom and conscience rights. The precedent established will leave no room for any limitation on what can constitute such a redefined notion of marriage or human sexuality. We cannot and will not allow this to occur on our watch. Religious freedom is the first freedom in the American experiment for good reason.

Conferring a moral and legal equivalency to any relationship other than marriage between a man and a woman, by legislative or judicial fiat, sends the message that children do not need a mother and a father. As a policy matter, such unions convey the message that moms and dads are completely irrelevant to the well-being of children. Such a policy statement is unconscionable and destructive. Authorizing the legal equivalency of marriage to same-sex couples undermines the fundamental rights of children and threatens their security, stability, and future.

Neither the United States Supreme Court nor any court has authority to redefine marriage and thereby weaken both the family and society. Unlike the Legislative Branch that has the power of the purse and the Executive Branch which has the figurative power of the sword, the Judicial Branch has neither. It must depend upon the Executive Branch for the enforcement of its decisions.

As the Supreme Court acknowledged in the 1992 decision of

*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*

, its power rests solely upon the legitimacy of its decisions in the eyes of the people. If the decisions of the Court are not based on the Constitution and reason, and especially if they are contrary to the natural created order, then the people will lose confidence in the Court as an objective arbiter of the law. If the people lose respect for the Court, the Court's authority will be diminished.

The Supreme Court was wrong when it denied Dred Scott his rights and said, "blacks are inferior human beings." And the Court was wrong when Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in

*Buck v. Bell*

, “three generations of imbeciles are enough,” thus upholding Virginia’s eugenics law that permitted forced sterilization. Shamefully, that decision was cited during the Nuremburg trials to support the Nazi eugenic holocaust.

In these earlier cases, the definition of “human” was at issue. Now the definition of “marriage” is at issue. The Constitution does not grant a right to redefine marriage — which is nonsensical since marriage intrinsically involves a man and a woman. Nor does the Constitution prohibit states from affirming the natural created order of male and female joined together in marriage.

We will view any decision by the Supreme Court or any court the same way history views the

*Dred Scott*

and

*Buck v. Bell*

decisions. Our highest respect for the rule of law requires that we not respect an unjust law that directly conflicts with higher law. A decision purporting to redefine marriage flies in the face of the Constitution and is contrary to the natural created order. As people of faith we pledge obedience to our Creator when the State directly conflicts with higher law. We respectfully warn the Supreme Court not to cross this line.

We stand united together in defense of marriage. Make no mistake about our resolve. While there are many things we can endure, redefining marriage is so fundamental to the natural order and the common good that this is the line we must draw and one we cannot and will not cross.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2015/04/sign-pledge-in-solidarity-to-defend.html>  
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# They Call Me Superstitious [at Serviam Ministries]

Written By: Gregory Watson

‘You ought to stand for all the things these stupid people call superstitions. Come now, don’t you think there’s a lot in those old wives’ tales about luck and charms and so on, silver bullets included? What do you say about them as a Catholic?’

‘I say I’m an agnostic,’ replied Father Brown, smiling.

‘Nonsense,’ said Aylmer impatiently. ‘It’s your business to believe things.’

‘Well, I do believe some things, of course,’ conceded Father Brown; ‘and therefore, of course, I don’t believe other things.’ (*The Dagger with Wings*, G. K. Chesterton)

I used to work with a fellow who with absolute seriousness would not put a hat down on top of a table—and if someone else put his hat on top of a table, he would never wear that hat again. He really and truly believed that wearing a hat that had been set on a table would bring bad luck. I would drive him nuts, when I found out about this superstition of his, by purposely setting my hat on our work table and then promptly returning it to my head.

Midway through the first round of Stanley Cup playoffs, more and more fans are refusing to shave in solidarity with hockey players growing “playoff beards” not to be shaved until their team is either eliminated or emerges victorious. Even today in this age of hyper-secular rational materialism, one rarely finds an apartment building with a “13<sup>th</sup>” floor, though the more pretentious “badasses” might claim that Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> is their “lucky” day rather than being unlucky.

I am routinely asked whether I believe in this or that—be it ghosts or aliens or magic or whatnot, because since I believe in God, I must therefore be a gullible and credulous person. And yet, precisely *because* I am a religious person, I am not a superstitious one—or, as Fr. Brown states, “Well, I do believe some things, of course, and therefore, of course, I don’t believe other things.”

The atheist, in his rush to assert his own intellectual and rational superiority, equates religion and superstition, and dismisses both as irrational nonsense. The Catholic, on the other hand, acknowledges that superstition arises from the same psychological impulse from which comes religious sentiment, but that the former is a perversion of the latter in much the same way that masturbation is a perversion of sexuality. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines superstition thus:

Superstition is the deviation of religious feeling and of the practices this feeling imposes. It can even affect the worship we offer the true God, e.g., when one attributes an importance in some way magical to certain practices otherwise lawful or necessary. To attribute the efficacy of prayers or of sacramental signs to their mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions that they demand, is to fall into superstition (#2111).

Dictionary sources specify that these superstitious beliefs and practices are irrational, and are believed independently of (and often in the face of) contradictory evidence about the way the world works. The

atheist asserts that belief in religion is just as irrational as any faith in a rabbit's foot or fear of a black cat, but as I've written argued in the past on this blog ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), belief in God is eminently reasonable. However, the irony of the atheist and agnostic position goes beyond simply calling religious people superstitious, but actually reverses the correlation—and I would absolutely love it if sociologists would conduct a thorough study of this question (or else, that someone would point out such a study to me, if it has been done: Google was less than forthcoming). Instead, I shall rely on the admittedly anecdotal evidence of G.K. Chesterton (which perfectly coincides with my own experiences):

Superstition recurs in all ages, and especially in rationalistic ages. I remember defending the religious tradition against a whole luncheon table of distinguished agnostics; and before the end of our conversation every one of them had procured from his pocket or exhibited on his watch chain some charm or talisman from which he admitted that he was never separated. I was the only person present who had neglected to provide himself with a fetish (*The Everlasting Man*).

Unlike the superstitious person who makes rituals out of coincidences to protect himself from a seemingly meaningless world, as an attempt to foist some meaning on it, because deep down in his soul, he knows there must be meaning, we as Catholics, through the sound use of our rational intellect, aided by faith, know that there actually is a meaning and an order to the universe, and a God who, despite the seeming darkness and chaos of our lives, remains firmly in control. Rather than merely trusting in His Providence on blind faith, we know that it's the only logical conclusion.

## Comments

comments

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## We can choose... [at Brutally Honest]

Circumstantial evidence leads me to believe that in certain circles, some of them very close, I am considered to be a black sheep... a black goat even. I'd like to think I'm wrong about it, simply misunderstanding the circumstances but... I'm also trying not to be a fool about the obvious.

What I'm attempting to train myself to do for now is withdraw from circumstances where that evidence seems overwhelming. Why? Because in my humanity, in the person that I am absent Christ's presence, I'm likely to act in ways that are counterproductive.

I'm handling things better now than before admittedly but there's always room for improvement.

Where do I go to grow? Where might I pick up that which helps me see things for what they are and helps me deal with them in a manner I hope is productive?

I've come to believe that where Christ is, so should I be if I want to be more like him so I go where I sense a strong presence of the Lord. Mass certainly helps, particularly and specifically the Eucharist, where I've come to firmly believe Christ is but I also go to the Godly. I go to those whose words are like balm, in whose words I sense the presence of God.

I go to people like [Fr. Justin Udomah](#) who yesterday wrote a most timely piece:

*We can choose to live from within or from without. We can choose to be real or fake. We can choose to be sincere with ourselves or pretend to be who we are not. And we can choose to live freely or tie ourselves down with unnecessary concerns. When we live from within, we are not preoccupied with what people will think or say about us. Rather we are primarily concerned with being ourselves - real, sincere, and true. This is authentic living. When we live from without, we are more concerned with the impressions people will have about us and how that could affect our self image. This is a façade-driven life. The truth is that people who care too much about what people will say end up living empty lives. But those whose actions are motivated from within live truly happy and fulfilled lives.*

I have chosen to be real. Real can be raw to some, a rawness that engenders an awkwardness, an unsettling, a discomfort in those focused on what their perception of real is and how they expect all to meet those expectations.

More times than not, I don't meet those expectations. Likely never will. Likely never will because I'm sincerely trying to consistently choose the real over the fake, and this means avoiding the appearance or pretension of being someone I'm not.

That's a difficult thing to embrace in a culture that would rather we embrace the shallow, would rather we embrace the pretend, would rather we embrace the facade-driven life.

There have been times when I think, wouldn't it be simpler, wouldn't it be easier, wouldn't I get along better with everyone else if I weren't who I am today, if I was someone who focused less on the transcendent and much more on the here and now?

And the answer comes back... no... it wouldn't be because the Hound of Heaven would be hounding me all the more.

I am, paradoxically, content with who I am yet restless in knowing that there's more of who God wants me to be.

I am choosing to live from within and not from without.

Dear Lord, continue to help me in that choosing and thank you for putting people like Fr. Justin before me when I so need them.

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This contribution is available at [http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally\\_honest/2015/04/we-can-choose.html](http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2015/04/we-can-choose.html)  
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# Heartbroken for our Baltimore [at Catholic Review]

Ask me why I love Baltimore.

It's not a flashy city.

We have a few jewels, and we are so very, very proud to show them off to visitors.



We may not know all the details of our city's great history and the legends who grew up here—or lived here once for a few years—but we are more than happy to tell you what we can remember.

Of course, we have fantastic food and we love our Old Bay—on everything, really.

And then we have our challenges. What city doesn't? We also have people who care deeply about our city and believe passionately in strengthening it for the future.



It's those people, those people who are investing in the city by living there, working there, playing there, who make it such an amazing place.

Last night we watched as a family as the latest news unfolded on TV.

Maybe we should shield our children from the images, I thought at first. Maybe we shouldn't try to explain what is happening in a way they will understand. I even turned the TV off for a while. And it was so painful for me to watch myself. But I turned it back on.

After all, this is real, and it's happening in our city—in our children's city.

They weren't born in Baltimore, but their Baltimore accents shine through. Their love for their city is solid. They beg to picnic at Fort McHenry. They root for the Orioles and the Ravens. They assume everyone puts Old Bay on scrambled eggs.



And we had already talked about what was happening—and some of why.

So we watched together, and we discussed what we were seeing and hearing.

“Mama,” our older son said at one point. “That man is talking about Martin Luther King!”

So we stopped to talk about Dr. King. We grasped for the light in the darkness and held onto it.

As we watched the clergy marching, I realized what I had been looking for.

Hope.

Strength.

Belief that tomorrow can be better.

All of that—and more—came through as we watched that group walking together along a Baltimore

street. It was so moving.

This is not Charm City's finest hour. We can't flip a switch and bring peace and justice to Baltimore. But we can each do our part to bring light to the darkness, to work toward peace, and to believe that we can have a role in building a better tomorrow for this city we love—for the world beyond this city.

The beauty is that we can start right now, in this very moment, with prayer. Please join me in praying for Baltimore, for all those who live there, and especially for those who are offering hope for the future.

We love you, Baltimore.

*4/28/2015 12:41:15 AM*

By

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This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2015/04/28/heartbroken-for-our-baltimore>  
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## Look Him in the Eye [at Ignitum Today]

How often do you walk by someone who is homeless or in need, asking for change on the street? This is often more common in larger cities, but even where I live in a college town, there are many homeless men and women asking for aid on street corners.

I've even encountered homeless individuals in my hometown, an upper middle class area.

I remember coming out of my home parish with my family and seeing a mother with her young son standing in the church parking lot with a sign asking for help. The usual post-Mass chatter was hushed as the crowd passed her by, uncomfortable by their presence.

So, you may or may not see the homeless where you live. If you do, do you see the same people often?

Maybe you occasionally give them a buck or two...but when you don't, do you avoid eye contact? Do you avoid them all together?

I know what it's like for me. I have an inner desire to help others, but a societal attitude that's been ingrained in me since childhood. Where does my responsibility to help begin and end? I feel guilty when I don't or can't help; is this warranted? Am I encouraging panhandling rather than work for a paycheck?

The above are just a few of the thoughts that have run through my head, many of which make me ashamed.

After all, I call myself a Christian. I follow and believe in a God who walked on the Earth simply to love those who society rejected and shamed. How can I sit comfortably in my spacious apartment, with nary a need unmet, and ignore those who are placed in my path on a regular basis?

But how can I help? What do I have to give?

Perhaps you've thought this as well. I won't claim to have all of the answers, but I do know one thing: every human being needs and desires to be acknowledged and loved.

So maybe you can't give a dollar to every homeless person you encounter, but maybe there's something you have to give that means more than your pocket change.

Maybe try looking them in the eye and saying hello. How often are our brothers and sisters, struggling to survive on the streets, met with something other than a cold shoulder and downcast look? Imagine what it's like to have someone you don't know just smile at you and say "hi". No matter who you are, or the struggles you're facing, this shared humanity speaks volumes.

So I encourage you, look him in the eye. Acknowledge his existence. Say hello. Ask him how he's doing today. If you have change to spare, do with it what you will. But at the very least, treat him like the child of God that he or she is.

Attempt to see He who died for your transgressions in every person you encounter, especially those who are rarely treated with any amount of genuine kindness.

Don't do it because you're a Christian, or because our Pope regularly preaches social justice.

Do it because they're human and Jesus died for them, too. Love them as He has loved you.

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## The Cross and The Crucifix [at We, A Great Parade]

On Holy Thursday I stared yet again into the black night of all that feels too heavy to carry, raging against this God who somehow expects my back to be strong enough to bear the load.

*I want to put it down. I want to make it stop. I cannot do this.*

On Good Friday, I read His words.

*"The cup that my Father has prepared for me, shall I not drink it?"*

And it cut me to the core, because of course I will. He prepared it for me.

(Sometimes He doesn't, I know that. Sometimes bad things happen because of the sin of human beings, sometimes they *just happen*. I know God didn't "prepare" my oldest son's sufferings; they were the result of a fallen, broken, hurting world. But I do know He prepared mine. I know it because of how the weight of it has gloriously ruined me in all the right ways.)

I used to have a problem with crucifixes. "He's not on the cross anymore! He rose, He's alive! Don't leave Him on the cross!", I said.

There would be no Resurrection without the Crucifixion. But the Crucifixion is ugly, it's embarrassing, it's well... sad. And we like our religion to feel good.

But that was years and tears ago and I don't even have the luxury of choice anymore. I *need* to see my Savior on the cross these days as I stumble and fall under the weight of my own. I *need* to see the extravagant love of God made visible, offered up for me and for all those hungry for Bread. I am reminded of the horror that allowed the Resurrection to be possible. The one that allows you and me to hope in the midst of our own great pain.

Empty crosses are fine, but they simply can't move me the way the limp, beaten body of my Savior does. They don't fill me with worship and gratitude and humility and love. In our society, they are incredibly easy to overlook- sometimes bedazzled onto jeans, sometimes encrusted in diamonds around our necks. It's pretty hard to conjure up any real response to seeing an empty cross. (An empty tomb, yes.) But nail

Jesus to it and things either get breathtakingly beautiful or they get awkward. Really fast. Which, incidentally, seems to be exactly the same reactions that walking-on-earth Jesus elicited, too.

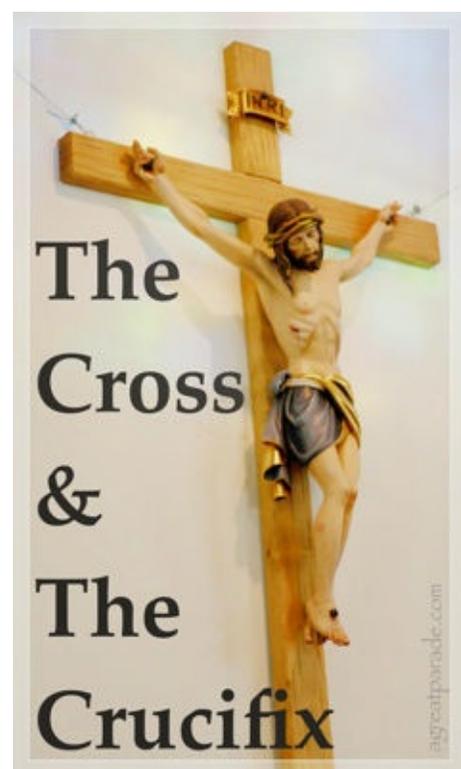
We don't like to suffer, you and I. We spend most of our lives trying to avoid it, actually. But what if we believed what Jesus' silent corpse tells us from the cross? What if we believed that suffering is *necessary* for our good? What if we trusted the Father enough to drink the cup He's prepared for us?

I have a dream for the universal church and it looks something like this: instead of seeking to feel good (whether that means wealth and prosperity or miracles and healing), we would seek to emulate Jesus' life of being with the poor and outcast, walking towards suffering (both theirs and our own) willingly, believing it will transform us when we meet God there. Not that some of us won't be wealthy- some will- and not that miracles and healing won't happen- they will. But what if Christians spent more time being changed by what is hard and less time chasing after what is glittery?

I believe it's possible.

I believe it will be the most lovely thing the world has ever seen.

I believe it starts with the crucifix.



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This contribution is available at <http://www.agreatparade.com/2015/04/the-cross-and-crucifix.html>  
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## Eastertide and Our Holy Week [at A Slice of Smith Life]

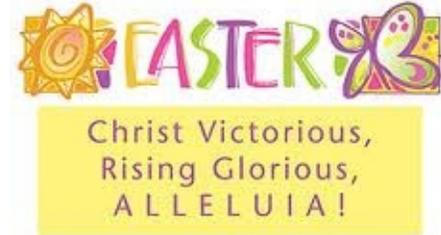
It's been a little while since my last post when I blogged about our

[Holy Week 2015 plans](#)

and then last week I quickly popped into my corner of blog land to tell about my

[chocolate green smoothie guest post](#)

.



It was a busy week last week and I posted pictures of our Holy Week on

[my blog Facebook page](#)

, but I thought I'd share a little about our Holy Week here. Also, it's still Easter so "Happy Easter!" as I share a little about our 2015 Easter fun too.

### **Holy Week 2015 - Monday/Tuesday**

We started and completed our

["Holy Week in Handprints" book](#)

from

[Catholic Icing](#)

that my 10 and 7 year old daughters enjoyed making. My older 2 didn't get into it and my 20 mo. hates having paint on her hands. It was a beautiful day last Monday, so the project was started outside in our backyard.



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Holy Week 2015 - Spy Wednesday

I hid 30 pieces of "silver" for the kids to find

• [We started this fun tradition last year](#)



**Holy Week 2015 - Holy Thursday** [Like last year](#)

, we visited the "Via Crucis" (Way of the Cross) with a few families.

A couple who attends our church has a beautiful garden in their side yard where you can pray the Stations of the Cross as you walk around the long path filled with the stations of the cross, statues, benches, plaques, crucifixes and there's even an empty tomb with a stone rolled away at the end of the path. Just beautiful! Via Crucis is opened year round and the owners say all are welcome anytime, but I like making it a Holy Week tradition.

In the evening, our family went to Holy Thursday Mass and it was a special way to end a beautiful day!





After visiting "Via Cruces", we came home and made some birds' nests to share for Easter lunch and dinner. Very easy and fun to make and yummy too!



**Holy Week 2015 - Good Friday**



After the Good Friday service at my parent's church, we saw the live reenactment of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection again which is something my kids remember from when we first went several years ago. It is put on by the Hispanic youth and adult community at the parish and although we don't understand the Spanish, you certainly know what is going on. It's a very powerful presentation as the audience followed the presentation to the various stations and locations around the church grounds. There were "guards" taunting Jesus as they kept the crowd away from where Jesus was walking.



Here's a short video clip of when Jesus died on the cross with music playing in the background.

**Holy Week 2015 - Holy Saturday**

On Holy Saturday, 2 of my girls painted

[our salt dough crown of thorns](#)

with glitter gold paint and decorated it with jewels since Sunday would be the day we celebrate our resurrected King of Kings! We then use the golden crown as a decoration for Easter Sunday.



On Saturday evening we made our traditional Resurrection Rolls and Resurrection Cookies. Some of our kids like the Resurrection Rolls the best. For the rolls, the marshmallow represents Jesus' body and then you dip the marshmallow into melted butter, cinnamon and sugar (oil and spices to prepare body for burial) and then wrap crescent roll (linen cloth for burial) around the marshmallow. While baking, the marshmallow melts and it looks like an empty tomb inside the bread!



The first step to making the resurrection cookies is to chop up pecans in a bag by having the kids pound the pecans with spoons to represent when Jesus was beaten. My kids really enjoy this part of the recipe which seems strange to say since it's representing something so sad. As we continue to make the cookies, scripture is read to tell what each ingredient symbolizes in the Easter story.

When the ingredients are finally mixed, they are put into the pre-heated oven and the oven is turned off for the night. The tomb is sealed by placing tape on the oven. In the morning the cookies are rocky and hollow-like to represent an empty tomb.



**Easter Sunday - Happy Easter!**

In the morning, our kids woke up to this on the kitchen table. We always hide their baskets in the house and they get to see what is in their baskets after church. On the table is displayed

[the sacrifice beans from Lent](#)

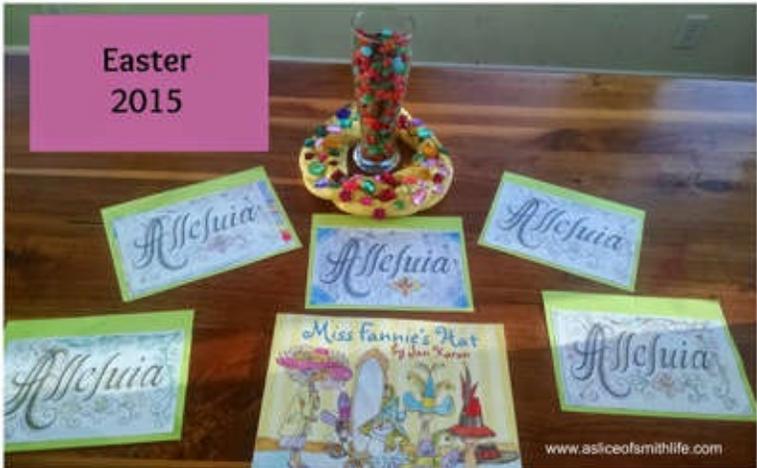
that turn into jelly beans,

[the "Alleluias" come out from hiding](#)

and this year our kids got this sweet story called

[Miss Fannie's Hat](#)

. It is a wonderful Easter book that we happened to borrow from our library so I had to buy it. I hope to write a post about it soon since it's that good!



This year our oldest daughter sang in the girl's choir on Easter Sunday and she sang with 2 other girls during the Communion song. They all sounded beautiful and they could be heard too!

We had to get to Mass an hour early to not only get my daughter to her choir practice before Mass, but also the Church fills up quickly. While I was waiting for Mass to begin I noticed from the back of the church that the tabernacle was glowing brightly with gold light just under the huge crucifix at the altar. Then as you walked a few steps the tabernacle shone a Marian blue. Thanks to the morning sun and the stain-glass windows, we were able to see this beautiful site, though I like to think that it was a way for us to remember Christ's true presence in the Blessed Sacrament.



Here's our family after the Easter Mass.



After Mass we came home and my parents came over for lunch and we used the gold crown that was painted as the centerpiece. Our little one loved pulling the jewels off the crown :)



At lunch my kids showed my parents their "Holy Week in Handprints" book that I put in a binder with page protectors to keep for years to come.



Pictures and an egg hunt outside. My Mom got in the photos, but my Dad was inside icing down a sore knee.



Then it was off to my in-laws house for more food, family and Easter fun. My kids and their cousins decorated this Easter bunny cake.



May you have a blessed Easter season! If you are looking for ideas to celebrate the 50 days in the Easter season be sure to visit Nicole's post at

[Children of the Church](#)

where she blogs about

[50 Ways to Celebrate the 50 Days of Easter With Your Children](#)

This post is linked up at

[New Evangelists Monthly](#)



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This contribution is available at <http://www.asliceofsmithlife.com/2015/04/eastertide-and-our-holy-week-2015-recap.html>  
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## 10 Quotes from Pope Benedict XVI on Faith

Today in the Catholic Church we celebrate the exceptional faith of St. Thomas the Apostle, who after seeing the wounds of Jesus Christ for himself professed the great words – “My Lord and My God.” In the Eastern Churches, this Sunday is known as [Thomas Sunday](#). When writing about this event in today’s Gospel (John 20:19-31), St. Augustine of Hippo says Thomas “saw and touched the man, and acknowledged the God whom he neither saw nor touched; but by means of what he saw and touched, he now put far away from him every doubt, and believed the other.”

A year before the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a [“Moto Proprio Data” \(Apostolic Letter\), titled, \*Porta Fidei\*](#) (Door of Faith). In this letter, Pope Benedict XVI explained the importance of faith during the Year of Faith. At the parish where I work at here in Gilbert, St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church, it was this letter and the title of the letter that gave us the idea to name our Adult Faith Formation Program, [Porta Fidei](#).



Here are ten quotes from Pope Benedict XVI focusing on the importance of Faith –

1. “The “door of faith” (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It begins with baptism (cf. Rom 6:4), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. Jn 17:22).” (#1)
2. “We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (cf. Jn 6:51). Indeed, the teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power: “Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (Jn 6:27)...Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation.” (#3)
3. “The renewal of the Church is also achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us...the Church ... clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. The Church, ‘like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God’, announcing the cross and death

of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1 Cor 11:26).” (#6)

4. “In fact, there exists a profound unity between the act by which we believe and the content to which we give our assent. Saint Paul helps us to enter into this reality when he writes: “Man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (Rom 10:10). The heart indicates that the first act by which one comes to faith is God’s gift and the action of grace which acts and transforms the person deep within.” (#10)

5. “Profession of faith is an act both personal and communitarian. It is the Church that is the primary subject of faith. In the faith of the Christian community, each individual receives baptism, an effective sign of entry into the people of believers in order to obtain salvation.” (#10)

6. “...We must not forget that in our cultural context, very many people, while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are nevertheless sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world. This search is an authentic “preamble” to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God. Human reason, in fact, bears within itself a demand for “what is perennially valid and lasting”. (#10)

7. “During this time we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2): in him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfilment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness in the face of an offence received and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfilment in the mystery of his Incarnation, in his becoming man, in his sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of his resurrection.” (#13)

8. “By faith, the Apostles left everything to follow their Master (cf. Mk 10:28)...By faith, the disciples formed the first community... By faith, the martyrs gave their lives... By faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ... By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages, whose names are written in the Book of Life (cf. Rev 7:9, 13:8), have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus...By faith, we too live: by the living recognition of the Lord Jesus, present in our lives and in our history.” (#13)

9. “Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path...through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love.” (#14)

10. “Having reached the end of his life, Saint Paul asks his disciple Timothy to “aim at faith” (2 Tim 2:22) with the same constancy as when he was a boy (cf. 2 Tim 3:15). We hear this invitation directed to each of us, that none of us grow lazy in the faith. It is the lifelong companion that makes it possible to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us.” (#15)

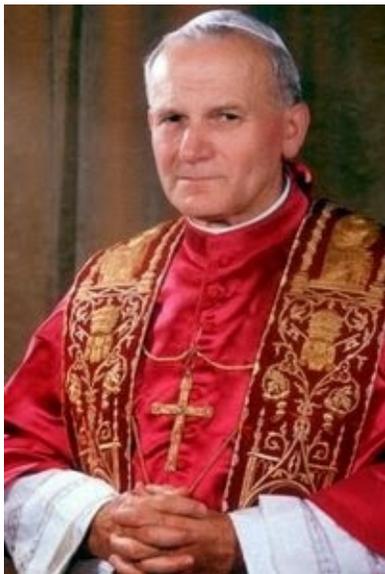
**One week ago last night, 21 individuals from our RCIA/Adult Confirmation program received the Sacraments of the Church. I dedicate this post to each of them in the hopes that their faith will continue to grow, burning like the fire that lit the Easter Candle. Go out and set the world ablaze with Word of God!**

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## Reflection for Holy Thursday [at Justin's Corner]



Today is Holy Thursday, the sacred day on which we commemorate Jesus' institution of the Holy Eucharist and the priesthood and give thanks to our loving God for the abundant graces he so generously showers upon us through these two sacraments of the Church. Today, April 2, also marks the tenth anniversary of the passing of Saint John Paul II. In the Gospel reading for tonight's Mass of the Lord's Supper, it says of Jesus, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). These words can be fittingly applied to John Paul II as well. He was such a Christ-like pope who generously gave of himself and spent himself for the good of the Church and the world. He was truly a loving father to all of us who loved us right to the very end--and now he is in Heaven praying and interceding for us.



In honor of this holy day and this great champion of our faith, I would like to offer for reflection a brief passage from one of his final written works, the book

*Rise, Let Us Be on our Way*

(Warner Books, 2004), which offers a beautiful and intensely personal teaching on the vocation, ministry, and responsibilities of a Catholic bishop. This wonderful book, written from the heart of a man of deep faith, courageous hope, and fatherly love, offers an unforgettable glimpse into the soul of John Paul II. Marked by the profound spiritual intensity, penetrating theological vision, and untiring pastoral solicitude for which he was so well known, it is a lost treasure that deserves to be rediscovered. The following passage is taken from pages 215--216:

"When 'His hour' had come, Jesus said to those who were with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, to Peter, James, and John, his closest disciples: '*Rise, let us be on our way*' (Mark 14:42). Not only must He 'be on his way' to fulfill His Father's will: they too must go with Him.

"That invitation, '*Rise, let us be on our way*,' is addressed particularly to us bishops, His chosen friends. Even if these words indicate a time of trial, great effort, and a painful cross, we must not allow ourselves to give way to fear. They are also words of peace and joy, the fruit of faith. On another occasion, to the same three disciples, Jesus said: 'Rise, and do not be afraid!' (Matt. 17:7). God's love does not impose burdens on us that we cannot carry, nor make demands of us that we cannot fulfill. For whatever He asks of us, He provides the help that is needed.

"I say this from the place to which the love of Christ Our Savior has led me, asking of me that I should leave my native land so as to bring forth fruit elsewhere through his grace--fruit that will last (John 15:16). Echoing the words of our Lord and Master, I, too, say to each one of you, dear brothers in the episcopate: '*Rise, let us be on our way!*' Let us go forth full of trust in Christ. He will accompany us as we journey toward the goal that He alone knows."

A blessed Triduum and Easter to everyone!

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This contribution is available at <http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2015/04/reflection-for-holy-thursday.html>  
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# Beaver Cleaver and the Common Good [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

I grew up in the 'good old days,' when many Americans enjoyed the seemingly-secure middle class lives of the

[Cleavers](#)

and

[Andersons](#)

.  
Some parents, mine included, remembered that there's more to life than wealth: so I never considered running away to a

[commune](#)

.  
But I understood why some folks my age, and a bit older, decided that buying stuff you don't need with money you don't have to impress people you don't like — made no sense at all.

I didn't have the horror that some older folks had for places like

[Drop City](#)

. It seemed to me that 'those crazy kids,' with their 'un-American' talk about peace, love, and brotherhood, had decided to take at least some of my Lord's values seriously.

That was a sharp contrast with venom-spewing radio preachers who hated commies, Catholicism, and rock music — which helped me learn to love rock 'n roll, eventually led me to

[become a Catholic](#)

, and that's another topic.

## The Universal Destination of Goods

Disaffected youth of the '60s weren't the the first to try communal living:

*"All who believed were together and had all things in common;*

*"they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each*



one's need."  
([Acts 2:44-45](#))

My faith doesn't demand that I forsake worldly goods and live apart. But there's a long tradition of monks and hermits who took that path. The vowed, folks in religious orders, are part of the hierarchy: one of three kinds of vocation. (

[December 11, 2011](#)



)  
Most of us are part of the lay faithful: folks who "...participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ..." (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[Glossary](#)

)  
For us, ownership of private property should be part of our life. (Catechism,

[2211](#)

)  
Private property is a good idea: it helps maintain our freedom and dignity, and gives a measure of security. But the right to private ownership isn't absolute.

That's because this world is God's gift to humanity. (

[Genesis 1:27](#)

-

[31](#)

)

It's for

***all***

of us: not just whoever has the biggest club, or owns the most corporate stock. "The universal destination of goods" is what we call the idea that God trusted humanity with stewardship of this world's resources: for our reasoned use. (Catechism,

[2401](#)

-

[2406](#)

)

Divvying up those resources gives each of us a particular job: managing what we have, to use for ourselves and others. That's where justice and charity come in — or should. Differences in abilities and wealth aren't the problem: misusing these differences is. (Catechism,

[1937](#)

-

[1938](#)

,

[2402](#)

-

[2406](#)

)

## Shoes and Carnegie Libraries

Sometimes folks with immense wealth don't do their job.

The shoe collection of

[Imelda Marcos](#)

may be an example of that. Or maybe not. Manufacturing and storing some 3,000 pairs of shoes provided employment for some folks: and helped stock two

[museums](#)

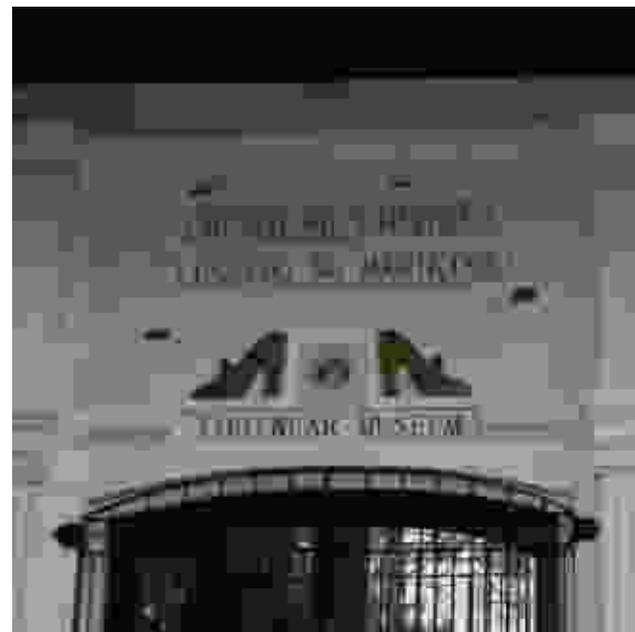
. Look me up after the Last Judgement, and we can see how that balances out.

The 2,509

[Carnegie libraries](#)

, on the other hand, are almost certainly a good use of wealth. One of them is on Main Street in my small town: yet more topics.

[Andrew Carnegie](#)



became a good sort of troublemaker, eventually giving away about 90% of his fortune and upsetting a few apple carts. Juggling them, anyway.

More recently, the

[Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#)

became the largest private foundation in the world. Bigger isn't necessarily better: but I don't see a problem with

[goals](#)

like saving lives and narrowing the gap between rich and poor.

## Humanity's Troubles

America wasn't the only place with troubles in the '60s - - -

*"...social unrest has gradually spread throughout the world. The acute restlessness engulfing the poorer classes in countries that are now being industrialized has spread to other regions where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. The farmer is painfully aware of his 'wretched lot.'* [\(9\)](#)

*"Then there are the flagrant inequalities not merely in the enjoyment of possessions, but even more in the exercise of power. In certain regions a privileged minority enjoys the refinements of life, while the rest of the inhabitants, impoverished and disunited, 'are deprived of almost all possibility of acting on their own initiative and responsibility, and often subsist in living and working conditions unworthy of the human person.'* [\(10\)](#)..."

("Populorum Progressio," Pope Paul VI (March 26, 1967))



- - - and humanity's troubles didn't start in the 20th century.

Leo XIII's "

[Rerum Novarum](#)

" of 1891,

[Saint Augustine of Hippo](#)

's "City of God," and

[Sirach 4:1](#)

addressed social and economic ills.

Today's world isn't perfect, either. Unreasonable, unjust, inequalities in wealth and power still exist.

That's wrong.

If I thought "

[Happy Days](#)

" America was the perfect society, I'd be trying to drag the world back to that era. Nostalgia is fine, but my memory's too good — the 'good old days' weren't. (

[August 29, 2014](#)

)

### Practical Justice and Charity

[Exodus 20:15](#)

and

[Deuteronomy 5:19](#)

say "You shall not steal."

The seventh commandment applies practical justice and charity to ownership. Letting someone who earned the 'fruits of labor' keep it is reasonable. (Catechism,

[2450](#)

-

[2453](#)

)

It's part of

[natural law](#)

that's reflected in the

[Code of Hammurabi](#)

,

[Minnesota Statutes](#)

, and every other legitimate legal system.



Sometimes we need to share, though.

Food, shelter, clothing are immediate, essential needs — during Minnesota winters, anyway. I couldn't fault someone for breaking into a shed to survive a blizzard, even if they "stole" fuel to run a portable heater. (Catechism,

[2408](#)

)

Taking essentials to stay alive, squaring accounts later — if possible — is okay.

On the other hand, I wouldn't be allowed to steal my neighbor's new television: even if laws allowed it. (Catechism,

[2409](#)

)

"Legal" and "right" should mean about the same thing, but sadly that's not always the case.

### **"Keep Warm, and Eat Well"**

Our job, part of it, is building a better world. (Catechism,

[1928](#)

-

[1942](#)

,

[2419](#)

-

[2442](#)

)

The basics are simple: love God, love my neighbors, see everyone as my neighbor, and treat others as I'd like to be treated. (

[Matthew 5:43](#)

-

[44](#)



,  
[7:12](#)

,  
[22:36](#)

-  
[40](#)

,  
[Mark 12:28](#)

-  
[31](#)

;  
[Luke 6:31](#) [10:25](#)

-  
[27](#)

,  
[29](#)

-  
[37](#)

; Catechism,

[1789](#)

)

Living as if that's true, and important: that's hard. So is changing a society's cherished traditions, when they don't conform to those basic principles.

[Matthew 25:34](#)

-  
[46](#)

make it clear that caring for the poor should be a very high priority. Defining poverty isn't necessarily easy, though.

Some folks in

[America](#)

are in genuine need. Others — well, my household has been at or near the 'poverty' threshold quite a few times, but we've never had to miss a meal.

We've always been "rich," by one standard. We've had a roof over our heads and more than enough food to last the day.

Not everyone has been so blessed.

I'm convinced that nobody should lack the essentials: food, clothing, shelter, medical care. What's essential and what's not depends on when, where, and how folks live. (Catechism,

[2208](#)

,

[2408](#)

,

[2524](#)

)

There is no one 'correct' culture. We're not all alike: and that's how it's supposed to be. There are, however, guidelines that apply to everyone, no matter where or when we live. (Catechism,

[1901](#)

,

[1915](#)

,

[1928](#)

-

[1948](#)

,

[1957](#)

)  
Then there's knowing what's right, and acting as if it matters.

*"<sup>6</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"*

*"If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day,*

*"and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?"*

*([James 2:15-16](#))*

And that's yet again another topic.

Some of my take on justice, charity, and all that:

- "[Climate Change, Science, and the Vatican](#)"  
(May 1, 2015)  
Particularly
- "[Holy Family, Not '50s Family](#)"  
(December 28, 2014)  
Particularly
- "[Morality isn't Just About 'Morality'](#) "  
(September 7, 2014)  
Particularly
- "[Getting a Grip About Politics and Principles](#)"  
(June 18, 2013)  
Particularly
- "[Life, Death, Theft, and Catholic Teaching: Who Said This Was Easy?](#)"  
(January 23, 2010)  
Particularly

Background:

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