

NewEvangelists.org

new
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New Evangelists Monthly #35

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Forward

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

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

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

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

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Top 7 Pope Francis Memes [at Campfires and Cleats]

As are many of you, we're big fans of Papa around here.....

Although it was a good five weeks ago today that we were blessed to attend His mass

My younger son and I happened upon a few fun memes recently

while doing some reading up on our Holy Father's life

before priesthood and papacy.....

I thought I'd stick them in a QT, because

well, why keep the the enjoyment for ourselves?

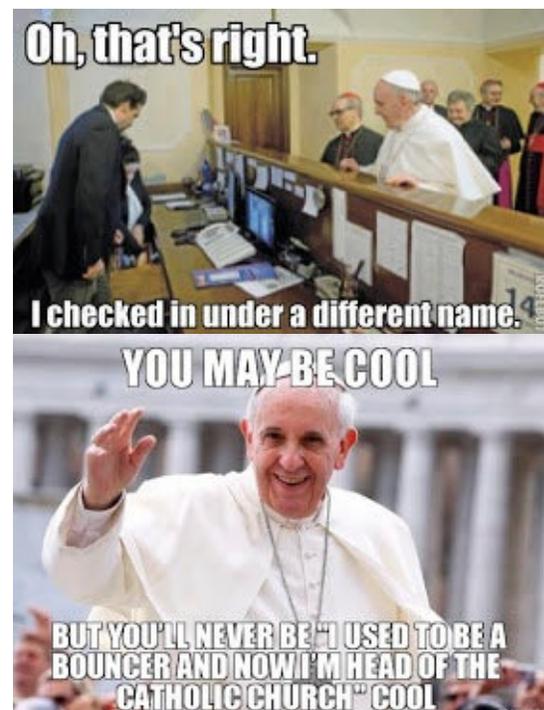
You may have seen some or all of these....

And, by the way, here's my (lengthy but newsy

in case you'd enjoy a peek at the festivities.

Anyway, enjoy friends!!!

I don't know quite which one is my fave!



BRACE YOURSELVES



**POPE FRANCIS IS ON
A PLANE WITH REPORTERS**



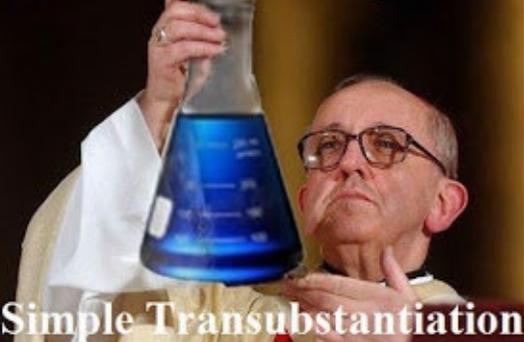
YOU LOVE JESUS TOO!?

**CHURCH ATTACKED FOR BEING OUT OF
TOUCH WITH THE POOR**

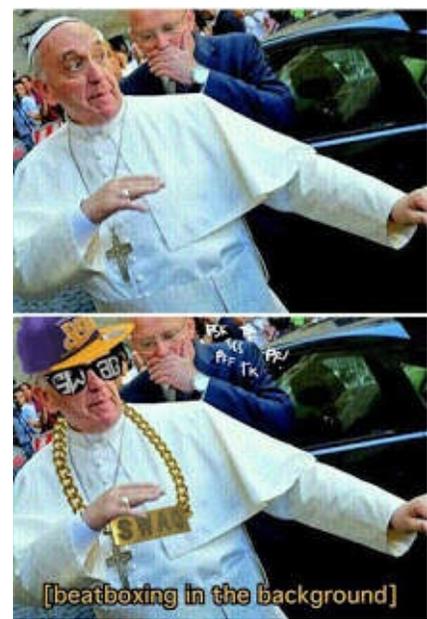


IT'S COOL GUYS, I GOT THIS

Wine + Bread $\xrightarrow{+}$ Body + Blood



Simple Transubstantiation



They are always wonderful!

Thank you for hosting, Kelly!!



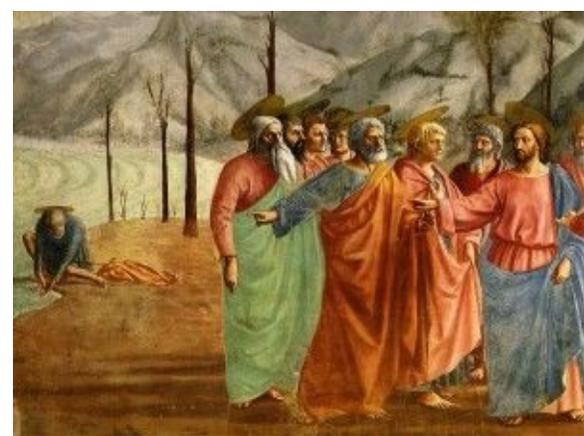
This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2015/10/top-7-pope-francis-memes-qt-103015.html>
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Halos - pagan or biblical? [at Catholicism and Adventism]

Some Christians dislike halos. That is often just another excuse to dislike the Catholic Church.

Where did halos really come from?



The Tribute Money, by Masaccio – Jesus and the Apostles with halos

Well, art. Art depicted all sorts of religious figures – saints, deities, those in-between – as having a halo. Why? Because all religions recognise that holiness is akin to light. And if someone is holy, they emit light – physical or metaphorical. So ... draw them emitting light. How? Use a halo – otherwise you have a white blob covering a subject that can't be seen.

Did halos exist in the pagan world?

Yes. Where did they get the idea from? Three possibilities – they made it up for the purposes of their religion; they used logic and determined that if holiness is like a spiritual light, light around a person's head can indicate holiness; they got the tradition from existing revelation from the true God.

Are halos biblical?

Yes.

Exod 34:29 (KJV) – And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.



Leonardo da Vinci, Benois Madonna

Matt 17:1-2 (KJV) – And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

So ... was Jesus mimicking paganism? Is the Bible adopting pagan beliefs in describing Moses and Jesus as having shining faces? Or is it the other way around – could the origin of light as a symbol of holiness have come from God, and the pagans adopted it from the true record of God's revelation?

My answer is that they a) may have invented it themselves due to the logic that light symbolises holiness, using a natural logic reflecting a creation by the true God, or b) they adopted it from the evidence of God's revelation to mankind.

Halos are an artistic way of depicting holiness, derived from biblical revelation. There is nothing to fear. Adventists in particular have a fear of anything to do with the sun, but the light is not with them.

What about the shape when it happens to be drawn as a circle? Is that not pagan?

No – it represents a crown. God is King, and kings wear crowns. Christians are victors, and will wear crowns.

Revelation 14:14 (KJV) – And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.



Four different planetary nebulae: NGC 6543, NGC 7662, NGC 7009, NGC 6826

Revelation 12:1 (KJV) – And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars

1 Peter 5:4 (KJV) – And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

A crown-shaped source of light? An artistic representation of our crowns and the light of grace.

God made nature to show us halos. God reveals himself with one. God tells us that we will have a crown. Do not fear the light.

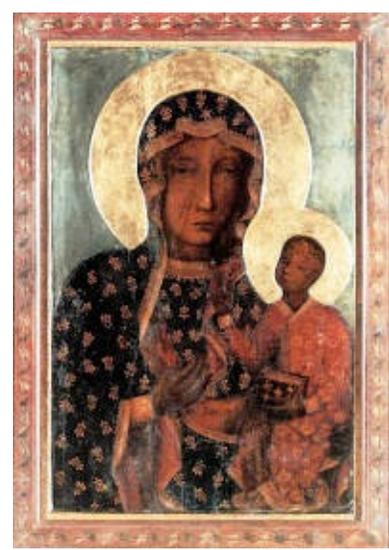
Further reading:

[Halo](#) by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman
[Art, Theology, and Prophecy](#)

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Unhealed Wounds ~ And the Virgin Mary of Czestochowa [at Pauca Verba]



The Virgin Mary, under the title of *Our Lady of Czestochowa*, is Poland's patroness and queen. She is also titled *The Black Madonna* as her features have been darkened by centuries of candle smoke. Some claim the icon was painted by the Evangelist Saint Luke. Art historians date it to somewhere between the 6th and 9th centuries.

Historical documents indicate the icon has traveled widely through Constantinople and then in and out of the hands of kings and castles. Eventually it found its way to the monastery at Jasna Gora where it is enthroned today.

It is said that when an enemy wants to attack the Catholic Church it does so by going after the Virgin Mary and the Eucharist. And so in 1430 there was a Hussite invasion of Jasna Gora, leaving the monastery plundered and the icon's face and neck slashed. Attempts by art restorers to repair the painting have failed - the gashes repeatedly re-appear.

Whether heaven has intervened in leaving the scars on Mary's face or simply that modern repair techniques won't adhere to centuries old paintings, doesn't matter: the message is the same - Mary is human - one of us - and we all bear wounds that sometimes just don't heal.

Some of that damage is suffered at a very early age, some later in life. And despite our prayers, hopes and perhaps even professional help, the scars remain. Time *does not heal all wounds*. Saint Paul writes in his Second Letter to the Corinthians 12:7-9

So tremendous, however, were the revelations that God gave me that, in order to prevent my

becoming absurdly conceited, I was given a stabbing pain - one of Satan's angels - to plague me and effectually stop any conceit. Three times I begged the Lord for it to leave me, but his reply has been, "My grace is enough for you: for where there is weakness, my power is shown the more completely." There, I have cheerfully made up my mind to be proud of my weakness, because they mean a deeper experience of the power of Christ.

Some scars can even remain quite painful. This leaves me to suffer them the best I can and perhaps to be compassion-ated by them. By this suffering I might become more understanding, more resilient, more connected to other sufferers, newly mindful of some gift of which I was previously unaware.

Suck it up and *Just get over it* are unkind and unhelpful responses to persons carrying even old wounds. We might wonder if we use phrases like this because we're unwilling or unable to be real companions to others in their sorrows. Or perhaps it's just laziness, or fear of one's own vulnerability.

Mother Mary of Czestochowa carries wounds. Sometimes the unhealed wound is national or eccesial: the national wound of what was done to Native Americans in this country. The wound to the Church in the recent sex abuse scandal and the institutional, self-protective stance of some bishops once the story broke. Or the wound is deeply felt in a very personal way:

the wound of family dysfunction of carrying addiction of child abuse of some grave loss or disappointment

the scar of divorce of failed parents or teachers of an experience of personal violence of a loved-ones sudden death

the pain of inner disturbance of war of betrayal and infidelity of rejection or abandonment

the injury of being marginalized of marital abuse of lies and deception of being taken advantage of

The scar of repeated failure of ridicule and bullying of physical disability of chronic pain

We can bring these things to mind and hold them in silence before the Czestochowa Mother of God who bears her own scars. It isn't necessary to speak - just exchange gazes.

This contribution is available at <http://www.paucaverba.blogspot.com/2015/10/unhealed-wounds-and-virgin-mary-of.html>
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Funny, Smart, Holy: Teresa of Avila [at joy of nine9]



water colour by Emanuel Franco Gómez, OCarm. (Manu)

Today, Oct. 15, is the Feast of St. Teresa of Ávila, also called Saint Teresa of Jesus. I love this woman. Although she is a doctor of the Church and one of the three great 16th century Spanish mystics (along with St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. John of the Cross), she is humourous as well as wise.

+

St. Teresa of Avila is the real deal; holy, down to earth, humble and best of all extremely articulate. Her phrases are succinct, to the point yet those few words point to a deep, Divine wisdom.

+

Since I cannot top St. Teresa, I will simply let her speak for herself.

+

*It is not so essential
to think much
as to love much.*

St Teresa of Jesus

"If this is the way You treat Your friends,



no wonder You have so few!"

St. Teresa of Avila

Famous HUMOUROUS Quotes

- The first line of her autobiography is funny.

"Having virtuous and God-fearing parents would have been enough for me to be good if I were not so wicked."

- After a donkey threw her into a cold river she said-

"If this is how You treat Your friends, then it is no wonder You have so few of them."

You've gotta love that level of practicality and annoyance in a mystic.

For prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.

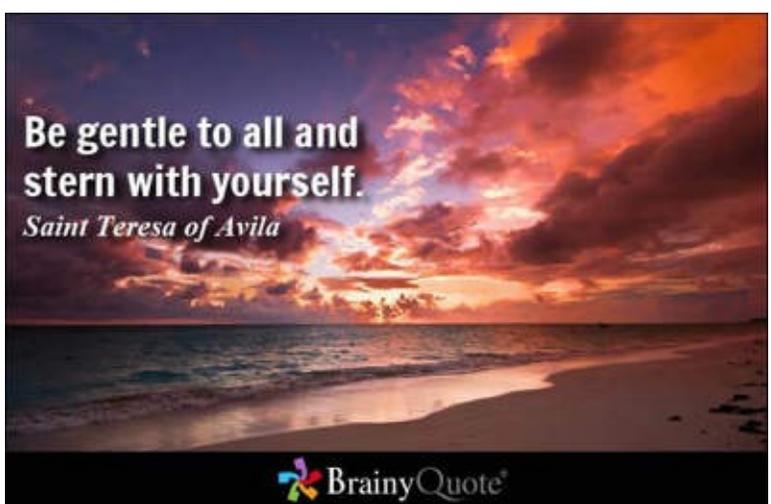
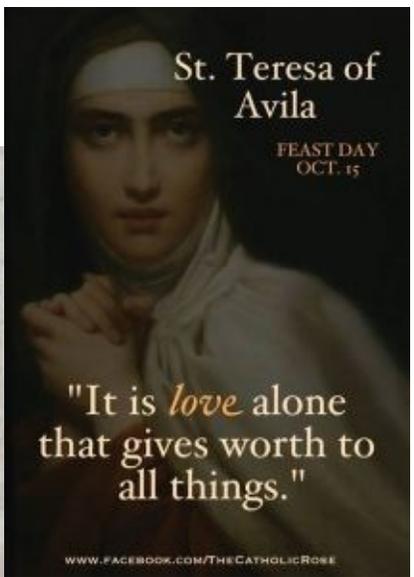


+

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him

+

May God protect me from gloomy saints.





- Teresa of Avila was fully, deeply, unapologetically herself. If she had written a letter to which her correspondent had not replied, she did not hesitate to write again, demanding,

“Why haven’t you answered my letter? Don’t you love me? Do you have any idea of the pain your silence is causing me?”

This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanjuneau.wordpress.com/2015/10/15/funny-smart-holy-teresa-of-avila/>
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What is Heresy?! [at A Faith-Full Life]

her·e·sy /'herəsē/ *Belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religious (especially Christian) doctrine.*

Okay...so what is orthodox?

or·tho·dox /'ôrTHə,däks/ *Conforming to what is generally or traditionally accepted as right or true; established and approved.*

— 1 —

Questions of orthodoxy and heresy began to really occupy my mind several years back as I was beginning to investigate the claims of the Catholic Church. Essentially, I began to realize that even though I had been raised with the idea that certain Christian beliefs were “*orthodox*” and certain Christian beliefs were “*heretical*,” I really had no way within my Protestant tradition to say which beliefs were orthodox, which were heretical, or why. Everyone seemed to rely on their own personal interpretation of Scripture to determine right from wrong – orthodox from heresy. Within this context, notions of orthodoxy and heresy devolved into mere personal opinion, and in the interest of unity were typically surrendered as “*non-essentials*.” Orthodoxy became shorthand for “*generally accepted*” while heresy became shorthand for “*generally condemned*.”

When I was a Protestant, if I were to have read the definition of orthodox listed above, I would have been on board with the vagaries of “*generally accepted*” – but “*traditional?!*” Church traditions aren’t generally received very favorably within the Protestant movement. Most Protestants tend to exhibit a fierce individualism when it comes to their own personal interpretations of the Scripture. In fact, many Protestants today feel no particular need to hold to the traditions and doctrines espoused by the fathers of the Reformation – much less the patristic fathers of the Church in the first several centuries after Christ.

“*Established and approved?*” That gets even dicier. Established and approved by whom exactly?

— 2 —

Orthodox or Opinion?

And yet, these are critical questions. Orthodoxy assumes that truth is absolute and non-relative, and furthermore, that because of God’s self-revelation of Himself to man we can know the truth.

Feel free to check out my post: [Thoughts on Absolute Truth and Certainty in a Post-Modern Relativistic World](#) for more thoughts on this subject. And yes, if you thought the title was long, wait till you see the actual article 😊

“*Generally accepted*” is obviously too vague. Are we really to assume that truth is simply a matter of popular opinion? That morality is merely a matter of taste? If not, then we must engage with the historical and traditional perspectives while also asking the question, “*Who, ‘establishes and approves’ that which is true? Who determines orthodoxy?*”

And in spite of the critical nature of these questions, these are questions which Protestantism can't answer.

Orthodoxy has become opinion, and heresy is dismissed in the elevation of personal conscience and the desire for Christian unity. [\[Tweet This\]](#)

— 3 —

I read an interesting article the other day by author Ben Cabe, who is a convert to Eastern Orthodoxy. The article is provocatively titled, [“Is Protestantism a Heresy?”](#), but in spite of the title, the author attempts to answer the question graciously and with love. In the article he points out that, *“It is natural that a Protestant understanding of the church, and church unity, would consist in a ‘least common denominator’ model since such a model is the only unity any Protestant church achieves. Due to this phenomenon, there will always be a variety of opposing views within the walls of any given Protestant church. Many Protestants may wonder why Orthodox and Roman Catholics will not accept such a model of unity where we can ‘agree to disagree’ on things they consider to be ‘non-essential.’ The biggest problem with this way of thinking is that, for the church of history, those other things **are** essential.”*¹

I make a very similar point in my post, [Altar Calls and Other Protestant Traditions](#) There is a feeling among Protestants that as, *“long as we agree on the ‘essentials’ we can disagree on the ‘non-essentials.’ [But] Nowhere in Scripture do we read that parts of Christ’s gospel are ‘essential’ and that other parts are ‘non-essential.’ To the contrary, none of Christ’s Gospel is nonessential, up for spurious opinions, or of a contradictory nature.”*

— 4 —

Roadguides to Orthodoxy

In trying to get beyond this, *“least common denominator model”* Ben goes on to suggest three rules which can help guide us in our search for orthodoxy: Antiquity, Universality, and Consensus. In fact these three could be restated to fit the definition of orthodoxy above.

- Antiquity = Traditionally Accepted
- Universality = Generally Accepted
- Consensus = Established

You will notice however that we are still missing one point from the definition above – *Approved*.

We’ll return to this concept shortly.

In the article Ben goes on to say, *“So is Protestantism a heresy? Forgive me, but I will not answer this question. I cannot answer the question...It seems clear, however, that Protestantism is not, and cannot, be considered grounded in history—something that both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics can claim. With respect to this, and the sayings above, this is a serious reality. But does this mean that there is an absence of God’s grace in Protestantism? I do not think so. After all, ‘All Truth is God’s Truth’ as Augustine tells us. Certainly there are some, however, that are closer to the Truth than others.”*

A Better Way

And here I believe that Catholicism can answer the question in a way that perhaps Orthodoxy cannot. Here we see the necessity of the *approved* concept above. Without the authority of the Bishop of Rome, a first among equals, we are left with a general consensus but without a formal and binding stamp of approval. In fact, Eastern Orthodoxy struggles with this very issue today.

The Eastern Orthodox are only able to look to the past for answers to questions of today. They accept the ecumenical councils of the early Church, but in breaking from the authority of the Bishop of Rome they are left without the means to call new ecumenical councils or indeed formally “*approve*” the decisions of the various Orthodox patriarchs today. This lack of final authority – of binding *approval* – makes it increasingly difficult for them to determine what is orthodox and what is heresy in spite of the three guidelines which Ben proposes. Without this final and binding authority there remains much disagreement on issues ranging from contraception, divorce and remarriage, and yes, even on whether or not Protestants are heretics 😊

In contrast, the Catholic Church is very precise in her definition of heresy and makes a clear delineation between heresy, apostasy, and schism.

“Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same; apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith; schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.”²

With that in mind, does the Catholic Church consider Protestants to be heretics? The following is taken from the catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 817-819.

In fact, “in this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church—for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame.”³ The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ’s Body—here we must distinguish heresy, apostasy, and schism – do not occur without human sin:

Where there are sins, there are also divisions, schisms, heresies, and disputes. Where there is virtue, however, there also are harmony and unity, from which arise the one heart and one soul of all believers.⁴

“However, one **cannot** charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers.... All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church.”⁵

“Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth” are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church: “the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements.”⁶ Christ’s Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church. All these blessings come from Christ and lead to him, and are in themselves calls to “Catholic unity.”⁷

— 7 —

An Obligation to the Truth

Here we see the Catholic Church making a clear distinction between material and formal heresy. According to canon law, Formal heresy is the *obstinate* denial of a truth which must be believed with divine and Catholic faith. Material heresy is holding to heretical doctrines *through no fault of one’s own*. Material heresy, therefore, does not necessarily constitute a sin.

This was indeed my own experience. Having grown up Protestant, many of my beliefs were objectively wrong from a Catholic perspective. But since I was unaware that they were wrong, indeed since I sincerely held to these beliefs in good faith, there was no sin involved on my part.

From a Catholic perspective, the answer to the question of, “Is Protestantism a Heresy?” is this:

Some Protestant doctrines are objectively heretical, most Protestant individuals are not.

It is only when we are made aware of the error of our beliefs that we are then obliged to follow the truth where it may lead us.

May all of us be led by the Spirit of Truth further from heresy and closer to orthodoxy as we follow the One who is Himself Truth!

!

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1. Ben Cabe, Is Protestantism a Heresy? Conciliar Post, Sept. 03 2015 [↔](#)
 2. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph 2089, 2nd Ed., p. 507. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference [↔](#)
 3. Unitatis redintegratio 3 [↔](#)
 4. Origen, Hom. in Ezech. 9, 1: PG 13, 732 [↔](#)
 5. Unitatis redintegratio 3 [↔](#)
 6. Unitatis redintegratio 3 § 2; cf. Lumen gentium 15 [↔](#)
 7. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph 817-819, 2nd Ed., p. 216, Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference [↔](#)
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This contribution is available at <http://adamncrawford.com/what-is-heresy/>
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Shades of Gray Leave Catholics Confused

by Susan Fox

"I remember when the answers seemed so clear. We had never lived with doubt or tasted fear. It was easy then to tell truth from lies. But today there is no day or night. Today there is no dark or light. Today there is no black or white, only shades of gray"
(*Shades of Gray* by The Monkees 1967)



"Why didn't he tell me the truth? All I wanted was the truth?" the young black mother looked at me tragically with real tears in her eyes.

Born and baptized a Catholic, my friend had not been catechized, had not been to confession and had not received her first Communion nor Confirmation. But she wanted what she had lost as a child – the Catholic faith. She wanted it badly.

Now as a civilly married adult, all she wanted was the truth. "Can I go to communion?" she



asked the priest in confession. "I am not married in the Church." She was very clear on that matter, she

told me.

But the priest said, “You may go to Communion.” I never disagreed with that assessment because the priest was my pastor. But I got her into a Returning Catholics class in another parish, and trusted with all my might in Jesus Christ.

And there the pastor in the neighboring parish finally bestowed a great gift on her. He told her the truth: she could not receive communion until the Church blessed her marriage. And there was no impediment to that because neither she nor her husband had been married before.

Yet she had received her first, second and third communion before she received the truth from the second priest. And she was naturally upset.

I wonder if men and women living in so-called “stable same sex relationships” -- someday understanding the horror of same sex acts – will wonder why one of the Church fathers involved in the October Synod on the Family told them a “stable gay relationship” is better than a “temporary one.” False mercy kills.

“We are all called to observe the situation, not gazing from above and beginning with abstract ideas, but with the gaze of pastors who scrutinize today’s reality in an evangelical spirit,” Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, O.P., of Vienna said in an interview with Jesuit Fr Antonio Spadaro, editor of *La Civiltà*



Cattolica. Parts of the interview were published in the *British Catholic Herald* and the *Vatican Insider* in early September.

Maybe the gaze of Church fathers should focus on Christ. Tell the truth and let people be healed by His Word.

“Go, call your husband and come back,” Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well -- thirsty for the Water only He could give. *“I have no husband,”* she replied. Jesus didn’t gaze from above or scrutinize her situation. He evangelized. He told the truth: *“You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”* (John 4:17)

Then a miracle occurred. The Samaritan woman known now as St. Photina experienced a profound conversion, which means she turned the direction of her life completely around, and not in gradual steps either, but whole-heartedly.

“Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and



said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?’” (John 4:28-30)

Church tradition says she was martyred in Rome after a long career of evangelization, where she converted the Roman Emperor’s daughter and one hundred of her servants to Christianity.

Schönborn, the Cardinal who co-edited the Catechism of the Catholic Church, grew up in a broken family. He implies that as a child, he experienced the law of gradualism in which people grow in virtue gradually, not jumping into perfection in a single step. Gradualism also measures gradations of evil, recognizing that even in matters of grave evil there can be gradations of objective depravity, although the grave evil does not cease to be a grave evil.

Schönborn said the Church must look for what is good in irregular relationships. A civil marriage is better

than co-habitation, he said. “Instead of talking about everything that is missing, we can draw close to this reality, noting what is positive in this love that is establishing itself.”

Pope Benedict XVI himself said an HIV-positive prostitute using a condom is a step up from not using one. Unfortunately, the world didn’t understand he was talking about gradations of evil, and thought he was approving the use of condoms. But he was saying her sin was less. While she was involved in the sin of prostitution, at least she was trying to protect the health of her “clients.”

To me the suffering of a prostitute on the streets is so horrible that I can’t worry about such gradations of evil. I want to save her from the streets, not argue over which of her sins are less.

A friend of Cardinal Schönborn, who experiences same sex attraction, abandoned a life of promiscuity for a stable same sex union. “It’s an improvement,” he said. They share “a life, they share their joys and sufferings, they help one another. It must be recognized that this person took an important step for his own good and the good of others, even though it certainly is not a situation the Church can consider ‘regular’.”

The Church’s negative “judgment about homosexual acts is necessary,” the cardinal said, “but the Church should not look in the bedroom first, but in the dining room! It must accompany people.”

Most of what the Cardinal is saying is true. Converse with the people; accompany them on their journey. Look in their eyes. See and serve the Person of Jesus Christ in everyone you meet. That is the first step in evangelizing.

Then tell them the truth! “*You are right when you say you have*



no husband!”

One of Schönborn's key experiences for developing his theory of gradualism occurred when he was a student at Saulchoir in Paris. He met a homeless couple living under the bridge on the Seine. "The woman had been a prostitute. They definitely weren't married, nor were they Church-goers, but every time I walked past there, I would tell myself: 'My God, they are helping each other get through a very tough life.' When I saw them exchange gestures of tenderness, I would say to myself: 'My God, how beautiful it is that these two poor people are helping each other, how great!' God is present in this poverty, in this tenderness."



Then he goes on to say that as a pastor he needs to "discern the presence of God" in the lives of those he serves. **"We need to leave behind this very limited way of viewing the issue of access to the sacraments for people in irregular relationship situations."**

This is a very beautiful story, and we are indeed called to see what the good God is doing in other people's lives, and if we do, then they will have the courage to change direction. If we see only the negative, there is no hope of conversion.

However, the cardinal is seemingly ignoring one important step before we give access to the sacraments to people in irregular relationships.

The Church must evangelize! They must be told the truth; they must experience a change of heart. St. John the Baptist repeats constantly in the gospels, "Repent and be saved!" Then he baptized them, inviting them to put aside their former sins.

That is the problem with discussing gradualism in the context of the Synod on the Family where giving

communion to divorced and remarried Catholics and recognizing some good in homosexual unions is apparently on the table for discussion.

Do we immediately give the sacraments to the couple under the bridge, to the divorced remarried couples, to the couples involved in same sex unions as sort of a reward for the steps they have taken towards good in their lives? “Congratulations on using a condom. Your evil is less. Here’s the Holy Eucharist.” No.

Seeing the good in the couple under the bridge, now we must begin regular loving visitation and friendship with the goal of a) feeding them, b) binding up their wounds and c) finding them a home and d) converting them. This is the Church

Pope Francis is speaking about: “I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars. You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else.”

St. Peter Claver, calling himself “the Slave of the Negroes forever,” gives us the model for true evangelization. Every year, thousands of people taken as slaves poured into the port of Cartagena, Columbia, in the 1600s. As soon as a slave ship arrived, Fr. Peter climbed on board carrying oranges, food, medicine, brandy and tobacco. Fr. Peter and his assistants set up a real field hospital on the ship. Near death, his new patients were treated to aromatics tossed in a fire, their bodies washed with brandy, their nakedness covered with his own cloak. When they were comfortable, he spoke of Baptism. And when they were ready for the rest he told them of the one God, who rewards and punishes according to our merits. They made an act of contrition in their own language, and then he spoke of the cross and the mysteries of the Holy Trinity. During his 40 years of ministry, he instructed and baptized 300,000 people from Africa!

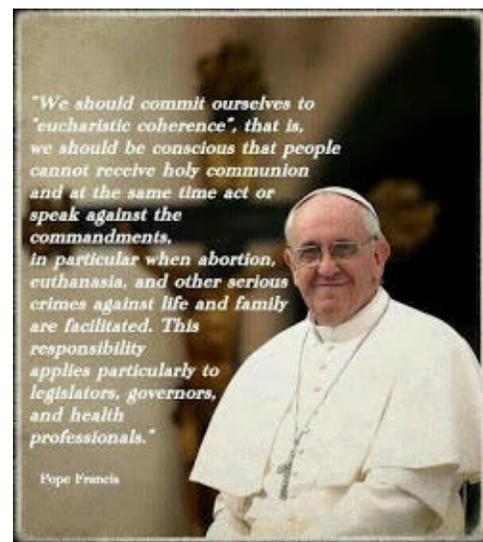
Fr. Peter's efforts on behalf of the Africans was not appreciated by the slave owners, whose consciences were stung! Ironically, slave owners protested Fr. Peter’s kind activity, accusing the apostle of “indiscreet zeal, and of having profaned the Sacraments by giving them to creatures who scarcely possessed a soul.” Like the unborn today, these African people were regarded as less than human. He, of course, ignored his detractors, and refused to stay with them when visiting the plantations. He was housed in slave quarters.

That is proper evangelization. Meet people with compassion, and then give them the truth. As the truth is revealed, the heart is softened ready for a change in direction. However, for some in the Catholic Church today, it is simply easier to hand out sacraments than it is to bind, heal, teach and preach.

Pope John Paul II is believed to have coined the phrase, the “New Evangelization” in 1983 in an address in Central America. Basically, he recognized that vast Christian communities exist “where entire groups

of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization.’”

But he reminded us “the witness of a Christian life is the first and most irreplaceable form of mission.” You can’t pass on what you don’t have. “It is important to recall that evangelization involves conversion, that is interior change,” he said. It arises out of a bone-deep experience of God.



Many today are receiving communion while they are using contraception, co-habiting or living in a civil marriage or same-sex relationship. Some of them are receiving communion with their pastor’s permission! They need to hear the truth from the pulpit and in the confessional. Without truth, there can be no bone deep experience of God leading to a change in the heart’s direction.

There is no problem with finding people under a bridge who have never been catechized. My mother moved to a small town where for 20 years she was not allowed to start the Legion of Mary, which is excellent in this type of re-evangelization. So she went down to the local nursing home and asked for the least visited patient. She found Mrs. George. Bedridden for decades, she was not pretty, interesting, nor holy.

My mother began visiting her weekly for 15 minutes. As a young girl, I found these visits uncomfortable because Mrs. George was inordinately interested in my relationship with boys. But after a few years, she changed. Mom continued to visit, giving her a little radio, bringing romance novels, chocolates. After a few years of such visits, I witnessed, Mrs. George weep, hug my mother, and greet her with great affection. I think that unpleasant old woman loved my mother more than I did! After seven years of loving visitation, Mrs. George asked for and received the Catholic sacraments. After that, my mother brought her the Eucharist weekly. She visited her for a total of 12 years until Mrs. George’s family moved her to another town, and shortly after that Mrs. George died.

We have souls with no knowledge of God in America living across the street from the rectory, and yet many priests (liberal or conservative) will not step outside the door, nor send his parishioners there to visit and instruct the pagan who does indeed desire God, but knows nothing about Him.

The law of gradualism as it is being discussed in this Synod is a direct attack on the New Evangelization and on good pastoral practice, which requires personal contact, teaching of the Truth, and conversion before sacraments can be administered.

Jesus met the woman at the well, and changed her heart. Afterwards, the apostles brought Him food, saying, “*Rabbi, eat.*” But Jesus wasn’t interested in food: “*I have meat to eat, which you know not,*” He said.

The disciples were confused, and thought someone else had brought Jesus food.



But Jesus responded: “*My meat is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest?’ But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.*” (John 4:34-38)

And the next line in the Gospel of John is “*Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’*” (John 4:39)

Instead of gazing at our dining rooms, bedrooms or kitchens, may all our pastors cast their gaze into our eyes, see and serve the Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and then feed all the faithful the Meat of Holy Truth.



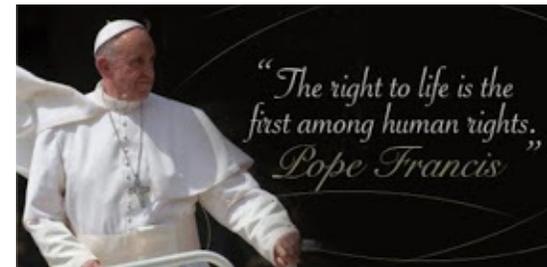
The mid-term report of the 2014 Synod on the Family, which contained questionable language regarding gradualism, was rejected by Pope Francis. It is not part of the official teaching of the Catholic Church.

This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2015/10/gradualism-poor-pastoral-practice-and.html>
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Pope Francis Comes to North America, and Catholic Pundits Can't Agree on the Outcome [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Lawrence Fox



While driving home from Lincoln, Nebraska, when Pope Francis was visiting the United States, I turned on the car radio to hear what was being said.

I heard visceral rhetoric opposed to the Pope's visit, complaining about what he didn't say, and jubilant rhetoric in favor of words they imagined he said. I tried my best not to engage the conversation on either side. Years ago I was told, "We are Catholics and disciples of Jesus Christ and not disciples of mad and sometimes foolish people."

Catholic pundits rejecting the Deposit of Faith -- as captured in the encyclicals *Casti Connubi* by Pope Pius XI and *Humanae Vitae* by Pope Paul VI -- castigated Pope Francis for seeking an end to capital punishment among the modern nations.

It seems many forgot that it was Pope Saint John Paul II who outlined in his encyclical, *Gospel of Life*, the moral argument against capital punishment when other options, such as permanent incarceration, were available. It was stated that Pope Francis did not speak clear enough on the horrors of abortion before Congress.



"The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development. This conviction has led me to advocate at different levels for the global abolition of the death penalty. Every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes." Pope Francis before Congress with Speaker of the House Catholic John Boehner weeping.

Many forgot that Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta spoke about the dire consequences of abortion in 1994 before U.S. President Bill Clinton, members of the United Nations and U.S. Congress, and students at various universities. "But I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself." She spoke also of contraception: "The way to plan the family is natural family planning, not contraception."

Blessed Mother Teresa warned that tolerance for such an evil would result in a greater evil -- nuclear war. And it appears the world – unrepentant for its sins of abortion -- is going merrily into hell in a hand basket as all the conditions for nuclear World War III are emerging in the Middle East.

I cannot think of one politician who publicly changed his or her position on abortion as a result of Mother Teresa's comments. If someone did then, "Praise God!"

I remember a young woman in charge of the youth in my parish, saying, "My greatest inspiration is Mother Teresa of Calcutta." Months later she invited speakers from Planned Parenthood to speak to the youth about human sexuality without allowing their parents to attend the presentation. So much talk -- with no conversion of heart.



Most of the world heard Mother Teresa speak about the gift of human life and so what? Even after it was revealed that Planned Parenthood alters the abortion procedure to provide living children for body parts, Catholics and Christians still support Planned Parenthood. Does anyone really think that if Pope Francis used the word "abortion" before Congress anything would change? I certainly do not.

Blessed John Paul II wrote eloquently about the gift of human sexuality. Pope Benedict spoke about the philosophical errors promoting same-sex unions. I cannot think of one politician who publicly changed his or her position on same-sex unions as a result of encountering Catholic teaching.

More often than not, we hear, “God does not make junk.” It’s a theological argument in favor of same-sex unions. Again, so much talk -- with no conversion of heart.



Some castigated Pope Francis for talking about migrants living on a common continent. It was Saint John Paul II who said, there is not a North or South America, only one America. Prudent? I don’t know, but who can know the mind of God?

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENNA

***"Proclaim
the truth
and do
not be
silent
through
fear."***



The Catholic Rose

“Take care not to be like mad and foolish people who set themselves up to investigate and judge the deeds and habits of God’s servants. Those who do this deserve severe correction.” St. Catherine of Siena wrote in her letter to Caterina di Scetto (a Dominican laywoman) (*Siena Passion for the Truth; Compassion for Humanity page 28*)

Sound advice for most Catholic pundits.

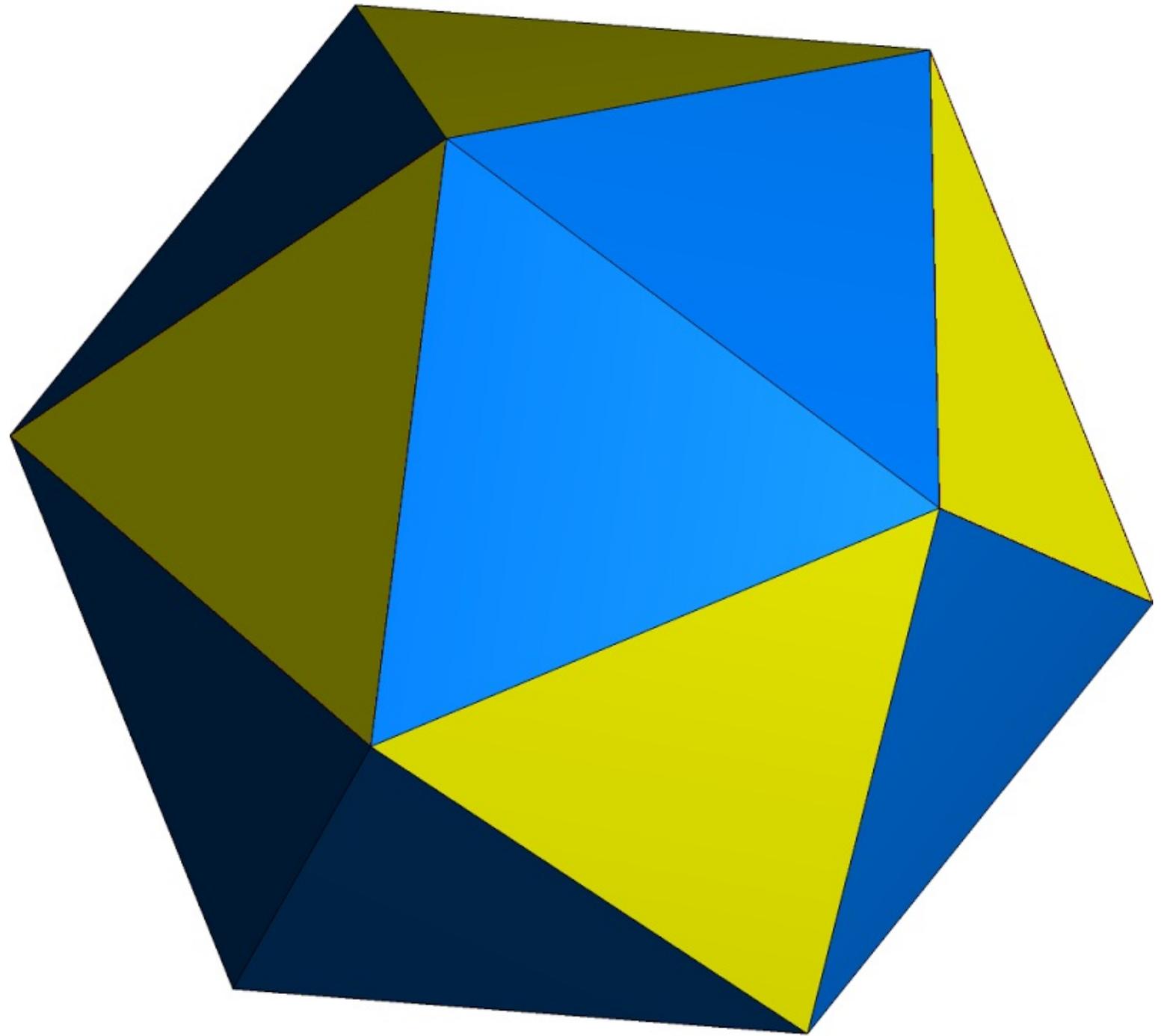
Lawrence Fox also writes biting satire:

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The Other Side of Bad Catholic Blogging [at Arnobius of Sicca]



(There's more than two sides to Problems with Catholic Blogging...)

Introduction

I've had a lot to say about the bloggers gone bad in the Radical Traditionalist sense. But I have become more aware of another bad trend in Catholic blogging—the abuse of one's reputation as a Catholic

blogger to promote a particular opinion on how to best obey Church teaching, treating other opinions on how to best obey Church teaching as if it was the sign of a cafeteria Catholic. I say that such Catholics *abuse* their reputation because people do look to them to explain the faith and defend it. So when they use their blog as a platform to attack people who disagree with them and treat this difference of opinion on ways and means as if the person who disagrees are actively choosing to disobey the Church, they alienate the faithful into thinking the Church has no place for them.

Making A Distinction

Now we have to make a distinction of course. When the Church teaches “We must do X,” or “We must not do Y,” then the Catholic who tries to undermine these teachings or tries to say that one may disobey the teaching of the Church *are* being faithless Catholics. The refusal to do this is rejection of the authority that our Lord gave to the Church:

can. 751† Heresy is the obstinate denial or obstinate doubt after the reception of baptism of some truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith; apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith; schism is the refusal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.

can. 752† Although not an assent of faith, a religious submission of the intellect and will must be given to a doctrine which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops declares concerning faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim it by definitive act; therefore, the Christian faithful are to take care to avoid those things which do not agree with it.

can. 753† Although the bishops who are in communion with the head and members of the college, whether individually or joined together in conferences of bishops or in particular councils, do not possess infallibility in teaching, they are authentic teachers and instructors of the faith for the Christian faithful entrusted to their care; the Christian faithful are bound to adhere with religious submission of mind to the authentic magisterium of their bishops.

Code of Canon Law: New English Translation (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998), 247.

So the person who tries to justify their disobedience to the Church teaching on sexual morality, abortion, social justice or any other area **cannot** be said to be having a disagreement on ways and means obeying the Church. This applies to the liberal politician who says they are more “pro-life” than the person who opposes abortion, and it applies to the radical traditionalist who says they can disobey the Church because they are being faithful to an “earlier” tradition.

But if two people agree that the Church teaching must be obeyed, but have two different ideas on how to best follow that teaching, the person who prefers method A has no right to denounce the person who prefers method B. He has even less right to accuse the person who supports method B of all the abuses that he thinks comes from not supporting method A.

This happens in many different ways. For example, the person who accuses a supporter of gun ownership

rights as “not really being pro-life” (that’s a *No true Scotsman* fallacy by the way) or the person who favors a strong stand against abortion treating bishops who try a gentler approach as if they were secretly supportive—these things are twisting the Church teaching in such a way to make it seem that disagreement with *them* is disagreement with the Church. But the person isn’t disagreeing with the *Church*. They are disagreeing with the claim that there is only one way to obey the Church teaching.

The Fruit of This Abuse Is to Alienate the Faithful

So this is an abuse of the credibility one has as a *Catholic* blogger when it is used to promote a certain preference tends to be harmful to the Church. In essence, it leads people to think that the Church is limited to one ideological view and has no place for them when the actual alienation is with the rash judgment of the blogger. I think we need to keep this in mind. Most of us recognize that it is scandal to try to tell people that it is all right to reject the Church teaching. But some overlook the fact that it is also scandal to tell people that they are sinning when they actually agree with the Church but disagree with us on the ways and means of obedience.

We who want to be *Catholic* bloggers (as opposed to bloggers who are Catholic—there is a difference), whose purpose of writing is to exhort people to be faithful to the teachings of the Church, need to distinguish between what the Church teaches and how we would prefer for that teaching to be lived out. The former is to spread our Lord’s teachings. The latter is to usurp the authority of the Church for our own purposes and can lead people into rejecting the Church without cause.

Let us as bloggers always keep in mind the words of Our Lord:

⁶ “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come! (Matthew 18:6-7)

If we drive people away from the faith because we cannot distinguish between our preferences and the teaching of the Church, we will answer for it. So let us always consider our words—especially when we are angry over something. Let us always pray that what we publish is in keeping with what Our Lord wants us to publish—defending the faith but showing love and compassion in doing so.

This contribution is available at <http://arnobius-of-sicca.blogspot.com/2015/10/the-other-side-of-bad-catholic-blogging.html>

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Our Crosses are Good and Come from God [at The Shield of Faith]

I. Jesus gives us our own cross.

Mt. 16: 24. Then Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Lk. 9: 23. If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Lk. 14: 27. And he who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Mt. 10: 38. He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

II. God can only give us good things.

Mt. 7: 11 Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.

Rom. 8: 28. Now we know that for those who love God all things work together unto good.

III. The cross is for our good.

Gal 6: 14. God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.

Rom. 6: 6. For we know that our old self has been crucified with him, in order that the body of sin may be destroyed, that we may longer be slaves to sin.

Col 1: 24. I rejoice now in the sufferings I bear for your sake.

1 Cor. 2: 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

IV. To say that the cross is good and comes from God sounds like nonsense.

1 Cor. 1: 18 For the doctrine of the cross, to them that perish, is foolishness, but to them that are saved, that is you, it is the power of God.

1 Cor. 2: 23 We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.



The Cross of San Damiano, from which Christ spoke to St. Francis of Assisi these words: "Go repair my Church, which as you see is falling completely into ruin."

Posted 10/04/2015 Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

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Sideways [at Smaller Mannhattans]



We still get where we're going

The kids were just right tonight.

Every year the children in my catechism class need a month or so to acclimate to how class works. The first meeting is always leaden- they don't know me and are cautious and reticent. But tonight they were fully alive, and this high will last through the end of April.

The lesson plan began with the Shekinah Cloud over Mt. Sinai, and would run through the Golden Calf to the Meeting Tent. Which is plenty interesting, but extra spark was in all the digressions prompted by kids' questions. For example, I was explaining how the Levite men were put in charge of offering sacrifice after the other tribes blew it with the Golden Calf:

"Were the Levite women priests too?"

Good question, no they weren't, just the men. But who sacrificed the lambs at the first Passover?

The elders!

Yes the elder men. All the way back to Abel, the men did the sacrificing.

So what did the Levite women do, they didn't have to work?

Sure they worked, they ran the households, that's work.

But I mean work that makes money.

Maybe they did, but it would be connected to running the household. Hey, there's a great bit in Proverbs about that called the Good Wife...here it is:

"Who can find a woman of worth? Far beyond jewels is her value.

Her husband trusts her judgment; he does not lack income.

She brings him profit, not loss, all the days of her life.

She seeks out wool and flax and weaves with skillful hands.

She picks out a field and acquires it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard.

She watches over the affairs of her household,

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband, too, praises her:

“Many are the women of proven worth, but you have excelled them all.”

"That sounds just like my wife. I kiss her and tell her she is the prize of a lifetime. But her work is much bigger than just what she may make and sell. And a Levite priest could hardly tend to his sacrificing business if his wife was not running the household and tending to the family's business."

It's gonna be another good year.

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Prayer on a Friday morning [at Catholic Deacon]

This morning after serving at Mass and doing my diaconal duty, which I love, of purifying and carefully putting away the sacred vessels and straightening up the sanctuary, I found myself alone in church with the Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament. Not knowing when else over the course of the day I would have the opportunity to pray the Rosary, I stayed and prayed.

After praying up to the first Sorrowful mystery, instead remaining in place sitting or kneeling, I decided to pray while walking in a circle around the church looking at the stained glass windows, which I love, and, more particularly, the Stations of the Cross. The parish church where I now serve is a contemporary church building. It was built in the late 1960s. I have no doubt many of my fellow Catholics would find it either ugly or nondescript and unappealing. I do not think that at all. In fact, I quite like it.



Confessional St Olaf's Catholic Church Bountiful, Utah

As I was making my way around the Church for the first time I stopped and stood looking at the Station that shows Jesus falling for the second time. As I did so it occurred to me that the Stations of the Cross are like a long meditation on the fourth and fifth of the Sorrowful mysteries (i.e., Jesus carrying the Cross and His Crucifixion). Then I was struck by the thought that perhaps, like integers, the "space" between each mystery of the Rosary is infinite. There can be no end of meditating on and contemplating the mysteries of our Lord's birth, life, passion and death, and resurrection, on the great Paschal mystery we celebrate all the time, the very mystery that God in His goodness is always at work drawing us more deeply into.

As I continued my walking and praying I ventured into one confessional and then into the other before winding up kneeling before the altar to finish my prayer. Apart from what I shared above, my experience this morning was indescribable. As I was praying in our parish church, which is located in the heart of our city, I think I experienced something very much like what Henri Nouwen must've had in mind when he wrote: "The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it."

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2015/10/prayer-on-friday-morning.html>
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Wealth Untold [at With Us Still]

One of these days, perhaps I'll learn to take Jesus at his word.

In the gospel passage [we heard on Sunday](#), for example, there was this gem:

Jesus said, 'Amen, I say to you,
there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters
or mother or father or children or lands
for my sake and for the sake of the gospel
who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age:
houses and brothers and sisters
and mothers and children and lands,
with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.'

As it happened, I heard these words proclaimed by one of my sons on Sunday morning.



Sharing the Body of Christ with the faithful...

Gerri and I were in Kansas City over the weekend, [visiting Chris](#)—where he's serving as Parochial Vicar (*aka* Associate Pastor) at [St. Francis Xavier parish](#) near [Rockhurst University](#).

It was certainly poignant to hear that bit about '*giving up...mother or father*' coming from his lips. And it's the truth of the matter, too: His vocation as a Jesuit means we don't get to see Chris all that often. So in a sense, he—and we—have given up something...the simple joy of having family close by...for the sake of the gospel.



On Sunday morning, though, we received a remarkable return on our investment—just as Jesus promised. As we stood next to Chris in the gathering space after Mass, a woman walked up to greet us. Like several other parishioners, she expressed her gratitude for Chris’ ministry and his presence at the parish. Then she said something a bit different than all the rest: ‘For a long time now, I’ve gone to Mass begrudgingly. Your son is starting to change that, though. His homilies—they’ve softened the grudge a bit.’

With that, she was gone.

But not before Gerri and I noticed that we had tears of gratitude welling up in our eyes, over this one heart moved (if even only a smidge) by our son’s ministry.

Chris would be the first to say, of course, that it’s really Christ—and Christ’s grace—at work in this woman’s life. And that’s precisely the point: That Christ *does* use us, imperfect vessels though we are, to bear the Good News to hearts in need of Christ’s love...and light...and mercy...and grace.

A simple ‘yes’ on our part is all it takes to unlock this divine treasure chest, Jesus says.

In choosing to follow him, we become stewards of wealth untold.

Not a bad gig at all.



A young Jesuit...alongside a statue of the original Jesuit, St. Ignatius Loyola.

Suscipe — A prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

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

IHS

The Synod: fornication as a path to holiness [at LMS Chairman]

of the Synod's Final Relatio, paragraphs 84-86. Here I want to say something about paragraph 71, translated by

.
Back in 1969, Catholics were told that the Traditional Mass had been forbidden, because of some slightly ambiguous but very emphatic language of Pope Paul VI in a public audience. That was the most the liberal fascists of that era were ever able to throw at Traditional Catholics to back up the claim that traddies were disobedient and schismatic. Of course, this kind of nonsense can the more easily be undone later on, as it was by Pope Benedict in 2007 when he said that it had never been forbidden after all. But it made very little difference for the intervening

38 years

. 38 long, long, years...

So let us have a look at this paragraph, which will form what we might, in a secular context, call a mandate for something similar in a Papal Post Synodal Exhortation a bit further down the road, and heaven knows how many statements by bishops and journalists.

The preceding paragraph had been all about how couples didn't get married, often, because of financial considerations. Having had a go with that idea, the Synod fathers seem to have tired of it and now want to try another explanation: 'cultural contingents'.

The choice of civil marriage or, in several cases, simple cohabitation, is often not motivated by prejudice or resistance against the sacramental union, but from cultural situations or cultural contingents.

As a matter of fact the financial factors cited by cohabiting couples are themselves dependant upon 'cultural contingents', because it is obviously a 'cultural contingent' that couples think they can't get married until they have stable jobs and can afford a lavish wedding. So we can forget the special pleading of the previous paragraph, and get down to brass tacks with this idea.

With the very opening words, however, the Fathers of the Synod seem to have got into a muddle. The failure of couples to get married sooner, they tell us, is

not

'resistance against sacramental union' - it is not because people reject marriage, but, instead, cultural contingents. But is it not the case, Reverend Fathers, that what you actually mean by a 'cultural contingent' is a view of marriage which lowers its importance to such a level there is no urgency about getting married, and that instead it is regarded as better to cohabit for a few years, or indeed forever? This cultural contingent, then, while not necessarily a total rejection of the state of marriage, is about the

values

of the couple, a set of values in which marriage is not understood or valued as it should be. The idea, then, of 'cultural contingents' as

excusing

, as opposed to merely

describing,

the

de facto

rejection of marriage, disintegrates. There is no contrast between a couple who reject marriage because of 'resistance against sacramental union' and a couple who fail to marry because of 'cultural contingents'. Their 'resistance against sacramental union', whether permanent or temporary, is a cultural contingent.

Notice that there is nothing in this paragraph addressed to or about couples who defy the cultural contingents which reject sacramental marriage. In their eagerness to see the culture as an excusing condition, as something which as it were removes moral responsibility from couples, the fact that many thousands of couples buck the trend and get married in church, is actually a little embarrassing. Let's not talk about them.

Let us, instead, give the most optimistic possible reading of de facto unions:

In many circumstances, the decision to live together is a sign of a relationship that actually wants to navigate towards the prospect of stability.

There is something truly pathetic about this statement, which the Synod Fathers like so much that they repeat it, in different words, three more times. They desperately want to believe that cohabiting couples are just waiting for the right moment to marry in church. I'm afraid they aren't. As a matter of sociological trends, there is no reason to assume, in the second decade of the 21st century, that a co-habiting couple has any aspiration to put on formal clothes and have a big party with their boring relations - which is all the word 'wedding' means to most of them. Oh, but 'in many circumstances' it may be heading for wedding cake and embarrassing speeches from the Best Man - I suppose this is true if the Synod Fathers can think of three or more instances. If that is what it comes down to, I feel sorry for them.

But even this they fail to express in a straightforward or indeed coherent way. It is the 'relationship', they tell us, that 'wants to navigate towards the prospect of stability'. Not the man and the woman involved, no - the relationship itself. The attribution of intentions to the relationship is peculiar, to say the least - there are precedents for attributing intentions to actions, but this takes things a step further. What is the point of talking in this strange way? Easy: the Synod Fathers don't want to confront the fact that it is frequently only one party to the relationship who would like things to go in this direction. It sounds a lot more positive to say the relationship in some mysterious way 'wants' to move towards marriage than to say that, for example, the girl wants to get married and hopes that by setting up house with a commitment-shy young man she can work on him to that end.

Allow me to ask a brutal question. When a man is dragged to the altar by hysterical threats of a break-up, or by an unexpected pregnancy - unexpected by him, at least: are these cases of a relationship 'navigating towards the prospect of stability'? Is this among the things the Synod Fathers have in mind?

Notice the extreme caution of the statement they make, however. It is not that the couple wants to get married - the Synod Fathers recognise that that would be too strong a claim. Instead, they propose that 'in many cases' the relationship 'wants' to 'navigate' - a charming metaphor, to be sure - whither? Not to marriage, not even to 'stability', but to the 'prospect' of stability. What in heaven's name is that? You are in your ship, and you navigate, not to the Islands of the Blessed, but to a 'prospect' of them: you can see them in the distance, perhaps with the help of a powerful telescope. And then what? Presumably, having satisfied your curiosity, you go home.

What comes next?

This will, which translates into a lasting bond, reliable and open to life can be considered a commitment on which to base a path to the sacrament of marriage, discovered to be God's plan for [the couple's] lives.

There may be cases of cohabitation which could be described as 'a lasting bond, reliable and open to life': you can't exclude such a possibility. As a generalisation, however, intended to guide a pastoral response to the phenomenon of couples not marrying in church, this statement can only be described as delusional. Reverend Fathers, are you not aware that the vast majority of

marriages

are not 'open to life'? That in many developed nations a third or even half of marriages end in divorce? And that, on both counts, non-marital unions are

far worse

, far less likely to be open to life, far more likely to end in a break-up? One can only wonder, at this point, if the Synod secretariat had put something psychedelic into the refreshments.

But this sentence is not just over-optimistic on the sociological facts. There is something extremely strange going on with the theology as well. Talking of a pseudo-marital relationship, we are told that it 'can be considered', presumably by sympathetic pastors, as a 'commitment on which to base a path to the sacrament of marriage'. Again, we have contorted, embarrassed, language, and the Synod Fathers are right to be embarrassed. Not the relationship, the 'commitment' of the relationship, isn't a path, no, it 'can be considered' a path, to the sacrament. And what sort of path is it?

It is a pathway of sin, the kind of regular, habitual, conscious, and serious sin which ensures that the parties are in a permanent state of mortal sin, that they are incapable of entertaining sanctifying grace, that they are not in friendship with God, that their prayers can have no merit, that they can have no supernatural virtues, and that they can receive no grace from any of the sacraments: unless, of course, they

leave this path,

by repentance. If you are on a path of sin, I am sorry, Reverend Fathers, we know where that leads. It does not lead to a sacramental union and living happily ever after. It leads to hell. Only by turning

off

this path can the couple put themselves right with God and receive the graces of sacramental marriage.

And that, of course, is what sometimes happens. Many Catholics, over many centuries, have forsaken the sins of their youths, made a sincere repentance, received sacramental absolution, married, and embarked on a new life. They have done this because they were conscious that their previous lives were sinful. This possibility does not vindicate the Synod Fathers' mode of expression; it shows the rashness of it. It is only because the Church does

not

use this contorted language of sin a pathway to holiness that these sinners have understood the need to be reconciled with God.

Suppose a priest were to use the Synod's way of thinking and talking to encourage unmarried couples to pluck up the courage to tie the knot in church. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this strategy were successful? No, it would be a disaster. Because those couples would not be repenting of their sinful past lives; they would marry in a state of mortal sin, heaping an objective act of sacrilege onto their sins of fornication, and receive no graces from the sacrament. In modern conditions, a marital union without the graces of the sacrament of marriage is not a good prospect. Indeed, it is not too extravagant a speculation to suppose that the reason why the Catholic divorce rate is indistinguishable from that of the general population has a lot to do with couples not receiving the graces of the sacrament because of unrepented mortal sin. You don't, after all, repent of the pathway to the sacrament, do you?

It is matter of sociological observation that marriage following a period of cohabitation is

[more likely to end in divorce](#)

If you still need convincing, consider this. The Synod Fathers want us to believe that the fornication of a committed, long-term relationship is a pathway to marriage. As a matter of chronology, one can see what they have in mind. Let us take a larger view. Before the fornication of a long-term relationship, we generally see, chronologically, the promiscuity of 'playing the field'. Yes, that is how most people find their long-term sexual partners. So that is part of the pathway to holy matrimony too. And before that, there is generally a period of using pornography and solitary vice, at least for young men. Yes, that is how most men first engage in genital sexuality. So that is also part of the pathway, presumably. At the other end of the process, come to that, it will be equally valid to observe that marriage in church is itself, 'in many circumstances', a pathway to separation, divorce, and, particularly under the new rules, annulment and remarriage.

Is this the teaching of the Church? That a career of impurity, in which the conscience is deadened, emotional sympathy blunted, and sexuality objectified, is a preparation for the holy state of marriage which should be acknowledged and 'accompanied'?

No. The teaching of the Church is the teaching of Christ. It is a call to repentance.

The time is accomplished, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the gospel. **Quoniam impletum est tempus, et appropinquavit regnum Dei: poenitemini, et credite Evangelio.**

(Mark 1:15)

This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2015/11/the-synod-fornication-as-path-to.html>
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Why I Remain Catholic [at JOY Alive in our hearts]



The anchoress Elizabeth Scalia posed the question on her [Patheos blog](#), “Why do I remain Catholic?” to Catholic writers and all media persons [in this post](#). #WhyRemainCatholic is going wild. This conversation is timely for me, for I’ve begun writing and speaking about my faith story. I’m reliving some key moments such as when I gave my life to Jesus at a Protestant youth retreat. In my staunch faith I never dreamed that five years later I would marry in the Catholic Church. The only way God could ever get me to convert to Catholicism was to arrange for me to fall in love with a devout Catholic. My official conversion almost three years later when I realized I belong in the Catholic Church.

Later there’s the story of my renewal, an event that took me from Sunday Catholicism to full time. It plunged me deep into covenant community 40 years ago. These highlights provide the backdrop of how I arrived where I am today but don’t tell the understory of why I remain Catholic. Why I created a Catholic blog and write incessantly about my faith. Why my career as a writer and speaker winds around my faith. Why I adore the Eucharist. Why I evangelize.

It’s a fact that I feel God’s presence in my beautiful marriage, parishioners and my covenant community. These relationships provide me with spiritual nourishment daily. How could I ever do without these intricate parts of my life? Remaining Catholic doesn’t depend on any earthly structures or relationships, no matter how indispensable they seem right now.

I remain Catholic because it’s who I am, a beloved child of God, best friends with Jesus and a channel of grace and charisms of the Holy Spirit. These don’t depend on whom I’m with or where I worship but on a deep, unshakable conviction that I belong in the Catholic Church where I find the Real Presence of Jesus. He’s my life, my inspiration and my fulfillment. With or without these supportive relationships in my life,

he stands alone as my destiny. I was created for him, for Truth. I was meant to be Catholic. There's no going back from where I belong.

What's your reason to remain Catholic?

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My Surprising Secret to a Happy Marriage



I'm writing about something I have never written about before. I've barely even spoken about it, even with my closest friends. It's been my secret, but it's time to share.

I support and follow the Catholic Church's teaching on artificial contraception.

I have shied away from discussing this topic because it forces me to talk about intimate matters in public, and there's already way too much of that going on these days. It feels unseemly to bring it up. The Southern lady in me is aghast, but it's not just that. The real problem is that I know how hard this teaching is, and for reasons I will explain, I haven't had to experience the full brunt of its difficulty. I'm a vastly inadequate poster child for the virtues of chastity and openness to life.

So I've been silent. I've done nothing to counter the usual narrative, the "Catholic women ignore the Church's teaching on contraception, which is just an idealistic theological fantasy cooked up by old, celibate males" story.

But now I feel compelled to speak up. For one thing, the Synod on the Family is on my mind, and I'm aware of how badly Catholic clerics need to know that there are people in the pews who love the Church's difficult teachings and whose pastoral need is to hear these teachings praised and defended rather than evaded or ignored. Also, I've come to realize that many of my Protestant and Catholic friends think the Church's teaching is nuts, which means, unless they think I'm nuts too, that they take my silence to mean I don't follow or defend that teaching. Finally, and more importantly, I've come to realize that I can't answer questions about what makes my marriage such a happy one, how I know what God wants of me, or what it means to surrender to God, without telling this story. It feels awkward to say so, but the truth is that I can't think of any specific action that has made a more profound difference in my spiritual life than rejecting contraception. (Or in my family life—there's one of us who would definitely not have existed if we had followed conventional wisdom on these matters.)

When I first stopped using contraception, I was a new convert to the faith. I didn't fully understand the Church's teaching, but I had converted because I had decided that the Church possessed the truth and was protected, in its fundamental moral doctrines, from error. If I had thought it was possible for the Church to be wrong about something so important, I would not have become a Catholic to begin with.

And yet, all these years later, I have only three kids. What gives? My small family is probably why people assume I contracept. But you see, I don't really have only three kids. I have three kids here on Earth, but

there are eight more in heaven. I've been pregnant eleven times. I have a known problem that leads to frequent miscarriages, usually between five and ten weeks. I haven't had to contend with the expense and the logistics of a large family, but I've had to deal with the difficulty of remaining open to life in a different way. Alongside my husband, I've had to accept uncertainty and loss.

But God blesses us through suffering, and indeed all of that uncertainty and loss has been an enormous blessing to me. My miscarriages, as painful as they've been, have helped me to understand and appreciate the wisdom, goodness, and beauty of the Church's teaching on sexuality and marriage. Because of those losses, my husband and I have experienced our children as given rather than chosen. We haven't planned our parenthood. We did not choose when to have our children or ponder the perfect age separation or birth months. For us, being open to life also means being open to death. The only way to deal with that, to go forward in hope, is to surrender to God, to decide that His plans for our family are good and worthy of trust.

Having surrendered to God's plans, and having been so grateful for the children He gave us, how could we ever shove God aside and demand total control over our fertility? "Ok, God, that was great of you, but we have two kids now, one boy and one girl, so you can bow out now. It was nice cooperating with your awesome creative power, but we'll take it from here."

But, horrifyingly, that's exactly what we did, at least for a couple of years. I was a professor pursuing tenure, and we were just so darned busy. I wouldn't get any more maternity leave, and even if I switched jobs and did, all those extra years of child care! So expensive, not to mention exhausting. It is not a coincidence that we also didn't attend Mass every Sunday during this time. We were moving often and were spiritually afloat. Thankfully, we recovered from our temporary insanity (which, from the perspective of most, looks like temporary sanity, I realize.)

Being open to life when you want more children is one thing, but being open to life when your family feels complete is another. Accepting our fertility again took a deeper level of surrender, but the rewards were huge. For one thing, we have Peter, who is walking, talking, screaming evidence that God's plans are better than mine. Far more difficult and exasperating than mine, but better.

But there's another reward, having to do with our marriage. As long as we used contraception, I couldn't fully grasp what our marriage really was. I was as if we were just two individuals, joined in a partnership to raise children while each pursuing our individual goals, trying to be as close and as happy together as we could. But that's not what marriage really is. That's a sad, distorted, dull shadow of what marriage is. When we stopped blocking our fertility and went back to cooperating with God, our marriage began to feel once again like what it truly is, a real one-flesh union, a new creation that transcends both of us, something mystical and joyful that reflects, in a not-yet fully clear way, the way God is united to His people. God is alive in our marriage, not just in each of us separately. It's as if our marriage was a thing, and now it's a being. It's alive and potentially life-giving, and we don't know exactly how it will grow and develop.

Date nights are great, but if you really want to put excitement in your marriage, give it life. It's also how you make your marriage last, because to end it would be tantamount to murder.

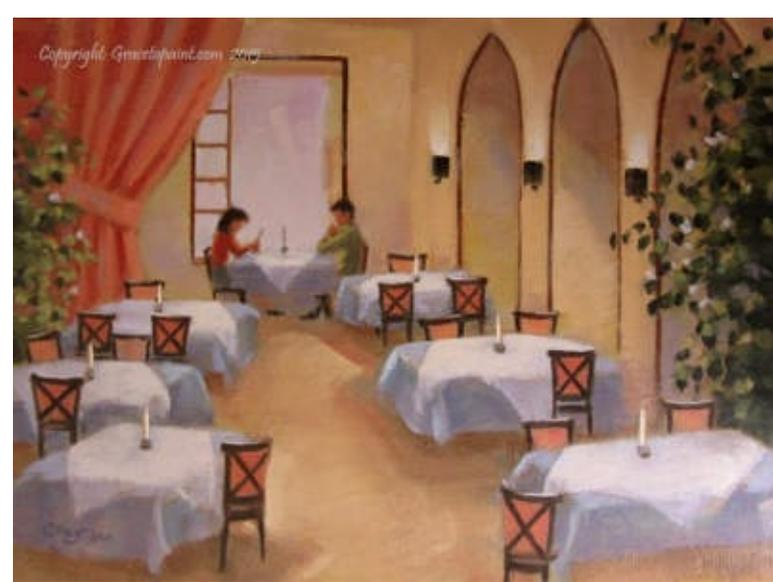
Like I said, I know it's a hard teaching. It's difficult to embrace chastity in marriage, and it's difficult to welcome more children, especially for women with big careers or with health problems or for poor families. I haven't shared my experience before because I don't want to appear to give advice or to shame

anyone, and I'm not doing that now. What I want to do is share this piece of the Good News, because that is what the Church's wisdom in this area has been to me, something beautiful, true, and good that's hidden in plain sight. It's a treasure well worth sacrifice and a truth worth defending.

This contribution is available at <http://www.mollyoshatz.com/my-surprising-secret-to-a-happy-marriage/>
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Table for Two [at Grace to Paint]



9×12" oil paint on canvas panel; use "comment" below to inquire.

It may be the line design that attracted me to the possibility of this painting. It adds punch to the scene that you do not see in the previous day's post.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2015/11/03/table-for-two/>
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Learning to Fly [at Making It In Vermont]

One of my sons asked me a few years ago what would I choose (if I had the opportunity to be gifted with a super power) Flying or Invisibility? Without thinking I immediately chose flying. The son who asked me chose invisibility and went on to state his elaborate case for his choice. But his question and my quick answer brought me back to my childhood.

I used to watch this tv show in the early 1980's called [The Greatest American Hero](#). It had a guy who finds this book and this suit. The suit (very super hero-y with a red cape), has special powers, but it is nearly useless without the book. Well the premise of the show is that the guy loses the book and he and his buddy need to figure out how to make it all work so he can have all his superpowers back in full. He does manage to fly and use other powers by chance, though his landings are always very unpredictable.

One Saturday morning in my 10 year old life, I had a dream that I was the Greatest American Hero and **I could fly**. It was so vivid that feeling of flying and felt so real that when I woke up my 10 year old self had to try it out. I ran downstairs into my living room wearing the long johns I had slept in and bounded around trying to lift off. Even though I didn't catch air, it felt so close, like I was on the verge... it was an amazing feeling.

Eventually, after ten minutes or so of not actually flying, I accepted the dream for what it was and joined my brothers to finish watching the Saturday morning tv line up of Ritchie Rich, the Babapapa's, Care Bears, and whoever else was on before Candlepin Bowling started at 1pm.

I have never forgotten how close I felt to flying, how free...

So lately I've been reading the Catechism of the Catholic church. I've been reading the Bible for years now, pretty much since I moved to Vermont 9 1/2 years ago... But the Catechism and the way it is bringing everything written and unwritten together really reminds me of the book that went with the suit that The Greatest American Hero lost in that kitchy 80's show.

It reminds me of how before I started this adventure with Jesus I was kind of limping along, really not sure how this human suit I had worked or even more importantly, what it was for.

But here it is this life instruction book in front of me. All I need is to comprehend it...

...no small feat.

I could read the Bible over and over and over though and not get it. Just because I have read the words doesn't mean I grasp them, let alone synthesize their meaning into my life. Understanding is gradual, incremental.

Like most things, to understand something to truly understand it. We have to live it.

Take my son G. G is 2 1/2 and has Down syndrome. Can I just say that as I typed that sentence I smiled and surged with pride. True pride in just who he is as a person. Ha! My point exactly!

Before G I had very little contact with anyone with Down syndrome. I was pretty much scared of people with any sort of disability, classified them as other, thought they were all pretty much alike, that their parents must be very special people, that the person with Down syndrome was someone to be pitied, that their quality of life must be poor, they were happy all the time etc. etc. It wasn't in my wheelhouse, I just didn't know, until I did.

I do not think I can say this strongly enough: I DO NOT pity G, or myself for that matter (and no I am not special for having him and loving him). He is my son, I'm getting to know him as he grows, just as I am getting to know my other boys as they grow. The person they are today is not necessarily the person they will be tomorrow. As their mom I do my best to try to help them navigate life and encourage them to leave their spirits open to the many different ways God may call them to become.

G has gifts and is smart. Yes his timetable for certain things is different than my other boys. With each of my 7 sons, if I am being fair to them, I treat them as individuals. Some like being hugged and others just want me to listen to them, others may need a jump start early mornings with a can do attitude from mom. They ALL have different needs, G is no different, he is human, like us all: he gets mad, he gets sad, he laughs, he is silly...

I wouldn't have known though, I wouldn't have *truly* known if he hadn't come into my life. He has opened my eyes.

And that is what faith does, faith says yes in the dark and then waits for the light.

So the Catechism has been that light, it too has opened my eyes to deepen the faith that the Bible and prayer have nurtured.

It is a big book (intimidatingly thick) that I have been reading bit by bit in small moments.

Here is a beautiful paragraph that makes so much sense to me especially after being pretty sick with a parasite, yes a parasite, earlier this month and needed to lean heavily on God, my husband, mother in law, and kids...

(pg 88) paragraph 340 from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tell us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other."

I don't know about you but as a young twenty something person, I did not dwell on my inter-dependence. It was ALL about my inde-pendence. To do it on my own was my ultimate goal.

I am learning the folly of that way of thinking. When you feel like you are living life on your terms, that you are "winning", that you have "earned" your life, there is a sore lack of connection, there is a denial of the true nature of our humanity.

I cannot fly...

...well not on my own at least.

With love from the trenches,

~Lisa

This contribution is available at <http://www.makingitinvermont.com/2015/10/learning-to-fly/>
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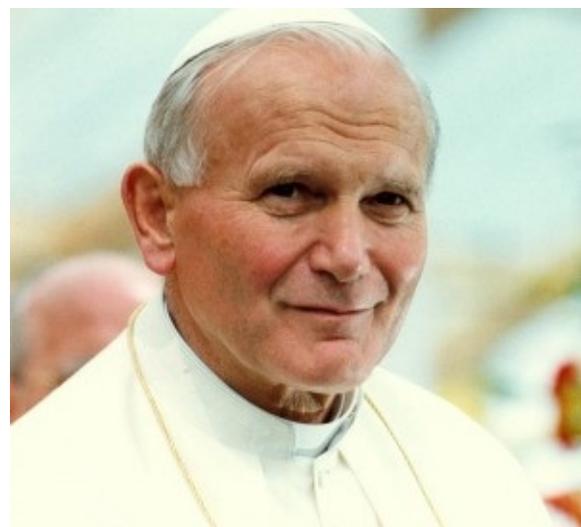
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[Ellen Kolb](#) October 22, 2015

On the feast of St. John Paul II [at Leaven For The Loaf]

He's known as Saint John Paul now, and I'm not the only Catholic who adds "the Great" to the title. Twenty years ago this month, he was simply Pope John Paul II, visiting the United States with a staggering schedule that included three cities and at least fifteen speeches and homilies in five days. Piece of cake for a man who visited more than 120 countries during his pontificate.

From [his farewell address](#) at the end of that 1995 trip:



John Paul II (photo by Leja/Creative Commons)

Democracy serves what is true and right when it safeguards the dignity of every human person, when it respects inviolable and inalienable human rights, when it makes the common good the end and criterion regulating all public and social life. But these values themselves must have an objective content. Otherwise they correspond only to the power of the majority, or the wishes of the most vocal. If an attitude of skepticism were to succeed in calling into question even the fundamental principles of the moral law, the democratic system itself would be shaken in its foundations.

The United States possesses a safeguard, a great bulwark, against this happening. I speak of your founding documents: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. These documents are grounded in and embody unchanging principles of the natural law whose permanent truth and validity can be known by reason, for it is the law written by God in human hearts.

At the center of the moral vision of your founding documents is the recognition of the rights of the human person, and especially respect for the dignity and sanctity of human life in all conditions and at all stages of development. I say to you again, America, in the light of your own tradition: love life,

cherish life, defend life, from conception to natural death.

This contribution is available at <http://leavenforthe loaf.com/2015/10/22/st-john-paul-ii-i-say-to-you-again-america-cherish-life/>
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Very Messy Church Synod [at Convert Journal]



The Catholic Church is a very messy place. It is full of flawed people (well over a billion). We all hope to become saints, but for now we are all sinners, every one of us.

That is why we need the Church.

Her mission is to spread the *Good News*, **without distortion**, in order to help as many people as possible get to Heaven.

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them.

When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted.

Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

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

There is no other institution like the Catholic Church. Absolutely none. This is the institution Christ himself founded, the only one.

What is a synod?

Simply put, a synod is nothing more than a fancy word for an advisory committee. Nothing more. It includes only a small fraction of the Magisterium. At its conclusion, it will make recommendations to the Holy Father.

The current Synod on the Family

I have avoided writing about this, hoping and praying that numerous reports are over-reacting. You might find this hard to believe. It is certainly deeply disappointing, but please try to keep it in perspective..

This synod, very unfortunately, is **a failure**. If you have been following faithful Catholic media, you are already aware of the myriad of problems. These include:

- non-representative participation – the synod members (“synod fathers”) are not drawn from the vast majority (the good shepherds) who represent worldwide Catholicism of the ages, but instead skew heavily toward the modernist “progressive” end of the spectrum; some members have openly promoted heretical positions long before their invitation to the synod.
- non-transparency – information flow has been anything but open. Press credentials are given to new (even non-Catholic) media with apparent heterodox agendas while actually revoked from other long-standing faithful media (even clergy). Transcripts are not provided. Official translators, mostly from

- progressive ranks, give their own personal summaries which have been shown to exaggerate progressive views while omitting traditional, faithful ones which were (often strongly) expressed.
- “shadow synods” – groups pushing progressive agendas have been working in a political style, in private, strategizing how to steer the result.
 - pre-determined results – credible reports of at least draft forms of the final synod recommendations are persistent, including prior to the synod starting.
 - extraordinary synod experiences – the shennigans from the preparatory synod last Fall are legion and quite well documented. This has NOT resulted in effective reforms for the synod itself. If anything, circumstances are worse.
 - synod rules – differ from previous synods and are a major facilitator of the problems.
 - wide ranging issues – the purpose of this synod is to strengthen the family, yet non-related homosexual issues and women’s ordination to the diaconate have been permitted while faithful bishops have been shutdown when supporting the continuous teaching of the Church.

Response of the Faithful

Over 800,000 people, including many Bishops and Cardinals, have signed an extraordinary *Filial Appeal* to Pope Francis asking for clarification.

During the synod, a group of Cardinals (including Cardinal Dolan of New York City) have written to Pope Francis expressing their alarm.

Numerous books by groups of faithful Cardinals and Bishops have been authored in response to the false, dangerous proposals some have made in the last few years which are coming to a climax now.

Probable Outcome

Doctrine is inerrant and therefore can not be changed (ever), so accept that as a given.

The synod itself may or may not produce a public final report. If it does, expect it to be ambiguous and contradictory. The committee tasked with writing it is clearly stacked. Pope Francis might take no action. If he does, expect approval of “pastoral responses” to “certain needs” which he either specifies OR leaves up to national bishop conferences.

Either way, the net result of this in much of Europe (Germany for sure while Poland not at all) and certain non-European areas (including parts of the US), will be an increase in significant abuses. This is similar to the pattern that followed Vatican II. People will be led away from truth to their eternal detriment.

There is talk of this causing schism (that won’t happen, but true unity will suffer). Bishops are being urged to walk away from the synod should it be necessary for them to show their strongest disagreement with its often outrageous conduct and false conclusions.

YET, the Church will survive. We may see harmful turmoil, but in the end the Church will pull together, possibly smaller, but stronger than ever. Perhaps it will be under a different pope and not in our lifetimes. This remains the Church Christ founded, it can be wounded, but the gates of Hell can not prevail.

As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer

accompanied him.

Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?”

Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?”

He was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray him, one of the Twelve.

For now, pray. Pray for the faithful bishops who fight against this stacked deck. Pray for the heterodox bishops who seek compromise with the fallen world under a banner of false mercy. Pray for Pope Francis, that he strongly and clearly lead the Church in the truth of Christ.

This contribution is available at <http://fp.convertjournal.com/2015/10/very-messy-church-synod/>
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A Tree Grows in Brooklyn: An Appreciation [at One Thousand Words a Week]



Oh, magic hour when a child first knows it can read printed words!

~ [Betty Smith](#)

“Stop by the library and grab a movie for this weekend.” It’s a simple request I’ve heard from my wife countless times, but I always take it up as a challenge: *Can I find something we’ll both enjoy?* We have limited time for movie-watching, so I like to make it count.

Unless I have something in mind already, I usually skip the “New Releases,” and instead head directly to the librarian’s re-shelving cart. I suppose it’s a “wiki” approach to winnowing the field, perusing what others in my neighborhood have been checking out, and it often leads to some happy discoveries. It’s how we originally came across the six-hour BBC version of “Pride and Prejudice,” now a family institution, along with another classic favorites like “[A Tree Grows in Brooklyn](#)” (1945).



I remember our first viewing of “Tree,” and marveling that I’d never come across it before. It’s the story of Francie Nolan and her impoverished family struggling to survive in Brooklyn after the turn of the twentieth century, and how flourishing can still be nurtured in the midst of tremendous strife. Director Elia Kazan managed to shape a powerful, beautiful, *believable* narrative about struggle, sin, and salvation – truly magnificent. Every character – *every* character, both amiable and repellent – somehow captures the viewer’s attention and sympathy. It’s a remarkable achievement.

The funny thing, though, is that my love of the movie never drove me to seek out its inspiration, the [novel](#)

by [Betty Smith](#), and I only did so at the urging of my daughter Margaret. “If you liked the movie, you’ve got to read this,” she insisted, handing it to me. “It’s my favorite book now” – high praise from my literary teen. I followed her advice, and by the time I finished it, I knew I had a mission: To get people to read it. I haven’t been affected by a novel – actually *any* book – like that in a long, long time.

To begin with, Smith’s compassionate portrayal of her characters is clearly what inspired the film’s benevolent tone. There’s no excusing, for example, the alcoholism of Francie’s father, nor the repugnant selfishness of Uncle Willie, but both men elicit our understanding, pity, and even mercy. The novel’s bad

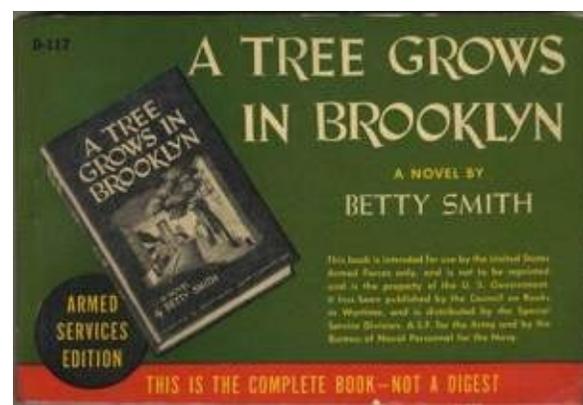


characters, like real life, aren’t *all* bad, and the good characters similarly have their obvious flaws. There’s room in the narrative for grace to operate on every individual’s margins – a place in their broken personalities and spirits for God to stake a claim and undertake a sanctifying operation.

That leads to a second appealing aspect of Betty Smith’s epic that makes it stand apart: its authentic unfolding. Unlike other classic coming-of-age novels, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* follows its protagonist’s fortunes throughout adolescence and beyond (unlike the briefer slice of life depicted in [To Kill a Mockingbird](#)), and there’s no implied assurance to the reader that all shall be well in the end (as in *Anne of Green Gables*). Thus, there’s a longitudinal continuity and open-ended moral vision in *Tree* that seems to be palpably present as you read – as if you’re living what is happening in the novel *as it is happening*. It’s like an urban American [Neverending Story](#): you get caught up into it and it becomes *real*.

And it’s a reality you don’t want to end. There were several moments in the reading of this novel that brought tears to my eyes – the first taking place within the first ten pages – but my sobs at the conclusion coincided with turning the last page. Smith’s story was over, and I was left thinking about Francie growing up and moving on to college in Michigan. Would she be alright? What new hurdles and challenges would she face? I missed her already, but I knew I was a better person for having gotten to know her – for having the opportunity to walk beside her and share in her trials and triumphs.

The foregoing assertions are pretty bold, I know, and ordinarily I’d shrink from such ticklish claims given my lack of literary criticism street cred. But I happened upon an article a while back that emboldened me, and I was persuaded that my (and my daughter’s) singular devotion to *Tree* wasn’t so far-fetched.



It wasn't an article about Betty Smith or her story directly. Instead, it was about the cheap, specially-sized paperbacks distributed to U.S. forces overseas during World War II. Molly Guptill Manning had published a history of these "Armed Services Editions," and Jennifer Maloney reviewed it for the [Wall Street Journal](#).

In her review, Maloney included a brief and engaging portrait of troops taking up serious literature in the midst of combat, but what really caught my attention was her sketch of the Marine who wrote a letter to Betty Smith.

He told her his heart was dead after watching his friend die. For two years, he walked around in an almost comatose state. After contracting malaria he found himself in the hospital without anything to do. When he asked the nurse for a book, she gave him "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn." "He started reading it, and he could not believe that he laughed," Ms. Manning said. "He hadn't laughed in such a long time."

Apparently Smith's narrative also elicited her correspondent's tears – something the Marine acknowledged as unusual. Nevertheless, "he was proud of his tears because it proved that he was human again," Manning noted in an [NPR](#) interview. "He closed the letter saying that he didn't think he'd be able to sleep through the night if he hadn't thanked the woman who caused him to live again."

Laughter and tears; joy and tragedy – the two extremes of the human condition. Betty Smith's wonderful tale provides unexpected, subtle insights into how those extremes are intimately connected. "Sometimes I think it's better to suffer bitter unhappiness and to fight and to scream out, and even to suffer that terrible pain," Smith declares through one of her characters, "than just to be ... safe." That's a core affirmation in *Tree* that not only rings true, but clearly confers healing as well.

This contribution is available at <http://onethousandwordsaweek.wordpress.com/2015/10/25/a-tree-grows-in-brooklyn-an-appreciation/>
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A 'Bushel Of Falsehood' and A Lesson From Archbishop Lynch [at Sacred Sharings For The Soul]



"The Ecumenical Council of the Vatican is only known to the world in general from reports of newspaper correspondents. These reports are generally very unreliable, many totally false, others containing a grain of truth in a bushel of falsehood, and cannot be relied upon. These reports generally came back to us in Rome, and amused and often surprised us, as each bishop received the leading newspaper of his city. A weekly Toronto journal kept me posted in the news of the day here and brought me news from Rome that I was entirely ignorant of. The secular newspapers, as a rule, were what we term in opposition." (Archbishop John Joseph Lynch-Lecture at St. Michael's Cathedral Toronto, following the first Vatican Council)

I have chosen to revisit these words from the first Archbishop of Toronto as I see them rather fitting in regards to what we are currently experiencing throughout much of the media coverage on the current Synod taking place in Rome. Due to the nature of this Synod there is much being discussed that is hitting home with many people. There is a danger however when the information that one is reading and receiving is flawed. It is important to remember as [Fr. John Zuhlsdorf](#) reminds us that "there is a Synod and there is a Synod of the media".

Through revisiting this excerpt from a lecture given by Late Archbishop John Joseph Lynch at St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto -*following his return from the first Vatican Council*, I could not help but be drawn to his eloquent words about newspaper reports concerning matters of Vatican events. These words from long ago echo today and offer some insight as to how one should treat secular and politically driven media reporting today.

It is important to unearth these words from Bishop Lynch as I find that they affirm the fallibility and error in much of what we may read, hear, and receive today.

The immediate accessibility of information has allowed for a large number of articles, interviews, and video footage to surface about our Pope and our Bishops. Their words are often misused, misunderstood, or related in such a manner to serve one's own ideals/agenda. This rapid sharing of news carries both positive and negative elements. It is important to approach information that we receive regarding the matters of our Holy Catholic Church with great discernment and understanding of our faith.

Many are often inclined to cling to the `grain of truth` within the `bushel of falsehood` as a result of personal agendas and many other varying reasons. While seeking to know more about matters concerning the faith can be leading one closer to encountering the fullness of Truth, it can also damage or

alter perceptions of this Truth if what is being absorbed is flawed..

The `grain of truth` that we may cling to amidst the `bushel of falsehood` may be a reflection of our own selfish desire and our unwillingness to surrender to the complete Truth found in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; Truth that is unwavering and does not bend with the opinions, views, and wants of a majority, but remains fixed and concrete as when it was proclaimed by Christ. I do not desire to judge the opinions and values of others or to determine that their sentiments or desire for `change` is wrong, I am simply at peace with what has always been and remains consistently right and just (C.C.)

More from Archbishop Lynch...

``The secular newspaper correspondents have published that Papal Infallibility means that the Pope is like unto God, Supreme, not subject to any error, and can make truth falsehood, and falsehood truth. I need hardly say that this definition is utterly false. Another journal says that Papal Infallibility means that the Pope is impeccable — cannot err — and that all his sayings and doings are infallible; that also is false. He is subject to human weaknesses, and confesses them, like every good child of the Church, and receives absolution and penance. An other writer says that the Pope can prophesy and invent a new religion as he pleases — well, that also is false. He receives no gift of prophesy by his election to the Popedom and can invent no new dogma or religion ; he can only pronounce that such and such truth has been always in the Church, and has been revealed to the Church by the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, according to the words of Christ, " I will send you another Paraclete who will teach you ALL truth — not truth, but ALL truth.`` (Archbishop John Joseph Lynch)

This contribution is available at <http://sacredsharingsforthesoul.blogspot.ca/2015/10/a-bushel-of-falsehood-lesson-from.html>

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Beauty of Union With God [at A Spiritual Journey]

This was all I could think of this morning. Here are some descriptions. In union with God, you and God become one, totally inseparable. You and God are in each other and belong to each other. Wherever God is, you are. You are aware of God dwelling within your heart. You and God share the same joys and sorrows; are in perfect harmony because his will and yours are the same. You enjoy his perfection, holiness, and beauty. It's eternal love. It's reality, no fantasy. Without union, your spiritual journey will be laborious. With union, it becomes effortless because God carries you all the way. Union is possible because it's all God's doing with your consent. Union with God is the ideal and perfect state of existence for us because it is precisely what God desires.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2015/10/beauty-of-union-with-god.html>
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Can You Drink the Cup? [at The Jesuit Post]

“A poem,” Robert Frost wrote, “begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness.”

In our preaching course, professor Bob VerEecke, SJ encourages us future-priests to break from the boring ease of staid prose. His assignment for [this Sunday](#) challenged us to preach an original poem about the Gospel. Mine read like a dry-bones outline to an essay; less *lump-in-throat*, more *lump-in-pillow*.

The writer Jean Cocteau notes that a poet doesn’t invent — he listens. Fortunately, our class has a few keen listeners in it. Brother Scott Surrency, O.F.M. Cap., wrote a poem, “Can you drink the cup?” which stings and soothes in equal measure. Finer than any essay, it echoes Jesus’ simple (j/k, not simple) question about Christian discipleship:

Can you *drink* the cup?
Drink, not survey or analyze,
ponder or scrutinize –
from a distance.
But drink – imbibe, ingest,
take into you so that it becomes a piece of your inmost self.
And not with cautious sips
that barely moisten your lips,
but with audacious drafts
that spill down your chin and onto your chest.
(Forget decorum – reserve would give offense.)

Can you drink the *cup*?
The cup of rejection and opposition,
betrayal and regret.
Like vinegar and gall,
pungent and tart,
making you wince and recoil.
But not only that – for the cup is deceptively deep –
there are hopes and joys in there, too,
like thrilling champagne with bubbles
that tickle your nose on New Year’s Eve,
and fleeting moments of almost – *almost* – sheer ecstasy
that last as long as an eye-blink, or a champagne bubble,
but mysteriously satisfy and sustain.

Can you drink the cup?
Yes, you — with your insecurities,
visible and invisible.
You with the doubts that nibble around the edges

and the ones that devour in one great big gulp.

You with your impetuous starts and youth-like bursts of love and devotion.

You with your giving up too soon – or too late – and being tyrannically hard on yourself.

You with your *Yes, but*'s and *I'm sorry*'s – again.

Yes, *you* – but with *my* grace.

Can you drink the cup?

Can I drink the cup?

Yes.

Scott Surrency, O.F.M. Cap. (2015)

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Jane Eyre and Real Virtue [at CF Family]



Clare and I just finished up another

[Valley Performing Arts](#)

play ~ Jane Eyre. We already miss the shows and the cast and crew. It truly is a community affair. One of the sweet parts of each VPA show is the themed, interactive lobby exhibit. Last year's *Velveteen Rabbit* had a Christmas tree with Santa giving away candy canes and posing for pictures. *Jane Eyre's* crew came up with a people-sized picture frame and black velvet background with a rack full of vintage clothing for patrons to don and snap photos in.

It was wonderful to read the book again after many years and I am so proud to contribute to putting the story on stage.

[My friend](#)

wrote a piece on Jane Eyre over the summer and I wrote for our Frontiersman last month. I've copied mine here in full, as clicking on the newspaper link results in annoying, required survey questions.

Jane Eyre and Real Virtue

"Reader, I married him."

One of the most famous lines in literature, this sentence begins the final chapter of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. It is a story of a girl turned lady, a girl who learned through sadness and loss to better herself and to become a lady who held tightly to God's laws of charity and chastity, a girl whose life began unwanted and unloved and ended with knowing "what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth...supremely blest beyond what language can express because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine."

What is it about Jane? Why are we drawn to her story? Why are readers, so pleasantly addressed as such by Miss Bronte, gladdened to see her move from unforgiveness to forgiveness of her Aunt Reed; to see her stand up for Christian morality with her master; to see her call upon Providence in her deepest sorrow, to see happiness and contentment finally visit her, all the while retaining her vibrant personality and quick wit? Why does relationship with Jane change and soften Mr. Rochester until he did "begin to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconciliation to my Maker...to pray."?

Virtue.

It's not a word you hear much anymore. From the Latin word

virtus

, it means, "Habit superadded to a faculty of the soul, disposing it to elicit with readiness, acts conformable to our rational nature." Or, as Saint Augustine thankfully explained more succinctly, "Virtue is a good habit consonant with our nature."

The Church charts virtue into two groups: moral and theological. The moral virtues are prudence (reasoning to discern the good), justice (man regulating himself in relation to others), temperance (restraining concupiscence), and fortitude (moral strength to do what right reason requires). The Catechism of the Catholic Church says about these, "The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love (#1804).

The theological virtues are infused; that is, gifts from God. They are faith (intellect perfected by Divine light), hope (confidence in Divine assistance to life everlasting), and charity (love of God and neighbor). According to our catechism, "The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They have the one and triune God for their origin, motive, and object (#1813).

Jane saw virtue in her Lowood School friend Helen Burns who, when questioned by Jane about vengeance, answered with, "I so sincerely forgive the first [criminal] while I abhor the last [crime]: with

this creed [from the Creator] revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low; I live in calm, looking to the end. Why should we ever sink overwhelmed with distress when life is so soon over and death is so certain an entrance to happiness -- to glory? God is my father; God is my friend; I love him; I believe he loves me." Indeed, Helen's life was over too soon. Her gravestone was marked with her precious name and the word,

Resurgam

-- I shall rise again. Her influence lived on in Jane, though, and made the world a little better.

She also saw virtue in her teacher and friend Miss Temple, who, as well as teaching Jane the liberal



arts of language, literature, French, drawing, and mathematics, took every opportunity to smile, to give, to embrace, to listen, and to show a tear. Jane said, "I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts. What seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind." Jane carried this virtue, both from God and practiced in life, with her to Thornfield Hall and Mr. Rochester.

Her virtue attracted Mr. Rochester: "The more you and I converse, the better; for while I cannot blight you, you may refresh me." He delighted in Jane's true, easy, and excellent conversation free of coquetry and shallowness. Their interactions leading to true love are delightful to read. And often funny.

"Tell me now, fairy as you are, can't you give me a charm or a philter or something of that sort to make me a handsome man?"

" 'It would be past the power of magic, Sir'; and in thought I added, 'a loving eye is all the charm needed; to such you are handsome enough; or rather, your sternness has a power beyond beauty'."

When the existence of a secret, lunatic wife was exposed and their wedding called off, a desperate Mr. Rochester begs Jane to move with him to France and live together, for no one would know or care. To which Jane replied, "I care! I will keep the laws given by God; sanctioned by man. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation; they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour, stringent are they, inviolate they shall be. They have a worth; there I plant my foot. I will not be yours." Her answer to her love's anguish was to "Do as I do; trust in God and yourself. Believe in heave. Hope to meet again there. I advise you to live sinless and to die tranquil."

Resurgam. Virtue.



This contribution is available at <http://northerncfamily.blogspot.com/2015/10/jane-eyre-and-real-virtue.html>
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Overcoming Annoyance

»»»» Lead Me On
St. Thérèse ««««

Theologyisaverb.com

**“Formerly one of our nuns managed to irritate me whatever she did or said. The devil was mixed up in it, for it was certainly he who made me see so many disagreeable traits in her.”
(*The Story of a Soul*, St. Thérèse)**

To a chosen few, I have confided that **this** less than perfect, but usually patient child of God does indeed have her moments. There, I said it! All joking aside, however, this week I was reminded of St. Thérèse’s own difficulties with her fellow sister with someone in my own life. While I didn’t outwardly display my inward feelings of annoyance and profound frustration, it was in truth all consuming. Occupying my mind, and keeping my heart at bay, I found myself unable to truly listen or engage in anything being said. This inner hollow numbness, at the words being spoken was so striking, I caught myself aghast at my disconnect from the conversation and her expression of pain. Why was she telling me this? Why was I being drawn into her inner circle, is there no one else?, I was thinking. Then it sank in, God wasn’t asking anyone else in that moment...he was asking me.

“As I did not want to give way to my natural dislike for her, I told myself that charity should not only be a matter of feeling but should show itself in deeds. So I set myself to do for this sister just what I should have done for someone I loved most dearly.” (St. Thérèse)

So, therein lies the challenge, and the invitation that is set before me. To not only tolerate, but to extend the same love that I would show for someone “I loved most dearly”. This requires not only desire but an intentional effort, something not usually needed for those whom we find easily to love. And yet for it to be meaningful, and not hypocritical, it has to begin with love and involve a change in heart. Yet, where do I start? Prayer. Here is a gift that blesses not only the one being prayed for but the one who prays.

“Every time I met her, I prayed for her and offered God all her virtues and her merits. I was sure this would greatly delight Jesus, for every artist likes to have his works praised and the divine Artist of souls is pleased when we do not halt outside the exterior of the sanctuary where He has chosen to dwell but go inside and admire its beauty.” (St. Thérèse)

Beauty, yes, God has most certainly given each one of us virtues and merits..that is worthy to be praised and recognized. While hidden at times, perhaps, they are there awaiting discovery and appreciation

nonetheless. And still, I wonder, God's brush strokes and artistry remain hidden at times within me? Most certainly, I wasn't showing my best self to her, the fullness of who God had created me to be.

“I did not remain content with praying a lot for this nun who caused me so much disturbance. I tried to do as many things for her as I could, and whenever I was tempted to speak unpleasantly to her, I made myself give her a pleasant smile and tried to change the subject.” (St. Thérèse)

Ah, here we have the next step, small outward gestures of love and concern. Not for the world to see, but that speak of our gratitude for God's beauty within each of us. St. Thérèse never said this was easy for her, in fact she speaks of her internal reluctance to do so. The resistance I feel, I cannot help but recognize is God himself prompting me to grow.

“When I was violently tempted by the devil and if I could slip away without her seeing my inner struggle, I would flee like a soldier deserting the battlefield. And after all this she asked me one day with a beaming face: “Sister Therese, will you please tell me what attracts you so much to me? You give me such a charming smile whenever we meet.” Ah! it was Jesus hidden in the depth of her soul who attracted me, Jesus who makes the bitterest things sweet!”(St. Thérèse)

You too, St. Thérèse? Whilst the saints inspire us so much in the joys, delights and flights of ecstasy experienced in seeking to love and serve God, so too do their challenges. To this I say thank you, St. Thérèse for your openness and admittance of imperfection. Thank you for sharing so generously of the struggle. For in doing so, you have given the rest of us striving to be someday saints hope and companionship in the journey.

Peace,



This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2015/10/12/overcoming-annoyance-lead-me-on-st-therese/>
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10 Reasons I Haven't Given Up on the Rosary

[The Rosary](#) drifts in and out of my life. Seasons change, lifestyles are uprooted, and my interest in the prayer waxes and wanes. Yet, same as the beads scattered across the dining room buffet, it remains within reach.

October is the Month of the Holy Rosary, and I'm bothered by the fact the Rosary isn't part of my routine the way it once was. I had no experience with a family recitation of the Rosary, so praying it privately during my daily commute for years suited me just fine. Then the commute ended, and I've struggled ever since.

Add to the fact that family prayer with young children – at least my young children – is frustrating and aggravating at best. I breathed a sigh of relief when I read [this post](#) on a family Rosary that resembles prayer in our household. I'm so weary of the gentle suggestions to provide little ones with pretty pictures to look at and coloring books to use so that they can follow along quietly. Ain't gonna work here.

I can't recall a time we've gotten through bedtime prayers, which last less than five minutes, without multiple calls to “kneel,” “stop climbing on me,” “leave your sister alone,” “be quiet,” etc. There is NOTHING calm, peaceful, or satisfying about it. It is a cross with only glimmers – very small, distant glimmers – of devotion.

Yet I'd never consider abandoning bedtime prayers.

Here's why I haven't abandoned the idea of the Rosary despite repeated bouts of boredom and circumstances that make its recitation less than appealing.

1. **It's flexible and portable.** The mysteries and prayers have long been committed to memory. Got a few minutes? Time enough for a decade. Forgot your beads? Still have ten fingers. Driving, waiting, lying in bed, walking? Got you covered.
2. **It fits every mood and need.** Discouraged and suffering? Try the Sorrowful Mysteries. Happy and grateful? Pray the Joyful mysteries. Humbled and awestruck? Go with the Glorious Mysteries. You get the idea. It's adaptable.
3. **My relationship with Mary.** I've always been comfortable turning to Mary in times of need, begging her to go to her Son. There's nothing quite like a mother's love, especially when the mother is sinless, pure and yet fully human.
4. **It brings peace. And sleep.** There's something calming about the prayers, whether it's the repetition, the familiarity, or the words themselves. It's still my go-to prayer in times of trouble when more than a quick prayer or plea is warranted. It's also an effective sleep-inducer, as I've counseled kids with occasional bouts of insomnia.
5. **So many resources to keep it fresh.** Need a boost? I do. There are all sorts of aids and books. It's time for me to re-read this book – [The Rosary: Keeping Company with Jesus and Mary](#). (My short [Amazon review](#).)
6. **The mixture of repetition and contemplation.** Paradoxically, it's both the same and different every time.
7. **The beads.** They can be rough-hewn and masculine, intricate and dainty, or chunky and coated in

primary colors. You can go plastic, glow-in-the-dark campy or finely-detailed and handmade. To each his own. [These lovely beads](#) recently caught my eye.



Day of the Dead Rosary. Look at the little skulls.

8. **Holier people than me recommend it.** [Starting with Mary. And lots of saints.](#) Do I have to say it? Nope. Should I? Yep.
9. **The Hail Mary.** In my estimation, except for the Our Father, a prayer doesn't get more perfect than this. Most Catholics have rattled it off a bazillion times. It's worth examining. Sarah Reinhard's new book, [Word by Word: Slowing Down with the Hail Mary](#) is the perfect tool for doing so. [I recommend it.](#)
10. **It can be fun.** Living rosaries, rosaries prayed during a cemetery procession. My school-age children participated in a Rosary with balloon launch last week.



Rosary Balloon Launch
(Photo: Carla Lang)

BONUS: The bling factor. We've all seen rosaries dangling from rearview mirrors or hanging from celebrity necks. (You can Google the celebrity images. Some are repulsive. Some are respectful. Like anything else, its propriety depends on the spirit with which it's done.)

I've wasted more time than I should trying to gauge whether a celebrity is wearing a rosary or something else. Is it a rosary or a "miracle icon"?

RISER

DIERKS BENTLEY



Exhibit A: Rosary or not a rosary? Miracle icon? Who knows? Is he even Catholic? Not sure.

This contribution is available at <http://carolynastfalk.com/2015/10/20/top-10-tuesday-10-reasons-i-havent-given-up-on-the-rosary/>
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Thankful Fall [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



Thankful for my backyard, yellow, fall view from our dining room.

We've had a beautiful fall here in Minnesota.

I am trying to enjoy and appreciate it.

(hoping it to be my last one here in Minnesota)

We've had both warm and cooler temps.

Next week looks to have expected highs in the 40's



Thankful for waterpainting boys

There's a christian message with the spider web, did you know that?

Yes.

The spider makes her web and busies herself

with a million other things going on.

She decides one day to do some housecleaning,

getting rid of old bugs and messy strings.

She is busy working away until she pulls
a piece of the web that is stretched out and looks as if
there is no need for it.

She pulls it out and the whole web falls down.

Do you know the moral of this story?

(it's kind of a stretch of the imagination but I like it)

The string that she was not paying attention any more
ended up being the string she should have been taking the most care of.

Her spiritual life.

God

Her soul

Putting the right things in order, by putting God first and center.



Pretty, huh?

And kind of October-ish-Halloween-ish.

(trust me, it's a word)



Thankful for homeschool soccer on Saturday mornings!

(this is a picture of the morning warm up)

Thankful the people that run it, have been running it for 20 some years now

and this is their last year.

Their youngest is a senior.

What a gift they've been all these years to all of us!



Thankful a couple weeks ago, we had temps in the 80's

It was like summer again!



Kids were running around in shorts, playing with water and sticks
(and branches)



Thankful I got to correct papers out in it!



The next day.

Not so warm.

It was really, really cold actually!

Thankful we only have a few more winter items to replace
after giving everything away last spring.



Thankful for unicycling Mondays!



It's hard to get pictures of moving unicyclists...these two are a little easier!



See?



Thankful they are forever best friends and worst of enemies!!



Reminds me of these two cuties!

This is my little brother and I!

(he's 13 months younger than I am)

We were 2 and 4 here and I remember it vividly.

The photographer wanted him to lean on me and his elbow was digging into my leg.

But she made him keep it there....can't you tell by the look on my face?



Isn't he just a honey?

Now if he doesn't make you want to have another baby, nothing will.



I tried to steal him before we left, but it didn't work,

I forgot my baby carseat!



Thankful for little helpers!



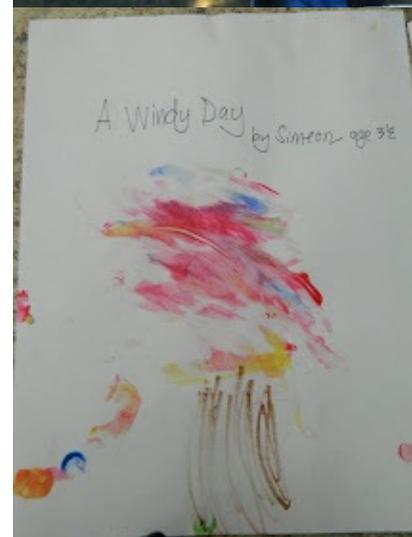
Thankful for graveyard walks on fall days

This graveyard is behind our home, through the woods.





Thankful some kids still jump on the trampoline!



Thankful for beautiful fall art!



Thankful [Billie Jo](#)

is always sharing her love for candles and her home looks so homey,

because I'd thrown out all my candles decluttering last spring!

So I had to go get a fall smelling candle and I'm loving it!



Thankful for these two....



and fall leaf kicking walks!





Aren't they sweet?

They're holding hands....



No walk goes without someone getting stuff in their shoes



or kids throwing things down someone's back



Please tell me our kids are not the only ones that fight like this!!

Thankful their fighting did not ruin *my walk!*



Thankful for my fall mailbox!

(kind of a sad sight these days)



Reminding myself of this quote daily.

(**Thankful** I know how to put words on pictures now!)

I probably should have picked a different picture though,

as no color wording worked.

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2015/10/thankful-fall.html>
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Forgive us our trespasses... [at On the Road to Damascus]

Johnny and Billie were playing catch in the back yard on a sunny Sunday afternoon. Johnny was younger than his brother and couldn't catch as well. Billie teased Johnny about this and Johnny grew angry. When Johnny could no longer take the teasing he threw the ball as hard as he could at his brother. The ball sailed over Billie's head and crashed through the kitchen window. The boys ran to the front of the house in the hope that they wouldn't be caught. The boys' dad came out of the house and looked at the window. Shaking his head he went back into the house and nothing was ever said to either of the boys.

When the boys came down for breakfast the next morning they found the kitchen full of ladybugs. They were everywhere. They were on the walls, on the table, even crawling on their pancakes.

"Where did all of these ladybugs come from?" Johnny asked.

"They came through the broken window." Johnny's mother said with a grumble.

"The repair man is coming." Johnny's dad said calmly

Later that night Billie went into Johnny's bedroom. "You will be doing the dishes for me tonight." Billie said to his brother.

"I will not." Johnny replied.

"If you don't do the dishes for me I will tell mom and dad you broke the kitchen window."

Johnny hung his head and went downstairs to do the dishes for his brother.

The next night Billie visited Johnny again. "Tonight you will take the trash out for me." Billie said. Johnny knew better than to argue. He just hung his head and took out the trash.

Wednesday night Billie told Johnny to walk the dog for him. Johnny grew angry and exclaimed, "No I won't". He walked out of the room, went downstairs, and found his parents.

"Mom, dad, I broke the kitchen window." Johnny said through tear filled eyes. "I am sorry."

"We know." Johnny's father said. "I was in the kitchen and saw you do it."

"So what are you going to do with me?" Johnny asked.

"Son, we love you and we forgive you for breaking the window. But it is still broken and you need to repair the damage you have caused." Johnny's dad said both sternly and lovingly. "The repair man is coming in the morning and it will cost five dollars to fix the window."

"But I only have a dollar and a nickel in my piggy bank." Johnny said dejectedly. "I know, I counted it on Sunday."

“Go get your piggy bank and let’s have a look.” His father said with a slight grin on his face.

Johnny ran up to his room and brought his piggy bank to his father. He pulled the plug out of the belly and began to shake the bank. Five, one dollar bills spilled out onto the carpet. Johnny’s eyes got big and his mouth hung open.

“I only had a dollar and a nickel in there, I swear!” he exclaimed in disbelief.

Johnny’s father picked up the money and gave his son a hug. “I will make sure the window gets fixed in the morning.” His father said. Johnny hugged his father tight with a smile that went from ear to ear.

As Johnny ran back to his room his mother looked at his father and raised an eyebrow.

"I put the extra four dollars in there last night." His father said. "I figured he would break and admit it tonight."

A cornerstone in Protestant theology is “once saved, always saved”. Many believe that Jesus died once for the forgiveness of all sins, past, present, and future. Because all sins have already been forgiven there is no need to confess them and seek forgiveness once you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Any transgression they commit has already been forgiven.

Sin is any thought or word, spoken or left unspoken, or any action done or one we have failed to do that damages the relationship between one’s self and God and God’s people. When one damages this relationship a debt is incurred.

Forgiveness is a word that means “to let go”. God is love and forgiveness is a fruit of love. In his perfect love for us God is willing to let go of the debt we owe him when we sin. The key words here are “willing to”. God is “willing to” let go of our debt. It is not automatic as the once saved always saved people believe it to be. If Jesus died once for all sin (which he did) why are all sins not automatically forgiven?

Forgiveness is a fruit of love but it is also a gift given in love. For a gift to be effective the gift has to be accepted, opened, and used. If I give you a gift for your birthday and you hand it back to me and tell me you don’t want it you have not received anything. If I give you a gift and you put it in the closet without opening it you have received nothing. For my gift to you to be effective you have to accept it, open it, and use it.

Forgiveness is a gift given in love. For forgiveness to happen we have to accept it, open it, and use it. Another gift God has given us is our free will. God is willing to give us the gift of forgiveness but he also respects our right to deny this gift, to shelve this gift, and to not use this gift. The only sin God will not forgive is the sin we will not allow him to forgive. This comes in two flavors; despair and arrogance.

Despair happens when we believe that our sin is so great that even God cannot forgive it. God is willing but we cannot believe he can so the gift of forgiveness is never received. Arrogance happens when we believe that we don’t need God’s forgiveness. Instead, many times we believe that it is God who needs our forgiveness instead. In neither case is the gift of forgiveness accepted and therefore the sin is never forgiven. This is always by our choice, our will, and not by God’s. Once saved, always saved violates the principle of free will for it denies the individual the ability to reject God’s forgiveness.

Like with the broken window, although the debt of our sin is forgiven there is still damage to be repaired. When the sin only damages our relationship with God that relationship has to be repaired. God's love for us is perfect and cannot be damaged. The real repair work is on us and our side of the relationship. This is done through penance. Penance is defined as voluntary self-punishment inflicted as an outward expression of repentance for having done wrong. It is our way of telling God our Father that we are sincerely sorry for what we have done. Penance needs to be serious enough that it stands as a deterrent to us not to commit the sin again but not so grave that it causes further harm.

In addition to causing damage to our relationship with God our sins can also cause damage to the relationships with God's people. For example, if I lie to someone with the intent to defraud them I not only damage my relationship to God by violating the eighth commandment but I damage my relationship to the person I have lied to. I have to seek forgiveness from God but I also have to seek forgiveness from the person I have lied to.

We are called to forgive as God forgives. Indeed, we are called to forgive even if forgiveness isn't sought by the person who harmed us. In this case forgiveness actually serves two purposes. It does release the person from the debt incurred by their action if and when they ever are willing to accept our forgiveness. When we forgive we are also released from the affects that sin can cause on us.

When someone sins against us it often creates feelings within us that generate evil intentions. We hate the person for what they have done. We hope that they will get theirs. We pray for bad things to happen to them. In the extreme we seek revenge. All of these responses have an evil intent. When we give in to evil and respond with malicious intent in our hearts we damage our relationship with God. When hate in our hearts is not released and purged it can turn into poison and affect everything we do.

When we truly forgive someone who has harmed us we "let go" of all of the built up evil inside of us. We are released and a huge weight is lifted from our hearts. Forgiving someone and letting go of all malicious intent is not the same thing as forgetting the damage done. We are not called to forgive and forget. We are called to forgive. To forgive does not mean we have to open ourselves up to have the same damage happen again.

The evil one uses our sin that is kept in darkness against us. It gives him power over us in much the same way that Billie used the broken window to get Johnny to do his chores. Once we bring our sins into the light he loses that power over us. Once Johnny told his dad what he had done Billie lost the ability to blackmail him. As a Catholic we bring our sins into the light in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We confess our sins to a priest who is acting in persona Christi capitis – in the person of Christ the head. In effect, we confess our sins straight to Christ.

Why can't I just confess my sins directly to God? Like Johnny's father God the Father already knows our sins. He sees all we do. We can go directly to God in an act of perfect contrition, that is, if we bring the sin completely out of the darkness of our hearts and are truly sorry for it. For most of us that is very difficult to do. It is easy to say sorry to God and not actually mean it as long as we are not held accountable for it. The sin never really leaves the darkness of our hearts. As long as it is in our hearts the evil one can use it against us.

When we confess to a priest we bring the sin into the light where it cannot be hidden. Jesus gave authority to forgive sins and that authority has been bestowed upon the priest. When the priest gives absolution it is not the man but Jesus through the man granting the forgiveness and burning the sin away in the light of his

love.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This is an extremely dangerous part of the Lord's Prayer. We are petitioning God to only forgive us as much as the forgiveness we offer to others. Mercy will be received in the same measure it is given. If we refuse to forgive someone for a wrong committed against us, if we live with a grudge, or if we harbor evil intent towards someone we are giving God permission not to grant us his forgiveness. If I want to be forgiven for the wrongs I have done toward God I have to wipe the slate clean for everyone who has wronged me. This also violates the principle of "once saved, always saved". If I am saved simply by my acceptance of Jesus as my Lord and Savior then it doesn't really matter if I grant my brother forgiveness for anything he has done against me. I am forgiven. Who cares about my brother. God will forgive him as well once he accepts Jesus....

I cannot do any of this on my own. I do not have the perfect love for my brother that God has for me. God knows this and will give me the grace I need to forgive my brother if I honestly wish to do so. All I have to do is look in my spiritual piggy bank. God will have put the five dollars in there for me to pay the repairman. God grants me the grace, the special favor, to forgive the same way he forgives. How great is our God?

Be a blessing to all you meet and allow them to be a blessing to you....and forgive, forgive, forgive.

This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2015/10/forgive-us-our-trespasses.html>
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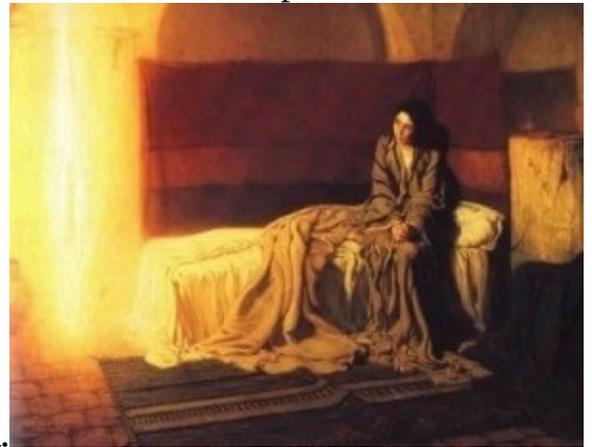
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Saint Joseph - Terror of Demons

October 31, Halloween, is for most people a time to attend parties, greet Trick or Treaters or for a few sit in a Pumpkin Patch and await the arrival of the Great Pumpkin. Some may enjoy watching Horror movies (not me) or visiting a Haunted House, Mine or Corn Field (again not me).

The general public looks on the supernatural decorations as just another form of merriment akin to the Easter Bunny or Frosty the Snowman. But it should be recognized that there is a darker side to the festivities and it is demonically driven.

For those who believe in the reality of a Spiritual realm, the existence of Good and Evil non-corporeal Beings are a fact. Some deliberately choose to associate with the dark cohort of this plane, often in an attempt to control the Demons to gain power for themselves (see [this](#)). Others solicit the aid of the Saints and their Guardian Angel to protect them from demonic attack. In this eternal Spiritual War, one name



stands out as the ultimate battle-tested warrior, Saint Joseph.

While it is undeniable that the Virgin Mother Mary will crush the head of Satan and that



Saint Michael the Archangel has already won a primeval battle against Satan and his legions, it is to Saint Joseph that the title Terror of Demons is given.

Mary is the most perfect creature in all of God's creation. Michael is pure spirit and endowed by God with supernatural abilities to combat His enemies. How then is Saint Joseph able to be listed among these super-eminent beings? For that answer, we look to the Bible and the proclamations of some the Church's

Saints.

First it will do us well to explain why the demons attack us and how. The why is simple, they hate God and wish to hurt Him. They also take perverted joy in hurting any other creature they can. Their motives are driven primarily by pride and hatred of all humanity. Pride as they see themselves as superior to all others and desire the worship that is due only to God. Hate because it was through a human, the Virgin Mother Mary, that God acted to save the entire human race.

The Baltimore Catechism answers the question, “Why did God create us? God created us to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him and to be happy with Him for eternity in Heaven.” It is God’s eternal desire that all of His creatures choose to be with Him in indescribable bliss.

The demons are aware of this and know each time they trick a creature to reject God they hurt Him. It is really the only way they can inflict any pain on God. Jesus wept for the people who rejected Him. For the demons, they keep a tally in their futile battle against God by snatching our souls from their eternal rest. A hash mark on a scorecard is all we are to them.

Understanding this, we can then begin to understand why Saint Joseph is given the title Terror of Demons.



The demons use our weaknesses in their battle against God. They learn we are greedy for money or lust after illicit physical pleasures. They encourage us to seek our ease to the point where we neglect our duties to others and to God. They fortify our notions of our own greatness, boasting of our innate talents instead of acknowledging them as the gifts from God they really are.

All of us are susceptible to these attacks because we have been weakened by the effects of Original Sin. Baptism cleanses us, but like a scar from a healed wound we are permanently marked. The Church teaches that Mary was given the singular grace of being immaculately conceived, that is, she never was tainted by the effects of Original Sin in preparation for her role as the Mother of God. It is also taught that Jeremiah and John the Baptist were also freed from the effects of Original Sin, prior to their birth, in preparation for their missions. But the mission of Saint Joseph to be the foster-father of the Son of God and the guardian of His Mother is greater than either the call of Jeremiah or John.

Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bernadine of Siena teach that God provides sufficient grace for the work He calls us to. In that light then, Joseph must have received a gift superior to that of both the Prophet and the Pre-Cursor. It is reasoned that Joseph was delivered from the effects of Original Sin immediately after

his conception. By this gift, he was able to be in full conformity with his will which was to serve God and God alone.

Joseph experienced temptations like any human does, however, he was endowed with sufficient grace to resist them and freely choose to do God's will always. Since temptations are the normal means of attack by the demons they find in Joseph an immovable object. His desire, so completely centered on God's, proves to be a shield against their attacks on him. When we invoke his protection for our family and us, we are utilizing that same impenetrable shield. They see their attacks neutralized and in the realization of their own futility are stricken with fear.

During his mortal life, Joseph was the Father's chosen instrument to protect His most precious Son and Mary His mother. Joseph was chosen to do this when He could have assigned a whole Legion of Angels to do the task. Joseph was the savior of the Savior. With God's grace, Joseph completed his mission in an exemplary manner. If the earth-bound mortal Joseph was able to do that, how much more can he do now that he immortally dwells in Heaven with Jesus and Mary by his side?

In the Old Testament, Pharaoh told the people to, "Go to Joseph" for their needs. Today, as the activities of the demons are more frequently shown on the six o'clock news, we should seek the aid of the New Testament Joseph for our needs and especially for our protection.

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Remembering the "Prison Angel", Mother Antonia Brenner - On the 2nd Anniversary of Her Passing [at It Makes Sense to Me]

(

Except for some minor minor edits and photo additions, this is the same blog post from last year written on the first anniversary of Mother Antonia's passing. It is still as timely today. She was and still is a shining example for all of us as to what it means to take up one's cross and follow Christ.)

IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

by Larry Peterson

This is a love story. No, it is not about romantic love. Rather, it is about the love of Christ exploding in the soul of a woman who ran with her God given gift and did her best to shower it upon some of the meanest and worst criminals in Mexico.

This is about

[Mother Antonia Brenner](#)

, who was born in Beverly Hills, CA, married and divorced twice, had seven children and ultimately became known as the "Prison Angel" of La Mesa Prison, the worst and most dangerous prison in all of Mexico. Mother Antonia died two years ago on October 17. On the anniversary of her passing I just thought I would remember her with a few words.



Mary Clarke was born in Beverly Hills on December 1, 1926. Her dad, Joe Clarke, was a successful businessman and Mary and her two siblings grew up surrounded with affluence and the glitz of the movie world. One thing was certain about Papa Joe. No matter how good life was for his family he made sure his kids were always taught to help the less fortunate. The desire to help others would blossom in Mary and was one day, destined to explode. However, before the "explosion" Mary embarked on a circuitous life journey.

Mary married at 18 and had three children. The first died shortly after birth. That marriage ended in divorce and then Mary married again. The wedding took place in Las Vegas and it was to a man named Carl Brenner. She and Carl had five children together but ultimately, that marriage also ended in divorce.

Mary had somehow distanced herself from her strict Catholic upbringing. No matter, it seems that the Holy Spirit had his eye on Mary Clarke her entire life. It was time for Him to shower His grace on His daughter.

Mary became more and more involved in charity work and as her seven children got older she began to visit La Mesa Penitentiary to deliver donations such as food, medicine and clothing to the prisoners. The plight of the prisoners at La Mesa began to impact her greatly and as time went by her growing compassion and love of neighbor would become focused on these people. They would become her specialty, her ministry, her purpose in life.

In 1977, after her kids were grown and her second divorce was final, Mary gave away her expensive belongings, moved out of her home in Ventura and headed to La Mesa. She had received permission to move there. Her new home was to be a 10' by 10' cell. She would live as any other inmate, sleeping in her concrete cell and having only cold water and prison food. The amenities in her room included a Crucifix on the wall, a Bible and Spanish dictionary nearby and a hard, prison bed. In the morning she lined up with the other prisoners for roll call. This was to be her home for the next thirty years.

The story of how this twice divorced woman and mother of seven kids from two marriages was accepted by the Catholic Church as a Sister and founder of a

[new order](#)

can be found at the links provided. Suffice it to say that as time went by Sister Antonia became "La Mama" (Mother Antonia) aka

[The Prison Angel](#)

, She moved freely among the drug traffickers, thieves, murderers, rapists and others touching cheeks and offering prayers. Many of these people were among the most violent and desperate of men. Yet she happily walked with them and comforted and consoled them and held their heads between her hands as they were dying.



Mother Antonia Brenner truly saw the face of Christ in each and every prisoner she came in contact with. She loved them all. Why else would hardened criminals, some who had never loved or been loved, call the diminutive woman who hailed from Beverly Hills, "La Mama"? They loved her in return.

I believe that one day Mother Antonia Brenner will be canonized a saint. She was an example for each

and every one of us showing us how to selflessly "love our neighbor" no matter who they might be. Her life also shows all of us that no matter who or what we are or where we have been or what we have done, God is always calling us. Like Mother Antonia, all we have to do is listen to His call.

Mother Antonia, please pray for us. Please remember her followers,

[The Eudists Servants of the Eleventh Hour](#)

and consider donating to their prison ministry.

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Post-Synod Analysis [at CruceSignatiBlog]

The Synod is finished, thanks be to God! The fallout and response is somewhat varied though, and the overall outcome is yet to be seen.

I was very disappointed by this today. One question at this morning's press conference, by Thomas J. Reese, SJ, exposed a serious flaw in the Synod on the Family, and an instance of clear sexism. While before I had thought that ordination was a prerequisite for voting at the Synod (and one could make that theological argument: it was a synod of bishops, and priests participate in the ministry of the bishop through the sacrament of holy orders), today I learned that Brother Herve Janson, a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus, also had voting rights. That is, he is not ordained. That is, his canonical status is technically that of a layman or laywoman. Thus, ordination was not a prerequisite for voting. So where were the women religious who had voting rights, where were the laymen with voting rights, and where were the laywomen with voting rights? (If you follow the link you can see the exchange on video.)

This was a huge missed opportunity for the Synod, and it goes against Pope Francis's explicit desire, as stated in "Evangelii Gaudium," to have more women in leadership roles.

Trust me, man, you would NOT want a woman like me at the Synod. Can you please get off the equality bandwagon for once and focus on something of substance?

James Martin, SJ @JamesMartinSJ

And a message to all you haters out there: I'm going to continue to preach a merciful God. So get ready for more mercy. A whole year of it.

On Twitter, apparently he had this:

One Mad Mom dishes on that [here](#). Go Mad Mom!

So I clicked over to [Fr. Z's blog](#) (you know he HATES Vatican II ;)) to try and get some balanced review on the Synod. If you're still looking for some, I strongly urge you to read his latest posts. [This one](#) was particularly good, especially if you're a Lord of the Rings fan.

Rorate Caeli had some good observations, as well as the Catholic News Service's interview with Cardinal Pell [here](#).

A more hopeful but still realistic view is over at [Catholicism Pure](#). Originally from Fr. Ed Tomlinson, the post contains more exhortations to pray, fast, and stay faithful to the Church, as well as practical things we can do.

The articles which I found the most "to the point" were from Steve Skojec at 1Peter5. If you have the time to read it, check out ["No, the "Conservatives" did not "win"](#). Strong commentary there.

Pray for the Holy Father. Please.

This contribution is available at <http://crucesignatiblog.wordpress.com/2015/10/28/post-synod-analysis/>
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First Beginnings



Prayer and My Personal Journey

To mark the publication of my new website I would like to introduce you to my own personal spiritual journey, as I first learnt how to pray. I am only doing this so that you may learn from my failures more quickly than I did, and in the hope that what little I have learnt may be of some help to you on your journey.

My first recollections of prayer were of kneeling at my bedside repeating the same set of petitions night after night. God bless Mummy and Daddy, my brothers, and all my aunts and uncles who were mentioned by name. It was only after my cousins were prayed for in order of age that my turn came. I was not taught to ask God to bless me as he was asked to bless everyone else, but to make me a good boy! Who wants to be a good boy? I didn't! So I stopped praying to be a good boy the moment I was left to pray on my own, and I started to ask for things instead. The first time I stormed the gates of heaven it was to ask for either an airgun or a catapult. Nothing happened for about a week and I was just about to lapse into atheism when the parish priest told the whole school that God was not only everywhere, but knew everything, even our most secret thoughts! It didn't take me long to realise why my weapons of mass destruction hadn't materialised. If God knew all things, even our most secret thoughts, he knew what I wanted them for! From then on I didn't pray for things as often as I would have liked. Most things that I wanted didn't fit in with being a good boy, so in future I didn't think God was the best person to ask. Inevitably night prayers tended to be forgotten when they were no longer supervised by my mother, and when there was nothing that I could ask for that I thought God would give me.

There was another form of prayer that my mother taught me to use in the morning. She told me to kneel at my bedside and make the *morning offering*. She explained how, by this prayer, I could turn ordinary commonplace things into something precious, by offering them to God, as Rumpelstiltskin turned straw into gold. I kept to it religiously for a time, until during a particularly severe winter I found it too cold to get out of bed and it didn't occur to me to pray before I got up. We did say the Morning Offering at

assembly in the local primary school, but when I went to senior school I forgot all about it. So, by the time I was ten or so, my personal prayer life wasn't what it should have been, in fact it would have been non-existent except for a type of prayer that I discovered all by myself when I was only seven or eight years of age.

I was one of six boys chosen to be trainbearer to the May Queen. However I became so angry when one of the other boys was chosen to carry the velvet cushion for the Queen's crown that I wolfed a large piece of chocolate cake that we had been forbidden to eat until after the ceremony. I made the mistake of sitting next to the radiator when the visiting preacher began his interminable sermon. Before he was more than half way through, the chocolate cake began to cook inside my stomach, and I had never been particularly fond of hot chocolate pudding. It ended up on the caretaker's compost heap long before the sermon was over and I ended up feeling sicker than I'd ever felt before. It was the first time I really prayed from deep down within me, without any prompting from anyone else. When I had asked my mother why I had to pray that God would make me into a good boy, she said, "Because that's what God wants more than anything else." Suddenly in my hour of need the penny dropped. If that's what God wanted more than anything else, then that's what I will promise him, if he would only make me better and soon.

"Please God," I prayed, "Make me better, and I promise that I will be a good boy." Even at that tender age I had realised that God could not be bribed, not with the whole contents of my piggy bank, not even with the contents of all the piggy banks in the world. God had everything that he wanted, everything that money could buy. But I realised that I had it in my power to give God something that money couldn't buy, something that my mother said God wanted more than anything else. When I did get better, I realised that I would always get what I wanted out of God, by promising to give him what I knew he wanted more than anything else. In case God rumbled my little game I only asked him for something when things were desperate, and even then I tried to be a little better for a day or two as insurance for the future. The first heart-felt prayer that most of us make is usually the prayer of bargaining with God, offering our good behaviour for his goodwill or for whatever we happen to need, or for whatever we think we need. I was always getting into trouble at school, particularly with the homework that I never seemed to do, with fighting in the playground and when the school report was due, so I never stopped praying for God's help, in fact I couldn't really manage without it, even though my prayers were not always answered. However there was another sort of prayer that I didn't even realise was prayer at all, until much later, but I will write about that next time. In the meantime let me end by calling to mind the words of T.S. Elliot when he said – *'the end of all our travelling is to end up at the place where we started and to know that place for the first time'*.

After very many years of studying Christian spirituality especially as practised at the dawn of Christianity, my prayer life returned to the simple prayer my mother first taught me, but I understood it clearly for the first time. When I did I realised that, without any of the theological education that I was privileged to receive, my mother understood all she had tried to teach me in the only way that really matters and that was in the way she put her morning offering into practice every day of her life for her family and for the God to whom she offered everything each time she celebrated the sacred mysteries. What I learned from her is so important that I have made it the subject of a Podcast entitled '[Entering into the Prayer of Christ](#)' which I would like you to listen to as it completes all that I have been unable to say in this post.

The joy of love for celibates [at walk the way]

Although I have been celibate all my life, I will have to take a solemn promise of celibacy if I am ordained to the diaconate, perhaps next June.

Although this is a bit overwhelming, it is becoming more real and more fulfilling than I could have imagined.

It does have a downside, which Fr. James Martin attributes to Father Paul, the abbot, in his recently released novel *The Abbey*:

His novice director told him that the biggest challenge of religious life lies in knowing that you'll never be the most important person in anyone else's life.

That's humbling – and a bit fearful since I would like to be considered important in others' lives.

But it is not so much a question as being loved as loving in response to God's love.

Today I came across this quotation from G. K. Chesterton's *Saint Francis of Assisi*, which refers to the saint's frolicking in the snow:

A man will not roll in the snow for a stream of tendency by which all things fulfill the law of their being. He will not go without food in the name of something, not: ourselves, that makes for righteousness. He will do things like this, or pretty nearly like this, under quite a different impulse. He will do these things when he is in love.

One of the most delightful scenes in the film *The Great Silence* is when the Carthusian monks frolic in the snow, laughing all the time.

Celibacy should not make us dour and sad. It should give us life and laughter. For a man or a woman will not – or should not – take a vow or promise of celibacy if she or he is not in love with God.

James Keating's *The Heart of the Diaconate* is particularly helpful in considering this:

Celibacy is a way of being human; not a way of avoiding our incarnate state. Anyone who chooses celibacy for reasons other than being captivated by the beauty of God and looking into that beauty as one's chosen pleasure is setting oneself up for disappointment and sadness

It's a question of falling in love with the beauty of God.

And though he is referring to married deacons, Keating makes it clear that our love and the love of Christ for us are central to any consideration of celibacy – or, I would say, chastity, whether married or celibate:

Celibacy only makes sense in light of one being deeply affected by the Person of Christ; so affected, in fact, that the man receives from him the fulfillment of all desire. This is why one question for all married men seeking entrance into the permanent diaconate must be: Is Christ enough for you? Do

you have or are you going to develop a contemplative prayer life deep enough to satisfy your spiritual-erotic needs for self-transcendence? This is mainly a question about vulnerability before the love of God and one's own capacity for self-knowledge.

And so I ask myself: Am I open enough, empty enough, vulnerable enough to let myself be loved by God – and make him central to my being?

That's my question today – as I prepare for being installed as a lector at one of the confirmation Masses this weekend in the parish of Dulce Nombre de María, one step on the road to the diaconate.

May God help me love and let myself be loved.

This contribution is available at <http://walktheway.wordpress.com/2015/10/22/the-joy-of-love-for-celibates/>
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The Sobering Story of the Pope Who Begged for Help from Purgatory [at ChurchPOP]

Reigning from 1198 to 1216, Pope Innocent III was one of the most influential and important popes of his era.

He granted Francis of Assisi and his small band of followers permission to found the Order of Friars Minor; he convened the Fourth Lateran Council which, among other things, dogmatically defined the doctrine of transubstantiation; and he organized great efforts to combat heresy in Europe and repel invading Muslim forces.

[See also: [Burned by the Hands of Souls in Purgatory: A Museum's Rare Collection](#)]

[See also: [Is Purgatory Really in the Bible? Jimmy Akin Explains](#)]

Then, after more than 18 years as pope, he died suddenly. But that wasn't the last he was heard from.

When a Christian dies, Catholics believe, they may go straight to heaven if they lack any outstanding temporal punishment due to sins they've committed. But many Christians will go to purgatory first, where, by the grace of Jesus Christ, they are purified and prepared to enter into the presence of the all-holy God.

The story goes that on the day Pope Innocent III died, or soon thereafter, he appeared to [St. Lutgardis of Aywières](#) in Belgium. St. Lutgardis is considered to have been one of the great mystics of the 13th century, known for her miracles, visions, levitation, and particularly adept teaching.

When Pope Innocent appeared to her, he thanked her for her prayers during his lifetime, but explained that he was in trouble: he had not gone straight to heaven but was in purgatory, suffering its purifying fire for three specific faults he had committed during his life.

And he made a desperate [plea for help](#):

“Alas! It is terrible; and will last for centuries if you do not come to my assistance. In the name of Mary, who has obtained for me the favor of appealing to you, help me!”

Then he vanished.

With a sense of urgency, St. Lutgardis quickly told her fellow religious sisters what she had seen and prayed for his soul.

Remember to pray for the holy souls in purgatory!

[See also: [5 Saints Who Had Terrifying Visions of Hell](#)]

[See also: [Why Satan Is So Scared of St. John Paul II, According to Rome's Chief Exorcist](#)]

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Of Demons, Swine, Unwelcoming Hearts and the Eucharist [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

What do demons, swine and an unwelcoming town have to do with the Eucharist?

The Gospel read at Mass one day during my recent silent retreat was from Mathew (8:28-34) – a passage many of us have read or heard numerous times. Although the Eucharist is never mentioned, on this particular day the Apostle’s words drew me to that Mysterious Gift. Let me explain.

As you will recall, Jesus crossed over from Galilee into the mostly Gentile area of the Gadarenes. He and His disciples approached a field where a large herd of swine were feeding. There Jesus encountered two demon possessed men who made travel on this particular road impossible.

The demons within these men immediately recognized Jesus as the Son of God. It had to be excruciatingly painful for these evil spirits to remain in His Presence. They begged Jesus to send them into the nearby herd of swine.

“Out with you!” Jesus commanded. They entered the swine and the entire herd ran down the bluff and into the sea where they drowned.

At this sight, the swine’s caretakers (herdsmen), not knowing who Jesus was or understanding what they had just witnessed, fled the area and informed their fellow townspeople what they had seen. Matthew tells us that everyone in the town later came back to meet Jesus.

They came. They saw Jesus. But did they actually meet Him?

The townsfolk had to have seen the formerly possessed men now normal in appearance and behavior. One would think they would be full of gratitude for their restoration, to be rid of these evil spirits and to be able to travel freely on the road without fear or impediment. Surely, if they really wanted to meet and thank this Man, they would spend time in His presence, talking with and listening to Him. They had to have a multitude of questions: Who was He? From whence came His power to cast out demons? Why did He come to their town? - and so on and on.



The Son of God was in their midst! He came there intentionally. Although Gentiles, He was ready to welcome them into His loving embrace. He who had cast out demons was ready to transform them. They failed to recognize Who He was and how blessed they were to be in His Presence. They showed Him no appreciation, reverence or respect. They asked no questions. They sought no relationship with Him.

Instead, they let fear take root and snuff out the offer of faith and salvation standing at their feet. Through their actions and words, they did the unthinkable – they told Him, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Savior of mankind, the Son of God, that He was not welcome in their town, their hearts or their souls. They begged God to leave!

He left. God would never interfere with anyone's free will no matter the pain their poor choices caused His Most Sacred and Merciful Heart.

How tragic! Jesus was right there, in their midst, seeking a relationship with each of them. They were not interested!

Let's not be too quick to condemn or cast stones at these blind souls.

Have not many of us treated Jesus in a similar manner – not taking the time to meet, talk and listen to Him? Are we just as reluctant to seek a relationship with Him as were the Gadarenes? How many of us act like Jesus is not really, truly and substantially present here with us in the Eucharist? Do we act irreverently toward Him? Do we ignore Him, content to abandon Him to His tabernacle-prison?

If we do go to Church are we anxious to get out as quickly as we can? Do we spend time expressing our gratitude for the Gift of His Presence? Do we prepare ourselves properly to receive His Body, Blood,

Soul and Divinity and with the awe, amazement, and gratitude such a Gift deserves?

How many of us ever come back to visit and talk to Him during the week? When is the last time we spent time in His Presence, just sitting there silently, basking in the invisible but ever present graces flowing from behind the locked tabernacle doors or from the Sacred and Most Precious monstrance in which He hides Himself humbly behind the Consecrated Host?

We are all guilty of inattention, indifference and irreverence toward the God Who lives among us and wishes to live within us.

To have the Son of God here with us and not to spend time with Him is the same as telling Him that we are not interested in getting to know or have an intimate relationship with Him and that He is not welcome in our minds, hearts or souls. Like the Gadarenes, we are telling the Son of God we do not want Him in, or to interfere with, our lives. We are telling God we are not interested - to leave.

Fortunately, although we are all sinners, it's never too late to seek a relationship with our waiting Lord. He would have welcomed the reluctant Gadarenes if they came back to Him, just as He awaits the joy of welcoming us with open and loving arms.

It is simple enough. We must humble ourselves and seek a relationship with Him. We must make the conscious decision TODAY to come into His presence, open ourselves up to His transforming graces, kneel down before Him and adore Him! We must invite Him to be an intimate part of every aspect of our earthly lives.

We must strive to love Him no less than He loves us! We must silently spill our guts out to Him. He already knows what we need and with what we are struggling. He just wants us to tell Him ourselves. "Just do it!" You will never be the same.

Let us learn from the Gadarenes - it's not enough to just come. We must want to meet Jesus! AND we must never, ever, beg the Son of God to leave!!!

Teaching Your Children About Pope Francis [at Saints 365]

I was closing in on my 11th birthday when Pope Paul VI died. The subsequent election and death of Pope John Paul I followed by the election of the young, dynamic non-Italian Pope John Paul II fascinated me. I scoured newspapers and magazines (the internet of the day) for articles about the Popes - and meticulously scrapbooked all my findings. These mysterious men in white mesmerized me and the Lord would eventually use my childhood devotion to the Holy Father to call me back to my faith after I wandered from it.

If your child is interested in learning about Pope Francis and the Papacy in general, here are a few resources to satisfy their curiosity.



Books

- [Francis, the Pope for Kids](#)

is a great resource for kids ages 9-11. It is chock full of great Pope Francis facts, is cleverly illustrated and provides a glossary to explain the more complicated faith-based words.

- [Praying with My Fingers: An Easy Way to Talk with God](#)

is an adorable rhyming book for that the youngest of children will enjoy as a read-aloud and is based on the Five Finger Prayer that Pope Francis is said to pray frequently. This book would make a very special faith-filled gift for a baby shower or Baptism!

- [Lessons from Pope Francis for Children](#)

provides catechesis for kids on different areas of the faith - with each "lesson" interspersed with quotes from Pope Francis. Beautifully illustrated, this book would be a great read-aloud for younger children or a read-alone for older ones.

Prayers

Pope Francis is associated with two prayers in particular - the Five-Finger Prayer and the devotion to Mary, Undoer of Knots.

The Five Finger Prayer

is a simple prayer of petition and intercession that can be said anywhere,

[Catholic Online](#)

for a detailed description of how to pray the Five Finger Prayer.

anytime by anyone, including even the youngest of children. It is a great prayer for families to do together and seems so "Pope Francis-like" in its down to earth style and simplicity. Visit

The Devotion to Mary, Undoer of Knots captured the attention of Pope Francis when he was a priest studying in German in the 1980's. He was captivated by the painting depicting Our Lady "undoing the knots" in a long rope.

While the

[Novena to Our Lady of Knots](#)

is a little complex for young children, the idea behind the concept is simple enough to grasp: we all have "knots" in are life that we cannot overcome on our own - they may be bad habits, patterns of sin, and other struggles. The devotion to Our Lady of knots invites the Blessed Mother to assist us in "undoing" those knots in our life - much in the same way a Mom is able to undo the knots on her child's sneakers. Children can certainly appreciate the concept of asking Mary to help them undo the difficulties in their lives.

Videos

I love this animated video about Pope Francis (and the one like it about Pope John Paul II) - this is a fun teaching tool for younger children to watch at home or in the classroom.

I showed the Apologetics class (ages 9-11) I teach at our homeschool co-op

[this video from Biography.com](#)

which was chock full of information about the Holy Father.

Pope Francis Crossword Puzzle

Kids and adult alike will love this crossword puzzle - which is chock full of fun facts about Pope Francis. Put on your researching hats and see how many of these you can figure out.

Click here to download your FREE crossword puzzle and answer keys.

[Pope Francis Crossword Puzzle](#) [Pope Francis Crossword Answer Key](#)

This contribution is available at <http://saints365.blogspot.com/2015/10/teaching-your-children-about-pope.html>
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Prayers of Love: The Holy Rosary [at Plot Line and Sinker]



photo copyright Ellen Hrkach

October is the month of the Holy Rosary. I'd like to repost an updated article I wrote as a guest post for another blog years ago:

“When lovers are together, they spend hours and hours repeating the same thing: I love you! What is missing in the people who think the Rosary monotonous, is Love.” Sister Lucia of Fatima

I have been a Catholic for my entire life (56 years), but it is only in the last 30 or so years that I have had a devotion to the Holy Rosary. I attended Catholic schools until high school. As a teenager, I would have identified myself as Catholic, but between television and secular influences, I didn't totally embrace my faith until after I was married, and this was because my husband insisted that we not use contraception during our marriage.

As we dialogued back and forth in those few months before our wedding day, I still didn't know why the Church taught that married couples shouldn't use contraception to avoid pregnancy. In fact, I remember thinking that the Church just ought to come out of the Dark Ages and get more in line with the modern world.

In the end, I decided to trust my husband (and the Church). In the next year, we read [Humanae Vitae](#), as well as other church documents, and I became fully convinced that the Church was indeed speaking the truth when she declared that contraception was a grave sin. Before we were married, we learned NFP and we are now a CCL NFP Teaching Couple Specialist (and have been teaching NFP for 30 years).

During that first year of our marriage, a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses came to our door. My husband and I welcomed them and dialogued with them. Most of their questions centered on Mary: “Why do Catholics worship Mary?” “Why do you say such a monotonous repetitive prayer?” “Why is Mary so important to Catholics?” First, we gently explained to them that Catholics don't worship Mary, we honor her. As for the other questions, I realized that I didn't really know the answers, so I did some research.

To the question “Why is Mary so important to Catholics,” what I found out could probably fill an entire

book. However, my own thumbnail answer is this: Jesus honored his mother. We, as Catholics, are called imitate Christ. He honored his mother and so we should do the same. Also, as Jesus hung on the cross, He gave his mother to the whole world when He said to John, “Behold your mother.”

Mary is indeed our mother and, as our mother, she desires us to be closer to her Son. The rosary is the ideal way for us to become closer to Him, because as we say the repetitive prayers (with love), we are meditating on His life.

I have found that saying the rosary has brought me closer to my husband and to Christ. Even after 33 years of marriage, we continue to say “I love you,” just as we continue to say the rosary together, with love.

[Emily’s Hope, my first novel](#), is based on my true conversion story and the parallel story of my great-grandmother.

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Catholic Mom Article [at String of Pearls]

I am WOEFULLY behind when it comes to keeping up with this blog. Life on the road is not conducive to blogging, I've decided. And this travelin' Grammy has been on the road a lot lately (but what's new about *that* ?!).

If String of Pearls is to be a well-kept eScrapbook that chronicles my family's important life events (which is one of the main reasons I started it in the first place), I have to do a better job of covering those events! There were some very important birthdays in our family on Sept. 30, and another important one yesterday; and I have plans for a birthday post of epic proportions (truly, it will be epic--wait until you see it!).

But that birthday extravaganza is going to have to wait until tomorrow; because another thing I'm behind on is my online book club, Grace-filled Tuesdays. I'm not sure it has any members, besides the usual suspects (hi, husband!) who check in here religiously, but I'm determined to keep up with it nonetheless! For aside from cataloguing my family's memories, this blog is also one of the few marketing weapons I have in my arsenal; and I feel I have a duty to try to get the word out about my two Catholic novels,

Finding Grace

and

Erin's Ring

.



I still sometimes can't believe that I was able to get those two books written, and that they were actually published. I am well aware that those things wouldn't have happened if God hadn't meant them to. And because both of my Catholic YA novels show the beauty of the Faith and give glory to Our Lord and His

Blessed Mother, I believe they can be a positive influence in the lives of young readers. But they can only do good in the world if people know they exist. So as much as promoting my own work goes against the shy and introverted grain of my God-given personality, I am here today to humbly implore you to help me spread the word about

Finding Grace

and

Erin's Ring

.

Did you know that

Erin's Ring

wouldn't have ever seen the light of day if the president of Bezael Books, Cheryl Dickow, hadn't approached me with the offer to write a second YA novel for her company? It was not a book I intended to write; I had decided that I was probably a one book wonder (and I use the term loosely, because "wonder" implies that my first novel,

Finding Grace,

was a monster hit that earned me fame and fortune, which is certainly not the case!). But God had other plans for me.

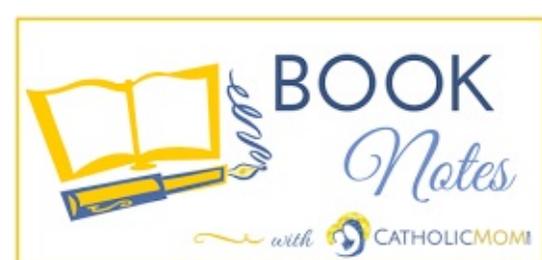
If you're interested in learning more about how

Erin's Ring

came to be, on Sept. 25 the folks at CatholicMom.com posted a short article I submitted in the "Book Notes" section of their website. Here's

[a link to that article](#)

if you're interested.



Erin's Ring

is tailor-made for Catholic classrooms (there's even a glossary in the back!). Just ask these happy

campers, a group of Chicago fourth-graders I had the pleasure to meet last May.



Perhaps your Catholic school or homeschool would like to add this sweet historical novel to its reading, history, or religion curriculum, too. Depending on the time and the distance, I might even be persuaded to come and talk to the kids. (Gulp! Yes, I just volunteered to speak in public...)

Erin's Ring.

Meeting adjourned!

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2015/10/grace-filled-tuesdays-book-club-meeting.html>
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Getting The Job Done [at A Moment From De Sales]



No one is born to live in the past. We are born to live, thrive, and flourish in the present moment from our first breath. And what makes it more wonderful is that Jesus is waiting to meet and welcome us from that very moment!

Why does Jesus want us to follow Him in the first place? Or why does He even need us. It's a mystery, but Jesus continues to call us everyday using the same simple words of invitation: "Follow me."

Now surely this phrase simply means what it says, "go with Jesus." However, Jesus wants our response to be much more. What Jesus is asking is that we bond with him. How? By leaving all we have and sharing His life, through getting to know His friends and meeting all the people that He meets. Fr. Jim Martin writes that Jesus' "*follow me,*" "*implies a personal relationship with Jesus.*" Fr. Martin continues with his insight, that the relationship with Jesus means—"*join Me, live with Me, eat what I eat...share in My life.*" Jesus is very clear about what He intends—when He looks us in the eye and says—"Follow Me."

Although with every call, Jesus never gives any details. He doesn't tell us how we can do it? With each searching question, He just responds—"Come and see." It's as if Jesus is saying: "Look, I don't have much time to explain it all now. I'll explain it all along the way."

Jesus doesn't like to wait too long for a response either. When Jesus says "Come and see," Jesus means now. Remember when Jesus heard "I can't come now, I have to bury the dead." Jesus' reply was simply, "Let the dead bury the dead." This may sound cruel and uncompassionate, but Jesus has an urgent mission; like "building a Kingdom" and only a short time frame to complete it

When Jesus steps into our lives today and asks, "Follow Me," Jesus' request is to continue building His kingdom with our help! And like Jesus then, we have only our lifetime to get "*the job done.*"

So Jesus utters: "*Come and See today*" or "*Go Sell what you have now*" or "*Buy that field immediately.*" Jesus is speaking for the many who still need to hear the Word preached, or for those people who want to receive the love and mercy that Jesus left behind for them, and for those others still hungry, or without clothing, and in need of a place to stay, as well as for the many still looking to belong somewhere. Jesus knows that if the kingdom is built sooner all can be helped.

Jesus encourages us not to store our possessions in barns, or putting our light under a barrel. Rather, He

wants us to give it away, and when we do we will have them forever. Our present moment is not a dress rehearsal, but the real thing. Listen for these words “follow me.” Jesus has much work yet to get done

Jesus’ call—no matter when or how it comes—is simple and direct, but the details will still be unclear and imprecise. However, what is clear is that Jesus calls us all, with the same words “Follow Me.” How do we want to respond?

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God Alone is Enough [at bukas palad]



Year B / Ordinary Time / Memorial of St Teresa of Avila

Readings: Romans 3.21-30a / Psalm 129.1-2, 3-4, 5-7a (R/v 7) / Luke 11.47-54

Have you ever assured someone, “It will be fine; God is with you”, trusting as you said this that God alone is enough to console, to affirm and to uplift her?

God alone is enough is the concluding line of a prayer St Teresa of Avila once wrote and prayed. Many of us know this prayer:

Let nothing disturb you,
nothing surprise you,
all things pass:
God does not change.
Patience wins everything;
whoever holds onto God
lacks nothing;
God alone is enough.

What gives St Teresa and us that quiet confidence to declare in prayer for ourselves or in care of others this truth that God alone is enough?

I'd like to suggest that we can find an answer to this question in the refrain from our responsorial psalm today: "With the Lord there is mercy, and fullness of redemption". You and me, and St Teresa too, have all experienced the Lord's mercy, and, more so, the fullness of God's redemption in our lives, not once but repeatedly.

We know this experience to be true and real because as unbelievable as it may seem to many, we have encountered the God of mercy we believe in very palpable ways. When a friend receives a friendly Facebook like for his kind act, would he not sense God affirming his goodness? When a child feels her father's encouraging pat on her back after failing a Maths test, would she not think of God's care too? And when spouses forgive each other, would they not believe even more in the fullness of God's forgiveness and compassion?

What about us, Lasalle brothers and Jesuit priest, who teach and lead in our Lasallian schools? We work hard to show our students the love of God in the faith we share, in the service we give and in the community we are as a school daily. What empowers us to do this? I'd like to suggest this: nothing less than our own encounters with a God who loves us as we are, sinners, yet finds us—no matter how incomprehensible it is to our rational minds—always worthy to be God's beloved. And not just good enough to be loved, but very good in fact to continue the good work God began with St John Baptist de la Salle.

I suspect it is because we have each experienced God's mercy in our brokenness only to be redeemed again and again to live more fully in God's ways that we want our students and teachers to experience this same love of God. Isn't this why we strive so hard and so long to give so much of ourselves to touch our students' hearts, to engage their minds and to transform their lives?

Yes, to those who have received much, much will be asked of them to work with Jesus to bring about God's kingdom. We have received much. And we can still give more in our teaching and leading because God alone is indeed enough reason, strength and hope for us to do so.

Preached at the Lasalle Brothers' House, SJI, Malcolm Road

Photo: sunset in harvard square by adrian danker, sj (boston, june 2015)

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2015/10/homily-god-alone-is-enough.html>
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Why I Am a Catholic and What Keeps Me Catholic [at From the Pulpit of my Life]



Grapes and wheat are transformed into bread and wine, which, when consecrated, are transformed into the Eucharistic species, the Body and Blood of Jesus.

When I was a child I learned that I am Catholic and I learned how to be Catholic. Learning this was part of my immersion in a Catholic family and in a wider Catholic faith community.

One of the most memorable childhood experiences in my life was making my First Holy Communion. There are no photographs of me wearing my fancy white communion dress and veil, although I remember I wore those things along with white shoes and socks. I also remember practicing for the event: how to process down the middle aisle of the church with a partner; how to genuflect and enter the pew; how, at communion time, to exit the pew, meet my partner, and walk into the sanctuary with hands folded; how to kneel, how to open my mouth, stick my tongue out and wait for the host to be placed there by the priest; how to return to my pew; how to bow my head and rest it in my hands; how to pray in thanksgiving for this wonderful gift of Jesus. I remember clearly how tedious the practice was! At the same time I that understood the reason for all this fuss had to do with something holy, something desirable. And that was the point.

What I remember of the actual event, the very day of receiving my First Holy Communion, is receiving the sacred host, Jesus, on my tongue. Aside from the initial feeling of noticing the texture and taste of the host, I remember my *joy* that this was Jesus! He was really with me and in me—at last. I had waited all my little young life for this special moment. When I returned to my place in the pew, I prayed in thanksgiving. My First Holy Communion can not be repeated. But there have been hundreds (?) of opportunities to receive Holy Communion in the sixty-some years since that day.

Because Holy Communion is so available in U.S. Catholic parishes one can, over time, develop a sense that this is something routine, when in fact it is *always* a holy time with the Lord. One can forget that these

moments in communion with the Lord have an effect, a spiritual effect.

What are some of the effects? Here are a few:

- Jesus and I grow in intimacy. Just last Sunday the priest explained this by saying it's like two separate clouds that move near each other, touch, and become as one. I think it was his way of expressing what Jesus said, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."
- Holy Communion is nourishment for my soul, the spiritual part of my human nature. It "preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received in Baptism (CCC 1392)." We customarily eat three meals a day; yet so many of us starve ourselves or our children of the benefits of receiving Jesus regularly.
- When I am united to Christ in Holy Communion, I am simultaneously cleansed from sins of the past and strengthened against temptations to sin in the future. I want to receive Holy Communion as often as possible, because without its strength against sin I believe I would fall into sin very easily.

I was prompted to write this after reading what Deacon Greg Kandra wrote in ["Holding God in the Palm of Your Hand: a Eucharistic Lesson from Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan."](#)

In the article he relates the story of a Vietnamese archbishop of Saigon who was imprisoned during the Vietnam War without being tried or sentenced. Nine of his 13 years of incarceration were solitary. However, his friends were able to smuggle "his medicine," which was actually the elements of bread and wine that he needed to celebrate Mass. With these elements he celebrated Mass daily at 3 PM in commemoration of the hour at which Jesus died on the cross for our salvation. This bishop was Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan.

What is the message of this story? Holy Communion is **a gift**, a gift unsurpassed by any other—a gift of God's love. It is **a miracle**. It is **a mystery**. We must do what we can to receive this gift in a worthy, reverent manner. Be mindful.

The Catholic Church teaches us that the Holy Eucharist is "***the source and summit of the Christian life!***" I believe this.

This contribution is available at <http://www.fromthepulpitofmylife.com/2015/10/why-i-am-a-catholic-and-what-keeps-me-catholic/>

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Now what? Empty nest and..... [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

One Friday night in late August of this year, my husband and I were sitting in separate rooms of the house within sight of the other quiet and somewhat lonely, if you will. For the first time in over twenty years, we found ourselves childless and abandoned feeling. The noises of the house were typical noises of a house, the hum of the dishwasher, the clock on fireplace tick-tocking, and the rustle of the newspaper. But the other noises of the house were deafeningly silent. The shower running for 10, 20, 30 minutes upstairs and the father of the house complaining "she is still in that shower"...yet again. The thunderous rumbling of the nearly 6' teen coming down the stairs in search of her book bag, a glass of water, and to see if there was any popcorn left to snack on. Music coming from the piano, or the violin in hasty practicing, or just a third or 4th voice in the house. No, not tonight, or tomorrow night.....maybe on the weekend, but probably not; they are both just across town at the university, for heaven's sake. But for now stillness and quiet, it's weird and sad at the same time.

There are the perks of this new stage of life, however, most seasoned parents would tell us. We can take trips and eat out more...yeah, yeah. There is just this feeling that life will never be the same again, ever. Our neighbors next door are newly empty nesters too, and I asked the wife out by the mailbox the other day how it was going for them and the empty house. She said, "I don't like it!" "I know! It is too strange and I'm not ready for this!" I said. We both sympathized with each other and said we should go to dinner sometime soon. I felt vindicated by that conversation, somehow I have never thought of myself as a childless married woman. My vocation and passion has always been being a parent, a mom and busy wife with children undertow, meals to prepare, homework to monitor and music lessons to taxi the young musicians to each week. I look across the parishioners on Sunday and find the couples without children and wonder, should I ask them what it's like to live without children around? Nah, they will think I'm weird.

My husband is content, and so is my neighbor's husband, she told me that her husband was ready for this. I'm not, and wonder if I was supposed to be preparing for this somehow? Well, even if I thought about it, when the real thing hits, you really can't be totally prepared for the loss of your job, or vocation, or livelihood.

Funny thing, after a new minutes on that August evening, my husband's text tone sounded. I asked him who was that? He said, "Rebecca, I asked her how things were going." Just then I received a text from our other daughter, Sarah, I had asked her how things were going. We are on the same page, and somehow, somehow we will get used to this silence....or fill it with pastimes that we will enjoy... Well, we do have each other... and maybe there will be grand kids, but for now we will just take a day trip on the weekends, eat out a couple of times a week and go bowling.

This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2015/10/now-what-empty-nest-and.html>

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Called. Qualified. [at FranciscanMom]

My husband and I are the parents of a teenager with Type 1 Diabetes.

That can be hard. It's not like diabetes lets you take a break. There is no remission. There is no cure. There is only treatment: 24/7. And the game plan can change in an instant when the insulin pump's power button quits working or TheKid gets a touch of a stomach virus.

There is one thing, though, that makes it clear that we're the right people for the 24/7 job of caring for our diabetic teen.

We know how to look for patterns.

Diabetes is all about patterns. When you do x , you expect y to follow. When z follows instead, you need to examine whether you really did do x , or if q happened to get in the way.

I used to test educational software. Testing software is all about patterns. It's also about remembering what you did 2 or 3 steps ago, because you need to examine if doing *that* caused *this* to happen.

Hubs is a computer programmer. See above. Plus, he majored in meteorology in college. Patterns all over the place.

Hubs and I learned, practiced, and taught Natural Family Planning. NFP is all about observing and recording patterns of things that happen in your body.

All of this pattern-noticing is a lot more critical when it comes to diabetes. There's not a lot of room for error. You can't just release a new version, like you can with software. You don't get to start fresh next month like you can if you mess up your NFP chart, and if you mis-read your chart, well, we all know how *that* might turn out, and it's not a terrible thing.

Too much insulin, though, can be **fatal**. Quickly. Too little insulin can have long-term consequences. The balancing act is a lot more critical. But we notice enough patterns to have figured out the times of day when TheKid needs more insulin to do the same job, and when he needs less, and what to do when he eats a crazy-high-carb meal from Chick-Fil-A.

A good portion of TheKid's care depends on our ability to notice patterns and make judgments based on those patterns—but not to be so locked in that we automatically expect y to happen when we do x . Sometimes, we get j instead, and no one can figure out why.

There are plenty of times when we feel like this is above our heads. But we get some of our confidence in helping TheKid manage diabetes from our ability to note, record and compare patterns.

If that old adage, “God doesn't call the qualified; he qualifies the called” is true, he's been qualifying us for nearly three decades to do the delicate work involved in parenting our youngest child. I find that comforting.

This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2015/10/06/called-qualified/>
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Who am I? [at Blogging For A Better Life]

This could well be the million-dollar question some of us are asking ourselves right now.

“Who am I to pray for the Pope?”

(John Boehner)

“Who am I to judge?”

(Pope Francis)

I know who I no longer am. I’m no longer the person of my past. That person fortunately can’t live here in the present moment. That person is no longer in existence.

That thought makes me rejoice. (I did some crazy stuff way back when!)

Who among us can look in the rearview mirror of life and not have any regrets?

Regrets because we believed that we were trapped, we felt afraid; we became too stubborn to change, we liked being comfortable versus doing what was right. I made and still make a lot of bad choices, so I’m grateful for second chances, new beginnings.

2 Corinthians 5:17 reads:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!”

This verse makes me ask a different question. Not “Who am I?” but

“Who am I in Christ?”

In Christ, I become different in a new way, a better way, the old me has been washed away with my sins.

Pope Francis has asked us all to pray for him—from young school children to high-ranking Government Officials. We all got our homework assignment from Pope Francis. PRAY.



As I get down to the business of praying for the Pope, I also pray for others and myself and our earth . . . and soon enough it starts to sink in, this act of praying, and before long, I too stir up emotions deep within that asks: **“Who am I to judge?”**

Find Jesus—let Him recreate a new you.

The old has gone, the new is here!

Thanks for reading my blog.

This contribution is available at <http://blogforabetterlife.blogspot.com/2015/10/who-am-i.html>
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New Evangelization: Fire and Light [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

"The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. The focus of the New Evangelization calls all Catholics to be evangelized and then go forth to evangelize...."

(["New Evangelization,"](#) USCCB¹)

In a way, the "new" evangelization isn't new.

[Matthew 28:19](#)

means the same thing now that it did two millennia ago.

But it isn't the first, or the 11th, century any more. We're in the 21st, and the world is changing.

This isn't a new situation:

"...the world is on fire. Men try to condemn Christ once again, as it were, for they bring a thousand false witnesses against him. They would raze his Church to the ground.... No, my sisters, this is no time to treat with God for things of little importance...."

(Camino de perfección, 1, 5; St. Teresa of Avila; quoted by [Benedict XVI](#) on July 16, 2012)¹)

St. Teresa of Avila wrote

[Camino de perfección](#)

around the middle of the 16th century.

The 20th century and the first 15 years of the 21st haven't been 'just like' 16th century Europe's experience: but I think there are some parallels — Violence in the Middle East and Europe, social and political unrest, new

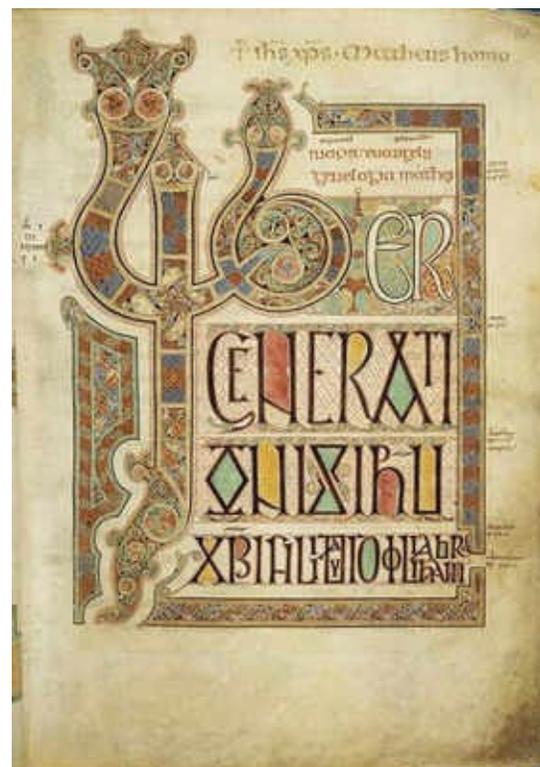
[military](#)

and

[information](#)

technology.

Machiavelli's



[The Prince](#)

reflected, at least, the 'principles be hanged: I'll get what I want' political attitude that's still with us.

The

[Protestant Reformation](#)

let northern princes set up their own state-operated churches, like

[Henry VIII](#)

's Church of England. The

[Münster Rebellion](#)

was, arguably, an unsuccessful private-sector effort to do the same thing on a local scale.

Remarkably, "

[De revolutionibus orbium coelestium](#)

" wasn't banned until six decades after its publication. As

[Grace Hopper](#)

said, "humans are allergic to change." I've discussed Copernicus and newfangled ideas before. A lot. (

[February 20, 2015](#)

;

[January 9, 2015](#)

;

[July 18, 2014](#)

)

Getting back to 'today,' we've gone from

[zeppelins](#)

and

[neon lights](#)

to the

[Internet](#)

and

[industrial robots](#)

in a few generations. Europeans

[slaughtered](#)

each other in wholesale lots,

[twice](#)

, abandoned their empires, and are trying to

[cooperate](#)

for a change.

The

[United Nations](#)

has lasted seven decades, with

[193](#)

members and two

[observer](#)

states.

I don't think the UN is the "competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level" that

[Bl.](#)

Pope Paul VI mentioned in "

[Gaudium et spes](#)

," but it's a start. (

[September 27, 2015](#)

;

[May 1, 2015](#)

;

[August 24, 2014](#)

)

St. Teresa of Avila: Reform, Yes; "Going Back," No

Anxiety comes easily in times when society is in upheaval.

I'm cautiously optimistic, though, about the future. That's partly because I think today's society

should

change. The trick is pushing change in a good direction.

A little over three years ago, Benedict XVI talked about St. Teresa of Avila's era: and how she can be a role model for Catholics today.

"...In promoting a 'radical return' to a more austere form of Carmelite life, St. Teresa sought 'to create a form of life which favored a personal encounter with the Lord,' the Pope explained.

"Rather than harking back to the past, however, St. Teresa presented 'a new way of being Carmelite' to 'a world which was also new,' Pope Benedict observed. He quoted the Spanish saint's own writings to her religious sisters in which she summed up the 'difficult times' in which they lived.

" 'The world is on fire,' wrote St. Teresa of post-Reformation Europe. 'Men try to condemn Christ once again. They would raze His Church to the ground. No, my sisters, this is no time to treat with God for things of little importance.'

" 'Does this luminous and engaging call, written more than four centuries ago by the mystic saint, not sound familiar in our own times?' asked Pope Benedict in response...."

([David Kerr](#), CNA/EWTN News (July 16, 2012))

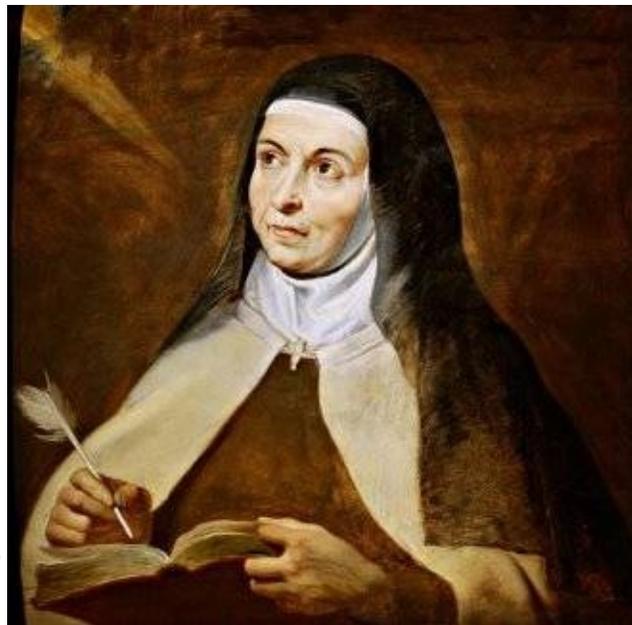
If I thought we had a perfect society in the 'good old days' before

[1954](#)

,

[1933](#)

,



[1848](#)

, or some other imagined golden age, I'd be protesting rock music, promoting prohibition, or trying to keep my wife from voting.

Let's remember what "reform" means: "to improve by alteration, correction of error, or removal of defects; put into a better form or condition." (

thefreedictionary.com

)

We can't go back to the 'good old days,' which is just as well. We had problems then, too, and I'm drifting off-topic: which assumes I had a topic in mind to begin with.

Let's see: "the world is on fire," Münster Rebellion, zeppelins. Right. Got it.

Priorities and Love

I'm a Catholic layman, so I'm part of the Church's front line, permeating "social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life." (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[899](#)

)

I'm Catholic, though, so that doesn't mean trying to ram my subculture's preferences and customs down everyone's throat. (

[August 30, 2015](#)

;

[September 7, 2014](#)

)

My top priority is knowing and loving God. (Catechism,

[1](#)

)

I'm also expected to pass on the best news we've ever had: God loves us and wants to adopt us. All of us. (

[John 3:17](#)



;

[Romans 8:15](#)

;

[Ephesians 1:3](#)

-

[5](#)

; Catechism,

[1](#)

-

[3](#)

,

[52](#)

,

[1825](#)

)

As an adopted child of God, I'm expected to reflect God's qualities: which is pretty much the opposite of easy. (Catechism,

[339](#)

,

[355](#)

,

[369](#)

-

[370](#)

,

[386](#)

-

[409](#)

)

If I take God, and my faith, seriously, I'll —

Love God, and love my neighbor. (

[Matthew 5:43](#)

-

[44](#)

;

[Mark 12:28](#)

-

[31](#)

;

[Luke 10:25](#)

-

[30](#)

; Catechism,

[1825](#)

)

See everybody as my neighbor. (

[Matthew 5:43](#)

-

[44](#)

;

[Mark 12:28](#)

-

[31](#)

;

[Luke 10:25](#)

-

[30](#)

; Catechism,

[1825](#)

)

Treat others as I want to be treated. (

[Matthew 7:12](#)

;

[Luke 6:31](#)

; Catechism,

[1789](#)

)

As I've said before, it's simple: not easy. (

[October 12, 2014](#)

)

"The Light Shines in the Darkness"

The Catholic Church is old: ancient. For two millennia, we've had the same basic message: Jesus stopped being dead. Heaven is open to us. (

[John 20](#)

; Catechism,

[638](#)

655

1026

This is a big deal.

"^{1 2} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

"He was in the beginning with God.

"³ All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;

*"⁴ the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
([John 1:1-5](#))*

'Ancient' and 'consistent' isn't the same as '

[decrepit](#)

' and 'outdated.' Our basic message hasn't changed. How we present it hasn't stopped changing. (

[May 31, 2015](#)

Benedict XVI said we're supposed to use "...methods free from inertia...." I think he's right.

"...In the 'exhilarating task' of the New Evangelization, he said, the example of St. Teresa should inspire all Christians because she 'evangelized unhesitatingly, showing tireless ardor, employing methods free from inertia and using expressions bathed in light.'

*" 'This remains important in the current time,' said the Pope, 'when there is a pressing need for the baptized to renew their hearts through individual prayer in which, following the guidance of St. Teresa, they also focus on contemplation of Christ's blessed humanity as the only way to reach the glory of God.'"
([David Kerr](#), CNA/EWTN News)*

I don't know how much "tireless ardor" I can manage, and I can't think of an expression "bathed in light" for wrapping up this post — so I'll repeat one of my favorite bits from the Bible.



"While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them.

"They said, 'Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.' "

([Acts 1:10-11](#))

Two millennia later, we're still working, watching, and waiting. If we'd been following anyone else, we'd have given up long ago. But Jesus isn't anyone else. And that's another topic. Topics. (

[April 5, 2015](#)

;

[November 30, 2014](#)

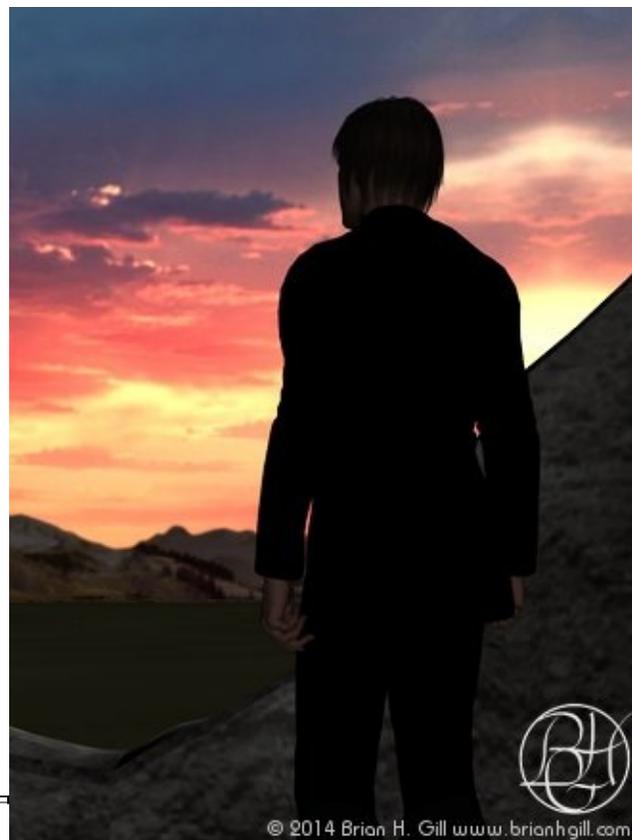
;

[October 5, 2014](#)

)

Remembering what matters:

1



Background:

- "[Letter of the Holy Father to the Superior General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites on the 500th anniversary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus](#)"
Francis (March 28, 2015)
(From w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150328_lettera-500-teresa.html (October 23, 2015))
- "[Message to the Bishop of Ávila \(Spain\) on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the foundation of the Monastery of St José in Ávila and the beginning of the reform of the Order of Carmel](#)"
Benedict XVI (July 16, 2012)
(From w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120716_avila.html (October 23, 2015))
- "[Holy Mass for the New Evangelization](#)"
Benedict XVI (October 16, 2011)
(From w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20111016_nuova-evang.html (October 23, 2015))
- "[Porta Fidei](#)," for the Indiction of the Year of Faith
Benedict XVI (October 11, 2011)
(From w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-

[proprio_20111011_porta-fidei.html](#) (October 24, 2015))

- "[Apostolic Letter issued 'Motu Proprio' Ubicumque et semper of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization](#)"
Benedict XVI (September 21, 2010)
(From [w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper.html](#) (October 23, 2015))

This contribution is available at <http://catholiccitizenamerica.blogspot.com/2015/10/new-evangelization-fire-and-light.html>

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Sin, What's Your Excuse?



Sin, What's Your Excuse?

“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into fiery Gehenna.”
Matthew -18:8-9

Excuses, we all make them. Sometimes they are harmless, other times they can be life-changing, shameful, or dishonest.

We put off yearly medical exams, mammograms, colonoscopies, dental exams always finding something else in our lives more important. Sometimes we put them off so long that a problem that could have been diagnosed early is out of control. We are embarrassed that our excuses caused us to put our health at risk.

We want to get together with an old friend in a nearby city. But, something always is more important and we make lame excuses why we can't visit. Years go by, our friend passes away, and we forever regret that we never made seeing them a priority.

A disagreement results in a family argument with family members taking sides. They haven't talked in years, estranged from the people that they should love the most. Years later, they can't even remember the reason for the split. They want to reconcile, but old wounds make for too many excuses and only a family tragedy brings them together.

Yes, excuses are powerful life changing road blocks to our happiness.

“If we sin deliberately after receiving knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains sacrifice for sins” Hebrews 10:26

The same holds true for sin. Each of us is born with an understanding of right and wrong. It's imprinted on our DNA. But, we still sin knowing that it is wrong. We have excuses for every sin!

“It's in my background.”

I was brought up that way.”

“Everyone is doing it.”

“Someone hurt me, I was falsely accused!”

Don't feel bad. The bible is full of people making excuses! Adam and Eve had an excuse, Cain did, Noah's people, and even Satan made excuses.

So, how do we begin to put these excuses aside and declare, “NO MORE EXCUSES” for sin? How do we take ownership of our sins and eliminate the excuses for continuing to commit the same ones?

First, we must recognize the temptation and admit our weakness in dealing with it. Then, pray for the grace to overcome the temptation and resist it.

Here are a few actions that we can take to do this;

1. *Pray for the grace to resist the temptation.* Most people commit the same sins over and over again. Prayer is a powerful defense against sin.
2. *Avoid sinful places and people.* My dad used to say, “you become who you hang out with.” If you go places where you are flirting with sin or hang out with people who lead you to sin you will find resisting difficult.

“The just act as guides to their neighbors, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.” Proverbs 12:26

3. *Stop blaming others or the situation.* The devil didn't make you do it and neither did anyone else. You are singularly responsible for your actions and no self-justification applies.
4. *Stop procrastinating.* I'll start the new diet next week or this fall I'll get back to the gym simply puts off taking action. It is simply just another excuse. Same with sin. If you want to stop sinning, start now!

In Matthew 18, Jesus uses the technique of amplification and exaggeration, customary of the times, to make a point of the power and seriousness of sin. We don't need to start cutting off limbs and plucking out our eyes, but we do need to make the pledge of “no more excuses!”

Let's take the pledge together.

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Distributism and Labor Unions [at Practical Distributism]

It has sometimes been said that distributism, the economic system that promotes widely distributed productive property - whether this is owned by a single proprietor, a family, or a worker cooperative - is hostile to labor unions and the labor movement. While I do not deny that there may have been someone who labels himself a distributist who at one time or another said something negative about the labor movement, the central distributist movement, exemplified by theorists such as Hilaire Belloc or G. K. Chesterton, and of late by organs such as

Practical Distributism

or

The Distributist Review

, has not embraced such a position. Any apparent hostility is based upon a misunderstanding of the differences between a capitalist economy and a distributist economy. For example, when Belloc wrote that a union "is a proletarian institution through and through and a proletariat and a proletarian spirit is exactly what we are aiming to destroy,"

[1]

he was simply noting that in a distributist society the labor market divide between owners and workers, which is the hallmark of capitalism, would not exist, or would hardly exist. Since distributists desire a proliferation of small economic units - workshops, stores, farms - it is obvious that in such entities there would be no labor movement because there would be no labor. Or to put it more precisely, the worker would be the owner, and the owner the worker. There would be no need for him to form a union to protect his interests against himself. Entities that of necessity required a large facility with a large workforce would, according to the distributist model, be employee owned and administered by the workers themselves. Again there would be no need for a union. Thus Belloc is not exhibiting any hostility toward workers but rather hopes that their status may be improved by making them owners.

Although distributists desire that the need for unions be eliminated by making workers owners, nevertheless distributists recognize the desirability of economic organization. In fact, one of the central though sometimes neglected points of distributism, one that Hilaire Belloc insisted upon, is the creation of guilds or occupational groups, organizations of those in the same industry or selling the same products. Such guilds would work to eliminate or moderate competition and replace it with the cooperative idea that all producers are working together to supply the public with a necessary quality product, and there is no reason for any producer to desire a larger market share than is required for the support of his business. If a proprietor is making enough by his work to support himself and his family, there is no need and no right for him to work to put his fellow producers out of business by grabbing more market share than he already has. In addition, such guilds would probably regulate apprenticeship and other training programs, so that if there were any workers who were not yet owners, their interests would be watched over by guilds in which they themselves were members and had a voice and vote in the decision making.

But just because labor unions would be unnecessary in a distributist economy, that does not mean they are unnecessary in our capitalist economy. I myself, and I think most distributists, recognize the need for unions and the labor movement today, and lament the fact of labor's weakened and decreased role in the economy. In fact, Belloc himself thought that some unions might gradually be converted into guilds by being given an official role ("official charter") in regulating their portion of the economy.

Some of our greater trade unions to-day, though not officially chartered, have in practice attained many of the powers which an official charter would give. They, in practice, regulate wages, consider the opportunities of employment, prevent their function from being swamped with numbers and in general substitute status and order for chaotic competition.

It would be possible to begin by regularising these few successful experiments, giving them a legal basis, and using them as models for extension into other fields.[2]

Distributists desire above all that the economy function according to its natural purpose, that of providing the human race with the external goods we need or reasonably want, whether consumers who need a steady supply of well-made goods, or workers who need the economic stability that provides security for families and allows all of us to focus our attention on more important matters than earning a living. The economic system is not an end in itself, it is logically subordinate to society as a whole, and to the real needs and ends of humanity, both in this world and the next. The proposals of distributists are designed to accomplish this aim, and carried out into practice, would attain it as far as our fallen nature would permit.

Notes

[1] Hilaire Belloc, *The Restoration of Property* (New York : Sheed & Ward, 1946), p. 139.

[2]

Ibid

. pp. 139- 140

This contribution is available at <http://practicaldistributism.blogspot.com/2015/10/distributism-and-labor-unions.html>
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Aging and Loving It! [at Quiet Consecration]

I have been reading a slew of articles on the Internet lately that try to address the growing number of people my age who are entering into the twilight of our lives and doing so alone. We have no spouse, no children and not grandchildren. Recently I ran across this posting from a woman in her 20's and I thought it was interesting:

"I am pretty sure we are not going to have children. I hate babies. Being pregnant looks horrible. I love my free time and being able to do whatever I want. I love my relationship with FI and don't want kids to get in the way of it. I always envisioned not being a mother. I hate everyone telling me I'm selfish. I hate feeling the only reason I would want a kid is to please family. My mother will most likely never be a grandmother.

Well, on to my question. getting older scares the shit out of me. FI is an only child. My brother hated me since the day I was born and lives 5 states down so there will be no family when we're older. FI and I don't have many friends and those we do already have children or plan to. I am scared of years from now, out living FI and being all alone. My grandpa died so for years, my mother and I took care of my grandma until she passed. The thought of being all alone and/or dying alone is scary!

wow, how depressing. Lol.

Read more:

<http://boards.weddingbee.com/topic/those-who-chose-not-to-have-kids-are-you-scared-of-being-alone/#ixzz3phwU1edu>

"

When I read this I laughed out loud. I did not post LOL....I actually laughed out loud and then clamped my hand over my mouth.

Why?

Because, like the young poster, I too once worried and fretted over this very issue. What was going to happen to me when I get to be my Mom's age (she turned 94 October 9)? I have no children (I am both post abortive and the mother of a child lost to miscarriage) and, of course, no in laws or grandchildren to turn to when my phone is accidentally off the hook for two hours or I need a ride to go shopping. Woe is me, what will I do?

I tell you what I am going to do - I am going to do just fine.

See, I figured out (after a considerable time spent worrying about stuff that hasn't happened yet) that no one, including all my friends with perfect Hallmark families, have any guarantee in this life when it comes to human beings. The reality is, while we must not ever forget that

our

purpose is to love and serve we cannot do that with the idea that someday we will be loved and served in return. In fact, if that is why I am doing this deal (a quid pro quo version of Christianity) then I am going to have some explaining to do when I stand in front of Jesus at the end of my life. It won't matter how many packages I delivered to St Vincent de Paul, how many Rosaries I prayed and how many Masses I never missed...if I have not Love then I am an empty gong.

Just as accepting Jesus into my heart as my personal Lord and Savior will

never

guarantee my salvation, neither will my abundant good works - especially if I am doing those good works with the idea that God will make sure I am not alone at the end of my life, that someone will be there to love me and care for me and that everything will be okay.

That is not how this deal works.

Now, I could turn this into a 'I told you so' thing about my choices to abort my children when I was younger but it isn't even about that - I know men and women who did everything as best they could when raising their children who are currently trying to find rides to Mass on Sundays because Junior or Junior Miss are too damn busy to bother with Mom or Dad now that they are 80. I also know people who have had no kids and have no family who are surrounded by people loving them, helping them and making them feel wanted and needed.

In other words there is just no guarantee. When I hit my knees in the morning, when I hold those I dearly love in prayer, when I end my day with a honest appraisal of what I did right and what I did wrong, and then ask God to forgive my sins and give me the grace to do the whole darn thing again the next day?

I better be doing it for one reason and one reason only:

Because Faith without Works is DEAD - and I don't want to be one of the Walking Dead.

Instead of being afraid today, I am confident. I am confident that whatever lies ahead for me I will be given just the grace and strength needed to deal with it. If I am all alone, living with a dog and nineteen cats, God will give me the strength to deal with it. If I am in a bed in a corner in a nursing home for the indigent, God will give me the strength and to deal with it. If I die without a friend or relative at the bedside I will die knowing that my Guardian Angel is sitting right there with me, ready to help me through to the next phase of life.

And then, if I am faithful, I will be able to stand in front of Him and tell Him the truth:

I did all that stuff for one reason - because I Love You...

God, grant me the courage to do that today. And when I falter, when I worry, when I slip into fear and that awful human need for recognition and dependence comes over me, help me to remember that my wants and needs are fulfilled by You and You alone.

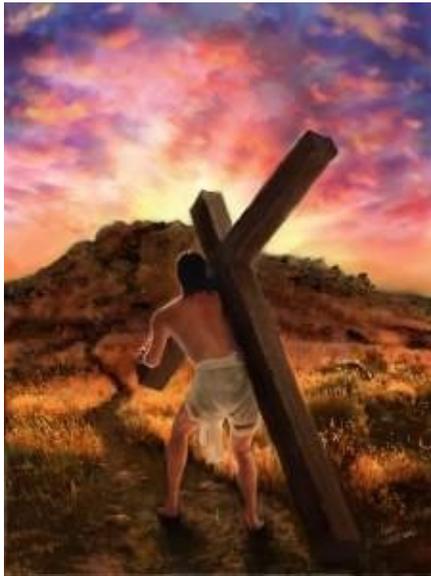
Amen.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2015/10/embraceyournumber-aging-and-loving-it.html>
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The Transforming Work of the Cross [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

§ *The Transforming Work of the Cross*



The Way of True Discipleship

“Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12:1-2)

Dear Pilgrims in Christ Jesus,

One of the problems we Christians have in growing spiritually as “disciples” of Christ is that we take discipleship for granted and lack an awareness that discipleship is the work of the Holy Spirit in us – not something we do of ourselves for God. And, what we also have trouble realizing is that this work of God’s Spirit in us and through us has to begin with a conscious, free, and willing decision to offer ourselves up to the Father as a “living Sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1-2), a sacrifice which entails the surrender of the right to our “self” to the Divine, so that He can enter our inner selves and conform us to the image of his Son.

This decision is separate from our decision to accept Jesus as Messiah and our Savior. However what sometimes is undetermined is our decision to submit ourselves fully to Him as our “Lord”. In our conversion we receive freely the Father’s gift of salvation that was won for us by Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross. But then, It is only as “freemen” that we can then, out of “agape” love, freely give our “self” to God – not out of obligation or compulsion but totally as a free gift of ourselves to permit God to set us apart for His service to humanity.

Denying our self, then, is the free and conscious commitment we make as redeemed children of God to yield ourselves to Him so that He can separate us to Himself as His instruments of Love to the world. In carrying out this commitment on a daily basis. we crucify our flesh so that God’s Spirit may truly have

full reign over us. That, my brothers and sisters, is, the cross we must carry daily. A cost we must clearly assess if we intend entering into “true” and “intentional” discipleship.

Self-esteem vs. Dying to Self

Once I was discussing “self-denial” or “dying to self”, as a principle of Christian discipleship, with a friend who had academic training in psychology.. His first take on this concept was that it went against the humanistic principle of “self-assurance” or “self-esteem” that is widely held as the founding principle for good mental health.

I took me several discussions to convince him of the difference between the two.

First of all let’s begin with the principle of “self-denial” that Jesus was asking of His disciples.

Luke 14: 26“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. 27“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29“Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

In the above citation, the scripture author uses the term “his own life” to indicate “his own self”, a term which is alternatively used in another citation, also from Luke,



Where I am -there my dsicple will be also ...

Luke 9: 23And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.24For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. 25For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

From this comparison we derive our understanding that what Jesus was saying is that in order to fully be His Disciple a person must make a clear decision to deny (go against) his own self-driven desires and follow the directions that Jesus is giving him through the Holy Spirit!

Also we note that this decision by the disciples to renounce their own desires in order to follow Jesus is

also termed by the Master as “carrying their own personal cross” daily. If our personal desires are based on the self-esteem derived from what others think of us, then, yes, we must die to those desires because they are humanly derived and keep us from the path to true discipleship. Severing our need for human self-esteem is the foundation for true humility.

It must also be said that our desire to be a disciple of Jesus indicates that we have come got a point in our lives where our personal relationship with Jesus has brought us to the point where whatever self-esteem we have is now being derived from the LOVE He has poured out on us through His Sacrifice on the Cross. Our understanding of that immense gift of Salvation and the Love of the Father manifested through it, for us sinners who deserve NOTHING from God, has so changed our inner man that ALL our self-esteem is now entirely and positively derived from our relationship with Him!

Now, one of the drivers of our human desires, is self-esteem. And if we let ourselves be controlled by how others esteem us, then it will be one of the determinants of our actions derived from our humanness. This is what the Apostle Paul terms the “old Man” in some of his letters. Our reaction to how others view us can range from the negative to the positive.. We normally react negatively to criticism and positively to praise. If we are too sensitive to the negative we fall into what is termed “depression”, whereas if we derive pleasure from praise we may be driven to narcissism. These are all traits of the “old Man”, the Old Man that we must crucify daily!

What Jesus is exhorting His followers is to bring us to completely put away the “old Man” in us, by severing our need to base our actions on our regard for human self-esteem and, instead, to base them only on following Jesus out of faith in Him and selfless, agape. Love! This is how we “crucify the Old man”.

Putting on the “New Man” ...

From Colossians Chapter 3:

1If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

3For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7In these you once walked, when you lived in them.

8But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 9Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices 10and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

12 [Instead] Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, 13forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.14And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

15And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in

all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.17And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

When we do this, we free ourselves from our self-centered controlled life and enter into a God-centered living existence. This is what Jesus referred to as the “Kingdom of God”, where we surrender the right to our selves and let the Lord truly RULE in our lives.

That is why becoming a disciple comes at a cost. And that is why it is a “cross” that we must carry daily! That is also why the Lord tell his followers that to be truly be committed as a disciple you must first asses the strength of your faith and willingness to follow Him as a disciple through the sacrifice of your right to your “self” to the Holy Spirit so He can work God’s Divine will in you and through you.

Many of think that just because we are true believers that we are also true disciples. No, although our belief in Jesus assures us of Salvation in Him, we cannot enter into a full state of discipleship unless we make the additional commitment to surrender the right to ourselves and give God full control over our lives so the Holy Spirit can conform us into the image of Christ that is in us!

Note how Jesus presented this choice to Nicodemus (cf., Jn 3). Jesus told him that although his awareness of the Kingdom working in Jesus’ ministry was a step in the right direction. Yet in order to enter the Kingdom Anointing that was over Jesus and take part in His ministry, he ,”Nikky” had to give up all that he was doing and become a follower of Jesus literally, in order to enter into that Anointing. And he could only do this through repentance, conversion and giving himself totally to the Holy Spirit so that the transformation could begin.

Yes, Nicodemus was a hidden disciple but he did not enter into the fulness of that discipleship until later. So it is, unfortunately, with many of us!

If you feel the Holy Spirit has nudged you regarding “discipleship”, I recommend that, after praying for the Holy Spirits advise, you look into reading Sherry Waddell’s book: “Forming Intentional Disciples – The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus” *

May the Lord Richly Bless you,
Your Brother in Christ Jesus Bartimaeus
(© B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus’ Quiet Place, [2008-2014])

[* Note: In her book [“Forming Intentional Disciples – The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus”](#) Sherry makes it clear that there are three concurrent spiritual journeys to what one might call “normative” Catholicism. She lists these as:

1. The personal interior journey of a relationship with Christ resulting in intentional discipleship.
2. The ecclesial journey into through the Church through the sacraments of initiation.
3. The journey of active practice (as evidenced by attending mass, receiving the sacraments and participating in the life and mission of the Christian community).

She also makes it clear that in a study conducted by her and a Catholic Cleric indicated that the majority of Lay Catholic Christians basically assume that all that is needed to be “Catholic” are to be involved in paths 2 and 3 (the ecclesial journey and the practice of the religious tenets of the faith).]

For related comments and links see:

<http://marriagepreparation.com/page/?pg=117>

<http://www.focus.org/blog/posts/forming-intentional-disciples.html>

<http://www.amazon.com/Forming-Intentional-Disciples-Knowing-Following/dp/1612785905>

Catherine of Sienna Institute

<http://www.siena.org/Article/who-we-are>

CDM Discipleship Resources

<http://www.navigators.org/us/ministries/cdm/about/>

CDM Intentional Discipleship Ministry

<http://www.navigators.org/us/ministries/cdm/idc/>

[Prayer to Receive the Holy Spirit](#)

This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2015/10/25/\\$-the-transforming-work-of-the-cross/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2015/10/25/$-the-transforming-work-of-the-cross/)

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The Coconut [at Busy Catholic Moms]

The Coconut

My 12 year old son got it in his head that a coconut must be delicious! He likes how they smell. He's had coconut desserts. He loves Almond Joys. A coconut must be delicious too. He dreamed of how the coconut milk would taste and what it would be like to crack open this exotic fruit and scrape out the white tasty insides. So for the entire summer, he has been on the lookout for coconuts. Our regular grocery store seemed to be chronically out of them, which didn't bother me. I didn't think that he was actually serious about it. But he definitely was.

Eventually, we went to a less-traveled grocery store and happened upon a coconut. As he was reading the directions, we realized that with some coconuts, the milk is not considered safe to drink. So he also found a can of coconut milk and begged me to buy it. So for \$3 all together, I indulged my son, warning him that it may not be quite what he had been dreaming about. For a week or two, that coconut sat next to the bananas, giving me dirty looks every time my glance fell upon it. I knew that it wasn't going to be quite what he was hoping for, and in addition to that, it was going to be difficult to get into! Likewise, every time I opened the refrigerator, that can of coconut milk glared at me because he swore that it would taste even better chilled.



Finally an open evening coincided with his memory of the deliciousness of a coconut, so he begged to have coconut for dessert. After dinner that evening when the dishes were done, I got out a corkscrew and popped a couple of holes in the coconut, letting the watery juice drain out. Then, following directions, I got a sharp knife, positioned it on the coconut's equator and tried with all my might to get through the tough coconut shell. I actually had to request a mallet from the garage to try to force it through. This part of the process took almost ten minutes before we actually made significant progress. And even then, it was a very difficult and slow process with little taps and pushes. But finally, the coconut began to give way – its crooked crack seemed to take forever to spread to a point that it could actually open up. But with my son's help, it finally broke apart, much to his great delight! He couldn't wait to take a bite! I scraped some of the white insides out, rinsed it off and divided it among the three children. They all took a much anticipated bite only to find that it tasted awful! A mix between wood and soap, raw coconut is not what they expected. They were extremely disappointed but held out hope for the coconut milk. I punctured the can, much easier than the coconut itself, and poured out what looked and tasted like Elmer's glue. A second disappointment...

So I scooped up a few bowls of ice cream which was far and above what they could of wanted with the coconut. Severely disappointed, they were happy to eat down a different type of creamy white goodness. But I never let it slip that I knew the coconut would be so awful.

Sometimes, in life, we have designs for what we think we want. We have plans for what we believe is best for our lives. God knows better, but we think that we know the desire of our hearts. We want that

coconut, even if it will be impossible to get into and taste awful. We want that coconut milk, tasting of glue, poured into our cup, even if it's not good for us. Even when God is wanting to give us ice cream, we dream of that coconut. Perhaps we should give up that coconut dream and realize that ice cream would be so much better!

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/our-kids/the-coconut/>
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This Daughter of Eve [at Life is Beautiful]



It's that time again already! Anyone else feel like the weeks fly by?

What's new with you? What are you excited about this week? Chime in and link up! See details below on our Tuesday Talk party and be sure to link back to at least one of the hostesses!



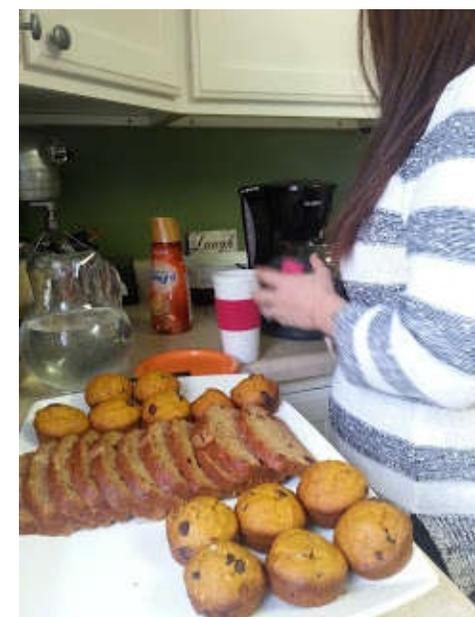
So this past Saturday a friend and I hosted our second meeting of our women's Bible study. I am so in awe of how God is using it already. We wanted to start out with an intimate group of 8-10 and we're already up to 16 women. Women crave community, don't we? It's so beautiful to see this group of women come together-- single, married, mothers-- and find common ground in our faith walks. Many of them did not know each other at the beginning, but we're already sharing our hearts, our joys and struggles, as we learn about the women of the Old Testament (and munch on muffins and sip warm drinks).

This past month we studied Eve, the first woman, wife, mother. I went in to this chapter thinking of it as an introduction of sorts, a chapter I wanted to "get through" so I could get to the more exciting characters like Esther or the more relevant ones like Sarah with her fertility struggles.

Little did I know, I would relate to Eve a lot more than I realized!

Like mother, like daughter.

As I reflected on the insights of the chapter, the Scripture passages, and the discussion questions, my heart kept opening up more and more to what God wanted to show me.



Eve and I are more alike than I'd ever have guessed.

Do you know why Eve committed that first sin, why she listened to the devil and ate that apple?

Because she didn't trust God.

Her trust in God was weak. She listened to the devil, believed his lies, and

then

acted. She doubted God's goodness, His providence.

She began to see God as One who was withholding good things from her.

She allowed Satan to

change her view of God

instead of speaking truth to herself, of reminding herself of God's promises.

Sound familiar? Yeah, I thought so, too.

My trust in God is weak. So often the devil whispers lies to me and causes me to focus on what God is withholding. I doubt His goodness. I doubt His providence. I believe the devil instead of my Heavenly Father. And then I act. I choose selfishness. I avoid prayer. My view of God is distorted.

If only Eve had walked away from the devil's deception. If only she had spoken truth to herself. If only she

had sought conversation and time with God, to remember who He is and to hear His reassuring voice drown out the lies.

If only I did that when I'm tempted to doubt, discouragement, sin.

This chapter was so beautiful, so surprisingly insightful. I am Eve's daughter and I see so much of her in me. At the end of the chapter, we were encouraged to make a 'strategy' for building virtue and strength for the moments of temptation. My strategy consisted of five points:



1. Remind myself of who I am in Christ.
2. Remember God's goodness and who He is. (

[My favorite site](#)

for the attributes of God!)

3. Develop more discipline in prayer and in my daily life.
4. Seek encouragement through mentors and through visible reminders. (Bible verses in house, car.)
5. Receive grace and strength through the sacraments of the Church. (Give me Jesus in the Eucharist!)

What would your strategy be? Who do you relate to most in the Bible?



The hosts of Tuesday Talk

Join the party, friends, by linking up with your favorite post from the week! Here's the scoop:

This contribution is available at <http://only-annegirl.blogspot.com/2015/10/tuesday-talk-3-this-daughter-of-eve.html>
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Hostage to the Devil [at Mere Observations]

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 6:12

Three articles on my news feed yesterday caught my attention.

[UK Police Says Witchcraft, Exorcism Cases on Rise](#)

Britain's Metropolitan Police have reported an increase in the number of child abuse cases that involve allegations of witchcraft and exorcism.

Police said Sunday a specialist unit received 46 such cases in 2014, more than twice as many as the year before.

The "Project Violet" unit says 60 incidents have been reported so far this year, continuing the upward trend.

[Aspiring Vampires Enjoy a Blade-Themed "Blood Rave"](#)

Just before midnight, a squadron of technicians suited up with body-mounted sprayers surrounded the crowd and, on cue, soaked the writhing masses with synthetic blood. No leather corset or bare tattooed back was spared as the ravers seethed with fanged glee beneath the crimson rain. For a few hours, it was truly weird and wonderful to see a sea of giddy daywalkers living out fantasy bloodlust.

[Pope Francis: 'When the devil numbs your conscience, he has won'](#)

With his "good manners," Francis said, the devil makes the man fall into moral relativism, calming his conscience.

We start saying things like "This happens everywhere" and "We are all sinners," Francis said. Yet "When we say everybody, we mean nobody," he said. "And so we live this worldliness that is the child of the evil spirit."

"Calming the conscience, numbing the conscience, this is a great evil," he said.

"When the devil manages to numb your conscience he has won a real victory," Francis said, because "he has become the master of your conscience."

Ever since I was a young boy I've been keenly aware that there are forces at work in our world. Long before I was a Catholic I had this sense. It was not due to any sort of Bible-based indoctrination...my family was nominally Protestant and though I did attend a week-long Bible Camp for a few summers in South Dakota and Sunday School into middle school, it was hardly a strict or fundamentalist upbringing. Snacks, crafts, and bible stories on felt boards from what I remember.

But as for the spiritual battle I just knew. And when you are aware of this ongoing battle you pay attention to things that others miss. You learn that what is mere coincidence to some is far from it in reality. Items in the news (missing children here, mutilated bodies there) are noticed despite your best efforts to take a break from the onslaught of internet information. It's as if you're being taunted. "*See what I'm doing? Nobody cares. Go ahead and say something. Nobody will listen to you and will laugh at you as some sort of nut. I can't be stopped.*"

Then I became a Catholic and joined the battle full on. One cannot ignore it then as begin to connect the dots and find that it's all around you.

There is a reason why the Church (*ALL* Christians) comprised of the living on earth is referred to as the Church Militant. From [Father Z's blog](#):

The Church Militant is made up of the living, we who are still on pilgrimage through this vale of tears, as the *Salve Regina* describes our earthly life. The whole Church can be described as having three main kinds of membership, namely, those who are still alive here on Earth, those who are in an earthly sense dead but who live in Heaven (the Church Triumphant) and those who have died but who are, during their time of purification in Purgatory, awaiting their entrance into Heaven (the Church Suffering or Penitent). These three are united, in one Holy Church, in a common "communion of saints", even though we of the Church Militant often aren't very saintly.

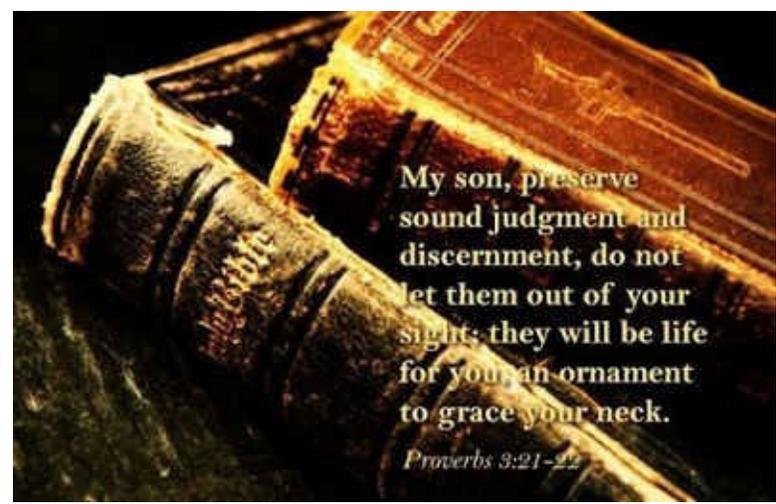
So that's what the Church Militant is. But what does it mean for those of us who are its members? Fr. Z again:

As a Catholic who is *militans*, "militant", that means that we dedicate ourselves with obedience and zeal to the role we are given in life through our calling and through our talents and good inclinations, our vocations in life. It means that we are also prepared to fight the enemy wherever and whenever threats to the salvation of our own souls and our neighbor's souls present themselves. It means working together as units and not as individuals merely. It means good conditioning and through drills in knowing well our Catholic Faith and practicing virtues and discipline in the use of the Sacraments. It means submission to the Church's teaching authority and her duly ordaining pastors. It means fidelity, loyalty and even a willingness to die.

In the Breitbart article I linked to above regarding Pope Francis, he went on to say that the key to combatting the devil is discernment and vigilance.

We need to be able to discern situations, he (Pope Francis) said, to see what comes from God and what comes from the devil who "always tries to deceive" and to "make us choose the wrong path."

The Christian cannot just accept anything, but must "discern and look well to see where things come from, and what their root is," he said.



My son, preserve
sound judgment and
discernment, do not
let them out of your
sight; they will be life
for you, an ornament
to grace your neck.

Proverbs 3:21-22

I learned the importance and relevance of spiritual discernment from St. Ignatius while attending retreats based upon his spiritual exercises. A nightly examination of conscience is a key part of Compline (or Night Prayer) as prayed before bed each night. And while I admit that I lag in my use of the Sacrament of Confession I always strive to attend more often and can attest to its graces and benefits. Today more than ever before I wield these devices as weapons in the intensifying war around us and urge you to consider doing the same.

Still not convinced about spiritual warfare? Fair enough. Below I'm going to paste the first paragraphs of the updated Preface to Malachi Martin's book [Hostage to the Devil](#). For years I'd read about this book that was originally published in the 1970s and re-issued in the 1990s. I came across it the other day in a bookstore, bought it, and haven't been able to put it down since. I own a copy of the book [An Exorcist Tells His Story](#) by Fr. Gabrielle Amorth but it's still near the bottom of my stack of books to read. But as I've practiced more discernment and looked "well to see where things come from and what their root is" my interest in this type of warfare has increased. At Christmas last year I picked up the then-new book [Manual For Spiritual Warfare](#) and found it to be so good that I've bought copies to give as gifts to friends.

As I sat here for a few minutes deliberating on whether to hit the PUBLISH button or not the familiar thoughts came to mind:

"Nobody cares. Go ahead and say something. Nobody will listen to you and will laugh at you as some sort of nut. Once you hit that button you will be dismissed as a nutter and people will no longer read your blog or take you seriously."

And then I thought about how we live in a culture that celebrates death. Our government has worked to enshrine abortion and euthanasia as unholy sacraments of a sort. Porn is rampant and we feed it unfettered to our children through benign devices such as smartphones, tablets and television. ABC Family celebrates "a new kind of family" and has done its best to promote anything except the traditional one... and our children watch because what parent denies their child a harmless network named after the family? We celebrate zombies, the undead, vampires, witchcraft and death...and not the cartoonish kind, but with as real of special effects and CGI as possible so we shock our systems with the viscera...and thereby desensitize ourselves to it. We do all this, and then are shocked when someone who has immersed themselves in our culture shoots up children in a school or slaughters their family before destroying themselves. We blame guns and mental illness, because they are easy to target and impersonal, but never ourselves for fostering such an environment. That would be too personal and we long ago did away with

the concepts of personal responsibility or shame. The devil has no need to unleash hell on earth. We opened the door with an open invitation.

In *The Screwtape Letters* C.S. Lewis wrote:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

I do not count myself to be in either camp. I do not disbelieve in their existence as to do so would deny Sacred Scripture. I do not have an excessive or unhealthy interest in them. I'm merely aware of their presence and the need to be prepared for combat. On at least two occasions in my lifetime I have come face to face with the presence of evil and experienced how suffocating it is. I have also encountered the holy and divine too many times to count.

I am a happy warrior, but not an ignorant one. That is my calling as a member of the Church Militant. It is yours as well. But before you can engage in the battle you must recognize, acknowledge and **know** your enemy. Open your eyes.



Preface to the New Edition: Possession and Exorcism in America in the 1990s

In the blink of God's eye since *Hostage to the Devil* was first published in 1976, nothing has changed on the one hand. And everything has changed on the other.

Nothing has changed in the process by which an individual is Possessed by personal and intelligent evil. Nothing has changed, either, in the requirements for successful Exorcism of a Possessed individual. All of that remains as described and summarized in the chapters and cases that follow.

What have changed are the conditions of the society in which we all now live. To a far greater degree than most of us could have imagined fifteen or so years ago, a favorable climate for the occurrence of demonic Possession has developed as the normal condition of our lives.

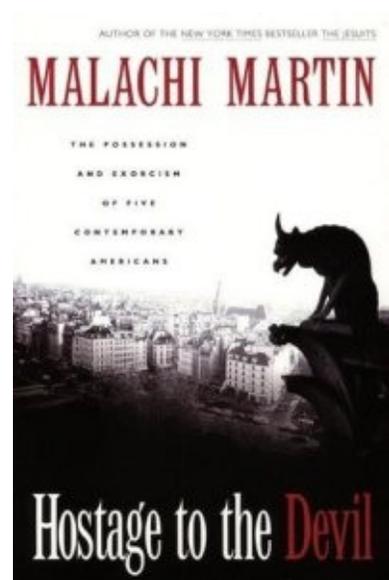
In 1976 Satanism was presented, and was probably regarded by most Americans, as a box office and a

bookstore draw. In fact, *Hostage to the Devil* was intended as a clear warning that Possession is not — nor was it ever — some tale of dark fancy featuring ogres and happy endings. Possession is real; and real prices are paid.

Now, in America of the 1990s, there is little question of demonic Possession as an entertainment. Among families everywhere and at every level of society, there is instead a justifiable fear. Most of all, this fear is for children. And in point of fact, there are few families not already affected in some way by Satanism. Even by ritualistic Satanism—formal ceremonies and rites organized and performed by individuals and groups in professed worship of Satan.

For obvious reasons, we don't know everything about organized Satanist groups, or covens as they are called, in the United States. But the ample knowledge we do have justifies the fear among average families for their children and their way of life in the future.

We know, for example, that throughout all fifty states of the Union, there are now something over 8,000 Satanist covens. We know that in any major American city or large town, a Black Mass — almost always organized by covens — is available on a weekly basis at least, and at several locations. We know that the average membership of Satanist covens is drawn from all the professions as well as from among politicians, clergy, and religious.



We know further that within those covens, a certain amount of “specialization” has come about. One can choose either a heterosexual or a homosexual coven, for example. In at least three major cities, members of the clergy have at their disposal at least one pedophilic coven peopled and maintained exclusively by and for the clergy. Women religious can find a lesbian coven maintained in a similar way.

We know, too, that in many public schools in any major city, it is a virtual surety that there is at least one group of teenagers engaged in ritualist Satanism. And though we know very little — again for obvious reasons — about human sacrifice as an element in ritualist Satanism, we do know that in certain covens in which confidentiality is an absolute, life-or-death condition, the penalty for attempting to quit the coven is ritual death by knife, with one stab wound inflicted for every year of the offending member's life.

Hard admissible evidence concerning human sacrifice as an element in Satanist rituals is limited by the fact that disposal of human remains has been developed into one of the dark art forms within Satanist circles through use of portable incinerators and crematoria; and because there are no birth or baptismal

records — no records of existence — of intended Victim infants.

Nevertheless, we have enormous amounts of anecdotal evidence indicating that some thousands of infants and children are intentionally conceived and born to serve as Victims in Satanist sacrificial rites. In the world of Satanist worship, boys are preferred as gender-replicas of the Christ Child. But girls are by no means excluded.

In this regard, the emergence of child abuse as a characteristic of our time must claim particular attention. Not all — perhaps not even most — child abuse originates in ritualist Satanism per se. Each case must be weighed on the evidence. But the extent of child abuse in America today and the concrete evidence of Satanism as a factor in many such cases, begins to give some idea of the degree to which the inverted standards that are the prime hallmark of Satanist activity in any form — and of ritualist Satanism above all — have infiltrated and influenced all levels of our society.

As horrifying as even that much information is — though it is not all of the information we have, by any means — still more shocking is the realization of the fact that in this, the America of the 1990s, one is never far from a center where such activity is carried out on a routine basis. No one lives far from some geographical area where some form of ritualistic Satanism is practiced. Ritualistic Satanism and its inevitable consequence, demonic Possession, are now part and parcel of the atmosphere of life in America.

That a more favorable climate exists now than ever before for the occurrence of demonic Possession among the general population is so clear, that it is attested to daily by competent social and psychological experts, who for the most part, appear to have no “religious bias.”

Our cultural desolation — a kind of agony of aimlessness coupled with a dominant self-interest — is documented for us in the disintegration of our families. In the breakup of our educational system. In the disappearance of publicly accepted norms of decency in language, dress and behavior. In the lives of our youth, everywhere deformed by stunning violence and sudden death; by teenage pregnancy; by drug and alcohol addiction; by disease; by suicide; by fear. America is arguably now the most violent of the so-called developed nations of the world.

Parents do have every reason to be concerned, then. For above all, the greatest changes in the conditions in which we have come to live over the past twenty years or so have meant that young people are left as the most defenseless against the possibility of Possession. Raised more and more in an atmosphere where moral criticism is not merely out of fashion, but prohibited, they swim with little help in a veritable sea of pornography. Not merely sexual pornography, but the pornography of unmitigated self-interest. Whether spoken or acted out without explanation, the dominant question of the younger generations among us is, What can you do for me? What can my parents, my friends, my acquaintances, my enemies, my government, my country, do for me?

The difficulty is that as individuals and as a society, we are no longer willing — many of us are no longer able — to give an answer to that question that will satisfy anyone for long.

Such pervasive cultural desolation is the most fertile ground one could possibly imagine for the causes of Possession to take root and flourish in almost unimpeded freedom. It is in this context that Satanism — including ritualized Satanism — is causing such justified fear among so many parents for their children. For, it is in that context that at least some may best be sought out by that Ancient Enemy of our race who,

in the words St. Peter used in one of his letters, “*prowls around like a lion seeking whom he can devour.*”

Hostage to the devil : the possession and exorcism of five Americans / Malachi Martin. —
HarperSanFrancisco ed. p. cm.

Originally published: New York: Reader's Digest, 1976.

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ISBN: 978-0-06-065337-8

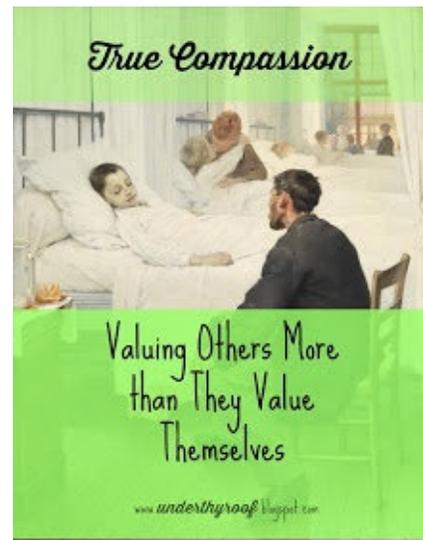
FIRST PERENNIAL LIBRARY EDITION PUBLISHED IN 1987;

HARPERSANFRANCISCO EDITION PUBLISHED IN 1992.

This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2015/10/13/preface-excerpt-hostage-to-the-devil/>
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True Compassion: Valuing Others More than They Value Themselves [at Under Thy Roof]



Yesterday, California Governor Brown signed into law the so called "Right-to-Die" Bill (ABX215). Physician assisted suicide will now be legal in California, as it already is in four other states.

What really got to me was Governor Brown's reasoning for

[signing the bill](#)

:

"In the end, I was left to reflect what I would want in the face of my own death. I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to consider the options afforded by this bill."

What I find interesting is that more often this "option" is not so much a comfort for the patient, but an out for the family/friends.

If an ill person is so sick that they do not value their own life more than the feelings of others - it is our job to value it for them. That is what it means to show love and compassion to a person in pain.

It is our failure, as a society, to learn how to deal with the pain and suffering of others that has led us to this warped world where patients give up their lives to make things "easier" for their families.

Terminally ill patients did not walk into that doctor's office thinking they would only fight until they were not supported anymore. That idea seeps in through the little failures of their supporters: failure to smile, to show hope, to just be there, to laugh, to find joy.

To a lesser degree of consequence, I see the building blocks of this failure in many other situations. The new mom isolated at home and completely over her head with this perfectly needy newborn.

The homeless man who misses the days when people would look him in the eye on the street.

The elderly woman who loves people but feels no one is interested in the musings of an old woman.

What they all need is to be valued for their personhood first and foremost.

Not for what they can give society.

Not for how little demand they place on others.

People are worth fighting for because life is worth living. Period. No qualifiers. No maybes. No exceptions.

This contribution is available at <http://underthyroof.blogspot.com/2015/10/true-compassion-valuing-others-more.html>
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The real battle in which we are continually engaged [at Brutally Honest]



I walked away tonight from the final night of a Scripture study ([Priest, Prophet and King by then Father and now Bishop Robert Barron](#)) and was enthralled by two things, Bishop Barron's handling of the 8th chapter of the Gospel of John and his reference to French philosopher and theorist Rene Girard's “scapegoating mechanism”.

There's no way I could articulate what I heard adequately but my friend Tom Zampino, who went through this same study nearly a year ago to the day, does that study, and more particularly the segment I heard tonight, great justice [here](#):

Please note: credit for everything that follows, except for any misunderstanding on my part, belongs completely to Father Barron.

French philosopher and theorist [Rene Girard](#) long-ago developed an applicable organizing principle – a dynamic – that he believed governs much of our dysfunctional society. The “scapegoating mechanism” helps us to understand how human conflicts, tensions, and emotions often play out - obviously not in a good way, as the name itself implies. Hitler’s Germany is an all too obvious and hideous example.

A deep sense of community, of commonality, develops whenever individuals, or groups of individuals, are pitted one against the other. We have an ingrained longing to become part of a larger group, perhaps for protection, and to separate ourselves from “the other.” As a consequence, we tend to organize around like-minded people.

Later, we will attempt to remove – or at least dominate and control – any one or any other group

that is perceived as different or inferior. We do this in order to release the tensions and eliminate the conflicts that necessarily arise between us. We often form “weird communities,” bound together by a common blaming of our adversaries.

We become, in short, a community of accusers.

Biblically speaking, one name often given to the evil force in the world (ha-santanis) is “the accuser.” Satan himself is the accuser, and this is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. That’s the real battle in which we are continually engaged. And it’s the enemy against which Jesus Himself stands.

Father Barron expertly illustrates this on-going struggle through the passage found in John, Chapter 8 – a favorite of Girard’s, as well as one of my own. Here we find not only a battle between competing groups, but between competing kingdoms:

Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say? ”They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him.

Then Jesus straightened up and said to her “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more.”

Notice, first, the need to find common ground, and then accuse and place blame. Then notice the need of the community of accusers to seek refuge within a religious sanction.

But notice, too, how Jesus stands apart. He doesn’t engage the mob. He doesn’t entertain the gossip. He does not, in any way, cooperate with the community of accusers. Not in the least.

He, in fact, reverses and dissipates the momentum through silence, wisdom, and love.

Here, in short, are two kingdoms, and they are in direct conflict. One, a false kingdom of this world, of Satan, of a commonality of blame and “accusational energy.” The other, is one of forgiveness, compassion, and non-violent love. It’s a re-ordering, and a re-prioritizing of the world. This earthly community of accusers finally meets its spiritual match.

There's [much more](#) and it's all well worth your time. Do yourself the favor of reading the whole thing.

You may be one who stands accused, even by those who call themselves Christians. Or maybe you, as a Christian, stand as one doing the accusing. Either way, Father Barron's study for me tonight particularly drove home the necessity to recognize, in myself first when I point at another, and in the other when

they're pointing at me, whose bidding is being done.

I'm struck by how Rene Girard's "scapegoating mechanism" has in effect become a national meme. The parallels are striking.

In any case, Tom Zampino closes with a prayer at [his place](#) that I'm choosing to close with here, maybe you're moved to pray along with the both of us:

“Father, may I always be kept so busy cleansing my own heart and mind that I never have time to notice whether others are washing theirs. Amen.”

Crossposted at [Wizbang](#).

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2015/10/the-real-battle-in-which-we-are-continually-engaged.html
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It's Not Over [at Sunflower Sojourn]

This song has seemed to come on the radio quite often lately. I think it's one of God's ways to urge me to trust in Him and to continue to pray on all the questions in my heart.

He is writing my story. And He's writing yours, too. The ending has not come; there are still chapters up ahead, with twists and turns. He knows every word, every ellipsis. He knows it all, including your present impatience and wanting to read ahead and to hold the finished book in your hands.

For those still waiting, longing, praying desperately for a spouse. **It's not over.**

For those crying out for a child to hold, feeling the ache of an empty womb and empty arms. **It's not over.**

For those seeking employment to meet daily needs, and only finding rejection. **It's not over.**

For those watching loved ones struggle because of their own harmful choices. **It's not over.**

For those praying for peace and the road to take. **It's not over.**

He is writing now, friend. Trust Him with the pen, and be amazed as the story unfolds.

God bless!

This contribution is available at <http://sunflowersojourn.wordpress.com/2015/10/22/its-not-over/>
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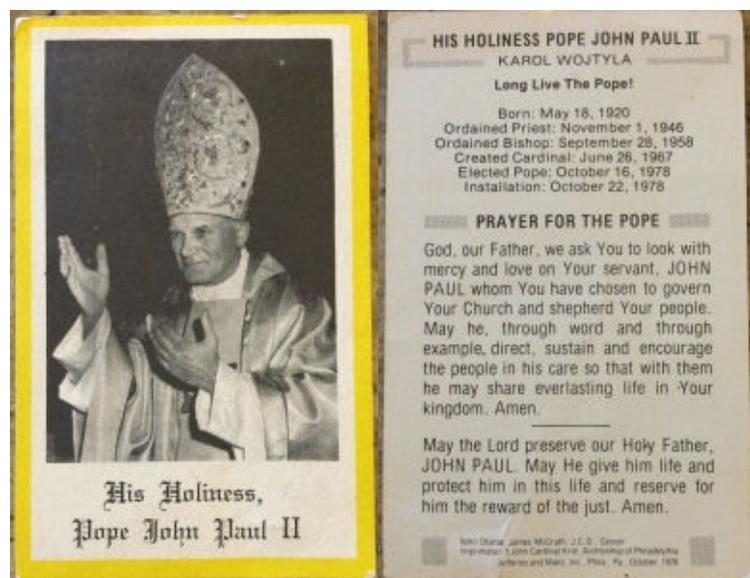
The Rookie Card of Pope St. John Paul II

Today is the feast day for Pope St. John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla) as well as the 37th Anniversary of his Installation to the Papacy of the Catholic Church. Below you will find two pictures – the front and back of a prayer card from October 1978.

In some aspects, this prayer card for Pope St. John Paul II is like a baseball rookie card. It states the dates of his birth, ordination to the priesthood, elevation to the episcopate, cardinal creation, election to the papacy, and installation to the papacy.

If the prayer card below is like his baseball rookie card, then my blog post titled, [Pope Saint John Paul: Mission Accomplished](#), is his induction to the Hall of Fame, well in this case, the Heavenly Kingdom.

In the 3½ years of writing through this blog, I have written about Pope St. John Paul II 47 different times. He is one of the main reasons why I teach and write about the Catholic faith so much. His inspiration in my life, which began through Bobby Kloska, has fueled many of my projects on here and in different parish/school positions.



For your reading pleasure today, here are the **Top 5** most read blog posts that I have written on the Great Polish Saint, John Paul II –

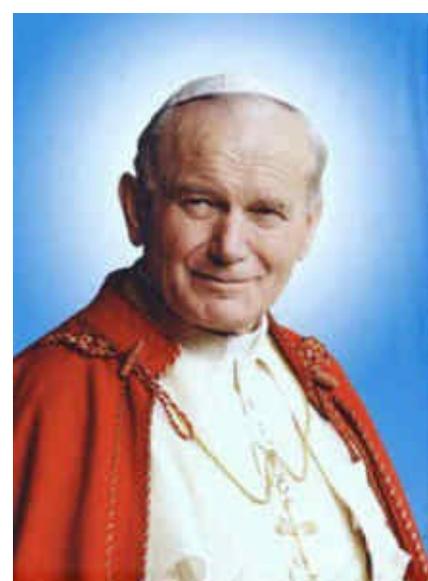
1. [12 Quotes from Blessed John Paul II on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World](#)
2. [“Mondays with Mary” – Pope John Paul II on Mary’s Witness to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ](#)
3. [“Mondays with Mary” – 5 Quotes from Pope St. John Paul II on the Mother of Mercy](#)
4. [5 Quotes on Pentecost from Pope St. John Paul II](#)
5. [12 Quotes from Pope St. John Paul II on Our Lady of Guadalupe](#)

This [link](#) will take you to the many other blog posts I have written on him.

Pope St. John Paul II...Pray For Us!

JP2, We Love You!

Be Not Afraid!



This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2015/10/22/the-rookie-card-of-pope-st-john-paul-ii/>
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The Rights of Evil



And So What About God?

First of all, it is not about God. Man is not so much rejecting God as he is rejecting his own self. Mankind is like the child that will hold its breath in order to get its way with the parent, but at some point the child has to accept the fact that breathing is an absolute part of its existence. Have you ever noticed that children only hold their breath as a maneuver with their parents? Do you actually believe it would work on one's peers? Think about that. But, of course, having merely held its breath, the child considers that a milestone to be reckoned with, and an advancement to its cause of independence and authority. "Don't mess with me."

In the same way as the parent, God is pleased to permit you the free will to attempt to live without breathing; comfortable in the truth that the self-asserting attitude of man can never replace the natural laws that define man's physical nature. And why do I say this?

C.S. Lewis, in his work, *The Abolition of Man*, addresses the deception that the secular mind falls prey to in its quest to overcome what it sees as Nature's failings. Mr. Lewis makes the logical argument that with each new technology, with each new medical advance, and with each dictum of relative, behavioral policy, mankind believes they move forward in the subjugation of Nature to man's purposes. It does appear that man rises with each new step he takes, but what is really happening here, and who is really being subjugated? Perhaps Mr. Lewis' example of the airplane is a good way to present the deception that resides hidden in man's mind:

The airplane has permitted man to travel significant distances in minimal time. This expansion of territory, through which he may travel and forage without loss to his ability to retain his primal home and family, has expanded the amount of resources he may procure for his own existence. Beyond the obvious advancement in his ability for commerce and communications, the airplane has also become a prime tool

for man's pleasures and rest; giving people the opportunity to travel to exotic locations for vacationing, and to attend events around the world and come home again in the seemingly "blink of an eye". It's a marvelous symbol of man's ingenious character, and a weapon for his insidious nature, for it permits him to direct missiles and bombs to those he either hates or wishes to dominate for his own gain. In his quest for ever-widened territory he may claim for himself and nation, he must compete with those who claim territory also. Conflict that would otherwise never happen – as man's appetite is always greater than his ability to consume that which he procures – leads to injury and death on a scale not seen before in mankind's history. In other words, man's short-term greed and self-worship emboldens his genocidal inclinations on an ever increasing scale. It is not that any tool is in itself evil; it cannot be such, but what is evil is the intent of the tool's use by one for his own advancement and the subjugation of another.

In other words, the airplane subjugates man as much as it frees him, even more, because it goes well beyond missiles and bombs. In traveling by airplane, those who are many must subjugate their schedules to the few, their monies to the few, and their relationships to the few. To travel in an airplane requires that man subjugates more of himself than that which he receives, and beyond that, mankind imprisons the future generations of mankind to this technology of his today. A man in a chariot, pulled by valiant steeds, can kill many. A man in an airplane can kill legions. And a train engineer, heeding the call of his desires, can bring destruction and death to the unexpected.

Man seeks to overcome Nature, but how can he; he is part of Nature. In his attempt to do so, he only overcomes himself. In order to use his sciences he must objectify those things under inspection and manipulate them to his purpose. This is subjugation. So when he performs heart surgery he requires a patient, or one who has been objectified and dealt with as a natural object. And through submission of the body to chemical manipulation, as in contraception, man can impede his own future and affect the type of man to be born in that future. In essence and truth, today's man, through contraception, imprisons and limits the abilities of future man to be independent from his past; the exact opposite of what the secular, modern man seeks in his own quest. The more he attempts to gain power over nature, the more he must objectify and subject those around him and in front of him to nature's control and influence. In the end, only Nature will win and man will lose; the cause of his own extinction through his own obsessive self-interest.

“In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them.” C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

As for God as a presence in the secular world? Well, for those I have just described, I've just buried Him in this discourse. DOA. He's buried in one of the two coffins that bear the tombstone with its simple message – a scarlet letter “A” – and beside Him are the good intentions of man, destroyed by pride and an insistence of perfection due to a fear of public recognition of man's “hidden conscience”. What I am directly referring to is a story written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and published in 1850, *The Scarlet Letter*. Read it. It's a fascinating mirror of today's society for it recounts the inevitable failure of man's attempt to avoid God's will, and then distance himself too far from God's reliable grace.

Evil's definition, presence, and relative level of damage it brings to humanity is in direct proportion to man's justification of his addictions to those things that only serve his individual purpose and not that of the whole society of man. It makes no difference whether it is the use of a phone camera to intimidate a

classmate or the abuse of a person's body for the sexual perversion of another; when it's for the self, it is evil. Whether its public rebellion or incremental, personal infractions of one's own beliefs, society ends up losing vision midst the falling ash of evil's carnage. And for evil to find victory in the demoralization and ultimate destruction of humanity it must separate man from those absolute values by which humanity achieved fruition, and isolate man from those second-person experiences that would reveal the harm that evil causes.

Have you ever noticed how prevalent in secular families it is to banish any discussion of religion and politics? These two subjects, more so than any others, are the very linchpins to man's success as a species. A linchpin is that pin or rod that affixes the wheel to the axle. Without them, well, the wheels come off as the axle turns and the cart moves forward. The Freemasons understood this and thus banned any form of discourse on these two subjects while meeting in their Masonic lodges. They banned such discourse knowing that to discuss these topics is to draw lines between the poly-religious nature of the Freemasons. For religion is the understanding that man has of his absolute world; the one he is not in charge of, nor ever will be. Politics is the discipline of social behavior and man's interaction with the relative world; that world which man has the ability to use for the good and for the evil. Whether man's politics is good or evil is based upon the purpose of its use. If it is in service to the absolute, then it is good. If it is in service to the relative, then it is evil. The secular family hopes to dismiss any discourse of these two subjects, for to engage in any meaningful conversation would invoke the inevitable admission of the family members failure to love one another fully, and to man's failure in his religion and politics to serve the greater good of the absolute, and thus it would lead one by the nose to the admission the absolute trumps the relative. It is as I said before: "man sees that place – with God – as something he must resist with all of the force that continued evil can bring."

So what is mankind resisting with all of the force of evil? God has been defined in many ways throughout the span of man's existence and ability to think coherently. As the definitions pile up into heaps of man's corroded thinking, it has become increasingly harder to attain a clear vision of God, and in that fog, man's focus can be little more than just the hand in front of his face. I can easily state that it were these very heaps of debris that alienated me from God as a teenager. I was assessing man and his hypocrisy for whether there was any truth in God as that sentient force that gave and continues to give all life. Amazingly stupid of me, I might say. I now understand a little better, and I can look at the complexities and formalities of Christianity as perhaps confusing at times, but with good purpose. So I focus not on my judgment of them, but rather upon He who has given rise of my very life, and as the only possible relationship I can have that will provide the greatest good for my life. Only in my successful relationship with God, may I achieve successful relationships with my wife, my son, my parents, my brother and sister, my friends, acquaintances, the general community of mankind, and my enemies. This is the greatest truth I have found since I became a practicing Christian, and there is no way to get around it, despite my desires to do so.

Let's Get Real

I want to make a few things clear before I wade deep into an argument that supports the belief that God and Christian values are superior to secularist philosophy in promoting the success of humanity and its goals to achieve happiness, contentment and peace.

First, most disciplines are simply ideologies. Whether it be training as an athlete, campaigning for environmental causes, or following the teachings of Jesus Christ, no one is going to attain the perfection of

methodology in reaching the goal. Humans are too complex, and that complexity too little understood, for anyone to hold to the ideological path that a discipline infers. The athlete is going to fall prey to a Twinkie, the environmentalist is going to enjoy a log fire on a cold night, and the Christian is always going to end up in Confession. No one is immune to one's inability to hold fast to a truth. Yet, in the verbal debate on the existence of God, too many with too little minds always take the tack that since so-and-so Christian sinned, that Christianity must be false. Well if that were the standard, then sports should be banned and environmental causes should be ignored. If that were the case, mankind could not believe in, support, or engage in any thought, word, or action of any discipline for mankind corrupts them all. We couldn't even just sit on a rock properly and rot. Christianity as a theology, over all of man's philosophies, recognizes this better than all other disciplines; especially secularism.

Second, as to the matter of God, I would hope to be able to define God in some secularist, scientific form, over that of some deity of spiritual form that has a conscious existence, has created something from nothing, lives outside of time, and is absolutely omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and is never, ever, wrong about anything. That's just who I was for the first fifty-seven years of my life; a good secularist and atheist, and a member of a generation of baby-boomers who welcomed relative reality as superior to absolute reality, and saw it as a beacon for man's future. I admit, the concept of God confounds me with every breath I take. I also admit that for anyone to believe that God does not exist, confounds me even greater. I have seen too much, learned too much, experienced too much, seen the proof-of-the-pudding too much to believe that God is anything other than who He has shown Himself to be; first with the Jewish people, and then with the Jews and gentiles who embraced the teaching and divinity of Jesus Christ. Beyond my own rise of consciousness to God's presence, I am also truly blessed to have had the life-changing event in my life of when God personally interceded into my life, revealed Himself unto me, and call me into His service; all within a two-hour period in the middle of the night. I had no choice in this matter. Think of it this way:

You live in a room with two doors. One door leads into the world, and through this door you leave and enter your room as you please in order to engage the world. The other door is on the opposite wall, and it is a door you have never opened. Now beyond that unopened door, and unknown to you, are the gifts of your sincerest hopes. The mere gazing upon these gifts would banish forever your anxieties and fears of life. To touch these gifts is to bring a sacrificial joy into your heart that propels you forward into loving relationships with those in your family and the world community. And to use these gifts for the good of the world community is to bring any everlasting quality of life that gives you eternal peace.

You contemplate the door; is it locked or unlocked? What would the knob feel like should you place your hand upon it? Would the door be light or heavy? Is the world beyond this door the same as that other world you walk in or is it different? You ponder what might come to you should you attempt to open the door, and if unlocked and you do open it, what will you find beyond that door? You sense something and it makes you unsure of yourself, so you try to think of other things, and your aid to do so lies with your experience to what you do know; that what is beyond the other door is a sense of the freedom and exercise of your own will to your own purpose.

I was presented with that door the night God came to me, and I had that freedom of my own will to choose to go with Him or stay where I sat. There was no choice though in my mind and soul. It was immaterially and materially obvious, and automatic. To stay behind would mute the possible. To go with God was to voice the unequivocal. To give up on my synthetic matrix of free will for that of the assurance of a loving grace that would show me how to love, was a choice not necessary to contemplate. Think of it as the

knowledge of arsenic as a deadly poison. Would you really drink it if you wanted to live? I really wanted to live. I gazed upon the gifts beyond the door that God had opened for me, and I have found peace of heart. I have touched those gifts and have found love. I have used those gifts to achieve my promised rewards, and I now understand that free will is but a narrow illusion of man's own quest to own himself; something he will never be able to do.

And so, walking past all of the proselytism in my life that inculcated a belief that God was nothing more than man's ignorance of nature, I have come to the true reality that God is not a product of nature but rather the producer of nature. There is no secularist, scientific definition of God because God is that deity that created what we know to be all things scientific and real. God is the supreme scientist. Therefore, having stated such, I apologize to those readers who wish for a scientific explanation for things unknown and unseen; something to ease their anxiety of inferiority. When scientists finally pass on the truth of God's presence to me, I'll pass it onto you. In the meantime, when it is obviously of God, I will use God as my truth to any claim I assert.

Third, I am not here to argue that secularists are evil. They are no more so than one of any philosophical or theological persuasion that strives to lift man rather than degrade man. Furthermore, I can attest that few secular people bear real ill will towards those of any faith. On the contrary, the secular goals are of the same nature as that of all good faiths. I have not met the man or woman, with a sane mind, who seeks not a society of man that lives in peace, which delivers prosperity to all, and views equal opportunity to happiness as foundational goals for humanity.

So, now it's time to wade chest deep into God's world and His promises that manifest themselves in the real things about us.

PART 6 – To come.

God Bless and Buen Camino – Reese

This contribution is available at <http://travelsOfANewChristian.com/2013/09/24/the-rights-of-evil-part-5/>
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I Bet You One Unplanned Pregnancy... {That Love Shows Up} [at Blossoming Joy]

It happens regularly. I'll be in the middle of a discussion with a pro-choice person about abortion and the conversation takes a turn from productive dialogue to slogan slinging. It makes sense. We all want a way to powerfully communicate our passionate views in 10 words or less and these slogans are clever and are reasonable to us in the context of our beliefs and our lives. They may have a place on a protest sign (maybe), but regardless of what side of the issue you're on, they're a dialogue killer when there is a real soul on the other side of the conversation.

"I'll bet you one unplanned pregnancy that you're secretly pro-choice."

I'll bet you nine that I'm not.

And the slogan slinging works both ways. I've done it many times...

"In a crisis pregnancy, we need to get rid of the crisis, not the child."

But the eyes that look back (and my own experience) have taught me... *you can't always get rid of the crisis*. Sometimes life is excruciatingly painful, whether or not we have a great slogan to apply or not. The hardest part of motherhood is not the single yes that we give in moments of courage but every individual suffering minute that we must walk through after that. The person who helps us through that first frightening yes will most likely not be there during the long days and nights that challenge to the depths of mind, body, and soul.

This particular truth hits me hard every time I am pregnant with one of my own beloved children. Sometimes, there is no way to remove the suffering that accompanies a yes to life... when even the most pro-life heart finds itself on it's knees begging the Lord to ease the pain.

"You're a white middle class woman with a husband. You don't know what crisis is."

Or maybe my crisis is just different. The unrelenting sickness and fatigue... like a perpetual flu... that requires all of my attention for months. That physically keeps me from even the Eucharist. That drives me to my miserable knees and turns my waking thought into an endless prayer... *"Please Jesus, have mercy. Help me, Jesus, help me. Please Lord, please, please, please..."*

Non-hispanic white women account for 36% of abortions.

28% of women seeking abortions identify as Catholic.

([source](#))

I know my blessings well. I'm not sure how I would get by if I didn't have a husband to support me and the grace of being able to stay home and cling to my couch. This knowledge has brought me very close to a real understanding of what drives a loving, thinking, compassionate woman to bring her child to the instruments of an abortionist. It is not in her nature nor even necessarily in her desire... but often, it is the

unrelenting pain, similar to the experience of many people who stand on the verge of suicide. *Most do not really want to die... they really just want to stop the excruciating pain.*

I have asked God many times to take away the suffering of pregnancy, and it always occurs to me that the most obvious vehicle of relief would be the removal of the pregnancy itself. For a person without support, without full knowledge of what abortion is and does, that line is easy enough to cross.

One of the single most influential pieces of fiction I have read is G. K. Chesterton's "The Secret of Fr. Brown." The entire series captivates me but nothing so much as Fr. Brown's explanation of how it was that he was such an extraordinary success at capturing criminals. He explains...

"I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realized that I really was like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action. It was once suggested to me by a friend of mine, as a sort of religious exercise..."

"No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about 'criminals,' as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's got rid of all the dirty self - deception of talking about low types and deficient skulls; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat." (Read the entire short story [here](#))

We can be outraged by the injustice of abortion and the cold evil which often accompanies the industry and participants... but we must be primarily motivated by great love and informed by truth and a good examination of conscience.

"You're not pro-life... You're pro-birth."

This slogan always leaves me dumbfounded. It's unjust in almost all cases. However... it strikes at a very important truth that must be acknowledged and lived: *Saving the life of the child is only the first step.* If our pro-life community does not have a comprehensive plan for loving families through every stage of pregnancy, birth, and beyond, then it is deficient, perhaps fatally so. Even if a woman gives birth to this child, her experience of suffering, isolation, and lack of care may convince her... *never again.*

61% of women seeking abortions already have children.

It is difficult to imagine enduring the severe physical illness of pregnancy without my full support system. How would I work? How would I perform basic functions? How would I get sufficient rest and nutrition? How would I navigate the emotional and mental strain of meeting unrelenting illness in most waking moments for months? I have had the better part of 20 years to try every remedy under the sun. I have overhauled my diet, soaked in magnesium, taken medication, read a million articles, heard all the advice. Kind words help but do not take it away. Sacrament and Scripture console but do not take it away. Prayer is my lifeline... and my family become the hands and feet of Christ... but I am still not relieved of the cross.

Pro-lifers know anxiety and depression. They know relationship drama. They know abuse. They know loss and tragedy. They know how hard it can be to get out of bed in the morning and brush their teeth and meet the world. They have simply decided that these sufferings do not ever justify the extermination of an

innocent human being. But they cannot pretend that the following three words in the midst of any of these trials could not send any of us to a desperate place:

You. Are. Pregnant.

Our dialogue and outreach should always reflect our understanding of that place and the acknowledgment that we can't fix everything. The Crucifix is not an exception... it is *the way*. And we can not erase the very real sufferings of humanity with a dialogue of slogans.

Please understand... we DO have the authority to stand on behalf of the unborn and fight for their right to dignity and life, *even if we can't personally fill every need of every person*. My hope and plea is that each pro-life community will also commit itself to finding local hands and feet to love families through the crisis... and into the arms of safety and joy. Not by going around the Cross, but by leaning into it. Love is messy. [Let's show up and love anyway](#). And then we can say with confidence: "I bet you one unplanned pregnancy... that love shows up." Thanks be to God!

Below are two local level organizations which need immediate assistance. If you or someone you know can possibly fill a need, please prayerfully consider doing so...

Maggie's Place

Maggie's Place is a community that provides houses of hospitality for pregnant and parenting women in need who are living in the greater Phoenix, AZ and Cleveland, OH area. All houses have ongoing financial needs, [current house needs lists](#), and a [current need for MissionCorps members](#) to commit to one year of service at a house. I know that in Cleveland, we have a need for two MissionCorps members to start in January. Is God calling you?

This contribution is available at <http://blossomingjoy.squarespace.com/blog/2015/10/12/love-shows-up>
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Stubbornness [at Bible Meditations]



Jesus was angry as he looked around at them, but at the same time he felt sorry for them, because they were so stubborn and wrong. Mark 3:5

Jesus had mixed feelings about the religious leaders who couldn't see beyond the letter of the law. They wanted to condemn Jesus for breaking the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day. What could be more holy than reaching out with compassion to relieve someone else's suffering? No wonder he felt angry.

He also felt sorry for them. Why? Because they were stubborn and wrong. I can't claim to know what Jesus was thinking, but I suspect it had more to do with their being stubborn than wrong. When we're wrong, we can always change our minds once we're corrected. But when we're stubborn, the right information won't help. We refuse to see the truth even if it's right under our eyes. Stubbornness truly deserves pity. There is no hope of growth or change when our minds are already made up. We dig in our heels and refuse to budge.

What's so hard about being open to another point of view? What's the harm in looking at things in a new way? We have nothing to lose. If the new idea isn't correct we can retain original position. But if we obstinately cling to what we think we know—without even considering other options—we're stuck with no hope of growth. No wonder Jesus pitied them.

I've been stubborn more than once in my life, often for no better reason than, "I've been doing it this way for years, why change?" I said it in the 1970's when our office computerized operations we used to do by hand. Luckily, my inflexibility gave way to the desire to keep my job. What if I had refused to consider the new procedure? I wouldn't be writing this blog, for one thing. I would have shut the door on learning the skills that have become a way of life our culture today.

Stubbornness can stunt our spiritual life with even more impact. The Holy Spirit is dynamic. God's truth doesn't change, but our understanding of it and the way we live it grows as we grow. The religious leaders weren't wrong in wanting to honor the Sabbath, but they were wrong clinging to their narrow interpretation of what that meant. May God grace us with open-mindedness as he deepens our understanding of his truth.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the humility to be teachable.

Reflection: What ideas are you clinging to that might be worth a second look? How can open-mindedness help you grow spiritually?

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Be the Hero: doing what you can [at Third Place Project]



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From time to time we all see or hear about professional athletes being put into critical situations for their team: being put on the ice for sudden death overtime in hockey, pitching or batting in the the bottom of the ninth in baseball, or playing an elimination game in any sport. When interviewers ask if they are nervous, many of them discuss how they've trained for years for this moment – and how they relish the chance to make a difference. [Jose Bautista's series saving homerun in the ALDS](#) a few weeks ago was the perfect example of this – with one swing of the bat, he changed the fortunes of his team. And it was a moment [he absolutely savors...](#)

I wish you could have heard my thoughts in that moment. It's the closest I have ever felt to being a superhero. I felt like I was Batman, and the villain had the girl dangling off the edge of the building. My adrenaline wasn't 10-out-of-10. It was ten-million-out-of-10.

While sports offer a spotlight for these sorts of heroic actions, there are numerous other careers that make life-saving decisions without the pomp and circumstance that Bautista and many like him enjoy – military personnel, first responders, and those who work in the medical field. Each man or woman who works in these fields and others like them trains to defend, protect, and save lives – looking precisely to those moments where their actions might make a difference.

I think that every kid who has ever tied a cape around their neck and pretended to be a superhero has felt that same hope, wanting to make a difference. Many superheroes embody those qualities many of us aspire to: of courage, of selflessness, and that same desire to make a difference in the lives of other.

I had an experience a couple of weeks ago that reminded me that it's a lot easier to imagine yourself as the hero than to actually be the hero.

The last week of October was a big week for the Landry family: in preparation for the birth of our fifth child, we moved from our home in Spruce Grove to a newer, bigger home in Stony Plain. On Saturday morning (Halloween), some friends had helped me put the final load in the moving truck and on our way to my new home we came upon the scene of a [horrific accident](#) – mere moments after it must have happened. Directly in front of me on the highway was a pickup truck, the front end crumpled, the hood slightly raised, with a small fire burning in the engine. To my right, in the ditch was a gravel truck – the hood open and a tire bent at an awkward angle. As I came to a stop, others who had witnessed the crash were trying to help those in the pickup truck and directed us to check on the driver of the gravel truck.

I took about ten steps in that direction and stopped when I saw someone's arm through the passenger side window. In this moment fear set in. What was I going to find? Was the driver even alive? In that moment I froze, knowing that I needed to step forward, but I was unable to do it. My friend, following in a second vehicle, ran past me and climbed up to cab to find the driver alive and semi-conscious... and we stayed with her right up until EMS arrived to take over her care.

At one point, I tried to go back to the still-burning pickup and see if I could help, but that same vein of fear kept running through me – what could I do? Was there anyone still alive there? I witnessed others unload a fire extinguisher under the hood (to no effect), and then pull a survivor through the back window to get him clear of the fire. When EMS arrived, they quickly and efficiently saw to the survivors and began to investigate the scene. After taking our statements, we were on our way to the new house – but a part of me had a hard time leaving this experience behind at all.

This is because for several days after the accident, I was wracked with two gnawing feelings. One was an intense sense of sadness – knowing that three men lost their lives a few meters from where I stood (likely before I ever got there), and that many lives – notably those of the two survivors – are irreversibly changed. The second was a sense of shame at the way fear won in my heart that day. I don't feel like I did anything heroic when the situation certainly called for heroic actions.

On Wednesday this week, [we will stop and remember](#) those who gave their lives fighting for the freedoms our country takes for granted... men and women who've shed their blood in the many wars throughout the 148 year history of our country. In a strange coincidence, I'll be at Canadian Blood Services early Wednesday morning to give blood before my family marks Remembrance day. The fact is that my life is not likely to lead me down the road where I'll don a uniform and fight for our freedom – but I will be doing what I can.

Gratefully, there were heroes at the scene of the accident- people willing to put their lives on the line for the victims of this accident... people who did what they could in bigger and smaller ways. My biggest contribution that day may have been the following post on social media:

Social media world: please pray. We were second on the scene at a very serious accident – some people died.

— Mike Landry (@mikeisthird) [October 31, 2015](#)

What I could do – enlisting the prayers of others in my social media network – represents 1250 people who apparently saw this post on Twitter or Facebook. Alfred Lord Tennyson, the nineteenth century poet, wrote: “**More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.**” And if any significant number of those people stopped and said a prayer for the victims at the hour of their death, for the survivors, and for all of their families and friends... it means that perhaps I've been able to offer something positive in an otherwise grim situation.

St. Paul writes of the community of the Church as one body with many parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). He explains how just as each part has a particular role and duty in the function of our bodies, so too does each person have a particular role and duty in the community. Some roles bring with them more fame and glory – but other, quieter roles are just as necessary. If you just don't see yourself as the superhero type (as I've recently learned about myself) – take courage. God sees more and has more in store for you than you might think. What can I do? I can give blood and pray for those who suffer.

The point is this: even if you are never given the opportunity to stand in a crisis moment and be the hero, you can still make a difference – a difference that matters. And in the case of the accident I saw, please pray for the victims, the survivors, the witnesses, and all the friends and family impacted by this horrific accident. That’s something you can offer in any circumstance and at any time... even if you haven’t been called to play Batman.

This contribution is available at <http://www.thirdplaceproject.com/be-the-hero/>
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The best stargazing happens in the cold and other lessons from my father [at Catholic Review]

It's my father's birthday! Last year we gave him a box containing an invisible jet, just like Wonder Woman's. He enjoyed it almost as much as his grandsons loved giving it to him.



This year in honor of my father I'd like to share some of the best advice he has given me over the years.



So here are just a few that come to mind:

- 1. Nothing is too much for your child to ask.** My father has moved children from city to city—occasionally without the child in question being present. In fact, he’s in the process of helping one of his children and her family move right now, and rumor has it that they are using the invisible jet—or at least the cardboard box it was in.
- 2. In every marriage there is a stronger person. And the stronger person has the strength to give in to the other.**
- 3. Education is the best investment.** 10 years after my youngest sibling graduated from college, my father finished paying off his loans on his six children’s college educations earlier this year. That calls for a party.
- 4. Grocery shopping is a time for socializing.** My father can strike up conversation with anybody any time, and he does. For years I couldn’t figure out why everyone wasn’t like that. I think the explanation is that he grew up in Minnesota, but it might just be his personality. Maybe it’s a combination.
- 5. Vacuum even where you don’t see dirt.**



- 6. If you are about to crash your car and you get to choose, drive into a bush instead of a wall.** He actually gave me a list of what was better to hit in which order, but I can’t remember the rest—except that you want to preserve pedestrians’ lives at all costs.

7. When baking cookies, cook them half the time on the lower rack and half the time on the upper.

8. Almost any drive is a day trip. One Easter morning when we were growing up, we woke up, went to Mass, and my parents announced we were going on a picnic with my two older sisters who were at college—in New Haven.



9. The best stargazing happens on cold nights—sometimes during the night. I have wonderful memories of shivering next to a telescope with my father.

10. It's OK to buy cars online sight unseen without telling your spouse. (Maybe this is a time to look back at #2.)

11. A 12-seat van can fit 10 people, all their luggage, and two artificial Christmas trees. Oh, and there's always room to store something else in the basement.



12. Don't waste money on a gift for your father when you could write him a blog instead. (OK, so he didn't say it quite that way.)

Happy birthday, Daddy! I hope you enjoy this blog as much as your invisible jet.

10/20/2015 10:15:07 PM

By

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2015/10/20/the-best-stargazing-happens-in-the-cold-and-other-lessons-from-my-father>
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Donna-Marie's memoir is a kiss from Jesus [at Peace Garden Passage]

I am finding it more and more difficult these days to carve out adequate time for indulging in my longtime passion of reading. But Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle's memoir, "[The Kiss of Jesus,](#)" had me blissfully rediscovering the delights of sneaking a flashlight and book under the covers each night, and staying up to the wee hours, quietly turning pages while my husband snored nearby.

For when you have a jewel that shimmers in your hands, the thought of it collecting dust becomes quickly dismantled, and "where there's a will there's a way" makes room.

It doesn't hurt that Donna-Marie is a personal friend, and that memoir happens to be my favorite genre. Through that friendship, I knew this book was percolating a while before it came to light. In fact, Donna-Marie and I met in person for the first time, after a years-long online friendship, at a conference where she was set about the task of setting her memoir in motion.



Roxane B. Salonen and Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle at the Catholic Marketing Network in Somerset, N.J., August 2013

At the time of that gathering, I'd just secured a contract for the memoir I'd co-written, "[Redeemed by Grace,](#)" also published by Ignatius Press. So Donna-Marie and I were on nearly parallel journeys with our books, these flowers we'd been tending and were now preparing for bloom. Having prayed for the success of her book as she did mine, I was invested spiritually, but still unaware of the depth of the treasure that awaited.

So it was with great joy that her book finally came into my hands. I knew part of Donna-Marie's story from personal sharing. I knew that she'd been through a great deal. And I have been blessed to be on the receiving end of Donna-Marie's mentoring heart. Over the years, we've exchanged stories of heartache regarding our journeys, shared concerns, and swapped many prayers.

But we never know all we can know about a person, and I knew that in opening Donna-Marie's memoir, I was about to go deeper into the heart of my friend.

As I moved through the difficult history that unfolded, my heart lurched. I texted her in those early chapters, feeling her pain as if fresh. "I'm so sorry you've been through all that," I said. As a friend, I couldn't help wishing I had been there in those hard moments to console her in some way. She responded that she was blessed in that now, having brought her story to light, she can use those crosses to help others.

But the book does not end with its tragic details, because even as Donna-Marie brings us into the center of her consternation, we watch the journey of a soul unfold; a soul that, though wounded, has been gripped by the love of God, swept off its feet by the tantalizing tenderness of our Lord, who is, at the same time, a jealous God who will do anything to have us in his embrace.

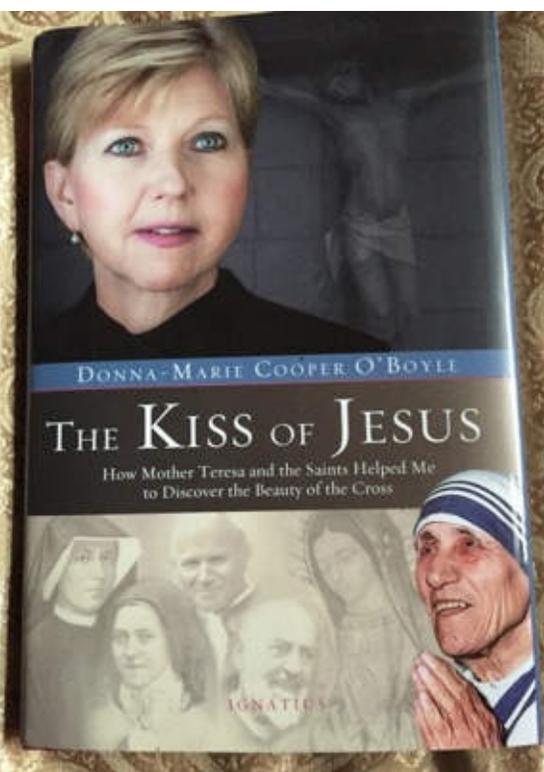
This past Sunday, our priest gave a homily that had me weeping in the back of the church. It could be summed up thus: "God will be as brazen as he needs to be to get our attention. That's how important our salvation is to him."

God has been brazen in the life of Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle, allowing all manner of suffering. Reading of it can be heartbreaking in moments. And yet, through the sharing of these hardships, we see hope. We remember that all saints have passed through great difficulty in order to be pruned enough to stand in the light of Christ.

Donna-Marie has been pruned in a most thorough manner and stands as a living testimony of God's love, an example of what we must sometimes endure on our way to sanctification.

Along with her personal story, Donna-Marie weaves in beautiful strands of details from encounters with strangers she's met along the way; people who have been, in rather unexpected ways, changed by her simple, humble witness. In addition, her expounding on her precious friendship with Mother Teresa and the advice she gave a struggling mother are a gain for us all.

I finished this book in the wee hours. Closing its covers, I closed my eyes and absorbed the gift that was given through the soul-sharing that had led me more deeply into the life story of my friend and the heart of Christ. For many days afterward, I have found myself affected by the witness of the loving hand of God in her life, and inspired to continue being tenacious in my own pursuit of God, and of souls for him.



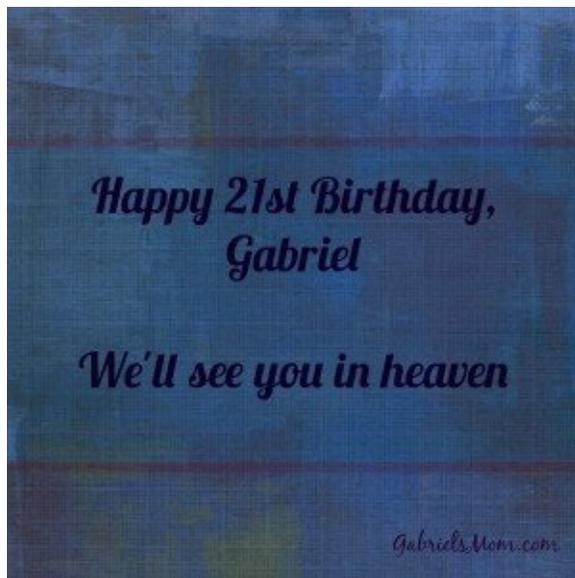
Donna-Marie's "[The Kiss of Jesus](#)" was to me a kiss *from* Jesus. It's a book I will be heartily recommending for a long time to come.

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2015/10/roxis-reviews-donna-maries-memoir-is-a-kiss-from-jesus/>

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Happy Birthday, Gabriel



I have had a very quiet day of rest. After a busy weekend of speaking and traveling, I just needed some down time.

With that down time comes lots of time to reflect and remember. Today would be Gabriel's 21st birthday.

I talked about Gabriel a lot this weekend, as I shared my pro-life convictions. I spoke about the dignity of every person, born and unborn, disabled and healthy, rich and poor. The sanctity of human life comes not from an individual's productivity, but from the fact that each person is created by God, in His likeness and image. Period.

I was advised to abort, repeatedly. My "choice" to protect my son was met with scoffing and ridicule from medical professionals. Thank God my husband agreed with me completely. Thank God we have family and friends who prayed for us, for Gabriel, and who continue to recognize Gabriel as the family member he will always be.

As a woman of faith, I believe in life after death. I believe human beings are made to be in union with God for eternity. My son never committed any sin (he was perfect!) and his baptized soul is in communion with God and the saints already. Some day, I will hold him again. That will be quite a reunion!

In the meantime, I imagine he looks down at his mom sometimes, praying for me. That's what good sons do...they pray for their moms and dads. I also imagine my son as part of a heavenly welcoming committee. There is no theological basis for this; but I just picture him greeting the souls of children who never took a breath, but whose lives matter just the same as us still struggling on earth. These images give me comfort.

So, as I commemorate the 21st birthday of my son Gabriel, I also pray for every mother and father who has lost a child, especially before birth. Many people do not understand this loss, but I do. Hang in there. You will never forget your child...but you *will* find peace and comfort.

This contribution is available at <http://gabrielsmom.com/2015/10/happy-birthday-gabriel/>
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Human freedom is not about sex but the nature of love [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

There is worldwide interest in the Synod of Bishops taking place at the Vatican in Rome. News outlets seem rather obsessed with the issue of the admission to Holy Communion of the faithful who are civilly divorced and remarried without having first been declared free to remarry by Church authorities. The vexing principle at work is Jesus' clearly reported teaching on marriage and divorce in the Gospels. The Church's challenge is how to apply Jesus' teaching in the lives of the faithful. However the bishops in Synod are studying together the much bigger picture of the call and challenge of the family to follow Jesus and live and proclaim the Gospel with our lives in our world today.

For many the issue is about a claim to unrestricted freedom to engage in sex and cut loose from historic and cultural definitions and taboos to the point even of redefining marriage and family. I believe that the true issue at work here is not so much sex but rather the true nature of love. Jews and Christians believe there is only one God, the Creator, who revealed to his Chosen People something of his nature and of his purpose in creating us human beings. He loves his creation and He loves us and simultaneously offers us and expects of us a genuine and reciprocal relationship of authentic love, which manifests itself in a paramount desire for and dedication to the good of the other. God's good is to be known and loved widely as He is and our good as human beings is to live in harmony with God and with each other. This is the heart of the Jewish faith and their specific vocation is to give witness to God in the world.

Jesus fine tuned the understanding of this revelation in his person, teaching, and example to the point of laying down his life for the glory of God and for the salvation and sanctification of sinners. Jesus has given to all of humanity a clearer and more readily understandable teaching and example of authentic love, both divine love and human love. Authentic human love is a living and true reflection of divine love, a love which pours itself out, gives itself completely to the other, holding nothing back and yet losing nothing of itself in the giving. Actually, it is only in giving oneself wholeheartedly to the other that one attains the fullness of authentic love and in a true sense fully becomes a person. In contrast, it is in the self seeking, the obsessive grasping for one's own pleasure and satisfaction, that love is distorted and reduced to a destructive counterfeit that destroys life, people, families, and society itself and that a human being shrinks and shrivels as a person.

After listening to several reports on the Synod and interviews with several bishops and Pope Francis himself, it seems increasingly clear that no one at the Synod is showing any desire to change what God has revealed as this is transmitted in Church teaching or for that matter to compromise the Gospel. A primary factor at play is that the bishops under the influence and example of Pope Francis are becoming more aware and hence also more preoccupied that for quite some time the Church has in many places and at various times been more likely to wield the truth as a club rather than show compassion and pastoral concern for the state and suffering of the faithful. This is the kind of failure of authority to truly serve for which Jesus reproached the religious leaders of his day.

The focus then is not so much on dogma but rather on the attitude and behavior of pastors - bishops and priests - towards the faithful. What comes to mind is Jesus' reproach to the religious leaders of his day that they did not keep the law in their heart, and what is worse, they did not lift a finger to ease the burden

they as religious leaders imposed so harshly on the faithful in all that had to do with the observance of religious laws. "You do not enter the kingdom yourself and also prevent others from doing so." They were not faithfully representing God to the people but were in effect only serving themselves. They did not love the faithful as God does. They were obsessed with external observance of religious law but not with the restoration of the people to an obedient and loving worship of God and service of the neighbor.

The principles at work in reviewing the Church's pastoral care of the faithful are several.

1. God alone is the judge. Jesus made it clear we have no right or authority to judge because we are incapable of acting out of both divine justice and divine mercy simultaneously. Moreover, only God knows truly the condition of souls and He alone is qualified to judge. He alone truly loves each soul and perfectly desires its good.
2. When Jesus gave authority to the Church to bind and to loose, He did so in order to extend and widen in time and space the exercise of divine mercy which He had inaugurated, not to restrict access to the blessings and new life of the kingdom. The binding is for dealing with sinners' unwillingness to turn away from sin and with hypocrisy and hardheartedness as when Jesus dealt with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes.
3. The bishops are considering how they and all the pastors of the Church are to exercise the pastoral ministry more faithfully to Jesus and his example. They desire as successors to the Apostles to remain faithful to the truth given to us in the person of Jesus and at the same time to the divine revelation contained in Jesus' person, teaching, and example. The Pope and the bishops are to help us learn and follow the ways of the Lord.

Reactions to the work of the Synod come from at least two extreme positions or views.

As the whole Church, all Christian churches and faithful, and people in the world at large observe the Synod fathers in their collective study and deliberation, there are people who are disturbed and react out of fear perhaps because they need the security of "black and white" answers. Not unlike the religious leaders in Jesus' day, such people try to find their security in setting themselves apart from all those whom they judge to be sinners or guilty of breaking some law. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who look for freedom from any law, from any restriction on their thought, speech, and behavior. They claim to love and to defend the truth, but they are not open to the whole truth, nor do they have any love, true love, for others.

Some of these people go so far as to qualify the RC Church as oppressive, not realizing that they misinterpret the Church's stance as some kind of fascism or dictatorship. Through the centuries the Church has always been composed of people of their own time. When society was such that authority was imposed by force, the Church tended to do likewise. The Spanish Inquisition was a reflection of medieval society in which the rule of law coincided with the rule of force, but today the Church has changed as has the society in which it is embedded. In our world today there are still societies that rely primarily on the rule of force but most western societies rely on responsibility and compliance from their citizens. Similarly, the RC Church no longer imposes or enforces its teaching by physical force or punishment. Even centuries ago when Church authorities did use the harsh methods of the times they were ostensibly seeking the good and eternal salvation of those souls, those people they deemed to be in error and in sin.

Currently, the bishops are remembering that the Church's only authority is that of Jesus in his person, his

teaching, and his example to the point of laying down his life. They realize and remind us that our Church, in its ways and practices, comes from the historical process of its development. The laity, such as married couples and families, are witnessing that in many situations pastors treat them harshly rather than with the compassion and kindness with which Jesus treated people. There has been too much insistence on the law and too little on the patience and mercy of God. Church authorities have not only been teaching the truth but at times they have been employing ways of imposing the teaching on people to the point of dictating their behavior and applying punitive sanctions and social pressure. The bishops are trying to recover Jesus' approach, which in any age is a difficult challenge but possible with the help and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Not unlike today then, in Gospel times the Scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees were constantly trying to pin Jesus down to clear and unequivocal answers that would clearly condemn sinners and cast them out while establishing themselves as "the pure ones", but Jesus consistently resisted this approach and attitude, saying He came for mercy not sacrifice. Those Jesus called hypocrites live their lives on the basis of appearance whereas God looks at the heart, mind, and intentions of the soul.

Jesus was killed for his merciful attitude toward sinners, which threatened all those who sought their security in the letter of the law, and the more the bishops try to approach Jesus' own attitude and pastoral care today and at any time the more they too will be resisted, judged, and rejected. It remains an incredible challenge for pastors to care for souls, to receive them and guide them through the mercy of God, while at the same time striving to increase and perfect the formation of their conscience, to care for the truth while also loving the sinner.

The temptation is great to "take over" the sovereignty of the individual conscience and "dictate" to others their behavior, but that was not Jesus' way. He spoke the truth as clearly and eloquently as He could but left people free to govern themselves, knowing that God alone could judge rightly. When anyone came to Jesus with a request He responded to them, often granting their request, but also warned them to sin no more. We are frightened and severely challenged by the patience and respect God shows each person and expects us to show one another and we continue to seek our security in the letter of the law rather than in a true and living relationship with God.

Only the tyrant refuses to respect others, to grant others the right to make mistakes. It was only with the hardhearted, hypocritical, and tyrannical that Jesus took the tough approach. Our purpose in life is to walk towards the light and none of us accomplishes the journey overnight. If it took me thirty years to come to a point of true conversion, who am I to demand that others make that jump on demand? It is not my concern. Even then, I have not arrived once and for all in safe harbor and must continue to struggle for perfection to my final breath.

God is ever just but simultaneously merciful, kind, and patient. He suffers not the shepherds who lead the sheep astray by letting them do whatever they want without warning them of the dangers they face and ignore at their peril. Shepherds must constantly teach the truth and warn the faithful of the dangers of misusing God's many gifts to us and then in their dealings with the faithful they must present to them the kind, patient, and merciful face of God in Jesus. Not only shepherds but all of us believers must be ever vigilant to confess our own sins and failure to love truly, and only by daily confessing our own sinfulness can we avoid sitting in judgement on others. Those who taste the goodness of the mercy of God can in their turn be empowered by God to show mercy to others. Those who refuse mercy and the humility of self confession and seek to justify and rationalize living in sin are at risk to harden their hearts, which was

the overriding condition of many if not most of the religious leaders in Jesus' day. Hardened hearts ever need to justify themselves at the expense of others by accusing others and finding fault in them.

Perhaps what contributes to the intensity of contemporary concern about our Church's approach to moral issues and pastoral care is the nature of our culture and society in this age of instant communication and social media. This setting may be abused by those who harbor a hypocritical attitude and seek to exploit the situation in order to justify themselves in their hardheartedness. I remember a class in high school religion when the teaching brother, Bro. French, was giving a class by having us read the text book out loud. The topic was human sexuality and the desirability of chastity. A student stopped reading and questioned the teaching and, finding the brother's responses unsatisfying, asked "But Brother, how far can we go?" This is an adolescent attitude focused solely on pursuing pleasure with no preoccupation whatsoever about true love. The selfish pleasure seeking attitude does not desire true good both for oneself and for the other, but shows total disregard for the will of God and God's intention in our regard. Rather than accept to allow God to lead us to true and complete happiness, we prefer to grasp for caricatures of happiness as the world promotes them.

It is the role of the Church to bring light to such consciences and to insist on the truth, all the while striving to allow Jesus as the Divine Mercy to continue to speak to souls today. Morality is a drama that plays itself out between the individual soul and its Creator, and we cannot avoid suffering the consequences of our collective choices and behaviors. We all share in the collective responsibility to serve the common good and our common need for order. The tension between individual freedom and the common good is a balancing act which requires ongoing discernment on the part of pastors and unrelenting patience, the patience of the loving parent who knows how to be firm with kindness.

That high school adolescent was a sort of Pharisee, an immature one, but a Pharisee nonetheless. Jesus did not hate them but loved them and the love they needed from Him was a firm hand and this is what Jesus showed them. He won some of them over but the others were not yet ready to welcome the light, but perhaps they would later.

Today, with the social media, people from differing points of view are quick to pounce on every word that comes out of the Synod, from the Pope or from bishops. The bishops need resolve and trust in God to be firm and resolute in attending to and following the guidance the Holy Spirit is giving them. They must continue to deepen their study of this complex situation of the Church as mother and shepherd as well as the condition of souls living in our time because we are all called to develop and deepen our humanity. The bishops and pastors are very much in need our prayers.

This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2015/10/is-freedom-about-sex-or-rather-about.html>
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Blessed Are They Who... [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday November 1, 2015

A Reflection on Matthew 5:1-12A, N.A.B.

By: *Larry T*

How can we define Christian spirituality? In his book, *A Guide to Today's Spirituality*, Father Richard J. Hauser, S.J. wrote: "*At the heart of Christian spirituality is an adequate understanding of the self. Spirituality is our effort with grace to become what we have been created by the Lord to be; we must grasp who we truly are in order to know what we are to become.*" Does being spiritual and being holy mean trying to be like Jesus? The answer is yes; the more we become like Jesus, the more we approach what we were intended to be.



If we define spirituality as becoming like Jesus, our spiritual formation probably started when we first began to learn about the Bible; as early as when we were taught the Golden Rule as small children. And, even though we might not have realized it, the process of becoming more like Jesus continued as we heard and understood more about him from the Gospels.

The Beatitudes present us with a self-portrait of the Lord; it's here where Jesus tells us how to become more like him.

¹ *When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.*

² *He began to teach them, saying:*

³ *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *Blessed are they who mourn,*

for they will be comforted.

for they will inherit the land.

*⁶ Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.*

*⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

⁸ Blessed are the clean of heart,

*⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*¹⁰ Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*¹¹ Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you
[falsely] because of me.*

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

Jesus wasn't content to give us a Beatitude to-do list; he showed us how to live the Beatitudes.

When was Jesus poor in spirit (humble)? ³*Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves,*⁴*each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others.* ⁵*Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,* ⁶*Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.* ⁷*Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance,* ⁸*he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.*
– *Philippians 2:3-8*

When did Jesus mourn? ³⁷*“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling! – Matthew 23:37*

When was Jesus meek? ⁴*This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be*

fulfilled:

‘Behold, your king comes to you,

mEEK and riding on an ass,

and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had ordered them. ⁷They brought the ass and the colt and laid their cloaks over them, and he sat upon them.

When did Jesus hunger for righteousness? *¹⁵ They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. ¹⁶He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. ¹⁷Then he taught them saying, “Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’? But you have made it a den of thieves.” – Mark 11:15-17*

When was Jesus merciful? *¹⁴When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick. – Matthew 14:10*

When was Jesus clean of heart? *⁸Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, ⁹and he said to him, “All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.”¹⁰At this, Jesus said to him, “Get away, Satan! – Matthew 4:8-10a*

When was Jesus a peacemaker? *⁴⁹His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked, “Lord, shall we strike with a sword?” ⁵⁰And one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹But Jesus said in reply, “Stop, no more of this!” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him. – Luke 22:49-51*

When was Jesus persecuted for the sake of righteousness? *¹⁵They cried out, “Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, ¹⁷and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle. – John 19:15-18*

When was Jesus *insulted and persecuted falsely*? ¹*Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, ³and they came to him and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they struck him repeatedly. – John 19:1-3*

If we were to choose one word to describe Jesus' Beatitude message it would have to be love - the true core of Christianity. But, how does Christian love mesh with our modern world or with any society since His crucifixion, death, and bodily resurrection?

Mankind's first sin against God was the arrogant presumption of self-sufficiency which prompted him to put on airs of divinity, to be his own god. Setting God aside in this fashion seemingly permits us to possess life completely, to gulp every last drop of what it has to offer. Nevertheless, yielding to this temptation remains the greatest spiritual danger we face.

Whitney Houston died on February 11, 2012. When I heard of her tragic death I thought, what could have possibly caused this beautiful, talented woman to reach for drugs. Didn't she have everything in life that she could possibly want? What happened to Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, John Belushi, and Robin Williams? Ignoring the possibility of mental illness, is it possible that they struggled with the desolation of not giving and receiving Christian love – a Godless existence?

The Beatitudes do run counter to our self-seeking culture, as they have to all cultures since they were first preached by Jesus, but they lead the way to richness of life and the greatness of our calling as spiritual citizens of the Kingdom of God.

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Do you trust in Something Greater? [at Journey to Wisdom]



A reflection by Heidi Knofczynski

Do you remember the trembling glasses of water in the movie Jurassic Park? In this scene some park guests being treated to a grand tour are stranded just outside the now de-electrified T-rex paddock. Then the sounds of thundering footsteps are heard off in the distance moving towards them. The footsteps are so powerful that even from a distance they create a vibration that causes the water inside the glasses to ripple slightly.

BOOM! Something great and terrible is coming this way... **BOOM!** Something powerful....**BOOM!** Something greater, and if you endure it you will never be the same!

It is a terrifyingly effective scene. Something like that feeling grips me as I read

[today's Gospel](#)

from Luke. As Jesus speaks to the crowd His words fall with such portentous weight that, for me, it triggers a trembling inside. His unfathomable reality exposes my fragmented, abstract, Christ-haunted spirituality. He has come to take us beyond our superficial expectations into the unknown of eternity. He has come to cast off all that we cling to to distract us from our nothingness. Fear is a natural response to death.

In Ecclesiastes Solomon saw how we “*chase the wind*” in search of something greater, something that will help us outlast death. Riches, pleasure and even wisdom may serve to distract us, but ultimately they only give the illusion that our life “*under the sun*” has meaning. Solomon’s wisdom kept running into the same unavoidable obstacle: Death means inevitable nothingness. We are shadows that cannot overcome that darkness. Until then, don't do evil and *cast your bread upon the waters*. In other words, don't cling to stuff, rather enjoy life before nothingness of death absorbs you into its shadow. Vanity of Vanities!

But there is something greater than Solomon here.

BOOM!

Solomon’s wisdom goes to the brink of death, but there all he sees is darkness. Jonah is taken further; he goes into the belly of a fish, which should have been a tomb, in order for God to bring an urgent warning to the notorious city of Nineveh. This city, whose ruthless reputation filled all who heard of it with fear and loathing, listened to the man who came from a tomb bringing them a fearful message. They listened and cast off their evil identity, through prayer and fasting and placed their hope in a power that overcame a tomb.

And there is something greater than Jonah here.

BOOM!

We must cast everything upon the waters; our hopes, dreams, who we think we are and even (like the crowd that gathered around Jesus) who we think that Jesus is. What is only a shadow within us must be overcome. We will be left with an acute awareness of our nothingness, But Something Greater has come to us, in all His earthshaking reality. Endure it, do not run and hide. Let His perfect love overtake you to cast out the fear of death to this world, because death cannot absorb Jesus into its darkness. Jesus is no shadow.

BOOM! Something greater has arrived!

What are you clinging to today that needs to be cast off?

Update: I forgot to add this Switchfoot song, BA55...."I believe you're the fire that could burn me clean"

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