

NewEvangelists.org

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Forward

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

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An Exorcist Tells His Story: Fr. Gabriele Amorth on the Power of Satan [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



As we prepare to celebrate the liturgical season of Advent, it is appropriate that we consider the threefold reason for Christ's Incarnation: 1.) to destroy the works of the devil, 2.) to free man from Satan's slavery and 3.) to establish the kingdom of God.

Fr. Gabriele Amorth was the Vatican's Chief Exorcist. In that capacity he performed thousands of exorcisms through which he has garnered innumerable insights into the works and slavery of the devil. I recently read Fr. Amorth's

[An Exorcist Tells His Story](#)

. To highlight his wisdom, I have reframed excerpts from, "The Power of Satan,"(pages 25-36) in

An Exorcist Tells His Story

into a Q & A or "interview" format:

Some priests rarely mention Hell and the power of Satan, preferring instead to focus on the love and forgiveness of Christ. Why is that bad?

Christ is the center of the universe. Everything was created for him and in view of his Coming, in the heavens (angels) and on earth (the tangible world, man first of all). It would be wonderful to speak only of Christ, but it would not be according to his every teaching and action, and we would never be able to understand him. Scripture talks to us about the kingdom of God but also of the kingdom of Satan. It tells us about the power of God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, but also of the power of darkness. It speaks of the sons of God and of the sons of Satan. It is impossible to understand the salvific action of Christ if we ignore the destructive action of Satan.

Why doesn't God just crush Satan right now?

God never rejects his creatures. Therefore, even though they broke with God, Satan and his angels maintain their power and rank (thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, and so on) even if they use them for evil purposes. Saint Augustine does not exaggerate when he claims that, if God gave Satan a free hand, "no man would be left alive." Since Satan cannot kill us, he tries to "make us into his followers in

opposition to God, just as he is in opposition to God".

Many modern theologians identify Satan with the abstract idea of evil. They deny the existence of Satan as an actual being. What about this?

Scripture tells us that angels and demons (I want particularly to mention Satan) are spiritual creatures but also that they are individuals gifted with intelligence, will, freedom, and initiative. Those modern theologians who identify Satan with the abstract idea of evil are completely mistaken. Theirs is true heresy; that is, it is openly in contrast with the Bible, the Fathers, and the Magisterium of the Church. The truth about Satan was never doubted in the past; therefore, there are no dogmatic definitions in this respect with the exception of the following statement of the Fourth Lateran Council: "The devil [that is, Satan] and the other demons were created good by God; but they became evil through their own fault." Whoever denies Satan also denies sin and no longer understands the actions of Christ.

There are those who say [i.e. The Jesus Seminar] that Christ's exorcisms are fanciful embellishments that didn't happen. They argue demonic possessions are nothing more than psychological disturbances and as such, exorcisms are play acting hocus pocus.

Let us be clear about this: Jesus defeated Satan through his sacrifice. However, Jesus also defeated Satan before his death, through his teachings: "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk 11:20). Jesus is the strongest one, who tied up Satan (Mk 3:27), despoiled him, and pillaged his kingdom, which is at an end (Mk 3:26). Jesus first gave the power to cast out demons to his apostles; then he extended the power to the seventy-two disciples, and in the end he granted it to all those who would believe in him.

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that after the descent of the Holy Spirit the apostles continued to expel demons, and all Christians have done so after them. Already, the earliest Fathers of the Church, such as Justin and Irenaeus, clearly express Christian thought about the devil and about the power to cast him out. Other Fathers, in particular Tertullian and Origen, concur. These four authors alone can refute many modern theologians, who, for all purposes, either do not believe in the devil or completely ignore him.

Is Satan ascendant in our time? Has he grown more powerful of late?

Even if this battle against Satan concerns all men and all times, there is no doubt that Satan's power is felt more keenly in periods of history when the sinfulness of the community is more evident. For example, when I view the decadence of the Roman Empire, I can see the moral disintegration of that period in history. Now we are at the same level of decadence, partly as a result of the misuse of the mass media (which are not evil in themselves) and partly because of Western consumerism and materialism, which have poisoned our society.

Is there any truth to the notion of "wandering souls" or the idea that some souls who have died are condemned to walk the earth and are afraid, or not allowed, to "crossover" into eternity?

Just as it would be wrong to deny the existence of Satan, it is also wrong to accept the prevalent opinion that there are spiritual beings that are not mentioned in the Bible. These are the invention of spiritists, of followers of the occult, of those who espouse reincarnation, or of those who believe in "wandering souls". There are no good spirits other than angels; there are no evil spirits other than demons. Two Councils of the Church (Lyons and Florence) tell us that the souls of those who die go immediately to

heaven or to hell or to purgatory. The souls of the dead who are present during seances or the souls of the dead who are present in living bodies to torture them are none other than demons. God allows a soul to return to earth only in very rare, exceptional cases, but we recognize that this subject is still full of unknowns.

What harm can the devil cause to the living? *Ordinary activity.*

This is "temptation", which is the most common activity of the demons, and it is directed against all men. When Jesus allowed Satan to tempt him, he accepted our human condition. I will not talk about this common diabolical endeavor, because the purpose of this book is to highlight Satan's "extraordinary activity", which can take place only if God so allows.

This second category can take six different forms:

[

[We will consider all six in part 2.](#)

]

This contribution is available at <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2015/11/an-exorcist-tells-his-story-fr-gabriele.html>
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Gathas Are Like Seeds [at Pauca Verba]



Here is picture of the young Frasier Fir tree (*Abies fraseri*) I bought yesterday. The nursery folks even decorated it with a little red Christmas bow. Frasier Firs are one of a few kinds of traditional Christmas trees, the branches leaving lots of room for hanging ornaments. But this tree is for planting outside, not for chopping. While it waits for me to find the right spot, with the maximum of sunshine, I am reminded of the need for prayer.

Gatha is a prayer-form found in Buddhism but not prayers as we often understand them in the west - some sentences (maybe out of a book) telling God what we need God to do for us. A *gatha* instead is a little verse that sums up or highlights a spiritual concept. Without using theological terms (a kind of foreign language to many) it is immediately accessible to the soul.

A *gatha* usually features some ordinary aspect of life, helping us to be mindful of what we're doing in the movements and encounters of everyday. What we're *REALLY* doing. A *gatha* invites us to be aware of the hidden aspects of living, the underneath as we: wake up, enter a room, set a table, wash our hands, brush our teeth, rake leaves, send an e-mail or make a phone call - plant a young tree.

One author says that *gathas* are like *planting seeds of goodness, spirit and joy*. As a response to our feelings of helplessness, *gathas* are seeds of desire and good intention sewn in a world burdened with killing, negativity, greed, suffering and injustice. Additionally, I'd say *gathas* are short exhaled expressions of surprise - interior exclamation points!

Gathas are a way for us to take control of our own minds which are often jerked around by so many silly and wasted distractions, too much media and too much talking. We can en-circle the world by writing our own - indeed - we should feel encouraged to do so.

As I awaken
Upon waking this morning,
I stay in bed until I smile,
grateful for these hours
and greeting all who suffer.

The days first encounter with water
Streams weave through the woods here,
rain and snow abound,
now grateful for the splash of water ~
our human commonalty.

As I put on my shoes
With a grateful heart I ask
Who made these shoes?
and that I'd walk the earth
in safety and peace.

While walking my dogs
In the dark morning hours ~
tiny headlights on my cap,
grateful for this bit of creation
entrusted to my care.

As my eyes fall on the Gospel page
At seven the pretty teacher taught me to read.
What a wonderful gift!
I hold this wish for the children of the world ~
especially the girls.

For the healing of my ancestors
In my ancestral line: poverty, imbalance and fear,
addiction and despair.
Now in this moment of recalling,
I wish them healing and joy.

Setting the table
As I set the table ~
dinner for four,
Can't we spread the table
for the world that has nothing?

In the planting of the fir tree
As an antidote to destruction
I plant the young fir tree
with hopes for an
ever-greening human unity

This contribution is available at <http://www.paucaverba.blogspot.com/2015/11/gathas-are-like-seeds.html>
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We Are Prodigals All [at A Faith-Full Life]

Recently, one of our close friends lost his father. This last Saturday we attended the funeral. Prior to his death, his dad had selected which readings he would like to have read at his funeral. Inexplicably, the gospel reading that he chose was the parable of the prodigal son found in Saint Luke's Gospel.

— 1 —

This man had been a faithful Catholic his entire life, raised ten children in the faith, and been married to his wife for an astonishing 66 years! In fact, shortly before his death he renewed his marriage vows, publicly proclaiming that after 66 years he was every bit as much in love with, and committed to his wife as he had been on the day that they were first married.

By any standard he had lived a commendable Christian life. He had lived a life of faith and commitment to family. And yet, as the hour of his death approached, he asked that the story of the prodigal son be read at his funeral. It was a reminder to me that,

We are prodigals all.

— 2 —

The word prodigal basically just means wasteful, or describes one who is a wastrel. The prodigal son leaves his father's house with his share of the inheritance, and proceeds to *waste* his entire inheritance on a wild and reckless lifestyle.

“Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.”¹

He takes the gifts which his father had bestowed on him and he squanders them.

— 3 —

But, who among us can say that we haven't at some point wasted the gifts or talents that our Father has given us? All of us at one point or another have forsaken our Father and our family, have lived a life “*of the world*” rather than a life set apart but nevertheless “*in the world.*” We have squandered our inheritance and gifts.

All of us have at one point or another wandered dusty roads far from home, wanting nothing more than to return to the outstretched arms of our Father and be welcomed into His loving embrace.

We are prodigals all.

Who among us, coming to the end of this earthly sojourn, muddy and bedraggled by our exile here below, doesn't dare to wish that he might be made but a servant in the heavenly realm? For in the end, just to return home, just to be fed the scraps from the table in return for service – is that not enough? To have a purpose and place? Even that of a servant? Happy thieves in paradise indeed!

We are prodigals all.

— 4 —

St. Augustine (perhaps the most famous prodigal son of all Christendom) wrote that, “*The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.*” It is, one could say, the first step on the journey home. And it is confession and reconciliation that are at the heart of the story of the prodigal son.

St. John Paul II writes that, “*Confession is an act of honesty and courage – an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving God.*” Confession, also called the *Sacrament of Reconciliation* by the Church, is certainly a means of grace. It is, in fact, the primary means by which God’s mercy is bestowed on us as repentant believers, for,

We are prodigals all.

And certainly the return of the prodigal son is both a confession and an appeal to mercy.

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”²

— 5 —

And yet, in taking that first step, in simply turning our face towards home, shockingly, we see the Father Himself *running* towards us! It is as if, “*Jesus wants to make it clear that the God of whom he speaks is a God of compassion who joyously welcomes repentant sinners into his house.*”³

And, amazingly, it is not as servants that we are welcomed home – but as sons! It is why the Church teaches us that, “*Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life. By baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an adopted son he can henceforth call God ‘Father,’ in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes clarity into him and who forms the Church*”⁴

Grace brings us into restored relationship with the Father, not as servants, but as sons! [\[Tweet This\]](#)

— 6 —

Augustine famously wrote: “*You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace*”⁵

Henri Nouwen in his masterful book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, writes, “*I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not ‘How am I to find God?’ but ‘How am I to let myself be found by him?’ The question is not ‘How am I to know God?’ but ‘How am I to let myself be known by God?’ And, finally, the question is not ‘How am I to love God?’ but ‘How am I to let myself be loved by God?’ God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.*”⁶

Brennan Manning was a best-selling Christian author and speaker. He passed away in 2013, but it is his voice that speaks to us from the dc Talk song *What If I Stumble?* observing that, “*The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.*”

Manning was also a failed Franciscan priest who broke his vows in order to marry and then later divorced. He was an addict who struggled with alcoholism and it’s effects throughout his life.

In his immensely popular book *The Ragamuffin Gospel* he writes:

“When I get honest, I admit I am a bundle of paradoxes. I believe and I doubt, I hope and get discouraged, I love and I hate, I feel bad about feeling good, I feel guilty about not feeling guilty. I am trusting and suspicious. I am honest and I still play games. Aristotle said I am a rational animal; I say I am an angel with an incredible capacity for beer. To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, the light side and the dark. In admitting my shadow side I learn who I am and what God’s grace means. As Thomas Merton put it, ‘A saint is not someone who is good but who experiences the goodness of God.’”

Reflecting on the reading of the prodigal son chosen for the funeral Mass of my friends father, I realized that I could not imagine a more perfect selection to accompany his passage from this life into the next, for in truth,

We are prodigals all.

!

You can buy Henri Nouwen’s book here:

[The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming](#)

AWS.InvalidParameterValue: 978-0385473071 is not a valid value for ItemId. Please change this value and retry your request.

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1. Luke 15:13 [↔](#)
 2. Luke 15:18-19 [↔](#)
 3. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Return of the Prodigal Son [↔](#)
 4. CCC paragraph 1997 [↔](#)
 5. Confessions, Book 7 [↔](#)
 6. Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming [↔](#)

This contribution is available at <http://adamncrawford.com/we-are-prodigals-all/>
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O Come O Come Emmanuel [at Campfires and Cleats]

Just crazy [how long it's been](#) since I stopped by to chat with you! A whole month---sheesh. Well I miss you all, miss the comments, the chatter, the everything. Life has kept me away. occupied, longer than planned. I hope my American friends had a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday! And now, onto Advent.



This time, this gift of being still. Pondering. Silenced. Quieted. Hopefully so. Waiting. Watching. Remembering. Catching glimpses of the small and the extraordinary in the every day. While we anticipate the most amazing gift ever. However you "do" advent will fit the family culture you're building. Elaborate crafts and stress inducing how to's are not allowed, Momma! Simple reflections in this season of waiting are all we need..... I'll look forward to reflecting here in this space a bit on this liturgical season of advent during the coming weeks...For now, here's a collection of numerous activities my family's enjoyed in the decade and a half we have been blessed as parents.

Some are just plain fun and some have taught us much about ourselves and this glittering, sparkling season of.....well...waiting.

Enjoy my friends.

I'll look forward to seeing you soon.



[It's the .:Most:. Wonderful Time of the Year! 10 of Our Traditions for Advent and Christmas~ Wreaths, Trees, Recipes, Crafts, Stories, Santa, Science & Savoring](#)

thank you for stopping over and

spending some of your precious time

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Until next time,

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Call no man Father? Tell Ellen White! [at Catholicism and Adventism]



“Father Miller”

Adventists and others accuse Catholics of disobeying Jesus by calling our priests “Father”.

There is [plenty of biblical evidence](#) to show that it is quite okay to do call them that.

But the interesting thing is that Ellen White referred to William Miller, the founder of the Millerite movement that started Adventism, as “*Father Miller*“, and gives one of the Catholic reasons for doing so (cf 1 Cor 4:15):

“He was indeed rightly called **Father Miller**, for he had a watchful care over those who came under his ministrations, was affectionate in his manner, of genial and tender heart.”

– Ellen White – [Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White 1880, page 149](#)

“He was indeed rightly called **Father Miller**, for he had a watchful care over those who came under his ministrations, was affectionate in his manner, of a genial disposition and tender heart.”

– Ellen White – [Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, page 22](#)

“As **Father Miller** made a practical application of Scripture truth to the hearts of his hearers ... ”

– Ellen White – [Christ Triumphant, page 337](#)



That pretty much makes hypocrites of Adventists who accuse Catholics of being

unscriptural. They consider Ellen White to be inspired, and her writings are used as a lens through which to interpret the Bible.

Ellen G. White

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Annunciation by Murillo (Restored Traditions)

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Featured on New Evangelizers

“Faith is an encounter with Jesus Christ, with God, from which faith is born, and from there it brings you to witness,” Pope Francis tweeted.

That’s what happened to the Virgin Mary.

Mary’s encounter with God’s messenger changed her life. The Holy Spirit overwhelmed her with such joy she could only respond by telling those dearest to her what God had done in her.

What questions did Mary ponder on her way to visit Elizabeth? In telling her faith story the angel’s visitation became more active, more powerful, more real. The reactions and questioning that followed her initial experience clarified it.

Knowing and pondering our faith story helps clarify our thoughts. Like Mary, when we share our story, we see how God intervened and steered us to the path he planned for our greatest happiness. Then our deepest beliefs naturally emerge — like Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-49:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. . . The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

Read how Mary helped me share my story on [New Evangelizers](#).

The Miracle that Led [at ChurchPOP]

Sir Alec Guinness is one of the most recognizable actors of the 20th century. While he appeared in lots of films over the years and won many awards, he best known as having played Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*.

What many people don't know about him, though, is that at the age of 42 he [converted to Catholicism](#) – in part because of a miracle.

[See also: [The Amazing Deathbed Conversion of Oscar Wilde](#)]

[See also: [The Night Charles Dickens Was Haunted By the Spirit of... the Virgin Mary?](#)]

Guinness was born in 1914 in London to a broken family. He never knew his father and grew up in poverty. Though he was confirmed in the Anglican faith at 16, he was unsure of what he really believed about religion. Over the next few years he bounced around Presbyterianism, atheism, Marxism, Buddhism, and even attended a few Quaker meetings. Like a good Englishman of the early 20th century, though, he had no interest in Catholicism.

While rehearsing for the play *Hamlet*, an Anglican priest approached him and explained that he was blessing himself wrong and showed him the correct way. Something about the encounter had a spiritual impact on him, and he regained some interest in Anglicanism.

He was drawn further into the Anglican faith in the turmoil of World War II, but it wasn't until 1954 when he was 40 years old that he had another experience that would open him to considering Catholicism.

He was in France working on the film *Father Brown*, based on G. K. Chesterton's well known fictional crime-solving priest. He was playing the title role and so was dressed up as a Catholic priest. While walking down the street in priestly attire, a local child spotted him and mistook him to be a genuine Catholic priest. The child ran up, grabbed his hand trustingly, and walked with him down the road.

The trust and affection the child had for Catholic priests had a deep impact on him and made him start to seriously consider Catholicism. He later [explained](#):

Continuing my walk, I reflected that a Church that could inspire such confidence in a child, making priests, even when unknown, so easily approachable, could not be as scheming or as creepy as so often made out. I began to shake off my long-taught, long-absorbed prejudices.

Soon after, his son Matthew contracted polio and appeared to be close to death. Desperate and seeking divine help, Guinness started dropping by a local Catholic church to pray.

He made a deal with God: if God healed Matthew, he would allow his son to become Catholic if he wanted.

Against all expectations (miraculously?), his son recovered! So Guinness and his wife enrolled him in a Jesuit school. A few years later, Guinness, his wife, and his son all converted to Catholicism.

Guinness remained a faithful Catholic the rest of his life until he died in 2000. May he rest in peace!

Do you know of another famous person who converted to Catholicism? Share in the comments!

[See also: [This One Quote Convinced Me to Convert to Catholicism](#)]

[See also: [Watch ChurchPOP's Editor on "The Journey Home" Share His Conversion Story](#)]

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The Difference Between a Cafeteria Catholic and a Repentant Sinner [at Arnobius of Sicca]

So, I saw on a blog the other day where the author was citing an authority for a moral issue. In this case the author was citing the SSPX and said that the SSPX was “for real about Church discipline” and he was willing to listen to them. On the other hand, the author has no respect for the teaching authority of the current Pope and the bishops. When someone called the author out of this, asking about the contradiction of the SSPX being disobedient, the author replied that the SSPX followed all pre-conciliar teachings and disciplines. To which the reply was “except obedience to the Pope.”

Now I’m not naming the blog or linking to the article in question, because the point of this article is not about condemning a person or article or website. Rather, watching this exchange, I found myself reflecting on the common epithet “Cafeteria Catholicism” and what distinguishes Cafeteria Catholicism from other people who find themselves running afoul of the Church. Are *all* of us Cafeteria Catholics on account of our sins? Or does the term reflect a specific mindset?

Of course the term is an epithet, not a theological term. That makes it harder to pin down in a way people will agree on. Generally the term is based on the concept of the Cafeteria: where individuals serve themselves from a line of food and select and reject based on their personal preferences. The term “Cafeteria Catholic” then means that when it comes to the Church teaching, an individual decides to accept or reject teachings based on their preferences—they accept the teachings they agree with and refuse to follow the ones they disagree with. This is going to be the working definition I will use in this blog.

Oh sure, the cafeteria Catholic—regardless of whether the person is conservative, liberal, modernist or traditionalist—will offer justifications as to why they do not *have* to obey the disliked teaching. But the point is, they will not accept the possibility that they could be wrong and the Church on the issue. Therefore the Church can be disobeyed (it is argued).

I think this is quite different from the sinner who knows that they are doing wrong and wants to change. Certain people have inclinations which lead them into sin (for example, addiction to drugs or pornography, alcoholism, and so on). Others are in situations where they feel trapped in a bad situation. Others simply chose pleasure over God and now regret it.

The difference between the two is the cafeteria Catholic knows the Church teaches against what they demand but rejects the authority of the Church to tell them right from wrong when they do not want to obey. The latter knows what they do is wrong and wishes that sin was not between them and God. They recognize they need salvation, even if they feel unable to turn back for one reason or another. This person is like the tax collector in Our Lord’s parable who “...*stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’*” (Luke 18:13)

I think the Pope gets it. In his talk of mercy (which is well publicized) and repentance (which is virtually ignored), he seeks to reach out to the second group. He wants to help make the path of return to the Church easier for a person who is ashamed of what they are. Unfortunately, people assume he is reaching out to unrepentant cafeteria Catholics who have no intention of accepting the fact that they are doing wrong.

As we begin Advent, let us consider whether there is any rebellion in our hearts that make us cafeteria Catholics—and in doing so, avoiding thinking of cafeteria Catholics as only being people we disagree with—and if there is, let us turn to Our Lord and say ‘*O God, be merciful to me a sinner.*’

This contribution is available at <http://arnobius-of-sicca.blogspot.com/2015/11/the-difference-between-cafeteria.html>
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What Our Catholic Ancestors Can Teach Us About the Faith [at Plot Line and Sinkers]



Photo from Wikimedia

[My latest post from Catholic Mom](#) is entitled, “What Our Catholic Ancestors Can Teach Us About the Faith.”

When a great uncle of mine passed away years ago, his closest family members went through his belongings, as per his wishes, and took mementos. A box was left over, I was told, of “religious items,” and I was asked if I’d like to have the box. As one of the few practicing Catholics in our extended family, I gratefully accepted the box.

I was delighted to find three Latin/English Missals from the 1940’s and 50’s, religious statues, rosaries, holy cards, a scapular and other Catholic sacramentals.

When my mother died eight years ago, my siblings and I went through her jewelry box. I was surprised to find a beautiful cameo miraculous medal and a card enrolling my mother (then a young teenager) in the “Miraculous Medal Society.” I now wear my mother’s miraculous medal.

My father, who died when I was a teenager, frequently recited the rosary. One image I recall from his wake is of my father, peaceful in death, his hands clutching his rosary.

Rosaries, scapulars, religious images, medals, holy water are all sacramentals, or visual reminders of our Catholic faith.

Catholic sacramentals have somehow lost popularity. While many Catholics still wear medals, the displaying of religious statues, icons and other sacramentals in Catholic homes is not as common anymore. Strictly speaking, it is not obligatory to use sacramentals. However, since they are reminders, they do help us in our journey towards heaven.

Our Catholic ancestors did not shy away from the faith. With few exceptions, they went to Mass every Sunday (with their Latin/English missal) and attended Mass often during the week, they abstained from meat on Fridays, recited the rosary, wore medals, proudly displayed crucifixes in their homes and

religious statues in their gardens. Most had holy water fonts in their homes. They proudly proclaimed their faith and were not ashamed.

Recently, my scapular was hanging out in front of my shirt. A fellow parishioner asked me what it was. “It’s a scapular, a sacramental,” I replied. This fellow parishioner was around the same age and yet had never seen a scapular “up close” and didn’t know what a “sacramental” was.

When my parents attended grade school and high school in the 1940’s, catechism was memorized and learned from an early age. Young Catholics knew and understood when sin was sin; there was no watering down of the faith. There was no “subjective truth.” Pre-marital sex and contraception were sins and even if they fell into temptation and took part in these acts, they knew it was sinful and headed to confession immediately.

Now? Well, it’s a different story. Although some Catholics do know the teachings of the faith, many do not. In fact, I’ve spoken to Catholics who are under the mistaken impression that the Catholic faith is a democracy or opinion-based church. I’ve talked to Catholics who had no idea Sunday Mass was an obligation and missing it was a sin. I’ve spoken to Catholics who had no idea that living together before married was a sin or that birth control was a sin.

Sacramentals remind us of our faith. They remind us that our life here on earth is temporary and that heaven is our goal.

We have a lot to learn from our ancestors. Our Mass going, rosary reciting, scapular and medal-wearing ancestors understood the importance of sacramentals and the importance of knowing—and practicing—their faith.

To find out more information on the importance of sacramentals, check out this helpful link:
<http://www.fisheaters.com/sacramentalsintro.html>

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Synod 15: Personal Conscience versus the Mind of Christ [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Susan Fox

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10: 27)

Tora Hutchison had only a high school education, but she



could teach a course in the theology of marriage.

Her life is a testimony to the beauty of the sacrament, which she lived at great personal cost in complete fidelity to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

Tora was baptized a Roman Catholic as a young married woman in 1953 -- one week before me, her infant daughter. Because of Tora's fidelity in two Catholic marriages, and one choice not to marry when the Church denied an annulment, I almost feel like I lived my entire life under the shadow of one long Synod on the Family. The questions that came up in the two-year Synod process ending Oct. 24, 2015, were questions answered in suffering and love during my lifetime by my mother.



Tora, who died in 2001 at the age of 82, would have approved of most of the final Synod document, which was a beautiful witness to the indissolubility and procreative nature of marriage between one man and one woman, making marriage a reflection of the relationship between Christ and His Church and the mirror of the interior life of the Holy Trinity. None of the 13 small working groups of the Synod on the Family called categorically for allowing divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Holy Communion. However, some fear that three ambiguous paragraphs in the final Synod document (#84-86) may have opened the door a crack to create a path for divorced remarried Catholics to receive communion on a case-by-case basis. "My hope is the synod will leave us with open doors, not closed ones," said German Cardinal Reinhold Marx at the conclusion of the Synod. The Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference, Marx was among those who supported communion for divorced remarried Catholics.

No one should be alarmed, however, that the final Synod Document has fuzzy language on this issue as it is simply an advisory document for Pope Francis, who has said that the Church cannot change the doctrine on marriage, which prevents the divorced and remarried from receiving communion. The Final Relatio of the Synod on the Family has no canonical status whatsoever.

The Church has always taught that after having investigated the roots of a marriage, if it cannot find grounds for an annulment, it remains valid. Under those conditions, anyone entering into a second civil marriage is living in a state of adultery, precluding reception of communion and confession.

For as Jesus said, *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."* (Matthew 19:9)

St. Augustine reminds us: "Who dismisses his adulterous wife and marries another woman, whereas his first wife still lives, remains perpetually in the state of adultery. Such a man does not any efficacious penance while he refuses to abandon the new wife. If he is a catechumen, he cannot be admitted to baptism, because his will remains rooted in the evil. If he is a (baptized) penitent, he cannot receive the

(ecclesiastical) reconciliation as long as he does not break with his bad attitude.” That is according to the saint who lived with a lot of women in adulterous relationships before his conversion.

The ambiguous paragraphs of the Final Synod Document were largely the work of the German-speaking group. The German cardinals opined that “in an ill-conceived attempt to respect the doctrine of the Church, repeatedly we have had harsh and merciless pastoral attitudes that created suffering,” especially for unwed mothers, children born out of wedlock, cohabiting couples, homosexual persons and those who are divorced and civilly remarried.

“Poof!” Tora would have answered, “It is not the Church nor its laws that created that suffering. Obedience to the Church is obedience to Christ.”

“Here, here. I agree,” said my aunt, a Catholic who told me, “Susan I made a mess in my life. I couldn’t go to communion for two long years (while I waited for the annulment process) because I ran off and married in Las Vegas.” Marry in haste; repent at leisure -- that was her message.

But the German Catholic bishops believe that a Catholic priest should lead those trapped in the snare of a second civil union through an examination of conscience, and let them decide what to do.

“A sincere reflection can reinforce trust in God’s mercy, which is never denied to one who places his or her failures and needs before God,” the group said. Very true words, but ultimately, when the German bishops say the individual’s conscience should be respected and allowed to determine if access to the sacraments is possible, they deny the Mercy of God. God is not allowed to offer His Mercy when man takes the matter out of His Hands.

And they entirely forget the Catholic Church has its own Conscience. The Church is not required to give communion to someone in an objective state of serious sin, even if their malformed individual conscience says, “Give me, give me!”

Cardinal Marx, who participated in the Synod’s German speaking group discussion, made it clear in his Oct 21 Press briefing, that they were using the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas during their discussions. Aquinas defined the human conscience as the “aboriginal Christ.” Out in the wild jungle of natural revelation, St. Thomas argued that even if a person’s conscience is malformed, they are obliged to obey it. But such discernment would not apply to a situation in which the Church’s position is objectively known through an annulment process.

The Conscience is the place of judgment where through reason – not emotion -- a person chooses the good and rejects evil. For a person to judge that my conscience is superior to the objective moral teaching of the Church is foolish. The Person of Jesus Christ is the Conscience of the Catholic Church. To hold your conscience superior to the teachings of the Church is to say your puny individual conscience is greater than the Mind of Christ.



“Under no circumstances can pastoral work be in contradiction with doctrine. Actions of the Church need to – if they want to be Catholic – correspond to faith and dogma,” German Cardinal Walter Brandmüller said just prior to the beginning of the Synod on the Family in October. He co-authored “Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church.”

Tora was a widow -- my father, James Burkhardt, died when I was four. When I was seven years old, my mother met Gilbert Koch in the Legion of Mary. They were both in love with each other, and in love with learning more about growing closer to God. I remember going to Eucharistic Adoration with both of them on Friday nights. Faith of Our Fathers, the Rosary, incense, and candles! I loved it.

He introduced Mom to deep sources of sanctity -- True Devotion to Mary by St. Louis Marie de Montfort and the Introduction to the Devout Life by St. Francis de Sales. In my living room today is a statue of St. Francis de Sales that belonged to Gilbert Koch. Gilbert – also a convert to Catholicism – asked Tora to marry him.

There was only one obstacle, which they both recognized. Gilbert had been married before his conversion. His wife abandoned him. Both he and his ex-wife believed that she had never been baptized.

I was seven years old! It was firmly established in my mind at that age that people married to unbaptized people could remarry. How funny now to read Cardinal Marx question the very same thing on Oct 21, 2015.

“There is a lack of synthesis in the (Church’s) theology of marriage,” Cardinal Marx asserted, “If two persons left the



Protestant Church and make their civil marriage, they receive the sacrament of marriage. You will not believe it, but it’s true! Every contract between two baptized persons is a marriage. Is that possible?”

Yes, it is. The Church defines marriage as a sacrament that two baptized people bestow on each other while the Church blesses and witnesses their choice. It makes perfect sense to me. Even in the case of a marriage between unbaptized persons, they make a commitment to each other. They are called to be faithful to that commitment.

So Tora and Gilbert chastely dated for two years in expectation of marrying once Gilbert received an annulment of his first marriage based on his first wife’s unbaptized state.

Then tragedy struck. Gilbert’s first wife’s mother recalled she *had* baptized her daughter. The Church denied the annulment deciding Gilbert was still married to his first wife.

I’m so glad Pope Francis is trying to shorten the annulment process because I’m sure if any other couple had gone through that ordeal today they would be living together when the annulment was denied. Both Tora and Gilbert had a strong sense of right and wrong, so they did not live together. Added to that, Tora was very conscious of maintaining a good example for her young daughter.

And consider this. Gilbert and Tora were converts from Protestantism. Once permission to marry was denied, they didn’t think to themselves, “Oh, we’ll just go back to being



Protestants and get married anyway.” Tora and Gilbert listened to the Conscience of Christ. They made a heroic choice. They obeyed the Church.

Gilbert moved to Riverside, Calif. It was a good hour's drive from Anaheim where we lived. They ceased to see each other, but not to love each other. Two years later he died from a heart attack. My mother was present with him in the hospital when he died on Oct. 30. Later, she said to me because she and Gilbert decided to separate when the annulment was denied, Gilbert now had the hope of eternal life. Love denied opened the gates of heaven to Gilbert Koch!

That is true love. Love seeks the good of the beloved even at the expense of one's own happiness.

“In determined circumstances, the persons find great difficulty with acting in a different way. Therefore, while holding up a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that the responsibility regarding specific actions or decisions is not the same in every case. Pastoral discernment, while taking into account the rightly formed conscience of persons, should take these situations into account. Also the consequences of the accomplished acts are not necessarily the same in every case.”
(#85 Final Document from the Synod on the Family)

Yes that is a very confusing paragraph, part of three confusing paragraphs that came out of the Final Document from the Synod on the Family influenced by the German group. Quoting Pope Francis, Cardinal Marx in an address before the Synod on Oct. 14, said the Eucharist is not “a reward for perfection, but a generous remedy and food for the weak.” Who apparently could be weaker than a couple living in objective adultery (a second marriage not blessed by the Church) trying to raise their children in the Catholic Faith? This can cause some consternation.

During one Sunday Mass, the young son of one of my friends discovered two consecrated hosts, apparently received into someone's mouth and then discarded and stuck wet underneath the pew in front of him and his mother. They found it the Sunday after the parish celebrated the children's first Holy Communion. My friend without thinking pulled what she could off the pew and swallowed it, knowing it was the Body of Christ. I was sitting in the pew directly behind her, and witnessed the whole ordeal. We suspected two embarrassed parents left it there after they went to communion lacking the courage to tell their child that they themselves were barred from receiving communion.

Tora found similar difficulties when she was doing door-to-door evangelization in Southern California in the 1960s. She came home one night, and said repeatedly: “Susan, thank God your father died, and we didn't lose him through divorce.” What she meant to say is that divorce is one of the greatest horrors that she – a widow -- had ever encountered!

I experienced the same thing in the 1990s doing door-to-door evangelization intensively for one week in Iowa. A teenage girl answered the door. I told her I came from her local Catholic parish to give her greetings from the pastor. She immediately had a change of heart. She said she was baptized, had her first communion and confirmation, but her parents divorced. The family never went to Church again! With her innocent little brother standing by watching, she said to me in a very resolved tone, "I am going to talk to my mother. I want to go back to Church." She was a child, who had to grow up when her parents would not.

Pope Francis understands the horror of divorce, and its effect on families. That's why he doesn't want divorced families to feel excommunicated. They aren't, of course, and if they remain faithful to the vows of their first marriage, they can receive all the sacraments. That's paragraph 83 in the Final Synod Document. But even if they remarry civilly, they should still feel welcomed in the Catholic parish where they can come, participate in parish activities, and bring their children to Mass.

Tora had another opportunity to prove her faithfulness in marriage. In 1971, she married Byron Hutchison. I was her 18-year-old bridesmaid. Hutch suffered from post-traumatic syndrome, paranoia and bi-polar disorder, but we had no idea of this when she married him. I came back from college to visit six years later, and my mother wept in my arms. This had *never* happened before.

"Hutch is so mean to me," she wept. I encouraged her to get him mental health assistance, but he would have blown his stack. So I said, "Mom, YOU have to go to the doctor and find out what's wrong with HIM." And so she did. And finally she understood she could not take his behavior personally. He was ill.

At this point I said to her, "You know Mom, you could get an annulment because they generally don't do Catholic weddings for people who have been in mental institutions (as Hutch had)." But she said, "Hutch didn't know he was mentally ill when he married me. He has a right to my faithfulness."

And so she made the heroic choice to remain in a marriage where she suffered emotionally. On a daily basis, for 29 years until she died, she was nailed to the cross of her marriage bed. After she died in the hospital, Hutch was upset because he couldn't find her wedding ring. But I thought to *myself*, "God has destroyed it because the marriage is no more. My mother is free in death."

Tora's marriage to Hutch -- an unbaptized man -- was that case I learned about when I was seven years old. They could have easily gotten an annulment because he was not a Christian. But she did not. As a result, Hutch, who had been very anti-Catholic through most of the marriage, began to be attracted to the faith. I suggested to Tora that when she suffered emotionally and physically (she lost one leg in her 70s

due to peripheral artery disease) that her sufferings would benefit Hutch. "Oh, I so hope and pray so," she said.

And with that choice, God created a fascinating dynamic. By the suffering Hutch created in their lives together, which Mom united to the sufferings of Christ, he was saved. She even had a vision of herself going to communion, and Hutch following behind moving towards God. *"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife; and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband: otherwise your children should be unclean; but now they are holy."* (1Cor 7:14)

Though I tried a few times to get priests to talk to Hutch about Baptism after Mom died, they were reluctant to ask, "Do you want to be baptized?" In the nursing home, the priest showed him where they had Sunday Mass. He went to Mass every Sunday until he died.

I once asked him, "Dad, why don't you get the Catholic sacraments and become Catholic?" And he answered, "Susan, I don't qualify." But he wanted it; don't you see? And so he had it -- Baptism by desire.

For every Sunday he went to Mass, he didn't go for the great sermons or to hear the Word of God. Hutch was deaf as a doornail and wouldn't wear hearing aids. He went because he believed in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. I had seen him looking covetously at the host when I gave Mom communion. He wanted Christ. The witness of Tora's life bore good fruit.

Whereas the decision not to marry, opened the gates of heaven for Gilbert, the decision to stay married opened the gates of heaven for Hutch.

Ultimately, we have to thank Tora's marriage to my father,



James Burkhardt, for Hutch's conversion and my own. Tora converted to Catholicism because of his witness and that of his mother's, my grandmother Dora. He was the fisher of men, who caught such an incredible swordfish (Tora) that on her tail came countless others into heaven.

Tora's first marriage was emotionally very happy, but lasted only seven years before he died. Yet in this marriage too there was incredible suffering. My father had tuberculosis and had to have one lung removed. Tora told me of that time in the hospital when he used profane language, something she had

never heard from him before, because the pain was so great.

Then he spent a year at home recovering, and gradually all their friends except one – Dean Howard – stopped coming to visit. Because of that experience of abandonment, she made a point of inviting all the little people with no families to Thanksgiving dinner every year when I was growing up.

She remembered my Dad filing the needle on his daily shot because unless it was sharp, it hurt! But that year offered great happiness as well because they had only each other, and they spent hours playing Scrabble and talking together.



When Mom discovered she was pregnant with me, my father was at the point where he nearly died. My birth came with a lot stress for her as she had to keep a baby happy, and allow her ill husband his sleep.

By the time I was four, he was recovered. We were immensely happy. People remember my father for his incredible sense of humor. So that year – 1957 – we set out for Detroit on vacation to buy a new car.

We visited family in Ohio where I came down with the measles. We drove south to New Orleans in the new car with new seatbelts on our way back to Los Angeles. But people then weren't used to using them, so they weren't on when we had a head-on collision on a three-lane road that allowed people to drive both directions in the middle lane.

My father's remaining lung was punctured by windshield glass and he died three days later on April 28,

1957, the feast of a saint as yet unknown to us -- Louis Marie de Montfort. He was wearing a medal of the Sacred Heart, and had just been to confession the previous weekend.

I was in the back seat when the accident occurred. I had looked up just before the accident and I saw my parents looking at one another with deep longing and love. In that last second of their lives together, they taught me what life itself was all about.

Perhaps the German bishops don't understand the resiliency of the Catholic laity, or the hunger of the human heart for God. With the right teaching, I have seen ordinary people literally give their lives in horrific daily suffering to remain in love and union with Christ.

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? ...What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-39)

This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2015/11/synod-15-personal-conscience-versus.html>
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Hiding in My Comfort Zone and Other Sins of Omission

Last week at the library and immediately after at the playground, I got to talking to another mom. I tend toward the quiet introvert type, so I don't often strike up a conversation. My husband can't get through a simple retail transaction without a full-blown conversation ensuing while I could go weeks without one if pressed. Meeting new people is not my strong suit, but after seeing this woman in not one but two places in a short span, I started chatting.

She was a young, pregnant mom, new to the area. We found some similar interests and common experiences and had a good conversation. Eventually it was time for me to corral my kids and for her to get to a prenatal appointment. We each went our separate ways without so much as a goodbye.

And it bugged me.

Here was a young woman in a new town, with a husband who travels a lot for work, suffering through first trimester sickness with a toddler in tow. Oh, how I could relate.

And yet, she didn't leave my company any better than when she'd met me, other than perhaps to be assured that her experience wasn't unique. Another mom understood.

As I drove home, I wished I'd offered to keep in touch. If she ever needed an emergency baby sitter or a friendly ear, I live less than a mile from her neighborhood. But, I hadn't had a business card on me, nor a paper or pen. I did, however, have a phone. It never occurred to me that I could have easily texted my contact information to her or given her my name and invited her to find me on Facebook.

All this to say that while my intentions are often good, I fail at simple interactions.

I readily accept that when it comes to sins of commission, growing in virtue and eliminating bad habits may take time, persistence, prayer, and practice. I may have to employ specific tactics or use specific skills.

Then why when it comes to sins of omission, do I think I should spontaneously know and do what's right every time?

I'm not certain that my behavior last week was sinful, but at the least it was a missed opportunity to demonstrate kindness. I'm reluctant to admit that doing so doesn't come naturally.



How many
opportunities to
do good have
been missed?

Maybe being a better person means I have to do things that are difficult or uncomfortable. Maybe just as I teach my children to make eye contact and offer a firm handshake, I need a lesson in social graces myself if for no other reason than to cultivate virtue.

I've long considered practiced social skills as calculated or manipulative. It's taken many years for me to realize that if done in the proper spirit it's merely thoughtful.

Take this post from Michael Hyatt on [simple conversation starters](#). Why has it taken so long for me to see that preparing and practicing for such situations is more courteous than disingenuous? That a habit of enduring conversation rather than engaging conversation has caused me to miss opportunities to do good?

Everyone is called to kindness and holiness regardless of personality type. Certainly the saints offer us vivid examples of the diverse paths to sanctity. Whether spunky, smart, dim-witted, cranky, introvert, or extrovert, they were filled with grace. Holiness didn't make them less of who they were, only more, enabling them to be the person God intended them to be.

Regardless of our personality types or natural proclivities, we may have to step outside our comfort zones – do a little more, try a little harder – lest we let a wealth of opportunities for doing good slip by. Even one as simple as lending an ear.



Carolyn Astfalk is wife (to one), mother (to four), and author (of *Stay With Me*). She formerly worked as a communications director and now works just to keep her head above water. She is a member of the Catholic Writers Guild. Find her blog at My Scribbler's Heart and her words scattered around the blogosphere and social media.

Fulton J. Sheen

“There are not a hundred people in America who hate the Catholic Church. There are millions of people who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church — which is, of course, quite a different thing.”

The Actual Documented History:

In 312 A.D., outnumbered but determined, Constantine moved against Maxentius, marching his army down across the Alps at lightning speed. Maxentius drew up his forces along the Tiber River, some nine miles north of Rome. He was confident of victory, for he had received a prophecy: “*On this day the enemy of Rome shall perish.*” He took it as a good omen, for certainly god meant Constantine when they spoke of “enemy of Rome.” So confident was Maxentius that he made no plan for retreat. His only avenue of escape was over the narrow Milvian Bridge, which spanned the Tiber.

Before the battle, Constantine had a dream or a vision, He saw a strange sign in the heavens and heard the words *en toutoi nika* – Greek for “In this, conquer.” (The Latin is sometimes rendered as *In hoc signo vinces*, “In this sign you will conquer.” Constantine ordered that a new imperial standard bearing the sign be made immediately, and that the mysterious sign be painted on the shields of all his troops. The sign was formed from two greek letters, *chi* (X) and *rho* (P), the first two letters of the title ‘Christ’ (XPISTOS – CHRISTOS) in Greek.

Through it was smaller, Constantine’s army routed Maxentius’ dispirited troops. Then ran from the field, trying to retreat over Milvian Bridge. So many people were fleeing across the bridge that thousands were thrown into the river from the narrow span and died in the flood waters of the Tiber. Maxentius himself, the “enemy of Rome,” perished that day in the river. Constantine was victorious – and was now the new Augustus of the Western Roman Empire.

Together with his ally and brother-in-law Licinius, the Augustus of the west, the two Augusti joined in issuing a new edict of toleration, the *Edict of Milan*, in 313 A.D. This edict granted freedom of worship to all religious groups within the empire, making special mention of the Christians:

“When you see that this has been granted to [Christians] by us, your Worship will know that we have also conceded to other religions the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases; this regulation is made that we may not seem to detract from any dignity of any religion.” — “**Edict of Milan**“, Lactantius, On the Deaths of the Persecutors (De Mortibus Persecutorum), ch. 48. opera, ed. O. F. Fritzsche, II, p 288 sq. (Bibl Patr. Ecc. Lat. XI).

The Anti-Catholic Myth:

The Roman Emperor Constantine established himself as the head of the church around 313 A.D., which made this new “Christianity” the official religion of the Roman Empire. Later, in 325 A.D., Constantine called the Council of Nicaea in an attempt to unify Christianity. Constantine envisioned Christianity as a religion that could unite the Roman Empire, which at that time was beginning to fragment and divide. As

head of this new church, Constantine merged Christianity with pagan beliefs to create the Whore of Babylon as we read about in the book of *Revelation*.

Alternatively, some non-Catholics will assert that the Catholic Church began in 325 when Constantine called the First Council of Nicaea.

13 Logical Problems with the Constantine Founder Myth:

1. **If Constantine started the Catholic Church**, then it would, therefore, seem to follow that Constantine himself was a Catholic Christian. This was not the case. Constantine (possibly) was not baptized into the faith until he was on his deathbed on May 22, 337 A.D. (SEE ALSO: [Was Constantine Baptized an Arian](#)).
2. **For Christianity to become the official religion of the Roman Empire, would require an Edict.** The *Edict of Milan*, which was issued by Constantine and Licinius (as noted above) only put Christians on equal footing with all the other recognized religions in the Roman Empire; granting the same religious freedom that was already being extended to the pagans and Jews. It would not be until 392 A.D. when Emperor Theodosius removed government support from the old Roman pagan religions and established the Christian Faith (Catholicism) as the sole religion of the empire.
3. **If by virtue of Constantine calling a general council of all the bishops of the Church to meet with him at Nicaea** (a resort town in the hills of Asia Minor just south of Constantinople), a Church was created, it then, therefore, follows that: (a) the Church that existed prior to the Council from which all the bishops were called merged themselves into the new church of Constantine; (b) we should see no continuity between the preexisting church and the new Church; (c) we should see no continuity between the pre-Nicaea Church and modern day Catholic Church. I'll dismiss these non-sequitur arguments below.
4. **If by virtue of Constantine issuing an edict of religious freedom for Christians** and calling together the First Council of Nicaea means that he started the Catholic Church, it would, therefore, mean that anytime a Roman Emperor granted religious freedom to any religion or stepped into resolve their controversies that they had become the founder of that pagan or Jewish religion. We don't see such a claim by Protestants about the Emperor of Rome in any other circumstance than with the Catholic Church. In addition, this assumption also fails to recognize that the Roman Emperor thought himself to be in charge of all things in his empire. Therefore, it would have been natural and welcomed for the Emperor to extend his leverage and protection to assemble together all of the Catholic bishops of the Roman Empire.
5. **The reason why Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicaea was to resolve the controversy over Arius' teaching** that Christ Jesus was not consubstantial with God the Father. Therefore, it then follows that for there to have been a heresy or even a counter belief to create a controversy, there must have been prior to Arianism a well-established belief about the nature Jesus Christ in a Church community that all agreed with this understanding. Otherwise, the teachings of Arius would not have caused such a controversy.
6. **That Constantine assembled together all of the bishops of the Roman Empire proves** that there were well-organized dioceses and churches prior the First Council of Nicaea who were in

agreement with each other. Further research into this area will demonstrate the precise areas in which they agreed, such as the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, about many of the books which were thought to be inspired Scripture, and the Bishop of Rome being the successor of Peter and the head of the universal Church.

7. **218 years before the Council of Nicaea** Saint Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, appointed by Saint Peter, wrote a letter to the Smyrnaeans in which he used the word ‘Catholic’ to denote the Church established by Jesus Christ:

“Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people also be: as Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”

8. **In that same letter** Saint Ignatius gave a teaching about the Holy Eucharist that continues to be taught only by the Catholic Church today:

“They abstain from the Eucharist and from the public offices; because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ; which suffered for our sins, and which the Father of his goodness, raised again from the dead. And for this cause contradicting the gift of God, they die in their disputes: but much better would it be for them to receive it, that they might one day rise through it.”

9. **170 years before the Council of Nicaea** Saint Justin Martyr wrote in *First Apology* (a letter to pagan emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161 A.D.) explaining what Christians did at Mass):

“On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits.

“When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves . . . and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation. When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.

“Then someone bring bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judges worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgiving, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: ‘Amen.’

“When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give those present the “eucharsited” bread, wine and after and take them to those who are absent.”

10. **136 years before the Council of Nicaea** Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, and a disciple of Saint Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John, proclaimed that all churches must be in unity with the Church of Rome, which was established by Peter and Paul:

“But since it would be long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the churches, we confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether, through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assembled other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient church known

to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With that church because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition.”

11. **It is true. If Emperor Constantine started the Catholic Church**, then there should be no way to trace the continuity of every Bishop of Rome, from Peter to Francis today. To the contrary, there is only one Church on the face of this earth that can verifiably point to the Church in Rome, established by Peter and Paul, and by continuity in leadership, doctrine, and tradition show a seamless continuity from the first century until today, and that Church is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.
12. **Prior to the Council of Nicaea there had been many local councils where local bishops, priests, and deacons gathered to issue canons to the faithful**; such as the Councils of Carthage, where Saint Cyprian presided at the Seventh Council in 256 A.D. where a canon was issued stating, “. . . *heretics, who are called antichrists and adversaries of Christ, when they come to the Church, must be baptized with the one Baptism of the Church, so that friends may be made of adversaries, and Christians of antichrists.*” Another example of the Council of Elvira, Spain in 300 A.D. where 19 bishops and 26 priests and deacons gathered together to issue 81 canons. Canon 16 stated, “*Heretics, if they do not wish to come over to the Catholic Church, are not to be given Catholic girls in marriage.*” Therefore, how could Constantine have started the Catholic Church in 325 A.D. if it already existed in Spain in 300 A.D.?
13. **The Romans were aficionados when it came to documenting the legal affairs and history of the Empire.** If it had been the case that Constantine established his own state religion or established a new state Church, we would have been able to find it documented somewhere in history that such an event happened, but when we examine the history and legal documents from ancient Rome, we find no traces that the myth that Constantine founded the Catholic Church is true.

Moreover, if Constantine did found the Catholic Church at the First Council of Nicaea then we should be able to find at least some once reference to the Roman Emperor in the creed and canons of the Council, but in the [Creed of Nicaea and in its Twenty Canons](#) nothing was mentioned about the Roman Emperor. Nothing at all.

To the contrary, what all the canons are dealing with is membership of those who had rejected the faith during the persecution, fallen lapse, or who had been excommunicated, primacy of Churches, and the administration of the Sacraments. Altogether the canons are concerned with establishing a solidarity and uniformity of administration and liturgy in the Catholic Church. There is no concern whatsoever in these canons for the Roman Empire or the Roman Emperor in the Canons of the Council of Nicaea.

In regards to the Nicene Creed, it was dealing with more fully proclaiming the [Apostle’s Creed](#), which the Church already affirmed in manner that resolved the Arian heresy. We find nothing in the Creed of this Council that supports the Myth of Constantine Founding the Catholic Church:

“The Synod at Nice set forth this Creed.

The Ecthesis of the Synod at Nice.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten (γεννηθέντα), not made, being of one substance (ὁμοούσιον, consubstantialem) with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not (ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν), or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion — all that so say, **the Catholic and Apostolic Church** anathematizes them.”

Indeed, the only place we see name of Constantine mentioned in reference to the Council of Nicaea is in a post-Council Synod Letter written to the Church of Alexandria, but only in regards paying him deference and honor due to him as the Emperor of Rome who called the bishops together to resolve the Arian heresy:

“To the Church of Alexandria, by the grace of God, holy and great; and to our well-beloved brethren, the orthodox clergy and laity throughout Egypt, and Pentapolis, and Lybia, and every nation under heaven, the holy and great synod, the bishops assembled at Nicaea, wish health in the Lord .

Forasmuch as the great and holy Synod, which was assembled at Niece through the grace of Christ and our most religious Sovereign **Constantine**, who brought us together from our several provinces and cities, has considered matters which concern the faith of the Church, it seemed to us to be necessary that certain things should be communicated from us to you in writing, so that you might have the means of knowing what has been mooted and investigated, and also what has been decreed and confirmed.

First of all, then, in the presence of our most religious Sovereign **Constantine**, investigation was made of matters concerning the impiety and transgression of Arius and his adherents; and it was unanimously decreed that he and his impious opinion should be anathematized, together with the blasphemous words and speculations in which he indulged, blaspheming the Son of God, and saying that he is from things that are not, and that before he was begotten he was not, and that there was a time when he was not, and that the Son of God is by his free will capable of vice and virtue; saying also that he is a creature. All these things the Holy Synod has anathematized, not even enduring to hear his impious doctrine and madness and blasphemous words. And of the charges against him and of the results they had, you have either already heard or will hear the particulars, lest we should seem to be oppressing a man who has in fact received a fitting recompense for his own sin. So far indeed has his impiety prevailed, that he has even destroyed Theonas of Marmorica and Secundes of Ptolemais; for they also have received the same sentence as the rest.” (... [continue reading here](#))

Conclusion of the Emperor Constantine Founder Myth

Those who posit that Constantine founded the Catholic Church either with the *Edict of Milan* or by calling

together the First Council of Nicaea are unable prove their claim. There is no documentation from that time, either explicit or implicit by historian or theologian that even hints that such an event transpired or was the intention of Constantine or the bishops of the Catholic Church to transpire.

This story, most famously told by Jehovah Witnesses and Fundamentalist Protestants, came out of their necessity to support their lie that there was an apostasy in the early Church. It is their way to explain how their reform and late arrival is justifiable. The myth is that because the Church of the Apostles fell in to apostasy, a remnant of the true and orthodox believers of Jesus remained hidden from and often persecuted by the Catholic Church until THEY brought the reform and true faith back. Prior the rise of Protestantism, no one ever dared to tell this lie. Only in the space of the unintelligent, uncurious, and hostile can such a myth and lie bear fruit.

Again, none of which can be proved or supported by the documented facts that the Churches we read about in the Bible started calling themselves Catholics by the early Second Century, and the unique teachings of that Church founded by the Apostles are only present in the Catholic Church today that is in union with See of Rome where the successor of Peter presides.

* Jurgen, William A. The Faith of the Early Fathers. Volume One. The Liturgical Press. Collegeville, Minnesota. 1970

* Lasseter Rollin A. ed. Light to the Nations. Part One. Catholic Textbook Project. 2014.

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidlgray.info/blog/2015/10/myths-and-lies-1/>
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Planned Parenthood is America's Giant Vomitorium [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Lawrence Fox



In America, we have observed bohemian men and woman at "All You Can Eat" buffets frequenting the restroom to expel their self-indulgence. Sometimes, we have heard the man or woman in the next bathroom stall mutter, "I hate when I do this do myself" while heaving their innards out.

It is under debate whether the Romans actually had structures for the purpose of vomiting after meals as the word "Vomitorium" also applies to getting a fast exit from a theater.

But it is a fact that my wife and I have observed that American men and women do overeat at restaurants, then expel the products of their pleasure in the toilet afterwards.

But people, who cannot resist the second and third helping, also worry about their waistline. So they plan ahead by swallowing over-the-counter pills that turn fatty foods into non-digestible rubber that is then forced out of the bowels the morning after.



Younger women engaged in this practice of vomiting after meals are cruelly categorized as “bulimic” by medical professionals, school board counselors, and by state and federal government bureaucrats. Bulimia is defined as the habit of binge eating a large amount of food rapidly or even a small amount, followed by methods of purging the food -- vomiting or taking laxatives in order to remain slim and trim. It is identified as an eating disorder.

Then there are people -- knowing they cannot resist the third helping -- who purchase over-the-counter pills which are meant to mitigate the craving to eat. These men and women are identified as more cautious, sensible, and liberated but without the pill, they are no different from those struggling with binge eating.

Most citizens of the modern world would identify such behavior as tragic, irresponsible, and certainly not something to be subsidized by the taxpayer. Yet remove the food from the context and replace it with sexual self-indulgence and observe how the tenor of the discussion changes.

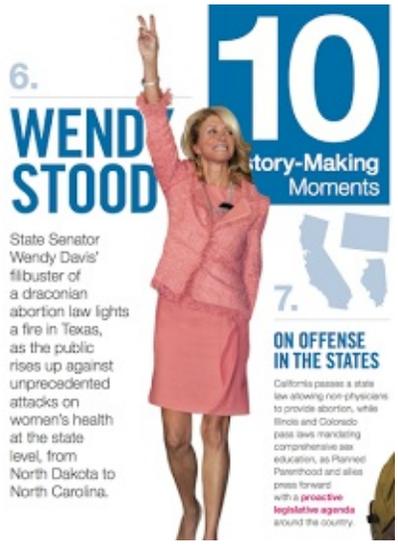
In America, sexually active woman are observed to frequent Planned Parenthood to expel their self-indulgence. Whether willingly or no, sometimes they are accompanied by sexually active men anxious to see the self-indulgence expelled. But often they arrive alone as the sexually active man can't be



troubled to show that much concern for his actions. These women drive out of the parking lot of Planned Parenthood with tears in their eyes because they have not only killed their own child, but also the relationship with the man who would not take responsibility.

It is observed time and again that women while heaving their innards lament, “I hate it when I do this do myself.” Their thoughts are unknown as they exit Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion

provider.



Planned Parenthood is **America's Giant Vomitorium.**

There men and women, who cannot resist sexual encounters, purchase over-the-counter pills which brings upon the woman the safe medical condition known as "hemorrhaging."

The woman is told that self-induced hemorrhaging is an excellent way of forcibly expelling any potential "conceptus" the "morning after" a lunch or dinner liaison.

Younger women in large numbers are cruelly categorized as "nympho" by medical professionals, school board counselors, and by state and federal government bureaucrats.



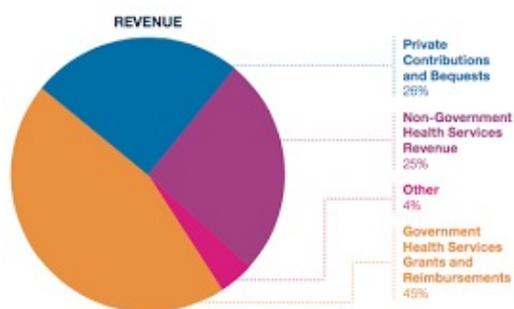
NBC's popular series *Parenthood* depicts the first abortion on a major network entertainment program in years, reaching millions of people with a storyline that connects broader segments of the public about abortion. Planned Parenthood has also worked with major television programs and media outlets such as *Girls* and *Cosmopolitan* to promote our brand and cover our issues.

Nymphomania describes the habit of having intercourse even in small quantities as a result of no personal control and no concept of consequences. Younger women are counseled to embrace their nymphomania as something normal and prescribed over-the-counter pills to mitigate one of the consequences of such a habit.

When the pills do not work, then the same agencies and counselors encourage the young women to come to Planned Parenthood which is more than happy to accept their money or that of their "loving" and "good-hearted" parents and boyfriends to expel the product of their self-indulgence; thereby allowing the younger women to stay slim and trim.

Most citizens of the "modern" world would identify such behavior as liberating, responsible, and certainly something to be subsidized by the taxpayer.

Combined Revenue and Expenses: National and Affiliates



In fact, the U.S. Government donated \$540.6 million in Fiscal Year 2013 to Planned Parenthood to promote and perpetuate the American habit of baby vomiting.

Monies have poured into the coffers of Planned Parenthood regardless of whether Republicans or Democrats owned Congress and the White House.

Most Americans tragically participate in one form or another in the baby vomiting activities of Planned Parenthood.

HEALTH CARE EXPANSION

Millions more people begin getting free access to birth control, breast exams, and other preventive care as the **Affordable Care Act** goes into effect, with the women's preventive benefit that Planned Parenthood led the fight to include.

2. LEGAL WINS

As part of a growing litigation docket with active cases in 12 states last year, courts strike down laws in Arizona and Indiana that would have blocked Medicaid patients from getting care at Planned Parenthood.

And yet, this attitude may have slightly changed because of increased knowledge deriving from a series of undercover videos of Planned Parenthood's activities undertaken by The Center for Medical Progress.

It has been documented that Planned Parenthood has been altering abortion procedures in order to deliver intact children for the purpose of gutting them while they are still living and selling their fresh body parts. This practice has increased Planned Parenthood's prestige in the pseudo medical profession. Of course without missing a beat, progressives -- including Democrats, Hollywood, the LGBT lobby (hoping for a cure for AIDS) and Medical Research -- have come to the defense of **America's Giant Vomitorium**. These citizens of "modern" times view the vomiting of unborn children as liberating, responsible, and certainly something to be subsidized by taxpayers.

Now Planned Parenthood has claimed it no longer accepts money for baby parts, but really nothing has changed. They continue to promote and enforce the vomiting of children from the womb in order to allow America's sexual disorder to flourish.



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Faith + Humour = 36 Years of Marriage [at joy of nine9]

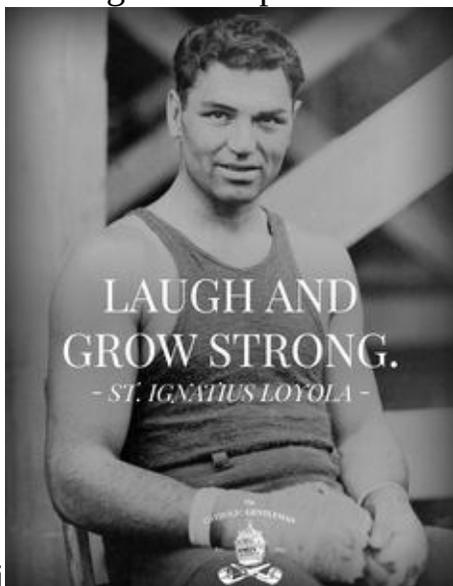
My husband, Michael, and I have been married for 36 years, and we are happy and still in love. Surprisingly, we have become one in reality, deeply in tune with each other's spirits even though we are still opposites in personality. Our tangible joy is inexplicable through secular eyes, because from all outward appearances our life together has been a tough journey including poverty, nine kids, overwhelming chores on a small family farm and long-term, clinical depression.



Accessing Power in the Sacrament of Marriage

The grace available in the Sacrament of Marriage is not some esoteric theology; it is real and it is powerful. The power available in the sacrament is what kept my husband and I together through the rough years. We both understood, beyond a doubt, that God brought us together. We never questioned this basic call from God, our vocation together, even during the dark years.

I have always managed to keep our difficulties in perspective through humour. One of my jokes is on the



typical marriage vow about for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. I say, "Well, we've seen worse, poorer and sickness and we are more than ready for better, richer and healthier." Then I dissolve into gales of laughter. I must admit Michael never fails to

simply raise one eyebrow in my direction and smile apologetically at our visitors. However, the truth is humour works. It has been proven, when people laugh at their foibles and do not take themselves too seriously, their problems suddenly shrink and they in turn gain perspective. Over-dramatizing conflict is deadly. This is simply an example of cognitive therapy in action: take a step away from each conflict and looking at the big picture, through the eyes of God.

The Gift of Suffering

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



The Role of Faith in Our Marriage

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

Advice for People Who Are Dating

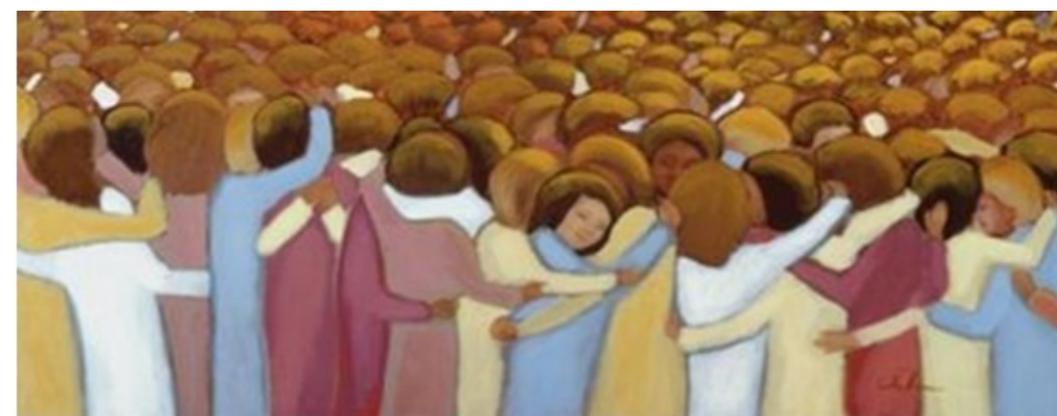
Many young people wait secretly for their knight in shining armor to whisk them off their feet so they can live happily ever after, or for a wonderful woman to lift off a sense of aimlessness. Although we laugh at such ridiculous fantasies as the stuff of naive, lovesick teenagers, we all must face the deep temptation

within ourselves to seek out a future partner to fulfill all of our needs. We have been brainwashed by Hollywood's romantic movies. The truth is, counter to what secular society would lead us to believe, only God can meet our core need for love. Countless marriages end up in divorce, because people have embraced the crazy notion that the man or woman of their dreams will completely satisfy and fulfill them. This is a lie.

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

Advice

Society does not prepare people for a Christian marriage. Couples have to actively seek out help and advice. I suggest a multitude of tools from reading insightful books, conferences, retreats, confession, prayer, spiritual direction and counselling which help couples mature and grow together as one in Christ. As a newlywed, I wish someone had explained to me that in marriage partners irritate each other by pulling out each other's darkness, bringing their wounds to the surface. Once I understood this spiritual dynamic, I quit blaming Michael and pointing out his faults and instead centered on my own need for repentance and growth.



I spent years as a pitiful, innocent victim, crying my eyes out over my plight married to an insensitive man when all along my own sins blocked Christ's love from flowing to both of us in our marriage. Once I focused on my own need for growth rather than on Michael's issues, the Spirit of God could finally deal with my own sinfulness and need for healing. If I had thrown up my hands and divorced Michael, chances are the second fellow would have turned out exactly the same. My sinfulness triggered my husband's sinfulness. Period. I had to stop blaming and pointing out Michael's failings if I wanted a great marriage. Instead of pointing out the grain of sand in his eye, I had to allow God to show me the log of faults in my own eye. God designed us so only His love will fill the desperate desires of our hearts. Once I understood this truth, I could allow real love, respectful love, to grow between Michael and myself without making crushing demands on the poor guy to fulfill the role of God in my life.



Why We Have a Large Family

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

Looking back over 36 years of marriage. I am filled with the joy of the Lord, grateful my husband is a patient man.

[linking with theology is a verb](#)

This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanuneau.wordpress.com/2015/11/17/worth-revisiting-faith-humour-36-years-of-marriage/>
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Erring on the Side of Eucharistic Excess [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



The soul cannot expect to be anything but lukewarm without the grace of frequent Holy Communion.

~ [Dom Hubert Van Zeller, OSB](#)

Cecilia had served the 7:00 a.m. Mass on Saturday, and I was driving her home. She'd be heading back to church at 2 p.m. that same day to serve a wedding Mass, so I attempted a clever remark. "Too bad you're not serving the Vigil at 4:30 this afternoon – three Masses in one day would be a family record!"

"I couldn't do it anyway," she responded, shooting me down. "You can only receive Holy Communion twice in the same day." It's indeed true that the Church limits our intake of edible grace – of the Eucharistic Jesus, of the comestible God himself – to twice a day ([Cn 917](#)). And if we received him the first time outside of Mass – say, at a Communion service in a nursing home or hospital – then the second time has to take place within the context of a Mass. This is to ensure that we don't just sit around all day and fatten ourselves on sacramental grace – to take in the divine nutrients well beyond our spiritual caloric needs. After all, Jesus himself established a standard ration of "daily bread" in the [Our Father](#).

"Pretty impressive," I granted my daughter. "Not many eighth-graders would know Canon Law when it comes to frequency of Communion." I could've clarified that acolytes aren't required to receive the Eucharist in order to serve at altar, but I let it go in favor of affirming her liturgical acumen. In any case, her instincts were correct: the Church has made it clear that the norm is to receive the Eucharist whenever we attend the liturgy. "It is in keeping with the very meaning of the Eucharist," reads the [Catechism](#), "that the faithful, if they have the required dispositions, *receive communion when they participate in the Mass*" (emphasis in the original).

That naturally led into a discussion of the Easter duty – the requirement that Catholics who've made their first Holy Communion must receive the Eucharist at least once a year, ideally during the Easter season ([Cn 920](#)). It was hard for her to grasp that such a precept was necessary. I observed that it used to be pretty widespread to [rarely receive Holy Communion](#) on account of extreme scrupulosity. Of course, one could argue that the opposite is the case these days, but I appreciated Cecilia's response. "Even if you have doubts – even if you're not quite sure if you *should* receive," she said, "it's better to go ahead



and let Jesus figure it out.”

Allow me to interject here that I’m confident that my daughter has a good understanding of proper interior preparation with regards to the sacraments – that one must not be conscious of any unconfessed mortal sin before approaching the altar, in other words. As already indicated, she has a well-rounded grasp of Church teaching, and I know she’s familiar with St. Paul’s injunction to the Corinthians: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” ([CCC 1385](#)).

On the other hand, I like Cecilia’s gut sense that we’re not to starve ourselves either – whether from an old-fashioned Eucharistic anorexia borne of scrupulosity or, more likely today, an overreliance on substitutionary and inferior sources of pseudo-spiritual sustenance. Better to receive Holy Communion even when you’re in a crummy place with God than not to receive it at all.

Besides, the Eucharist itself forgives our minor offenses, and it helps us to avoid offending God any more in the future. “If, as often as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins,” [writes St. Ambrose](#), “I should always receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins.” In other words, if we wait until we’re really worthy to receive the Eucharist, we’ll never receive it – I think that’s what Cecilia was getting at. It’s like waiting until we’re ready to get married – or waiting until everything is in place to have a baby. We’ll never get to that place – we all know that, right? We’d be waiting forever.

Even so, it’s also true that the Eucharist, like any sacrament, isn’t automatic – it doesn’t work moral and spiritual wonders without our cooperation and effort. “Frequent Communion is not magic,” writes Fr. Van Zeller. “The Holy Eucharist does not, as if by a charm, bend an ill-disposed character so that, in spite



of itself, the soul finds itself rising to the heights.”

Jesus is really present whether we apprehend him or not, and his grace is present in his sacraments whether we assimilate it or not. But *we* still have to apprehend him, and *we* still have to assimilate him. That is to say: we have to do our part! God *could* save us against our will, I suppose, but he isn’t going to do it. We’re free agents with will and intelligence. We *know* in our intellect that we’ve been granted the free gift of grace that can save us, and we can willfully *choose* to cooperate with that grace – not resist it,

that is, like a child refusing the medicine that will foster healing and restore life.

“Only action is the proof of sincerity,” [Fr. Anthony Paone](#) observes, and going to Communion even when we have doubts or scruples is action that is oriented to sincere spiritual growth. Along with that, however, we must also act to align our whole selves, interiorly and exteriorly, with our desires for spiritual growth.

We can’t expect Holy Communion – or even Jesus, which amounts to the same thing – to do all the work. We’re not automatons, we’re not mindless marionettes, waiting helplessly on the Lord to save us *despite ourselves*. Not at all.

In fact, we’re very active sinners, in need of grace, in need of Jesus, and he expects us to approach him in Holy Communion with all manner of mixed motives and complicated aspirations – do we really want to be saints? Well, yes...and no. We show up at Mass, though, and we go forward with everybody else for Holy Communion, because...what? What do we want?

We want the Savior who spread himself around like a dissipated feast, a rolling banquet through time and space. We want to become whom we eat.

This contribution is available at <http://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/2015/11/15/erring-on-the-side-of-eucharistic-excess/>
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Cultural resistance and creative subversion [at Catholic Deacon]

Is there a culture war? What a stupid question. It's stupid because the only appropriate answer is another question, Who cares? As a Christian I am tired of hearing about various options. I have the option to live my faith fully, which means engaging in and not running from society and culture. Hence, the only "option" I have found attractive in the least is the one whose creator told me in person he did not it branded as an "option"- Dr Chad Pecknold's

["Dominican Option"](#)

. Another person whose work is starting to influence me in these matters is Dr Michael Martin. I highly recommend his book

[The Submerged Reality: Sophiology and the Turn to a Poetic Metaphysics](#)

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Triumph of the Church, by Peter Paul Rubens, ca. 1625

Let's be clear, the only leaven the Lord warned His disciples to be wary of was the leaven of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and Herod (

[Matt 16:6-12](#)

;

[Mark 8:14-21](#)

;

[Luke 12:1](#)

). While we need to avoid bad leaven (i.e., hypocrisy, condescension, and the corruption of worldly power), we are to be leaven: "He spoke to them another parable. 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened'" (

[Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20-21](#)

). There are innumerable ways to constructively engage contemporary culture. The least effective of these is by condemning it all wholesale. The fundamental issues and questions with which women and men wrestle remain perennial. As Luigi Giussani noted, it is precisely these fundamental issues and these existential questions that constitute our humanity.

You may have caught wind of the controversy surrounding the rejection of a Church of England-produced 60-second ad featuring the Lord's Prayer by Digital Cinema Media (DCM), the firm that handles advertising for Great Britain's three largest cinema chains. Neil Davenport, commenting on this rather unsurprising development for

[Spiked](#)

(a secular on-line publication), noted:

The banning of the Lord's Prayer ad may seem like a minor story, but it exposes how bereft of meaning and purpose Western societies have become. The tragedy is that this uncertainty only acts as an invitation for anti-Western Islamists to pose their ideology as the principled alternative to that of decadent, hollow Europe. A nominally Christian country in which some people deem that a 60-second advert featuring the Lord's Prayer is 'offensive' has surely lost the plot

So it seems that the question for us Christians is, How do we help our society regain the plot? My answer is, through culture, genuine culture, human culture, which does not prudishly ignore any aspect of reality as we experience it, or foster a bizarre, sentimental sub-culture.

As a result, our

traditio

for this final Friday of this Year of Grace is The Church of England's Lord's Prayer ad:

Given that I blew at least one mind by entitling a post

["Eucharist as immanentized eschaton,"](#)

let me note that by asserting that the Eucharist "immanentizes the eschaton," all that I was trying to say, albeit in a philosophical and alliterative way, is that in each and every Eucharist the Lord returns and the saints rejoice. In other words, when we participate in the Eucharist we participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb, in Christ's ultimate triumph. This is how the Eucharist becomes "the only place of resistance to annihilation of the human subject." In light of this, please note 2 things:

1. Resistance, despite not having the appearance of power, is

not

futile

2. Resistance is both joy-filled and beautiful

In the second chapter of his autobiography,

[Surprised by Joy](#)

, entitled "Concentration Camp," C.S. Lewis traced back to his early years at a terrible boarding school what, in time, became a major part of his contribution to helping modern Western society maintain or regain "the plot". Referring to the resistance of the boys to their awful headmaster, "Oldie," Lewis wrote,

We stood foursquare against the common enemy. I suspect that this pattern, occurring twice so early my life [the other time was his camaraderie with his brother *vice* their father after the death of his mother], has unduly biased my whole outlook. To this day the vision of the world which comes most naturally to me is one in which "we two" or "we few" (and in a sense "we happy few") stand together against something stronger and larger

We all know how Lewis engaged culture. He did so by engaging it creatively. Pope St John Paul II, rather than taking up arms and joining the armed resistance against the Germans after Poland was conquered, also chose cultural resistance, thus aiding his country in maintaining the plot. In addition to resisting the Nazis, the effects of this cultural resistance were strong enough to ultimately defeat Soviet-style communism more than 40 years later.

The important thing to attend to here is that Christianity, when practiced well, is a subversive force. Don't believe me? Forget Star Wars and read St Paul, a man who very clearly set out to creatively subvert the Empire- Star Wars is a very pedestrian story by comparison. One can also consider the conditions under which Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, became human. He did not become human as the emperor of Rome, Persia, or any other powerful empire, but, to borrow John P Meier's title, He became incarnate as "a marginal Jew"; a marginal member of a marginal people living under Roman occupation. Here's something simpler yet- just recite the Lord's Prayer.

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2015/11/cultural-resistance-and-creative.html>
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Less Talking - More Doing [at Through the Eyes of the Faithful]

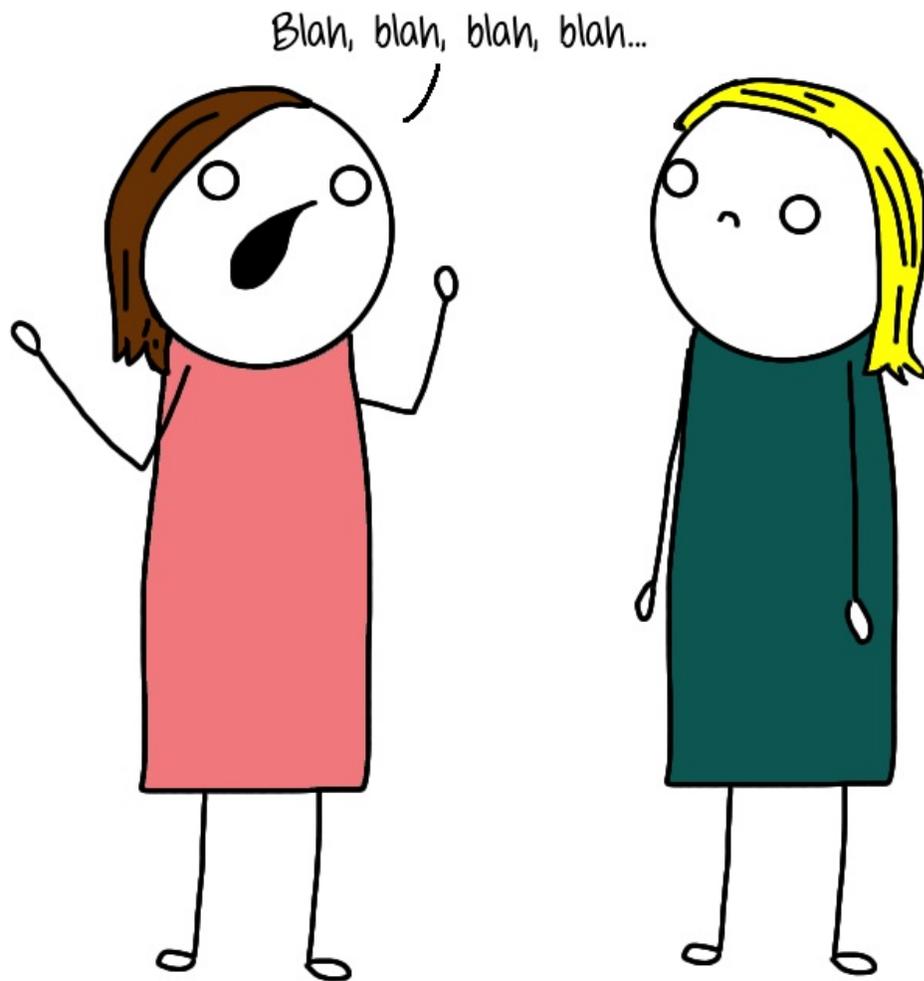
I was tossing and turning one night, unable to sleep from frustration and discouragement. Try as I might, I felt like my words of evangelization were the equivalent of spitting on a forest fire. All of my efforts seemed utterly fruitless and I thought that perhaps I had missed God's will for me entirely. I thought I should give up, scrap this blog, and admit failure. My heart cried out to God to just tell me what He wanted from me. "Lord, I want to do your will, but *please*, I don't know what you want me to do! Don't be subtle, I'm too dense for that. A boot to the head, neon sign, or something of that order is most necessary."

As usual, when I'm throwing a tantrum like this, God did not give me what I wanted. Instead, a gentle message worked its way into my heart, two actually. The first was a reminder of some wise words from Blessed Teresa of Calcutta: God does not ask us to be successful, only to be faithful. And: If you are discouraged it is a sign of pride because it shows you trust in your own powers. Ouch. I had to realize that my idea of success and God's are not necessarily the same. I don't know God's plan; I can only be faithful to what I think He is calling me to do. If this blog stays relatively unknown forever, and nobody but a stray friend with words of encouragement ever comments on it, then so be it. It is not for me to decide whether or not this is worthwhile. I may never know God's purpose in my sitting for countless hours trying to drown out the noise of children to focus long enough to get these thoughts out of my head and on the screen...and I don't need to.

The second message was the title of this post: less talking, more doing. Over and over it repeated in my mind and I could feel the start of something. I could also feel the realization that I wasn't getting anymore sleep because once the gears start going on a new idea it's hard to make them stop, even if it is three in the morning. But what it turned into, is the idea that we do so much talking and so little doing. This is true more today than it has ever been. Thanks to modern technology we are able to communicate with anyone anywhere in the world. How ironic and sad that we are more capable of communicating now than we have ever been, yet we've never been more out of touch with our fellow man. We can surround ourselves with everything we like and nothing we don't. The more we "like" on Facebook, the more we see of what we like. Don't like what somebody has to say? You can make it go away! Somebody getting on your nerves too much? You can unfriend and block them! We can create our own little virtual bubble to live in and the effect it is having on society is undeniable. We feel entitled to never be upset or offended...ever. We declare the need for safe spaces and healing spaces and trigger warnings when people are going to say things that might upset us. And finally, we consider it helping our fellow man when we share a post or change our Facebook profile picture to raise awareness.

Now, I understand the blaring hypocrisy of a blogger calling out the virtual world. This post will be shared on Facebook, and I'll ask everyone to read it while encouraging people to spend less time on Facebook. Social media has its purpose and can be a really good tool used to accomplish great deeds which would otherwise be impossible. But it has a way of taking over our lives and I'm sure most people can acknowledge that. We need to find a balance of spending just enough time on social media and technology in general to gear us up to get back to real life with focus and purpose.

So what's your point?



What do I mean by "less talking, more doing?" Let's stop spending so much time broadcasting our opinions and more time putting them into action. Rather than trying to convince each other that we're right, let's show why. Speaking directly to my fellow Christians, put your Faith into action. Don't just tell people what you believe, show them. Show them the fruit of Christ living within you. Show people what God's love makes you *do* and let them know that He is the reason.

Non-believers, you're not off the hook here. I hear it all the time that we don't need God to be good people. Let's see it. What does your love for humanity make you do? How are you moved to act by what you believe?

Now, do I expect everyone to run out there and adopt twelve kids, end world hunger, and bring about peace in the Middle East? Of course not. We have jobs, kids, responsibilities coming out our ears and I get that. Now, perhaps many of us could be a lot less busy, but let's not go off on that tangent(yet). The point is, everyone can do *something*. Whether you're flat broke, have a brood of children to mind, or whatever else heavy responsibility, we can all do something to help one another, encourage one another,

lift each other up. Dare I say, that cross on your shoulders might actually feel a bit lighter if you take some time to help someone carry theirs.

Let me be clear, that I am not at all suggesting that we all just stop talking about our Faith, opinions, issues and so on. I applaud my fellow evangelizers and anyone who is willing to carry on civilized discussion and debate with people they disagree with. It is truly a lost art in our society. But it seems that too often, talking is all we do. When I was an atheist, it wasn't the debates I had with my brother that made an impression on me. It was how he and his wife loved and cared for me unconditionally. They supported me through a very difficult time in my life and it was such a powerful witness to the love they had in their hearts. We can all talk until we're blue in the face, but it's through our actions and especially our sacrifices that we will change hearts and minds.

There's so much to say about this, and I intend to make this an ongoing topic on my blog, but I am determined to keep this post short. What I want to do today, is just start a little flame burning in the hearts of anyone who reads this. Let's start something together. Make it your goal to do something good today.

Find someone who needs help and just help them. You don't have to save the world, Christ has already done that. But you can be His hands and feet here and now. Show someone they are loved. There are so many possibilities and this will look different for everyone. Pay for the person behind you in the drive thru. Tell them God loves them and you hope they have a great day. Take a homeless person to lunch and sit down and eat with them. It doesn't have to be a stranger. So often we look to help those far away and overlook the ones right in front of us. Put down your phone and give your spouse your undivided attention. Call up an old friend and catch up. Read your child a book when you would rather be watching t.v. Just keep your eyes open and God will do the rest.

Come on, let's start something. Until next time, may God bless you.

This contribution is available at <http://eyesofthefaithful.blogspot.com/2015/11/less-talking-more-doing.html>
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The Lord spoke to St. Francis, "Go, and repair my house, which as you see is falling completely into ruin!" [at The Shield of Faith]

It was St. Francis who crossed the battle lines during the Fifth Crusade in order to try to convert the Muslims to Christ and His Church, setting an example which is unheeded today. Not only are we not to "proselytize," but in just what condition is the Church to which one should be converted? Today the Church is being torn by Progressivist laxity on the one hand, and those trying to preserve traditional Roman Catholicism on the other. The words the Lord spoke to St. Francis over 800 years ago seem to be more relevant and urgent now than they were then. As to what specifically must be done to "repair" His House, I will leave that to your comments below.

"Francis left the town one day to meditate out-of-doors, and as he was passing by the church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse with age, he felt urged to go in and pray. There as he knelt in prayer before a painted image of the Crucified, he felt greatly comforted in spirit and his eyes were full of tears as he gazed at the cross. Then, all of a sudden, he heard a voice coming from the cross and telling him three times, "Francis, go and repair my house. You see it is all falling down."

Francis was alone in the church and he was terrified at the sound of the voice, but the power of its message penetrated his heart and he went into an ecstasy. Eventually, he came back to himself and prepared to obey the command he had received. He was quite willing to devote himself entirely to repairing the ruined church of San Damiano, although the message really referred to the universal Church which Christ "won for himself at the price of his own blood" (Acts 20:28), as the Holy Spirit afterwards made him realize and he himself explained to the friars."

(St. Bonaventure,

Major Life of St. Francis

, circa 1263 A.D., Chap. II, no. 1).

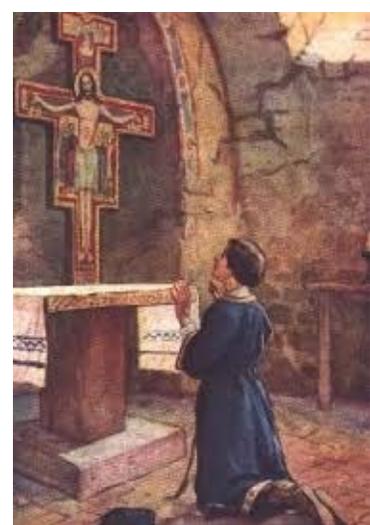
". . . while he was walking near the church of San Damiano, an inner voice bade him go in and pray. He obeyed, and kneeling before an image of the crucified Savior, he began to pray most devoutly. A tender, compassionate voice then spoke to him: "Francis, do you not see that my house is falling into ruin? Go, and repair it for me." Trembling and amazed Francis replied: "Gladly I will do so O Lord." He had understood that the Lord was speaking of that very church which, on account of its age, was indeed falling into ruin.

These words filled him with the greatest joy and inner light because in spirit he knew that it was indeed Jesus Christ who had spoken to him. On leaving the church he found the priest who had charge of it sitting outside, and taking a handful of money from his purse, he said: "I beg you, Sir, to buy oil and keep the lamp before this image of Christ constantly alight."

(

Legend of the Three Companions

, circa 1246 A.D., Chapter V).



http://www.bspenance.org/The_Crucifix_our_living_book.shtml

"Changed now perfectly in heart and soon to be changed in body too, he was walking one day near the church of St. Damiano, which had nearly fallen to ruin and was abandoned by everyone. Led by the Spirit, he went in and fell down before the crucifix in devout and humble supplication; and smitten by unusual visitations, he found himself other than he had been when he entered. While he was thus affected, something unheard of before happened to him: the painted image of Christ crucified moved its lips and spoke. Calling him by name it said: "Francis, go, repair my house, which as you see is falling completely to ruin."

Trembling, Francis was not a little amazed and became almost deranged by these words. He prepared himself to obey and gave himself completely to the fulfillment of this command. But since he felt that the change he had undergone was beyond expression, it is becoming that we should be silent about what he could not express. From then on compassion for the Crucified was rooted in his holy soul, and, and it can be piously supposed, the stigmata of the venerable passion were deeply imprinted in his heart, though not as yet upon his flesh."

(Thomas of Celano,

Second Life of St. Francis

, circa 1247 A.D., Chapter VI, no. 10).



"The church of San Damiano seemed to be collapsing from old age, already beyond repair, desolate, without devout worshipers and without prayers The painted wooden image of the Crucified Lord that hung by the altar had survived all that decay - an image of goodness and suffering, expressing with extraordinary vividness both martyrdom and love. One day, going up to the city, Francis went into the church, knelt, and began to pray. He asked to be given light in the midst of all his darkness, to know the divine will, in accordance with the promise made during the night in Spoleto.

Suddenly it seemed to him that Jesus' gaze was fixed on him. There was no doubt about it. Those eyes had become animated, taken on life. They were speaking and expressing a burning passion. And, as in the night of the vision of the enchanted castle, the cavalier consecrated to a high undertaking distinctly heard his name being called. The words fell like a whisper, a light sigh, scarcely perceptible.

"Francis, go and repair my house, which, as you see, is falling into ruin." After a short pause, the sad call was repeated for the second time, and for the third time. Francis got up, frightened. The church was again sunk into a silence without beginning or end. He went out, sought the old priest who had custody of the place, and offered him all the money he had with him so that he might relight the lamp before the crucifix.

Then he rushed up to Assisi. He went to the shop [of his father] and took down some scarlet, the noblest and most expensive cloth that then existed, used for making mantles suitable for the grandeur of kings and elaborate gowns with trains for beautiful women. Francis wanted to use it to cover the poor abandoned church in sumptuous purple."

(Arnaldo Fortini,

Nova Vita di San Francesco

, 1959, trans. by Helen Moak, Chap. 6. Fortini was mayor of Assisi for 20 years, and his 800 page book is considered the most authoritative of the modern biographies.)

The Rights of Evil [at WordPress.com]



God's Nature – What Man Resists

God's nature is love in the full, self-sacrificial form. To experience Him is to feel at first an impulse to the kindness one should show to others, and given good soil to grow in, it becomes a devotion to the demotion of one's personal desires for the good of all, knowing that in turn one receives the highest quality of humanity; happiness, contentment, and peace. It is a virtue of humanity that cannot be replicated through man's own endeavors.

Anyone who would contend that their engagement and successful navigation through life is due to their singular force is selfishly ignoring the backs of others upon which they climbed or the receiving nourishment of one order or another from others. No matter how hard one may try, the inevitable truth of God's work in one's life is unmeasurable. While the atheist can deny He exists, the atheist cannot deny the assistance of others in his or her life. There, the potential of God always resides and the atheist cannot shake it off. There, the self-sacrificial nature of God and His call for mankind to demonstrate a similar nature resides to lift man away from his inclinations to himself to the aspirations of man in God's form; a society for the benefit of all.

The first paragraph in the Prologue of the Catechism of the Catholic Church reads:

“God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church.”

I know of no constitution of a government of man that reads so eloquently and lovingly of the hopes for man in his society. The inclusive nature of such a truth goes far beyond any statement that secular man can assert, for it recognizes man's capacity for evil and yet forgives it in the hope that all mankind would realize the truth of self-sacrifice, of love. Secular man likewise recognizes man's capacity for evil, yet there are few provisions for forgiveness; preferring conditioning to whatever temporal, relative thought that is brought about by power. Secular society builds prisons, so as to not have to deal with its own short-comings. God builds His Church, so as to deal with man's short-comings. The first seeks to exclude, the second seeks to include.

The Arts

We see the nature of God best expressed in our arts. Man knows what art is naturally, and with a unified voice. He knows what art is not when there is no such unity of voice. We see this played out consistently in our society to the point where we force feed our society with those inventions of corrupted art that assault the dignity of man rather than praise it. Obscenity is an absolute and we know it. We can dish it out in vast quantities, but we can never stomach it as that spiritual nourishment by which we may live.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in Chapter I, reads:

“The *human person*: With his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God’s existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul.”

This is our longing for what man calls his arts. He hopes for God with each stroke of the brush, each chisel bite into stone, each note choreographed on a sheet of music. Man hopes for the vision of God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and perfectly good character in his artistic endeavors. God is the supreme artist. The arts of man are therefore the display of God’s nature, and so when man imposes a corrupted form of art upon society, the society rebels and debates. It’s not because of varying, valid opinions by critically-acclaimed experts that man debates such, it is because man knows innately what art is; the valid expression of God’s nature. As secular man moves away from God’s form of love to a form that advantages only the person, then the visible obligations and responsibilities of true love, expressed by man through his arts, become intolerable to him. We see this movement towards the abdication of our artistic responsibilities to common good in the compositions of painters and sculptors and in the performances of singers and musicians who employ obscenity for obscenity sake. We see it in the clothing manufacturers who weave, sew, and sell clothing that promotes violence through its emulation of criminal gangs of youth caught in the grips of secular society’s own failures. It is vampirism by its very nature.

But God can lift man from his fallen nature and take man into God’s own. God, in His love for mankind, hopes for man to use his own choice, his free will, to seek He who resides within him. God calls man to the service of man, and not to himself, and in so doing to be in right relationship with Him; that right relationship being coined perhaps most simply in the question, “What would Jesus do?”

God’s Covenant with Man

God, in showing Himself to the world, has shown one singular characteristic that is the greatest cause for love; His perseverance to mankind. God’s promise to love us is eternal and a guide for man’s hopes. No constituency of mankind can make this claim. No body of mankind can demonstrate a respect for all humanity; not only in the present and on into the future, but of most importance, those of the past. Lacking respect for present man, we take from one to give to another according to relative notions. Lacking respect for future man, we kill future man for the choice of pleasures by the present man. Lacking respect for past man, those who once carried the hopes of mankind forward and now take rest from their work, we ignore their work, then disregard their work, then decry their work, and finally condemn them for their work. We live in revisionist times.

I find this denial of the work of past man to be of a most horrendous nature. It is through the countless of centuries that man has walked this earth that we are now able to step on his memory in order to rise to our

own gains. We celebrate our ingenuity when all along we have done nothing more than stolen what is not ours. We educate ourselves to sophistication through the employment of sophistry. Secular man is particularly of this sordid nature as he knows that past man has universally acknowledged the supernatural, the spiritual as in dominion over that which man is or could ever become by his own means. For secular man to achieve his goals, he must sever his dependency on God, and to do so means he must first ignore, then disregard, then decry, and then condemn all of the spiritual influence upon his shadowy dominion in a continuing act of despotism. It is in man's nature to betray, not in God's nature.

Now, man makes little attempt to resist God's covenant like he does God's nature. Rather, man wallows in God's covenant, taking full opportunity of God's steady love to advance himself while giving little to God in return for His gifts. But as man distances himself from acknowledging the One who has brought him this far, and will continue to carry him forward, he slowly moves away from the dynamic character and force of centrality and democracy to the malaise and lethargy of dissolution; leaving the door open to a distilled, secular despotism.

GK Chesterton in, *The Everlasting Man*, reinforces the nature of man's consistent failure to guard against denial of those absolute truths that have always have brought man to the pinnacles of his culture.

“If there is one fact we really can prove, from the history that we really do know, it is that despotism can be a development, often a late development and very often indeed the end of societies that have been highly democratic. A despotism may almost be defined as a tired democracy. As fatigue falls on a community, the citizens are less inclined for that eternal vigilance which has truly been called the price of liberty; and they prefer to arm only one single sentinel to watch the city while they sleep.”

Towards False Humanity

It is important to put man's construct of Christianity and all other religions into its proper place so as to understand how to use them. When we observe how Christianity is spreading into new regions of the world, like China, Russia, and Africa, it is not Christianity that is the catalyst, but rather it is humanity as God had created it in the beginning.

Christianity is the reflection of God's good nature in man. Christianity is the result of God's creation of a creature that is sentient in nature so it can acknowledge that foundational, behavioral trait that God has gifted to it for its success as shepherd of the world; love. And what better form of love is there than the monogamous, family structure. Rare the anthropologist or sociologist they would be who would take any position against the family structure of biological parents and children as the very necessity for man's ascent to the biological pinnacle of all creatures in the known universe. The family is the essential element of God's creative plan that takes mankind successfully forward in the service of God. The family is that crucial element that, in its delineation and delegation of authority through love and dependency, tampers down those thoughts, words and deeds that attempt to destabilize the family and resultant society.

Christianity and other religions are but the philosophical outlay of God's plan for mankind and we call it theology. In man's ability to acknowledge – to be conscious of – those things that lead him along the path of life, he by nature, God's nature, takes measure of his process. To sell Christianity though as man's sole guide, and not humanity, is to put the cart in front of the horse, and to analyze humanity through Christianity only creates division. Christianity is in service to man, and man is in service to God, and evidence of what I say here is borne out in the fact that for a few hundred years now, Christianity in Western civilization has failed to inspire mankind to a state of self-sacrificing love over that of a state of erotic

love and self-flagellation.

Instead, what we see is secular man selling a deception he calls humanity, and this is why he is successful in this empowered world. He claims to be selling the very thing that God gave breath to and the very hope that gave rise to Christianity as the new covenant. In the meantime, the religious man has placed that which is in service to all men – Christianity itself – above all men, and holds its iconic form out in front of itself like Constantine’s army held their marked shields before them as they went into battle against Maxentius. We see this acted out in the countless denominations of Christianity that view the egalitarian ethic as in authority over God’s Word. True humanity predates Christianity, and in so selling the deception of humanity, the secular man hopes to sweep aside all religions and God, for that which God created; the world and humanity. The son seeks to murder the Father.

Secular liberalism is a deception and a deformity of man’s good nature, as God created it. Secularism hopes to replace the authority of the family with a broader view of society as the family, and thus a new authority is being created for the provision of that which God had planned for man; divine happiness, contentment, and peace through self-sacrificial love. It is a bold claim for secularism to make and there is little argument against such a claim by those who have been lifted in material success by a force that provides for desires over hopes. Here is the deformity; desires over hopes.

Man’s desires – played out through his technology – is advanced in the service of increased communications between living individuals and groups. We strive to what appears to be a good model for an equal society; the ability to freely communicate over great distances and through even greater diversities in order to freely distribute information. We believe that this free and immediate distribution of information will lead mankind to a global cohesion of thought, word and deed that will attain universal satisfaction for all. In itself it is good, however we fail to understand there are two, vital components missing that are genetic and God created: The Biological Family as created by God, and the Second-Person Relationship as created by God. I will tackle these two components in my next two posts.

PART 7 – To come.

God Bless and Buen Camino – Reese

This contribution is available at <http://travelsOfANewChristian.com/2013/09/26/the-rights-of-evil-part-6/>
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Saints who touched me - Benedict the Moor [at walk the way]

November 1 is the feast of all saints. I'd like to share a few of the saints who have touched my life.

I grew up in the midst of the piety of the 1950s where we said the Rosary in the family during October, where we learned about the saints in Catholic school, and where there was a large statue of Saint Therese of Lisieux in our parish church.

I had an attraction to the Franciscans at this time, which continues to this day. I even got to the first Mass of Father Cyprian Harkin, ofm, the nephew of a woman who worked with my Dad.

Somehow I learned of the Franciscan Saint Benedict of Sicily or, as he was known then, Saint Benedict the Moor – now called Saint Benedict the Black, who lived in Sicily from 1526 to 1589.

Born in Sicily of parents who had been freed from slavery, he joined a group of hermits living under St. Francis' Rule for hermits. Shortly after, the pope disbanded all small groups of hermits, and Benedict joined the Franciscans.

Benedict, though illiterate and a lay brother, was chosen novice master and later guardian of the friary. But he finally asked to return to the kitchen to do what he loved – cook.

Father Cyprian found a statue for me which I had stored with friends when I left for Honduras in 2007. On my recent trip to Ames, I found the statue and it is now in my prayer room – next to a Guatemalan statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe and a Bolivian angel.



Why did St. Benedict mean so much to me in the late fifties?

This was the time of the civil rights movement and Benedict was obviously an example of holiness that is not limited to whites. His holiness also reinforced my concern for civil rights and racial equality.

Looking back, there are several other aspects of his life that touch me even now.

He was illiterate but that did not stop him from being holy or from being an example and guide for others. God does not need education to work wonders of holiness – though education helps.

In addition, he found holiness amid the pots and pans, preparing food for his brothers. He was a real servant.

I am so happy to have his statue here – as I try to be of service to the poor and to the faith community here.

I ask God for the grace to be loving and humble as Benedict was and be open to the poor.

This contribution is available at <http://walktheway.wordpress.com/2015/10/31/saints-who-touched-me-benedict-the-moor/>
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Enter in [at The Bible Freaks]



It's Advent! This strange liturgical season squeezed in right before Christmas where we are supposed to be doing a million things. Like buying presents, going holiday shopping, cooking, decorating all things and keeping up with our normal lives!

Buying presents for everyone who you have ever met? (I may exaggerate.) It can all be exhausting. I know that it often feels like that for me. Honestly I feel much of the time like Advent is just one last thing to do.. Right on top of a high list of expectations and things we really need to do in our lives right now.

Ever since I have started college, Advent has seemed rushed and even panicked.

Here's how it goes for me.

Advent Week 1

Thanksgiving happens, which is all well and good, time spent with family and friends being grateful. All is great and then comes Monday. The day after break when essentially all hell breaks loose and you discover that you have approximately 1,000 things to do this week! Plus it's Advent so you know spend a great deal of time feeling guilty about not being Advent-y enough and shopping because it's Cyber Monday and we all need a jump start on the 1,000 presents to buy.

This week you have just started is also the last week of classes so you can be prepared to be swept away by classes, projects, and things you forgot to do until the very last minute.

Advent Week 2.

Then finals week comes and you barely manage to pray on Sunday. You subsist more off of coffee than anything else. You eat, sleep (a little), and dream class notes and exam taking.

Advent Week 3

You arrive home the next week exhausted and promptly sleep/watch Christmas movies for the next three

days. Plus go to a few Christmas parties your parents dragged you too. Not to mention-it's the pink week of Advent which means joy and quite realistically the only joy you can imagine is your pillow. Besides the fact that you still have not even thought about Advent or done anything about it because exhaustion has set in.

I hope I am the only one who experiences this beautiful season in this *magical* way (sarcasm intended.) But I know that is not the truth. The hustle and bustle, the business that accompanies all of this can drag us down. Our expectations and the Target website failing to respond can get to us.

Which is why I am going to enter in. To enter into the crazy, the stressed, the mess. I am not going to wish it all to go away. Often I think, if only this were different, if my life were different I could enter in more fully to Advent.

Only that is not true. It's my life. I will still have the same life 10 years from now because I am still me.

So I am going to enter in, and I am going to ask the Lord to enter into it all with me. To enter in with me to the stress, the websites that refuse to respond, the exams that have to be taken, the shopping that needs to be done. I am going to get the important things done but I am not going to do them alone. I am going to enter into it all with the Lord. To have him help me everyday because no matter what season it is, He is and always will be my lifeline.

I am going to enter into the mystery, that is the here and now, the today. I am going to enter into this season and savor all of it. I am going to enter in with the Lord.

If two minutes in the Bible is all the time I can spend while trying to get it all done then I will enter fully into those two minutes.

Be not Afraid!

-Emily

Enter In

A very honest Advent
reflection.

<http://thebiblefreaks.blogspot.com/>

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The Hippocratic oath & Bruce Jenner [at Miss Em]

As the world watched and Vanity Fair showed off

[Bruce Jenner](#)

as a woman there has been a shock-wave reaction in America. Everyone was talking about it, good or bad.

As I heard this news I pondered the thought process of the doctor who did that surgery.

There is the old adage that is applied to the medical profession "First do no harm."

This line is attributed to the Hippocratic oath but it is not actually in there. However the Hippocratic oath is in the spirit of that quote.

I know because I researched the

[hippocratic oath](#)

and found a version that is used by John's Hopkins.

I highly recommend that you read the oath because I found it to be a profound reflection on what the medical profession should be.

I might also add, there was not point in that oath that said unnecessary and potentially life threatening surgeries should be done at all times. Nothing that said, if someone is not sick you should probably change their body so they will forever have to take drugs to feel "normal."

In no place did it say that healthy people should have surgery so that they can be unhealthy.

Doctors help people who are sick get better. Doctors are not supposed to take healthy bodies and change them so that they will be sick. Doctors heal the sick not make people sick.

"I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, **but a sick human being**, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.

I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure. I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of **healing** those who seek my help." Emphasis added. If you just read that in shock thinking that perhaps I am foolishly implying that to want a sex change means that you are, mentally unstable then I would like to clear that up. That is exactly what I am saying.

I am going to say the taboo. Men and women are different.

They are different and there is nothing that can change that. I am a psychology major and I know for a fact that men and woman's brains are different. Our brains function differently, males brains are more

lateralized and specialized.

What are we to do about that difference for Bruce Jenner? Will we recommend brain surgery in hopes that we can make his brain more feminine as well?

Bruce is a man, a person, a human being. He is a man. However he has decided that he is not, he is simply refusing to believe who he is, and he had surgery to prove it.

It's as if he woke up tomorrow and told us he was Kim Kardashian.

I think we would say something, explain that is not who he is at all. But since he thinks he is a woman our society is just going to let him be one.

My point is that Bruce is sick, mentally sick.

And we are applauding him for it.

I cannot help but think of that doctor and of other people who are truly sick.

How many cancer patients would give anything to avoid surgery, to stop taking medicine, to be well again.

Then there is Bruce Jenner who is now not only mentally ill but physically as well. He was never meant to be a woman. He is a man.

The last part of the hippocratic oath mentions the joy of healing.

There is no joy of healing without healing. The doctors who did surgery on Bruce made him physically sick. It is unnatural. We have companies like Chipotle where they have done away with modified foods.

And we are clapping for the modified people.

We have the adage "Do no harm" for a reason.

Doctors need to step up and start with that.

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Celebrating Christmas 24-7 [at Lyfe Unscripted]

In addition to the 1/5 of the population that was arguing about red cups last week. There is also the before Thanksgiving, Christmas debate.

I have been listening to Christmas music since the first weekend of October. It's early for most people. In fact most people are scandalized to find me listening to Christmas music before Thanksgiving!

I don't really get it. I think that people are worried that if we listen to Christmas music too early we will be sick of Christmas music by the time Christmas comes around.

Of course, there is also the encampment that includes my mother who think that you should start Christmas the day before and then celebrate far into January.

Personally I am part of both encampments. Both the before and the after Christmas celebrating.

After putting some thought into it. I think we can never celebrate Christmas enough.

The real point of Christmas is less about red cups and twinkling lights no matter how much I love both of them. The real point is about Christ coming to the world, as a baby!

God. Coming to earth changes everything. His presence on earth changes everything.

The day that Christ came to earth, the world changed, maybe even more than it will ever and has ever changed.

The day Christ came transformed the world. I don't think we can celebrate that enough. That truth changes our lives forever. It still changes, impacts and transforms our lives every day, including today.

I don't think we can ever possibly celebrate Christ's coming to earth enough.

That's why I say bring on the Christmas carols, the twinkling lights and everything else. The Christmas season might be the only time that we ever even think or even have any measure of true gratitude for Christ's coming to earth.

All the things we do on earth, can come nowhere close enough to the real celebration that should happen everyday for Christ coming to earth.

We are human. We fall short. We get caught up in silly things like red cups, and when we need to start and end celebrating. The real purpose however is that we celebrate.

That we celebrate a child. That we celebrate the coming of Christ in all his glory into all our silly mess.

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Completely Protecting Children [at Declaring the Whole Counsel]

Today, we spend much time on protecting children from sexual abuse and that is a good thing for us to be doing. We have background checks, training courses, and various kinds of checks and balances in our ecclesiastical procedures. I am wondering, however, about our priorities. As grave an evil as child sexual abuse is (and the sexual abuse of children is

a horrific evil

--do not misunderstand me!), have we shown an equal amount of concern about protecting our children from spiritual abuse? We have CCD classes and preparation for receiving the Sacraments, but that is not all that it takes to protect the soul of a child.

What measures have we taken to protect our children's souls? Do we have some sort of "background check" to determine whether our catechists have ever caused spiritual abuse in their past history (or parents for that matter)? Do we have any means of determining even how to quantify the spiritual abuse of child? Yes, I myself know that sexual abuse is a devastating thing for a child to go through, and it even leads many of those who experience it into lives of misery and (often) other forms of evil (in addition to those who commit suicide as a result of the abuse).

How about spiritual abuse though? How many lives are destroyed by spiritual abuse? We would likely be shocked were to find out the actual number of children who have been taught (intentionally or unintentionally) that the world's pleasures are greater than God's joys (which is, of course, a spiritual abuse). This is bad enough when it happens in a pagan family; it is all the more horrible when it happens in a Catholic home. I will not say where or when, but I have spoken to children that I know have been spiritually abused. They have been taught that the Sacraments are options; they have been led to believe that holiness is boring; and they have been encouraged to "follow their heart" (thus placing themselves on the throne of judgment).

No, I do not want to start policing the activities of parents, but we cannot continue to treat physical abuse as more detrimental than spiritual abuse, when both can lead a child away from God and into eternal damnation. We as Catholics believe that we are a "whole person" in both body and soul, and that means that when we protect a person, we must protect them body and soul. If we keep them physically safe, and yet allow them to be more catechized by the lusts of the world than by the virtues of Christ, we have not truly protected our children.

The Scriptures give some of the most stern warnings to those who would lead children astray (cf. Mark 9:42). That can be either a spiritual or a physical action, but it usually is both. Those who make the decisions about your CCD classes, and those who are teaching your children should also be held accountable for how they lead children's spirits. There is something genuinely wrong about having a catechist who has children that have left the faith, yet few seem to treat this with the same urgency as a catechist who once physically touched a child in an immoral manner. Why?

I see no one today working to resolve this challenging situation. Few are even aware that it exists. Something has to be done to find a proper balance in "protecting God's children", and that means both in

their bodies and souls (because both are tender and vulnerable). I love my children; both those that I fathered, as well as those who are under my spiritual fatherhood in the Church. I shudder to think that any of them would ever be abused either in body or soul. What can we as a Church do to protect them

completely

?

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God's favor [at With Us Still]

It's well past the mid-point of November, but there were flowers in full bloom at All Souls Church today.

My first time ever to visit the parish—drawn there by the funeral of the 92-year-old mother of a dear friend. And what an unexpected joy, I must say...the handsome little garden I discovered just outside [the church doors](#).



Favored...by an unexpected burst of beauty.

Brilliant blooms, in late November: Yes, they caught me by surprise.

Kinda like the lesson in God's favor I've been learning here lately.

As it happened, today's funeral was my second memorial Mass in two days.

On Thursday, we celebrated the short life of the infant son of a young couple at [my 'home' parish](#). Little George Peter lived only a day or so, but in that time he was—as we Catholics like to say—fortified by the sacraments. He'd been baptized by our pastor, an act giving us confidence that this tiniest of parishioners was not only deeply loved, but [has in fact joined](#) the communion of saints.

Now, it's certainly heartbreaking to lose someone so young. Heartbreaking, too, to say farewell to a cherished matriarch. And yet, as I heard the stories told about their vastly dissimilar lives, I was struck by the one thing these two saints had in common: Their utter openness to God's favor.

I realized that George Peter had done this—and only this—during his brief life span: He'd become a perfect receptacle of grace. God smiled, and he received.

My friend's mother, I learned, found herself in much the same circumstance at the end of her 92 years. Stricken by dementia, she was said to no longer recognize the priest or pastoral associate who frequently [brought her communion](#). In fact, almost all that once had been precious in her life was gone. To be sure, her children and grandchildren joyfully recalled her great beauty, her steadfast spirit and faithfulness, her sense of style, her loyalty, her athleticism. But in the end, these were only memories. All she really had was God's grace—which (they tell us) she happily received, right until the end.

Two lives, worth celebrating. Two lives, providing a remarkable window into God's favor.

Teaching us, perhaps, that what really matters—to the One in whom [we move and live and have our being](#)—is an open heart, and a willingness to receive.



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

IHS

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Our deliverer is coming [at Blog of the Dormition]

For *eighteen years*, a woman was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. For *eighteen years*, she endured a spirit of infirmity. For *eighteen years*, she was in bondage to this suffering and torment.

Until the Lord Jesus came into her life.



Do we have something to learn from this woman? I think we do. I think we have patience to learn from her.

The Philip's Fast in which we find ourselves is a particularly poignant liturgical moment for us to reflect upon patience and hope. We are waiting for the coming of the Lord at Christmas. As Israel prepared for the coming Messiah, so we are preparing for the second coming of our Lord. As the bent over and infirm daughter of Abraham waited for her healer with patience and hope, so we are waiting for our healer and deliverer. Just like her, we don't know *when* he is coming, but we *know* that he is coming. So let us wait – with patience and with an expectant hope and not give ourselves over to despair when things are difficult. If we wait for the Lord, we do not wait in vain.

Through Isaiah, the Lord God comforted his people with the knowledge that “those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles” (Is 40:31). If you can't even

stand upright, it is hard to believe that one day you will fly – that you “shall mount up with wings like eagles.” But against all doubt and all despair believe it, and wait upon the Lord. No matter what you or your loved ones are suffering, be assured that your healer is coming. No matter what chains bind you or what bars enclose you, your deliverer is coming. His coming is as sure as the rising of the sun.

My soul is waiting for the Lord. I count on his word.

My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak.

Let the watchman count on daybreak

and Israel on the Lord (Psalm 129).

God’s time is not like our time. In the Chronicles of Narnia, Aslan – who is Lewis’ figure of Christ – tells the children he’ll be back “soon” and they ask him, “what do you call soon?” And he says, “I call *all* time soon.” With that in mind, I tell you Christ is coming soon.

But you know, what is soon to us is not necessarily soon to the Lord. Israel endured 40 years wandering in the wilderness before they could enter the Promised Land. And before that, they endured 400 years of slavery in Egypt before the Lord sent them Moses, their deliverer. But he is always coming. Our deliverer is coming. And when he comes, may he find us waiting for him.

When the Lord Jesus comes, where does he find the woman in today’s gospel? She is bent-over and infirm. Does he therefore find her hiding and waiting for death? No, he finds her in the synagogue where he is preaching. He finds her among the people who gather to hear the word of the Lord. This daughter of Abraham comes to the synagogue and there meets the Lord Jesus, who takes away her infirmity and looses her from her bondage.

Let us all imitate this woman in this. If we are at all able, let us come often to the house of the Lord to worship him and to hear his word, even if to come we must overcome difficulties to do so. When the Lord comes, may he find us here worshipping him and listening to his word. And one day soon, he will take away our infirmities and free us from our bondage.

It is meaningful what the Lord says to the woman, I think. He says, “Woman, you are loosed” – “you are released” – “you are set free.” He doesn’t just say to her, “you are healed,” because he recognizes that the

woman has been afflicted and oppressed for many years by this infirmity. Her spine has been tied up in knots and Jesus now unties those cords. But this bodily affliction has also weighed heavily upon her spirit and the Lord is offering her not only healing of body, but also freedom and deliverance from a *spirit* of infirmity. We are body and spirit – never one without the other.

The woman is bent over in body, but she's not bowed down by despair. In the face of her suffering, she has not cursed God and given up hope, as Job's wife would recommend and as many do. No, she carries on. She comes again to the synagogue. She does not give up on God even when, after eighteen years, it may have *felt* like God had abandoned her to that torment forever.

It may have felt that way, but *we* know that isn't true. *She* didn't know that morning, when she struggled for the six-thousandth time to get up and go out, that *this* was the day the Lord would deliver her. But she did know, I think, that her deliverer was coming. It is the same with us. We can't know the day or the hour of our deliverance, whether it will be in this age or in the age to come, but we do know that it is coming. And so, each day, let us rise up and prepare for the Lord's coming into our lives.

We can know that the Lord wants to be with us – that our sufferings and afflictions and difficulties – the evil and the death that we contend with daily – is not the will of the Lord. “God did not make death” (Wisdom). It wasn't the Lord who bent this woman. The spirit of infirmity is not the Holy Spirit. It is the Lord who frees us, not ties us down. It is the Lord who heals us, not afflicts us. Jesus tells us who this spirit of infirmity is: it is Satan. St. Cyril of Alexandria affirms: “The accursed Satan is the cause of disease in human bodies.” Let us not attribute to God the things of Satan. God wants us well, as Jesus makes clear today.

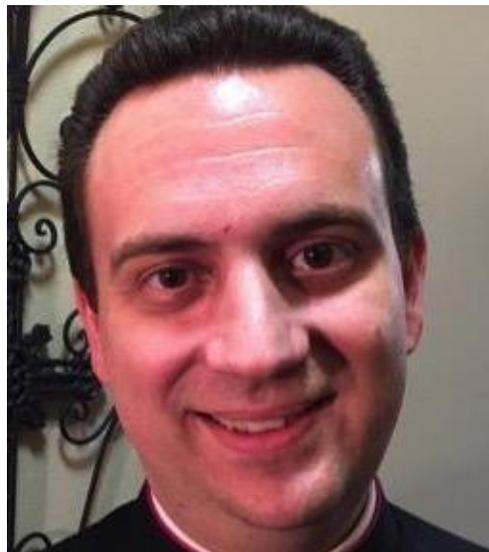
Soon, to begin the anaphora, I will say to all, “Let us stand aright; let us stand in awe; let us be attentive to offer the holy Anaphora in peace.” The liturgy reveals the will of God for us. He wills that we stand aright in his presence. And here in his presence is a woman who for eighteen years has not been able to stand aright. If she were here among us, I would still say “Let us stand aright,” because that is in fact very like what the Lord did say to her: “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.” And he lays his hands upon her, and immediately she is made straight.” She is able to stand aright. This is what the Lord wills for her and for us.

This contribution is available at <http://holydormition.blogspot.com/2015/11/our-deliverer-is-coming.html>
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My Friend, Bishop-Elect Steven J. Lopes

Yesterday, I received news via Facebook that my long time friend, a college friend I have known for 21 years, when I was in the St. Ignatius Institute at the University of San Francisco, **Steven J. Lopes**, was going to be the first ever Bishop of the [Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter](#). To say that this news was exciting would be an understatement. Instantly, some of us used social media to spread the great news that one of our own, those who were in the original St. Ignatius Institute (1976-2001), had been elevated to Bishop. We were also text messaging each other to share the news. It's my hope, once I talk to my boss, that I will attend his Mass of Ordination on February 2, 2016 in Houston, Texas.

I first met Bishop-Elect Lopes when we were undergraduates together from 1994-1997 (I transferred in Fall 1994). He lived down the hall from me on the 4th floor of Gillson Hall (a footnote: his roommate my first year is now a Benedictine brother). Since we would both graduate in 1997, we were in many of the same classes together in the St. Ignatius Institute. Even now, I can think of the many great times we shared in so many fantastic classes taught by Professors who truly loved their craft and their Catholic faith. There isn't a day that goes by when I don't give thanks for that Great Books Liberal Arts education.



From the moment I met him, I can remember that he always desired to be a Catholic priest. He was a superb student and loved learning. Although my love for the Catholic faith blossomed while in college, and my academic conversion began, there was something different that separated him from me. For many of us that knew him in college, we had a feeling that he was destined to do great things for the Catholic Church. I look forward to speaking to him soon and hopefully seeing him in February. If I attend the Mass of Ordination, I will write more then.

For those of you that are not aware, the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter is essentially the Anglican Rite of the Catholic Church. Taken directly from their website it says,

“The Ordinariate exists for those who are and who will be coming into full communion with the Catholic Church. Through the reverence and beauty of our worship, study of sacred Scripture and charity for those in need, we desire to share the joy of being Roman Catholic! With respect and gratitude for the Anglican heritage that nourished us, we seek to build bridges with all our brothers

and sisters who are drawn to the Church, so that we might build up the one Body of Christ.”

I would encourage you to read more [about](#) the Ordinariate. You might have a parish in your area that you could attend. Since they are part of the Catholic Church, just as the Eastern Rites (Maronite, Byzantine, Melkite, and others) are in the Church, a Latin Catholic (Roman) can attend these liturgies and receive Holy Communion on any given day when Mass is offered. There is a parish part of this rite about 90 minutes from where I live. It’s my hope to attend Sunday Mass there soon.

Also, [read more about Bishop-Elect Lopes](#), although I know his background quite well, reading it is impressive. Here is the for the Press Conference.

Do me a favor: Please pray three Hail Mary’s through the intercession of Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary; for Bishop-Elect Steven J. Lopes has he begins his new ministry as Shepherd.

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2015/11/25/my-friend-bishop-elect-steven-j-lopes/>
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Over the last few weeks since Pope Francis' departure, there has been a noticeable divisiveness within the world of Catholic social media. From Ross Douthat's letter of critique of Pope Francis in the New York Times, to the response of theologians, priests, and Douthat again- we see firsthand a visible polarization. Yet, disagreement and dialogue in and of itself should not be disturbing. For, as Cardinal Dolan has so aptly noted of the most recent synod, "[for] Francis, and those who know better tell me so, that this is part of Ignatian spirituality: a mess, confusion, questions are a good thing." [1] What is personally disconcerting, however, is the manner in which our discourse is taking place. Repeatedly, I am seeing a promulgation of an article, or op-ed piece posted on social media in which the dialogue takes on a very ugly, often misinformed and even discriminatory tone having left the realm of discussion altogether. Quick to respond, we find ourselves at the ready to wage war or nod our heads in agreement when we do not even have a full grasp of the situation. This is neither productive nor enlightening, which is as I understand it is the goal of honest dialogue. Accordingly, if I might suggest, that we remember in both our virtual and face-to-face conversations the importance of:

Prayer

Before we tweet, post, share or comment let us take a moment to pray. For, if we consider the medium of new media as a tool for evangelization, then I believe, we must address the witness that we are so ready to make accessible to others. Our online presence then should make our witness to Christ *clearer*, and the message conveyed expressive of the mercy, love and compassion of our Lord. Yet, for those times we fail, we are reminded that we are also a "church in constant need of forgiveness" who, through the "sacrifice and self giving" of one another in community, finds strength and freedom from sin.[2]

For those times when I seek to be less than compassionate in responding...Lord help me to see you in others.

Openness

Christianity began in encountering Jesus in community and is a product of *dialogue* and translation

embracing cultural, linguistic and religious differences.[3] For, through St. Paul's experience we are clearly made aware of the pastoral needs of the community, and the necessary translation in witnessing to the Gentile community. While there needs to be a clear idea of what it is we believe in our expression of Christianity, without error,[4] this need not encumber dialogue. This past week Fr. [Rob Ketchum](#) observed that "we [Christians] are sometimes more aware of what we are against and of what we *fear* than of what we are for and what we *love*". [5] Fear does not engender strength, or a convincing witness and does not exemplify love. As Pope Francis so eloquently remarked, "unless we train ministers capable of warming people's hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey"?[5]

Listening

True listening requires a humility and sincerity to respect one another-to accept change even our own. Few among us embrace change easily and for this reason we tend to romanticize the past. Yet, if we look back historically, we can readily identify that change and disagreement are nothing new for us as a people of faith. There has been a natural, although sometimes painful, working out of our faith through the many complicated issues that have arisen over time. Our tradition serves as guide and witness to a wealth of experience expectantly working towards conversion and transformation of the heart and situation to the mission of Christ. If the dialogical engagement is real and substantial then there is always the beautiful possibility that all involved will grow.

When we encounter a position that is different from our own, are we truly seeking to meet it with love or with pride?

While some may view this as naiveté, I truly believe, that there can be a fruitful sharing and transformation in evangelization when there is openness, humility, and prayerful consideration of one another. This isn't something to be feared, but as Christians our conversion of heart and mind is to be constant turning and transformation to the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and in the world. Therefore, we ask ourselves, have we as a community grown from our interactions and dialogue with humanity at large? Are we engaging, and responsive to the Holy Spirit at work in the world? This I believe is truly "*an ideal which [we] can identify and to which [we] can commit [our]selves with enthusiasm and lasting zeal*". [6]

Peace,



[1] <http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2015/10/15/new-york-cardinal-dolan-sees-light-amid-the-synods-confusion/>

[2] Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2002, p. 105

[3] Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People called and Sent*.

[4] Pope Paul VI, *Dei Verbum*, 1965.

[5] http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-

[verbum_en.html](#)

[5] Reese, Thomas, “Pope Francis ecclesiology rooted in the Emmaeus story”. National Catholic Reporter. August 2013. <http://ncronline.org/news/spirituality/pope-francis-ecclesiology-rooted-emmaeus-story>

[6] Gleeson, Brian, “*Images, Understandings, and Models of the Church in History: An Update*”. Australian E-Journal of Theology, 12. ISSN 1448-6326. 2008

This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2015/11/16/will-they-know-us-by-our-love/>
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Pearls of Great Price [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

Many years ago my wife, Nancy, created this mixed-media creation. She calls it, Sunday Morning at Mass. It's placed prominently in my prayer room. I've studied it and contemplated it many, many times over the years. I wrote this essay a few years ago after one particular contemplation. Here it is again in case you missed it:

Sunday Morning at Mass

A mixed-media creation by Nancy Maffeo

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

No one sees it happening. Not with our natural eyes, anyway. The priest – an ordinary man given an extraordinary privilege – holds bread and wine aloft, speaks a prayer of consecration, and the Holy Spirit supernaturally changes them into the body and blood, soul and divinity of our God-who-took-the-form-of-Man. The fancy word for the change is transubstantiation.

No, no one sees it happening. Not with our natural eyes, anyway. During the Mass, mortal time intersects with eternal time, a time in which time does not exist; certainly not as we understand time. And we are there, at the whipping post, two thousand years ago – as we count time. His blood oozes from strips of flesh laid open across his back and arms and legs and buttocks, sliced open by a Roman whip. Blood drops to the pavement at His feet.

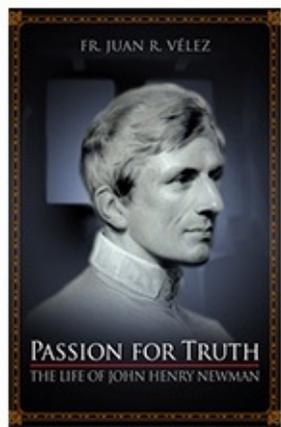
No one sees it happening. Not with our natural eyes, anyway. God-in-the-flesh carries the cross laid across His bloodied shoulders. Soldiers push Him along the Via Dolorosa, flogging Him again and again. Mocking Him. Spitting at Him. And more of His blood drops onto the pavement. No one sees it happening. Not with our natural eyes, anyway. He stops at the top of Gogotha's hill. Soldiers throw Him down onto the cross, grab His hands and feet and hammer spikes into them.

No one sees it happening. Not with our natural eyes, anyway. But at each Mass the faithful can follow with their eyes of faith the drops of blood, like pearls of great price, glistening along the path from whipping post to splintered cross, the path which only the God-Man could walk, which only the God-Man could transform from a place of death to a throne of life. Eternal life. No one sees it happening. Not with our natural eyes, anyway; But it happens at every Mass.

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2015/11/pearls-of-great-price.html>
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Worship, a Preparation for Christ's Coming [at Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman]



Blessed John Henry Newman helps us to begin the season of Advent with a sermon titled “Worship, a Preparation for Christ’s Coming.”[\[1\]](#)

He opens with the words of Scripture: “Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.” Isaiah xxxiii. 17. And reminds us that when we die, before reward or punishment, we will be judged. We will stand before the Lord. The whole of Scripture speaks to us of that Day of Judgment. Newman summarizes some of those passages:

And, as they see Him, so will He see them, for His coming will be to judge them. “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,” says St. Paul. Again, “We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” And again, “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy Angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” [2 Cor. v. 10. Rom. xiv. 10-12. Matt. xxv. 31, 32.]

Both in the Day of Judgment and at the moment of each person’s death, each person will come before God, the Creator and Judge:

We have to stand before His righteous Presence, and that one by one. One by one we shall have to endure His holy and searching eye. At present we are in a world of shadows. What we see is not substantial. Suddenly it will be rent in twain and vanish away, and our Maker will appear. And then, I say, that first appearance will be nothing less than a personal intercourse between the Creator and every creature. He will look on us, while we look on Him.

We cannot forget this importance truth, and that is the reason for religious worship. People often think that keeping the commandments and good works alone suffices. But it is through worship and the sacraments that we prepare to come before the Lord, face to face:

Direct intercourse with God on their part now, prayer and the like, may be necessary to their meeting Him suitably hereafter: and direct intercourse on His part with them, or what we call sacramental communion, may be necessary in some incomprehensible way, even for preparing their very nature to bear the sight of Him.

Let us not take lightly that Day of Judgment; He is beautiful yet he is also a consuming fire. “What it would be to meet Christ at once without preparation, we may learn from what happened even to the Apostles when His glory was suddenly manifested to them. St. Peter said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” And St. John, “when he saw Him, fell at His feet as dead.” [Luke v. 8. Rev. i. 17.]

Advent, thus, should be a time of preparation and purification to see the Lord:

When we kneel down in prayer in private, let us think to ourselves, Thus shall I one day kneel down before His very footstool, in this flesh and this blood of mine; and He will be seated over against me, in flesh and blood also, though divine. I come, with the thought of that awful hour before me, I come to confess my sin to Him now, that He may pardon it then, and I say, “O Lord, Holy God, Holy and Strong, Holy and Immortal, in the hour of death and in the day of judgment, deliver us, O Lord!

Newman reminds us that here on earth we walk by faith, not by sight. Christ’s face is hidden behind a veil. Still, in the sacraments, especially in the Holy Eucharist we have a glimpse of him whose countenance we will one day see face to face.

We approach, and in spite of the darkness, our hands, or our head, or our brow, or our lips become, as it were, sensible of the contact of something more than earthly. We know not where we are, but we have been bathing in water, and a voice tells us that it is blood. Or we have a mark signed upon our foreheads, and it spake of Calvary. Or we recollect a hand laid upon our heads, and surely it had the print of nails in it, and resembled His who with a touch gave sight to the blind and raised the dead. Or we have been eating and drinking; and it was not a dream surely, that One fed us from His wounded side, and renewed our nature by the heavenly meat He gave. Thus in many ways He, who is Judge to us, prepares us to be judged,—He, who is to glorify us, prepares us to be glorified, that He may not take us unawares; but that when the voice of the Archangel sounds, and we are called to meet the Bridegroom, we may be ready.

Before God was to descend on Mount Sinai he told Moses to sanctify the people, to have them wash their clothes and to purify themselves. How will we purify ourselves in this sacred season of Advent? How will we prepare to stand before the Son of Man at the moment of death and when he comes in his glory?

[1] John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. 5.

This contribution is available at <http://www.cardinaljohnhenrynewman.com/worship-a-preparation-for-christs-coming/>
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I love these Advent Printables! [at Equipping Catholic Families]

FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING



The [Feast of Christ the King](#) (one of my favorite Feast Days!) marks the last Sunday of the Liturgical Calendar...Advent starts NEXT WEEK! The Jubilee Year dedicated to the theme of Mercy begins shortly after that, on December 8th!





I finally made my own family set of Jesse Tree ornaments, thanks to [Faith and Fabric](#)'s Jen Frost and her awesome new [Our Family's Jesse Tree printable](#). I originally intended to make them out of construction paper and laminate them, but Jen's awesome pattern inspired me to go with felt. Look how cute they are!

I realized that I was a little intimidated by *that much* hand sewing...but then I remembered [Thermoweb Heat'n Bond Ultra Hold Iron-On Adhesive-17" X36"](#) *

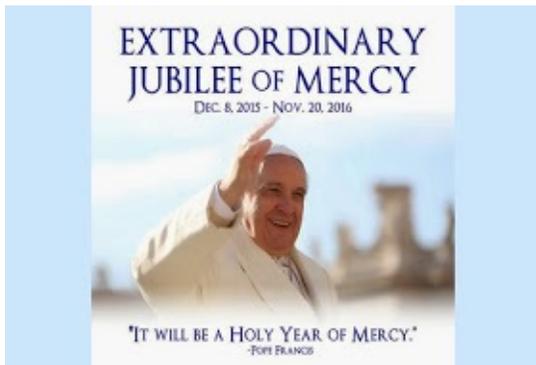
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Mercy [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]

The Jubilee Year of Mercy starts December 8th,
just after Advent begins.

It is a time to receive mercy and be merciful to others.



"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow
has not yet come. We have
only today. Let us begin."
MOTHER TERESA



I have been contemplating and praying a lot about this Year of Mercy
and what it means to me.

What does God want me to do?

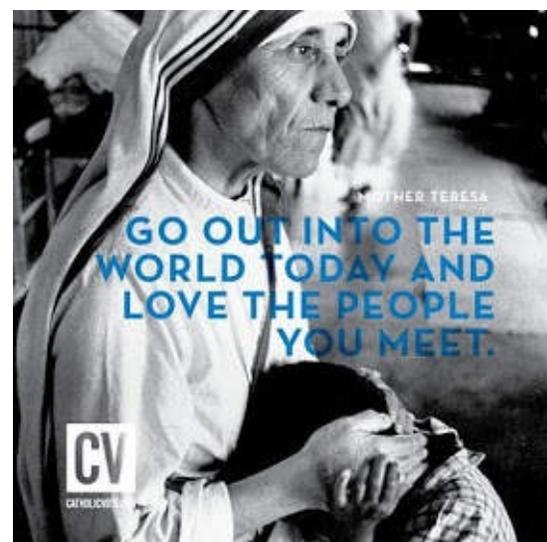
How can I be merciful?

I try every morning to remember to ask God,

"What do You want me to do today?"

"Who can I help today?"

"Please put those You want me to help in my path today"



When I think of Mercy, I think of Blessed Mother Teresa and
how very merciful she was.

I yearn to be like her.

Psalm 69:20

"Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless;

I looked for sympathy,

but there was none,

for comforters,

but found none."

Mother Teresa says,

"Be the one"

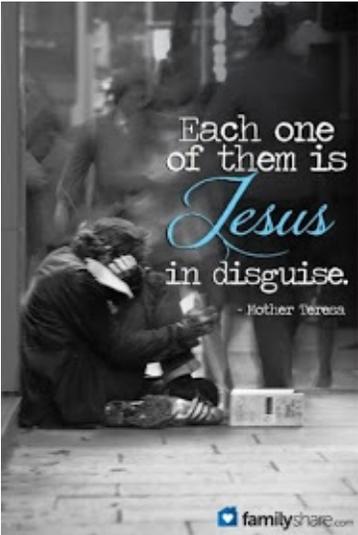
Be the one to comfort Jesus.

With our own mercy.

We do not need to be merciful to others to gain heaven,
but how comforting it is to Jesus, how close we are to Him
when we are merciful.

"Be the one."

Wow. Yes.



Sometimes that involves going out and finding ways to be merciful to complete strangers, look for them, and really see them.

Maybe it is the people we see at Mass, in stores, at work or school.

And, sometimes it is the people right here in our own home.





I want eyes filled with Mercy for others, like her eyes.

Like the eyes of my Lord Jesus Christ.

You can see Jesus in her eyes.

You can see Jesus in her life.



She did not worry about what she was wearing or how she looked

She did not care what her hair looked like or if this poor baby

would pee on her.

That's what I see here, I see complete mercy and love.

No second thoughts, just automatic action to love.



I've been praying for ways to add God more.

More each day.

More love

More hope

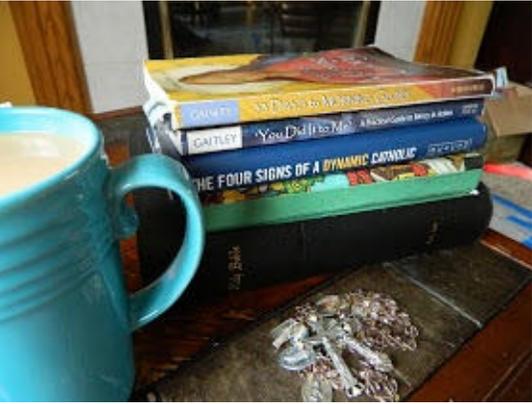
More mercy

More Joy

What are ways we can add God? Add more?

Add Mercy?

Be more merciful?



(my current reading)

I recently joined a Living Rosary Group for mothers.

In this group, each woman is assigned a decade of the rosary

(one decade is a mystery of the life of Jesus, it is one Our Father and 10 Hail Mary's)

I have The Wedding Feast of Cana.

John 2:5 "Do whatever He tells you."

This is what Mary says in this mystery.

She's saying it to us.

We pray our assigned mystery for each other and each person's intentions

and for the vocation of motherhood.

If you are interested in joining us

by getting a decade to pray every day,

and being a part of this living rosary,

(when put together, several rosaries are prayed in unison)

please email me, and I will help you,

you do need to be on Facebook though.

(Jamie jo 99 @ gmail. com)

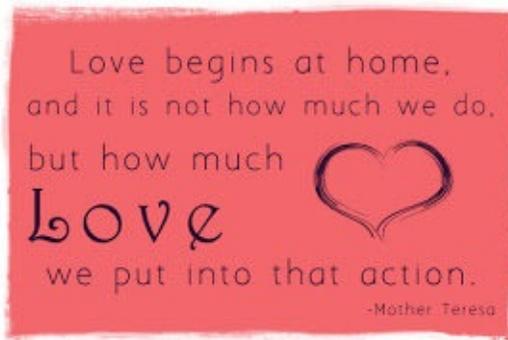
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Some ideas for adding God and being more merciful:

- **Go to Confession. Yes, Confession. If it's been a long time, then tell that to the priest, believe me, he's heard everything, and he'll guide you through it.**
- **Jesus waits for us to humble ourselves and ask for His Mercy in the Sacrament of Confession. He is Mercy Himself. Arms open wide on the cross waiting to give you His Mercy.**
- **Go to daily Mass, start by going one extra day per week. (it's only 1/2 hour) You will start to yearn for God more, for Mass more, I promise, so try adding more days if you can.**

- **Sign up for a holy hour at an Adoration chapel or if your parish has Adoration at certain times, GO!**
- **Stop by an Adoration chapel for a quick visit with Jesus or stay a while and visit (pray or talk with Jesus)**
- **Stop by a Catholic Church, sit in front of the tabernacle (the gold box with a red candle by it) Sit and beg for the graces He is wanting to give to you!**
- **Start your day with the sign of the cross.**
- **Start your day with what you are thankful for.**
- **Remember Jesus during the 3:00 hour. Try setting a timer so you remember.**
- **Offer up the little things you do for someone you are praying for.**
- **Offer up the big things you do and/or are suffering from for someone you are praying for.**
- **If you can, donate the things you don't need instead of selling them.**
- **Offer people rides that normally take the bus.**
- **Cook a meal for someone in need, someone sick, lonely, elderly, or a mother of a new baby.**
- **Cook a meal for someone who has lost a baby or lost anyone special in their life.**
- **If it's raining out, offer your umbrella for someone that doesn't have one.**
- **If it's cold outside, offer your coat to someone that needs one, it's probable you can buy a new one, yet, they cannot.**
- **Likewise, offer your shoes, hats, mittens, scarves to someone in need that you see.**
- **If you see someone ringing the bells at any given store during the holiday season, and they look cold, see if you can get them something. Maybe gloves? Or maybe a warm drink.**
- **Stop to say hello to homeless people on the street, ask if you can get them anything to eat or if you can get them anything they need at the store. (you'd be surprised at what little they ask for)**
- **SMILE!! My Spanish teacher in high school, after finding out her best friend had committed suicide, told us no matter what, to smile at people, to always smile, that our smile might be the one thing that makes someone feel loved that day. I've never forgotten that and to this day, think of it every time I smile at someone.**
- **Clean someone's home**
- **Bake someone bread or cookies**

- **If you are talented and can sew or make special things, make something for someone, and give it to them for no reason at all.**
- **Invite someone to dinner, someone you don't know very well, but, maybe see all the time, the worst they can say is "no".**
- **Pray for people, and tell them you will pray for them. Bless them.**
- **Bring someone flowers.**
- **Call someone and tell them how important they are to you.**
- **We must also be merciful to our own family in our own homes, it seems self defeating if we are kind to everyone publicly but forget to be kind in our own homes, Mercy starts at home.**



(I could probably do another whole post on trying to be merciful at home)

This is just a few ideas.

I'm sure you could come up with a ton more!

I am, in no way, an expert on this.

This is a list for me too.

To always be yearning for God and

striving for mercy and to be merciful towards others.

To remember the boundless mercy Jesus has for us.

You may be the only way someone sees Jesus or feels His love.

"Be the one!"



This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2015/11/mercy.html>
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God's Will [at A Spiritual Journey]

The will of God is to be embraced, treasured, followed, lived and upheld by us. It is always beautiful, loving, gentle, *graceful*, uplifting, and protective, intended to lead us to spiritual freedom and eternal bliss. It's definitely something to die for. Life becomes an excitingly beautiful journey when you seek to do God's will.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2015/11/gods-will.html>
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I LOVE Christmas -- No Matter What [at It Makes Sense to Me]

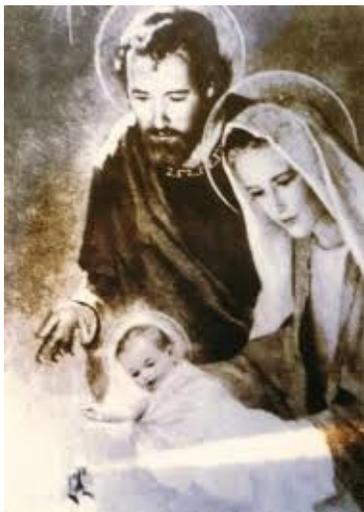
IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

Turkey Day is over and now the 2015 Christmas odyssey is underway. My personal pilgrimage began Sunday at 5 AM, as I prepared my wife's medications for the week. There are fourteen different pills she takes at different times during the day for varied reasons and I do this every week. So, I pour a cup of coffee and spread the pill bottles in a row in front of my still-squinty eyes. I have a pill box with four rows of sevens so I can prepare meds for the entire week. The morning row gets five pills in each box, the noon row gets four, etc. When I am finished there are 112 pills sorted out for the week. I am proud of my system...most of the time.

I finish placing the the last pills in place and reach over to get the coffee. Ah yes, life is always an adventure. That's right; I knocked over the coffee. As I did, I leaned onto the bottom of the pill box and it flipped, ever so gracefully, end over end into the air spraying its newly received contents everywhere. Okay--you get the picture. Pills on the floor, pills on the table floating in coffee (too bad they were not donuts) and me staring, mouth hung open, in disbelief.

Fortunately, God has blessed me with a self-deprecating sense of humor. I took a breath and began to laugh. Then I created some dialogue for the moment. I raised my hands, looked out across my random pill and coffee display, and announced to no one, "You are such an idiot!" Then I laughed some more and began Round Two of the weekly pill dissemination. That time I succeeded.



No matter, Christmas is my favorite time of the year. I love the 'reason for the season' which is the Baby Jesus. I love the awe in the faces of so many children and the extra smiles that come from the wonder and

mystery surrounding Santa's impending visit. I love the cookies and candy and cake and even some of the anxiety and pressure and insanity that mixes in as we move forward. I even love eggnog, fruitcake and pfeffernuesse. I am a hopeless *Chrismatist*.

More than anything, I love thinking about the Holy Family. Have you ever really thought about the Blessed Mother when she was a young girl about 14 or 15 years old? She was almost full-term in her pregnancy and was forced to travel on the back of a donkey for over 80 miles to fulfill the census law. We have to marvel at her husband, Joseph, who must have just loved her so much that he was willing to accept her Baby as his own. He led her and the unborn Child on this journey, protected them with his life and made sure that the Savior of all mankind lived to complete His mission. This was, after all, a very different time culturally. Mary's alternative could have been death by stoning. Thank you, St. Joseph. Thank you, Mother Mary. Thank you, Jesus.

I will finish this up by telling you I made it to eight o'clock Mass with the wife at my side. What better way to continue the day, especially after the pill and coffee fiasco. Yes, the Season of Advent is upon us. I have no idea how the rest of this day or the days following will play out. No matter what, it will be OK. We are on our way to Christmas. For all of you willing to embrace the season, it is a beautiful, wondrous time for family, friends, love, joy and miracles.

In closing, as we continue on this unpredictable and happy odyssey into Christmas wonderment, I would like to wish you all a beautiful, blessed, healthy and joy-filled Christmas. (If I don't electrocute myself putting up my Christmas lights you may hear from me again before Christmas arrives.)

“Celebrate the feast of Christmas every day, even every moment in the interior temple of your spirit, remaining like a baby in the bosom of the heavenly Father, where you will be reborn each moment in the Divine Word, Jesus Christ.”
St. Paul of the Cross (Catholicquotes.org)

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Photo courtesy davidthig.org.uk

This contribution is available at <http://www.slipperywillie.blogspot.com/2015/11/i-love-christmas-no-matter-what.html>
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Duns Scotus and the Immaculate Conception

Blessed John Duns Scotus saw so clearly that God had planned that his son, for whom the world was created, would be made flesh to live in and rule over that world as Christ the King. From this Duns Scotus argued that the very moment that God had made this decision, then that decision included a human mother, how else would he be made flesh? As Scotus put it – “*If God wills an end, he must will the means.*” This was obviously before creation had taken place in space and time, so his mother would have been conceived perfect in every way, as the mother of the *Word to be made flesh*, or if you like, *Immaculate*. She would be totally free from sin. When sin did eventually stain humankind, God made sure that the human mother of his son remained exactly as he had originally conceived her, otherwise his plan would be in jeopardy. It was inconceivable for a woman warped by sin and selfishness to give birth to and bring up a perfect man destined to be the King that he claimed to be before Pilot.

It was for these reasons amongst others, that at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Scotus was the greatest champion of the *Immaculate Conception*. He was furthermore in the minority, sometimes of one, as he defended this doctrine against all comers most particularly against the Thomists. Now Scotus wasn't anti- Thomas Aquinas, in fact there's no evidence that he ever read his works, except through the writings of others. Inevitably the Thomists who held what's come to be called the '*Legal Theory of Redemption*', argued that all the descendants of Adam were infected by his sin and that included Mary. Many bitter battles were fought over this doctrine until it was finally defined '*de fide*' by the Church in 1854.

The moment the famous Jesuit mystic, *Teilhard de Chardin* had heard about Scotus' teaching, he immediately replied, “*Voilà! La theologie de l'avenir.*” “*There it is, the Theology of the future*”. So many of Chardin's ideas not only resonated with those of Scotus, but added to them and even enhanced them. One thing Chardin did say that was relevant to what Scotus stood for was this: – “*Love differentiates.*” In other words, love makes things different. The prayer inspired by St Francis ends with these words, “*It is in giving that we receive.*” In other words when we try to love God, in the very act of loving we receive his love in return and this love enables us to grow into our true selves, and in becoming our true selves we all become different. That's why Scotus taught that *love is the principle of individuation*. There's an old saying – ‘*people are the same the world over*’ –and it's true, self-centred people are the same the world over. They are like a handful of different seeds. Even an expert horticulturist would find it difficult to distinguish one from another, because they all tend to look the same, they all seem to be turned in on themselves. But, put them in good soil, water them and make sure that they get plenty of sunlight and see what happens. Then, when they bloom they will all become totally different, each manifesting God's beauty in many totally different ways.

If human care can do this for common seed, what can God's love do when it is allowed to enter into human beings? It will enable them to grow into their true selves. Then, as they become their true selves, they will gradually become more and more different from the crowd from whom they were hardly distinguishable before. Francis of Assisi was a case in point, he was just one of the boys before his conversion, but the more he allowed the love of God to change him, then the more he became what love made of him – his true self, and that was miles away from the drinking pals he'd left behind. That's why all the saints were totally different. Compare Francis of Assisi with Thomas Aquinas or St Teresa of

Avila with St Joan of Arc or St Ignatius of Loyola with St Benedict – love differentiates. Even the early companions of Francis, Leo, Angelo, Rufino, Masseo and Giles etc. were, thanks to the love of God, all completely different. I have no doubt that most of them would have been canonized shortly after their deaths, but unfortunately it would have been seen as supporting one faction of the order at the expense of another. What was more important at the time was supporting the unity of the whole order, than stating publicly what those who knew them knew only too well.

Perhaps Chardin's famous little phrase helps to give a further glimpse into the very nature of the Trinity – '*love differentiates*'. As we have seen, the closer love enabled Francis to draw closer and closer to God, the more he became aware that His love is not just twofold. For the love that continually revolves between the Father and the Son is not just a blind impersonal force, but a person too in 'His' own right. Furthermore Francis realized that the more that love entered into him, the more he became himself, not just here on earth but hereafter. The invitation to share in the love unlimited that binds the three in one together to eternity, means that his journey never ends. It is not just one continual ecstasy but '*epecstasy*', as St Gregory of Nyssa described it. What he means by adding the pre-fix '*ep*' to the word ecstasy is that we are not just taken out of ourselves and into God, but continually taken out of ourselves and into Him forever and ever. The more love that we receive, then the more our hearts are opened to receive more love, and as God's love is infinite, the journey goes on and on without end.

The reward of the traveller is to go on travelling, the solace of the searcher is to go on searching, for there is no end to this journey this side of eternity. In heaven the ever deeper and fuller loving simply goes on to eternity together with the ever increasing joy and delight that being loved always brings with it. Like a rose bud that is touched by the sun, it cannot help but respond. Now the longer the sun shines on it, the more the bud opens to receive its powerful rays with ever greater intensity, until it is fully open to display the fullness of its beauty and spread its fragrance to the delight of all. The sun however is finite, it has a beginning and an end, and so does the rose that depends upon it, but the love that we depend on for our completion had no beginning and no end. We have a beginning like the rose, but we have been created by God with an infinite capacity for love so we can go on living and loving to all eternity, like the love that that never stops possessing us with ever increasing power and intensity.

When Our Lady appeared to Marie-Bernarde Soubirous in 1858 she told St Bernadette, as she was later to be known, that she was the *Immaculate Conception*. Mary herself confirmed what had been defined by the Church only four years before. The teaching of Scotus, once only held by a minority, had at last become part of her official teaching.

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/duns-scotus-and-the-immaculate-conception/>
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Home to Me [at Saints 365]

Memories of my Grandmother's house powerfully evoke all five of my senses

. I can still hear the creak of the linoleum steps beneath my feet as I would ascend to her second floor apartment, the smell of simmering marinara sauce or some other Italian comfort food wafting to meet my nose. Her greeting was always the same: a tight, warm embrace in her sturdy Sicilian arms followed by the lilt of her broken English:

"Deborina...how's my beautiful granddaughter".

And the tastes... Dinner at Grandma's was always a feast for the palate. She could transform a head of iceberg lettuce, a slab of mozzarella and a dash of oil and vinegar into the most magically delicious salad I have ever eaten.



I have the greatest memories of the days and nights spent as a child at her home: from sleepovers when I was allowed to stay up late and watch episodes of the Love Boat and Fantasy Island while she snored on the couch next to me to the sounds and smells of her frying meatballs on Sunday mornings. As a teen, when my parents drove me nuts for no other reason than they were my parents, I would escape to my Grandmother's house. All my fittings for my wedding dress were done with me perched precariously atop her kitchen table, and her adept seamstress hands pinning and repining. When I finally had my own children, I soaked up her parenting wisdom (my favorite quote:

"The mother is the doctor.

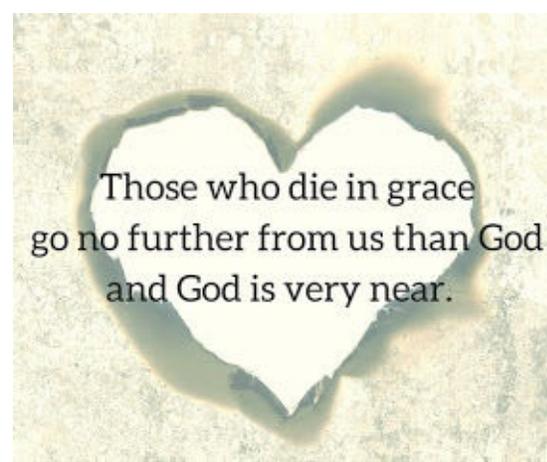
") and delighted in the love she showered on her great-grandchildren.

Nothing in my Grandmother's house ever changed

. Growing up on a small, remote island off the coast of Sicily and arriving in the United States as an immigrant in the midst of the Great Depression gave her a natural detachment from material things. It wasn't that she didn't like nice things - her home was meticulously, albeit simply, furnished. It was just that she saw no reason to replace something that was still perfectly useful. The result was that her home remained exactly the same year after year, until she passed away at nearly 99 years old. It was that

unchanging quality that I missed the most after her death. Life at Grandma's house was like her love-stable, steady, rock-solid and unchanging.

I was well into my forties when she died, but her death rocked me as if I were a child. Reminders from well-meaning friends of the length and beauty of her life offered me little consolation. I missed her presence in my life: I missed her hugs, I missed her voice, I missed her meatballs and I missed the home that I considered one of the happiest places on earth.



A few months after her death

I sat in my Spiritual Director's office and cried my heart out to him. He patiently listened as I sobbed through my grief. When he finally spoke, he gently suggested that I was looking for my grandmother in all the wrong places. Instead of longing for her presence in the past, in the flesh, in her home - he proposed that I seek her instead where she was to be found: in the Lord, in the Spirit, in heaven. He asked me to pray for the grace to release her in this life, so that I might discover her in a new way. Finally, he gave me this quote, which has sustained and consoled me ever since:

"Those who die in grace go no further from us than God, and God is very near."

I turned over that quote in my mind for many months. I have come to appreciate the truth in its words. I thought that what I missed the most about my Grandmother was the permanence of her home and all that represented to me. What I have discovered is that her home was just a dwelling for her love, and that remains alive, well and exactly as it always was: stable, steady, rock-solid and unchanging.



This post is part of the “Home to Me” blog hop, hosted by Julie Walsh of

[These Walls](#)

. During the two weeks from Friday, November 13 through Thanksgiving Day, more than a dozen bloggers will share about what the concept of “home” means to them. “Home” can be elusive or steady. It can be found in unexpected places. It is sought and cherished and mourned. It is wrapped up in the people we love. As we turn our minds and hearts toward home at the beginning of this holiday season, please visit the following blogs to explore where/what/who is “Home to Me.”

This contribution is available at <http://www.saints365.blogspot.com/2015/11/home-to-me.html>
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Praise Leads to Gratitude [at Sunflower Sojourn]

“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. His love endures forever.”~Psalm 136:1

Have you ever felt displeased with your current circumstances? Have you ever wished that things could just turn around? They will, my friend. God’s promise is true! ***Yet, we must learn to be content where we are.***

Praise Him, and your discontent will melt away! You’ll be amazed as you remember the blessings and His faithfulness in the past. **He has done it before, and He will surely do it again!**

Lately there have been times I’ve been discontent. But when I remember to praise, the realization of how blessed I have been washes over me! I have seen how much my Heavenly Father loves me as I call to mind the wonderful things in my life. I get stuck in the discontent and focusing on negative aspects. ***Praise leads me back to joy, gratitude, and the arms of my Heavenly Father!***

In the USA, we celebrate Thanksgiving this week. ***Focus on your blessings!*** Once you get started, it’s often hard to stop. ***Praise Him and grow closer to the One who loves your soul, and has given you so many good gifts!***

Praise will lead to gratitude!

This contribution is available at <http://sunflowersojourn.wordpress.com/2015/11/23/praise-leads-to-gratitude/>
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The Secret to Catholic Happiness and Joy [at On the Road to Damascus]



At the center of our faith is the Eucharist, the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. It is the source and summit of the Catholic Faith. Everything we do as a people flows from and goes back to him. The Eucharist is the number one reason to be Catholic, to become Catholic, or to return to the Catholic faith.

Ephesians 2:8

“By grace you have been saved through faith; and not that from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

This is the foundation of our joy, that through our faith in Jesus Christ we have been saved and redeemed. Death has no hold on us. Through our baptism we become adopted children of God the Father.

We have been provided the structure needed to live a joy filled life in Exodus 20, 1-17 and Luke 10:27. The Ten Commandments flow directly from the nature of God and establish morality which shows us how to live just and upright lives. Jesus focuses these commandments into the great Commandment – to love our God with all that we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

There are three things that are repeated throughout all Holy Scripture. Anytime God interacts with his people, either directly or through one of his angels, we are always told, “Be not afraid. Peace be with you.” When we trust in God we have no reason to fear anything. We can be at peace knowing that he will always provide exactly what we need. Even during times of great distress or persecution we can still live joyful lives through our trust that God will always be there with us.

True Christianity is never a private relationship. Selfishness is the true root of all evil. We are called to love and serve our brothers, our neighbors, even our enemies. The more we empty ourselves in service to the other the more room Jesus has to live within us. Where Jesus is there is joy. There are three ways that Catholics fulfill this calling:

Servant – We are called to directly serve others. We are called to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, give shelter to the homeless, care for the sick, visit those in prison, and to bury the dead. These are the corporal works of mercy. The measure of mercy you give will be the measure of mercy you shall receive.

Shepherd – We are called to lead and guide others, both directly and as example in how we live our lives. We are called to instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, offer fraternal correction, bear wrongs patiently, forgive offences willingly, comfort the afflicted, and pray for the dead. These are the spiritual works of mercy.

Steward – We are called to be good stewards of everything within our care. Jesus was asked by the rich man what he must do to inherit eternal life. The answer was to sell everything and follow Jesus. When we choose to follow Christ we recognize that everything we have ultimately belongs to God and that we are nothing more than stewards of these things. We are called to care for all of God’s creation. He gave us dominion over all of the earth and its creatures to care for it and not to use it recklessly for our own profit. We are to ensure that objects under our control are used properly and not for selfish gain. With what we take we can make a living; with what we give we can make a life.

True joy starts with Jesus at your center and emanates outward with love, service, and stewardship. The more you empty yourself in love and service to others the more God fills the space and the greater your joy becomes.

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

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The Empty Chair

THE EMPTY CHAIR



“I am not alone at all, I thought. I was never alone at all. And that, of course, is the message of Christmas. We are never alone. Not when the night is darkest, the wind coldest, the world seemingly most indifferent. For this is still the time God chooses.”

–Taylor Caldwell

Thanksgiving and Christmas are the happiest times of the year. We get together with family and friends, exchange gifts, share wonderful meals, and enjoy the holidays.

But, for many of us, the loss of a loved one makes this a sad and even depressing time. Let’s face it; every one of us will have a holiday where there is an empty chair.

The loss of a spouse, parent, grandparent or a child can be devastating enough, but the holidays have a way of magnifying the sadness. Add the cold and snow and the fact that it gets dark earlier, and just getting out of the house seems like an insurmountable task.

So, what can we do? How can we not only get through the holidays, but find joy in the season?

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.” –Revelations 21:4

Here are some ideas that might help:

1. **Let the traditions evolve.** If you have always hosted Christmas at your house, let someone else host. Especially for those who have lost a spouse, this is the perfect time to pass on the hosting responsibilities to an adult daughter or son. After all, they have families and starting a new Christmas tradition will take the pressure off of you and let you think less of what was and more of right now and what can be.
2. **During the Holiday season manage your loneliness.** Stay active and get out of the house. Accept invitations from friends, even if you don’t feel quite up to it. Try volunteering at a homeless shelter, or help serve Thanksgiving dinner to the less fortunate in your town.
3. **Accept your feelings, it’s ok to grieve.** A wonderful way to remember a lost loved one is to light a candle, hang their favorite Christmas ornament of the tree, or make a charitable donation in their name. And feel free to talk about your loved one with family at the holidays. They too want to keep the deceased spirit alive and part of family traditions. It gives them permission to share some

wonderful stories or photos that will warm your heart.

4. **Take care of your health.** During these difficult times it is easy to slack off in your self-care. Get up, shower, get dressed, work out, take a walk, and attend mass or anything else to get moving. Remember to eat regular meals. Often, the loneliness of the holidays causes us to miss meals, eat all of the wrong things or to drink too much coffee or alcohol.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed.” –Psalm 34:19

5. **Stay close to Our Lord.** As psalm 34 reminds us, the Lord is close to the brokenhearted. He is there for us at mass, in the reception of the sacraments, in the rosary and reading scriptures. He will get us through these difficult times if we just reach out in prayer.

And, that is the message of Christmas. We are not alone, not when the night is darkest, the wind coldest, or the world seemingly most indifferent.

With God’s help, we can make it through the holidays together, and celebrate our lost loved one whose memory remains, in spite of the empty chair.

God bless you my friend.

If you found some peace in this article, you might also like this one from 2013. [Click here to read.](#)

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Advent hold the Christmas carols [at Leaven for the Loaf]



It's Advent, the beginning of the liturgical year, penitential and contemplative in tone as befits preparation for a great feast. It's a blessed relief from any number of things. I enter it this year sick at heart due to some recent events, ready for a time of prayer and quiet and humility and renewal.

Keep that elf doll away from me. Throw a curtain around that poinsettia display for a few more weeks. And in regretful (some will say regrettable) defiance of [my bishop's directive](#), I am fleeing my parish church for the duration in order to avoid Christmas carols at every Advent Sunday Mass.

Yes, carols. He used the plural and I assume that means more than one. It's not as though Bishop Libasci is ordering the choirs to sing "Holly Jolly Christmas." Nevertheless, I am not on board. I need Advent for the next not-quite-four weeks, not Christmas Lite. Carols at the kids' concerts or at the store are one thing. Carols during an Advent liturgy are another.

The Mass is the Mass, and my feelings about the music are irrelevant to that. (We liturgical music critics can be insufferable.) My reaction to the bishop's directive, though, isn't a matter of mere distaste. I fear we're diluting Advent and thereby losing something important.

I've worked retail, and I remember how we depended on November and December sales. Santa-shaped chocolates on the shelf and "The Little Drummer Boy" on the speakers put people into the shopping mood, so by golly we had the Santa chocolates on display and the music playing by Thanksgiving. We worked long hours. Our paychecks and material support for our families depended on that.

Wanna know what Christmas Eve is like for a retail worker after the store closes? There's a lot of sleep involved – unless there are kids to be settled. Mass the next day, in all its glory and joy and beauty, is something to be gotten through.

I learned in those days to treasure and crave Advent. My attention to the Advent liturgies was renewed and sharpened. I hadn't realized how much I had always taken the season for granted. The Old Testament prophecies, the old plainsong chant we now know as *O Come O Come Emmanuel* (however far from plainsong it's been dragged by contemporary arrangements), John the Baptist's blunt call to repentance:

all became balm to my spirit when I realized I had to seek out and intentionally participate in Advent rather than just let it happen somewhere in the background. The beauty of the Incarnation, *contra* my bishop's concern as expressed in his directive, wasn't dulled by such preparation. Quite the opposite, in fact.

I mean no disrespect to Bishop Libasci, who has gone out on a limb as a Catholic leader in this very secular state of ours to [advocate for refugees](#) and [defend religious liberty](#). The other aspects of his directive make sense to me, especially in view of the coming formal opening of the [Jubilee Year of Mercy](#).

Christmas carols during Advent liturgies, though, affect me like physical blows. I've heard them before, albeit by the choice of music ministers rather than directives from the Diocese. However scriptural the lyrics, they don't fit Advent any more than Easter songs would fit into Lent. The carols' ill timing evokes for me the malls and commercials and movies that hijack them before Thanksgiving.

I guess I'll be crossing the state line for a few Sundays, although it'll be odd not to be amid familiar faces. What's going on at the altar will be familiar enough.

This contribution is available at <http://leavenforthe loaf.com/2015/11/29/advent-hold-the-christmas-carols/>
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A Gradual Advent [at FranciscanMom]



Up on the housetop, the kids hung Christmas lights.

The weather today was warm and clear and not too windy; all the kids were home, so Hubs sent them up to the roof to hang Christmas lights—like about half the people in our neighborhood.

After the initial trial run to [make sure Russ had checked every bulb](#), I unplugged those lights and that's how they'll stay until Sunday.

We don't go whole-hog on Christmas decorating around here until well into the Advent season. I like to bring things in gradually.



Way back when Middle Sister was little, she used to bug us about the Christmas tree. She'd have been happy to have that tree up on Halloween. (I think that's because her birthday is two days after Christmas, so if Christmas was coming, her birthday would not be far behind!) But in the interest of not rushing the season, we decided that we'd save Christmas-tree decorating until "Pink Candle Sunday." She'd be able to see very easily, without being old enough to read or use a calendar, when it would be Christmas-tree time. And that's become the custom in our family every since.



Here's how I usually do decorating:

- **First Sunday of Advent** I bring out the Advent wreath, Christmas storybooks (when the kids were little) and the empty manger scene. Nothing else.
- **Second Sunday of Advent** I hang a few pine garlands around the house and put up some other decorations.
- **Pink Candle Sunday** is Christmas-tree day.
- **Fourth Sunday of Advent**, the rest of the house decorations—and animals (only) in the manger.
- **Christmas Eve**: Holy Family in the manger.
- **Christmas Day**: shepherds in the manger.
- **Epiphany**: Wise men in the manger.

I take the tree down after Epiphany, but often we keep the manger scene up until Candlemas.

When the kids were little, we used to bring out their toy Nativity scenes (we had this [Playmobil](#) one as well as a soft fabric one) at the beginning of Advent. These toys were only played with during the Advent and Christmas season, so the kids really looked forward to having those again.

Keep it simple. Remember, the point of Advent is preparing a place in your heart. And that's hard to do when you're running around like a crazy person.

Believe me. I know.

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Does truth matter? [at Convert Journal]

People are confused by gobs of secular group-think. At one time, folks held knowledge of truth (and living consistently with it) in high regard. Now, whatever the topic, it seems to go through a quick filter of “does it matter to me one way or the other?” If not, then go with the flow, live and let live, to each his own and who am I to judge? Truth is no longer an immutable fact, but equated with preference. What is right for you might not be right for me — so, truth is assumed to be relative.

We see this played-out in abortion politics. If a wanted child is killed *in utero*, that is considered murder (in most states). If that same child is unwanted and “terminated” by her mother at an even later stage, it is considered choice. The humanity of that child is true or false depending on it being wanted.

Most people today are atheists, agnostics or “nones.” Atheists at least have thought about God and have come to a conclusion, albeit an incorrect one. Agnostics and nones are more interesting because they simply do not care enough to find out. If there is a God, what could possibly be more important? The implications for *everything* are huge! It would seem that those who have not figured it out would spend as much effort as necessary to move themselves either to the faith or to the atheist column, yet do not bother.

There is a wide spectrum of those who claim faith. Many have confused religious belief with affirmation of whatever their fallen will desires. They will engage whatever faith community is easiest, most welcoming / accepting / affirming of their lifestyle and (current) values, involving no inconvenience and calling for no amendment of their life. It is also valued if “worship” is entertaining and fun. Social interactions with useful business or political networking is a plus. In reality, this is not so much about God as it is about themselves. Truth has little to do with it.

Moving further in the faith direction we come to those who hold a firm belief in a “higher power.” Just that, nothing more — no need to dig deeper or think anything through. Believers at this very low level are barely outside the agnostic / none camp. They move between Christian and broader faith communities with ease. Many would proudly describe themselves as “spiritual” and hold that all religions are equal. Their car bumpers typically sport “coexist” stickers.

At last we come to true Christians! By grace we are Christian believers, but have sadly landed in numerous, separated ecclesial communities. A large chunk of us believe in the Trinity and that the cross somehow saves us but know little more. There is, even among Christians, a common assumption that being a good person (just about everyone thinks they are one) is good enough (or at least not requiring much more than that). To my mind, such folks appear to be banking on their invincible ignorance to be sufficient. Like non-believers, they sadly miss lives blessed by abundant grace.

Distinct from these brothers and sisters, are those who care about and seek truth. In an ideal world, we would all be in this group! Devout Christians are open to the Holy Spirit, seek to know and understand what God has revealed, place God at the center of their lives, seek continuous conversion of themselves and a closer relationship with our Creator. This is the narrow road that leads to truth and eternal life.

Those of us who are baptized are priests, prophets and kings. We have responsibility, not only to get ourselves to heaven but to bring as many others as possible along with us. That can only be done by keeping ourselves in that last group while evangelizing in love, those in all the others. This can not be done solely by example.

Preach the gospel at all times — if necessary, use words.

Something St. Francis of Assisi never said.



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Abortion and Adoration [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]



Thanks to the generosity and encouragement of Allison Gingras and Elizabeth Riordan, an interesting group of Catholic bloggers take the time each week to re-post their favorite articles on “It’s Worth Revisiting” Wednesday.

Here is what I am sharing this week:

Abortion and Adoration

(Originally posted January 25, 2013)

As we continue fighting to protect life from the moment of conception to natural death, I thought today – a day when tens of thousands will be publicly standing up for life and protesting the horror and slaughter of millions of innocent lives in this nation facilitated by the Supreme Court’s

[Roe vs. Wade](#)

decision in 1973

- would be an appropriate time to share one woman’s example of God’s healing touch to those who come into His Presence.

Several years ago, a dear friend, who has tirelessly labored for more than two decades to promote Eucharistic Adoration, gave me a copy of the journal entry set forth below with permission to share it widely.

You are certainly not required to believe this woman's story. I suspect more than a few will. What no one should ever doubt, however, is that our Lord continues to physically and spiritually heal countless souls who either humble themselves and spend time in His Eucharistic Presence, or who have asked others who

do to intercede on their behalf.

Maybe others reading this post, who have spent time at Adoration and whom God has healed, will share their experiences here as well.

Oh! that we would come to understand the value and power of adoring and worshipping our Lord, here physically present with us!

MY ADORATION TESTIMONY - MARCH 2009



I am sharing my story in hopes of preventing maybe one less baby to be killed...I had an abortion. It was at least 19 years ago. I cannot recall the date. I have buried the time, but the act never forgotten. Even though I did confess my horrible deed to a priest face to face absolving me of my sin... the question: "Is this a sin that can ever be truly absolved?" has haunted me subconsciously and consciously.

My adoration story answers this question and was a true miracle. I have only shared one on one with a few when I felt the nudge from GOD. I am ready to present my story here [in a the journal at an Adoration Chapel the writer visited] again in hopes that whoever reads this will share my story and hopefully a life (lives) will be saved - not only the baby, but the mother too.

My husband is an adorer. In July of 2006 we were busy with projects, him especially. He goes to Adoration late during the week and I selfishly offered to attend his hour for him ... wanting him to rest to get one of our projects completed. I had gone to Adoration for him a couple of times before but admittedly never got much out of it. So I went. I had the hour to myself.

There were rows of chairs at the time in Adoration Chapel. I sat in the back row chomping on gum. I shrugged my shoulders and said right out loud, "GOD you know who I am. I want our project done. I can't fool you." I suddenly felt that chomping my gum was very disrespectful. I pulled paper out of my purse and wrapped it up placing it back in my purse. I decided to repeat my Daily Prayers and approached the Monstrance and knelt down. I began by thanking GOD for dying on the cross for me and all, [for] Mary enduring all she endured and just feeling unworthy ... I then witnessed a ring form on the perimeter of the Eucharist. It started to glow. There was motion as if materializing - fighting to come through. The Eucharist actually started beating. I felt as if a beating heart. A baby's face was revealed... my baby's

face!

At first [he] just looked in wonder at me blinking his eyes. He then began to cry. His face scrunched up. He was very angry. I broke into tears telling GOD how sorry I was for giving him up. It did not stop. I kept repeating over and over how sorry I was and what did GOD want from me. My baby kept crying. Once in awhile he would stop and actually make a sucking motion then would cry again. At one point I gathered myself and began to question what I was seeing. I stood up went to the right of the room. I went to the left of the room. I knelt low. I tippy-toed high. The image persisted. Now knowing this was the real deal I broke down again. The whole hour was my baby crying, me crying telling GOD I was sorry and [asking] what does HE want from me.

The next adorer came in. I gathered myself leaving with the image even there. I got in my car and began crying again. I shouted "LORD, GOD WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?"

As clear as if I am here sharing with you I heard "YOU NEVER TOLD YOUR BABY YOU WERE SORRY"... Of course! You can summarize the rest. . . I said I was sorry.

The following week I insisted on doing my husband's hour alone. To my surprise - same scenario - the shadow ring, the materialization - my baby's face - but smiling back at me.



Then I was blessed with seeing Jesus for the next six months and occasionally since. I have been a faithful Adorer ever since and would not miss a week for the world because Jesus gave me more than that. HE gave me my life. I believe with all my heart and soul that I was atoned. Truly atoned right here in this Adoration Chapel.

I can never thank dearest BF enough for starting this [Adoration Chapel] and all of you for keeping it going.

A VERY BLESSED ADORER

(Source of baby image: e-women health care.com)

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2015/11/worth-revisiting-wednesday-abortion-and.html>
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Christmas 2015 Recommendations [at Eastern Christian Books]

For the last several years, I have been able to provide a synopsis of all the books noted on this blog in the previous twelve months. Last year's list is

[here](#)

, and the one from 2013 is

[here](#)

and contains links to previous years also. You are encouraged to review those lists, and the blog overall. What follows here is not an exhaustive summary of everything this year, but selected highlights under numerous categories.

Eastern Christian Encounters with Islam:

In a year in which so many headlines have been "inspired" by ISIS, it seems almost grimly fitting that the number of books treating Muslim-Christian relations, especially up to the end of the Ottoman period, has continued to grow. A new book on Christians in late antique Iran, and their interactions with Persian Muslims was recently noted

[here](#)

. A forthcoming book on Coptic Christians was noted

[here](#)

For further details on

[*Europe and the Islamic World: A History*](#),

John Tolan's latest book, go

[here](#)

Perhaps the most widely respected Catholic scholar of early Christian-Muslim relations, especially in Syria, is Sidney Griffith, author of

[*The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam*](#),

details for whose new paperback edition are

[here](#)

.
A study looking at Christian exegesis of the Quran was mentioned

[here](#)

.
Egypt, long a front-line for Christian-Muslim relations, was the object of at least two new studies this year, including one noted

[here](#)

.
A second study, on Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt, was discussed

[here](#)

.
My students get sick of my constantly telling them how important maps are in an era when we foolishly take for granted GPS systems. Thus I was especially interested in a recent study examining the shifting Byzantine-Islamic frontier, noted

[here](#)

.
A book treating Orthodox-Muslim relations in medieval Anatolia may be found

[here](#)

.
Syriac Christianity continues to receive perhaps the greatest attention in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, and for good reason insofar as Syria was of course the first country to be invaded and conquered by Islam, as a new book, noted

[here](#)

, reminds us.

A new study from Oxford on Greek Christians and power politics under the Ottoman sultans was mentioned

[here](#)

.
An important collection of primary source texts of Muslim-Christian relations was noted

[here](#)

. I hope to have more to say about it in the new year once I've finished reading it.

Byzantine Studies:

The category of Byzantium never runs dry. Dozens of books in Byzantine history continue to appear each year. I drew attention to just a few this year, including a book on Byzantine manuscripts

[here](#)

.
My year-long and ongoing

[fascination](#)

with death and funerary customs and practices saw me note a new book on Byzantine funeral orations

[here](#)

.
A fascinating study of Marian icons in Byzantium and their links to Italy was noted

[here](#)

.
I had occasion

[here](#)

to draw attention to a book on Byzantine vestments first published in 2012 but given renewed prominence this year thanks to a display at the Met in New York.

A recently published book,

[*Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium*](#)

was noted

[here](#)

in some detail.

Derek Krueger's recent study on Byzantine liturgics was noted

[here](#)

Author Interviews:

My friend, the prolific Orthodox pastoral theologian Bill Mills was recently interviewed

[here](#)

on the challenges to following Christ today.

The Ukrainian scholar Cyril Hovorun was recently interviewed

[here](#)

about his fascinating new work in ecclesiology, which I hope to adopt for my courses next year.

I interviewed

[Daniel Opperwall](#)

about his singular and welcome book translating the insights of the desert fathers to our time. This would make an excellent book for introductory courses on patristic spirituality, or for parish study groups.

Gregory Jensen was interviewed

[here](#)

on asceticism as the antidote to consumerism.

My interview with Peter Bouteneff about his new study of the Orthodox composer Arvo Part may be seen

[here](#)

The Tataryns were both interviewed

[here](#)

about their intriguing book on the Trinity and disability.

The Greek Orthodox philosopher John Panteleimon Manoussakis turned his hand to a short but lovely and compelling study on some of the challenges Catholics and Orthodox face in the search for unity. My interview with him may be seen

[here](#)

.
Evidently a brave man, Michael Martin tackles the still controversial question of sophiology in his new book, about which I interviewed him

[here](#)

.
Marcus Plested, whose splendid and vitally important book

[*Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*](#)

I reviewed

[here](#)

several years ago when it was first published in hardback, and whom I interviewed

[here](#)

, had his book released in paperback this year, as noted

[here](#)

. It continues to deserve a wide audience.

Syriac Christianity:

Though the on-going war in Syria threatens to continue to diminish the already reduced Christian communities there even further, they have not yet disappeared entirely from a place where they have had a vibrant, distinct, and vital tradition for most of the last two millennia. The Syriac tradition continues to be the object of scholarly study today more than at any point in the recent past, even in English alone. This year I drew attention to, inter alia, a new book on Ephraim's hymns

[here](#)

.
A new book on Syriac Christians and Islam was detailed

[here](#)

.
And finally Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent's study (her doctoral dissertation) on Syriac missionary stories was noted

[here](#)

. She has promised us an interview about this book, and I hope to run that as soon as she gets it to me, but as she's just had a baby, she is justly occupied with maternal duties just now.

Centenary of the Armenian Genocide:

For a unique story of "ecumenism in action," if you will, a story of an American Methodist rescuing Armenian Christians, see

[here](#)

.
For a collection that brings us up to date on the general state of the scholarly literature on genocide in general--covering not just the events in Armenia, but other more recent genocidal activities as well--see

[here](#)

.
In this centenary year of the genocide, it is not surprising that we have seen so many books emerge in the last 12-18 months on the horrifying fate that befell Armenian Christians in the summer of 1915. In a lengthy note

[here](#)

, I listed many of these recent publications.

Oxford Handbooks:

Oxford University Press, the oldest and most prestigious academic press in the anglophone world, continues to publish an impressive collection of "handbooks" devoted to hundreds of topics, including many theological topics. Their recent handbook on Christology was noted

[here](#)

.
Their hefty collection on sacramental theology was noted

[here](#)

, where I drew attention to the extensive inclusion of Eastern Christian thought, including a chapter from yours truly.

That great Byzantine theologian Maximus the Confessor continues to draw considerable scholarly attention, and Oxford's handbook on him was detailed

[here](#)

Finally, with attention to Eastern and patristic courses, the handbook on natural theology was noted

[here](#)

Russian Religious History:

This has been an interesting year especially for treatment of the question of tolerance of religious minorities in Russia, under the tsars and more recently. For one, the fate of Old Believers was noted

[here](#)

. For another, the role of the Jesuits at the court of the tsar was mentioned

[here](#)

. Additionally, Russian-Greek

[identities](#)

were treated in a new book by Lucien Frary,

[*Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821-1844.*](#)

Finally

tolerance and religious diversity in tsarist Russia was treated in a new book noted

[here](#)

Gavrilyuk's splendid book

[*Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*](#)

is now available in a very affordable

[paperback](#)

. My lengthy discussion of it, based on my 2014 OTSA presentation, was noted on here last year.

The beautiful art and architecture of churches in Russia has long continued to draw admiration from around the world. A new book focuses on a neglected region, the far north of Russia as noted

[here](#)

At long last we had a fine English translation of Destivelle's landmark study,

[*The Moscow Council \(1917-1918\): The Creation of the Conciliar Institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church,*](#)

further details of which were noted

[here](#)

Patristics:

We saw at least two new books this year on the golden-mouthed preacher of Constantinople. In the first instance, we had a book on Chrysostom's views on

[slavery](#)

and in the second a book on his theology and preaching, noted

[here](#)

The great Alexandrian father Origen continues to inspire a large scholarly following, and this year a new book on his views on evil was noted

[here](#)

Oxford isn't the only game in town to publish handbooks. Wiley-Blackwell has been in on the action for a while, calling theirs "companions to...." In this case, we recently saw a hefty companion to patristics noted

[here](#)

As a psychoanalyst

manqué,

I was fascinated to see the publication this year of a book devoted to visions and patristic [dreams](#)

.
A new collection of collected essays on John the Damascene may be found [here](#)

.
And finally the latest translation of Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on John was noted [here](#)

Problems in Historiography

I am becoming more and more fascinated by the uses and abuses of memory, history, and identity (on which see, inter alia, the elegant Margaret MacMillan's useful little book

[*Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History*](#)

) in not only intra-Christian disputes, but also in Christian-Muslim relations as well. A recent collection, noted

[here](#)
, treats some of the issues in Christian historiography.

A new study of the early Arab

[conquests](#)

revisits some of the problems, long known to scholars, of the unreliability of virtually everything from the first century of Islamic history.

The new edited collection

[*The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*](#)

treats

[papal](#)

history in the first millennium but begins, as I noted in my initial review, with serious historiographical

problems.

This summer saw the release of an important new book raising a difficult question on the secular-sacred split in Russian

[archives](#)

Ukrainian History and Christianity:

John-Paul Himka's latest book Ukrainian iconography was noted

[here](#)

Serhii Plokhy's year has been a busy one, with his latest study on Ukrainian history noted

[here](#)

. Earlier this year he also published

[*The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union.*](#)

With the commemoration in July of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, I drew attention to Ukrainian Catholic churchmen of the 20th century

[here](#)

In addition, thanks to the ongoing interest in the country over the last two years as a result of the Russian invasion and war of aggression, I noted various works in Ukrainian history

[here](#)

Nationalism:

Though published in 2014, it was only this year that I got around to reading, and

[here](#)

initially reviewing,

[*Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe*](#)

. It remains an important and wide-ranging collection devoted to an issue that has long bedeviled Eastern

Christianity--to say nothing of Islam.

This contribution is available at <http://easternchristianbooks.blogspot.com/2015/12/christmas-2015-recommendations.html>
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Surrendering or giving up all... and a deep question [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

When our children were younger and in youth group, the leader had this pat answer for all the teens' woes and groans, "offer it up!". The kids would just laugh and think about Jesus for a second and then go on groaning and complaining. The intentions were good, however, but I never thought that very many modern-day teens had the capacity to understand and really get the whole offering up thing in their young and very self-centered lives. Myself, included, with the surrendering of control and lifting up pains and tribulations to the invisible; it can be fairly daunting. A chosen, precious few can do this...they are gifts to society.

Each day, I have been reading the "33-day Marian Consecration Retreat" along with several at

[Catholic mom.com](http://Catholicmom.com)

since the 5th of November and each day, I have been given a gift of new understanding about Mary with each read. The decision to dedicate myself to Mary means to be surrendering all, my whole self to her as the Theotokos, Mother of God. Surrendering my prayers, good works, thoughts and actions, emotions, even those around me that I love. As a mother, myself, I understand how she would feel as one of us enduring a trial would go to her and know that as the mother, she would help..... I know that what I pray for is not always in God's plan and will, so offering up my prayer to my heavenly mother makes sense. Letting Mary distribute my prayers to the most needy and for the purpose directly in God's plan. Different way of thinking of things, but it makes sense, surprisingly.

As of this year, I have been praying more urgently for our youngest daughter who is the "Girl in a War" for the past year or so, but especially exploding as she turned 18 last December. She has turned away from God, turned away from many other good choices in her life that her father and I had thought we instilled in her and her siblings' hearts. Almost every Mass is offered up for her and a rosary said every morning, a Divine Mercy chaplet prayed in the afternoon in the hour of 3 pm.... nothing is happening yet, she isn't even softening.....she is just still determined to refuse God. I'm sad, and losing hope.

During Mass today, I thought about how I receive the Eucharist for myself as food for my daily life and getting through life with His help. I wondered, Mary is the mediatrix between us and Jesus, her son. She bore him, took care of him, loved him and was the first to believe in Him, was His first disciple, if you will. We pray the rosary, ask Mary for her intercession, we rely on her to help us grow closer to her Son through prayer and I'm wondering.....

As my daughter's mother, I nursed her for 18 months, what went into my mouth was later fed to her through my milk. I gave her nutrients that she needed to grow strong and healthy. I was thinking.....If I am receiving the Eucharist into my body, and as her mother, continue to love and care for her,....could I spiritually be giving her the Eucharist through my love and prayers? Could I receive the Eucharist into my body, and through my prayers and constant concern and love for my daughter's spiritual welfare be giving her Jesus from the Eucharist I receive?

Does that sound crazy?

This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2015/11/surrendering-or-giving-up-alland-deep.html>

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Crunching Leaves

We have had some amazing and beautiful fall weather this season and one Sunday we found ourselves on



a hike at our local arboretum. The temperature was just cool enough to wear a light jacket and the kids big enough to last on a longer hike. The afternoon sun shown in between the leaves in the trees and every so often, the wind would swirl more leaves to the ground to crunch under our feet. As I shuffled through the multicolored noisy leaves, I thought about how our lives pattern after the life of leaves. When we are very young, our faith is tender and new, like the buds of a tree in spring. We are just developing in the warmth of the sun. Our faith is also very simple, like those beginning buds. They don't need to be complicated to be lovely, filled with hope and anticipation of what the future might bring. Flowers burst from the trees as we pass through the Sacraments in our young lives. We give off a fragrant perfume as we become baptized, receive our First Reconciliation and First Communion. And then we fully blossom as we are confirmed in the faith. As we mature into adulthood, we become green like the leaves in summer. Leaves of trees are hard workers, producing food for the tree. In a similar way, our adulthood is the time when we work hard for the kingdom of God. We serve others, teach others, live as example to others in our work and play. In the autumn, as the daylight hours wane and the cooler temperatures set in, leaves change to the beautiful reds, yellows and browns that we love to see. When the sun hits them, the leaves turn landscapes on fire with their beauty. In the autumn of our own lives, we become shining examples of a lived-out faith. At this stage, we can still inspire others, but perhaps with less or more focused busyness. Until at last, we, like leaves from a tree, let go of this life, and what is left behind, our faith-filled legacy, is the crunch under someone's feet to enjoy of a cool fall day.

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/our-kids/crunching-leaves/>
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Did Not our Hearts Burn Within Us? [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

Did Not our Hearts Burn Within Us?



Jesus' Burning Heart is Within Us

When Jesus Proclaims the WORD the Holy Spirit Activates it in our Hearts.

Luke 24: ... 30 *When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"*

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If there ever as a time in world history where we need a great revival it is now. Our western culture that was once the cultural bearer of the Gospel of Christ to the world has now fallen away and not only rejects Christianity but has fallen into the grasp of the world system and a humanistic ideology that permeates and corrupts our culture to a complete falling away from the basic Judaeo-Christian principles that has kept our ship afloat.

Without a new, world-wide spiritual revival, that brings us all to repentance and faith in Christ our Redeemer, our Earth will become a living Hell.

I know that there are many Christian groups praying for a spiritual revival ... but somehow we must be lacking something ... or, Someone, ... a Divine Someone who can bring our spirits to a renewed faith and spirituality so we can truly be God's ministers of renewal in this fallen world. Someone who can empower us to preach the Word of God with power... a pure and explosive spiritual power that will reach the heart of the peoples and set their hearts on fire with a spiritually empowered fire of the Word.

That Someone, my fellow pilgrims, is the Holy Spirit.

Yes, we need the Holy Spirit to empower us to proclaim the Word with signs following so that the deceived world can be turned back to the truth of the Gospel. An empowerment that permits us to speak for Jesus, explaining and proclaiming the Word in such manner that our hearers will also say, "did not our hearts burn within us..." and turn their lives around for Christ.

Yet, we must understand that unless God's Word has burned within us, as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is sometimes termed, we cannot speak for Christ as His messengers. Nor can we proclaim a Message that will burn in the hearts of our hearers.

Of course, it is clear from the cited scripture, that not only did their hearts burn with inspiration at the proclamation of the scripture but their spiritual eyes were opened at the “breaking of the Bread”. This is the way it should be with us at the celebration of the Mass, where His Word is proclaimed and His Bread (another form of “His Word”) is also broken for us to receive Him, Praised be His Holy Name!

Remember that Jesus told his disciples that, “... ***without me you can do nothing***”. So thus, if we have not yielded our lives to Christ and received Him as His Disciples, we cannot make disciples, and likewise we cannot proclaim His Word, which, as disciples is what is needed to comply with the Great Commission.

It is only through the active Spirit of Christ in us and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that we can be participants in Christ’s ministry to proclaim the Word and bring the fire of the inspired Word to the world. Without the abiding presence of Christ in us, we can do nothing.

As believers, we are covered by His Blood and reconciled to the Father, but unless we have yielded ourselves to His Lordship and received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit we, as merely self-willed religious humans, have no way to accomplish His Mission here on Earth – that is to bring the Fire of His Word to others in this fallen world.

He has told us that His words are Spirit and Life (Jn. 6:63) and that if we abide in Him and His Words abide in us we can ask whatever we need to fulfill His Mission (Jn15:7) and it will be granted to us. So, if you have opened the door to your heart to him and personally consecrated your life to Him (Rom.12: 1-2), then, you abide in Him, and you can ask for the anointing you need to fulfill the calling He has placed on you as His bond-servants in this world.

If, you have not yet yielded yourself, but are being moved by the spirit to move in that direction then you may grow in that direction by first coming to an understanding that the WORD of God is NOT just a document that you can just read, study and receive spiritual activation. Yes, all those preliminary steps must be taken to satisfy your intellect and reason, but the most important step to spiritual empowerment is to let the Holy Spirit bring the Empowerment of the WORD to life in your Spirit so you become assimilated into the Spiritual Life that is in His Word! This will activate your spirit so that whatever you say and do and think – everything that emanates from that activation, will come not from you but from His Spirit that dwells in you. That is what spiritual empowerment is about!

Unfortunately our modern christian culture does not give us all the teaching we need to move in the spiritual realm and truly understand what “walking in the spirit” really means. We must come to realize that we all need a gradual process of initiation into what a “burning”, empowered spirituality is all about, so that the Holy Spirit Himself will inspire and guide us spiritually the rest of the way.

Our first pope, St. Peter instructs us how this initiation begins ...

<> ***First of all you must let the Word of God bring you to a “New Birth”***

1 Peter 1: 23 ***“You have been born anew [in your spirit], not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and abiding word of God,* 24 for: “All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the field; the grass withers, and the flower wilts 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever. This is the word that has been proclaimed to you.”***

<> ***Then walking in the Inspired Word, you must “Grow up to Salvation”***

I Peter 2: 1 “So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word] , that by it you may grow up to salvation; 3 for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

As we grow in the Word we then understand that to unite ourselves to Christ’s mission here on Earth, requires that we must first consecrate ourselves to Him so that we can truly discern the Father’s Will regarding our role as His bond-servants.

<> ***St.Paul exhorts the Faithful regarding our Consecration as a Form of Worship***

Rom. 12: 1 “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Once we are consecrated to Christ we need the Empowerment of the Spirit to act in His Name. With this empowerment we are then ready to obey our Lord and Master and truly take part in His Ministry to the Church and the World.

<> ***Entering the “Kingdom” requires joining your self to Christ’s Ministry***

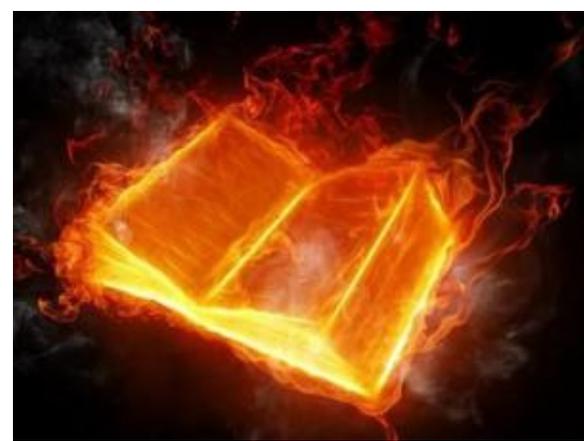
Thus, Jesus, instructing Nicodemus about His Kingdom Ministry, tells him that the Holy Spirit may open your spirit to be aware of what God is doing through the Spirit, but in order to be part of what God is doing (His Kingdom), you have to repent and dedicate yourself to Him (ie., water baptism) and then move into His ministry through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John 3: 1 “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ 8 The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.”

This is in accord with what John the Baptist told His disciples ...

Matt. 3:11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Jesus Himself stated His Mission ..



The Spirit Inspired Word

Luke 12:49 ***“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!***

Now Jesus, in His Compassion, still wishes to bring the Fire of His Word into the World and He is looking for volunteers ...

Matt. 9: 36 ***But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”***

Pray then, brethren, to the Lord of the Harvest and ask: “Lord, am I one of your workers?”

Are you ready to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with Fire?

Luke 11: 9 ***“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”***

May the Lord hear your prayers, and answer them

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matt. 9 : 37-38)

Your Brother In Christ Jesus ... Bartimaeus

(© B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus' Quiet Place, [2008-2015])

Related Links...

[***Jesus the Source of Living Water and Us***](#)

[***Testimony of the Pope's Preacher***](#)

The Transforming Work of the Cross

Prayer to Receive the Holy Spirit

This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2015/11/29/\\$-did-not-our-hearts-burn-within-us/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2015/11/29/$-did-not-our-hearts-burn-within-us/)

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Trying to Hold on to Hope, Let Go of Fear [at Quiet Consecration]

I am still in shock this morning over the events of yesterday in San Bernadino, California. Once again a seemingly unthinkable act of violence has unfolded in America and I am sick to my stomach over the carnage.

It would be simple to immediately write this off as a Jihadist Terrorist Attack. The information we have been given - the perpetrators were of the Muslim Faith and they came to play rough, dressed in tactical gear, body armor and using Assault Rifles to mow down 31 innocent people - seems to point solidly in that direction. They killed 14 of people. And now 14 families will be looking at empty chairs on Christmas day, while 17 families hold vigil at hospitals and pray for their loved ones to heal.

Yet, while I do not dismiss the idea that this is a result of radical Islamist beliefs I'm not yet convinced of it. There are too many odd variables. The target is a weird target - the workplace of one of the perpetrators, rather than a crowded mall or an amusement park or even a college campus.

Look, I am not a terrorist and do not pretend to be any kind of expert as to how these people think. It just seems to me that if my objective is to kill infidels for the glory of Allah as well as send a message to the citizens of the Great Satan to convert or die, taking out the co-workers who recently gave me a baby shower wouldn't be the way to spread that message. Blowing myself up outside of the Santa Claus display at a downtown mall at 3pm on a Saturday afternoon would be a hell of lot more effective, and terrible. All those 3 year olds waiting in line with their stressed out Moms and Dads, dressed up to get their picture taken with Santa and a guy dressed in an elf costume make a much more impressive target.

Yet, to dismiss this as one more act of violence by a mentally ill man and his wife, perhaps caught up in a Folie a Deux, might be missing the Truth as well. This is a pretty horrific act. Could it simply be a case of work place violence? Was he just another quiet time bomb ticking away, ready to go off?

As a Catholic, I know what my response to such horror is supposed to be and I am trying very hard to walk that path today. I am praying for the souls of those murdered (yes, even for the perpetrators' souls...that's what we do...we love our enemies even as they are murdering us). I am praying for the health and healing of those wounded in the attack, both mentally and physically, and I am trying very hard to put all of this into the Hands of God. I trust Him. I know that nothing happens in His universe in error and that while God does not cause or condone evil acts, He can draw good from that evil and does every day. I may not see the good in my lifetime but I trust Him.

Today I am willing to wait and let Law Enforcement do their job, while I do mine. I cannot imagine the horror, the pain and the anger San Bernadino is experiencing as a result of this violence. My heart goes out to the community.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2015/12/trying-to-hold-on-to-hope-let-go-of-fear.html>
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7 Ways To Be More Like Jesus This Advent [at Miss Alexandrina]

Okay, it's not quite not quite Advent, but I thought I'd share some of my thoughts and things I may do during this year's Advent to better follow in Jesus' footsteps. Of course, these are only some suggestions, of which there are many more to do.

~1~

Pray more earnestly. It's easy to get into the routine of thanks, praise, intercession, confession, and petition, where one forgets to really *connect* with God whilst praying. Mix up the time in the day in which you pray, and the styles of prayer you use – praying over The Bible, reflecting on your week, using a chant or singing, etc.

~2~

Give your time as well as your money. Of course, around Christmas everybody is giving to each other and hopefully to charity. However, especially in the winter, many charities are busier than ever, and they may need more hands. Follow Jesus' example of putting others' needs before your own, and volunteer some of your time to assist others where they need it most.

~3~

In the same vein, **volunteer at your church.** Especially in a university community like mine, we lose a lot of the community at the start of Advent, but this is actually when some of the bigger services take place, sometimes one after the other. A smaller church might be in need of (more) cooks or readers or ushers.

~4~

Abstinence for Grace. Some, most notably non-Christians, consider abstinence as being a dramatic action for believers, but abstinence actually consists of less 'effort' – there is no removal of food altogether, but a changing of habits, a lessening of what we take for granted, in respect to those who do not have as much. For one day a fortnight, one could fast to experience the Grace of The Lord.

~5~

Think over a passage in the Bible. I love *Lectio Divina*, the practice of reading a passage in the Bible several times and seeing if any words or phrases are calling to you. As well as inspiring in us a sense of peace, *Lectio Divina* helps us concentrate more on the message and feeling of the Word than simply reading it.

~6~

Share a compliment with someone you wouldn't normally. Because Advent is about doing something beyond the typical that we do the rest of the year, it might be worth sharing God's Love with a stranger or

a colleague one doesn't normally speak to. Give them a positive something to lighten their day. These spiritual habits are great to make, and what better way to start than Advent?

~7~

Spend more time with the ones you love. In the rush of daily, it's easy to forget about those we spend every day with, like our friends, colleagues, housemates, and family. This might sound easy to spend more time with them, but you'd be surprised how easy it is to overlook the ones we love the most. This Advent, take a second to remind them how blessed you are that God has guided you together.



Blessings, have a lovely weekend.

This contribution is available at <http://missalexandrinabrant.wordpress.com/2015/11/27/quick-takes-friday-7-ways-to-be-more-like-jesus-this-advent/>
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Never too late [at Bible Meditations]



Then they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and it calmed down at once.

This made the sailors so afraid of the Lord that they offered a sacrifice and promised to serve him.

Jonah 1:15-16

Jonah refused to do God told him to. Instead of heading to Nineveh to preach, Jonah hopped a boat in the opposite direction. When a storm almost sank the boat. Jonah realized his responsibility. He asked the sailors to toss him overboard. The pagan sailors showed compassion and tried to row to shore but the storm got worse. Finally, they threw Jonah into the sea. When the storm calmed down instantly, the terrified sailors converted on the spot.

After his ordeal and three days in a whale's belly, Jonah became willing to do what God intended him to do. He preached to the people of Nineveh and the whole town repented. It is ironic that God used Jonah's reluctance to convert the sailors he never would have encountered had he not resisted God's will. Once Jonah surrendered himself for the sake of others, God did what Jonah could not do and calmed the storm. As a result, the sailors on that ship were saved both physically and spiritually.

Like Jonah, we have choices about whether to cooperate with God's plan for us or not. I don't think God zaps us with disasters as revenge. I do believe God gives us opportunities to rethink our choices. Jonah did, and from the moment he acknowledged his wrongdoing and thought about others instead of what he wanted, God used him to achieve the purpose

God can bring good out of everything—even our reluctance—when we surrender to His plan. It's never too late to change.

Prayer: Lord, help me see what you have in mind for me today.

Reflection: How am I avoiding God's plan for me today? What would it take for me to trust his plan?

This contribution is available at <http://www.biblemeditations.net/archives/2816>
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I (heart) Art [at Grace to Paint]

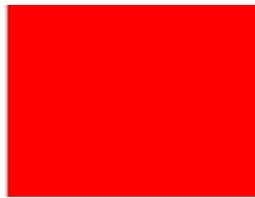


8×8" oil paint on primed artist board; use "comment" below to inquire.

Just for fun!

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2015/11/25/i-heart-art/>
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Paris, Evil, and Love [at A Catholic Citizen in America]



(From Anne Sophie Chaisemartin/AP, via New York Daily News, used w/o permission.)

"

Victims of a shooting attack lay on the pavement outside La Belle Equipe restaurant in Paris Friday, Nov. 13, 2015. Well over 100 people were killed in Paris on Friday night in a series of shooting, explosions.

"

(New York Daily News))

I've read that Friday's attacks in Paris are the fault of right-wing hate-mongers, that America's president is to blame — — — and the American election is still nearly a year off. I am not looking forward to the usual self-serving balderdash.

Death and Assumptions



(From Philippe Wojazer/Reuter, used w/o permission.)

("

A general view of the scene that shows the covered bodies outside a restaurant following a shooting incident in Paris, France, November 13, 2015.

"

(Reuters))

It's only a matter of time before 'all Muslims are terrorists'

[ponies](#)

get their moments of fame; while another lot will blame America, France, or their political foes.

I don't doubt that folks who blame Muslims, Jews, Catholics, blacks, or other 'foreigners' for their troubles are sincere. That doesn't make them right. (

[June 21, 2015](#)

;

[September 11, 2014](#)

)



I am pretty sure that Muslims who blame France, America, and Western civilization for their problems are sincere, too.

But the grand imam of Al-Azhar called Friday's attack "odious," Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb said it was "heinous," and Saudi King Salman called it "repugnant."

[1](#)

Not all Muslims, or Christians, are alike.

It looks like 137 folks died in the attacks: including eight attackers.

[2](#)

I've gotten the impression that ISIS, whose leaders claim responsibility for Friday's attacks, doesn't approve of today's world.

I don't, either. I'd better explain that.

Change and the Status Quo



(From Philippe Wojaze/Reuters, used w/o

permission.)

("

French fire brigade members aid an injured individual near the Bataclan concert hall following fatal shootings in Paris, November 13, 2015.

"

(Reuters))

I'm not among those who apparently think the world was fine in the 'good old days' before

[1954](#)

, or some other imagined golden age. (

[August 30, 2015](#)

;

[July 13, 2014](#)

)

Today's world, my country included, has problems. But as I've said before, I remember the 'good old days:' and they weren't.

Like I said last week, I'm part of a literally

[καθολικός](#)

, universal, outfit: not tied to one time, place, or culture. (

[November 8, 2015](#)

)

My job as a Catholic layman is

not

desperately clinging to customs and attitudes that won't work any more: and never worked as well as some imagine.

Part of my job is finding or making ways to permeate "social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life." (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[899](#)

)

That is emphatically

not

the same as trying to restore the world of "Leave it to Beaver." (

[May 3, 2015](#)

)

Accepting the way things are isn't an option. I can't change the world, not on my own: but I can keep talking about respecting humanity's "transcendent dignity," our "dignity as persons," and "human solidarity." (Catechism,

[1928](#)

-

[1942](#)

,

[2419](#)

-

[2442](#)

)

Terrorism and Legitimate Defense



(From Philippe Wojazer/Reuters, used w/o

permission.)

("

A French policeman assists a blood-covered victim near the Bataclan concert hall following attacks in Paris....

"

(Reuters))

This may seem 'judgmental,' but terrorism is wrong. The same goes for kidnapping and torture.

(Catechism,

[2297](#)

)

Maybe you heard that 'Christian' rulers sometimes indulged in that sort of thing. It's true. Catholic pastors, sadly, sometimes did not protest these actions: and sometimes committed the same crimes. It's still wrong.

(Catechism,

[2297](#)

-

[2298](#)

)

Getting back to what's been happening in France, the French president seems disinclined to 'give peace a chance,' and do what ISIS wants.

I think it would be nice if ISIS and similar outfits would start acting nice if someone asked them politely. But I am quite sure that asking politely would not work.

ISIS and like-minded organizations have been quite willing to kill folks whose chief offense is having fun

— or otherwise offending the sensibilities of ISIS. That is not acceptable.

Since being alive is preferable to being dead, we are allowed to defend ourselves. This principle, applied to outfits like nations, is called just war. (Catechism,

[2307](#)

-

[2309](#)

)

I've been over this before. (

[August 24, 2014](#)

)

Evil



(From AFP, via BBC News, used w/o permission.)

("

Rescuers evacuate people following one of the attacks

"

(BBC News))

I've mentioned this bit of dialog before: (

[May 23, 2012](#)

)

Kevin:

"Yes, why does there have to be evil?"

Supreme Being:

"I think it has something to do with free will."

("Time Bandits" (1981) via IMDB.com)

Oddly enough, that snarky line about free will is pretty close to the truth.

Sin, evil, is deciding to act — or not act — in a way that hurts someone: me, or anyone else. Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and God. It is failing to love. (Catechism,

[1849](#)

-

[1850](#)

)

I'm human, so I'm a rational creature: able to decide what I do, or don't do. I can decide that I'll just 'go with the flow,' and act as whim and emotions dictate: but that's a decision, too. Either way, I'm responsible for what I decide. (Catechism,

[1730](#)

-

[1738](#)

)

God doesn't 'make' anyone do bad things. But like I said: each of us has free will. I can decide that I'll hurt — or help — someone. It's my choice. Making good choices isn't easy, since the first of us made a really bad decision. (Catechism,

[385](#)

-

[389](#)

,

[396](#)

-

[409](#)

)

I've talked about original sin before. It's

not

the notion that God

[botched](#)

our design. (

[September 27, 2015](#)

)

Love



(From sporki, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

(World Youth Day 2000.)

I'm Catholic, so I must believe that human beings are people:

all

humans, no matter who our ancestors are, where we live, what we look like, or how old we are.
(Catechism,

[357](#)

,

[361](#)

,

[369](#)

-

[370](#)

,

[1700](#)

,

[1730](#)

,

[1929](#)

,

[2273](#)

-

[2274](#)

,

[2276](#)

-

[2279](#)

)

We have equal dignity, but we're not all alike: and we're not supposed to be. (Catechism,

[33](#)

,

[366](#)

,

[1934](#)

-

[1938](#)

,

[2232](#)

,

[2393](#)

)

That's easy to say when life is

[copacetic](#)

, not so much when your city has been attacked:

"...Faced with the violence of men, may we receive the grace of a firm heart, without hatred. May the moderation, temperance and control that has been shown so far, be confirmed in the weeks and months to come; let no one indulge in panic or hatred. We ask that grace be the artisan of peace. We need never despair of peace if we build on justice."

"([Cardinal Vingt-Trois of Paris](#)*, via Vatican Radio)*

"...In a telephone interview on Saturday with the Italian Bishops' Conference official television network – TV2000 – Pope Francis said the attacks are 'not human.'

" 'I am close to the people of France, to the families of the victims, and I am praying for all of them,' Pope Francis said. 'I am moved and I am saddened. I do not understand, these things hard to understand.'..."

"When asked if this is part of the 'piecemeal Third World War' the Holy Father has mentioned many times before, Pope Francis said 'this is a piece of it,' adding 'there is no religious or human justification for it.'..."

([Pope Francis](#)*, via Vatican Radio)*

I put longer excerpts at the end of this post.

[3](#)

By the time you read this, the Pope's statement that the

attacks

are "not human" may have morphed into "the

attackers

are not human" — which is not the same idea at all.

Folks have a knack for embellishing, or distorting, what they hear. Scrambled messages are fun in a

[telephone](#)

game: and that's another topic.

I keep saying this: I must love God, love my neighbor, see everybody as my neighbor, and treat others as I want to be treated. (

[Matthew 5:43](#)

-

[44](#)

,

[7:12](#)

,

[22:36](#)

-

[40](#)

,

[Mark 12:28](#)

-

[31](#)

;

[Luke 6:31](#) [10:25](#)

-

[27](#)

,

[29](#)

-

[37](#)

; Catechism,



[1789](#)

)

That's not easy, particularly when my neighbor does something profoundly repugnant: like killing folks at a rock concert.

But despite how I feel at the moment, the eight dead attackers in Paris are human beings: people. So are those who convinced them that killing innocent folks in Paris was a good idea.

My love of neighbor must not be an easy-going indifference, or unthinking approval. "Friends don't let friends drive drunk" may be a half-forgotten cliché, but the principle is still valid. (

[October 12, 2014](#)

;

[August 24, 2014](#)

)

At the moment I don't feel very "loving" toward ISIS leaders, and those who have decided to follow them. I'd be concerned if I did. Their actions are most emphatically not what human beings are supposed to do.

Doing what is right is easier when my emotions are in sync with my reason: but "...conscience is a law of the mind..." I've got brains, and I'm expected to

think.

(Catechism,

[1762](#)

-

[1775](#)

,

[1776](#)

)

Actually, I don't feel much of anything at the moment. Experience tells me that I've most likely shunted emotional responses to the non-conscious parts of my mind. It's late Saturday night as I write this, early Sunday, actually: I could have

very

interesting dreams later on.

I'm forgetting something. What was it? Paris. Death. Evil. Love. Right.

ISIS leaders apparently want to set up a global Islamic state: where ISIS-style Islam is enforced. (

[Wikipedia](#)

)

I've run into a few Christians, some of them Catholic, who apparently feel the same way about their notion of Christianity. What can I say? Some of us do not understand our faith. We're still cleaning up the mess Charlemagne made at Verden. (

[August 9, 2015](#)

)

Even if I had the power to make others believe as I do, I couldn't do it. As a Catholic, I must support religious freedom: for

everyone

. And that's yet again another topic. (Catechism,

[1738](#)

,

[2104](#)

-

[2109](#)

)

More about making sense in a big world:

1

Muslim responses to the November 13, 2014, attacks:

["UK Muslim Council: Nothing Islamic about killers"](#)

The Times of Israel (November 14, 2015)

"...The council says that while the Islamic State group is claiming responsibility for the attack, 'there is nothing Islamic about such people and their actions are evil, and outside the boundaries set by our faith.'..."

["Égypte: le grand imam de la mosquée Al-Azhar condamne des 'attaques odieuses' à Paris"](#)

Jeune Afrique (14 novembre 2015)

"Le grand imam de la mosquée Al-Azhar, prestigieuse institution de l'islam sunnite, a condamné samedi les attaques à Paris qui ont fait au moins 128 morts les qualifiant d' « odieuses » et a appelé « le monde entier à s'unir pour faire face à ce monstre »

"« Nous condamnons cette attaque odieuse », a affirmé cheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb à l'ouverture d'une conférence au Caire, soulignant que « le temps est venu pour que le monde entier s'unisse afin de faire face à ce monstre »..."

["The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, a prestigious institution in Sunni Islam, on Saturday condemned the attacks in Paris that killed at least 128 dead describing them as 'odious' and called on 'the whole world to unite to face this monster']

" 'We condemn this heinous attack,' said Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb at the opening of a conference in Cairo, stressing that 'the time has come for the world to unite to face this monster'...."]

["Arab states condemn 'terrorist' Paris attacks"](#)

Al Arabiya News (November 14, 2015)

"Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Egypt have been among the Arab states leading condemnations of the simultaneous attacks in Paris that killed 129 people and wounded 250 - 80 critically - on late Friday.

"Saudi King Salman sent a cable of condolence to French President Françoise Hollande. 'We learned about the pain and the sadness of the terrorist attacks in Paris...we express our condemnation for this repugnant terrorist act and offer our condolences to your excellency, the French people and the families of the victims,' said the king, who is currently in Turkey for the G20 Summit.

"Prominent Saudi scholars also condemned the attacks...."

2

Background:

3

Catholic responses to the November 13, 2014, attacks:

["Cardinal Vingt-Trois of Paris: statement on terror attacks"](#)

(Vatican Radio (November 14, 2015))

"...Message of Cardinal Vingt-Trois following the terrorist attacks in Paris

"Our city of Paris, our country, was hit last night with particular savagery and intensity.

"After the attacks of last January, after the attack in Beirut this week and many others in these past months, including in Nigeria and other African countries, our country knows anew the pain of grief and must face the barbarism spread by fanatical groups.

"This morning I pray, and invite Catholics of Paris to pray, for those who were killed yesterday

and for their families, for the injured and their loved ones and for those who are hard at work assisting them, for the police forces who face formidable challenges, and for our leaders and country, so that together we will remain in unity and peace of heart....

"...Faced with the violence of men, may we receive the grace of a firm heart, without hatred. May the moderation, temperance and control that has been shown so far, be confirmed in the weeks and months to come; let no one indulge in panic or hatred. We ask that grace be the artisan of peace. We need never despair of peace if we build on justice."

["Pope Francis: No religious or human justification for Paris attacks"](#)

Vatican Radio (November 14, 2015)

"Pope Francis has called the attacks in Paris 'a piece' of the 'piecemeal Third World War.'

"In a telephone interview on Saturday with the Italian Bishops' Conference official television network – TV2000 – Pope Francis said the attacks are 'not human.'

" 'I am close to the people of France, to the families of the victims, and I am praying for all of them,' Pope Francis said. 'I am moved and I am saddened. I do not understand, these things hard to understand.'..."

"When asked if this is part of the 'piecemeal Third World War' the Holy Father has mentioned many times before, Pope Francis said 'this is a piece of it,' adding 'there is no religious or human justification for it.'..."

This contribution is available at <http://catholiccitizenamerica.blogspot.com/2015/11/paris-evil-and-love.html>
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Less in life is better [at A Moment From De Sales]



Having less in life is a lesson more evident with each added year we live. Yes, our journey is more easily traveled if we have a “lighter load” to carry. Yet, somehow in our “more is better” culture this doesn’t always resonate. Instead, we buy into the adage that more stuff guarantees a fuller life.

David Brooks, columnist for the *New York Times*, wrote: “We are encouraged early on *to savor the smorgasbord of life’s possibilities.*” And so we set out on a journey of acquiring a little here, a few things there, until we realize we are moving in the wrong direction.

Again, it’s “having less which makes our journey better, not more.” However, it just gets terribly difficult to move from one place to another when we have too much “**stuff**” to carry.

Thus, we change from a “*grab all the gusto we can*” attitude to a mood of “*How can we downsize all this?*” It is at this moment we see that with less to distract us, we can realize more clearly “who we truly are and what we want in life.”

With this new “awareness,” we navigate better our chosen path. But is having fewer “things” to distract us, the only reason to reduce our possessions? Is this the only reason to practice the virtue of *Simplicity*?

Simplicity has to be more than living with a de-cluttered closet and an immaculately clean desktop. Simplicity beckons us to fill our spaces once jammed with “possessions” we don’t need, with qualities like humility, graciousness, gentleness, understanding, and prayer-“the stuff” we really do need.

It is in this newly acquired calm, that we savor God’s nearness and the cleansing warmth of His Holy Spirit. Less distracted we hear Our God whispering His words of love, as He enjoys His new living space in our hearts.

True simplicity then, is not just living with “less,” but also cultivating the “more” we need in every walk of life. It is this life style alone, which brings us real moments of peace and joy, pointing us in the right direction to **live life to the “fullest!”**

This contribution is available at <http://livetodaywell.org/>
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Stories from the sidewalk: Will you hold their hands on the way out, too? [at Peace Garden Passage]

This struck me from the very beginning days of my prayer time on the sidewalk. And it's been even more pronounced lately as escorts at our local abortion facility have seemed more...aggressive, I guess you could say, about "protecting" their clients.

Going in, the clients seem to get the royal carpet treatment of sorts. A woman begins making her way up the sidewalk and the yellow vests come out in throngs, surrounding her, encircling her to keep her from hearing the words of life we want to offer her in those last moments before the point of no return.

I'm sure escorts would say they must do this so that the clients are not tormented by the dangerous protestors (their sentiments). But it seems to me that the encircling by vested escorts would frighten the women just as much as those quietly standing there with signs saying the rosary.

This sealing off of the clients might seem heroic, but it isn't really, because it denies the clients a chance to hear words of life spoken by those who have nothing to gain, no profit to be made, from their vulnerability. Who is more trustworthy here, really?

If we prayer-ers were a true threat, I'd understand their purposeful protective stances, but something about it seems misplaced. And just as bothersome — and transparent — the encircling only happens on the way in. Once the client goes through with the abortion, little attention is paid her. Often, she quietly slips out, not an ounce of eager assistance in sight.

Today, one of our pray-ers who has been through abortion called them on it, telling the escorts in a mild but firm voice, "I hope you will hold their hands on the way out, too."

In my hour of watch today, I witnessed one woman going in and another coming out. The contrast was dramatic.

The client going in was unaccompanied, until crossing the street toward us. At that point, the yellow vests were moving, and soon, had engulfed her. As she stepped inside, the escorts were laughing, saying things like, "Isn't it a great day today?"



One of my friends took issue with the laughter. How can anyone be so callous? Even those who claim “choice” cannot say that abortion is fun, that those who would be so desperate as to seek it would be singing a happy tune. Can we at least agree abortion is not a happy topic? That it’s, instead, deadly, and sad? This doesn’t seem a stretch to me.

The client on her way out had hailed a taxi and she slipped out rather unobtrusively as most do. The escorts clearly noticed her, but that was about it.

Which kind of makes sense, right? What would you say, after all? “Thanks for your business, have a nice day?” On some level, the awkward silence seems completely logical. And yet, it also points to the reality of what has just happened, and why celebration should be far from anyone’s mind.

“We care about you bunches on the way in. Not so much on the way out.” This is the message that speaks loudly from the escorts. All of us pray-ers have noticed it, and commented on it.

It’s short-lived compassion. Once the money has been collected and the girl out of recovery, she’s released...into the cold world, with the life that had been moving and thriving and growing no more.

No potential for that life to bless her, not to mention the many people in her life. No potential for that life to save her, as we have heard countless times from mothers who have kept their babies even in difficult situations. No potential for that baby to look into his/her mother’s eyes and say, “I love you, Mommy,” wiping away all traces of doubt in an instant, permanently.

It’s not possible, not with that soul, not until heaven anyway.



“I’m sorry honey,” my post-abortive friend said to the client on her way into the taxi, who clutched a little brown paper bag. “I’ve been there; I know what you’re feeling right now.” The girl had a nervous grin on her face as she stepped inside the cab, but I’m glad she at least heard it. I hope it brought her a moment of connection; that she saw us not as enemies, but fellow mothers, sisters.

Words of love is what we want to give, and we’ll speak them whether the women are on the way in or out. If we could, we’d follow them home and tell them where they can receive post-abortive healing, and get assistance with reversing the brokenness that has led them to this grave decision.

“I’m sorry.” “We love you.” “God bless you.” That’s what we tell the women, on the way in and on the way out.

They are not a number to us, not a paycheck. They are of inestimable value just because...they are. And thank God they are.

Lord have mercy on us in our blindness and in the hopelessness that leads us to desperation. Help us be there for your precious children, no matter the direction they’re heading.

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2015/11/stories-from-the-sidewalk-will-you-hold-their-hands-on-the-way-out-too/>
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Secure in Insecurity [at New Evangelizers]

By W.L. Grayson



For those who are advanced in the spiritual life and have learned to place God above all things leaving behind the cares of this world: this article is not for you.

But if you are like me and you find your progression in the spiritual life slow to the point that it often feels like you are regressing, then maybe you will be able to relate.

I was reflecting on the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). In this parable, a rich man had an abundant harvest and felt very secure in his wealth. But that night, God would require his life. I believe that many people see this as a statement about how we have no guarantees about the future. And this is a good and apt reflection. But I think we need to bring this into a more immediate state. The parable is trying to remind us of something that we often forget:

We have no security right now!

None of what we have in this life alone is secure. We could not take even our next breath without God willing it. Every second we have and every good thing that we experience is a gift. And it is a gift that can be taken away at any moment.

The problem occurs when we forget how much of our security hangs by a thread. We think that we are in control of our lives and our fortunes. And while we do exercise some control, there is so much outside of what we can influence. I have a very good friend of mine who is struggling with health issues. He said that he has come face to face with the realization of how much of his life is out of his control. How many of us have experienced things like economic distress or relationship problems due to things outside of our power?

And when the troubles hit, we look back on all the bad choices we made in the past. We wonder why we didn't plan or prepare for bad times. Like the Hobbits in the Shire, sometimes we think the times of peace and plenty are the rule rather than the exception. And we waste time on things that do not matter until we say like Richard II "I wasted time and now time doth waste me."

The point of this is not to drive us to despair. Rather, it is to turn us ever more to the God we need. In my own life, I am not a stoic soul who bears pains with patience. I quickly burden all those around me with my tales of woe. I do not suffer well, the way the saints did as they rejoiced to share in the cross of Christ. But I should rejoice. Even in my weakness I can see the benefits in these crosses.

The biggest improvement is in the intensity of my prayer life. I have written before about the necessity of building up habitual prayer even if it is not accompanied by feelings. The spiritual danger with that

situation is that you can go on mental auto-pilot and do what Christ warned us against and “rattle on like the pagans do.” (Matt 6:7) But when real fear and terror in life strike, there is an amazing turn-around in concentration and sincerity. In the immediacy of my mind, this prayer matters.

And here is the thing: it always mattered. I am always in need of God. The rich fool thought that in his moment of seeming security he was not in need of God. But there is never a case where we can escape the need for His grace in all matters of life. The troubles I experience do not make God matter more. Rather they make me realize how much God has always mattered even when I did not notice.

Another thing that is a blessing of insecurity is the improvement against my vices. The more secure I become, the easier it is for me to fall into bad habits. But when troubles hit, I find many of my current vices squeezed out of my soul. For example, I often struggle with horrible judgmentality, the likes of which Christ condemned the Pharisees. I look at my brothers and sisters in Christ and I focus on their faults. But when my troubles come, I reflect on how unworthy I am of any Divine assistance. In that reflection I can see my faults better and I work harder at avoiding them. And when that happens, I see others in a much more positive and grace-filled light. Please allow me to be clear: nothing about the person I was judging has changed. They always were more worthy of my esteem. What changed was the haughtiness that infected my perceptions has somewhat diminished. I strive to be more worthy of the graces I need from God.

That is not some kind Tony Soprano type character who will only do us favors if we kiss his feet. God ALWAYS wants to do what is best for us, regardless of our own goodness. That is because the love of God is pure gift.

The problem lies with me. I am like that unruly child who only stops punching his little sister because he doesn't want to get in trouble. I, like the child, should cease my bad behavior because I come to a strong realization of its wrongness. But instead, like the child, I find myself falling back into bad habits once the negative pressure is off. Once I think I can “get away with it,” I sink back into old vices.

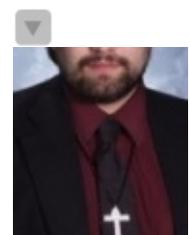
And for that reason I think God gives me troubles. He is giving me a chance to reorient my heart and soul. I am always in need of His support and my soul is always in desperate need of repentance. But it is hard to motivate the soul to radical change when your head lays sweetly care-free on a soft pillow as you slumber in peace.

I am a weak person. And the troubles the Lord sends me would be light to others, but they are sometimes so difficult for me. But as CS Lewis said when he was dealing with a much worse situation (the death of his beloved wife), “Either I need this or I don't.” God does not desire anyone to suffer needlessly. And He will only allow us to suffer if some greater good can from it. Lewis could not quite fathom how his pain was a help to him. But once he surrendered to God's will, he found peace.

So do I really trust God in my suffering? Do I really believe that He will take care of me? And do I really believe that this is all ultimately for my good?

Will I remember that the only security I have is what I can find in God alone?

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W.L. Grayson

I am a devoutly Catholic theology teacher who loves a popular culture that often, quite frankly, hates me. I grew up absorbing every movie, TV show, comic book, science fiction novel, etc. I could find. As of today I've watched over 2100 movies and tv shows. They take up a huge part of my life. I don't know that this is a good thing, but it has given me a common vocabulary to draw from in order to illustrate whatever theological point I make in class. I've used American Pie the song to explain the Book of Revelation (I'll post on this some time later) and American Pie the movie to help explain Eucharist (don't ask). The point is that the popular culture is popular for a reason. It is woven into the fabric of our lives and imaginations, for good or ill. In this blog I will attempt to bring together the things of heaven with the things of earth. Of course this goal may be too lofty for someone like me.

[next post: Money](#)

[previous post: The Window's Mite](#)

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Trust Issues: Learning To Change [at Blogging For A Better Life]

I love it when things work out better than planned. Like when you go to pay for your coffee and someone ahead of you already took care of the charge. Sweet!

Could you give knowing you would be without? Would you be willing if asked, to give your last dollar, your last bit of food, your only coat?

I would have no problem purchasing some stranger's coffee, wouldn't even have to think twice about the act, but these other questions, I'm not so sure.

Jesus tells us to trust in Him.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these....”

(Matthew 6:25-34)

Oh-oh trust—I may be harboring some unwanted trust issues. Trust means to believe. I know Jesus is talking about more than just giving out some of our surplus. He is talking about believing that God will provide. Feeding the poor. Caring for the sick and dying, helping those less fortunate.

The hand that gives is the same hand that will receive. All we have to do is trust.



Trust—with no issues. It may require some changes on our part.

Jesus tells us to trust in Him. Will you comply?

This contribution is available at <http://blogforabetterlife.blogspot.com/2015/11/trust-issues-learning-to-change.html>
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Advent: Standing [at bukas palad]



Year C / Advent / Week 1 / Sunday

Readings: Jeremiah 33.14-16 / Ps 24. 4-5ab, 8-9, 10, 14 (R/v 1b) / Thessalonians 3.12-4.2 / Luke 21.25-28, 34-36.

“To stand with confidence before the Son of Man”.

Today’s gospel reading ends with this image. We often think of it in terms of a future action: God judging us at death into heaven or hell.

But “To stand with confidence before the Son of Man” is also an appropriate image to begin our Advent preparations on.

After all, isn’t Advent meant to help us move towards Christmas morning when we will stand before the infant Jesus in the manger, gaze upon his comely face and praise, reverence and delight in him who is Son of Man and Son of God?

Now what if how we stand before the baby Jesus at Christmas is in fact how Christians should live daily? **Standing before God as we are, with all that is bright and all that is dark about us, and to give God permission to love us still.**

If you agree with me that Christian discipleship is about standing before God who wants to perfect us, let us consider why our standing before God this afternoon is indeed Advent grace.

“Your redemption is at hand”. Jesus proclaims this message to his disciples and to us in today’s gospel passage. We heard this as we stood before God here.

It is fitting to hear this Good News in these troubling, worrying, confusing times we live in, isn’t it? Terrorism runs amok globally and threatens us locally. Political and economic decline up north heightens our concerns. The mismanagement of a local church’s funds disappoints. But God’s redemption is still at hand. Yes, even, if the heavens shake and the nations on earth may quake in dismay, God will be there, saving us, Jesus assures.

God’s salvation will come not through action but through a person, the Son of Man. He will come in power and glory. He will come as radiant light to dispel our darkness.

In faith, we know this Son of Man has already come: come as one like you and me. Come to us poor and lowly, vulnerable and human. Come as Mary’s boy child, Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God. Come in a birth that has overcome sin, transformed the world and conquered death.

But it is his second coming that is our present advent: we are waiting for the reign of God to flourish in our midst. The reign of God we seek to build for one another. The reign of God wherein we will dwell eternally with God, no matter our successes or failures, no matter what we have done right or what we have failed to do.

Hasn’t God’s reign already come into our midst? Jesus tells us in the gospels that it is has.

If this is so, then we should not fixate ourselves just on preparing for God’s future coming. Instead, we should better **prepare ourselves this Advent to sincerely find God already in our midst**, and to recognize God’s ongoing labor for all human good, including ours.

So, do we recognize God’s goodness

- when our love ones forgive us and we forgive them?
- when nations and homes welcome the refugee and homeless?
- when human care and solidarity overcome terrorism’s murderous hatred?

I believe we do, but not often and gratefully enough.

Maybe when we can glimpse, experience or make the reign of God alive in our lives and in the lives of others, in every act of justice and compassion, of love and concern, of reconciliation and peace, you and I will see and know how God’s redemption is indeed at hand. Then, we have every reason to give thanks.

This is why Advent invites us to look forward by looking back to the one – our First Reading speaks of – from David’s line who does what is right and just in the land, the one who secures us and makes us safe. The one we call Jesus.

He has indeed come and saved us, and given us his Spirit to live fully in love with God and with neighbor.

But this story of our salvation that God began in Jesus is not complete; it awaits our fulfillment. We hear Jesus calling us to complete it in the gospel reading. We are to be vigilant, to pray, and not to be drowsy from carousing and drunkenness. We are to prepare ourselves to stand before the Son of Man who will come to judge us.

And how blessed are we that he comes to judge not only as God but as one like us. One who knows what and how it is to be human. One who is truly concerned about us, as only a fellow human being can be— loving what is human and life-giving in each of us and hating the inhumane and life-denying actions we are also capable of. How can we not be hope-filled when Jesus who will judge us will do so with sympathy of one who has lived amongst us and with us?

To welcome this Jesus is the reason for our Advent preparations.

In these next four weeks, many of us will busy ourselves: we will shop for presents, bake our cookies and

sweets, trim the Christmas tree with friends and family, and even charitably bring Christmas cheer to the lesser amongst us.

But shouldn't we also make these Advent weeks a graced time for our conversion and renewal? A time: to make right the wrongs in our lives, and to make room within each of us, and between ourselves, to welcome Jesus again at Christmas time.

I believe we can do all these, if we but let the grace of Advent work in us. And we should do all this so that we can better stand before Jesus, God-with-us, not just at judgment time and Christmastime but daily.

Why would we want to stand before Jesus? What will we see and hear?

Looking at his face, we will see more clearly how Jesus has first gazed upon us and loved us from sin into life through every human face we have encountered: the face of an innocent babe gurgling at us; the weary, anxious faces of the poor thanking us for our help; the tear-streaked faces of sinners we've embraced; and even the surprised faces of enemies we've forgiven. Indeed, Jesus continues to love us through the countless faces we live and work with, we play and pray with, we love and are loved by.

And in Jesus' countenance, we shall also see the faces of everyone who has been good and kind and gracious to us, and whom we have done likewise too, looking back at us, and loving us even more too.

Then, if we quietened ourselves, we may hear his voice coming through these faces, saying: "you did this and this and all that is good for the least of my sisters and my brothers; and you did these for me." Indeed, his voice, rich in love and tender in mercy, will come from a face like yours and mine. And it will not fade away: it will simply fill our very being from here to eternity, giving us life again and again.

How can we, then, not lift up our faces this Advent towards that face of Jesus, Son of Man and beloved Son of God? And how can we not do this with the confidence of the forgiven and the hope of living who now recognize that our redemption is indeed always at hand in Jesus?

Maybe when we know we can do this, we will come to that lowly manger on Christmas morning, and stand before the infant Jesus lying in it, to adore him, but, more so, to say to God, with greater wonder and much more gladness, "Thank you."

preached at St Ignatius Church, Singapore

photo: enchantmentwiththeheart on www.tumblr.com

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.com/2015/11/homily-advent-standing.html>
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The Ache of Empty Arms [at Conversation with Women]



I lay in the ultrasound room looking at the image of my perfectly formed baby on the screen. I could see the profile of his face and his little hand. I had a hard time believing my doctor's gentle words: "I'm so sorry. His heart isn't beating." The next day I held my son in my arms after delivery, and we named him John. Eight months later I lay in another ultrasound room and again heard the words I most dreaded: "The baby is measuring smaller than she should be, and there is no heartbeat. I'm sorry." My daughter was beautiful, and we named her Agnes. Another six months, and a phone call with lab results confirmed what I already knew: we had lost our third baby to an early miscarriage. We named him Michael.

How does one cope with the loss of a child? I have shed more tears in the past year and a half than I have probably in the rest of my life combined. I grieve for each of my babies. I struggle to accept God's will. But there is joy too, and my heart has grown with love for the children I can no longer hold.

I imagine my children in heaven—probably romping around causing mischief together. Surely kids can cause mischief in heaven, right? I'm no theologian, so I guess we'll find out when we get there. My husband and I have joked that our kids probably have their elbows on the table at the heavenly banquet, and the Blessed Mother is up there gently scolding them. Heaven seems more like a real place now, not an abstract idea but the home where my children live. I look forward to having a big family reunion there someday.

As I have processed my own grief, I've also connected with other women who have lost babies and have seen their pain. People at our parish have shared about their own losses when they heard about our babies, and friends I've known for years have told me about babies I never knew existed. So many couples are suffering silently as they grieve their children.

I also have friends who struggle with infertility. I understand and share in their desire to raise a family, although I don't know the monthly disappointment of being unable to conceive. They also suffer silently and feel the ache of empty arms.

Bishop Loverde of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington will lead a [novena](#) to Our Lady of Guadalupe for those suffering from infertility, miscarriage, and infant death beginning on December 4. Please join in praying for those of us who carry this cross. We appreciate each and every prayer.

[Novena for those suffering from infertility, miscarriage, and infant loss](#)



This contribution is available at <http://www.conversationwithwomen.org/2015/11/30/the-ache-of-empty-arms/>
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Islam and the decadent West [at LMS Chairman]



I've not had time to write anything about the terrible massacres in Paris. It was good to be able to attend a solemn Mass for the dead the day after the killings had taken place. Every Mass for the dead, and practically all traditional prayers for the dead, even if they are for the benefit of a specific person or group of persons, is also for 'all the Faithful departed'.

May they rest in peace. And may God protect us all from an unprovided death.

I've done a number of blog posts criticising the approach to understanding and tackling Islam taken by various people, notably the zealous Evangelical

[David Wood](#)

, and the American Syrian Catholic

[Robert Spencer](#)

. In the comments to one of these posts a reader recommended a book by a Jesuit who hails from the Levant, Samir Khalil Samir, which proved to be excellent. Samir has given a very interesting

[interview to Edward Pentin](#)

, in which he explores the way the West is seen from the Arab Muslim perspective, an important factor, obviously, in these attacks.

Here are some extracts:

Muslims know that modernity is coming from the West; this is a fact. Now they see the West as having lost its ethics, especially on sexual questions. They're very shocked by what they see or hear. ... So they say this comes from modernity. They want to reject the excesses and abuses of some principles, but end up rejecting the whole thing. The problem is that the West is responsible, without knowing it, of the reaction of the Muslim world.

...

When Muslims see that, they immediately recall that homosexuality is absolutely condemned in the Quran, with reference to the biblical Lot. See chapters 7: 80-81; 11: 77-82; 15: 58-74; 21: 74; 26: 165-166; 27: 54-55; 29: 28-30; 54: 33-34. In some cases, they were burned alive. Then the Muslims say, "Okay, the West is Christian, Christianity allows this, and so Christianity is not the true religion; it's a false religion. And we want to be true, to stick to the Quran and to the tradition."

This means we are partly, indirectly responsible for the fanaticism that is spreading more and more in Islam, as a reaction to the West — not only, but this also — and playing a role in the radicalization of



Islam.

We have to be careful, in responding to terrorism, that we don't allow acts of terror to give a kind of legitimacy and political importance to extreme views, views unpopular even with an ethnic or religious population the terrorists claim to represent. 'Most Muslims reject the ideology of ISIS', goes the mantra, and I have no doubt that it is true. What we do need to do, however, is to consider the issues which give terrorists whatever degree of popular support they do have, for by dealing justly with the legitimate concerns of the population from which the terrorists come, one can begin to drain the swamp.

So rather than looking at terrorists' demands, if indeed they have any coherent demands, it would be better to look at the much bigger picture of the religious revival the world is currently undergoing. Demanding and vigorous versions of several strains of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Pentecostalism, have all taken off in the decades since the end of the Cold War. What they have in common is a rejection of Western materialism, which they associate with Western political hegemony. The package they offer has had

considerable appeal not only in former colonial countries, where resentment of the West might be expected, but in the West itself, and not only among the dispossessed, but among the comfortable and educated. You don't have to lack material possessions to experience the emptiness of materialism: on the contrary. Islamic terrorism, like the Hindu and Buddhist mobs who burn down churches, are an extreme manifestation of this much bigger phenomenon. The anti Christian violence comes, as Samir notes, from an association of Christianity with Western values. But as a matter of fact, the recent Paris attacks targeted, among other things, a Rock concert.

The Eagles Of Death Metal band was in the middle of the show when the assailants attacked the Bataclan. Pseudonym of its singer: The Devil Jesse Hughes. In a European tour to defend their new album Down Zipper (!), the first in seven years, the rockers were playing on stage the Title: Kiss the Devil when the first shots were heard inside the room...



Western culture has major aspects which are an affront to God, to the Natural Law, and to Reason. What I have argued

[here](#)

, is that what we urgently need is a critique of the decadent West which is specifically Catholic, at once sane and radical. As I wrote:

"The problems posed by the de-secularisation of the world are not going to be solved overnight, but we can do something to stop making things worse. We can assert the Catholic critique of the decadence of Western culture, especially sexual culture. If there is one concrete gesture which might make those being

drawn towards militant Islam stop and think that, perhaps, the Catholic Church may not be part of the problem they are trying to address, then it might be the restoration of head-coverings in church by Catholic women in the West. This would signal a rejection of both decadent sexual mores and of the attack on the difference between the sexes.

"Contemplate the likelihood of this happening any time soon, and you will glimpse the depth of the problem."

This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2015/11/islam-and-decadent-west.html>
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God Hates Efficiency [at Little Fiat]

Efficiency is a tricky thing. Our market-driven, productivity-obsessed culture holds it as one of the most important virtues (along with autonomy, independence, and originality), and let's face it: who among us is sitting around with too much free time? Not me, that's for sure. I have to be efficient just to get the laundry done in between changing diapers, making meals, and wiping snotty noses (thanks, preschool!). If I were more efficient, maybe the living room floor wouldn't have so many crumbs on it right now.

But it's easy to fall into the trap of prizing efficiency as the highest good. It's not. God doesn't care much about efficiency, and I know this because He Himself is super inefficient.

Don't believe me? Let's consider the inefficiency of God.



In the first place: we exist. Creation itself is VASTLY inefficient. God is perfect and perfectly self-sufficient, so why create anything at all? We can add nothing to God's perfect nature; He didn't need us. As a Trinity of Persons, he's even got community baked into his divine nature. All the angels, saints, sinners, and the whole material and immaterial universe: what a waste of time and effort. Very inefficient.

But hey, here we are, and the inefficiency doesn't stop there! God decided to take millenia to even bring the human race around after kicking things off with a Big Bang—was that really necessary? After Adam and Eve finally show up on the scene, they have their big moment of bringing sin on our poor species, and then God waits ANOTHER few thousand years before sending Jesus Christ to fix things up, the slowpoke.

But beyond just taking his time, God has built inefficiencies into the system. For example, there's the

concept of the intercession of the saints. We Catholics believe that we can pray to our departed brothers and sisters in Christ in Heaven, asking them to intercede for us to the Father, the same way our friends here on earth can pray for us. But here's the thing: how do the saints hear our prayers?

Well, it's through the beatific vision. That is, the saints spend their time contemplating and worshipping God, and through this heavenly union with God, they receive information from Him who sees and knows everything.

So this is how it works: we pray to a saint to ask for his prayers. God is the messenger who relays our prayer to that saint. The saint then prays to God for us. And then God responds.

Talk about inefficient! It's like giving a note addressed to your child, TO that child, to deliver to someone else, who has to give it back to him before he can read it. It's almost nonsensical.

Actually, it IS nonsensical, until you think about why God might do things this way. It's because He doesn't value efficiency in itself. He values love. He values community. He values us, his beloved creation, and so helps us to find ways to depend on each other, to build each other up, and to participate actively and meaningfully in his divine plan of redemption.

Sure, He COULD do lots of things more efficiently, but instead He delights in involving us. He says, "Come join in this wonderful work with me!"

It's like baking with a small child: you could make the muffins way faster by yourself, but they love scooping the flour and mixing the batter, and they are so proud of the muffins that they truly helped to make. You do it for your love of them. The relationship and the time together are more important than the lost ten minutes and the extra step of wiping down all the sticky surfaces.

Just like the generous Father he is, God chooses extravagant love over efficiency every time.

If our personal pursuit of efficiency comes at the expense of love or our relationships, then it's not a good thing at all. There have been plenty of villains who were incredibly efficient, but they were still villains. "Getting things done" is only as good as whatever the "things" are.

Sure, sometimes efficiency is good—we are called to be stewards of creation and to use our resources wisely. But in those cases, efficiency is subordinate to a higher priority. Being efficient in our use of paper is in recognition of the importance of forests in our environment. Wasting money might endanger your family's well-being if that money would be needed for food or rent. Efficiency isn't an idol being served in these cases; it's in service to a greater good.

Often the most important forms of love are seemingly inefficient: sweeping the same old kitchen floor over and over again to provide a clean house for your family. Visiting a nursing home. Praying a rosary with your children. Kneeling in front of the Eucharist. Putting your work aside to give a hug and a listening ear to someone who's upset. The world calls these wastes of time; we know differently.

So if you're frustrated today because it feels like you can't get one simple task done around all of the interruptions and questions and snack requests, remember this: as long as you are acting in a spirit of love and service, you are doing your job perfectly. We are here for each other and for God, not for clean floors and big bank accounts. It doesn't matter how long things take.

In fact, when it comes to love, the longer the better.

Like the
GENEROUS FATHER
He is,
God chooses
extravagant love
over **EFFICIENCY**
every time.

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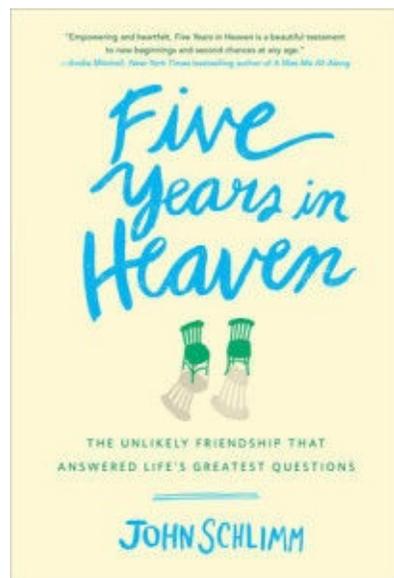
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Delightful Inspirational Reading for the Holidays & Beyond [at A Catholic Newbie]

I love to read! But these days I tend to engross myself in nonfiction books, mostly related to Catholicism, theology and religion. Sometimes, though, my brain needs a break from all the heavy stuff with a light and pleasant read. The holidays can be a perfect time for this type of reading if the rest of life is already overwhelming your brain.

I've got two new books to recommend that are just perfect for grabbing a soft blanket, curling up on a rainy or snowy day and jumping into the beautiful simplicity of these stories. These are books you won't want to put down.

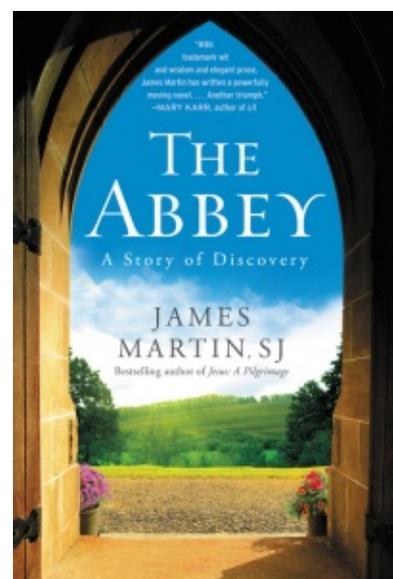


Five Years in Heaven: The Unlikely Friendship That Answered Life's Greatest Questions by [John Schlimm](#) (Image Books, 2015)

“Five Years in Heaven” is a memoir of a young professional’s relationship with a 90+-year-old nun in Pennsylvania. Schlimm shares how he met Sister Augustine, who runs a ceramics shop at a 150-year-old convent where he lived, and began a five-year dialogue with her that led him to sort out God’s direction for his life, learning valuable lessons along the way.

As St. Teresa of Avila says, “God is in the pots and pans,” so He is in this simple story. While I am no artist and know nothing about ceramics, I absolutely delighted in the descriptions of how Sister Augustine created these little works of art that ended up bringing so much joy to so many. From her fingers molding the clay to firing them in the kiln to her gentle strokes of paint, God is in the details here. I could have read on and on about the beauty that came from her creations and from her gift of self to this young man.

It’s truly a delight and covers several Christmas seasons, making it a lovely Advent treat.



[*The Abbey: A Story of Discovery*](#) by James Martin, SJ (Harper One, 2015)

The Abbey is a fiction tale that came to Martin in a dream. Martin is a Jesuit priest and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* and *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, as well as editor at large of *America* magazine.

I love anything about a convent or monastery, as I'm fascinated with how they live their days focused on prayer and work — and all the difficulties that must come with living in community. This story follows the intersection of the lives of three people — a single man, a divorced mother whose son died as a teenager and the abbot of a monastery, also in Pennsylvania.

This is a wonderful story of love, loss and finding one's place in religion lived out in three very different ways. I think we can all find ourselves in one of these characters, relating to their struggles and their attempts to find peace in life. I finished this book in a matter of days and found myself anxious to know what happens to these characters next. It's always the mark of a good book when you are sad for it to end :).

The Abbey reminds me of the [Mitford Series](#) by Jan Karon, which followed the simple lives of an Episcopal rector in small town North Carolina. Enjoyable, easy, inspirational reading.

[Read a sample of "The Abbey"](#)

Get your Christmas reading in order now so when you need a break from the busy-ness, you'll have handy a copy of one of these works to put yourself in another place and time.

Note: I received a copy of "Five Years in Heaven" from [Blogging for Books](#) and a copy of "The Abbey" from HarperOne for this review.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/delightful-inspirational-reading-for-the-holidays-beyond/>

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There is No Other Stream (How We Forgot our Song) [at Mere Observations]

*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement.
And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

T.S. Eliot
Burnt Norton (1935)
Four Quartets

A few hours ago I was sitting in a pew near the rear of the Eucharistic Adoration Chapel of the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration (we know them as the “Pink Sisters”), listening to them sing Midday Prayers before the presence of the exposed Blessed Sacrament. I come every Friday...to pray, to think, or to simply sit in silence. Today I came for the silence, seeking a respite from the angry, hurting and confused voices we all have heard over the past week since the terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and elsewhere last Saturday. We’ve heard them again soon after as the debate about whether or not to accept Syrian refugees into the United States rages on.

[As to that specific question I have decided not to enter into the fray here. If I were, however, I would surely quote extensively from what I consider to be the best response yet to the question by Dr. Taylor Marshall, who takes the most clear-eyed and pragmatic approach that I’ve found so far. You may read it here: [Islamic Refugee Crisis: Good Samaritan or Maccabean Response? Or both](#), and in fact I encourage you to do so. As Dr. Marshall writes in the introduction: *This article is politically incorrect and says things that might shock you. Please read the entire article until the very last two paragraphs before making a judgment or writing incendiary comments. This might be one of the clearest things you’ve read on the topic, because it draws on virtue ethics of Thomas Aquinas – something generally ignored in our day and age.*]

I’ve found it difficult to even begin to write something to make sense of it all. The need to place blame. Or offer solutions. As if I could do any of that. What I sought at the chapel today was peace with a side order of clarity. I found some today.

Without getting into specifics I will say that some of the fog that has lifted is the quick-trigger response I often have to blame Islam. Before you think I’ve gone off the deep end please hear me out. While Islam is a heresy, and often a dangerous ideology, I do not lay the blame for the terrorist actions or the growth of ISIS solely on Islam. For the conclusion I’ve arrived at is simply this: Islam is one of many ideologies competing to fill the void left by the West’s abandonment of its Judeo-Christian heritage. And before we lose our minds over Islam we need to recognize that we’ve got an even bigger problem to confront at

home.



I've read that great civilizations held their course and their prosperity as long as its people knew its story. That story is what provided them with common purpose. Vision. It gave them their song.

We in the West have long ago abandoned our story and have lost our conviction. We have forgotten our song.

*They have given us into the hand of new unhappy lords,
Lords without anger and honour, who dare not carry their swords.
They fight by shuffling papers; they have bright dead alien eyes;
They look at our labour and laughter as a tired man looks at flies.
And the load of their loveless pity is worse than the ancient wrongs,
Their doors are shut in the evening; and they know no songs.*

G.K. Chesterton, The Secret People

I began to connect the dots as I watched the BlackLivesMatter movement spread like wildfire across the campuses of our nation's universities. Watching the videos, reading about their demands, and marveling at the speed in which they are filling a vacuum left by the lack of purpose felt by the youth in our country has led me to this theory. Our nation abandoned its traditions and began to tear down the institutions that made it strong long ago, but especially after World War II.

The sexual revolution begat the pill, unlimited abortion, the desecration of the sanctity of marriage by way of adultery and no-fault divorce, the destruction of the family, multitudes of single parent homes, the feminization of men and the epidemic of fatherless children, not to mention the rampant glorification of porn and unfettered access thereof. Pornography itself leading to the objectification of others, an inability to connect and maintain personal relationships and the constant pursuit of the orgasm over everything else (not to mention sex-trafficking and prostitution). All of which creates the majority of the ills we face as a society today; the ills we tell ourselves we must find solutions to at the costs of millions upon millions of dollars and social programs. We throw buckets of money at the problem but never dare address the solution that would cost us nothing. I've often thought that a great subject for a book would be about what the consequences are of doing the exact opposite of each of the Ten Commandments.

Our nation is increasingly becoming a citizenry without purpose. Men and women seek adventure. We yearn for a deeper purpose and contribute *something* during our time on this earth to help bring order

and clarity. But we have removed that sense of belonging by way of Cultural Marxism and Critical Theory. We are committing suicide while wandering through a fog of our own choosing. And while we stumble aimlessly, threats to our existence and our civilization are growing stronger inside (Cultural Marxism) and outside (Islamic extremism) our culture because they are helping many to find a purpose, nihilistic though it may be.



[Writing in *The American Conservative*](#), Rod Dreher brought to my attention an interview between Sophie Shevardnadze of *Russia Today* and Scott Atran, an anthropologist who studies terrorism that was an eye opener. Among the more interesting parts of the interview was this exchange:

SS: *Dr. Atran, I know that you've mentioned that even if ISIS is destroyed in Iraq and Syria, it will spring up elsewhere and you've said, Africa, for instance, and Asia. Is the potential of this movement limitless? How many people can there be who want to live in a blood-thirsty, genocidal state run by psychopaths? I mean, I know, you're saying it's a repetition of history...*

DR.SA: Well, first, I don't think they're psychopaths...

SS: *...and you know, it's like French Revolution or Bolshevik revolution – but you'd think that we've learned something from history, no? I mean, I don't want to be back in Bolshevik revolution times...*

DR.SA: No, I don't think so. Look, George Orwell in his review of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" back in 1939 have described the essence of the problem. He said: **"Mr. Hitler has discovered that human beings don't only want peace and security and comfort and free from want. They want adventure, glory and self-sacrifice, and Mr. Hitler's appealed to that – and while the Oxford student union at that time vowed to never fight again, Mr. Hitler has 80 million people fall down to his feet, in one of the most advanced countries in the world."** How did that happen? Again, ISIS is appealing to the same sort of sentiments, that have been appealed to throughout human history... and no, I don't think we've learned much from history about that.

[snip]

SS: *But, you know, we're used to think that young people, teen in transition, like you say, they want freedom. They want to have fun, they want to have sex and drugs and drink. What we see with ISIS is forbidding this, for young people and for everyone – yet, there is this flock towards ISIS. I still don't understand why, because whatever they're trying to convince young people of, it's pretty obvious there is no freedom where they are going. And young people usually strive for freedom...*

DR.SA: Yeah, but I believe they do think they're getting freedom. Instead of freedom-to-do-things, it's freedom-from-having-to-do-things, where a life well-ordered and promising. I mean, again, they appeal to people from all over the world. I got a call from head of Medical School telling me that her best students have just left to set up field hospital for ISIS in Syria, and she was asking me why would they do this; and I said, "because it's a glorious and adventurous mission, where they are creating a Brand New World, and they do it under constraints." I mean, people want to be creative under constraints. A lot of young people just don't want the kind of absolute freedom you're talking about. The choices are too great, there's too much ambiguity and ambivalence. There are too many degrees of freedom and so one can't chart a life path that's at all meaningful, and so these young people are in search of significance, and ISIS is trying to show them a way towards significance. Again, we have to take it very seriously, that's why I think it's the most dynamic counter-cultural movement since WWII, and it's something I don't think people are taking seriously, just dismissing them as psychopaths and criminals and... this, of course, is something that we have to destroy. I think, we're on the wrong path in terms of the way we're going to destroy it.

The West became bored and complacent with its story and wandered from the path. A new siren song has been whispered into the ears of the culture and is having an affect. Need proof outside of the headlines of the day? Easy. Wade into the comboxes. Engage someone in a simple back and forth. It is nary impossible as everyone has dug their collective heels deep into the fatty flesh of their malaise. Forgive me for sounding arrogant, but it's like trying to talk reason to a room full of pre-Kindergarten toddlers. It's pointless.

Now before I get accused of comparing college students to ISIS terrorists, read the boldfaced print in that portion of the interview again, but do by thinking not of ISIS, but of those college student movements. I don't know how much of the video or accounts of the confrontations at the University of Missouri, Yale or Dartmouth that you've read, but I saw most of them. And when I read of the storming of the library at Dartmouth in which protesting students yelled at their peers who were only there to do what college students usually do—study—and demanded that their peers stand and chant along I got an ill feeling. And when those same protesters then got in the faces and screamed horrible things and threats at those students who refused to stand I did get ill. Because anyone who has studied the history of fascist countries has seen that behavior before. It started with students in Nazi Germany. It evolved into much worse. The Taliban took it even further, putting a gun to the back of the heads of those who did not stand in solidarity with Islam or renounce Christianity. Then they pulled the trigger.

People, we have seen this before. Too many times to count. Don't tell me I'm going down a slippery slope. We've already skidded far below that slope's bottom.

The West is a body that is sick, if not approaching its deathbed. ISIS, the worst sort of Islamic extremism, is simply filling the void.

There is a new book out called [*The Devil's Pleasure Palace*](#), written by Michael Walsh. It is currently the #1 in Education Reform & Policy on Amazon. I used to read Walsh for years when he wrote for the National Review under the pseudonym David Kahane, but I'd lost track of him. Earlier I referred to Cultural Marxism and Critical Theory. So what is that exactly?

The Cultural Marxists of the Frankfurt School believed economic Marxism would fail because of the resistance of the working classes. They believed Marxism could only ever be achieved by undermining the institutions, all of them. They began what they called the long march through the institutions. Who

would have thought even a few years ago that the Boy Scouts would go gay? The Frankfurt School would have.

Critical Theory is central to their plan. More than likely, whether you knew it or not, this is what you got in college and probably even in high school. This will sound familiar to you, as familiar as the bromides you now hear from the students at the University of Missouri. Critical Theory seeks societal transformation through the emancipation of mankind from all forms of slavery. The slavers happen to be the Church, the family, and the free market.

When you hear someone badmouthing American history that is Critical Theory. The incessant intonations against the Crusades? Critical Theory. The patriarchal family, rape culture, multiculturalism, political correctness, speech codes; all Critical Theory. The idea is to make you question everything and in the questioning institutions fall.

You can read the entire review by Austin Ruse of Walsh's book [here](#). Like me, you may also want to pick up a copy, and the Amazon link is [here](#). I have already ordered mine.

It was after I spent some time thinking more about the book's subject, the protests at universities and the Islamic terrorism/Syrian refugee issues that I read this soon after the Pink Sisters finished their Midday Prayers:

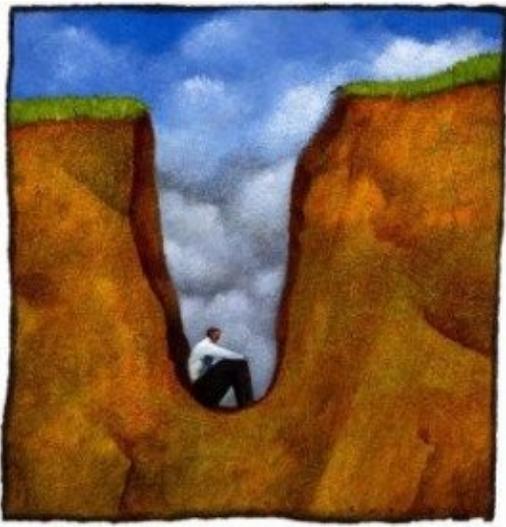
It seems that there is an almost ubiquitous denial of anything sacred in our contemporary world. *In our day, a very false opinion is popularized which holds that the sense of religion implanted in men by nature is to be regarded as something adventitious or imaginary, and hence, is to be rooted completely from the mind as altogether inconsistent with the spirit of our age and the progress of civilization.*[10] How striking it is to note that the propagators of these ideas, who claim to be themselves so highly cultured, receive with such credulity the prognostications of computer programming. Everybody believes that there is 'Someone' ruling the universe, 'Someone' who is not bound by human knowledge or technology. *They have no faith, but they do have superstitions.*[11]

[10] Pope St. John XXIII, Encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, 15 May 1961, 214

[11] St. J. Escrivá, *The Way*, 587

From *In Conversation with God*, Vol. 5, by Francis Fernandez, page 517

I believe with all my heart that unless man returns to God, the faith and the traditions of the earliest Christians that all will be lost. The modern citizen of the West lacks that ability because it is no longer taught or revealed to him or her. No longer do we live in a society where it can be taken for granted that the person you're talking to has any inkling of the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments or what the Beatitudes involve. There is no common or agreed-upon foundation upon which to build consensus or understanding. Our house is literally built on sand. We suffer from poverty, but not of a solely economic nature. We suffer from a poverty of spirit and attempt to fill that emptiness by singing that most inane and vapid of post-modern anthems, "Imagine" by John Lennon.



But Western man still wants to believe in something. He has retained his capacity for superstition and myth, misguided though they may be. But his stories are nothing more than comic books and his songs pop ditties compared to the incredible legacy and canon of thought and song bequeathed to him. He has laughed at, scoffed at, and disowned the heritage left to him, brushing it aside as mere foolishness and folly.

Will Western men and women drink once more from the one true stream of life? Or will they return to comic books and refuse to have their thirst for life, purpose and meaning quenched because of stubborn pride?

The future of our nation, and in turn the world itself, will be determined by their answer.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

“I’m *dying* of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Silver Chair, by C.S. Lewis. Chapter 2.

This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2015/11/20/there-is-no-other-stream-how-we-forgot-our-song/>

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Our Shepherd Among Us: Reminiscences and Reflections (Part One) [at Justin's Corner]

by Justin Soutar

(NOTE: Here is the first installment of a three-part article series recapping Pope Francis' unforgettable visit to the United States earlier this autumn. This series was originally published on the popular website

Catholic Online

and can be read there as well. God willing, I will post Part Two next Monday and Part Three the following Monday. J. S.)

Towards the end of September 2015, our Holy Father Pope Francis made his eagerly anticipated Pastoral Visit to the United States. Like those of his saintly predecessors—the cerebral trailblazer Paul VI, the energetic actor John Paul II and the scholarly gentleman Benedict XVI—Francis' visit to America was an historic and memorable occasion that was shared and experienced by millions of Catholics and non-Catholics alike, both here at home and around the world, thanks to extensive national and international media coverage and the power of modern communications technology. Like his three predecessors who came to this land over the course of the last fifty years, Pope Francis was afforded a personal glimpse of the vitality and vicissitudes of his substantial flock here in America—and, conversely, we American Catholics experienced the blessing of encountering our Shepherd in person and the opportunity to renew our love for and allegiance to the Successor of Saint Peter.

Of course, each papal visit to this country has been unique. That of Blessed Paul VI in 1965 was confined to New York City, where he became the first pontiff to address the United Nations Organization. The great Saint John Paul II crisscrossed America like no other pope before or since, touring nearly all of our major cities during his five pastoral visits in 1979, 1987, 1993, 1995 and 1999. With his rock-star charisma and passionate fidelity to the truth of the Gospel, these spectacular visits sparked a much-needed revitalization of the Catholic Church in America at a time of profound doctrinal and liturgical confusion resulting from erroneous interpretations of the Second Vatican Council. During his single pastoral visit in 2008, which was restricted to Washington, D.C. and New York, Benedict XVI was respectfully welcomed by President George W. Bush and endeared himself to the American people with his humble and genial personality; that, along with his firm condemnation of priestly sexual abuse, took many of his critics by surprise.

Groundless Apprehension

In the weeks and months preceding this latest papal visit, a good deal of discussion in both Catholic and secular media revolved around the question of whether Pope Francis would really click with American

Catholics and the American people in general, and there was some apprehension that he might not, for several reasons including the following: 1) he didn't speak English, our official language and that of the great majority of American Catholics; 2) he was largely ignorant of our country's unique history and culture; 3) he was highly suspicious of, if not downright hostile to, the capitalist free-market economic system through which our nation has achieved unrivaled wealth and prosperity. Polls showing Francis' favorability ratings among US Catholics dropping somewhat in advance of his visit seemed to confirm this sense of apprehension. Based on these assumptions, some observers even ventured to assert that Pope Francis himself was not at all eager to visit the United States, dismissing the Holy Father's own statements to the contrary as merely exercises in formal courtesy.

Thankfully, however, all of these fears turned out to be groundless, due in large measure to the efforts of the pope himself. Of course, Francis has by now amply demonstrated his ability to transcend language barriers by speaking the universal language of Christ's love to everyone through his simple lifestyle and deeply meaningful gestures. But he knew that gestures alone would not be enough to fully connect with the American people. So despite his advanced age and the difficulties involved, Pope Francis took it upon himself to learn the American language so that he could communicate verbally with us in our familiar native tongue. It must have been a great sacrifice for him to do this, but the result was definitely worth the effort. It was truly wonderful to hear our Argentinian Holy Father speak directly to us Catholics and Americans without the need for an interpreter in his brief prepared remarks at the White House and in his lengthy, well-written address to Congress; hundreds of thousands of English-speaking worshipers also appreciated that he said parts of the Masses at Madison Square Garden and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in their language. And then there were those brief spontaneous remarks he ventured in English at key moments that added extra flavor to many of the gatherings, which usually concluded with "Please don't forget to pray for me" and "God bless America!" that endeared him to us all the more.

It is true that until recently, Francis could boast only a passing knowledge of American history and culture. However, during an in-flight press conference on his return trip from South America to the Vatican back in July, he promised to read up on these subjects in preparation for his visit here. He obviously kept that promise, for in his addresses and homilies given during this visit, he demonstrated a good working knowledge and understanding of, as well as a keen appreciation for, our nation's rich historical and cultural heritage. This was quite evident in his masterfully written address to Congress, in which he acknowledged that we are a nation of immigrants and discussed in some detail the different contributions of four well-known Americans to the political and spiritual development of our country. Francis' grasp of our history and culture was even more clearly evident in his address at Independence Mall in Philadelphia, in which he reminded us that the inalienable God-given rights enshrined in our Declaration of Independence, especially our fundamental right to religious liberty, must be protected and defended.

And finally, there was the claim that Pope Francis regards free-market capitalist economics in general with suspicion and hostility. The Holy Father deflected this inaccurate criticism in his address to Congress by clearly affirming the important role played by entrepreneurship and the creation of wealth in the fight against poverty. He underscored his point by quoting a brief passage from, of all places,

Laudato Si' (Praise Be to You),

his lengthy encyclical on the environment: "Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving the world. It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the area in which it operates,

especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good.” Like his predecessors John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Pope Francis is not opposed to business or capitalism per se; he is only opposed to the selfishness and greed that can, and often do, transform them into destructive forces that negatively impact human society and the natural environment.

By learning our language, getting acquainted with our history and culture, and affirming the proper role of our free-market capitalist economic system, Pope Francis dissolved all remaining psychological barriers between himself and the American people, enabling him to seamlessly connect with his immediate flock and his wider audience. Having first won us over and gained our full trust, we were then receptive to his message, which was the authentic message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—a message of truth and love, a message of faith and hope, a message of mercy and forgiveness, a message of personal responsibility, of respect for human rights and dignity, of peace and justice, of care for creation, of the beauty of marriage and family life according to God's plan. The three overarching themes of Francis' visit were the centrality of religious freedom, the importance of caring for the natural environment, and the critical role of the family in the life of the Church and civil society. I followed EWTN's live coverage of this remarkable papal visit as it unfolded, and I appreciated the faithful Catholic commentary offered by news director Raymond Arroyo and his guests Father Gerald Murray and Robert Royal.

The Personal Touch

Pope Francis arrived on schedule at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, D.C., his American Airlines jet touching down shortly before 4 PM on Tuesday, September 22. Overcast skies and windy conditions seemed to reflect the general sense of apprehension surrounding this particular papal visit. However, that anxiety almost immediately began to dissipate a little. As the pontiff disembarked and set foot on American soil, closely shadowed by his security detail, he was warmly greeted on the tarmac by a brightly smiling President Obama and his family, Vice President Biden and his family, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, and other dignitaries, as well as by an enthusiastic crowd of about 1,000 people who were completely fenced in. The unusually high level of security at Andrews was maintained with remarkable uniformity throughout the pope's stay in America, and it was reassuring to see our Holy Father so well protected at all times. After exchanging a few words of welcome with President Obama in a nearby building and then briefly greeting the crowd, Pope Francis boarded a small four-door silver Fiat and was driven under police escort to the papal nuncio's residence, where he stayed during his visit to Washington.

Sunshine greeted Pope Francis as he emerged from the nunciature around 9 AM the following morning; he proceeded to personally greet several of the three hundred lucky Catholic schoolchildren assembled nearby. Then he was driven to the White House for the official welcoming ceremony accorded to him as a head of state. Although the ceremony was scheduled to begin at 9:15, Francis did not arrive until ten minutes later because of the time he spent with the schoolchildren. Running a little behind schedule for most of the public events, with the notable exception of the Masses, was a pattern throughout his visit which is typical of his quaintly slow personal style. Although some might be annoyed by this lack of strict punctuality on the Holy Father's part, I find it charming and even somewhat refreshing. Unlike so many in our excessively fast-paced and self-centered world today, Francis is never in a hurry regardless of the importance of the appointment awaiting him. Of course, he does take his appointments very seriously, but he believes that taking sufficient time to encounter persons along the way is more important than maintaining rigid adherence to predetermined schedules at the cost of avoiding contact with people around him or gruffly brushing them aside. In this regard, Pope Francis gives us a valuable lesson in

Christian charity that many of us need to hear, bombarded as we constantly are by the selfish ideas and attitudes of modern post-Christian secular society.

Two Speeches

A chorus of cheers from a crowd of some 15,000 people gathered on the south lawn of the White House greeted Pope Francis as the Fiat came rolling up. In his eloquent yet highly propagandistic welcome address to the Holy Father, President Obama stated that the pontiff's visit "reveals how much all Americans, from every background and every faith, value the role that the Catholic Church plays in strengthening America." Unfortunately, the Obama administration's approach to the role of Catholicism in our national life has been dictated by its own radically secularist agenda. This was manifested by the fact that, for this very occasion, the President had deliberately reserved choice seats on the White House lawn for a slew of notorious Catholic dissidents and homosexual activists. Continuing his polished speech, Obama remarked to Francis, "You call on all of us, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to put the 'least of these' at the center of our concerns...to stand up for justice and against inequality, and to ensure that every human being is able to live in dignity—because we are all made in the image of God." True enough words, but here again they rang quite hollow; under the elitist Obama administration, the US poverty rate has soared to 19 percent, the wealthiest 1 percent are richer than ever before, and taxpayer funding of abortion is the order of the day. But the worst hypocrisy came a little later when President Obama turned to the subject of religious freedom, declaring, "Here in the United States, we cherish religious liberty." I cringed when I heard that. By forcing its unprecedented HHS mandate on our country and repeatedly refusing to rescind it, the Obama administration has clearly exhibited its utter disdain for the religious liberties of Catholics and other Christians in America.

In his brief address thanking President Obama for his welcome—his first public speech given in English on US soil—Pope Francis emphasized that religious freedom "remains one of America's most precious possessions...all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it." This was a clear reference to the Obama administration's egregious assault on our religious liberties with the HHS mandate. In his subsequent remarks, which were dedicated to the need to take responsible care of the Earth, "our common home," Francis approved of President Obama for offering a proposal to reduce air pollution and highlighted the need to address the pressing concern of global climate change. "Climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to a future generation," the pope declared. "We still have time to make the changes needed to bring about 'a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change' (

Laudato Si'

, 13)."

Initially I was somewhat put off by the fact that our Holy Father devoted nearly half of his introductory remarks to the topic of the environment, partly because I am convinced that global climate change is due principally to changes in solar activity and is thus largely beyond our human ability to control, partly because the global warming hypothesis which Pope Francis accepts does not square with the scientifically documented fact of declining global temperatures in recent years, and partly because I felt that His Holiness could have used the occasion to talk about an even more pressing issue such as abortion or radical secularism or the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. However, a close reading of what Pope Francis actually said reveals that the pontiff carefully avoided making explicit political or scientific statements. He was essentially laying out the Church's perennial teaching on good stewardship

of creation within the context of the present situation as he perceives it. He was apparently inferring that climate change is primarily a human-generated problem, but even if it is not, we do need to develop a strategy to deal with it because of its negative impacts on millions of people around the world. And even if increased carbon dioxide levels are not actually fueling a rise in global temperatures as the pope believes, we should still work together to reduce air pollution for the good of the planet and its inhabitants. Then too, it is the Holy Father's prerogative and even his duty to speak about and emphasize whatever he believes is important for us to hear and think about, and it is clear from Francis' choice of name, the length of his encyclical on the environment, and many of his addresses and homilies as pope that the responsibility to protect creation is a major theme of his pontificate. And while we Catholics are not obliged to agree with everything the Holy Father says on a matter of prudential judgment such as climate change, we should still listen respectfully to what the Vicar of Christ has to say to us on the matter, and we must not allow our prejudices to prevent us from accepting the Church's basic teaching on the issue.

(To be continued)

This contribution is available at <http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2015/11/our-shepherd-among-us-reminiscences-and.html>

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Home to Me... and to Our Children [at Catholic Review]

“Home is where the heart is,” goes the phrase. And it’s true. But for children who are adopted as toddlers, it isn’t as if you can easily explain that a strange, unfamiliar place is home.

When we met our sons as toddlers in China, everything was new and different. We were strangers to them. We spoke a language they had never heard, fed them unusual foods, and expected them to eat and play and sleep in a different place.

For the first two weeks—for each of our adoptions—we lived out of suitcases in hotel rooms.

If home is where the heart is, a hotel room for a newly formed adoptive family is home. But if home is where you can make a meal with an instrument other than a hot pot and not worry about having to lock your passports in a safe, then a hotel room is not exactly home. Not even when there's a fantastic playroom down the hall.



Our older son stayed in two different hotel rooms in China and a hotel room in Chicago before we finally

arrived home together at our house in Baltimore.

He had just turned 2 and, even after only two weeks of hearing English, he understood almost everything we said to him. But there was no way for us to explain to him that this had been our goal the whole time. This place, yet another unfamiliar building full of toys and food and beds, was our final destination.

This house, I wanted to tell him, was not just another set of rooms along the way.

This was special.

This was home.

Of course, after our long trip home—

. During the two weeks from Friday, November 13 through Thanksgiving Day, more than a dozen bloggers will share about what the concept of “home” means to them. “Home” can be elusive or steady. It can be found in unexpected places. It is sought and cherished and mourned. It is wrapped up in the people we love. As we turn our minds and hearts toward home at the beginning of this holiday season, please visit the following blogs to explore where/what/who is “Home to Me.”

November 13 – Julie @ [These Walls](#)

November 14 – Leslie @ [Life in Every Limb](#)

November 15 – Ashley @ [Narrative Heiress](#)

November 16 – Rita @

November 17 – Svenja, guest posting @ [These Walls](#)

November 18 – Anna @ [The Heart's Overflow](#)

November 19 – Debbie @ [Saints 365](#)

November 20 – Melissa @ [Stories My Children Are Tired of Hearing](#)

November 21 – Amanda @ [In Earthen Vessels](#)

November 22 – Daja and Kristina @ [The Provision Room](#)

November 23 – Emily @ [Raising Barnes](#)

November 24 – Annie @ [Catholic Wife, Catholic Life](#)

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11/15/2015 10:31:55 PM

By

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2015/11/15/home-to-me-and-to-our-children>
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The Kingdom of God is Within [at beautiful thorns]

If you have been following my blog, you know that I haven't been blogging as often as usual lately. To be honest, Tom (my husband) and I have been going through a tough time and have been trying to figure some things out.

For years now, we have been trying to figure out our ministry niche and what God's will is for us. Tom has a degree in Theology but for the last seventeen years he has been working in insurance at a company in Clearwater. Ten of those years we have lived in Lakeland and he has been commuting to and from work. That means for three to four hours he is in the car everyday. He usually leaves the house around 7am and arrives home between 7 and 8 pm.



It would be one thing if it was a job he loved but it is not his passion to say the least. It also is a very stressful and demanding job with unrealistic expectations that cannot humanly be met unless he lived at his job 24/7. It sucks the life out of him! By the time he gets home after a stressful day and 2 hours in the car in rush hour traffic, he is SPENT! Also since he doesn't usually arrive home till close to 8pm and around the time the kids are also getting ready for bed, the most stressful time of the day, this has not been good for his relationship with our children. It also does not allow him the time to be involved in much ministry at the church. We are thankful that it pays the bills but feel there must be more to life.

We have been crying out to the Lord about it for some time. I know the Lord has used it to build character and whatnot, but I would love to see Tom find a job where he could use his gifts and talents and a job that is rewarding and he enjoys going to. A job that doesn't suck the life out of him and take up all of his time.

Several months ago Tom came across a ministry position that made his heart race. It was a national, young adult ministry position that would have availed him the opportunity to also work from home. This sounded like a dream job and made us both excited. He applied for it and even was interviewed for the position. He ended up being one of the five final candidates. We were hopeful! For six weeks we prayed together every night and even prayed a couple novenas. Well, after six weeks of waiting, we found out he didn't get it. It was very disappointing to say the least even though we knew that if he didn't get it, then it wasn't God's will. If it wasn't God's will and his best for us then we wouldn't want it anyway, but it was still disappointing.

So, now we are in a place again of seeking and waiting. We are continuing to pray together most evenings, which has been very uplifting and faith-building. The Lord showed me that through us praying together, he is able to build infrastructure so we can eventually fly spiritually. Kind of like the bones in a bird's wings. Praying together has been helping build those bones.

If both Tom and I search our hearts, what we ultimately want to see is God's Kingdom manifest in our lives and the lives of others. God's Kingdom is His presence, manifestations of the Holy Spirit, lives changed and transformed, and also miracles. I think for us to get to the place where we see this kind of Kingdom manifestation, we need to continue to surrender to the Lord's transforming work in our own lives. We have been doing this for a long time so we are probably closer but there is probably still more the Lord wants to do before releasing us.



Needing some encouragement, Tom and I were praying together recently and the Lord showed me a coconut. In the middle of the coconut is the rich, nutrient filled coconut milk. First however, you need to break through the thick, outer shell. In this analogy, the coconut milk represents the Kingdom of God. The hard outer shell represents unbelief, fear and doubt, to name a few. I share this because I don't think Tom and I are the only ones that can use more faith and may struggle with unbelief at times.

Last Thursday's Gospel reading was from Luke 7, which says, "***The reign of God is not "out there" but is already among us.***"

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

The Kingdom of God is within us. If we are believers, we have the Holy Spirit. If we want to walk in the fullness of that knowledge and see the Kingdom manifest around us, first it needs to burst forth within **us**. We need to allow the Lord to break through the walls of unbelief, fear and doubt that have accumulated through trials and giving into worldly mindsets. We need to have the faith of little children again, knowing that we serve a good and loving Father that withholds nothing from His children (Luke 11:11)! It is then that others around us will also be able to taste and see that the Lord is good!

Going dark as we await the light of Christ [at Brutally Honest]



Fellow readers... I've made the decision tonight, on the evening of the first Sunday in Advent, shortly after our Church blessed the Crèche pictured above, to go offline for this holy season... my blogging and my social media presence will end until after Christmas for some much needed downtime.

My guest bloggers are free to have the run of the place (or not). Either way, I'll be praying hard for each of you and for where the Lord might take this blog, if anywhere, next.

Thanks to all who've read these pages loyally. Pray for me if you would.

And as always... carry on.

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2015/11/going-dark-as-we-await-the-light-of-christ.html

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Pass Me Not By [at Journey to Wisdom]

A reflection by Heidi Knofczynski

Whenever this Gospel is proclaimed at Mass, I always connect it with the hymn, Pass Me Not, Gentle Savior. Because for Zacchaeus, the grumbling crowd and for me unexpressed hopes and, also, those deep fears of abandonment in those hopes rise up as Jesus approaches us.



Pass me not, O gentle Savior,

Hear my humble cry;

While on others Thou art calling,

Do not pass me by.

Oh, how Zacchaeus wanted to get a glimpse of Jesus, so much so that this man, who had a great deal of power within the community, was willing to cast aside his ill-gotten dignity and climb up a tree to do so. An impulsive moment perhaps, but Jesus, who knows what occurs in the depth of our hearts, was right there. Without reservation He willingly entered this bully's home to dine with him. As we read, this caused much grumbling among those who had also gathered to see Jesus.

Many of those grumblers may have been scandalized by this because Zacchaeus so willingly took the side of oppression and dishonesty for his own personal gain. But among those grumblers, there were some in that crowd who may have been deeply hurt by Zacchaeus' unscrupulous actions and, maybe, his heavy-handed use of authority. Their honor has been stolen; stolen and misused by this little man in a tree! Why would the healer pass by the victims in favor of the victimizer?

Let me at Thy throne of mercy

Find a sweet relief;

Kneeling there in deep contrition,

Help my unbelief.

I admit in my meditations I sometimes I find myself to be a major grumbler in the crowd. I see myself standing in the crowd as someone wounded by that small person. I am still struggling under the burden of the dishonor and humiliation that was heaped upon me. I hoped beyond hope that the Savior would reach out His hand and call me to Him, to restore what was taken. But instead, He passed me by to get to Zaccheus, did I deserve my dishonor? Is there nothing about me or my sorrow that calls to His Heart? I do not even have the strength, under the weight of my burden, to think of forgiving this little man you are calling on. I start to fear my hopes; I start to doubt my Savior!



It is really hard to stay with a meditation like this, because it is so painful. There is often so much fear that He will not respond to the pain. We might be tempted to think that we don't want to risk being rejected. And on top of that, in the background of these thoughts are the murmurings of your own guilt when it comes to how we treat each other. Maybe I don't deserve His attention. Maybe I am selfish in desiring it.

**Trusting only in Thy merit,
Would I seek Thy face;
Heal my wounded, broken spirit,
Save me by Thy grace.**

This is where my meditation hears a soft whisper of “

Do you trust me?”

, so faint I could miss it save that it comes up through a rising sob in my heart.

“I have not passed you by. Those who hurt you cannot truly pay their debt to you without Me. Fourfold you will be repaid, just as in my mercy fourfold you will give. My justice surges like

water and spreads its splendor like an unfailing stream. ([Amos 5:24](#)).

Thou the spring of all my comfort,

More than life to me,

Whom have I on earth beside Thee,

Whom in Heav'n but Thee.

Truly we should not begrudge Zacchaeus his joy at being singled out by Christ in this way; we all are a Zacchaeus to someone. We have stolen someone's honor, or made them feel insignificant or worse.

Mostly we do this blindly, but not always. And you need His intimate love and unfailing grace to even begin to pay this kind of debt back. Christ does not pass by **ever** in indifference to the hurt one is feeling. He is always bringing you to a deeper level of healing.

How do you relate to the story of Zacchaeus? Are you ever worried that He might pass you by?

As Christ approached you this Advent, let Him draw out your deepest fears and replace them with a hope that is deeper still. Let your trust in His gentle ways cause your

justice to surge like waters and flow like an unfailing stream!

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2015/11/pass-me-not-by.html>
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Men at church... [at Servimus unum Deum]



Seemed like old times. The first parish I ever registered at was St. Olaf in Downtown Minneapolis - that was in the 1980's. I was able to make it to morning Mass there today - the first Mass at 7 AM. Fr. Kennedy celebrated the Mass - seemed like old times because he was newly ordained when I first started going there way back when, for adoration on Thursdays. That was the olden days in the early 1970's - shortly after my conversion, when hardly any church still had exposition all day - which was usually on Fridays - as at Assumption in St. Paul. **Fr. Kennedy always had the reputation of a more 'liberal' priest but I always found him orthodox in homilies and confession. This morning it could have been the Pope giving the homily ... it was excellent. [Get it you Pharisees? This supposed "liberal" priest may not be that cookie cutter Cardinal Burke priest you want, but when it comes to the essentials of the faith including MASS, he says the black, and does the red. While it's great to bring priests to further orthodoxy with kindness and encouragement, we should shut up if they are "doing their duty" and not scandalizing the faithful.]**

Notably, the chapel was fairly full for such an early Mass, mostly businessmen in their 30's or 40's, a few older guys, and what seemed to be downtowners - people who live someplace downtown. Like I said - there were mostly men. Everyone knelt for the Eucharistic prayer and at the Agnus Dei.

After communion I don't know what happened. I mention this because there is a lot of talk that men don't go to Mass. Just because men were at Mass this morning - and most likely every morning noon and evening at St. Olaf, doesn't mean that observation is wrong of course - **but it does indicate to me that men really do go to Mass.**

Mass this morning was not effeminate. Fr. Kennedy is a 'manly man' and a serious minded priest and Mass was celebrated according to the rubrics. The men at early Mass seemed like manly men as well. I wasn't on watch there, but I took in the crowd. I prayed and participated in Mass - I simply noticed who was there, what was going on, aware of my surroundings - not looking for errors or lack of formality.



St. Olaf

Here's the deal.

I think.

Men go to Mass when they believe, when their faith is living, when Mass is straight forward - and straight plays a big part in that - like honesty.

It seemed like old times to me - the daily Mass goes downtown have a living faith - they are not there because of an obligation, nor does their faith depend on the person of the priest - downtown churches get a variety of substitutes during the week. Downtown parishes host a huge diversity of persons. It's a microcosm of the Church I think. It's as different from my rich parish in South Minneapolis, as my parish is to the FSSP parish in North Minneapolis, or the traditionalist 'Remnant' parish in South St. Paul. There is a distinct freedom of spirit in a living body.

Love casts out all fear:

Years ago when I got caught up in the fear mongering which trails ultra conservative trad-minded Catholics, I ran into a priest at a store I worked at and he asked, "What the hell happened to you?" He asked in passing because he was in a hurry to get out of the store we were in, and I laughed and said, "What?" I just thought he meant I'd gotten a bit older or something. But now I know what he meant. He assumed I'd gone 'back' - that I was one of those people who wanted everything to go back to tradition. I never had. But I worked in a milieu he associated with the St. Agnes *cult* he had warned me years ago to avoid. And there I was.

I haven't seen him since, but I'd like him to know nothing happened to me. I'm just fine. I never rejected Vatican II or the Ordinary Form of Mass. This morning reminded me of all that.

I kind of think most men don't go to Mass because they don't like church-lady-talk, Mass chat, coffee and donuts gossip. They're not into the Fellini ecclesiastical fashion show of vestments, and grand style. Some may like it - some may not. [Get it guys and gals? We don't want stupid cutesy social hours or crap on the altar, that belittles the Holy Mass. Listen, a parish social every month or so is not bad for getting to know your parishioners and see old friends, and it's great to BOOST community, but that should not be a primary focus with a falsely misleading label of "evangelization" slapped on it. Other Christian churches have those too, and they attract more converts and ex-Catholics, so something is there beyond the socials.

At the same time, those of you who love liturgy and the Latin Mass too much, you think that ALL people will go nuts over the smells and bells, and cappa magna worn by prelates like Cardinal Burke et al? No. You have missed the point, as described above. It's the NO NONSENSE, clear teaching of the faith as part of the Liturgy that attracts people to Mass, especially men, NOT SOLELY the

things they see or the prelates wear. Most people don't give two cares about the cappa magnas and stuff. They are not liturgy freaks like some of you. Get this in your mind: FEW PEOPLE CARE ABOUT VESTMENTS, SPECIFIC PATTERNS, CAPPAS MAGNAs, ETC.

Now, this doesn't mean that we should have those ugly spaceship/barn churches with vestments and banners that look like they were designed by middle school children, and were maybe fine in our school years. We should at least have proper gear and wares and such that respect the liturgy at its basest level.

The main point is this: BALANCE. Not too disgusting, and not too much femininely designed gear and events at Mass as in the Church, but not the other extreme of pompousness and everything dressed up like the Palace in Versailles. Neither extreme attracts people, especially men to the Church.]

In my neighborhood, a lot of guys stopped going to church because of the bishop scandal - which included gay priests and teen boys, adulterous priests and parish secretaries and or female penitents, as well as billions of dollars of payouts in legal funds. That erodes trust - one guy down the street will probably never step in a Catholic church again. I also don't think most guys are all that interested in talk show apologists, dressed up in safari outfits, or talking like post-game wrap-up commentators. [Now this is interesting. Part of what has gotten people back to a sense of the Church and Mass, that is, those who are "on fire" for their faith, IS professional apologists, such as Keating and his Catholic Answers, and these speakers such as Scott Hahn, Jimmy Akin, Matthew Kelly (who is Australian, and the one I am assuming Terry is pointing out,) Tim Staples, etc. I think that Terry is partially wrong in his assessment. He might be right in that it's not bringing in the Masses, but to me these speakers have contributed to helping establish the "New Evangelization" generation base that now is starting to do ministry in the Church. CONVERSION EN MASSE???? No, that's what I agree on with Terry. I do not agree with his statement flat out and it needs qualifiers or re-wording.] Going after men doesn't need to involve chest bumps and back slapping stereotypical imitations of successful mainstream media pop-culture marketing. I don't think you have to try to sell men on masculinity with another spokesman in lace and red satin talking about how feminized men have become. [Here I think Terry is tackling the two extremes of Bishop Robert Barron and definitely Cardinal Raymond Burke, who in the blogosphere is famous (or notorious???) for that interview about the man crisis in the Church. With +Barron, the focus is on products, popular advertisements, videos, etc. He is in no way doing the bro-fist or the chest bumps or trying to speak like a teenager, but I get Terry's point.

As for ++Burke, Terry is 200% correct. The way that the Radicals Misrepresenting Traditionalists worship the lace and cappa magna loving prelate who does Pontifical Masses, is sickening. Isn't there a passage in Scripture about NOT worshiping Princes in the Church or society??? Furthermore, it is clear in ++Burke's interviews and the sides he has taken not only on Church issues, but on other personal "Trad Issues," (e.g. Catholics suing Catholics, Men in the Church,) that they are the Radically Traditionalist side in favour of that, with no proper evaluation and

balanced analysis of all sides and information on those matters. ++Burke sadly is doing no favour to Traditionalists, and clearly his reputation for what he is doing has earned him a ticket out of the Vatican's inner circle, and he will NEVER become Pope as long as he lives with the Post-Vatican II generation of current Cardinals (I am confident in that.) If anything, yes he ++Burke has been blunt on the issues at hand, but he has done so in a way that he will never gain the trust of the regular Catholic populace and his fellow clergymen, and even more so he is creating an atmosphere of distrust of the Papacy, one whereby those who are "orthodox" may be spiritually tempted in their admiration of the Cardinal (despite HIS blunt upholding of Catholic doctrine, which we can give HIM the benefit of the doubt) to rebel against Holy Mother Church and self-schism one's self to Hell lest they die. Also, like the issue of the fancy lace and clothes issue above people have been trained in Modern Catholic society to scoff at that stuff. Benedict got away with it being the Pope, but with Francis in charge, it's back to normal. Again ... most NORMAL people, NOT those in love with the Latin Mass, do NOT CARE about fancy vestments. The association of that with a "disappointed" , Francis-clashing prelate, gives a BAD reputation, and most Catholics will NOT be motivated by ++Burke to think positively of the Church, or of even the Novus Ordo Mass. Nevermind the Latin Mass, which he does frequently, so the TLM gets even more unfair knocks thrown its way.]

I might be wrong - but I don't think evangelization is the same thing as marketing.
This anti-Pope thing is so not going to attract more men to Mass either. Talking about the pope and the church in political terms doesn't work. I think most ordinary guys think this pope is great. I know non-religious people do. I'm no expert - just speculating here. [Men are just plain sick of politics interfering with the Church, from the top above, even down to the local parish level. I currently have fully disassociated with one parish, and mostly with another, because of this garbage. However the RMTs also ruin things by lashing out against Francis, when he is clearly NOT committing heresy. If people cannot even respect their highest leader, the one who is supposed to be the Vicar of Christ on Earth with HIS divine authority in matters of faith and morals, then why bother even being a part of the Church? They can get all that in their own religion or local community Christian church of whatever denomination.]

I don't know. Like I said, I'm probably wrong. [No Terry, You are quite right about all this. It's the sick RMTs that do not get it. You have gladly spoken on behalf of the normal, Catholic man. It was raw, true, and from the heart and proudly expressed the TRUTH of the matter.]

It was good to experience downtown again - I miss it in a way. I realized something did happen to me - in some ways, I am different today.

BTW - I never resign St. Olaf's, just stopped going downtown, and they stopped sending me newsletters.

I was actually 'involved' with the parish - unusual for me because I don't usually get involved with church people. The people I knew weren't there this morning, and so I expect everyone has moved on or away.

Nothing stays the same. You can't go back.

I'm just a single Catholic man.

This may be the appropriate to replace a comment from an earlier post discussing Pope Francis. Today I realized not everyone has a negative opinion of him - thanks be to God.

Yesterday I wrote: I must be an idiot - I just don't see Francis abandoning Catholic teaching. I see him as consistent with his predecessors - a lot more frank and talkative, to be sure, but I do not feel my faith is in the balance because of him. Actually when he calls out Pharisees and the hypocrites I've taken it to heart - I totally accuse myself. If it wasn't so indiscreet to do it, I would proclaim my

sins online - just to prove it. Rather than feel put down by the Pope, I feel his call to repentance and reconciliation - to drink deeply at the font of Mercy. I'm not just saying that either.

"If a good man reproves me, it is kindness."

My first waking thought every day is prayer - it is hours later that I even check online - my spiritual life comes first. Neither do I check what the pope has said every day. It isn't my first priority. I avoid those who 'report' on what he said, or how he said it. I believe only what is confirmed by Vatican authority, and if I don't understand it, it isn't for me.

I understand that a priest or director may have need to know what he said, what he meant, to refute what gossip media reports, so I pray for priests.

Personally, I just keep thinking that finally *I have a pope, a father who understands me - who understands the outsider - the freak. I don't have to try to fit in with any faction because he welcomes the stranger. [BAM!!!! Pope Francis' mission IS Working!!!! The Church is for everyone, you purist prudes! Christ's Church is Catholic, meaning universal, that includes the freaks! No we don't condone their sins, but we bring them in to give them a greater light in their lives!!!]*

If I feel like that think, of all the people who feel excluded from the Church now feel. **Think of all the ordinary people who don't identify with the liturgical class wars and politics.** There is hope after all for all the prodigals - while our elder brothers grumble because they have always been good and never wasted their lives on prostitutes.

I can't make excuses for the pope or church people - so that is not my intention here.

I've been steeped in sin since birth - so I dare not try to instruct anyone. Pay no attention to me.

I've always taken my cues from the Church - especially the Pope - be it Francis, Benedict, JPI and II, Paul VI and so on.

It's none of my business who is or who is not in church, any more than it is my business or under my control, who goes to communion or who does not go to communion.

I only have to make sure I go to Mass and I'm able to receive.

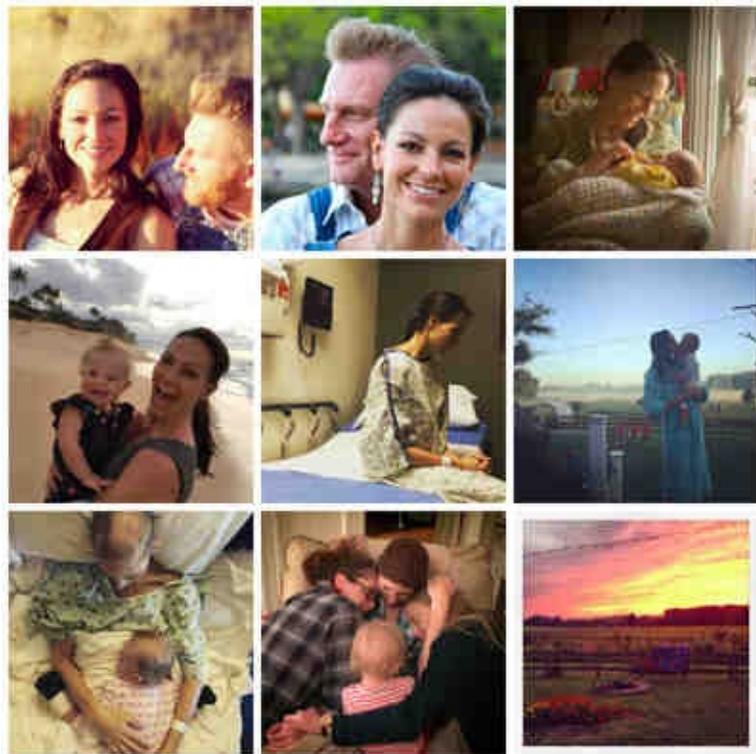
Joey Feek, 40, of the amazing bluegrass duo Joey + Rory is dying of cervical cancer. In October, she ceased all treatment and is now in hospice care at her childhood home — a farm in Indiana. A month ago her father went to the altar and was saved.

According to an interview, possibly her last, [Feek told the Tennessean](#),

“Now all of my family believes. And all of my family, when we die, we’re going to see each other again. I told my dad, ‘I would go through all of this again, if that meant one person came to Christ because of it. The fact that my daddy did, Dad, I would do it all over...”

Feek, a mother of three girls, was diagnosed with cervical cancer in May 2014. She underwent aggressive treatment, but the cancer continued to grow. Although she had faith that God would heal her body, she is reportedly at peace with dying. Her Facebook cover photo highlights a special prayer, Joey’s prayer:

“Pray for a miracle, but even more so, pray for peace with His decision.”



Courtesy Joey + Rory on Facebook

You can learn more about [Joey + Rory on their website](#) or on Rory’s blog, [This Life I Live](#).

How You Can Help Joey + Rory in the Final Days

Barring a miracle, Joey Feek will probably die before Christmas, maybe even before Thanksgiving. If you’d like to help the Christian duo’s song, *When I’m Gone* reach number 1 on the iTunes chart, [click here for more information](#).

Here is Joey singing that beautiful song.

When I'm Gone by Joey Feek

**And every star will take it's place / In silv'ry gown and purple shawl
You'll lie down in our big bed / Dread the dark and dread the dawn.
But you'll be alright on that first night when I'm gone.**

Joey Feek is not a stranger to tragedy. In 1994, her brother was killed in an accident. Her 2009 tribute is memorable, and full of the same grace she possesses as she faces her own death. [Click here to hear the goodbye she made for her brother.](#)

**But life will call with daffodils / And morning glorious blue skies.
You'll think of me—some memory / And softly smile to your surprise.**
– From When I'm Gone, Joey Feek

This contribution is available at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jenx/2015/11/the-reason-joey-feek-would-go-through-cervical-cancer-all-over-again.html>
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CONQUER SERIES

THE BATTLE PLAN FOR PURITY



One of the worst things

facing families today is pornography. A new five-DVD series is now available to help men — especially husbands and fathers — win the battle for purity. The program is called **The Conquer Series** and it's unrivaled in its scope and authority. It's a five-week, life-changing event that provides men with biblical strategies, scientific facts and insight on how to use God's weapons to become conquerors over porn.

From The [Conquer Series website](#):

For the first time in history, a cinematic teaching series on sexual purity is here to help men get to the root of the sin, while offering proven principles and practical tools to walk in freedom from sexual

sin like pornography.

The Conquer Series DVD set includes five 1-hour cinematic lessons on five DVDs. Included in the set is a 6th bonus disc with a leader's training video. The Conquer Series Study Guide is sold separately. This product is for group or individual study. Each DVD is approximately 1-hour in length.

Conquer Porn Series Highlights

- Explore strongholds that keep men in bondage
- Examine the neuro-chemistry of addiction
- Discover the weapons and strategies of God
- Investigate proven strategies to prevent relapse
- Study practical daily techniques to remain free

This contribution is available at <http://www.jenx67.com/2015/11/a-new-program-to-conquer-porn-addiction.html>
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What I've Been Up To... [at String of Pearls]

So much has happened lately that I hardly know where to start. I haven't been a very faithful blogger, have I? But between traveling and having patchy Internet access, it's been tough to keep up.

As I write this, our baby has arrived safely and is getting settled in Germany, where he will be stationed for the next three years. My husband and I flew out to OK the last week in October to attend his military graduation, help him get his car ready for shipment overseas, and make sure his apartment was ship-shape by the time the movers came to box up his worldly belongings.

Then our sweet boy took a few days of leave before his departure and came up to the new "Oyster Haven" VRBO house on Lake Champlain, because he wanted a chance to see it before he began his great adventure. So we "broke it in"--slept in it for the first time, on the brand new beds we purchased for future renters.

Our first morning waking up in the new house, this was our view out the kitchen window. Isn't it glorious?! As my dear late father-in-law always used to say, "It doesn't get any better than this."



We had a wonderful visit with our baby (which included a night of decadent lounging in the hot tub with cold beverages in hand--talking about the big step he was about to take, becoming a leader of men...and solving most of the world's problems to boot), and then before we knew it, it was time to drive him to the airport for a tough good-bye.



I'm sick and tired of this view, people: the backs of my sons, as they're walking through busy airports, getting ready to fly far, far away from me.

But like it or not, I am learning to deal with it. The acceptance process includes many tears; but it also includes a heart bursting with love and pride for the amazing men--all five of them--that I had the privilege to carry within me for nine months, and whose care God entrusted me with on their journey to adulthood. No matter how old they get or how far away their lives may take them, I am comforted by the thought that I was their very first home.



We were going to leave NY on Monday, right after we dropped our son off at the airport, and head back to our poor neglected home in NH; but while we were spending the weekend at the lake house, we became aware of some plumbing problems and other issues that needed our attention, so we postponed our departure until yesterday. (It's a good thing we gave the house a "test run," so that we could iron out some of the kinks before we have paying customers!)

I can hardly wait to show you some pictures of Oyster Haven! We have been working so hard on it--cleaning, painting, and furnishing it, and doing needed repairs. I have had a ball decorating each and every room. As my sister-in-law, who has a VRBO house less than four miles from ours, has said, it's like playing house. You get all the fun of making it pretty, without having to see the usual wear and tear your real home gets because people actually live there full-time.

Because our NH house was a bit overcrowded with furniture and framed artwork, we have been able to use a lot of things we already had to make this 1830's farmhouse into a cozy vacation retreat.

For instance, we brought a tan leather sectional to the new house, one we've had since our oldest son was about 14 (and he's 32 now!). It started out in our basement, then moved up to the former garage that we converted into a sports room/man cave. It's essentially indestructible, so we thought it was perfect for a

rental property.



The brown leather reclining loveseat in the foreground is actually one that we bought over the summer as a gift for my parents, but which they didn't like (that's a story for another post!); so we reclaimed it, and we think it works beautifully in this room. The coffee table and end stands are ones that we had for years and then gave to son #2 for his first grown-up apartment. After he got married to a young lady who had plenty of better-looking furniture already, they boomeranged back to us, and we didn't know what to do with them. Thankfully, we didn't take them straight to Goodwill, and instead stowed them in the attic; because now they've found the perfect home in our house by the lake.

On the wall behind the sectional are pieces of artwork scavenged from our NH house (with the exception of one small drawing of the high school where my husband and I met, which I had framed to add to this little wall gallery). They are pieces that were becoming a bit lost in the shuffle over the years, as wall space in our NH house has increasingly become as rare and valuable as a parking space in downtown Boston. (I mean really: when it comes to the walls of my house, my motto is definitely *not* "less is more.")

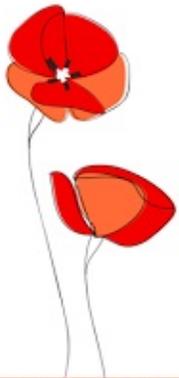
This Oyster Haven retreat is really coming together...and I'm starting to love it a little too much. As in: I'm a little bummed that we have to let other people use the house at all. But *c'est la vie*.

In the coming weeks, I'll post lots of pictures of the interiors. I know I've already shown you the amazing kitchen, but it can't hurt to show it off again, can it? (I am still in awe of this kitchen.)

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2015/11/what-ive-been-up-to.html>
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Works of Mercy Bouquet: Bury the Dead [at Veils and Vocations]

It has been awhile since I have really posted regularly. Have you missed me? I don't know if anyone has noticed that the blog is quiet, sometimes I wonder if there are actually people out there who read and anticipate new posts. We have been incredibly busy, plus I do not have internet hooked up at the new house. I told my husband that I could live without it for a couple of months, but I am missing writing and it seems impossible to get anything posted without constant internet. We have been working non-stop to settle into the new house and prepare the old house for rental, throw in some major plumbing issues and a two year old, and well that's why I haven't been writing.



*Works of
Mercy
Bouquet*



I wanted to finish my

Works of Mercy Series

in time for Christmas, everywhere I look the world is telling me that I am running out of time. On top of the internet problems, I have really struggled with what to write about "Bury the Dead". I considered skipping it, but that didn't seem right. I knew there had to be a story there to share, a piece of wisdom that the LORD wanted me to pen for all of you. But what? What more is there to say about bury the dead other than the title of the work implies. Surely, in modern cultures, the dead are always buried in some way, shape, or form. Most places have laws about that, you cannot just leave a body on the ground and ignore it.

However, two recent events made me realize why this is an act of mercy. The first was the terrorist attacks in Paris, the second, the anniversary of my daughter's due date--she would have been five on the feast of St Elizabeth of Hungry. I realized despite all our civility and hygienic laws, we do not properly bury our dead, and as Catholics, we must step up and go against the tide, and demand better for God's sake and our own. I shared

[the story](#)

of losing my daughter to miscarriage and the miscarriage of justice for her remains that followed before. I was assured that her ashes were buried within a stranger's coffin, along with "other medical waste."

Read as other pre-born children, except they were one who had been selectively terminated for whatever reason, I never wanted to bury my daughter before even meeting her. So, yes, she was buried, but how and where and when? I was never allowed to know. Did she have a Christian burial? Was she buried with honor and dignity? While, I will never know the answer to the first question, the second is a resounding NO! She was mixed in with other lost children, cremated, then strategically hidden in a casket, the family and friends never being the wiser. The loved ones who wept over the casket and grave never knew that they were weeping over my child, nor any child. Yes, she was buried for propriety's sake, but no dignity was shown. The value of her life was never considered, she was just some waste that had to be dealt with legally and efficiently. Do only the wanted and useful deserve to have dignity?

To my discredit, in examining this topic and the duties of the work that we are obliged to undertake, I found myself lacking as well. I never had a proper Mass of Burial said for Ashley. I have included her in many prayer intentions and Mass requests, particularly in November. I have lit candles and wept prayerful tears, however never a proper Mass just for her. Once I could not acquire her remains to bury, I felt that I had no right to such a blessing. I felt my opportunity to lay her to rest ended with the hospital disposing of her remains without my consent. Through prayer and reflection, I realize that I am wrong. I'm not really sure how one accomplishes such a task as a Mass of Burial five years later with no body to bury, but God has laid it on my heart to discover just that.

In the midst of this soul searching, the attacks on Paris occurred. They truly shook my heart and soul. I had

[sensed rumbling](#)

of something awful to come, but more over I have a great appreciate and love for Paris and her people. The shocking, yet not completely unexpected considering all that has been going on in the world, news led me down another path of examination. What could all this violence and evil have to do with a work of mercy? The LORD kept drawing my mind back to this article but I couldn't understand why. Then it hit me, head on---what will become of the dead terrorists? Where will their remains be laid to rest? Will anyone pray for their souls? Were they annointed and shown dignity that every human being, as a child of God, deserves? More and more questions, no answers!

I know that this is not a part of the puzzle that we want to consult. They are dead and we rejoice in that shred of hope that at least they can commit no more atrocities against humanity. However, part of me always wonders, what were their last thoughts? Did they have children, a wife, siblings, friends? Even in a radical, militarist society, their mothers must weep knowing they are gone. Surely, even with a mission from Allah, they will be missed. Even if they aren't, they were all infused with immortal souls at conception, they were blessed by the LORD and their lives were planned before eternity began. Yes, they have turned against God. Yes, they have sinned against their fellow man, taking innocent lives and creating fear in a cloud of evil and destruction. But, do we not all sin? Does it not grieve the Father when we speak harshly to our brother or child, when we react selfishly and refuse to focus on the other? Are we any more deserving of mercy because our sins have not become international news?

There is great evil in the world and it begins to feel like darkness is closing in on us, advancing every second. In moments of weakness, we may fear that the dark forces may win--but they will never prevail. Still, every one of us will stand judgement, all of us will meet our Maker and account for our every second of life. We will stand alone, there will not be a hierarchy, there will be no one less worthy beside us to make us look better. Our body will be buried in some way, shape, or form, and our soul will ascend

to the Gate. Will we be welcomed in? Who will we meet on the other side? Will there be a Paris terrorist? Will there be a poor, lost, and sinful soul that we wrote off as no good? God is our ultimate Judge, in His courts, true justice is metered out; not by what we deserve but by what He deems, in His Mercy, we will receive.

I pray often for the conversion of

our enemies

, for the softening of their hearts. I pray that their knees will bend to the One, True, God and they will turn from the darkness and embrace the Light. I pray that their consciences will guide them to the beauty of humanity and the sanctity of life. However, I have never prayed for their dead. I have never lit candles for the repose of their soul, never requested a Mass be said for their intentions. The LORD wishes that none should perish, in that final moment between here and the hereafter, we are given the choice of eternity in praise or eternity in misery. Which did they choose? Did even one of the terrorists repent as their soul departed this earth? Is he "serving his time" of cleansing in Purgatory? What is the quickest way out of Purgatory? The prayers of many faithful for your release.

So how do we live this work of mercy? Surely, we cannot hold funerals for children that we never knew existed. Should we track down the morgues where those killed in the perpetration of crimes are kept and offer to bury their bodies? I do not have the answers. All I do know is that we should mourn every life lost. Our heart should weep for every soul that leaves this earth, and pray for its eternal destination. So I ask all of you, please do just a little part in remembering all the dead, those loved--but more importantly, those forgotten, unloved, and reviled. Please, this Sunday, as you go to Mass pray for the victims, every victim, of the ISIS tragedies--those lost by force and those lost as perpetrators of force. In the prayers of the faithful, offer a silent prayer for the repose of the souls of the terrorists. After Mass, light a candle and ask God to grant them a conditional blessing, that if their bodies were not treated with dignity that they may be blessed in traveling from this earth to their final resting place, that they may receive a proper burial as children of God; for surely even if no one else in their family nor country has wept for them, their Father in Heaven has.

This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2015/11/works-of-mercy-bouquet-bury-dead.html>
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Seeing Mary As She Is [at Reasonable Catholic]



People treat things according to what they think it is. The first test of sanity is whether or not someone *sees* what is really there. The second test of sanity is whether or not someone *acts* according to what is really there. What we see and how we act ultimately determines whether we're living "in the real world" or not.

Mary is real person; and she's your mother and mine. Take a moment to think about this. You know it; but do you live as though you know it? *Do you see Mary – and treat her – as she really is?*

I'm afraid I often don't. Admittedly, I often get so caught up in studying and contemplating the *dogmas* about Mary, that I forget about Mary herself. So my personal resolution this Advent is to see and interact with Mary *as she really is* - my mother; that is, to see Mary as a person and not as a dogma.

Six years ago I re-entered the Church after several years fallen-away. Not long after my re-entry to religion I discovered a call-in radio show called [Catholic Answers Live](#). One of the first memories I have of that radio show (which would eventually become a staple of my intellectual formation – it's not *just* a show by airwaves but by airwaves, a portable classroom) is one particular call regarding Mary. Apologist and convert, Steve Ray was the guest. In his response to the caller's question, Steve pointed to St. Luke's Gospel and illustrated how Luke would have likely sat down *face to face* with Mary herself in order to know the details he so carefully recorded in his Gospel (note also that in his prologue – see beginning of Luke 1 – he states his firm intention to write an "orderly account" of real events). That statement – that Luke actually needed to *hear Mary's voice* in order to write what he wrote – was for me a profound realization that pointed towards the reality of the Gospels, and more importantly, the reality of the characters within the Gospels. The great thing about the Gospels versus, say, the Lord Of The Rings, is that the characters of the Gospels *live today*.

Imagine sitting face to face with Mary as Luke did. He records details about what Mary *felt* and *thought* during her encounter with the angel Gabriel. He also tells us that after the visit by the shepherds following Jesus' birth, Mary pondered "in her heart" what had occurred (see Lk 2:19). How could Luke know about this unless he had been told firsthand? Indeed, Luke must have sat with Mary, looked into her eyes, and listened with keen concentration as her sweet voice retold the events as she could remember them. And certainly she would have recalled them with flawless vividity.

Who is Mary to you, here and now? We know who Mary was for Luke – for his Gospel reveals profound insights into who he, along with the early Church, understood her to be (more on this later). But again, who is Mary – right now – for you?

You can't love who you don't know; and each new thing you learn about someone is something new to

love. Gaining knowledge is, therefore, key in the Christian life. But when gaining knowledge becomes an end in itself – and not a means that culminates in love. As we all know: Mary is a person, not a dogma. Marian dogmas describe Mary, but they are not her. Allow me to digress for a moment:

Doctrine is the Church’s collective teachings on faith and morals. But, of course, there are different [levels](#) of Church teaching. Thus, dogmas are doctrines which have been infallibly defined by the Church. Dogmas are not created by the Church. They are everlasting truths that are revealed by the Church. *All dogmas are doctrines, but not all doctrines are dogmas* since not all doctrines have reached that level of infallible certitude.

Stephen Hawking believes in the beginning of the universe; but he doesn’t believe God did it. He doesn’t believe anyone did it. He [writes](#), “Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing”. But only persons create. Laws don’t *do* anything. They are descriptions and nothing more. Dogmas are much the same. This is why we must always love the person before the dogma (common sense, I know).

God has told us much about Mary through the Church; hence there are some things we can know *dogmatically* about her. She was born without original sin and full of grace, and was consequently preserved from all sin thereafter. She was also the mother of Jesus, who was God always and everywhere – including of course while he was in Mary’s womb – and thus she is rightfully called the Mother of God or *Theotokos* (which means God-bearer). These examples (there are more) of Marian dogmas, though revealed by the Church at different times through history, reflect the constant teaching of the Christian Church since the earliest centuries A.D.

Mary is a person; and moreover, she’s personal – as all the saints are. We believe, alongside twenty centuries of Christians, that the saints are given a special grace of interceding for us from before God’s throne in heaven (see Rev 5). Saints look upon us as a great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1) who desire, not to be merely spectators, but to be personally involved in our lives as intercessors and friends. We will never sit at a banquet table with folks like Papa Smurf or Peter Pan, but with friends like St. Joseph, Pier Giorgio Frassati, St. John Vianney and Mary – oh yes, the invitation has been issued and the table is set: this is a real opportunity and the price of admission is persevering love decorated with mercy unto our last breath. This is not fantasy – it is more real than the reality we know.

Mary, furthermore, takes a special place in our lives that even exceeds that of all the other saints: she is our intercessor, friend and *mother*.

This tradition of holding Mary to be the spiritual mother of the living – that is, of you and me – has its origin at the cross of Christ . “Behold your mother” said Jesus to John, who stood with Mary before their bloodied Savior (Jn 19:27). This has immediate consequences, for Jesus was about to die and did not have blood brothers of his own to care for His beloved mother; so he chose the “beloved apostle” to take in His mother and care for her. On death’s door due to crucifixion-induced asphyxiation every breath is precious and counted; yet our Lord labored to speak these words directly to John (and John was sure to record them).

But the words “Behold your mother” spoken by Jesus to John were also, on a deeper level, to all of humanity; and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Tim 3:15) the Church has maintained this. There at the cross Jesus gives His mother to St. John—and to us too—that we might also be under her protection, guidance and help.

The *moment of adoption* at the cross was climactic as St. John's next verse testifies, "After this...Jesus knew that all was now finished" (Jn 19:28).

Mary is our mother in a spiritual yet literal sense. St. Ambrose near the close of the 4th century wrote,

"It was through a man and woman that flesh was cast from Paradise; it was through a virgin that flesh was linked to God....Eve is called mother of the human race, but Mary Mother of salvation."

Just as we might call Eve our first mother "in the beginning"; so also Mary might be seen as our everlasting mother from the New Beginning onward. St. Irenaeus writes:

"Just as Eve, wife of Adam, yet still a virgin, became by her disobedience the cause of death for herself and the whole human race, so Mary, too, espoused yet a Virgin became by her obedience the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race.... And so it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by Mary's obedience."

Mary fulfills perfectly what Eve couldn't: God's will. And she untwists what Eve twisted. She is perfect inside and out like, in a sense, the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant is the holy container that held the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, the miraculous manna of the Israelites, and the rod of Aaron that budded miraculously (Heb 9:4). The ark was *so holy* that if one touched it he would die (see Sam 6:7). It was, in a sense, perfect: designed by God, made of imperishable acacia wood and endowed inside and out with pure gold. It is no surprise therefore that Mary was eventually called the Ark of the New Covenant in the early Church.

Mary (in a clear parallel to the ark) held the Word of God (stone tablets), the Bread of Life (manna) and the High Priest (Aaron's staff). She was the sacred vessel who would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35), just as the ark of the covenant would be overshadowed by the glory cloud of God (see Ex 40:35).

St. Luke is explicit in his unveiling of Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant. With 2 Samuel 6 in mind, St. Luke describes what happens when Mary, newly pregnant, ventures to the home of her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. Steve Ray does a great job outlining the parallels between Mary and the ark of the covenant, as emphasized by St. Luke in his Gospel. From [Catholic Answers'](#) website:

Golden Box: Ark of the Old Covenant

The ark traveled to the house of Obed-edom in the hill country of Judea (2 Sam. 6:1-11).

Dressed as a priest, David danced and leapt in front of the ark (2 Sam. 6:14).

David asks, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam. 6:9).

David shouts in the presence of the ark (2 Sam. 6:15).

The ark remained in the house of Obed-edom for three

Mary: Ark of the New Covenant

Mary traveled to the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah in the hill country of Judea (Luke 1:39).

John the Baptist – of priestly lineage – leapt in his mother's womb at the approach of Mary (Luke 1:41).

Elizabeth asks, "Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43).

Elizabeth "exclaimed with a loud cry" in the presence of the Mary (Luke 1:42).

Mary remained in the house of Elizabeth for three

months (2 Sam. 6:11).

The house of Obed-edom was blessed by the presence of the ark (2 Sam. 6:11).

The ark returns to its home and ends up in Jerusalem, where God's presence and glory is revealed in the temple (2 Sam. 6:12; 1 Kgs. 8:9-11).

months (Luke 1:56).

The word *blessed* is used three times; surely the house was blessed by God (Luke 1:39-45).

Mary returns home and eventually ends up in Jerusalem, where she presents God incarnate in the temple (Luke 1:56; 2:21-22).

Mary as the Ark Revealed by Items inside the Ark

Inside the Ark of the Old Covenant

The stone tablets of the law – the word of God inscribed on stone

The urn filled with manna from the wilderness – the miraculous bread come down from heaven

The rod of Aaron that budded to prove and defend the true high priest

Inside Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

The body of Jesus Christ – the word of God in the flesh

The womb containing Jesus, the bread of life come down from heaven (John 6:41)

The actual and eternal High Priest

Final Thoughts

We don't have to look to the [Church Fathers](#) to prove that the early Christians honored Mary with a profound reverence (but we certainly can!). St. Luke's Gospel spells it out clearly.

Mary is a person, alive and glorified today. She is our mother, and will be for all of eternity. She loves you and I more than we could ever comprehend. As Frank Sheed has remarked, you can't love what you don't know about someone. So get to know Mary even better! Read good books about her: I'll recommend a few at the end of this post. Say the rosary daily and really meditate on the mysteries. See the life of Christ through the eyes of Mary. And above all, speak with her and invite her intercession often through simple, little conversations – just as you do with your earthly mother. Mary is always listening and ready to act. As St. Josemaria Escriva has written:

“Only after the Last Judgment will Mary get any rest; from now until then, *she is much too busy with her children.*”

Recommend Reading:

[Behold your Mother](#) by Tim Staples

Hail, Holy Queen by Scott Hahn

33 Days To Morning Glory by Fr. Michael Gaitley (this is a do-it-yourself retreat)

True Devotion To Mary by St. Louis de Montfort

[Refuting The Attack On Mary](#) by Father Matteo

[The Mystical City of God](#) by Maria de Agreda (I've never read this but [I've heard good things!](#))

This contribution is available at <http://www.reasonablecatholic.com/seeing-mary/>
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I posted this three other years. I decided to post it every year now, as long as I remember! It's worth some solemn meditation.

Lament of St. Nicholas by Paul Murano

('Twas the Week Before Christmas - in Contemporary America)

'Twas the week before Christmas and throughout heaven above

the angels and saints were proclaiming God's love

“Nicholas”, called Jesus, “Faithful servant on earth

it's time for children to celebrate my birth

Go on and inspire the parents of these

to all of their hearts I now give you the keys”

Yes Lord! cried Nicolas with the greatest of joys

I love helping out with their clothes and their toys

But most of all Lord what I work for these days

is leading their minds back to you and your ways

So he started his mission, this jolly ol' soul,

to the homes of God's children, the young and the old

The trees were in place and the candy canes hung

but he stared at the fireplace as carols were sung

Something's wrong! said the saint, as it paused his delight

Less than half of the stockings are hanging this night!

I see cars, DVR's, home computers, and more

but I hear not the laughter that I heard once before!

So he checked his list twice but it just didn't jive

there were many more children that were meant to be alive



Dear Lord, cried St. Nicholas with a voice of surprise

Many children are missing! as the tears filled his eyes

Oh Nicholas my servant, I thought that you knew

in many heart\$\$ green has replaced pink and blue

And Nicholas, said Jesus with a sad solemn voice

in the past 40 years this is what they've called "choice"

Then He took the saint's list and divided it thrice

and revealed the true meaning of naughty and nice:

This first group has children I could never create

my people used barriers and drugs with their mate

The second are the children that had never been born

from the wombs of their mothers they were taken and torn

And the third group are now all the children on earth

they're the ones that did make it through conception and birth

Oh Jesus I'm sorry! ol' St. Nicholas cried

This shouldn't be happening - they forgot why You died!

Help me to show them how to be brave

like the poor Virgin Mary giving birth in a cave!

I Am the hope many don't know, Jesus said

so go forth dear St. Nicholas – my light you must spread

'Twas the week before Christmas and St. Nicholas did pray:

Merry Christmas to all ... and to all a new day!

~~~~~ Photo and  
color scheme were added by me. image

- <http://dontbuytheabortionlie.blogspot.com/2011/02/contraception-is-not-solution.html>

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This contribution is available at <http://www.tasteandsee2.blogspot.com/2015/12/the-reality-of-abortion-and-artificial.html>

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## Why having kids close together rocks [at the measuring mama]

Eddie went hunting for a few days back home with his dad and (to spare me some sanity) he took Benji along for the adventure. My mother-in-law (*God BLESS her!*) is watching him while Eddie is out ~~filling~~ ~~our freezer~~ enjoying the manly thrill of the hunt. In anticipation of all of the free time I would have without The Explorer around for a few days, I made a hefty To Do list... I mean, two kids should be a breeze, right?

*(insert laugh here)*

But, without Benji, our whole routine is off. Something just isn't right and I can't seem to shake it and start ticking things off my list!

We miss our little Explorer. He brings so much joy to the house that it makes up for all of the red pencil he scribbled all over the family room wall shortly before he left.



I thought that without Benji blundering around stabbing at the fish or slamming doors or climbing onto the table (and chairs and toilet and window sills and counter-tops), I could get a lot done.

Turns out, my kids kind of like each other. A lot.

David doesn't know what to do with himself without Benji around. He spent almost an hour this morning sitting in the chair, looking out the window (*Um, yeah, he is THREE*). He has been randomly announcing that he “woves Benji so much” and asking when he is coming home.

They “talked” on the phone last night for a few seconds and even though they were just sort of giggling and blabbering back and forth, it really did seem like they were having a grand old conversation! In fact, I think David is really the only person who can actually interpret what Benji is trying to say most of the time.



*“Benji wants more watermelon, Mom.”*

Their relationship does something to my Mother-Heart. There is just something so beautiful about seeing a bond like that between your two sons.



And THAT alone makes me so glad they are so close in age....

It hasn't exactly been easy having 3 kids ages 3 & under. But, days like these make me realize that this motherhood thing isn't all about me. They have each other. And that is AWESOME.

Cheers to siblings,

*Becky*



# The Pulpit of the Pub [at Serviam Ministries]

Written By: Gregory Watson

“The slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” –George Orwell

Last week, Lawrence wrote a beautiful post about St. Dominic in light of the Dominican Order’s 800th anniversary celebration. In the post, he alluded to an event (which he referred to as an “urban legend” of sorts) in the life of St. Dominic that has long been one of my favourite anecdotes from the life of my patron saint, and I began reflecting on that event, especially as it regards our efforts in the new evangelisation.

A friend once told me that we should be preaching a “simple” message geared toward people who weren’t familiar with Christianity. He made the point that we have to start somewhere when presenting the faith—so we should focus on presenting faith in Jesus, and avoid the “religion” stuff. He went on to say that in the popular culture, “religion” is often automatically associated with negative connotations, and therefore when we present the message of the Gospel, we should try to shy away from the “religious” association in order to make the message more palatable.

He wrote, “Religion” is a heavy word. Those of us who believe will ultimately all admit that the word “religion” carries with it a lot of baggage. When I am doing bar ministry and someone says “You sing about Jesus, you must be religious then” I shudder and typically outline the differences between hollow “religion” and real relationship with Christ.

My friend’s reference to “Bar Ministry” reminded me of another scene of ministry taking place in a bar (or tavern, at any rate). This one occurred roughly 800 years ago, and yet the situation is startlingly relevant, I think.

In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church had risen to a status of temporal power that it had never before seen, and, hopefully, never will again. I say hopefully never again, because the worldly ties possessed by the Church tended to make her leadership become all too worldly. Bishops, priests, even popes, were living lives of sinful avarice and lust. While the Holy Spirit, as He does in every age, preserved the Church from abandoning the Faith, nevertheless, the so-called “religious” of the day were living lives that were anything but! Even the monastic orders had traded in their vows of poverty for opulence.

In this milieu of decadence arose a heresy, known as “Catharism” or “Albigensianism”. The Cathari (i.e. “Pure Ones”) stressed a spiritual relationship with Jesus over and above the trappings of the world and of the religious institution of the Church. In fact, they went so far as to deny the goodness of the world, living incredibly austere and ascetic lives of fasting and penance, in order to demonstrate their revulsion for their flesh, and their desire to die so their spirit could be with God. The Catholics, especially the clergy, in their hypocritical decadence, were hard pressed to offer any compelling rebuttal against the Albigensian rigourism. And many Catholic laypeople, seeing the hypocrisy of their leaders, and the apparent holiness of the heretics, were scandalised by the Church and led to embrace this heresy.

But in every age, when the priest has abandoned the truth, God raises up prophets to call him, and the

people, back to the true life of the Gospel. To rebuke the Church, and to resist the Cathari, Our Lord raised up just such a prophetic voice in the person of St. Dominic de Guzman. Travelling through France (the center of the Albigensian heresy) on an ecclesiastical mission from Spain to Scandinavia, St. Dominic encountered the devastating effects of Albigensianism. Dominic very clearly felt the call of God to stay in France and help preach the Truth. In order to be more compelling to the heretics and to the people of the day, Dominic adopted a severely ascetic lifestyle, taking strict vows of poverty. He started the religious community that bears his name, the Dominicans, or the Order of Preachers, and sent them out to preach to all people. He preached a simple Gospel as contained in and exemplified by the Rosary and its mysteries of the Life of Christ. His zeal, his holiness, and his preaching won back many heretics to the truth of the Catholic faith—but the most effective witness was his life of lived charity and sincerity.

While St. Dominic’s preaching was simple enough so that the masses could understand and be converted, unlike Jeff Bethke, he never compromised the Message to suit the prevailing attitudes of the day. When the people of the day saw the hypocritical way that the clergy were living, and rejected the Church because of the scandal, St. Dominic didn’t respond by saying, “Jesus came to abolish religion. It’s not about religion but about a relationship with Jesus!” Instead, St. Dominic became more religious! He combatted hypocrisy by living Religion faithfully, sincerely, and cheerfully!

One such instance of St. Dominic’s cheerful ministry brings us right back to my friend’s comments about the person in the bar who automatically associates “religion” with “hypocritical legalism” or some such thing. During his missionary travels through the south of France, St. Dominic and a companion lodged in an inn owned and run by an Albigensian. St. Dominic engaged the owner in conversation about their respective beliefs. The whole night long, Dominic patiently proclaimed the love, truth, beauty, and freedom of the Catholic religion. Neither excusing the laxity and hypocrisy of the clergy of his day, nor denigrating the Catholic religion as a whole based on that scandalous hypocrisy, Dominic carefully and lovingly explained the Truth. And when morning came, the tavern in which he was preaching was owned and run by a Catholic!

My friend is right—people do have a dismal perspective on religion—especially the Catholic religion these days. Ironically, there’s significantly less reason to have such an opinion today than there was in the 1200s! Nevertheless, these negative associations persist. Is the cure for the problem my friend’s solution, to create a false dichotomy between the Religion that Jesus founded, and Jesus Himself? Is it to play word games with “Religion”, to make it mean something that it doesn’t, simply in order to tickle the ears of our audience? Or is the real solution, St. Dominic’s solution? To preach the Truth with love, patiently, sincerely, and joyfully? To fearlessly and tirelessly preach the Simple Gospel, but accurately and clearly, and not oversimplifying it?

If lazy language does indeed cause foolish thinking, as George Orwell prophetically warned, then the real witness to the Gospel must present that Gospel faithfully, articulately, and sincerely. With reverence for our hearers, let us clearly elucidate the Truth, in a way that they will understand, but without compromising. And above all, let us follow the example of St. Dominic. Let us live the Truth.

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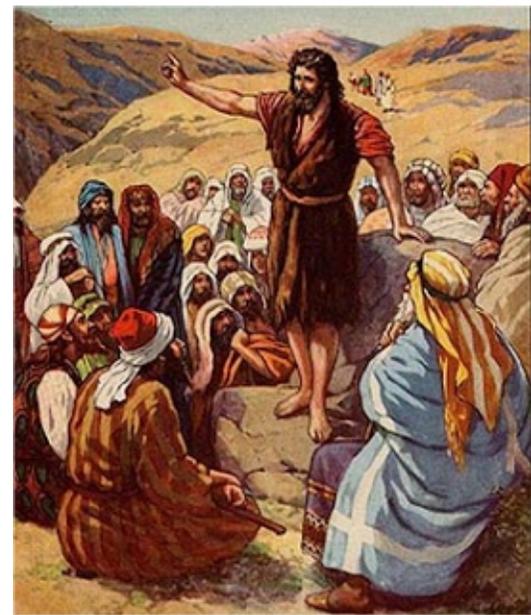
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# Pass Me Not By [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday December 6, 2015

A Reflection on Luke 3:1-6, N.A.B.



<sup>1</sup> *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,*

<sup>2</sup> *during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.*

<sup>3</sup> *He went throughout [the] whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,*

<sup>4</sup> *as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one crying out in the desert:*

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord,*

<sup>5</sup> *Every valley shall be filled*

*and every mountain and hill shall be made low.*

*The winding roads shall be made straight,*

*and the rough ways made smooth,*

*<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”*

As we reflect on this reading we might take a few deep breaths, close our eyes, and imagine that we are back in Jesus' time. We're walking parallel to the densely wooded bank of the River Jordan searching for a place to wade across when suddenly we come upon a throng of people gathered at the river edge.

Puzzled, we tap a burly onlooker on the shoulder, "What's going on?"

He turns with a smile, "Friend, John is baptizing those who are ready to be consecrated to God."

"He is John the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, but people just call him John the Baptist. Most people say that he is a true prophet of God, like Elijah of old"

Standing on our tiptoes and stretching our necks to see over the crowd we can see John immersing one pilgrim after another in the cold water of the river.

We tug on the cloak of our new friend, "How do you know that he is a true prophet of God?"

Turning he smiles again, "Just wait until you hear him preach. Besides that, the only clothing he wears is camel hair with a leather belt around his waist and all he eats is grasshoppers and wild honey as a sign of strict self-denial and spiritual discipline. Just wait, he's almost done with the baptisms and will soon begin preaching.

Intrigued, we decide to wait around to hear what he has to say. After all, anyone who dresses in camel hair and eats grasshoppers and wild honey might be worth listening to. As soon as he finished baptizing, he dried himself off and strode to the top a nearby grassy knoll. He turned to face the crowd.

Someone said, “John tell us what to do!”

He said, “Anyone with two tunics must share with the one who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.”

A tax collector rose to his feet. “Master, what must I do?”

“Exact no more than the appointed rate.”

A soldier stood up to speak for his small group. “What about us? What must we do?”

John said, “No intimidation. No extortion. Be content with your pay.” Then he turned his back to the crowd and strode purposefully away into the wilderness.

John’s message was unmistakable: give up extortion, blackmail, gouging, stop being greedy, and begin sharing with those who are in greater need. He eventually became so popular that Herod Antipas, fearing an uprising, had him first imprisoned and then executed. John’s reputation was so great that early Christians had to take special care to differentiate him from Jesus and underscore his inferiority to Jesus.

Still yet, the Acts of the Apostles contains two stories (18:24-28; 19:1-7) which tell us that John’s movement not only survived long after his death, but reached as far as Ephesus. And Josephus, the Jewish historian, some sixty years after the death of John wrote, “*He was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice toward their fellows and piety toward God, and so to come to baptism;*” (Ant. 18:116-119).

In the Church year John the Baptist is most prominent during the Advent season. The role of *precursor* or *forerunner* to the Lord is attributed to him by way of Isaiah 40:3:

*In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!*

*Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!*

Important as his role as precursor to the Lord is, it's John's message that is the essence of the Advent season. It's in living out his message that we truly prepare for the coming of the Lord.

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