

NewEvangelists.org

new
evangelists
monthly

January
2016

New Evangelists Monthly #37

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Forward

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

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

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Christmas is Christian [at Catholicism and Adventism]



Adoration of the Shepherds, by Gerard van Honthorst, 1622 AD

At this time of the year, when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and the Incarnation of God the Son in human form, scoffers appear. I don't blame atheists for not celebrating Christmas, but it is surprising, and sad, to find groups who claim to be Christian but shun the celebration of God the Son becoming Man.

Adventists are amongst these. Some Adventists celebrate Christmas, some don't. Many Herbert Armstrong derivatives don't either. Nor do Jehovah's Witnesses. Those who don't rely on two key arguments:

- 1) it's not commanded in the Bible, and no permission is given to do so, and
- 2) misinformation.

Part 1: No command / permission

#1 is easy to show the foolishness of. Most of these anti-Christmas people use flushing toilets, the electric telephone, and even the internet. Those aren't in the Bible either, and no permission is given in the Bible to use them.

Do we need permission to hold a celebration of one of the most important events in human history? Did the Magi need to find permission in the Bible to track Jesus down and present him with gifts – the very first Christmas presents? Did the angels need to find permission in the Bible to rejoice in heaven?

Do Adventists (and others) find biblical instructions to have their pot-luck events? Do Adventists (and others) find any biblical command to have their sabbath services in the morning rather than in the evening (as in Acts 20)?

Why the hesitancy to celebrate something as important as Jesus' birth?

Think about it this way:

If an Adventist group decided that they felt strongly that they identified with the feeding of the 5000 by Jesus, and they decided they would celebrate this once a year with a huge pot-luck ... would the Adventist hierarchy tell them to stop, because it wasn't commanded in the Bible?

Or this way:



Pope Benedict XVI wearing a camauro

1. Assume that the Catholic Church didn't exist.
2. If we assume that, then there would be no reason to reject things because they were Catholic.
3. Under such circumstances, would there be any real opposition to a proposal to celebrate Jesus' birth by a first century Protestant / Adventist / Jehovah's Witness?

I answer **No**. I think the underlying reason for most of these groups objecting to Christmas is that it is associated with Catholicism, which they hate. That it's not expressly commanded in the Bible is just an excuse.

In the Old Covenant, God specified when and how worship occurred, the dates, the animals to be sacrificed, and so forth.

In the New Covenant, we are not given those prescriptions. Instead of God telling us what to do, he now wants us to offer to him our own love for him ... and that is why we have the freedom to adopt [the day Jesus rose from the dead](#) instead of [the Jewish sabbath](#), to celebrate Jesus' resurrection [annually](#) as well as [weekly](#) instead of the Passover, to celebrate Jesus' birth. And so, from the earliest Christian times, that is how the Christians did things.

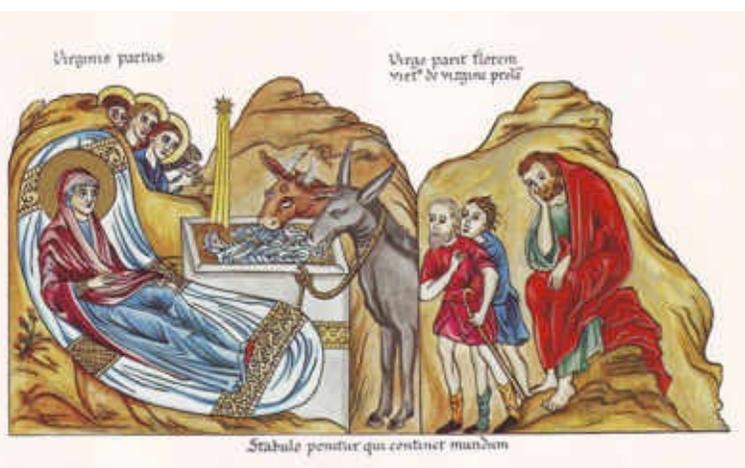
They turned the important events in Jesus' life into weekly and yearly celebrations.

Some Adventists, and others, tend to spurn these events, and either look the other way or denigrate them.

Romans 14 says that whatever day we use to worship God, we honour God by doing so, and those who cannot stomach that sort of thing are weak in their faith.

Part 2: Misinformation

I've said most of what I wanted to say. I'll keep the next section brief, and provide five links below that will take you to a more detailed look at why the false historical claims made by some Adventists and others are indeed false.



The Birth of Christ, by Herrad von Landsberg, 1180 AD

In short, the accusations are these:

1. Christmas is derived from Saturnalia and the winter equinox.
2. Christmas is derived from the celebration of the birth of Sol Invictus. (Yes, it's derived from two different events, depending on who is making the claim.)
3. We don't know when Jesus was born, and it wasn't in December in winter.
4. Christmas trees are forbidden in the Bible, and were adopted from the use of pagan Yuletide trees.

The answers to these:

1. Saturnalia started and ended before 25 December. If Christians wanted to use the date for Saturnalia, they could have asked anyone in the street. Furthermore, the winter equinox ended Saturnalia, 2 days before Christmas. And Saturnalia and Christmas do not share the same religious themes. And lastly, at a time when Christians were particularly averse to doing things that may possibly have resembled paganism, it doesn't make sense that they would adopt a pagan festival in the way the anti-Christmas crowd claim they did.



Lebanon Cedars, Lebanon

2. The celebration of the birth of Sol Invictus (the invincible sun) was once thought to pre-date the celebration of Christmas, and so some thought that Christians chose the same date to replace it with a celebration of the birth of the true sun of righteousness (i.e. Jesus; Malachi 4:2). It is now known that the Sol Invictus celebration came into being at least a century **after** the first documented evidence for

celebrating the birth of Jesus, and it came into existence as part of an anti-Christian sentiment in the Roman government ... so the Romans adopted the date from the Christians, not the other way around.

3a. The date of 25 December is calculated from the evidence given in the Bible about Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. The timing of her pregnancy can be calculated from the information given about Zachariah's service in the temple. With that information, it was determined that John the Baptist was conceived in September, and therefore born in June. Mary visited Elizabeth shortly after conceiving Jesus, and that was when Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant, i.e. in March. So if Mary conceived in March, Jesus would have been born in December.

3b. It was a pious Jewish belief, which early Christians considered relevant, that important people's lives began and ended on the same day of the year. So the early Christians knew that Jesus died at the end of March, which means that his conception must have been at the end of March too ... again making Jesus' birth happen at the end of December.



The Fall of Man, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1530 AD

3c. Winter? Snow? Too cold? The world was warmer back then – historians record vineyards growing in northern parts of Europe where it is too cold for them today. And even today, there are sheep out in the fields in Israel in December (special sheep for religious purposes.)

4. The origin of the Christmas tree comes from the German celebration of Adam and Eve on 24 December. Remember the story? There was a tree in paradise. Fir trees were well known to the Germans, so they used fir trees as the tree in paradise. Tree baubles? They represented the fruit on the tree. Later this was suppressed, and the tree moved to the following day.

So go and read these links, if you want more of the history – these people have read up on it more than I have:

- [Adam, Eve and the Christmas Tree ...](#) by Margaret Rose Realy
- [Yes, Christ Was Really Born on December 25 ...](#) by Taylor Marshall
- [How December 25 Became Christmas ...](#) by Andrew McGowan
- [Christmas, Pagan Romans, & Frodo Baggins ...](#) by Fr Dwight Longenecker
- [Christmas Was Never a Pagan Holiday ...](#) by Marian T Horvat

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I Knew Him in the Womb...

I just had to share with all of you the most amazing story of a young man that I know. Patrick Sewak is all of six years old, nearing seven. He is an extraordinary young man filled with virtue, and blessed by God; destined to become God's servant. He is raised by his wonderful mother, Meris, and by his grandparents Mark and Bernadette.

Patrick is "different" from the average child, and I say that in a good way. He yearns to attend daily Mass with his grandmother. At home he "plays Mass." This child knows the Eucharistic Prayer of Consecration at six years old! He has been assisting at Mass, as an altar server, since he was three years old. No one can ring the bells better than Patrick! He's got the flick of the wrist down pat. He is astute; but more so, he is virtuous. Patrick is gentle, kind, loving, caring, humble, pious, respectful, grateful, and faithful.

I have known Meris and her parents for about fifteen years now. So I can honestly say that I knew Patrick when he was in Meris' womb. I was in attendance to share in his Baptism.

Today, Patrick is so aware and knowledgeable, so filled with wisdom and understanding, that he was granted special permission to receive the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion at the age of six!

Sacrament of Reconciliation

I happened to pull up into the Church parking lot this past Wednesday afternoon, when Patrick was heading in to his First Confession. He wasn't nervous one bit. On the contrary; he was so excited, that Bernadette and I could hear him signing in the rest room of the Church, as we spoke for a few minutes, before his appointment with the priest. So, I was there for his First Confession too.



First Holy Communion

This past Saturday, on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patrick received his First Holy Communion. I was present to share in this extraordinary event, as were many other well wishers. Patrick was so joyful! You could literally see the Light of Christ shining from his gleaming face!

Afterwards, as the party wound down, my husband and I were ready to leave. We said our goodbyes, to his mom and grandparents, but we saw that Patrick and his friends were busy running around having fun. So I decided not to interrupt them and we began exiting the party. Patrick saw we were leaving and, on his own, came running up to me, shouting my name. He wanted to personally thank me for coming to be a part of this day. He gave me a big hug! Now that's a child who knows a lot about the virtue of gratitude!

The Future

So, I was there for the Baptism, First Confession, and First Holy Communion. God willing, I will be there for Patrick's Confirmation, and maybe, just maybe, his ordination to the priesthood. If so, then I would be honored and blessed one day to receive the Anointing of the Sick from Father Patrick as I leave this life for eternal life with Christ. For, I knew him in the womb, and would be graced to have him in my life, for the remainder of my life, here on earth.

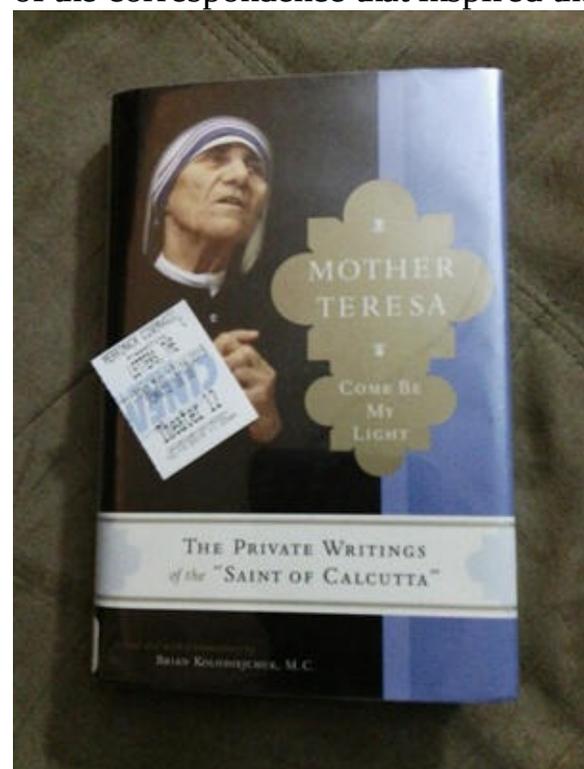
My wish is that Patrick continues to grow in virtue; to be that shining Christ-like example for adults and children alike. I pray that he remains under Mary's protection and grows in wisdom, knowledge and understanding of his faith. I also pray that he never loses that child-like trust in Jesus. May God bless my treasured friend, Patrick Sewak.

This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/i-knew-him-in-the-womb/>
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"The Letters" -- worth seeing, but read the book [at Leaven for the Loaf]

Somewhere between James Bond and a galaxy far far away, there are other films in release. Don't overlook *The Letters*, based on the lengthy correspondence between Mother Teresa and her spiritual advisor. Few accounts of the now-beatified nun convey the extent of her very human day-to-day struggles, internal as well as external, as the founder of the Missionaries of Charity. Those struggles are at the heart of the correspondence that inspired the screenplay by William Riead (who also directed the film).



The private letters, which were unknown to Mother Teresa's fellow nuns, would have been destroyed if her wishes had been followed. Instead, they were retained by her spiritual director, Father Celeste van Exem, who no doubt realized that the letters would be relevant testimony in any proceedings for beatification or canonization. Also, as the actor portraying him says in the film, van Exem knew that people experiencing spiritual discouragement could take heart if they knew that even Mother Teresa had had such crises.

The Letters is a quiet film, not flashy or sensational, and for that reason alone might be worth a couple of your Advent hours. It's a quick sketch rather than an in-depth story, and a fictionalized account rather than a documentary. Within those limits, I considered my two hours at the theater well spent, if not entirely satisfactory. There's much more to the story than the quick sketch Riead affords us – but with much of Mother Teresa's correspondence now publicly accessible, Riead's sketch could be an invitation to deeper study.

"It's God's will – not mine – I will trust in God." That was Teresa's response to objections as she responded to the "call within a call" that took her from being a respected teacher with the Sisters of

Loreto to being a servant of India's poorest people. As she offered profound charity in the slums and as more women joined her ministry (later the Missionaries of Charity), she was burdened by a sense that God had abandoned her. One is left to wonder how the poor of Calcutta would have fared had Mother Teresa chosen to work with a less encouraging and discerning spiritual advisor.

Beautifully filmed, with very effective understated music up until the jarring tune over the closing credits, *The Letters* benefits from elegant production and good casting. Juliet Stevenson as Sister (later Mother) Teresa ages decades over the course of the story not by obvious makeup but by posture, bearing, and tone of voice. She expresses an ongoing dark night of the soul without resorting to caricature. Her spiritual advisor, Fr. van Exem, is played in a kindly yet authoritative manner by Max von Sydow, whose rich voice narrates parts of the story. (Van Exem in his younger days is portrayed by Aapo Pukk, whose resemblance to von Sydow is uncanny.) Rutger Hauer gets third billing but has relatively little screen time as the priest responsible for investigating the case for sainthood.

Notable in supporting roles – roles actually far more substantial than those afforded to von Sydow and Hauer – are Tillatoma Shome and Vijay Maurya as a Hindu wife and husband deeply suspicious of Mother Teresa and her work.

There are drawbacks to a screenplay that tries to cover half a century in two hours. Some characters, notably the leader of the religious community Mother Teresa left in order to found the Missionaries of Charity, are two-dimensional. So are some of the scenes. I kept wishing for more material from the letters themselves.

Don't go looking for any mention of Mother Teresa's opposition to abortion, which in her Nobel lecture she called "the greatest destroyer of peace in the world today." Such details fall to the quick-sketch nature of the screenplay.

Director Riead spent over a decade bringing *The Letters* to the screen, and he obviously has great respect for his subject. It would be something to see if he were to give Mother Teresa's correspondence the documentary treatment it deserves.

As it is, I left the theater wanting more. Fortunately, more is available. [*Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*](#) (Doubleday, 2007) is a collection of the nun's letters, edited by a priest of the Missionaries of Charity. In that volume, the sketch of Mother Teresa becomes a portrait.

The Letters offers a glimpse into the inner life of one of the most influential women of our era, framed by a director who treats his subject with respect. For more than a glimpse, read *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*.

Mercy and Misconceptions [at If I Might Interject...]

On one of the Catholic news sites out there, I was involved in a debate with another reader about the issue of divorce and remarriage. This individual argued that the Church, in confirming that remarriage after divorce (as opposed to receiving an annulment first) is morally wrong, was ignoring the words of Our Lord concerning the parable of the lost sheep. In other words, this individual was asserting that to show mercy to the divorced and remarried, the Church had to stop teaching their actions were sinful and needed to admit them to Communion.

This kind of thinking confuses mercy with tolerating a lack of restraint, and misses the point of what mercy is. It seeks to assuage the conscience of the sinner by telling him or her that their actions are not even sins at all. The Church is accused of being merciless because she will not change herself when people demand that she stop saying things are sins. The reason she will not is because she *cannot* contradict God's commands without being faithless to God. When God commands that we do X or avoid Y, the Church cannot permit us to avoid doing X or permit us to do Y. As Our Lord said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

For the person who seeks to know, love and serve God, we have an obligation to seek out what is right and live in accordance with it. When we find a commandment difficult, and we don't understand *why* it is commanded, we are shown our task: To seek to understand why it is commanded, not to ignore it as too hard. The problem is we are used to having our way and seeking ways to justify our behavior before man, assuming that God will not punish those who choose to do what He forbade.

The mercy which God shows us can be demonstrated this way. God does not exact instantaneous punishment on us for doing what is evil. Instead He warns us of the dangers of sin, encourages turning back to Him, giving us the grace to respond. If we do respond (for grace is a gift we can refuse), He welcomes us back with open arms. If we refuse to respond, He continues to call us. Our Lord's mercy is not to tell people "It is OK to sin" or to say that what was once a sin is no longer one. It is to call people back from sin and to heal the relationship with them. But the person who refuses to heal that relationship is actually refusing the mercy Our Lord offers. The Church cannot change that reality and she cannot pretend to change that reality without being faithless to God.

So why does God command us to be merciful and to forgive? The answer is that He forbids us to behave in such a way that refuses to give mercy to the penitent and refuses to be God's means of reaching out to the sinner. He forbids us from considering any person irredeemable. Nor can we refuse to forgive the person who has wronged us or refuse to make amends with the person we have wronged. Our task is to seek the redemption of the sinner or the person who wrongs us, not their damnation. God's laws are made to show us how to live. Ultimately, if we reject these laws, we will face His judgment. We do have until the moment of our death to repent, but none of us know the day nor the hour of our death, so now is the time of respond to His mercy, and now is the time to be vessels of His mercy.

On the other and, when being vessels of mercy, we of course need to remember that we ourselves are in need of mercy. That means showing love and compassion for our fellow sinners who may sin in different ways than we do. We need to remember that we fall every day and are in need of Our Lord's grace and forgiveness. That should shape how we approach others. Belittling or mocking others will probably drive

them away. Nobody wants to be treated in that way, and we should ask if our attempts at humor might actually be counterproductive.

To offer a personal example, consider this account of a joke told by a Protestant minister at an interfaith meeting:

“I read a story some time ago about a man who visited the Pope. He looked around and observed the splendor and wealth of the Vatican. The Pope noticed his amazement and said laughingly, ‘We cannot say anymore that we have no silver and no gold.’ And the man answered, ‘Neither can you say, “Rise up and walk!”’” There was laughter from some in the audience, and I hoped it would break the tension.

Andrew, Brother; Al Janssen (2004-09-01). *Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire* (p. 215). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

My response to reading this part of the book was a mental middle finger and cost him some of the respect I previously had for him. Such attempts at humor are going to turn off the people who are the butt of the joke. If one wants to offer a fraternal rebuke over what they see as wrongdoing, things like sarcasm and perceived mockery are going to drive people away. Obviously, Brother Andrew was not intending to be offensive to Catholics (though I think his writings display some casual prejudice in that area). But his tone was counterproductive to some he might have otherwise convinced in a good cause.

Now of course the offended person has to practice forgiveness as Our Lord commanded. When someone behaves badly, we have to move beyond it and seek the truth. But people are human beings with feelings that can be hurt and fears that need to be considered. So in this case, I had to work past a bad joke that implied that the Church was worldly and no longer carrying out her mission to consider the merits of his book, but his book would have been more effective if he had omitted the wisecrack.

In a similar way, we have to consider *how* we present our message as God’s tools to present His mercy. Do we show compassion for their fears and sufferings, even if we must say “No” to the desire to treat sin as morally acceptable? Or do we bear false witness by leading people to think “Christians are jerks”?

Unfortunately, despite the tone we take, some will just take offense simply by the fact that we say X is a sin. Americans really tend to fall for the “Either-Or” fallacy, where if we don’t support one view, we are assumed to support the opposite. So, for example, if we oppose “same sex marriage,” we are accused of supporting all of the wrongs done to persons with a same sex attraction. Or if we oppose divorce and remarriage, we are accused of wanting to trap people in an unhappy, abusive, (insert negative description here) marriage. So if we stand for the Christian definition of marriage, we are accused of “hating homosexuals” and “not caring” about the suffering of people in broken marriages.

Obviously when we defend the teaching of Our Lord as passed on by the Church, we can’t help it if one takes offense at the teaching. But we have to be sure that the way we present that teaching is not a stumbling block.

Moreover, we have to avoid being avenging angels. We’re not like the Greek “Furies” who pursued the wrongdoers with vengeance all their lives with the intent to punish. We have to make clear that our concern is one of love and wellbeing as opposed to “vanquish the heathen!” Pope Francis used the image of the Church as field hospital—we’re here to save those people who have been wounded by sin, not

throw them out the door because they're not healed.

However, just as in medicine, saving the wounded does not mean telling the man with diabetes to continue doing the things that led to the disease, saving the spiritually wounded does not mean telling the sinner to continue to sin. Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery, but He still told her “Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more.” (John 8:11).

So it's a balancing act. We cannot give sanction to sin, and we cannot act like jerks when reaching out to the sinner. Some may refuse to accept the mercy God offers because that mercy tells them that what they want is killing them, but we still have to love them, even when they hate us and remember that ultimately God will judge both them and us.

This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2015/12/mercy-and-misconceptions.html>
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World Finds Out the Greatest threat
to Economic Prosperity is No People.

by Susan Fox

“Though modest silence is pleasing, dutiful speech is now more necessary. Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter.” (A sermon of St Bernard: The Whole World Awaits Mary’s Reply)

Pope Paul VI was right, and the world is finally waking up to the reality that less mouths to feed means less economic



prosperity for the whole world.

It was reported in no less a prestigious source than the Wall Street Journal, which ran a series of stories on the ill effects financially of childlessness worldwide.

The pope’s landmark papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* – almost 50 years old now – warned about the disastrous effects of population control, abortion and artificial contraception. Pope Saint John Paul II called the encyclical, “a truly prophetic proclamation.” More recently Pope Francis condemned the same things – abortion, contraception and population control -- in his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si* – a shock to [climate change liberals](#) locked in a 1970s time warp.

Most forms of contraception today are actually abortifacients, which cause miscarriages, but do not prevent conception from taking place. The world is involved in child murder on a very large scale.

Partly to blame is the discredited 18th century British essayist Thomas Malthus, who taught the world to fear its own children. He predicted population would outstrip food supplies. He was wrong. Agricultural productivity proved more than capable of feeding the extra mouths.

Now economists are waking up to the horrific cost of contraception. Declining fertility and aging populations worldwide means businesses are running out of workers, consumers or both. Either one means a decline in economic growth. That's why you see U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan supporting immigration in the new bi-partisan budget signed into law Nov 2, 2015. American businesses need labor! Since the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, 58.5 million potential laborers have been killed in the United States.

[Many](#) do not appreciate Ryan's efforts to bring in more immigrants, while refusing to defund Planned Parenthood, the U.S.' largest abortion provider. Many of today's immigrants are involved in a religion that approves violence to non-Muslims. The moniker "Religion of Peace" only applies to those who submissively adopt Islam.

The new "bi-partisan" budget is sickeningly ignorant on this matter. It does not address the source of the labor shortage: the wholesale murder of American citizens in the womb. U.S. taxpayers supported Planned Parenthood to the tune of \$528 million in 2014, representing more than 40 percent of the abortion company's revenues.



If the Republican-led Congress had defunded Planned Parenthood, they would have solved our labor

shortage and given us people who share our cultural values. They probably would have also shut down the abortion provider. Few businesses can afford to lose almost half their annual revenues.

Next year, the world's most advanced economies will watch their working age population decline for the first time since 1950, according to the United Nations, which expects this number to decline 5 percent by 2050 with the number of workers also falling in emerging markets like China and Russia. This means less demand for goods and services worldwide, lower prices, fewer jobs. The world economy is contracting.

Fewer people mean fewer consumers, and the bulging elderly population is entering that period of time when they save, but don't spend money. Old people don't spend, young people can't spend because of limited income and higher taxes, and so you get the stew the world created with population control.



Demographics – driven by the Culture of Death – explains why the United States is having a historically weak “recovery” from our recession while the unemployment rate dropped by 50 percent to a low of 5 percent. There aren't as many people to fill those jobs. A lot of businesses around my area have signs up saying they are hiring. But they pay low wages, and people would starve if they tried to work there permanently. Certainly, no one could afford to support a family, and that's why I'm seeing a lot of single young people not marrying and not starting a family. Even with a college education, only low paid work is available.

While the unemployment rate is only 5 percent, underemployment is floating between 14 and 16 percent this year. Those are the unemployed, plus those working part time, looking for full time work.

In this category are many people whose income levels fall below the poverty line of \$12,000 a year. When the working poor file their taxes, the government gives them a cash credit they didn't earn, and informs them they are eligible for food stamps. While most people are fined for not having health insurance under the Obama Administration, this group is not. They are free to get sick and throw themselves on the generosity of the local health care facility. One of the things I sharply noted after Obama “Care” was passed was the number of people walking into Urgent Care with sick children asking how much the visit would cost. When they were told \$140, many of them walked out. That never happened before. The bill literally threw the poor and middle class out of their health care.

To give you an idea of how devastating low wages are in Denver, average apartment rents are \$1622 a month, with one-bedrooms going for \$1305. At the same time, this year, U.S. home ownership has dropped to the lowest level since 1967. U.S. household wealth fell \$1.23 trillion in the third quarter driven by a decline in the stock market. This further slowed business growth and borrowing.

My husband and I used to laugh -- and cry --when we looked at which U.S. companies were donating to Planned Parenthood. America's second largest automaker, Ford Motor Co., regularly donated to Planned Parenthood until recently when they -- and other large corporate donors -- demanded their name be removed from the abortion company's public list of donors. The Center for Medical Progress released undercover videos this year showing Planned Parenthood manipulating abortions to get healthy baby parts to sell for research. Many people were disgusted. So Ford and other corporate donors disappeared from Planned Parenthood's shiny balance sheet.

But the damage was done. Ford's previous donations ensured the death of their future customers. Now they are working hard to sell cars abroad because of weak demand in the United States. Fifty-eight million potential Ford Motor Co. customers were killed by abortion in the United States since 1973.

Some investment advisors are comparing the world economy today to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Falling commodity prices, stock market declines with subsequent less wealth, layoffs and businesses shutting down -- all that adds up to no means to support your family. Commodity prices are



falling to their lowest levels reported since 2002, according to one index. "There's a fire sale on raw materials like copper, aluminum, gold and oil, raising concerns about the health of the global economy" read one headline on CNN Money.

Laugh Out Loud. CNN Money waxed and waned about over-supply. But there is an old adage in economics. Price is determined where supply meets demand. You could also say there is inadequate demand. Falling commodity prices speak to a worldwide business downturn. It's bad news for emerging economies and poor nations that depend on the sale of raw materials.



Barack Obama got his wish. At the beginning of his first term, he said he was glad about higher oil prices because they would discourage consumption. But he wished they would rise more slowly so people could adjust. The world adjusted. There are less people, less business activity and the price of oil has plunged to below \$50 a barrel. But that is not good news anymore. It is the last gasp of a dying world economy.



“The price of gold is collapsing because money velocity is collapsing. In other words, individuals have zero confidence in their jobs and in the world economy.” said business pundit George Gray. The velocity of money -- the rate at which people spend money -- has crashed to [levels lower than the Great Depression](#), according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. When there are more transactions being made throughout the economy, velocity increases, and the economy is likely to expand. The opposite is also true: money velocity decreases when fewer transactions are being made; therefore the economy is likely to shrink.

Higher taxes put a brake on money velocity as well. It is impossible to measure how much taxes have gone up under Obama since they were imposed in such a [piecemeal fashion](#). But there is no doubt that everyone’s take home pay has declined or remained unchanged. Pope Francis is wrong about his disdain for the “trickle down” effects of lower taxes because they increase the velocity of money! Everyone benefits when the velocity of money increases, the economy expands and there are [more high paying jobs](#).



The Obama Administration created money hand over fist during the last seven years. Yet its excessive monetary expansion has completely failed to stimulate economic activity largely due to higher taxes, less people working and consequently a declining rate at which Americans spend money. It seems that despite the popularity of this Democratic Administration among liberals, they -- like everyone else -- are showing distrust by failing to spend. But there are also fewer people to spend and fewer people to earn. The world is literally curling up into itself.

The same thing happened in the 5th century before the fall of the Roman Empire. Roman citizens suffering under the burden of high taxes actually hoped the barbarians would invade. Just like today, Romans lived in a “white-haired world” and imported foreign workers to fill their labor needs. (*The Church in the Dark Ages* by Henri Daniel-Rops) Romans were paying people to have children, just like Norway today, which boasts it has the most pro-family policies in Europe, but still suffers below replacement level population growth – 1.9 children per family in 2013. All of Europe is in the same depopulation boat.

So where are the long lines at U.S. soup kitchens? We won't see that during this downturn. We have welfare. There are more welfare recipients in the United States now than there are full-time workers. People are enjoying their Obama unemployment and underemployment seamlessly hidden in their own American homes -- 105 million full time workers in 2013; 109 million people receiving welfare at the end of 2012.

Social Security recipients are getting no benefit increases next year, a sign that inflation doesn't exist, but neither does their retirement income cover their costs. The retired elderly are working at low-paying jobs alongside our youth. They check my groceries at Wal-Mart and hand me food samples at Costco. Many of them suffer while they work, trying to stand for hours at a time with bad hips and other ailments. One was fired recently from a major wholesale retailer because she said, “Merry Christmas!” They are supposed to use the less religious phrase “Happy Holidays.” Since Obama took office in 2009, the number of elderly (65 and older) living in poverty rose 30 percent to 4.6 million in 2014.



Now to top it off even Mexicans are returning home because of better job opportunities in Mexico. For the first time since the 1940s, more Mexicans are leaving the U.S. than arriving, according to a new Pew Research Center report issued in November, 2015.

But perhaps the biggest nod to the truth of *Humanae Vitae* was when China announced on Oct. 29, 2015, that it was ending its one-child per family policy and allowing Chinese citizens to have two children.



China has woken up to the ill effects of allowing only one child per family – a policy choice which Pope Paul VI warned against in 1968. Recognizing that many feared world population would outstrip available resources, he urged public authorities: *“(To rulers of nations) The family is the primary unit in the state; do not tolerate any legislation which would introduce into the family those practices which are opposed to the natural law of God.”*

Marriage, he said, is not the result of *“blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design. Husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives.”*

“Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their

parents' welfare."

China didn't listen. Now it is faced with an aging population, a labor shortage, and a gender imbalance – more men than women creating a shortage of brides. The gender imbalance has increased the crime rate in China and will exacerbate its shrinking population. These trends threaten its economic prosperity.

The Chinese Tiger – once feared for its enormous population and military might – is facing a demographic crunch that could render it toothless.

"Too Little, Too Late," demographers said regarding China's move to abandon its 35-year-old One-Child Policy. A loosening of the policy two years ago resulted in a small bump in births, and demographers expect this one to have little effect. Like the rest of the world, Chinese families have become used to selfish choices.

A typical Chinese response to the change in policy is that of Li Shuning and her husband, both age 32. They have one son, and don't want any more. "For a second child, my answer is no, no, no. Doesn't matter what the policy is," she told the Wall Street Journal.

My Chinese neighbor, who was part of the first generation to feel the effects of this draconian policy, feels the same way. She has multiple siblings, but only one child, and she doesn't regret it. But she told me a story that illustrates the costs of China's interference in one of the most intimate areas of human life. In China, a child needs both a father and mother to be a registered citizen eligible to attend school and work. My neighbor said the husband of one of her friends in China went to prison for fraud. His wife was pregnant with their child. But without a father, the baby would have faced insurmountable obstacles in citizenship and schooling. So she had an abortion.

"No statement of the problem and no solution to it is acceptable which does violence to man's essential dignity; those who propose such solutions base them on an utterly materialistic conception of man himself and his life," said Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, quoting his predecessor Pope John XXIII

China didn't listen, but neither did many in the Catholic Church. The encyclical led to a virtual firestorm of rebellion. Even one year before *Humanae Vitae* was published, the Land of Lakes Conference of U.S. Catholic Educators insisted that they must have autonomy from The Catholic Church. "There must be no theological or philosophical imperialism," educators warned, pitting academic excellence against obedience to the Church.

Many historians of American Catholic higher education said with this statement, Catholic universities in the United States fully embraced Modernism – the ambition to eliminate God from all social life -- while the Catholic Church itself completely opposed it. I once read a Catholic newspaper editorial, in which the author said, “We must stop Jesus idolatry.” Jesus is God. Worship of God is never idolatrous unless you are a “Catholic” modernist.



Catholic historian Philip Gleason described the Land of Lakes document as "a declaration of independence from the hierarchy and a symbolic turning point," which made clear that the Church's "cold war with modernity" was over. Its bitter fruit was the welcome Notre Dame University issued to U.S. President Barack Obama in May 2009 when he received an honorary degree from the “Catholic” University and delivered their commencement speech. Obama is the most pro-abortion president in U.S. History. Last time I checked, the Catholic Church was still teaching, “Thou shalt not kill.”

Unfortunately, rebellion against *Humanae Vitae* in Canada was not limited to the universities. The Canadian conference of bishops created a right to dissent by personal conscience. It’s called the Winnipeg Statement, and it was decided a mere two months after *Humanae Vitae* was published. Western Catholic Reporter Douglas Roche exultantly reported, “The issue is over in Canada. Catholics are free to use contraceptives if their informed conscience so prompts them!” And the Canadian bishops have never disavowed the Winnipeg statement.

The notorious Paragraph 26 of the Winnipeg Statement establishes a right to personal conscience. Those who accept the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* are nevertheless told that in some circumstances, they need not observe it. They are free in good conscience to use contraception and go to Holy Communion. Sadly, many in the United States are probably just as ignorant. In 2012, the Guttmacher Institute reported that 98 percent of those identifying themselves as Catholic have used a method of contraception other than Natural Family Planning at some point in their lives. One of my dearest Catholic friends suffered breast cancer because of contraception use early in her marriage, and now she is wringing her hands because her daughter-in-law is making the same mistake.

To this day Canadians regard themselves as [“ahead” of the Vatican](#) on the issue of birth control and homosexuality. They are waiting for the Church to reform. They will be waiting a very long time. [A Canadian Priest Questions The Sinfulness of Contraception and Its Linkage to Abortion](#) “The prime victim is the Catholic family,” said Canadian Msgr. Vincent Foy in an article published in 1988. "Since Winnipeg, the use of contraceptives has increased until Catholic Canada has one of the lowest birth rates in the world and is on a suicide course. The contraceptive mentality has spread.” He added that this mentality leads to a host of other evils -- adultery, venereal disease, homosexuality,

pornography, sterilization, child abuse, abortion and euthanasia.

Free speech in Canada has also suffered, and two women --



Mary Wagner and Linda Gibbons -- have been jailed regularly trying to shine a light on the plight of unborn Canadians. They violate Canada's unjust and illegal "bubble zones" to try and offer alternative assistance to women waiting for an abortion. See: [Canada's Shame: Peaceful Pro-lifers Get Prison, Canadians Killed Seconds Before Natural Birth.](#)

This 1960s rebellion of private conscience created a veritable tsunami of abuse and false teaching during the '60s and '70s. Few understood that when you argue the right to private conscience versus the teaching of the Church, you are opening the door to a host of monsters: heresy, crime, sin



and acts of faithlessness in the vocations of marriage and priesthood. The informed conscience is intended to guide us when facing concrete issues in our daily life – do I give money to the beggar standing on the corner or not? What does the Church teach? Can I use contraception tonight? What does the Church teach?

The Church's teachings are intended to be our guide to daily decisions facing our conscience. Conscience is not intended to determine whether church teachings are correct. That approach jumps into the realm of judgment, forcing every man to become his own independent authority. Imagine the burden of being pope 24/7! Imagine Moses approaching God on Mt. Sinai with his own list of suggested commandments! "Lord, this is what my personal conscience teaches!"

Even the pope is not free to teach what he wants – he must teach what the apostles taught 2,000 years ago! It is called the deposit of faith. Pope Paul VI called his own teaching in *Humanae Vitae*, "Not our law, but the law of God." But the poison of nominalism entered Catholic thinking during the past century. There are no universals, just accidentals in nominalism. So many saw the pope's teaching as just one opinion among many. Truth exited the world stage.

The poison of personal conscience disturbed marriages, led to divorce, undermined priestly celibacy and the male-only priesthood. Whereas the U.S. ranks of priests and nuns had been growing in the first half of the 20th century, starting in the 1960s, [the trend reversed](#). Between 1965 and 1971, the American Catholic

Church lost 10 percent of its priests.

I remember that period of time. My pastor asked my mother to counsel a young priest planning to leave the celibate priesthood and get married. Sadly, she was not successful, and he left. He married the mother of one my grade school classmates, and I felt sorry for the boy.

In the name of personal conscience, chastity itself was under attack. In some seminaries, it was taught that since homosexual acts were not part of marriage, a priest in “good conscience” could engage in such acts without breaking their vow of celibacy. Natural Law and the Roman Catholic Church condemn such thinking, but it was the Church that suffered when this heresy opened a dam of vile practices. In the United States since 1950, over 17,000 minors were abused by 6,000 clergy at a cost of over \$3 billion in settlements, according to [studies](#) conducted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Some bishops looked the other way and continued to move offending priests from parish to parish. In Los Angeles, it was Mexican children who suffered. In New Mexico – perhaps one of the most devout Catholic states in the Union – the mixed Spanish-Indian mothers wept for their little sons. In Boston, it was the children of the poor. While liberal Catholic prelates mouthed platitudes about serving the poor, they permitted the rape of their children.

Many theorized that “being open to having children” – a necessary condition for a valid Catholic marriage -- could apply to the totality of married life rather than to each single act. So a married couple could use artificial contraception to space their children, but still have children. *Humanae Vitae* strictly condemned this thinking, which was contrary to the Church’s teaching on moral theology. A person’s character is set by every act of virtue he takes. He is not of good character because sometimes he acts virtuously, but because he consistently tries to act virtuously.

Pope Paul’s response to this was *“Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful – even for the gravest reasons – to do evil that good may come of it.”*

And that is why, my dear friends, any single act of contraception, is wrong. *“Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong,”* Pope Paul VI concluded.

However, Pope Paul VI did encourage Catholics to use the naturally infertile times in a woman’s cycle to have marital intimacy if there are good reasons to postpone another child’s birth. These infertile periods are naturally given to us by God, and to use them properly requires self-mastery and spousal communication. Hence Natural Family Planning actually assists spouses in their spiritual growth.



The science involved in understanding a woman’s cycles has rapidly advanced thanks to *Humanae Vitae*. Pope Paul VI encouraged doctors and scientists to learn how to properly

help men and women – not to see their fertility as a disease – but rather understand how to cooperate with it. Natural Family Planning can be used to help infertile couples conceive and also postpone birth naturally.

My husband and I – married 32 years during this dark period of church history – practiced Natural Family Planning in our marriage. We affectionately called *Humanae Vitae* our “Human Vitamins.” We wanted our marriage to last, and it has!

But I knocked on the door of a Filipino woman in the Seattle area in the 1990s, and she told me she left the church, and was not free to return. “Why?” I asked, “You are always welcome to return!” So she told me the story. She was married in the Church, and a Catholic priest told her husband, they could use contraception in “good conscience.” They did, and he left her. Now she lived with another man without marriage, and couldn’t leave him because he provided her sole support. Because of contraception, that poor woman had devolved into a commodity for the use of man, bought and paid for.

“The truth expressed in *Humanae Vitae* does not change,” [Pope Benedict XVI told](#) participants in the International Congress organized by the Pontifical Lateran University on May 10, 2008. “The key word to enter coherently into its content remains “love”...Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united... **Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the**



person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. If this unity is removed, the value of the person is lost and there is a serious risk of considering the body a commodity that can be bought or sold.”

“If the practice of sexuality becomes a drug that seeks to enslave one's partner to one's own desires and interests, without respecting the cycle of the beloved, then what must be defended is no longer solely the true concept of love but in the first place the dignity of the person. As believers, we could never let the domination of technology invalidate the quality of love and the sacredness of life,” Pope Benedict concluded. But that is exactly what the world has done. It has allowed technology -- a pill, a device if you will -- to invalidate the quality of love between spouses, and to violate the sacredness of life that union produces.

Now we must swallow the bitter fruit, helpless to stop the train wreck in our world economy, the devastation in the Church and our personal lives.

Praying outside the abortion clinic in Denver recently, I watched a young black woman drive out of Planned Parenthood’s parking lot, a look of stunned sorrow upon her face. She had lost her baby and all hope for the relationship that conceived the child. Reduced to a commodity that could be bought or sold, she left the clinic. There is no freedom in doing evil. The “choice” for evil always leads to slavery. Freedom is found in choosing the good.

I wanted to run after her car, yelling: “Your happiness can be restored! Christ makes all things new!”

I have the same message for the world.

“Awake, mankind! For your sake God has become Man. Awake, you who sleep, rise up from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you. I tell you again: for your sake, God became man.” (From a sermon by St. Augustine.)

This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2015/12/bitter-fruit-of-selfish-choices-empty.html>
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Going After God [at A Spiritual Journey]

I watched a movie on TV yesterday. The story was intriguing and the acting good. It did draw the audience's attention as the plot unfolded. Somehow, at the end I only felt that it was just an interesting story, for there's nothing that uplifted me in any way. So I got to thinking about the different "levels" of living. I could live (1) a life in which I fall away from God daily, (2) a life that's interesting but remains on the same level like that movie, or (3) a life that's inspired by God, making me want to advance toward him. Clearly, number 3 is the choice. Number 2 is only mediocre, not good enough for God. To not waste any time of our life, we should go after God, relentlessly if possible.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2015/12/going-after-god.html>
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The Word Was Made Flesh... He Lived Among Us [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Edwin Rodrigues

Two sacred realities are most vehemently denied and opposed. One is that God became man -- the poorest man among poor men.

And the other is that bread and wine are changed into that same God! He is the source and fullness of all riches!

Christmas is all about the first reality, that God took on human flesh and came to live among us. Christ instituted the second reality at the Last Supper. God accepted Christ's All-Consuming Sacrifice -- offered once and for all on Good Friday -- when the Son was nailed willingly to the cross.

The reality of the Holy Sacrifice is made present again during the celebration of every Holy Mass. After the holy seasons of Advent and Christmas, as we journey through Ordinary Time and approach the season of Lent, it would help us if we paused a little and remembered: *“And the Word was made Flesh; And dwelt among us.”*

As weak mortals, we tend to say our prayers instead of praying them meditatively. These two phrases are at the core of Salvation history and our Creed. God said to Moses, *“I am Who I Am.”* (Exodus 3:14).

Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and that means He is eternal. He always possessed His Divine Nature and lacked nothing. But for our sake, who are made in His image and likeness, Jesus assumed our human nature in all respects except sin.

In the order of creation, human beings possess a nature that is lower than that of angels. By taking on our human nature, Jesus abased and humbled Himself, and by doing so He exalted us to such a degree that we became perfected in and through Him, who is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2).

“For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect... who are being tested”(Heb 2: 16-18).

This mystery is so profound that we can scarcely begin to scratch its surface; much less plumb its depths or even express it. In such a bid, British pundit and theologian G.K.Chesterton refers to it as “Glory to God in the Lowest!” (*Gloria in Profundis*)

At the Annunciation, Jesus allowed Himself to be trapped in the temporal realm. He became so tiny, nay, invisible that only



through the power of the Holy Spirit, His Real Presence within Mary’s womb was felt by Elizabeth and the unborn John, the future Baptist.

The King of Kings made Himself so poor that He chose to be born in a stable! The first people to pay Him homage and a visit were poor shepherds, who had no social standing at all in the world.

Later when the Lord was presented in the temple, Jesus continued to manifest His “dependence” on His Mother, Mary, His foster father, Joseph, and Simeon for the fulfillment of His role.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”(Heb 13:8). He makes Himself vulnerable, exposed to rejection and persecution of His Presence in the sacraments and also in His Mystical Body, the Church -- with which He identifies himself in a very personal way (Acts 9:4 and Matthew 25:40-46).

In fact He identifies Himself with every human being. He is so meek and humble that he conceals His glory and omnipotence and asks us to participate in His redemptive plan.

Mary is foremost among all human beings to co-operate in His redemptive work. She literally carried

Him from womb to tomb. What we meditate on in the 4th Joyful Mystery (Jesus' presentation in the temple), was in reality the first of her sorrows.



Our Lady is co-redemptrix of the human race because she is Mother of Sorrows. She became co-redemptrix at the foot of the cross by her participation in Our Lord's Passion, which saved us poor sinners!

Though Jesus remains the one Mediator, Mary is Mediatrix of all graces because *“in suffering with Him as He died on the cross, she cooperated in the work of the Savior, in an altogether singular way, by obedience, faith, hope, and burning love, to restore supernatural life to souls. As a result she is our Mother in the order of grace.”* (Vatican Council II)



Gloria in Profundis

There has fallen on earth for a token

A god too great for the sky.

He has burst out of all things and broken

The bounds of eternity:

Into time and the terminal land

He has strayed like a thief or a lover,

For the wine of the world brims over,

Its splendour is spilt on the sand.

Who is proud when the heavens are humble,

Who mounts if the mountains fall,

If the fixed stars topple and tumble

And a deluge of love drowns all-

Who rears up his head for a crown,

Who holds up his will for a warrant,

Who strives with the starry torrent,

When all that is good goes down?

For in dread of such falling and failing

The fallen angels fell

Inverted in insolence, scaling

The hanging mountain of hell:

But unmeasured of plummet and rod

Too deep for their sight to scan,

Outrushing the fall of man

Is the height of the fall of God.

Glory to God in the Lowest

The spout of the stars in spate-

Where thunderbolt thinks to be slowest

And the lightning fears to be late:

As men dive for sunken gem

Pursuing, we hunt and hound it,

The fallen star has found it

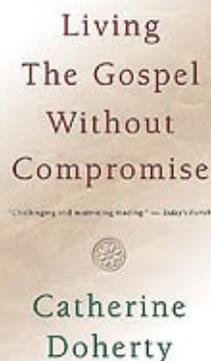
In the cavern of Bethlehem.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton

This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2015/12/the-word-was-made-fleshhe-lived-among-us.html>
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Prayer: The Cry of a Child (by Catherine Doherty) [at Plot Line and Sinker]



Living
The Gospel
Without
Compromise
Challenging and warming reading — *John's World*
Catherine
Doherty

As we get closer to Christmas, I'd like to share a beautiful excerpt, this one from Catherine Doherty's "[Living the Gospel Without Compromise.](#)" This is entitled "Prayer: The Cry of a Child" and is available free as a Pass it On article at this [link](#).

The first step in praying is to understand who we are, and that is awfully difficult. We must acknowledge that we are creatures, saved sinners, entirely dependent on God. We must be, as the bible says, anawim, poor people of God, the poor people of the beatitudes who know that they depend on God. We must face ourselves and realize that we cannot exist on our own, that we are dependent.

To the proud, this is anathema. We look at ourselves and we say "I depend on no one" — and suddenly, in the very saying, we realize that this is not so: we do depend on God. This is the beginning of prayer: that we become beggars before God, knowing that we receive even the steps we take from him.

To begin to pray we must first cleanse our souls of arrogance and pride. In grave humility and as beggars, must we come to him who alone can make us princes and kings and queens, not of earthly kingdoms, but of the kingdom of God. Only when we are thus poor and realize our total poverty, can we go to Bethlehem and meet the Child who became poor for us.

Is there any human being who does not respond to the cry of a child? Did you ever consider the first cry of the Child Jesus? It was his first message of love to us. When we know that we are poor, we can easily enter Bethlehem and answer his cry. We can easily walk behind the donkey that bears the woman and Child. If we are poor we will not hesitate to enter the humble home of Nazareth to take part in the hospitality of Joseph and Mary. Yet the proud and the arrogant look down their noses at simple folk from Nazareth: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

If we realize our own poverty we will follow him who had nowhere to lay his head. Prayer is the interpersonal relationship of a poor man with the Poor Man.

If we remain poor and keep following the Poor Man, a change will take place. Up to a point Christ will console us. But as our prayer deepens, we will enter the darkness of a fantastic faith, a faith that we have to pray for. The time will come when we will have to console Christ. For we see him all over the world — in slums, in Park Avenue — in people committing suicide because of the greed of people.

When we console him our prayer will take on a new dimension. The Son of Man became incarnate that

we might console him, so that in consoling him we might learn to console one another, to be tender toward one another. He offered himself as a victim for us on the cross so that we might take him in our arms as Our Lady took him in hers.

Our prayer will be dirgelike, and yet, a joy! Our pain will be purified and our prayer will have moved into another dimension: we will want to be on the cross because Love is crucified. A strange thing will happen: our prayer will become a prayer of joy, a fantastic resting in the heart of God.

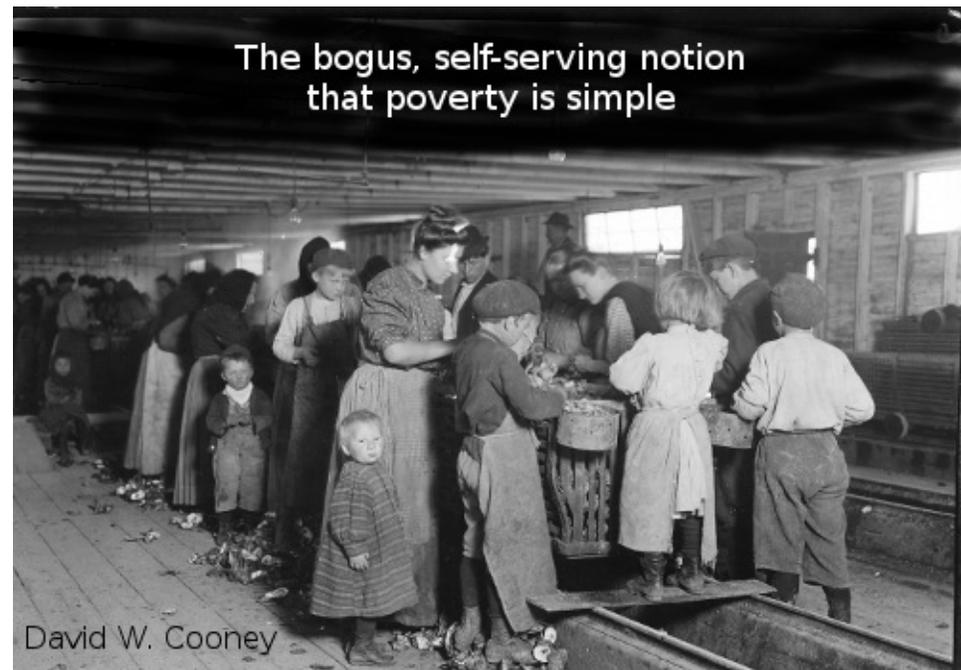
Thus from a recognition of our total dependence we are led to a prayer where we realize the Father is coming to us, know the touch of his hand, see Christ's human face reflecting his glory. Thus does prayer become a total and final resting place, a unity, a complete union of ourselves with God. The darkness of faith grows light and there is no need for words anymore. There is only a need for rest, the rest of a beloved in the arms of her Beloved.

This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2015/12/09/prayer-the-cry-of-a-child-by-catherine-doherty-2/>
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The bogus, self-serving notion that poverty is simple [at Practical Distributism]

The bogus, self-serving notion
that poverty is simple



In a recent article for

[The Week](#)

, Jeff Spross makes a fair claim against the standard "conservative" rhetoric that the real solution to the problem of poverty is for those in poverty to start working. He also addresses the position of some conservatives who say that we can never truly address the issue of poverty because it is such a complicated human problem. Mr. Spross points out fatal flaws with this claim, but fails to see the fatal flaw in what he presents as the solution.

To start with the flaws of the "conservative" solution he criticizes, Mr. Spross rightly points out that, in the so-called "advanced" countries, it is not as simple as going out and getting a good job. Thanks to the continued outsourcing of unskilled labor to "third world" countries, our own poor are deprived of the ability to simply go out and get a job which will provide enough pay for the basic needs of every day life; especially if they are trying to support a family. Instead, we have become a society where one already has to have ready access to money in order to get a job that pays well. You can't just graduate from high school and get a low skill job that will provide food and shelter for a family. It is increasingly the case that you have to go to college, or at least to a trade school, to get a good job, and that means that you have to already have access to money to get the education needed to get a job that pays even a subsistence wage.

Therefore, the typical conservative position fails to account for that large portion of the population that does not have the necessary access to money. These are the people they tell to go out and get better jobs, but don't seem to realize the true difficulties that exist in doing so. Ironically, they simultaneously want to cut funding for the education they need to do so on the basis that such government handouts inculcate

government dependence. This failure to see the incompatibility of the solution they propose and their cutting off the means to achieve that solution is the fatal flaw in the conservative position. They don't see how their own economic beliefs and policies created the poverty that made social welfare programs necessary.

Mr. Spross finds it "incredibly galling when Brooks declares that 'surely the solution is to throw everything we think works at the problem simultaneously.' Because this is exactly what he and his Brookings-AEI colleagues are

not

willing to do." The "what" Mr. Spross says they are not willing to do is money. Mr. Spross is representing the so-called "liberal" side and advocating the idea that what needs to be done is for government to throw money at the problem. However, he is being unjust in claiming that Mr. Brooks and Brookings-AEI are not willing to throw everything they think works at the problem because that is precisely what they

are

willing to do. What they are not willing to do is what Mr. Spross and the "liberal" side thinks will work. Conservatives don't think that increased government spending on social programs will work, liberals do.

However, this solution by the liberal side is just as bogus and self-serving as that of the conservatives. It starts by setting up the false premises that modern society, defined as one where "land and infrastructure is governed by private property rights, where we trade money rather than goods, and where labor is highly divided and specialized," somehow prevents people from being able to learn the skills and obtain the capital and resources they need to provide for their own living. Mr. Spross seems to jump straight from "primitive" agrarian societies to modern industrialized capitalism without considering any of the economic history between the two. We are taken straight from the ability to stake out unclaimed land to needing to go to college or trade school.

This bogus premise becomes the self-serving basis of the so-called "liberal" position that the solution to poverty in a "modern" society is increased intervention and spending by the highest level of government. Looking at the level of national spending on social programs in other Western countries as an example to follow, Mr. Spross criticizes the US because its federal programs are too small, too diffuse, and too ill targeted. However this is a very simplistic view of how to address the problem of poverty. The economic situation in these other Western countries is rapidly approaching a more wide spread application of the so-called austerity measures, cutting back the programs Mr. Spross advocates because they are unsustainable. I maintain that the reason they are unsustainable is because they were too centralized, which made them too large to effectively target those in need. Mr. Spross claims that it was increased social spending at the national level that maintained full employment in the mid-20th Century, but it was actually a much more complicated formula of social programs, subsidies to large corporations, federal regulation favoring those same corporations, and easier access to personal debt. In other words, the perception of economic prosperity was false because it wasn't actually based on people and corporations being economically supported by government and banks rather than being economically productive in a sustainable way. If they had been truly economically productive, and if this productivity had developed along the lines of supporting the wide-spread and independent ownership of production, then the need for government programs of assistance to the poor would have decreased.

The reality is that private property rights do not create a need for government programs to get the skills needed to earn a decent living. The earliest historical records reveal societies that already had land and infrastructure based on private claims to property. Even the "primitive agrarian" Mr. Spross uses as his example staked out unclaimed land, thereby claiming private ownership. Unless you discuss nomadic tribes or those striking out to form new cities, societies were based on private property rights and used some form of money to exchange goods for thousands of years before the rise of capitalism as understood by modern society. A look at different societies at different periods of time reveal that there is a way of providing the means to learn the skills and acquire the capital needed to be self sufficient. The establishment of wide spread private ownership of property and the guild structure during the High Middle Ages were key elements in nearly eliminating slavery, which was subsequently brought back by capitalism. The apprenticeship program of the guilds provided the means of support while learning the basic skills needed to do productive work. Once you became a journeyman, you could seek out further work and instruction to achieve the highest level of skill - that of master. When you were achieved the master level, you continued the process by having your own apprentices. It was these elements that allowed the slave to become first a serf and then a peasant - that is an economically and politically empowered citizen who was able to provide for himself and his family.

No, the solution to the problem of poverty is not, as Mr. Spross suggests, "as easy as pie." I've talked to people who know how to bake, and pie isn't actually that easy either, especially making a good crust. I do not say that government spending, including at the federal level, is no part of the solution to the problem of the poor not having access to a good job. It seems that this may be necessary in our current economic environment. However, I do not agree that the solution is as simple as having the government borrow, print and spend money.

If conservatives believe that the problem of poverty is too complex to be solved, it is because they are unwilling to see how economic liberalism increases poverty. Their blind adherence to economic liberalism prevents them from seeing this. If liberals believe that the problem of poverty is simple, it is because they are unwilling to see how political liberalism fails to actually help those in need to get out from under the state. Their blind adherence to political liberalism prevents them from seeing how the big state with a powerful centralized authority is unable to exist without big business. They don't see that increasing levels of centralized government spending will only enable big businesses to consolidate more wealth, pay lower wages and outsource more jobs. Big government supports big business not only through direct subsidies and regulations that give them advantages over small independent businesses, but also through social welfare programs which allow big businesses to ignore an economic problem they actually created.

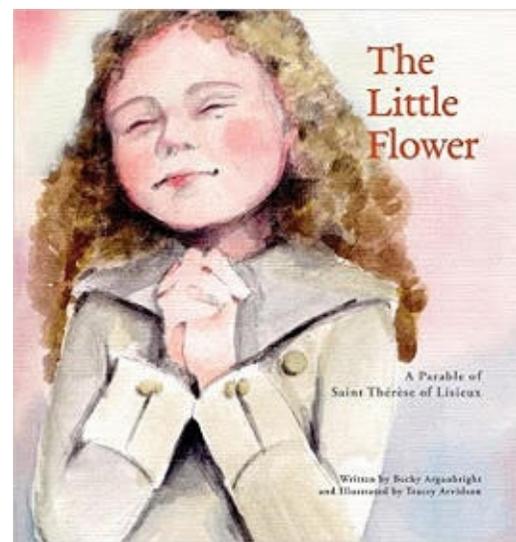
The problem of poverty is one that we will always need to address. "For the poor you have always with you: and whensoever you will, you may do them good." (Mark 14:7) If we truly want to minimize poverty by helping people get out of it, then we should look at what has actually worked. This may sound like a simple solution, but it isn't because it involves changing our perception of economics and government to include subsidiarity and solidarity. It involves unlearning the lie that economics is a science that can be separated from ethics in any practical way. It involves working out the complex issue of how to achieve the wider establishment of private ownership without committing acts of injustice. These are not simple things. However, it is not so complicated that we should give up trying, or simply try the same failed solutions over and over again as though they will somehow produce different results than they did in the past.

Maybe it's time to try distributism.

This contribution is available at <http://practicaldistributism.blogspot.com/2015/12/bogus-notions-about-poverty.html>
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Review: *The Little Flower* [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



My good friend,

[Becky](#)

has written a children's book!

I have pictures of Becky

[HERE](#)

.

She asked me if I'd review her book, *The Little Flower*.

It's been such an honor to pray for her as she has gone through this long process!

I was so happy and excited to get my copy yesterday!

My pictures do not do this book justice!

The illustrations bring your imagination to what heaven might look like.

They actually brought me back to my childhood and what I thought of heaven.

It is so beautiful, just a treasure to hold and have.

The story is so sweet and my children loved it last night.

It sparked conversations of how we can do little things and
how much God loves us.

For little children, this is BIG!

It was also a great way to talk about the real life of St Therese,
known as "The Little Flower".

You can see the entire book

[HERE](#)

in PDF form.

So, **leave me a comment** for a chance to win this beautiful treasure.

Enter by Wednesday, December 9th. (by commenting)

If you do not win, no worries!

You can order this beautiful book

[HERE](#)

This would make a very special gift for your children, grandchildren, godchildren,
or any special child in your life.

(my goddaughters will be receiving this soon!)

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Christmas Blessing [at Busy Catholic Moms]

December 24, 2015 Posted by Shannon

Instead of my usual articles, I wanted to share with you a prayer that I wrote a couple of years ago. It is my prayer for all of you.

As Joseph anxiously awaited Christ's birth, may you be filled with excited anticipation.

As the donkey carrying Mary to Bethlehem, may you bear your load without complaint or care.



As the stable that served as their shelter, may you make your homes a welcome respite for all.

As the star that shone over the manger, may you light the way to Christ for others.

As the angels in the sky, may you rejoice in his holy birth.

As the shepherds in the field, may you greet our savior with awe and wonder.

As the manger filled with hay, may you hold the Christ child high in your families.

As the kings who followed the star to the baby, may you follow Christ each day.

And as Mary, may you treasure each day in your hearts, knowing of Christ's sacrifice for each of us that started with the birth of an innocent baby.

Merry Christmas!

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/2015/12/24/christmas-blessing/>
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Remembering Christmas Eve Magic [at joy of nine9]

As I clean and get ready for our adult children to come home from university and work in the city, it is nice to remember the magic of Christmases when they were little. In fact, the scent of magic is still in the air, especially as our five grandchildren join our family! When you live with nine children, even the most crusty curmudgeon cannot resist the magic of Christmas.

It was still dark outside, way too early for my husband and me; we had worked to set up on Christmas Eve till 2:00 am. Although we couldn't even pry our eyes open, we were smiling with contentment as we lay in bed, listening to the excited whispers and giggles of our three youngest children. They made their way down the front stairs whispering in awe because one of the older kids had intertwined multi-coloured lights around the banister, transforming the dark staircase into a magical pathway to the tree.



First, the trio ducked into the formal living room to see the presents for the first time and special candy canes on the tree. In our old farm-house, our bedroom was right above the kitchen and we had left the kitchen back stairs door open. Suddenly another excited gasp of surprise escaped their lips as they gazed in wonder around the transformed kitchen.



A gingerbread house, created at night when the littlest kids were sleeping, sat in the centre of the table with a fruit bowl, dishes of candies, nuts and, best of all, sugar cereal! The whole room was edged with coloured lights and Christmas towels, tablecloth, napkins, pot holders with bright red ribbons on all the door handles.

One year a friend at Madonna House, Martha, asked Alison what her favorite thing about Christmas was and she said,

“The pineapple!”

Her answer shocked Martha but I was simply pleased. I understood that children notice and appreciate the small things. No detail escapes them. Without much extra cash during the year, they still to this day treasure every detail, ornament and treat that was and still is part of Christmas.



When a few of the oldest kids were in their mid to late teens, friends would ask to come over and set up with us. They would cart presents downstairs, arrange them, help fill 11 stockings and hang lights. They were intrigued by our large family with all the hustle and bustle and activity. It was never boring at our house.



The teens craved the joy and excitement of creating magic for younger children who did not receive many frills during the rest of the year. I think they also craved the sense of stability, of a family grounded in the old-fashioned values of mutual love and respect.



connecting with [theology is a verb](#)

This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanuneau.wordpress.com/2015/12/24/worth-revisiting-remembering-christmas-eve-magic/>
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As is our tradition, each year on the feast of the Holy Family, we publish an article about our ministry, recap the year and look forward to next year and what God may be calling us to accomplish for His glory. This year is doubly special as Denae and I will celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary this New Year's Eve.



Feast of the Holy Family 2015

The feast of the Holy Family always occurs within the octave of Christmas shortly after Christmas Day. God chose to save the world through a family, the holy family. The holy family was built on the solid foundation of two ordinary people, Joseph and Mary, who sought a closer union with God. We don't know much about their family history, legend has it that Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, were devout Jews who were childless for many years and after fervent prayer they were finally blessed with a daughter. They dedicated this child to God and Mary grew in holiness and only desired to glorify God with her whole being. We know even less about Joseph's childhood, scripture tells us that he came from the line of David, and based on the biblical account of the House of David, we know that it was not the best of families to come from. David's own sinfulness, even though he repented, was the beginning of much suffering for his offspring. There was much selfishness and sinfulness by many of Joseph's ancestors. Yet Joseph rose above this and did not let his family history dictate who he was. He too dedicated his life to God and grew in holiness his whole life and was chosen to be the husband of Mary and the foster father of the Son of God.

For many, emulating the Holy Family may be a goal that seems impossible to achieve, but we must remember that Mary and Joseph were just human beings like you and me. They experienced trials and tribulations just like we do, and they struggled to make the best decisions for their family. Mary faced a very unexpected pregnancy, Joseph had to provide for his family on a very modest income and even move his family to a foreign country on a very short timeline. Read the gospels and follow the story of the holy family and you may find that it is a story not a whole lot different than your own family story. It is tempting to see the Holy Family as a perfect family that achieved holiness through divine intervention, and

that there were no other options for Mary and Joseph other than to be holy. If you see it this way, think again. Put yourself in Mary and Joseph's shoes and I think you will see that it took heroic virtue on their part to follow God's plan for their lives. In fact it may have been more difficult for them than it is for us. Holiness was not something forced upon them, it was a gift offered and accepted.

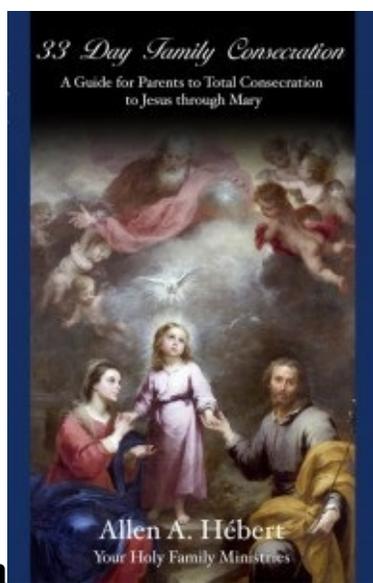


Our Family in front of the Church where we were married, old Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral in Houston, TX.

If we look at what made the Holy Family holy, we can learn how to do the same for our families. Mary and Joseph had a devout prayer life, they each had an intimate relationship with God and meditated upon his word and prayed that His will be done in their lives. They placed Jesus at the center of their family life. They knew their family was going to be a light to the world and they sought to glorify God in every thing they did. They knew that by themselves, they could do very little and they trusted in God to provide for their needs and to guide them in the difficult decisions. They lived a humble life of service to others, living in the world but not being formed by it. We are each made in the image of God and we can achieve the holiness of the Holy Family. God chose to be born into a family, to live family life just as we do, to show us that family life is the path to holiness. Their family life was not easy, it was not neat, it was not perfect, but through all the events of family life, God was glorified and the world was redeemed. Through our families God wishes to do the same, He wishes to use our family to glorify His name and to be a light in the world, all we need to do is surrender our will to His and allow Him to guide our family in the ways of holiness. It may not always be pretty, it may not always be easy, but if we trust in the Lord, He will work miracles in our family and in the families that we encounter along the way.

2015 Year in Review

Your Holy Family Ministries is dedicated to helping families grow in holiness through publishing articles, writing books and designing retreats, family days and workshops for the whole family. Our programs are designed to bring the family closer to each other and closer to the Lord. Where the world pulls the family apart, we seek to help the family form a community of persons united in prayer.



33 Day Family Consecration

This year we have made great strides towards our mission. We published our first book in August. “33 Day Family Consecration” is a guide for parents to develop prayer within their family. It uses the 33 Day Marian Consecration formula for individual prayer and consecration and converts it into 33 days of family friendly prayers, meditations and discussions. This book and the accompanying coloring pages provide parents with all the tools necessary to jump start prayer within their family. If your family already has a healthy prayer life, this resource provides a great way to meditate on the life of our Blessed Mother and learn from her example of how to give glory to God.

This program was used in several parishes as part of their Marian consecration programs and many individual families have used this resource in its online form or in printed book format. The reviews have been fantastic with many families speaking of the positive changes they have witnessed during the 33 days of family prayer.

The books are available on Amazon in ebook and print format, on our website and in a growing number of Catholic bookstores around the country. We hope to get our books into many more retail outlets and parishes as we aggressively promote this one of kind family prayer resource. If you would like to help us in this venture, please contact us and we will provide you with the materials you will need to approach your local bookstore.



Articles on Family Life

This year we published over 30 articles providing practical advice on how to live out holiness within family life. Topics included: setting family priorities, discipline, the dangers of being too busy, love, dealing with the death of a loved one, how to be a father after God’s own heart, Prom, the value of a Mother’s prayer, being a family of service, attitudes, evangelizing the world one family at a time, grandparents, dementia, and a series of articles on our pilgrimage to the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

It was a busy year for our family, we lost a grandparent to cancer and another grandparent to dementia (he is still with us, but not able to care for himself). We lived in three different cities during this time and learned just how giving our children can be, but there are limits.... But through all this, we survived and even grew in holiness along the way. Many of the struggles we encountered this year inspired blog posts and mediations in the prayer book, and there is more to come in 2016.

Things to Come in 2016

It is our ardent desire to allow God to drive the Your Holy Family bus, we are just trying to make sure we are open to going where he leads. At the end of 2015, we think we are being led in the following direction for the new year, but we could be wrong and are more than willing to let Jesus take the wheel and steer us in a slightly different or even completely opposite direction. Here are our top priorities for 2016:

- Publish a Guide for implementing parish based Family Ministry. The Family Fun Day/Teen Shenanigans program was developed and tested a couple of years ago and the next step is to implement it in a parish setting. While we have all the materials necessary to implement, we need to write it down and publish it. Along with this guide, we also intended to implement it within a parish, if your parish would be a good candidate, contact me and we will work with you to get this program into your parish.
- Publish a Guide for running Retreats for Families. We have run several very successful retreats for families over the years, but we want to enable anyone who would like to run them to have the resources necessary to do it on their own. We think running retreats for families is relatively easy. The main obstacle to running one for yourself is that a retreat for the whole family looks a bit different than a retreat for youth or for individuals. Our guide will seek to set expectations, provide practical guidance on how to plan the weekend, obtain quality speakers, select a theme, plan family friendly activities, coordinate food, shelter, and ensure that everyone (volunteers and attendees) has a great time. We would also love to conduct a family retreat in Texas, but we are still working out the details on when, where and how to pay for it. If you would like to hold a retreat for families in your area, please contact me and we will help make that a reality.
- Write more articles on family life! I have lots of thoughts on family life, just need to set aside the time to write about them. My resolution is to write at least two new articles a month, maybe more. My goal is to write articles that are positive, talking about the beauty of God's plan for family life instead of dwelling on all the problems in our culture and attacks against the family. It is my opinion that our world has plenty of negativity and we are in need of some good news and God's plan for family life is indeed great news! My articles will be a good mix of practical advice and thoughts on how we should approach family life with the goal of getting our whole family to heaven and maybe inspiring a few other families along the way to do the same.

The Hebert family wishes you and your family a happy and holy 2016.



This contribution is available at <http://www.yourhollyfamily.com/happy-feast-of-the-holy-family-2015/>
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Reflecting on Advents Past [at Campfires and Cleats]

Advent and Reflection..... inseparable, right?

Thought I'd combine, then,

because.....well..... a memory from the past.....

Please visit Kate and Micaela for beautiful

bloggers linked up, as well as their own photos and reflections.

So here goes my five.....

The essence of Advent, with a focus on *#HolyLens* and *reflection*, is, for me,

completely and unequivocally summed up in this one shot of

my sweeties back during December of 2009.

You can't really see the Christmas decor here, the Jesse Tree we were

creating, the handmade painted ornaments drying to be wrapped and gifted,

or hear Silent Night being pumped from the CD player sitting on the kitchen counter.....

but those are Spiderman Christmas pj's (!)

and Christmas is bursting out of every nook and cranny around them.

Both were still home schooled at that time and ardently working together,

older brother, then nine, helping younger, a just-turned seven,

with some sort of workbook or other.....

unaware I was lurking about with the camera.

We'd weave our work with our faith and our life ad our family

and it became one...no line, no "subjects," no separation.

Always work needed to be quickly done each day so that we could get to our

advent readings, light the wreath, tell *The Story*.

And it was a blessing.

Is a blessing.



Wrapped in our own bubble of contentment, productivity and mostly, faith,

during the memory filled season,

no outside schedules imposing....

only us.

When I think of advent now and in the future, I know I'll think of these days.

The candle lit, fireplace crackling, safe days of love and life and

of waiting...waiting for Jesus's coming.

At the time, thank God I did appreciate them.....

the days *and* the boys....

well, mostly anyway.



thank you for stopping over and

spending some of your precious time

here at my home on the web!

And hey:



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

If not, just enter your email address here

so we can be in touch regularly!



This post contains amazon affiliate links....

If you are shopping at amazon this Christmas season,

In this way, I will receive a small commission on the purchase.....

a few pennies per dollar.

If YOU are an amazon affiliate, please send me

your link and I will do the same!

THANK YOU!

Until next time,

This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2015/12/reflect-theme-thursday-five-minute.html>
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Two Teenagers, A Child and Christmas -- A Perfect Mix [at It Makes Sense to Me]

IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

If it were two thousand years ago and you lived in Nazareth you might notice a young man packing items on a donkey in preparation for a trip. Early the next morning you see this fellow, with his pregnant teenage wife sitting on the back of the burro, heading down the road. They are in compliance with the law of the day. They are embarking on a three or four day journey to Bethlehem, the town of their ancestors' birth, for the census.

We know so little about the lives of Joseph and Mary, yet they are THE integral part of the Salvation story. Mary's acceptance of a pregnancy that might have resulted in her being stoned to death as an adulteress was an act of monumental humility. Joseph, a good man and a faithful Jew true to the law, accepted a pregnant woman as his wife, another act of extreme humility.

To complete this humble family was none other than God Himself. The Creator of all there is became like one of His creations. He could have come in a majestic way, surrounded by armies and servants and glitter and pomp. He chose to come to us in the womb of his mom, just like all of us. He allowed Himself to be born among the animals in a cave. As He began His earthly life His body was wrapped in cloth and then placed on straw.



Why would He do this? He did it to show us Goodness, show us Love and show us how to do it. Finally He did it to save us, save us from ourselves and Satan's favorite tool, Pride, which had brought down Adam and Eve. The Holy Family was and still is, the complete and perfect embodiment of Humility. It remains so to this very day. Of course, the antidote to Pride is Humility.

Isn't God amazing in the way He does things? This is the story of our Salvation and the rebirth of Hope. This Salvation became available to all people for all time and its success was entrusted to a couple of have-not teens whose humility and love of God enabled them to conquer the seemingly impossible. They married against incredible odds and traveled to Bethlehem while Mary was full term. Joseph walked guiding the donkey, protecting his young wife the entire time. Mary gave birth in a cave surrounded by smelly animals and filth and then they managed to escape the soldiers of King Herod who were trying to kill their newborn Son. Lest we forget, they somehow made it to Egypt, about three hundred miles away. We know the rest of the story.

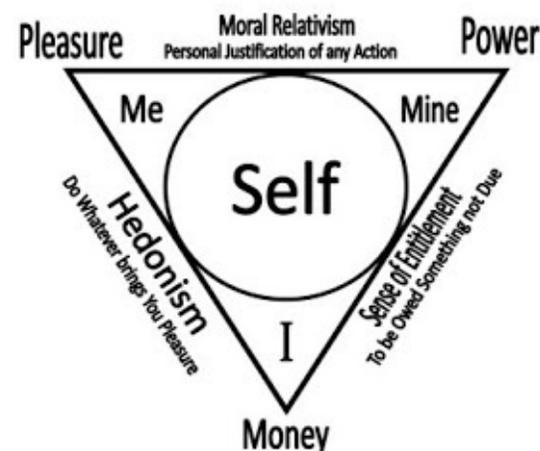
We must never forget that within that family it was the husband and father who protected his wife and Son from the evils of the world. The Son humbled Himself and gave his life for us all. And the Mom, our Mom too, the most humble woman ever created, stands ever vigilant ready to crush the head of the evil serpent who might harm any of her children. In so doing she is protecting all of her "children" (which includes you and I) for all eternity. She is our protection against all wickedness. Humility conquers pride. Just look to the Holy Family.

If you take a moment to truly ponder all that happened and how it happened and why it happened, it might leave you breathless. And then we remember it was all done for all of us. There was nothing done for themselves, not one thing. We need to get back to "Family" and the Holy Family is the model to build on.

The Catholic Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday following Christmas. If you are among the millions of folks who never pay an iota of attention to this family, maybe you should. Why? Because this is the family that "set the bar" for all families. Comprised of two teenagers, Mary and Joseph and their boy, Jesus, their unconditional love for God and each other cannot be surpassed. The Salvation story comprises the greatest acts of combined Love and Humility ever.

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The Lie of Secular Happiness and Joy [at On the Road to Damascus]



Catholic happiness and joy begins with selflessness and emanates outward in love and service to others. The secular lie is that happiness and joy centers on the self and all love and service should emanate inwards toward the self. The true root of all evil is the disordered love of self. Selfishness is at the heart of every deadly sin.

Lust – Lust is the intense desire to have something for our own, whether that is a lusting for sex, power, or knowledge. Adam and Eve lusted for the knowledge God was not willing to give to them when they ate from the tree of good and evil.

Gluttony – Gluttony is the intense desire for food or drink. It causes us to overindulge. We want food even when we do not need it.

Greed – Greed is the intense desire of possession. No matter how much of the object of our desire we have it never satisfies the desire for more. Adrenalin junkies push the limits of sanity with ever increasing dangerous stunts for the high they get by doing the stunt. Greed also presents itself as an intense desire for control or power.

Sloth – Sloth is intense lack of desire to be spiritually, emotionally, or physically active. Work has redemptive value to it. Scripture tells us that God does not like people who are lukewarm, people who

lack passion. Sloth is the intense lack of passion.

Wrath – Wrath is an intense emotional response. Anger is both good and useful when it is just. Wrath is unjustified anger that often leads to the desire for revenge or other malicious intent.

Envy – Envy is an intense sadness when looking at the goods or goodness of another. Envy often drives us to find a way to justify our shortcomings. This is usually done by comparing our shortcomings to ones who are worse. God, I thank you that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

Pride/vanity – Pride is unrestrained and disordered appreciation for one's own worth. I am the best, the most knowledgeable, the most beautiful, etc. It is listed as the worst of the deadly sins for where pride leads the rest of the deadly sins usually follow.

All deadly sins reside and grow within a self-centered heart.

The foundation of this lie is Moral Relativism. God is sacrificial love and he gave us laws that flow from his very nature to insure that we live selfless lives in love for the other. For Satan to turn us from God he had to get us to freely choose selfish lives over selfless lives. He had to get us to think of the law as something subjective. When we allow morality to be personally defined by each and every person morality loses its meaning. What good is a speed limit when everyone is allowed to drive as fast or as slow as they personally deem safe?

Take the commandment Thou Shall Not Murder. Pretty cut and dried. One human shall not kill another human. Moral relativism allows a person to define murder for themselves so we get things like – one human shall not kill another human unless that human is an unborn baby residing inside the first human or one human shall not kill another human unless the other human is terminally ill and is going to die anyway. Moral relativism allows each individual to define what is morally right for them, rendering morality a useless measure of anything.

Hedonism is all about personal pleasure. Eat and drink as much of anything you wish. Do any drug you want. Have any type of sex with any person or object of your desire. With the restrictions of morality diminished or gone one is free to do whatever brings the self pleasure.

When one is the center of one's universe it becomes easy to believe that one is owed everything just for being alive. The sense of entitlement grows proportionally to size of one's self-centeredness. To receive something one is due is the definition of justice. To be owed something that one is not due is entitlement.

The cornerstones of this lie are pleasure, power, and money. The secular culture would have us believe that the more pleasure we have, the more power we have, or the more money we have the happier we will be. We are bombarded relentlessly with images and suggestions of things that would make us happy if we only had them. Even people become nothing more than objects to be used and thrown away. For someone caught up in this lie there is never enough. They never reach a point where they have enough money or possess enough objects. Pleasure becomes harder and harder to obtain. Extremes must be pushed to get the same response they did in the beginning. They are never satisfied. They crave more.

In the Catholic secret of happiness and joy everything starts with Jesus at our center and radiates outward in love for others in the form of service, stewardship, and shepherding. In the secular lie everything comes in from the outside in the form of I, me, and mine. Everything for a self-centered person revolves around what "I" have done, what has happened to "me", or about the things that are "mine".

The secular lie is a bright, shiny object that looks to be the greatest, most fun thing ever but it is nothing more than a card house built on a sand foundation. It is only a matter of time before it comes crashing down and the only thing that remains is agonizing despair and loneliness.

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

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The Mourning of My Mother [at TASTE and SEE]

Today marks the 2nd anniversary of my mother's death. Two years. Two years ago she had some kind of attack and fell to the floor from her kitchen chair. She was in her pajamas when one of my sisters found her. It seems like it was just yesterday.



Of course, I pray for her all the time -- still. She may be in Heaven, but she may also be in Purgatory or even Hell. I doubt she is in Hell, but none of us ever knows the final destiny of a person's soul. My mother was raised a Catholic and she was a proud Catholic. She loved having her aunt who was a nun come visit her school. She told me how she bragged a bit about it. She also prayed the Rosary to me in French, because that is the language in which she was raised. Canadian French, that is.



Unfortunately, my grandmother had a terrible incident with her parish priest. And then there was the time my mother sought out a funeral Mass for her, and the pastor would not accommodate her. My grandparents went to the Saturday Vigil Mass every weekend. They sat in the same place in the same pews at the same church, and this priest was inflexible when my grandmother died. Much to my mother's dismay, we had the Mass at another parish in the city. (At the same time, thanks be to God that we could have it somewhere else!) The parish was barren and cold and echo-y. Not comforting.

These happenings tainted my mother and she became spiteful toward the Catholic Church. It so breaks my heart that she distanced herself at those times. She never went back and she held a grudge for the rest of her life. Even after I converted back to Catholicism, I was at a loss of how to convince her that being Catholic meant being true to God and to our Faith, not to the failing humanity of priests.



I wish things could have been different, but they weren't. My mother may not have drawn upon the salvific strength of Jesus Christ, but that doesn't mean I don't have to. In fact, I do it right now. It is His strength I

draw upon to carry the sadness associated with my mother's loss of faith -- and of all my siblings' loss of faith. Some of them are carrying on the bitter burden my mother carried due to the shortcomings of these priests in her life. May they come to see the face of God. May these priests come to see the face of God. And may I come to see the face of God as well.

I love you, Mom.

images - <http://www.atlantachinesedance.org/images/2012/In%20Mourning.jpg>
<http://www.azhagi.com/pics/azp-divider-14.gif> <https://redpointtailor.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/a-day-of-national-mourning-in-the-netherlands-in-memory-of-all-the-victims-of-flight-mh17.jpg?w=640&h=284>

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Massacring Children; 2000 Years and Counting [at It Makes Sense to Me]

IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

Since I find myself still filled with the wondrous spirit of the Christmas season I have decided that this will be my final blog post for 2015. I am simply doing everything I can to keep that upbeat feeling a bit longer. I don't care. I like it and I want to feel it and enjoy it a few more days. But right now I am going to smash that spirit with a right uppercut that will stagger it for sure. I am counting on my shaking it off and getting on with the true spirit of the season, feeling the peace and love that exploded all over.

Here is how it is (I am just speaking for me). We have the great celebration of the Birth of Christ and the next day we honor the very first martyr, St. Stephen, stoned to death for teaching about Jesus. Two days after that, on December 28th, we honor the Holy Innocents. In case you are unfamiliar with who the Holy Innocents are they are the baby boys massacred by King Herod in his quest to kill the Christ child. Herod, a seedy man insecure in his own pathetic skin, was afraid of toddlers. What a 'man'. Anyway, those remembrances can short-circuit that whole peace and love thing going on.

The gospel reading for the Mass of the day is about when Herod, in a fit of rage, ordered the slaughter of all baby boys, two and under, in Bethlehem and surrounding areas. He did this because he feared the Messiah, whose birth had been told to him by the visiting Magi. The gospel for the Mass ends this way:

The Gospel of Matthew 2: 17-18 reads;

Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet: (31: 15)

*A Voice was heard in Ramah,
sobbing and loud lamentation;
Rachel weeping for her children,
and she would not be consoled,
Since they were no more.*

History is filled with the destruction of people by other people. Here are links just to those genocides from the 20th century. This

[link](#)

will take you to all listed below:

- [Bosnia-Herzegovina: 1992-1995 - 200,000 Deaths](#)
- [Rwanda: 1994 - 800,000 Deaths](#)
- [Pol Pot in Cambodia: 1975-1979 - 2,000,000 Deaths](#)
- [Nazi Holocaust: 1938-1945 - 6,000,000 Deaths](#)
- [Rape of Nanking: 1937-1938 - 300,000 Deaths](#)
- [Stalin's Forced Famine: 1932-1933 - 7,000,000 Deaths](#)
- [Armenians in Turkey: 1915-1918 - 1,500,000 Deaths.](#)



Let us not forget the unborn, those in the womb, those unseen who quietly call out to us all to please help them. Humankind has slaughtered over 50 million of these little people and the numbers are continuing to escalate.

Finally, euthanasia is becoming an accepted means for people to end their lives "on their own terms". In the United States, Oregon, Washington State, Vermont and Montana and "parts" of New Mexico have Euthanasia laws on the books. These laws are referred to as "Death with Dignity" laws. But the nation of Belgium, an upscale European nation of 7 million (two-thirds catholic) approved

[euthanasia for children](#)

. Why not--lets let the little ones decide for themselves whether or not they like living. That's "full circle" for you; from being murdered to being able to murder yourself---at any age

So now, as we approach the year 2016, children are being tortured, enslaved, and murdered...all over the world. ISIS has beheaded, crucified, drowned and burned countless children because they are considered "infidels". Amazingly, there are some here in the United States, a supposedly highly civilized nation, who believe that Americans who have a different political viewpoint than they do, are more of an enemy to humanity than these monsters we speak of and hear of every day.

The bottom line to all of this is; there is a war between Good and Evil. Satan exists and is having his way. He can never win the war but the damage he will have done before he and his followers are vanquished is hard to predict. And the children of today are still being turned into HOLY INNOCENTS more than two

millennia later. The Western world must wake up. The secularist worldview is wreaking havoc on society as God is continually taken out of our lives by the self-absorbed "meists" of today. We owe something to mankind and especially to the innocent children who, for the most part, just want to be loved.

I'm done. I will now try to recapture a bit of the Christmas spirit that I have temporarily tossed aside. I am sure I will find some left somewhere. There are many millions of us who embrace GOD and LOVE and we can take solace in the fact that GOD is LOVE. I know HE has our backs. Happy New Year to everyone.

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From here to Eternity



Some years ago I had dinner with friends in London. When I was leaving their home I was introduced to the husband's father, who was busy digging in the garden. Taken by surprise and not knowing what to say I asked a rather stupid question – *“And what are you doing?”* I said. *“I do be digging the garden,”* he replied, glancing at his son as if to say – *“Who's your fatuous friend?”* Intrigued by his answer I asked a nun who taught Irish in Dublin what was meant by the expression, *‘I do be digging the garden’*. She said that it is the English rendering of what is called in Irish – *the present continuing tense*. It means – *“I have been digging the garden, I am digging the garden and when you stop asking the obvious, I will continue to dig the garden!”*

There is no such tense in English, but it perfectly expresses the meaning of the Aramaic idiom, as spoken by Jesus, and in this case by St John, when he said, *‘God is Love’*. He wasn't trying to give a definition of what love is in itself, as a Greek Philosopher would do, but he was describing in his own language, that God is *‘Loving’*, that's what he is, and that's what he does, continually. This is what St John was taught in the synagogue. It was here that he learnt how God had loved his people in the past and how he was still loving his people now in the present. Then when he became a young man, he tangibly experienced this love, in a deeply personal way, through the love of Jesus. After the Resurrection he continued to experience the love of God still reaching out to him from Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. The message of St John then, that you find on every page of his Gospel, is that – *‘God has been loving us, that he is loving us now, and that he will continue to love us’* – *‘from here to eternity’*.

The question that was continually asked by the Fathers of the Church and the other great spiritual writers who succeeded them, was not therefore, is God loving us, that was taken for granted and nobody doubted it. The question that they continually tried to answer was, *‘What must we do to receive it?’* This question was first asked by the crowds in response to Peter's famous sermon on the first Pentecost Day, when he told them that Jesus had risen and was at that moment and at every moment sending out God's love on all who would receive it. The answer that St Peter gave, in the biblical language that they could understand, was deceptively simple – *‘repent’* he told them, and then you will receive the love of God in return. Now repentance does not just mean turning back to God, but turning back to God with a pure and humble heart. Then his *Divine Loving* can firstly become his *Divine Mercy* for without his loving forgiveness he cannot enter further to make his home within us, as promised at the Last Supper.

Just as the word *love* means *loving* in the Gospels, so the word *repent* means *repenting*, for if it is to be effective, it must be continual, because we are continually falling. In my last article I showed how, at the beginning of human loving, lovers reveal themselves to one another, ‘*warts and all*’. This is to make sure that neither are deceived by externals and that they both seek the understanding and the forgiveness that reassures them that their mutual love is the real thing. If it is, love can continue as preparation for making a home together. However as every married lover knows well enough, the faults and failings that were once forgiven do not go away, but return again and again through even the best of marriages, and so therefore does the need for forgiveness and mercy that was so readily shared with one another at the outset.

It is exactly the same with God. At the beginning of the year of Divine Mercy we might respond to him like never before, and make a sincere resolution to begin again, but our human weakness will inevitably mean that we will nevertheless falter and fall time and time again. So we must have the humility to repent and turn back to God to receive his Divine Mercy, time and time again too. Only arrogance and pride will tempt us to question the infinite mercy of God that never fails. Keep in mind, the words of an old hermit, who once said to me, –“*When you stop falling you are in heaven, but when you stop getting up you are in hell!*”

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/from-here-to-eternity>
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Response to Prayer-Shaming [at New Evangelizers]

I have no idea if this is a growing trend or only the reaction of a few sad individuals, but in the last few days there have been more and more examples of prayer shaming.

In the wake of the horrible attacks in Paris and most recently in San Bernardino people responded on social media by offering their prayers for those affected. This is a natural thing done around the world as a way of expressing sympathy, sorrow, and compassion as well as reaching to the Heavenly Powers for aid.

But for some reason, there are those who are taking these prayerful offerings and mocking them. The New York Daily News did a front page headline publicly calling out and shaming people who offered their prayers to the victims, calling their prayers “meaningless platitudes.” And there are some voices on the internet that are echoing these sentiments. And yes this criticism was more directed at politics than individual spirituality, but it was an attack on prayer nonetheless.

So how is a faithful Christian to respond to this?

I think we have to look at it as a spiritual attack and a spiritual challenge.

By spiritual attack, I mean that it is an attack on the very idea of spirituality. Calling prayer a meaningless platitude implies that prayer is pointless. In other words, nothing of any substance happens in prayer. In the mind of the critic, petitionary prayer goes nowhere and does nothing. From their point of view it would be like someone saying, “I feel badly for starving people. So I drew a picture of food and then burned the picture in a fire.” Someone engaged in prayer-shaming would see the act of prayer itself as useless smoke and ash doing nothing to truly alleviate the suffering that impelled the prayer.

This is a poisonous mentality. As I have written about in the past, prayer is not magic. The ways of God are not the ways of man. God is not a trained monkey who we can make jump through our hoop upon our command. He is the Lord and we petition His grace rather than forcefully demand His obedience to our will. But in order to keep the correct mindset about prayer, we must wait upon the Lord. When He does not react to our prayers to our liking and on our timetable, we can get the impression that nothing happens. But something always happens in prayer. The result may not be immediately sensed, but it is there.

God does not need our prayers, but he gives us, as Pascal and CS Lewis put it, “the dignity of causality.” Even in grand and distant events, He allows us to participate through prayer. Our prayers act like invisible strings that imperceptibly and mysteriously affect the world around us. Those who engage in prayer-shaming are trying to convince us that we do not have this dignity.

It is the same mindset I have found when discussing with people the seal of confession. Some have told me that a priest should be allowed to break the seal if someone confesses something truly awful, like murder. Their point of view only makes sense if nothing happens in confession. If the sacrament consists of mere empty words, in the same way that the prayer-shamers view petitionary prayer, then of course it makes sense for a priest to break the seal to bring a person to justice. But if a real miracle is occurring in the confessional, the miracle of a soul’s absolution, then nothing should be done to endanger it. If

petitionary prayer is really affecting both the person at prayer and the object or subject of prayer, then anything which discourages prayer is evil.

But now we must take up the spiritual challenge. When I first had my conversion experience I joined a prayer group that was very devout in its dedication to the rosary, the mass, and praise and worship singing. Someone very close to me asked me one day, “Does your prayer group ever think of doing anything useful?” I immediately became very defensive and thought, “We are PRAYING! That IS useful!” But upon reflection, the main reason I believe I felt this hostility was because it made me reflect on my own lack of physical charity.

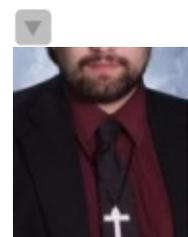
The Letter to James is a book of the Bible that always makes me feel terrible, but in a good way. Reading it makes me confront my lack of active charity and moves me forward. James writes, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:14-17) I think that the prayer shamers have this image in mind when they lay out their criticism. They should know that the Scriptures agree that “faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17)

We must be careful as Christians not to use prayer as a replacement for charity. When that difficult person comes to you to pester you with their problems, it may be easy to excuse yourself and say, “Well I’ll pray for you” instead of doing the more charitable thing of listening patiently. But that doesn’t mean that prayer isn’t a part of charity. The works of man will ultimately lead to nothing without the grace of God.

In the end, the prayer-shamers present us with a false choice of either/or. We must become people of prayer and works. As long as we are living this way, by the grace of God, then we can stand up boldly to those who are trying to shame us. We can say that we stand by our faith and we will not back down.

And we can say that we will pray for them.

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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.

This contribution is available at <http://newevangelizers.com/blog/2015/12/07/response-prayer-shaming/>
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Jesus: The Word Made Flesh [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]



“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name ‘Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ ” (Matthew 1:23)

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us...” (Jn1:14)

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we approach the celebration of our savior’s birth it is appropriate that we meditate on the unimaginable mystery and magnificence of this event. A mystery which was kept even from the angels – basically, the Father’s plan to redeem us from the sin which has enveloped humanity since Adam.

A plan not only to redeem us but to restore us to adoption as His spiritually generic Children. A plan that could be wrought only by through the Divine becoming one of us and atoning for our sins through an unjust passion and death at the hands of those whom He was saving. For, indeed only God Himself, in human form, could take responsibility and be judged for our sins since He is the Sinless and Holy One who created us. In this incarnation of His Divine Self and the Sacrifice of His Son for our sins is the ultimate and immanent manifestation of His transcendent Love -Yet, A love that expresses itself at the level of Human realization – A Love that goes beyond philosophy and theology to the reality of the birth of a human child incarnating God Himself – the birth of the lamb of God – The Lamb that the Father provided to be publicly sacrificed to atone for our sins,

“For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes on Him might not perish but come to everlasting life” (Jn; 3-16)

The Father’s giving of His Son begins at the Birth of Jesus – the event we celebrate as Christmas – the key event, on this Earth for His plan of redemption. The Gift of His Son begins at His Birth, His “incarnation”, where He emptied Himself of His Divine nature and became as one of us. This began the process by which the Word of God, the Son of God, became flesh for the purpose of sacrificing His Life for for our sins and, in this manner, manifested the Love of the Father for His creation and opened the door for our own re-creation in His “image”.

“... when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”
(Gal 4:4-7)

From this scripture we understand that, in order to accomplish His will in this regard, the Father needed a select volunteer, a human woman without sin to bring forth the Son of God incarnate into this world. This woman was Mary, a pure virgin dedicated to God, selected by Him to be the vessel through which His Son would be conceived and born as the God-Man anointed savior of the world.

And, as you might expect, it all began with an Angel delivering a Word from God.

(For God does nothing apart from His Word).



“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.” (Luke 1:26-35)

In delivering this Word from God, the Angel was delivering a Divine Promise and in order for this Promise to be realized, Mary, the chosen mother of His Son, needed to willingly and in faith accept and receive that Promise. Although she asked out of curiosity, **“how can this be since I am a virgin?”**, the Angel told her **“.. with God nothing shall be impossible”** (Luke 1:37). And Mary, responding in faith said, **“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her”** (Luke 1:38).

Brethren, I gently remind you of these things that you already have heard but which may not have had the

impact it ought on your heart, so that you may be made aware, by the Holy Spirit, that the Father's Love and purposes for the Birth of Christ, His ministry, His Passion, His Death and His Resurrection go much further than saving us from our sins and bringing us into His Glory. In fact, His intent was, and still is, for Jesus, His Son to be the first of many brethren. His intent is to replicate His Son in us so that His Glory and the Glory of His Son might be multiplied amongst us, and through us who believe, and so that we might be His instruments for the manifestation of His Kingdom in this world. Baruch ha Shem!

Peter, our first pope, expressly stated this underlying destiny for those who have also been born again through the Promises of His Word and who through the preaching of that word, have come to adoption as His children through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Yes! As you might expect, we also are re-born spiritually, through the proclamation of God's Word – the Good News of Salvation in Christ Jesus!

***“You have been born anew,
not of perishable but of imperishable seed,
through the living and enduring Word of God...***

***For “All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.***

***The grass withers, and the flower falls,
but the Word of the Lord endures forever.”***

That word is the good news that was announced to you.”

(1Ptr1:23-25)

And, as the Apostle Peter further amplifies, it is the Father's intent that we, through our faith in His Promises, may become His partners in bringing forth His Kingdom, through our baptism into Christ!

“His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.” (2Ptr1:3-4)

What shall we say then, to these graces and love that is freely bestowed on us? What is the response that the Father desires of us to His gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus? If the Living God gave totally of Himself, is it not appropriate that we His creatures give totally of ourselves in response to his Love. Is not this then the most appropriate gift that we can bring to the manger to celebrate the Gift of God's Son to us? Here again St. Peter hints the path of giving we must take to enter into the spiritual transformation that enables us to fulfill our destiny ...

“Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if

indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1Ptr1:2-5)

And what are these spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God? Aren't these, in effect, the giving of our “selves” to God?

To that question the Apostle Paul responds affirmatively

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12:1-2)

In order to assist you in accepting this challenge Brethren, I follow this article with a **Prayer of Commitment**, so that those of you whom the Holy Spirit has touched may, upon personal meditation use it to formulate your own prayer of commitment wherein you not only dedicate your “self” as a Living sacrifice in response to the Father's Love but you also yield yourself to the Holy Spirit so that He can fill you and mold you and empower you to bring forth the Father's kingdom in and through your lives.

I conclude with the Apostle Paul's prayer to the Ephesians who were also at the same point you now are, in being invited to enter the Kingdom through the gift of yourselves to the Father and to bring the Good News of the Kingdom to others....

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph.3:16-21)

Your Brother In Christ ... Bartimaeus

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O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O~O

Prayer of Commitment

Lord Jesus, I believe that you, the Son of the Living God came down from heaven to reveal the Father's Love to me by suffering and dying for my sins. I believe that through your death and resurrection you have brought redemption and life not only to me but also all else who believe in you. I further believe that it is only through knowing you in a loving personal relationship that I can know the Father.

Resource Links In Preparing for the Baptism In the Spirit

§ [Releasing the Spirit](#)

§ [The Double Portion Anointing](#)

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

§ [Pentecost and the Promise of the Father](#)

§ [The sanctifying Gifts \(Part 1\)](#)

§ [The Sanctifying Gifts \(Part 2\)](#)

§ [Praying in The Spirit](#)

§ [Empowerment Gifts \(Part 1\)](#)

§ [The Empowerment Gifts \(Part 2\)](#)

This contribution is available at <http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2015/12/18/§-jesus-the-word-made-flesh-2/>
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Roiled [at With Us Still]

At times, I wish Jesus wasn't quite so good about keeping his promises.

There's this, for example, in the passage we heard from Matthew's gospel at Mass today:

'From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force.'



The prediction fits the circumstances of our modern world all too well, it seems to me. The violent do indeed appear to have the upper hand of late.

I notice this, too: Violence tends to *beget* violence. With each new atrocity—foreign or domestic—the threats...and the retaliations...escalate. We react in fear...and begin to consider solutions that betray what's best in us.

The whole thing is terribly unsettling, even if I pause long enough to recognize that all these things are just as Jesus suggested they would be.

And into the tempest of violence wade our political leaders, bellowing and braying. Before long, I find myself getting caught up in their noise. My heart is roiled, so that it becomes nearly impossible to recall the promise that God makes [through the prophet Isaiah](#):

I am the LORD, your God,
who grasp your right hand;
It is I who say to you, "Fear not,
I will help you..."

Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

But why then, I want to know, does the Lord delay? Why does God not choose to redeem us now?

Almost as soon as these questions escaped my lips this morning, I was given a gift: the [extraordinary](#)

[witness of Father Jacques Mourad](#), a Syrian priest recently released from an ISIS prison.

I doubt that Father Mourad would consider himself heroic. But he *was* given this singular grace during his months in the cell: the opportunity to live out some of the [most difficult words of the Gospel](#).

‘Bless those who curse you, pray for those who persecute you.’

I have to say, it seems like a strategy that could *never* work. Not in a million years.

Yet, there it is: In this [Jubilee Year of Mercy](#), Father Mourad did in fact love his way to freedom.

—

Pope Francis’ Prayer for the Year of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ,

you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,

and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.

Show us your face and we will be saved.

Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;

the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;

made Peter weep after his betrayal,

and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.

Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:

“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,

of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:

let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.

You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness

in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:

let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of
Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and
ever.

Amen.

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

IHS

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Lessons From Star Wars: The Stony Heart [at Third Place Project]



Photo Credit: [James Jordan](#) on Flickr (CC-BY-ND)

“...show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” -2 Corinthians 3:3

One of the first large youth ministry events I organized was a youth rally meant to bring together the young people from several parishes in the Edmonton area. We titled it “Hearts of Stone and Flesh” in reference to the above scripture passage. Among other exciting things, we promised to give out free t-shirts to all who registered for this rally, and we wound up having 250 shirts printed with the following emblazoned across the front of the shirt in big, bold letters:

“ARE YOU STONE?”

This, of course, looked an awful lot like “are you stoned,” and reflects the first and last time I was ever allowed to design youth event t-shirts. In spite of these t-shirts, the rally was a great success (and is now headed into its thirteenth year) – and the theme is one that has stayed close to me in the years that have passed. Simply put, someone with a stony heart, is someone who, for a variety of reasons (usually sin or pain) has closed themselves off from loving others and being loved by them. Ezekiel explains that God intends to heal us of this condition:

“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” -Ezekiel 36:26

There is perhaps no place we see this play out more quickly than in the story of Luke Skywalker and his father, Darth Vader, in the original Star Wars trilogy.

Father Mike “Catfish” Mireau, the biggest Star Wars fan I ever knew, spoke of [the Jedi Knights as the coolest part of Star Wars](#). Why wouldn’t he? This select group of heroes (and villains) tap into a seemingly infinite power that gives them some incredible abilities. Jedi are known for their skills with a lightsaber, their ability to move objects both large and small with their minds, along with various Jedi

mind tricks.

To train to be a Jedi is to master not only these abilities, but also to master oneself... involving a particular detachment from exclusive or intimate human relationships. Jedi are asked to accept a lonely life – living in the galaxy with others, but valuing no other person as particularly unique or valuable above any others. There is no room for a Jedi to *love* (romantically or otherwise)... and this detachment is meant to make them more objective, and therefore more able to serve and protect those under their care. But what can also result from this sort of detachment is an inability to love and be loved... basically, a stony heart.

In the six Star Wars movies released (so far), on Jedi understood this “detachment” better than any other: Darth Vader. Vader so embraced his duty to put down the rebellion that he didn’t care who he hurt – or at what level he hurt them – in the process of bringing that peace. [Father Mike wrote](#) that “*Darth Vader is the man who has become his uniform; become his job, become the archetype that he represents, at the expense of his own humanness...*” – you might say that, in the process of becoming a Jedi, Vader/Anakin Skywalker allowed his heart to become so hard that his mission/job/goal became more important than everything and everyone else.

This is why, for Christians, we see love as the motivation for all things (whether it be detachment or sacrifice). We detach from things because we love them and recognize that love involves a surrender of control (but a total gift of oneself). The detachment involved here requires us to care more about the needs of others than our own well-being. And Luke understood this better than any other Jedi in the series. We see this at the moment of Obi-Wan Kenobi’s death (Episode 4), when he hears his friends are in danger (Episode 5), and in his rescue of Han Solo from Jabba the Hut (Episode 6). Luke allows his love for others to be his consistent motivation for doing good – and that love keeps his heart from becoming hardened. When Luke learns that Darth Vader *is* his father, he can’t shake the belief that his heart may not be completely hardened. This leads to the climactic scene in the entire story (so far):

It is Luke’s refusal to allow his heart to become hardened which decides the fate of everyone in the Star Wars universe: his own, Vader’s, and the Emperor’s, certainly; but many more as well. Luke’s willingness to show compassion to his father – even if it had meant his death – seems to awaken the heart of Anakin Skywalker from beneath the suit and the machine... replacing that heart which had been stony for so long with one that was (finally) capable of loving again.

While it doesn’t make him an ideal Jedi, the love and care shown by Luke Skywalker stand as a clear reminder to us as Christians to the way we are supposed to regard others. There are always those whom we will find it easy to love and care about (for Luke, this is Obi-Wan, Leia, Han, et al); but our love isn’t to remain limited to them in easy moments. We are called to love even when it puts us in danger, as it did for Luke on numerous occasions; and we are also called to love even those who don’t seem to deserve it.

[Star Wars can teach us many lessons](#), but at the heart of them is this simple and basic truth. We are created and called to live and love precisely as Luke Skywalker did... even when it’s inconvenient and doesn’t make sense. This is how Christ loved us... and how those of us who love Him are supposed to witness that we are His.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. -John 13:34-35

This contribution is available at <http://www.thirdplaceproject.com/starwarsstonyheart/>
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Can a Non-Catholic Find Comfort In Mary? [at Designs by Birgit]



Recently I received a question from someone who is not Catholic. Although she thought it might be a silly question (it wasn't) she wanted to know if a Protestant owning an object with the image of the Blessed Mother, Mary, on it was objectionable to Catholics (it isn't). Apparently, this dear sister in Christ has a great affinity for our Mother and finds comfort from her. What a gift! Many Catholics could take a lesson from this question - I know I did.

So What is the Answer?

Finding comfort in the Mother of God is natural when we remember that Jesus is our Brother. Many Scripture verses confirm that we are children of God and that Jesus is our brother. If He is our Brother and Mary is His Mother then she is our mother as well. Through the Fatherhood of God, the Fraternity with Christ, and the Motherhood of Mary we truly become one family.

We may well ponder the words in John 19:26. There Jesus speaks from the cross and says, "Woman, behold, your son!" and to John, "Behold, your mother!" Through these words of Jesus, our Brother, Mary becomes our mother, too. She exemplifies everything a mother is: comfort, support, unconditional love, and someone who pleads our case for us (intercession). This makes Mary a natural refuge in times of trouble - for all Christians.

Mary's Intercession for Us

Sometimes we find that those unfamiliar with Marian devotion are uncomfortable with the idea of asking

for Mary's intercession. "We can pray directly to Jesus", they say.

While it is accurate that He is "

[the Way, the Truth, and the Light](#)

", there are many ways to approach Jesus. One of those ways is through the intercessory power of Our Lady. We see an example of this at the Wedding Feast of Cana. The news that the hosts have run out of wine doesn't come directly to Jesus, it comes through Mary. When she petitions Jesus on their behalf He answers, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." Yet His insistent mother comes to the rescue, saying to the servants, "

[Whatever He says to you, do it.](#)

"

Thus Jesus complies, showing His deep regard for His mother and her requests. She is the singularly sinless creature in the history of the world (besides the God-Man, Jesus). As the Queen of Heaven and earth, she plays an important role in the Kingdom of God. She is the Mother of Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Her entreaties, then, are held in high regard.

The importance of Jesus' first miracle cannot be downplayed. It begins His public ministry and foreshadows the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, His mother's prominent role cannot be denied.

The Difference Between Honor and Worship

Fellow Catholics, how many times have you sought to explain that we don't worship Mary?

While we Catholics understand the difference between the honor given to Mary and the worship (adoration) reserved for God alone, many non-Catholics mistakenly believe they are the same. As the mother of Jesus, Mary has a very special place in salvation history. Her "yes" delivered a Redeemer to the world. As the vessel who carried Him in her womb, her participation in the Divine Plan is unmistakable and undeniable.

This unique role, as well as Jesus' own obedience to the fourth commandment - honor your mother and your father - dictates that we, His brethren, honor her as well. As we emulate His honor of Mary, we are doing as He has shown us by His own actions.

In Catholicism, there is even a verbal distinction between the honor given to Mary (

[hyperdulia](#)

) and the worship given to God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (

[latria](#)

).

As the prayers for the intercession of Mary indicate, we are asking her assistance while remaining firmly in worshipping Him alone. Just as you and I may ask for prayers from other Christians, so too we ask our Heavenly Mother to remember us. She, along with all other saints, is not dead. Fully alive and in the Divine Presence, she glories in her Eternal Home and ever worships God.

O Mary Immaculate

O Mary Immaculate, Virgin so fair
Mother of Our Savior, please hear my prayer
Intercede, dearest Mother
to your heavenly son.
Tell Him I am truly sorry for all the wrongs I have done.
Ask Him to guide me by the Gifts of The Holy Spirit
in all of my deeds and way.
So that I may give Him glory, honour and praise at the end of my days.
Amen.

The Hail Mary Is Scriptural

Arguably the most famous Marian prayer is the

[Hail Mary](#)

. While it may seem confusing, without proper discernment, the lines from this prayer can be found in Sacred Scripture.

[Luke 1:28](#)

- "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you." These words, delivered by the angel, Gabriel, come from God. Catholics, when reciting this verse while praying the Rosary, are quoting the Scriptural words of God.

The Greek translation of the phrase "full of grace" is the word "kecharitomene." Mary alone is given this unique title, which suggests a perfection of grace from a past event. Mary has been perfected in grace by God. The only other person described as "full of grace" is Jesus Christ.

[John 1:14](#)

In

[Luke 1:42](#)

Elizabeth utters the words, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed the fruit of your womb. (Jesus)" Just as Elizabeth blessed Mary first and then Jesus (the Fruit of her womb), so too can we go through Mary to praise Him. This hyperdulia honors Mary but is not the latria which is the worship belonging to God alone.

"And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

[Luke 1:43](#)

The equivalent of "Holy Mary, Mother of God" contained in the Hail Mary, this title makes an important distinction. Jesus is divine and is God. Mary is His mother. Therefore, Mary is the mother of God.

Can a Non-Catholic Find Comfort In Mary?

In summing up the divinely revealed, Biblical truth about Mary we come to the conclusion that Mary is the mother of all Christians - those who believe in Jesus the God-Man.

- We are God's children by adoption.
- Jesus, the Son of God, is our Brother.
- Mary, His mother, is our mother too - given to us from the cross.
- She played a special role in the Divine Plan for our Salvation.
- Jesus honored and obeyed her, as a good son is charged to do.
- Mary, was able to petition Jesus to perform His first miracle.
- As the role model of motherhood, Mary brings comfort to anyone who seeks it.

Can a Non-Catholic Find Comfort In Mary? was first published by [Catholic Stand](#)

This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2015/12/can-non-catholic-find-comfort-in-mary-28.html>
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Different types of missionaries [at walk the way]

Today is the feast of St. Francis Xavier, the sixteenth century Jesuit priest who is one of the patrons of missionaries, who died on December 2, 1552 on a deserted island off the coast of China.

But these first three days of December offer us visions of three different types of missionaries.

On December 1, 1916, Blessed Brother Charles de Foucauld was killed by rebels in Tamanrasset which is in what is now southern Algeria. He had sought to live among the poor as Jesus in Nazareth, hidden and poor – and so found himself living among Muslims in Africa.

For him to be a missionary was to be a witness by being present.

“The whole of our existence, the whole of our lives should cry the Gospel from the rooftops . . . not by our words but by our lives.”

Blessed Charles teaches us the importance of being present with our poor sisters and brothers:

We must infinitely respect the least of our brothers . . . let us mingle with them. Let us be one of them to the extent that God wishes . . . and treat them fraternally in order to have the honor and joy of being accepted as one of them.

On December 2, 1980, four US women missionaries were killed in El Salvador. Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clark and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, and lay missionary Jean Donovan offer us the vision of missionaries who accompany the poor in situations of violence and oppression.

Not only were they present, living among the poor, they were also responding to their needs, accompanying those who were being displaced inside the country, largely because of the repression by government and death squad forces.

They also noted that the poor can evangelize us. As Sister Ita Ford wrote:

“Am I willing to suffer with the people here, the suffering of the powerless, the feeling impotent. Can I say to my neighbors — I have no solutions to the situation, I don’t know the answers, but I will walk with you, be with you. Can I let myself be evangelized by this opportunity? Can I look at and accept my own poorness and learn from other poor ones?”

They accompanied the poor in their powerlessness and shared the fate of so many poor in El Salvador, a violent death at the hands of government forces.

St. Francis Xavier offers another vision of mission.

In some ways he appears to be the traditional missionary, in his ten years in India and the Far East.

He baptized thousands in India – and complained that students in the universities in Europe were thinking more of themselves than of the thousands who needed to hear the Gospel message and to be baptized.

But there is more to Francis Xavier than this.

In India he served the poor, visiting prisoners, slaves, lepers and people at the margins. He lived as a poor man.

But he was aware of the exploitation and violence wrought by Portuguese colonial rule in India and wrote back to the King of Portugal calling on him to correct the rampant injustices. He was a missionary who was not afraid to advocate for the poor.

But, though he identified with the poor and spent most of his time in India with the poor, he realized that, like St. Paul, he needed to be “all things to all people” (1 Corinthians 9: 22). So, when he went to Japan and saw that the rulers looked down on him with his poor clothing, he put on fancier clothes and brought gifts – opening up Japan to the message of the Gospel. He was a pioneer in inculturation.

And so, Charles de Foucauld teaches the missionary the importance of being really present among the poor. The US women religious martyrs teach the call to accompany people in the midst of poverty and violence and to be open to learn from the poor. St. Francis Xavier teaches the importance of being an advocate of the poor in the face of injustice and of being willing to make changes in the face of different cultures.

These missionary witnesses can help us who are missionaries in a foreign land to examine our ministry. (They also can help all Christians who seek to be missionaries, witnesses of the Gospel, wherever they may be.)

Yesterday, December 2, 2015, Pope Francis took up the call to mission and also provided food for thought.

He first challenged young people to think of becoming missionaries and recalled an 81 year old Italian woman religious he met in Bangui in the Central African Republic. She had left Italy when she was in her early twenties and had devoted all her life to Africa.

Pope Francis’ message reflects the challenge of mission in the twenty-first century, echoing the witness of Charles de Foucauld, Francis Xavier, Maura Clark, Ira Ford, Jean Donovan, and Dorothy Kazel.

But I address young people: think what you are doing with your life. Think of this sister and so many like her, who have given their life, and so many have died there. Missionary work is not to engage in proselytism: this sister said to me that Muslim women go to them because they know that the sisters are good nurses and that they look after one well, and they do not engage in catechesis to convert them! They give witness then, they catechize anyone who so wishes. But witness: this is the great heroic missionary work of the Church. To proclaim Jesus Christ with one’s life! I turn to young people: think of what you want to do with your life. It is the moment to think and to ask the Lord to make you hear His will. However, please don’t exclude this possibility of becoming a missionary, to bring love, humanity and faith to other countries. Do not engage in proselytism: no. Those who seek something else do so. The faith is preached first with witness and then with the word, slowly.

For more on the missionaries mentioned here, you can find short biographies in Robert Ellsberg’s *All*

This contribution is available at <http://walktheway.wordpress.com/2015/12/03/different-types-of-missionaries/>
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Tuesday, December 22, 2015

Saint Francis: Convert amidst the Darkness [at CatholicSoup]



In order that we might know Francis's life and his sanctity in a way that attracts and stirs, we are given a beautiful description of what he experiences and goes through, specifically in his conversion. Francis, growing up in the time of civil war, wrestles with his service and his ego. He asks himself many times it seems, "Whom should I serve and how should I serve?" For him early on, it was his country that he felt he should serve through knighthood and being recognized by honor and fame. From the very beginning God placed in him this desire to serve. God fulfilled his perfect will by having him serve by becoming a lesser brother, taking on the clothes of the outcasts, living with them and caring for them in such a way that becomes attractive to many. During his conversion and transformation from being this loud, rowdy leader of bandits, he was called to more than that. He was called to be a quiet, calm and prayerful father for those who wished to follow his own radical way of life. We are told that Francis was a builder before he was a brother. He built churches as a response to God's call; little did he know that while he was begging for rocks instead of bread and building churches, he was also building within him a home for Christ to stay in. Francis exemplified this in his life. He won the hearts of those he spoke to, and people wanted to follow him. I think they saw within him a love and a peace that was attractive and desirable. When he preached penance, people saw joy. When he gave to the poor, he gave freely. People began to listen to this sunny prophet who preached redemption to sinners and to sad hearts the secret of regaining joy and gladness. So many people were brought to the light of God by his humility, charm and uniqueness that men wanted to follow him. Francis, robed with a beggar's garb, was designated as a guide. Some thought that a new form of religious life had been born; and disciples eager to follow it soon presented themselves. So he had brothers. A major part of his conversion was his solitude, contrary to that of the world, he prayed and experienced great conversion of heart in the darkness and in the caves. This area of Saint Francis' conversion can give us hope in today's world. While many times we experience the darkness of our days and our world, the greater aspect is that through that darkness lies a conversion very similar to what Saint Francis experienced. Places like the cave or in

those times of silence and solitude is where Francis was formed and heard clearly the very voice of God and it can be the same for us. There is a fire to follow, but more importantly I think it has left me with a challenge to live like Saint Francis did. That is loving as best I can, in servicing as freely as I can and in being as joyful as often as I can. All three it seems are vital traits to adopt while responding to a Franciscan calling. In love, Francis loved his brothers and companions and also those he served. I think they recognized this rather quickly. In service, it seems that father Francis placed himself at the needs of those who were without. He did it willingly and obediently knowing that it was God whom he was serving. In joy, I have read that Francis was always in the spirit of joy, even in suffering, because of this he encountered God in the most ominous circumstances. To end, may there always be a movement toward these virtues that are the very charisma of the Franciscan spirituality.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicsoup.blogspot.com/2015/12/saint-francis-convert-amidst-darkness.html>

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Epiphanies, Our Lady, and Active Participation in the Mysteries [at The Catholic Spiritual Life]



We are now midway through the Twelve Days from Christmas to Epiphany. Epiphany is a Greek word that means “appearance.” The feast celebrates three manifestations: the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the first miracle at Cana, and the Adoration of the Magi. At first, this seems a jumble.

But we can better understand it by understanding what it has to do with Christmas. In the West, we have traditionally given greatest prominence to the day of Christ’s birth. In the East, they have focused more on the Adoration of the Magi (the visit of the wise men) which is celebrated twelve days after the Birth.

To Western minds, it seems strange to celebrate twelve days after the birth. The Birth is the big deal, right?

But in fact, in one sense, the Birth is not the big deal. The big deal is the Incarnation, which happened nine months before the birth. The Word was not made flesh on Christmas, but months before, in Mary’s womb. Theologically, the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, is a much bigger deal.

(Modern devotion has forgotten, but before the 1854 proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the womb of Anne, the tradition said something amazing happened to Mary when Christ took flesh. Before that, they said, she was indeed sinless – original sin did not “stain” her with any actual sin – but her flesh still bore the mark of the Fall. Her soul was full of grace, but all flesh, even Mary’s, was still distant from God. The moment Christ took flesh, Mary’s flesh, too, was healed. Pius IX’s careful definition of the Immaculate Conception does not prevent us from still thinking the Incarnation brought a miraculous transformation of Mary’s flesh.)

In other words, whether we celebrate twelve days after the Birth or on the day of the Birth itself, we’re still celebrating long after the real action has taken place. In one sense, nothing happens on Christmas Day – just as, in a similar sense, nothing happens when a baby is born. It’s not like there wasn’t a baby before the birth.

And yet birth is a big deal. (Let our pro-life fervor never lead us to say “nothing happens” at birth.) It’s a big deal because . . . it is an Epiphany, an appearance. What happens when a child is born is that, for the first time, mother and child look into each other’s eyes. That is not nothing. In some sense, that is everything. That is the whole meaning of human life. Finally the child is doing what it was made to do.

And let not our theological correctness lead us to say “nothing happens” at Christmas. For the first time, mother and child look into one another’s eyes. In some sense, that is everything. That is why Christ took flesh.

Forgive me now a hokey moment: every Spring when I teach my course on liturgy and sacraments, I tell my students about a classic corny sign sometimes seen outside Protestant churches: “ch—ch – what’s missing? UR!” (For some of my students I have to explain: “u-r” are the letters missing from the word “church.” But the point is that “you are” what is missing from the Church.)

In perhaps the most important twentieth-century book on sacramental theology, the Dominican Colman O’Neill ponders St. Paul’s bizarre phrase, “make up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ.” Nothing is lacking in the suffering of Christ – except one thing: u-r.

This is the heart of Catholic soteriology. Why do our works – or, more properly, our sanctification – matter? Because the one thing lacking from Christ’s work is for it to penetrate us. What is lacking? You are.

It is the heart of sacramental theology. Christ has done everything on the Cross. The only thing lacking is for us to receive his power. What is missing from the power of the Cross? You are.

It is the heart of liturgical theology. Traditionalists sometimes get confused on this. The Eucharist is everything, they correctly say. We can add nothing. So who cares about “active participation,” the key word to Vatican II’s document on the liturgy? But there is one thing lacking from the Eucharist: you are. Active participation contributes nothing to the power of Christ in the sacraments – or, it contributes nothing except for letting that power flow into us. The Eucharist doesn’t save the world on its own – else we would be Universalists, or at least Lutherans. No, what is missing from the Eucharist is us.

And so, too, this is the heart of Christmas. What is lacking from the Incarnation, on March 25? We are. Christ joins himself to human flesh at the very beginning of his earthly journey. But that is not the end of the story. He has still to look into his mother’s eyes. For the mother, what happens at the birth of her child? Metaphysically, nothing. Personally, everything. The whole point of taking flesh is to enter into union.

And so we see in what sense the East gets it right with their emphasis on the Epiphany. What is the point of Christmas? The point is that now we can see him – now all the nations, like the three kings, can join Mary in gazing on the face of Christ.

What does the face of Christ mean for you?

Sweet tinged with bitter [at Blog of the Dormition]

The joy of our feasting is always tinged with a bit of sorrow. There's always a bit of bitter mixed in the with the sweet – like a clove of garlic dipped in honey at our holy supper on Christmas Eve – or like the *chirin* we make for our baskets on Pascha – horseradish and beets, maybe with a bit of sugar. When St. Nicholas visits in some cultures he always leaves both goodies *and* a switch – because no child can be reduced to either naughty *or* nice – every child is good and yet also inclined to evil.

I think we can relate to these symbols, which express the paradox of our condition. God does not force us to stop hurting ourselves and each other, *but* out of the evil we bring into the world by our sins, he brings a greater good – like actually a greater good. Our attempts to do harm not only fail, ultimately (though they may succeed temporally) – they fail spectacularly. The greatest evil anyone ever tried to do, I believe, was kill Jesus. And out of that murder, death itself is defeated – the cross becomes the tree of life. God's good will is always done in the end. It's pointless to keep sinning – which really is trying to be what we are not and to do what we are not made to do. So let's knock it off, shall we? And submit ourselves to the good Lord. “That this whole day be perfect, holy, peaceful, and without sin, let us beseech the Lord.”

As we pray at the Lamp-lighting Psalms of Vespers, “the wicked fall into the traps they have set.” Our sinful designs cannot succeed against the designs of God. The very effort we use in sinning, God turns toward some good. “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor.” Allowing our vain and pointless efforts to unmake the goodness he has created for us, he uses these efforts instead and even against our vain, sinful, and corrupted wills, to build his kingdom. Though we suffer and cause to suffer, through our suffering, he brings healing. Though we die, in Christ we live forever.

And so, while we yet feast, we remember that the struggle is not done. The light of Christ is shining – but he is shining in the darkness – like the star shining over Bethlehem in the night.



Today we hear of sorrow coming quickly on the heels of joy. Joy came to the holy family by the birth of their new baby, who is our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ. But Herod does not share their joy. He does not rejoice at the news that the true king of Israel is born. And so, vainly, he tries to do him in – by ordering the indiscriminate massacre of the babies in those environs. These are holy innocents whom we will commemorate on Tuesday. This tragedy is a sign – pointing back to Moses, through whom God delivered Israel, and forward to our deliverance from sin and death in Christ.

Of course Herod's efforts are vain. Of course he fails. Sin is always vain. Sin always fails. When it seems that sin holds sway, be patient. It will fail. In this case, our Father did not mean for his Son to die in this way or at this time and so an angel visits Joseph in a dream to warn him to escape into Egypt. Another Joseph once narrowly escaped murder by being forced into Egypt – Joseph, the son of Jacob. These things are all connected – both to what has gone before and to what is yet to come.

Our Lord's incarnation, his conception, his birth, his baptism, his ministry all point toward his ultimate sacrifice, death, and resurrection for our salvation. The sacrifice of the holy innocents in the gospel today points to this – to the kind of death he would die. He is hunted and despised by some of his own people from the moment of his birth. Already the prophetic gifts of the Magi pointed to this also – Gold was for the King, frankincense for the Priest. Myrrh, however, was used to anoint the dead and so signifies that this little child was not only the priest but also the sacrifice.



The icon of our Lady of Perpetual Help, which we venerate in our annual pilgrimage to Uniontown, beautifully illustrates the infant Christ's premonition of his passion as angels display to him the cross and the instruments of his torture and death. He clutches his mother's hand for comfort.

Even the date of Christmas, in a labyrinthine way, is connected to the passion of Christ. There was a common belief in the early Church that Jesus was conceived and died on the same date – which may be one reason we make such a big deal now when the Annuciation falls on Good Friday. The date of Jesus' death, about which the gospels give much more information than his birth, was worked out by some to be March 25th, therefore this was reckoned to be also the date of his conception, therefore his nativity was reckoned nine months later: December 25th – this is [one of the theories](#) anyway, that the date for this festival of Christ's birth is actually derived from the date of his death. The connection between his birth and death was keenly understood. Christ's conception and his birth come with the promise of our salvation through his death and resurrection.

And so we reflect on this, even as we continue to celebrate his birth. He was not born into a world in which there was no pain and he did not choose to simply erase our pain, but to enter into it himself, to join us in it, even to use it as a means of sanctification.

St. John Chrysostom writes about today's gospel, "Even as He came in swaddling clothes we see a tyrant raging, a flight ensuing and a departure beyond the border. For it was because of no crime that his family was exiled into the land of Egypt. So do not be troubled if you are suffering countless dangers. Do not expect to be celebrated or crowned promptly for your troubles. Instead you may keep in mind the long-suffering example of the mother of the Child, bearing all things nobly, knowing that such a fugitive life is consistent with the ordering of spiritual things. You are sharing the kind of labor Mary herself shared. So did the Magi. They both were willing to retire secretly in the humiliating role of fugitive."

In Christ, God is now inside our troubles and our pain and our sacrifice. "God is with us, understand all you nations, and submit yourselves for God is with us."

This contribution is available at <http://holydormition.blogspot.com/2015/12/sweet-tinged-with-bitter.html>
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Never Underestimate The Power Of Prayer [at Principium et Finis]



I was powerfully reminded recently of the old saying, “Never underestimate the power of prayer”. I had just been reading about the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader, who has been urging people *not* to pray for France or for the victims of the recent Islamic terror attacks in Paris (a theme that has been taken up, [much less gracefully](#), by more secular sources after the terror attack in San Bernadino California).

Bemused by the apparent incongruity of a renowned religious leader discouraging prayer, I tracked down [this](#) news article, which quotes the Dalai Lama as saying:

We cannot solve this problem only through prayers. I am a Buddhist and I believe in praying. But humans have created this problem, and now we are asking God to solve it. It is illogical. God would say, solve it yourself because you created it in the first place . . . We need a systematic approach to foster humanistic values, of oneness and harmony. If we start doing it now, there is hope that this century will be different from the previous one. It is in everybody’s interest. So let us work for peace within our families and society, and not expect help from God, Buddha or the governments.

To be fair, the concept of an omnipotent Creator God who really hears our prayers appears to be foreign to the tradition in which the Dalai Lama was formed; we should not expect him to embrace a Christian concept of prayer. At the same time, St. Peter tells us to “to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (**1 Peter 3:15**), and therefore it is proper to point out several false assumptions implicit in the Buddhist leader’s remarks, which are amplified in their cruder expression on the front page of the New York *Daily News* (picture below).

First of all, the detractors of prayer seem to be suggesting that praying will somehow keep us from taking whatever concrete actions might be appropriate in a given situation, as if “Pray for Paris” means “Pray, *and don’t do anything else.*” Perhaps they’ve never heard the expression “Pray like everything depends on God, but work like everything depends on you.” In any case, nobody I know is proposing prayer *as a substitute for action*, so this is a (not very sophisticated) straw man argument. In the case of the people at the *Daily News*, it seems mostly an excuse to slam politicians they don’t like for not supporting gun control laws the newspaper promotes (one might point out that these policies were already

in place in both France and California, and did nothing to hinder either attack).



There also seems to be a misunderstanding, whether genuine or disingenuous, as to what such prayers are intended to do. Nobody is suggesting that God will restore the earthly lives of the innocent people murdered in Paris or San Bernadino in response to our prayers, or is expecting a *deus ex machine* whereby God simply steps in and solves our problems for us, as the Dalai Lama suggests. That is not to say that we discount the possibility of miraculous intervention (see below), but our prayers in response to human tragedies, for the most part, address things that are beyond the reach of any laws or “systematic approaches” we can enact in this world: prayers for the souls of the dead, and prayers that God bring healing and peace to the hearts of those among the living who are suffering from the tragedy (and in the case of suffering caused by evil-minded people, we pray for the conversion of the perpetrators hearts). Beyond that, we ask for the gift of God’s Grace, his divine assistance to give us the wisdom to know what we ourselves *should* do . . . and the strength and courage to do it. If the conclusion of that prayerful deliberation is that, for example, the application of armed force is advisable, we are happy to pray for the salvation in the next world of those on whom we are waging war in this one (we Christians are a Both/And People).

Not that any of those things are likely to deter those pushing the “For God’s Sake, Don’t Pray!” meme, because their real (but generally unspoken) argument is that prayer is futile, that it can accomplish nothing, except maybe to give the people offering the prayers the excuse that they have done their part and can leave the real work to others. This assumption most of all we should not allow to go unchallenged; we should not underestimate the efficacy of personal witness to the power of prayer, particularly when we have seen for ourselves that prayer can have powerful, and, yes, on occasion even miraculous results.

Here’s a true story, for instance, something that happened to me recently. When I first came across the Dalai Lama’s anti-prayer pronouncement, and was considering how I might respond, I ran into a colleague in the hallway who wanted to talk about another person on the staff who was being treated for cancer. That led to a discussion about a close family member of his who had been suffering from late stage cancer, and had been given less than two weeks to live. He described how he prayed *for* his relative, and *with* her, and *over* her as she slept. His suffering relative was still alive after two weeks; shortly after that she was cancer-free, and she is still alive and healthy today more than a dozen years after the the doctors told her she had barely enough time to get her will notarized and say good-bye. Interesting that this man, who had no idea what I had just read, and with whom I had never before discussed prayer or religion at all, should choose to share with me this personal testimony to the miraculous power of prayer just as I

was formulating a response to a public attack on the practice (Coincidence? Maybe . . . but who can say for sure?).

Another example from my personal experience is [Benedicta McCarthy](#), a young woman with whom, and with whose family, I was acquainted some years ago.



Benedicta swallowed an entire bottle of Tylenol when she was a toddler, destroying her liver. Her father, a Byzantine Rite Catholic Priest, organized a prayer campaign for her as she lay in the hospital, where the doctors who had observed a hopelessly damaged liver in the morning found a perfectly sound and healthy organ that same evening. The Vatican's Congregation for Saints attributed Benedicta's inexplicable (to non-believers) recovery as a miracle attributable to St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross (formerly Edith Stein), for whose intercession Fr. McCarthy and his family and friends had been praying; this miracle was cited at the Saint's canonization in 1999.

If we want an example more relevant to the threat of jihadists, we can look to the unlikely victories of Christian armies fortified by prayer over powerful Muslim aggressors at [Lepanto](#) in 1571 or [Vienna](#) in 1683. Let the Dalai Lama and the Daily News take note: Don Juan of Austria and Jan Sobieski did not stay home, secure in the expectation that God would smite the foe in their absence. Rather, they went forth to battle knowing that the Lord would answer their prayers only if they did their own part as well.

Prayer works: we have seen it happen. Really, aren't the people putting their faith in fantasies those who are relying on purely human "systematic approaches" and laws to do what such things have *never* done and perfect human nature? So by all means, let's pray. Let's pray for Paris, pray for San Bernadino, pray for healing for the people suffering from the ugly crimes committed there and for the conversion of those who seek to commit such crimes. Finally, let us pray for all of us, and all humanity, that we may be willing to turn to our Lord and let our actions be informed by his grace and guided by his will.

This contribution is available at http://vitafamiliariscatholica.blogspot.com/2015/12/the-power-of-prayer_21.html
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How Poor a Manger am I? [at Ordinary Time]



We have lost a sense in modern society of how important betrothal is. In today's society we think of engagement as simply testing the waters. What we call engagement in modern terms is what people a couple decades ago would have called courting/dating. It's not uncommon to hear that so and so is engaged one week, and well it didn't work out the next. It's almost as if for us engagement is just a promise of exclusivity on the way to marriage. That's not what being betrothed to someone in Jesus time meant. When you were betrothed, you were already married in essence. It wasn't a test period. It was just a period leading to the time when you would move in together.

For Mary to show up pregnant, well that was the same as committing adultery. Notice Joseph is thinking of divorcing her! Scripture indeed records him as being in his right to do so. "Joseph being a righteous man, but not willing to expose her to shame, was going to divorce her quietly." Righteous yet kind. It was his right indeed to divorce her. Here they are not living together yet, and she shows up pregnant. How his heart must have heart. It's a betrayal. Oh how it hurts to have someone you love go behind your back and betray you in this way. How hard must her story have been for him to hear? Oh, I haven't been with a man.. this angel appeared to me and said I'd have the child of God... What would you do in his shoes?

Then he had a dream from God. An angel told him that it was all true, and it says when he awoke, he did as the angel had instructed and took '

his wife

' into his home. How hard that must have been? God speaks to us all the time. He has given us the Church. The Church then gave us the scriptures. He speaks to us through our priests and deacons in their homilies. Through music. Through others. How much do we listen to him? How easy it would have been for Joseph to justify himself in not believing it. We do it all the time don't we? He could easily dismiss it as a dream. But he's a righteous man, a kind man. I imagine he wanted to believe it. He didn't want Mary to be shamed, and possibly killed. That's love isn't it? To put your doubt behind you and trust.

It's also one of the hardest things to do. To forgive for one. I am sure on some level he had to forgive

Mary, thinking she had betrayed him. That would be a hurtle of it's own... but another is to seek forgiveness. Once he realized she was telling the truth.. once he realized that she had not betrayed him... Oh it is not her he needs to forgive, but her forgiveness he needs to seek. Oh to get our own ego out of the way and say, I was wrong... I treated you wrong.. I am sorry... forgive me. Why should we? That's an easy question to ask. I am still mad we might proclaim. I still am not sure.. I still have doubts.

Emmanuel. God is with us. The Prophet Jeremiah said the name would be LORD our Justice. Our goal in life, the one that we reaffirm in Advent, the one that should stick out in our mind as we go through the octave of Christmas is this: To become more like God every day, every second, every breath. God is justice. We too, must become like Him. We must work for justice. In our relationships. In our societies. In our families. In every aspect of life. Justice means to give someone what rightfully belongs to them. When you say something untrue, when you hurt them by believing a falsehood, you are stealing their dignity. They are made in the image of God. God is truth. When you tell a lie you cloud that image. You try to cover it with something else, something not true. Justice requires you to restore it. Requires you to give them back what is rightly theirs... what is true.. what is kind and good.

Are there any people in your life right now you owe an apology? Is there someone in your past that you did wrong to? Is there someone out there that you should have helped or should be helping and did not/aren't? God is our spouse, we are the Church. For just a moment think about that great mystery. Is there anything keeping you from taking your spouse into your home? Is there anything keeping you from letting God fully into your heart? Maybe some teaching that someone misrepresented. Some issue that you just don't quite want to believe, or haven't quite come to terms with. Maybe some hurt in your past that you haven't gotten over... now is the time... to learn the truth.. and then, like the righteous and kind Saint Joseph... to take your spouse into your home. Let God into your heart. Come home.

In a world where all the doors are closing. Where hearts are so filled with so many distractions. Where football, hockey, food, drink, parties, drugs, sex, and so many, many more are taking the place of God inside... realize that the Holy Family is moving from door to door looking for a place for Jesus to be born. Are you preparing a manger for him? Oh how meager a manger it would be indeed where he to choose to be born here, in this sinful heart of mine. That's the grace of God though.. no matter how sinful we are, no matter how poor and meek a manger we might be.. He is looking to be born into you. He is looking for an open door. Is your door open? Are you ready to receive Him? It's time for us to work on our manger.. get it ready for the Lord.

His servant and yours,

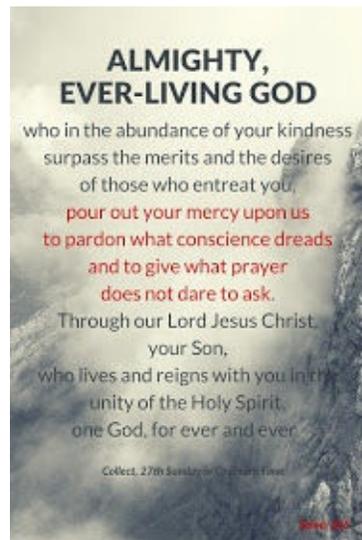
Brian

This contribution is available at <http://the-friar.blogspot.com/2015/12/how-poor-manger-am-i.html>
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What Prayer Does Not Dare To Ask [at Saints 365]

A few Sundays ago, the opening prayer (known as the *collect*) really hit me between the eyes. Ever have that experience? It was as if the words of the prayer seemed louder and clearer than normal. They stopped me in my tracks and after Mass I googled them to read them again. Here is what the prayer said:



So many parts of the prayer struck me, but in particular the lines "*to pardon what conscience dreads and to give what prayer does not dare ask*" touched my heart in a deep way.

What, exactly, does my conscience dread, I asked myself? What makes turning the handle on the door to the confessional so challenging sometimes? What am I afraid of? Shame? Vulnerability? The truth that I am fallible, fallen and most often, frustrated?

What does my prayer dare not ask? Why, in fact, if I place all my trust in the goodness and kindness of God the Father, am I still hesitant to ask for anything? I watch my children confidently ask my husband for whatever they desire, no matter how outlandish the request and I long for that degree of trust in my relationship with the Lord.

What is it in me that prefers to hang on to the false beatitude that says "blessed are they who ask for nothing for they will not be disappointed, instead of the true ones that demand full and unwavering surrender to the Lord?"

I know I am not alone in these thoughts - my suspicion is that they are rather universal - after all, their sentiments have made it into the opening prayer of the entire Church. My comfort comes in the reassurance provided by the opening lines of the prayer: "*Almighty and ever living God, who in the abundance of your kindness **surpass the merits and desires** of those who entreat you...*"

The Lord's generosity far outmatches my hesitation. His words far make up for my stubborn silence. His love far surpasses my sin. He longs to give far more than I can ever hope to desire.

For that greatness of mercy, I am grateful.

This contribution is available at <http://saints365.blogspot.com/2015/12/mercy-mondays-what-prayer-does-not-dare.html>
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Jubilee Year of Mercy

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

DEC. 8, 2015 - NOV. 20, 2016



“God’s mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). ... Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.” –Pope Francis

If ever there was a need for a year of mercy, now is the perfect time. Beginning Tuesday, December 8th, Pope Francis has declared a Jubilee Year of Mercy throughout the entire church, a year to open ourselves to the works of mercy in an invitation to love, kindness, forgiveness and generosity.

The entire story of our redemption is a story of God’s merciful love. Mercy is a divine characteristic that we as faithful Christians must share. If we truly desire to receive God’s mercy then we must also practice it ourselves.

So, what is mercy?

St. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* writes: *“the compassion in our hearts for another person’s misery, a compassion which drives us to do what we can to help him.”* Simply stated, mercy is our response to the suffering of others.

St. Thomas goes on to say that mercy is not only the greatest of human virtues, but is God’s greatest attribute! As He extends His mercy toward us and is in no need of our mercy in return, then, mercy should govern our relationship with others.

As we try to make sense out of the hatred, horrific shootings and terrorism of a polarized society, mercy should be our response!

“Let the church always be a place of mercy and hope where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven.” –Pope Francis

So, what can we do to participate in the Jubilee Year of Mercy? Here are a few things that I am going to try, why don’t you join me:

1. **Pray for a more peaceful and loving world** that only happens if we turn our attention toward our Lord. Pope Francis has a beautiful prayer that you can pray daily. [Get it here.](#)

For me, praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy has become a daily ritual for years. As I pray the Chaplet on my way to work in the morning, it become a perfect beginning to my day and puts me in a forgiving, positive mood. I also love praying Psalm 136 with the repeated refrain “for His mercy endures forever.”

2. **Read about mercy.** A good book to start with is Pope Francis’s Church of Mercy. It will give you great insight into why Pope Francis established the Jubilee Year of Mercy. My review and a [link to purchase the book can be found here.](#)
3. **Put the Corporal works of mercy to practice in your life.** Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, give shelter to those that are in need, visit the sick, minister to prisoners, and bury the dead.

Sound overwhelming? Then pick one or two to become part of what you do. It’s easy to clean out your closets and provide clothing and household items to the needy with your donations. Participate in a food drive by donating food to the local St. Vincent de Paul Society, Salvation Army or local homeless shelter. For me, prison ministry has been a very meaningful part of my life for the past decade. Find one that speaks to your heart and make it a resolution for 2016.

4. **Forgive someone.** That’s right. Especially family members that have become estranged. Find that person in your life in most need of forgiveness, seek them out, forgive them, and invite them back into the family. We must rid ourselves of anger and resentment if we are to truly become merciful.

As we go through Advent on our way to celebrating the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. Let’s vow to make the season and all of 2016 a year of mercy in our lives. Our world has never been in a more desperate need of mercy. Let’s get started!

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Words Written On Ice And Wind [at PURE HOMILETICS]



Reflections on the Craft of Preaching by a Creative Writer

At the turn of the century, I graduated from the Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier, Vermont. Armed with an MFA in creative writing, I set out to write the Great American Novel. I taught writing at the University of Central Florida in Orlando while continuing to labor in journalism (my first career), enjoying a modicum of success in the Catholic press before entering the seminary in August 2007.

During my discernment to the priesthood, I struggled with the idea of giving up a promising writing career. It was the death of Pope St. John Paul the Great in 2005 that spurred me to begin writing about the Church. I became a columnist and feature writer for *The Florida Catholic*, but in attempting to write a piece about the late pontiff's influence on my life, I found that it was like trying to pour the ocean into a thimble. I realized that I felt called to do more than writing. There is more to the Word than the printed page.

Doubling up on apostolic work at my parish ate up much of my time at the keyboard, but it was fulfilling, and it changed my perspective on my life's work. I realized that writing was no longer a job but a calling.

Each Sunday I watched and listened carefully to the homilies delivered by the priests and the deacons and began to see myself in the pulpit where I could impart to the congregation the fruits of my labor, to contribute my words as living stones to help build up the Body of Christ.

As a seminarian, I took two courses on homiletics, one taught by the chaplain at Harvard University who emphasized detail, style, form, content, and structure. He forbade his students from including rhetorical questions in their sermons. I didn't agree with that, but I got a good grade. The second class I took was taught by a priest who basically phoned in his lectures, for he wore many hats in the Archdiocese of Boston, and one of those was teaching homiletics. Maybe I learned more from him. I came away knowing that, were I to be ordained, I was on my own to determine the type of homilist I wanted to become. Composing a weekly message for an assembly was always a work in progress. I was more than willing to do the work. It was paramount.

The purpose of a homily is simple: to break open the Word and explain the Scriptures to the assembly—to edify, catechize, and exhort, and to raise their consciousness to God. The homilist must be a statesman of sorts. Preaching isn't theater, but it can be theatrical. John Paul the Great, an actor when he was a young man, and Archbishop Fulton Sheen, a televangelist with dark, arched eyebrows and caped in a cope, both displayed the craft of preaching with flair and aplomb. Sheen's natural habitat was before a television camera. John Paul displayed his craft on the world stage. The achievements of both men, one, a saint, and the other a servant of God, were substantial and inspired generations of Catholic preachers.

Every homilist, whether a bishop, a priest, or a deacon, is different. We bring our entire lives to the pulpit to reach and teach worshipers, to build a bridge between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. More or less, the preacher gets 10 minutes a week per Sunday Mass to impress upon my congregation the urgency of knowing and loving the Word of God. This is precious little time, so it had better be worth it to my parishioners, to hold the assembly's interest, to carry them through their busy weeks, and make them hungry to hear the Word of God on the following Sunday.

As a new priest, I was eager to preach. I felt confident that my career as a writer and a teacher of writing prepared me to one day become a competent homilist. Preaching, like writing, is a craft, and experience is the best teacher. Because I speak Spanish, my first assignment was at a Puerto Rican parish where parishioners held high standards for their clerics, and where all my gifts and skills, writing and speaking in English, suddenly became a liability.

As a new preacher in Spanish, I basically had the conversational skills of a 10-year-old; preaching in my second language humbled me and reminded me every weekend that I didn't have all the answers, that dramatic flair and syntactical surgery didn't necessarily get the job done. I had to be open to the Spirit. I persevered. My Spanish improved. Though I no longer work in Hispanic ministry full-time, I consider the

Spanish language skills I developed to be one of the sharpest tools in my spiritual tool box. Languages are different. The message is the same. Smile and tell them that God loves them.

In my final assignment—the largest parish in the diocese—I worked with a pastor who believed that good music and good preaching are the keys to a vibrant assembly. The results are self-evident. Four priests and three deacons lend depth to the lineup. The music ministry, comprised of music majors and professors from Michigan State University, routinely draws applause after the recessional hymn. (Nobody applauds for the preacher, but that’s okay; we perform, but are not performers.)

The spiritual clime of the parish pushes one to attain continuous improvement as a minister of the Gospel. Pope St. Gregory the Great wrote, “The preacher must dip his pen into the blood of his heart. Only then can he reach his hearer.” *Ah-ha!* There was the missing link: my sermons were more head than heart, so I began to write more anecdotally without making my preaching “all about me,” and included a rhetorical question now and again, when appropriate. I taped Gregory’s maxim on my computer and meditate on it before I begin to compose, and I pray the prayer to the Holy Spirit. Prayer must be the bedrock of homily preparation. If we would be purveyors of the Word, we must be in the Word.

Sometimes I heard a parishioner say, “I like it so much better when Father doesn’t use notes, when he preaches from the heart.” I believe there is truth to that, but many new priests and deacons use notes until they gain confidence and find their voice. Influenced by the novelism that I had studied, I worked all week to craft word-perfect stories, but left the pages in the folder in my briefcase in the sacristy to “preach from the heart,” *sans notes*. Jesus said, *Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

I believed Jesus, but I seemed to get in the way of the Spirit. I was always well-prepared, but my sermons appeared to be one-dimensional. I stalled, stammered, and lost my place, but it wasn’t from lack of preparation. By choosing to forego my words, I deprived the congregation of who I am, left most of myself in the sacristy. I felt compelled to focus on performance instead of the message. Bad idea. That wasn’t really me. Like Merton, I am bi-vocational, a writer who became a priest, a priest who is a writer.

In my homiletics studies over the years, I came across the “Barth Method” of sermonizing, developed by the Swiss Reform theologian Karl Barth. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a practitioner of the Barth Method, and he left little to be desired in the delivery of his sermons. Barth taught that there was no need to devise an opening anecdote; the Scripture passage provided it. All the preacher need do, after considerable study, was tick off a line-item exegesis, and when he reached the end of the pericope, the homily concluded. The length of the Scripture passage determined the length of the homily.

For example, a short Gospel, (i.e., Mk 1:14-14, “the Beginning of the Galilean Ministry”) would only require a short sermon. But for a long Gospel, (say, Mt 25:31-46, “the Judgment of the Nations”)—it’s a good thing parishioners are sitting down. At the least, Barth’s method ensures simplicity and variety. The depth, imagery, and language are up to the exegete. The preacher determines how much of himself to put into the homily, hopefully a sufficient amount, so that the assembly can identify with the message, which is paramount, without making it about him.

That sounded simple, and I often employ Barth’s technique in my daily homilies. And should things get crazy during the week so that I can’t produce a written sermon suitable to my standards, Barth’s approach works well in a pinch. But a wise nun once told me that no homily is better than an ill-prepared one. Her counsel stuck with me. My primary rule in homily preparation has always been “don’t embarrass yourself,” or, like the Boy Scouts motto, “Be prepared.”

My parish records Sunday homilies and posts them on our website as podcasts. Listening to myself can be painful, but it is a great way to learn and to grow, and it helps me to determine my strengths and weaknesses. I noticed that, unscripted, I tended to be nebulous, nervous, repeat myself, and launch into tangential sidebars, searching moment to moment for the right rabbit hole to enter, only to blank out. Ouch!

Then on All Soul’s Day I delivered a personal witness about carrying the torch for my deceased loved ones. Never had I delivered such personal material, but I discerned it to be appropriate because I wanted my assembly to identify with living without dearly departed love ones. Who could not relate to the truth of human death and the hope of the immortality of the soul?

People sat up. I held their attention. I wrote the homily out and used my iPad—the Gospel according to Steve Jobs—to guide me through challenging material, my words charged with imagery, energy, concrete language, and relevant anecdotes, committed first to paper and set before me, as I preached the faith with love from the heart in accordance with the truth, true to myself and guided by the Spirit. “You found your voice,” the deacon told me after Mass. Like Ronald Reagan and William F. Buckley, Jr., I do my best thinking with a pen in my hand.

Everything changed. Liberation. Coming home. Like Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, two great tastes—writing and preaching—came together. I combined my love of writing with the thrill of proclaiming the Word of God. No need to look back; now I only move forward. A preacher is as good as his last homily. More is always expected as we journey further with the Word.

An interviewer once asked Buckley, an uncannily prolific writer, how he approached the delivery of his speeches. He responded that he used a prepared text to guide him, to stay on target. “Some people have the ability to speak using a prepared text without seeming like they’re reading. I have that ability,” Buckley said.

As a novelist, I turned out to be a competent preacher. After All Souls Day, I listened to the podcast. What I heard was a steady, balanced, confident preacher delivering word for word—from the heart of his heart—what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. Once I decided to rely on words carved on ice and wind, that is, hand-crafted homilies written with all my skill and know-how as a professionally trained writer, my preaching improved 1000 percent. No more debate. Write from the heart. Speak from the heart. The message of the Gospel speaks for itself. I am only the herald.

The reason the Church possesses so many sermons and homilies extant from the Fathers Augustine, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and Peter Chrysologus, et al, even Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila, is because they wrote for posterity. As a bishop, Augustine (a former professor of rhetoric, which I was) sat in his cathedra with a scroll open on his lap and delivered the words that God inspired him to write. The Old Testament prophets preached in the Temple courts with scribes nearby busily transcribing every word. Their poetry is among the most sublime in the ancient world, held in the hearts of today’s worshipers as paragons of love, hope, faith, and truth.

As with the practice of medicine and law, the homilist’s apprenticeship doesn’t end with graduation from the seminary. The pulpit is a sacred space, like the altar, and the homily serves to open up the Liturgy of the Word in preparation for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Whether the preacher goes “without a net” or glances up and back from prepared remarks, his homily, constructed of words, like the bricks, mortar, and cables of a bridge, stretches over the waters between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist and transports pilgrims from one to the other. The homily, inspired by the Spirit, is the bridge between.

This contribution is available at <http://pure-homiletics.blogspot.com/2016/01/words-written-on-ice-and-wind.html>
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Our Lady of Guadalupe - Be Ever At Our Side [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

Last year on the Memorial of our Lady of Guadalupe, I wrote of the blessed visit my daughter and I had made to the site of this great Marian apparition so many years earlier.

[You can read that post here.](#)

Today I want to share a brief message she delivered to St. Juan Diego - a message meant for our ears as well:

"I, who am your Mother, stand before you. You remain always under the shelter of my protection. Be aware of how fortunate you are to have access to my motherly care at all times."



Our Lady of Guadalupe, ever at our side, pray for us!

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2015/12/our-lady-of-guadalupe-be-ever-at-our.html>
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Peanut Butter and Grace [at String of Pearls]

I've said it before here at String of Pearls, and I'll say it again: this blog has brought me so many opportunities, blessings, and even friendships that I never would have experienced had I not taken the plunge almost five years ago. I have my first daughter-in-law to thank for making me a blogger; she's the one who suggested the idea, feeling sure it was something I would enjoy. Well, she was right.

One thing that always amazes and surprises me is when, out of the blue, I receive an email from someone who has stumbled upon my humble little blog and asks me if I would be willing to use it as a tool to spread the word about their products or websites (and they're always wonderful Catholic products and websites). This doesn't happen often, mind you. Since I set up shop here on the Internet, I can count the number of times this has happened to me on one hand. But when it does, I get excited because I look at it as a way to evangelize about our glorious Catholic Faith.

So today I'm going to tell you about a new Catholic micropublisher that reached out to me not too long ago, called

[Peanut Butter & Grace](#)

. And because yesterday was Tuesday, and that's book club day...instead of a Grace-filled Tuesdays meeting, we're going to call this one "Peanut Butter & Grace-filled Tuesdays." (I know it's Wednesday; but it seems that lately I'm always a day late and a dollar short.)



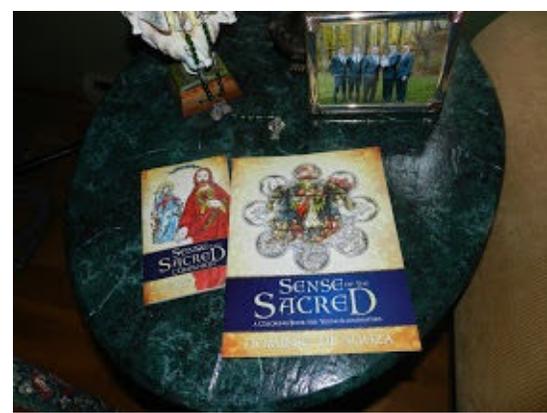
When PB & G asked me to look over their site to see if there was a book I might be interested in reviewing for the blog, I chose their picture book for children titled

The Little Flower, A Parable of Saint Therese of Lisieux

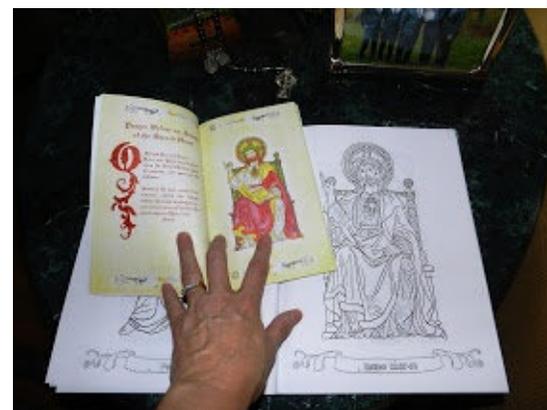
. But it was still in production, so they kindly sent me a two-book set instead:

Sense of the Sacred, A Coloring Book for Young Illuminators

by Dominic de Souza, along with its companion, a book of beautifully-illustrated prayers.



A young illuminator can use the full-color illustrations in the prayer book as a guide and try to recreate them in the coloring book, if he or she so desires.



These books are not only perfect for inspiring young artists, but they also teach many traditional but lesser-known Catholic prayers that they might have never learned before, such as "Mary, Help of

Christians," "Prayer Before an Image of the Sacred Heart," "Christ, King of the Universe," and "St Patrick's Breastplate." This set would make such a great addition to any Catholic school or homeschool art and/or religion curriculum--not to mention any Catholic home with youngsters in it.

I was just getting ready to blog about the

Sense of the Sacred

books when I got word that a paperback copy of the much-anticipated PB & G children's book about St. Therese was on its way to me. When we got home from our latest trip south to visit with three of our sons and their wives (and our two grandsons!), it was waiting for me in the mountain of mail that had accumulated while we were away. I tore through the packaging. (What can I say? St. Therese is a saint to whom I am very attached and about whom I get very excited!)

Here it is, PB & G's

[The Little Flower, A Parable of Saint Therese of Lisieux.](#)

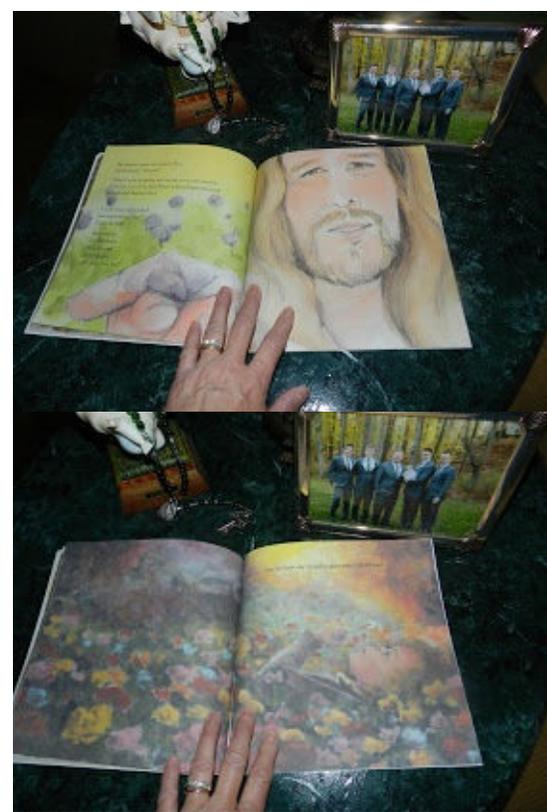


Look at that sweet cover artwork! Doesn't it just make you want to find out what's inside?

What's inside is more of the same: dreamy, ethereal watercolor illustrations accompany the story of Therese's childhood aspirations to become a saint. "She knew that because she was little, she could not do big things for Jesus...Therese wanted to do great things for Jesus, too. But how could someone so little do great things?"



This engaging and endearing book, lovingly written by Becky Arganbright and beautifully illustrated by Tracey Arvidson, tells young readers how Jesus spoke to Therese's heart, using a parable. He assured her that in His garden, the humble little pansy is no less important or beautiful than the grand orchid. Therese realized that she might be little, "but that did not make her any less important to the Gardener."



Children who read this book will learn why Saint Therese is often referred to as "The Little Flower," and they'll come to understand her "Little Way"--a way that even the smallest and humblest among us can follow. They will realize that every kind of flower has its place in God's garden and know that no matter how small they are, Jesus sees them and appreciates the unique gifts they have to offer.

I just visited the PB & G website and saw that if you order

The Little Flower, A Parable of Saint Therese of Lisieux

by December 14

,

you could receive your copy in time for Christmas gift-giving

.

So if you have a young reader/saint-in-the-making on your list, head on

[over there](#)

now, before it's too late. (The book is also available on Amazon.)

(Quick plug here: you could also get

Erin's Ring,

a Catholic novel for the YA crowd and up, in time for Christmas. Head on over to Amazon and

[order your copy now](#)

!)

Before I sign off, I want to thank the kind folks at Peanut Butter & Grace from the bottom of my heart for sending me these inspirational books, which I plan to share with my growing brood of beloved, book-loving grandchildren. It has been my privilege to share the good work you're doing with my readers.

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2015/12/peanut-butter-grace-filled-tuesdays.html>
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Finding Focus in Prayer [at Sunflower Sojourn]

As we celebrate the season of Advent and prepare to celebrate the coming of our Lord and Savior, we're called to still our hearts and go even deeper in our relationship with Him.



courtesy of unsplash.com

One reason some people don't make time/much time for prayer may be that it feels useless. They can't focus and are too distracted. So, they just give up altogether.

Fighting for your prayer life is truly a battle. Thankfully, there are some steps that you can take so that your conversations with God are a *priority and a joy*. You can have a vibrant prayer life!

All of these steps have helped me in some way and some have been taught to me by people older and wiser than myself!

Determine a place conducive to prayer. Having a set prayer corner or room works for a lot of people. Maybe you are in a bustling household and going to the chapel is necessary for you. In my own life, I've found that I really like to go on prayer walks and talk with the Lord.

Pray throughout the day. Remember to pray before meals (no matter where you are!), when you hear of situations needing prayer, even praying with people that bring up needs or difficulties to you. Commuting on the metro, car, or on foot is also a great time for prayer.

Also, have set times for prayer. More than that, *keep* them. It's important to have structure, too. Just like you set aside time to talk to your spouse, child, and other loved ones, you must set aside special time to spend with your Creator. Otherwise it may not happen.

Keep a pen and paper handy. If something comes to mind that you need to do, or some sort of inspiration, write it down. Then move on and continue in prayer. If you don't write it down for later and move on, it will stay in your mind and you'll find it difficult to focus in prayer.

Keep a prayer log. You can keep a list of people and other intentions to pray for, to give you more focus and remind you of who you have promised to pray for. Noting answered prayers is also a great step to

remind you of the faithfulness and greatness of God!

What prayer forms draw you close to the heart of Jesus? Some like silent prayer. Others thrive on singing. Praying with Scripture using the [Lectio Divina](#) method allows you to soak up the Word and its implication in your life. The [Examen](#) is a prayer form that many have latched on to. Others like to write letters to God. Attending Mass or a church service is a form of prayer. There are many, many different forms of prayer. Find the ones that fit your personality.

Find accountability. We need help on this journey. Find someone that you can count on to ask you how your prayer life is going—and will give you a kick in the pants when needed. Even better, they will pray *with* you.

I hope that these tips will enrich your walk with the Lord and enable you to have a thriving prayer life! Blessed Advent!

This contribution is available at <http://sunflowersojourn.wordpress.com/2015/12/05/finding-focus-in-prayer/>
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Loving Glances [at Bible Meditations]



“Whoever welcomes this child in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, also welcomes the one who sent me. For the one who is least among you all is the greatest.” Luke 9: 48

During Mass today, I noticed a father steal a glance toward the back of the church where the children’s choir stood. He stole a moment away from the priest and the altar to look back at where his little girl or boy was singing. Maybe he was glancing back to reassure his child of his support. Maybe he was just peeping back in pride. Maybe a little of both.

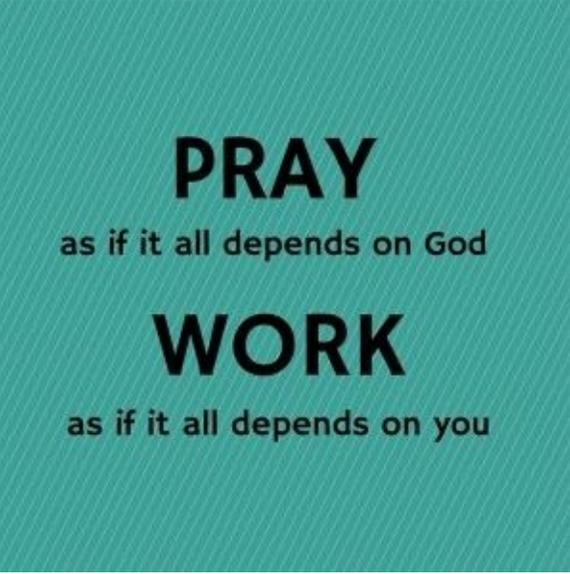
Distracted from worshipping God? Maybe. Then again, maybe not. Jesus taught his disciples that welcoming a child is also welcoming Jesus, and God the Father. That fleeting glance away from the altar toward his child took only a few seconds, but was packed with love for that child, and, no doubt, for Jesus and the Father, too. I don’t remember today’s homily, but I do remember the message of love my heart received.

We were all little children, once upon a time. God loved us then and loves us now. Maybe he lovingly glances at us as we perform our jobs at work, or school, or home. Not to catch us messing up, but just because he can’t resist watching us. I’m sure that father at Mass today didn’t care if his little one hit a wrong note or two, or fidgeted, or scratched an itchy nose. Our best is good enough for our loving Father. Our imperfections can’t dampen his love.

Prayer: Father, thank you for lovingly watching over us.

Reflection: What would happen if you immersed yourself in awareness of God’s love for even just a moment?

What we need alongside



PRAY
as if it all depends on God

WORK
as if it all depends on you

The most recent mass shooting has us all thinking and praying [again](#). But last night's reaction was different: there was an [outburst of outrage at those who offer “thoughts and prayers” without promising any sort of action to prevent violence in the future](#).

I have read that this was an [“attack on prayer”](#), that criticizing those who offer prayer is fundamentally anti-religious, but I disagree with that reading of the reaction. I saw people frustrated with using well-wishes as a replacement for the work needed to transform our society.

This morning I remembered this quote: Work as if it all depends on you, pray as if it all depends on God. I wish I could take credit for it. There are conflicting reports of to whom it should be attributed, some say [Augustine](#), some [Ignatius Loyola](#), and it can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (attributed to Iggy).

Regardless, it captures the “both/and” mentality that many people of faith value. We can do both at the same time: we can pray intensely but also work intensely, and perhaps both are equally needed.

What are your thoughts (and prayers) on thoughts and prayers?

This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2015/12/03/what-we-need-alongside-thoughts-and-prayers/>
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Being Caught and Lifted Up [at bukas palad]



Year C / Christmas Season / Christmas Day

Readings: Isaiah 52.7-10 / Responsorial Psalm 98.1-6 (R/v 3c) / Hebrews 1.1-6 / John 1.1-18

“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.”

These words end today’s gospel reading from John. They are cause for us to remember, celebrate and believe in the Christmas story. Because today God who once entered into human life in history to redeem us makes real again God’s promise to keep redeeming us in our life stories. For is it indeed **by becoming one like us that God has made us to become one like God, no matter our human struggles and sinfulness.**

Yes, God has come, God is with us, God will always be here for us. We proclaim this truth when we stand before baby Jesus in the crib. We see his gleeful face. We sense his outstretched arms inviting us to lift him up and to draw him into our lives. **This is Christmas joy: to know God is with us.**

What else can we experience but joy when Jesus comes amongst us, with all our faults, to reveal the glory of God’s saving love? A glory the angels sang as they praised God in the heavens and announced God’s peace on earth. That glory the shepherds experienced at Jesus’ birth. The glory reflected in Joseph’s contented face and Mary’s beaming smile as they gaze at Jesus. This same glory you and me honour by kneeling before Jesus lying in the manger as our Lord and God. This is why we can come with all our successes and failures, our hopes and regrets, even our holy and unholy actions, and place them before this child. For in this small, vulnerable, fragile child, Love divine, all loves excelling, meets us to save. This is the glory of God.

But we can easily lose sight of this glory. Hallmark cards reimagine it as Christmas quaint and traditional. Popular Christmas songs sugar-coat it. Shopping malls reduce it to Happy Holidays and bargain buys. These distortions of Christmas glory can make us forget why God comes to us in Jesus. What is this deeper, richer reason?

We can glimpse it in the opening line of John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

This line makes us think of Jesus, the Word, with God, the Father. Both side by side with each other. We do so because of the preposition 'with'. The Greek word for 'with' is '*pros*.' '*Pros*' suggests turning towards another, being orientated towards another, moving towards this other.

The Greek translation of the opening line then images the Word always turned towards God, always actively reaching out to God, always wanting to be with God. And God too is also turned towards the Word, actively reaching out to it, always wanting to be with the Word.

We believe Jesus shows us the way to God. He does this by modelling this more active way of turning, orientating, directing oneself towards God. Christian discipleship calls us to do likewise. But Jesus can turn towards God, and we can too, because God is always first turned towards him and us.

This Greek insight about being turned toward another reveals something profoundly beautiful about God and God's reason for coming to us. Knowing this must matter to you and me today.

It must matter like it does for those who swing on the flying trapeze: it's a matter of life and death.

Holding on to bars, two men swing to and fro, trying to synchronize their swings to that perfectly timed moment when one can let off of his bar, fly freely through the air, and be caught by the other to swing together, and not fall.

A moment of thrill and fear. A scene of wonder and grace.

Before this event however hours of practice. By one who is younger and inexperienced, wanting but hesitant. And by the other who is older, more experienced, surer of his moves and confident. Tries upon tries of stretching of one's hand to the other, but not daring enough to let go. Tries upon tries to soar but always fearful of falling down.

Until that day when the swings are synchronized and the timing right, and that older, more experienced catcher reaches out, grabs the other's hands, lifts him up, soaring through the air, never falling.

What if this movement in practicing flying trapeze is what Christmas is also profoundly about? Being caught and lifted up.

What if the desirous but hesitant flyer is you and me, always wanting to reach out to God but fearing we can't? And that catcher saying, 'now' is God, God knowing that this is the anointed time to lift us up into God's life? Lifting us out of darkness into God's radiant life. Out of sinfulness into fullness of life. Out of discord into peace. Out of despair into hope. Out of unbearable sadness into indescribable joy.

Yes, isn't Christmas really about God coming to us in Jesus and lifting us up, and taking us beyond our human limitations and sinfulness to God's pre-ordained possibilities of how much more like God we can be. Isn't this what Jesus did for us by being born like us to show us the way to God? Show us this way of always turning ourselves towards God?

And what else is God's action of reaching out to us but God's mercy? Mercy in its simplest but truest meaning -- of entering into the chaos of another's life and to lift her out of it and up into God's life, light and love.

God's mercy we receive through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus. The mercy of God we first glimpse in his infant face at Christmas. And as Jesus journeys with us through life, this mercy we come to truly know whenever we look upon his face, matured with age, scarred by suffering and death but always etched with God's love for us, no matter our sin. This face we see every time we look at the crucifix.

This is why meditating on the face of the infant Jesus will lead us into that deeper, richer truth that **Christmas is first and foremost about God's mercy coming to us.** Coming not because we've earned salvation. But coming because God wants us to be with us in our messiness and to lift us up from it -- Jesus born in a dung-filled manger to be with us; Jesus dead on the Cross to raise us up.

All this can be God's gift to you and me if we but trust: trust that in Jesus we will truly receive God's mercy.

Let us do this as we come before Jesus in the crib this morning: let us let go of our fears; let us lose ourselves in trust; and let us let God catch us in Jesus and not fall.

And if we meditate on Jesus long enough, we will be surprised: for it will not be us who will lift Jesus up into our embrace. Instead, it will be Jesus drawing us deeper into God's life, light and love. Then, let us savour God's mercy as Jesus lifts us up with his outstretched arms to let us soar again in life this Christmas.

As we do this, we will not hear angels singing "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to people of goodwill" as the shepherds did that first Christmas night. But you and I will want to sing those same words because this great truth of Christmas has begun to dawn again in our hearts and in our minds: **that God has come and his mercy is forever ours, not just today but always.**

For you and me, this must be all that must really matter in our lives. **Oh what joy that God's mercy is indeed ours!**

Preached at St Ignatius Church, Singapore

artwork: klebercampion.prosite.com

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2015/12/homily-christmas-being-caught-and.html>
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"It is Mercy that I Desire!" [at Association of Pauline Cooperators]



It has begun! The Doors are open in St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, and more will soon open throughout the whole world! Any sin (*and every sin*) can be forgiven! Don't wait, don't delay but *run* to a priest near you, a confessional, to the Sacred Heart of HIM who is your Lord, your Lover, Your Friend, your God! He who seeks you, awaits you and welcomes you to receive this Jubilee of Mercy; he yearns to cross-over the portal of your heart to bring you His Divine Love!

And can you imagine a more appropriate feast day than the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, for Pope Francis to begin this Jubilee Year of Mercy for the Church and the world? The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary can be called *the beginning of our salvation*, when the Mother of God was immaculately conceived in her mother's womb so as to prepare a place for Divine Mercy to be enfolded in our humanity— to be "*like us in all things except sin!* [\[1\]](#)"

In his Apostolic Letter *Misericordiae Vultus* ("Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's Mercy"), Pope Francis called for this Jubilee of Mercy, recalling that "*When everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn 14:9).*" [\[2\]](#)" It is in these beautiful words from St. John the Evangelist that we *capture* the true redeeming plan of our Heavenly Father and our own ultimate end: *to be welcomed into the light of his Face forever* (cf. Eucharistic Prayer II). This is what the Advent and Christmas Seasons reveal to us in the simplicity of a crèche scene we see so often displayed in homes, on town commons, on billboards, and even bumper stickers! This is what Christ has come to reveal: *the Face of His Merciful Father!*



Return of the Prodigal Son by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

In calling for this Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis hopes that all the world may receive this gift of increased outpouring of the Father’s love, and might *turn our hearts back to Him (and stop offending Him)*! But, why does this take on particular significance for the Pauline? Why should it garner even more of our attention, enthusiasm and resolve to help our Holy Father *proclaim it from the rooftops (cf. Matt 10:27)*?

Well, we in the Pauline Family were born of His infinite Mercy in a time of great need for Mercy: when, at the turn of the 20th century, print media was being used to propagate atheism and godless ways, devoid of Mercy. It is the case that the Pauline Family has a universal call to be of service to the Holy Father. One might say that our Pauline charism is the expressed apostolic and spiritual work of using the modern media to be at the service of Mercy itself. Just as Divine Mercy was prepared for by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (in the womb of her mother St. Ann,) so was the Pauline Family born from the conception (*small ‘c’*) of Blessed James’ encounter with Jesus Master during the Night Between the Centuries^[3]. It was here that Our Lord revealed that a great “*army*” would be formed to counter the growing movement and influence of those who used media to promote godless ways. And so began — if only in the mind & heart of a young sixteen-year old seminarian — the Pauline Family for the purposes of preaching & teaching through modern means of media: *Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life!*

So, how might we prepare each day for this great apostolic and spiritual work? We might consider looking at the Corporal Works of Mercy, the concrete visible ways one can both promote and receive mercy. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that these works are: “*feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead*” (CCC, 2447). Although it might seem easier to just promote the corporal works of mercy, it is far better that we take one and look to inculcate it into our regular way of living. For example, I might consider joining a small group or parishioners to make sandwiches for a local food pantry or help the local parish gather donated winter clothing for a local homeless shelter. Maybe I could bring Holy Communion to the homebound of my parish, or assist at parish funerals.

Any of these ways, and more, help us to see that we must first *become* the hands of God's tremendous Mercy for others before we can come to *see* His merciful face. We must look to show mercy towards another before we can hope to receive His Mercy. In the weeks ahead, let's consider how each of us as Paulines can become the *medium* itself by which the Lord's Mercy is proclaimed, so that our apostolic and spiritual works are fruitful for the coming of the Kingdom of God! Let us *run* towards this Jubilee of Mercy well aware that we can be made *whole* and be made *one* body in *Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life!*

[1]

The Order of the Mass, Eucharistic Prayer IV, Para 3.

[2]

Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, Para 1.



[If you are looking for resources to draw deeper into this Jubilee of Mercy, here is a link to Pauline Books and Media online bookstore with a whole selection of items on Mercy.](#)



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This contribution is available at <http://paulinelaitry.blogspot.com/2015/12/it-is-mercy-that-i-desire.html>
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Family Life is a Domestic Pilgrimage [at Kitchen table chats]



I always gravitated towards Pope John Paul II's description of the family as a domestic church. I will now add Pope Francis' description of family life as a domestic pilgrimage to my characterizations of the family. It is easy to be discouraged when our family does not look like bright images of television or social media. Take heart! Even the imperfect families are a source of holiness!

Head on over to

[Catholic Stand and see my reflection on the family](#)

as a pilgrimage in light of Pope Francis' Jubilee Year of Mercy.

This contribution is available at <http://catholic-mom.blogspot.com/2015/12/family-life-is-domestic-pilgrimage.html>
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Mercy! [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

The Year of Mercy/Jubilee of Mercy started on Tuesday, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

1

In my home parish, it's also when we started receiving the Eucharist under both forms: our Lord's body

and

blood.

If you think that's sounds gory and repulsive, you're not alone. Following our Lord has involved public relations issues from day one:

"Whoever eats [19](#) my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.

"Jesus then said to the Twelve, 'Do you also want to leave?'

"Simon Peter answered him, 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

"We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.' "

([John 6:54](#), [John 6:67-69](#))

Receiving under both kinds is a big deal for this parish, since our bishop had to sign off on the procedure, and we needed more servers. It'll continue for the duration of the Year of Mercy. After that, we'll see what happens.

Particularly since receiving our Lord under both forms is closer to what happened at the Last Supper, I like what we're doing now.

But I know "...that ... the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species, and ... those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any of the grace that is necessary for salvation..."

2

We'll be using Latin for parts of Mass during Advent, too: which is fine with me. I like Latin. I can even understand a little of the language. Mercifully, though, most of the Mass is in my native tongue.

3

— Which brings me back to the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis, and getting a grip.



Catholic, καθολικός, Universal: Really!



(From [Calendar of Major Events, Jubilee of Mercy](#).

([im.va](#)))

(A few of the world's Catholics in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City.)

I'm not sure why some loudly-Catholic folks cannot abide much of anything that's happened since Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1965. That's when Pope Blessed Paul VI closed the

[Second Vatican Council](#)

I could get snarky about the

[universal call to holiness](#)

being unpalatable to folks with excessive self-esteem. Whoops: too late, I just did.

More seriously, I can't know what's going on in another person's mind. Some were probably upset about what they heard on the news about the "spirit of Vatican II," which didn't have much to do with the actual documents:

"

[Documents of the Second Vatican Council](#)

" is a link list for the documents' English translation. They're available in Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili, too.

As I keep saying the Catholic Church really is catholic:

[καθολικός](#)

, universal: a united

and

diverse people, embracing all cultures and all times.

We are

not

an exclusive club of folks who yearn for a bygone era, or perfect people whose chief concern is remaining aloof from the rabble. Good grief, the Church let

me

join.

"Merciful Like the Father"



(From [Pilgrim Registration](#), [Jubilee of Mercy](#).

[im.va](#)))

Those folks were waiting to register as pilgrims at St. Peter's in Rome.

The Jubilee of Mercy

[Pilgrim Registration](#)

page's

[Registration](#)

link takes you to the Italian-language registration form. You can stick with Italiano, or use the language option menu to pick Polski, Español, Français, Deutsch, Portuguese; or my native language, English.

Wouldn't you know it, the Church has rules about registering:

"To participate in the Major Events of the Jubilee in Rome and to pass through the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica, it is necessary to register. You can register through the page '[Pilgrim Registration](#)' on the web site [www.im.va](#).

"You can register as an individual pilgrim or as the leader of a group (even families or small groups of friends should register as groups, regardless of how many people they include)...."
([Pilgrim Registration](#))

[logo](#)

comes with the motto in several languages. I picked the English one for obvious reasons. The motto, "Merciful Like the Father," is a close paraphrase of

[Luke 6:36](#)

. There's pretty good advice right after that:

"¹³ Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

"Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

[\(Luke 6:37-38\)](#)

Getting back to the Jubilee logo:

"The logo and the motto together provide a fitting summary of what the Jubilee Year is all about. ... The logo - the work of Jesuit Father Marko I. Rupnik - represents an image quite important to the early Church: that of the Son having taken upon his shoulders the lost soul demonstrating that it is the love of Christ that brings to completion the mystery of his incarnation culminating in redemption. ...

"The scene is captured within the so called mandorla (the shape of an almond), a figure quite important in early and medieval iconography, for it calls to mind the two natures of Christ, divine and human. The three concentric ovals, with colors progressively lighter as we move outward, suggest the movement of Christ who carries humanity out of the night of sin and death. Conversely, the depth of the darker color suggests the impenetrability of the love of the Father who forgives all."

[\(Description of the logo, from im.va.\)](#)

Mercy and Forgiveness

It's the best news humanity's ever had:

God loves us, and wants to adopt us.

All of us. (

[John 1:12](#)

-



,

[3:17](#)

;

[Romans 8:14](#)

-

[17](#)

;

[Peter 1:3](#)

-

[4](#)

; Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[27](#)

-

[30](#)

,

[52](#)

,

[1825](#)

,

[1996](#)

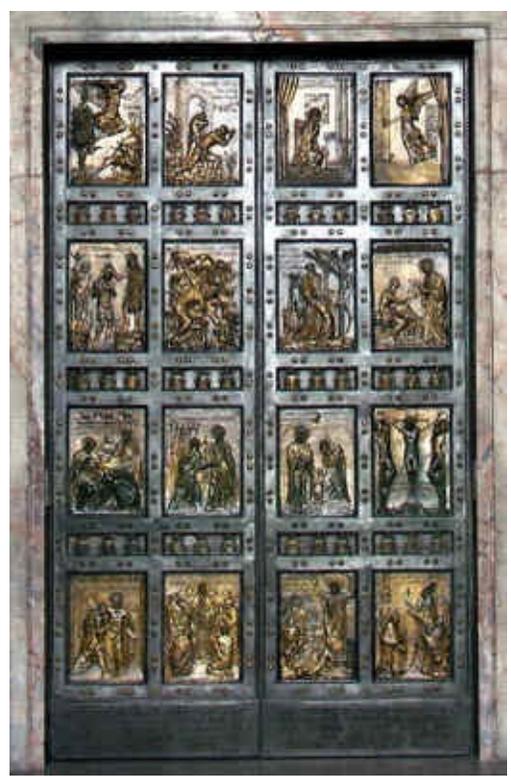
)

Because I believe that, trying to act like a member of the family seems reasonable.

I should love God, love my neighbors, 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](#)

)

I don't, putting it mildly, always live up to those standards. That's why we have the sacrament of penance and reconciliation: what my culture calls "confession." (Catechism,

[1422](#)

-

[1470](#)

)

I've got the rest of my life for "working out my salvation," and that's another topic. Topics (

[April 12, 2015](#)

;

[November 23, 2014](#)

)

Where was I? Jubilee of Mercy, being Catholic, a motto, acting like God matters. Right.

Pope Francis said what the Jubilee of Mercy/Year of Mercy is about.

Who

it's about, more precisely:

"Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith...."

("Misericordiae Vultus,"⁴ Pope Francis)

It's been a few months since a few tightly-wound Catholics were going ballistic over the Pope's "changing stand" on abortion. What's changed are a few administrative details.

The Pope said sin can be forgiven.

THIS IS NOT A NEW IDEA.

(

[September 6, 2015](#)

)

[John 8:3](#)

-

[11](#)

ends with Jesus saying to the woman who would have been killed: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, (and) from now on do not sin any more." (

[John 8:11](#)

)

The example I used involved woman caught in adultery. Oddly enough, she was the one about to be stoned: not the man. Elsewhere our Lord points out that men are responsible, too, or should be:

¹⁹ "You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."

"But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

([Matthew 5:27-28](#))

Relying on God's Mercy

Back in the 1960s, quite a few folks around my age decided that a life devoted to buying stuff we don't need, with money we didn't have, to impress folks we didn't like, didn't make sense.

I was one of 'those crazy kids' who thought there was more to life than slithering up the career ladder. I still do, and that's yet another topic.

Somewhere between "

[Blowin' in the Wind](#)

" and "

[Harper Valley PTA](#)

," I realized that what's legal and what's right can be two very different things.

I've discussed natural and positive law, ethics, and Chickenman, before. (

[August 30, 2015](#)

;

[September 7, 2014](#)

;

[August 31, 2014](#)

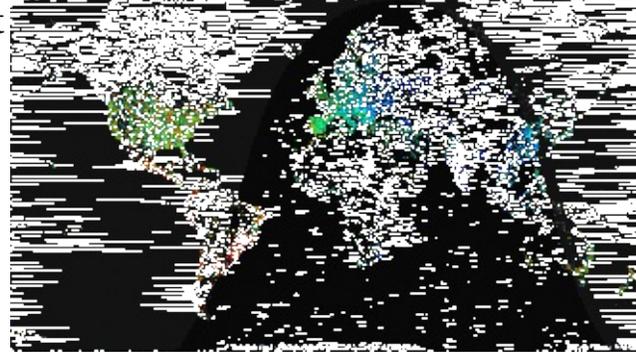
)

Some reforms my generation worked for were long overdue, and some didn't turn out as I had hoped, but I do not miss the 'good old days.' My memory's too good. (

[August 30, 2015](#)

;

[May 3, 2015](#)



)
Being a man who at least looks English is no longer required for folks looking for the better-paying jobs, happily. The underlying biases may linger for decades or centuries, and that's yet again another topic. (

[July 5, 2015](#)

;

[October 26, 2014](#)

)

Not-so-happily, killing innocent people is legal, or at least tolerated, in America: provided that the victim is below an arbitrary age, or very sick. I think human life is sacred, so I can't approve. (Catechism,

[2258](#)

)

I think

all

human life is sacred, which puts me in the awkward position of seeing capital punishment, euthanasia, and abortion, as bad ideas. That puts me at odds with an assortment of folks, but it can't be helped. (

[September 6, 2015](#)

;

[August 30, 2015](#)

)

I can't reasonably heap abuse on 'those sinners over there,' however. I remember our Lord's story about a Pharisee who 'prayed to himself:'

"Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.

"The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity - greedy, dishonest, adulterous - or even like this tax collector.

"I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'

"But the tax collector 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.'

"I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.' "

([Luke 18:10-14](#))

I'm like the Pharisee, sort of. I pray regularly, and have not committed any socially-unacceptable sins. But I have other items on my rap sheet, so relying on God's mercy makes sense. Besides, there's that pesky "stop judging" thing in

[Matthew 7:1](#)

-

5

.(

[March 15, 2015](#)

)

"...The Forgiveness of God Cannot be Denied..."

Having a conscience, learning to notice whether something I'm about to do will help or hurt another, is vital. (Catechism,

[1776](#)

-

[1794](#)

)

We're social creatures, so I must think about the common good: which also involves using my conscience. (Catechism,

[1905](#)

-

[1912](#)

,

[1928](#)

-

[1942](#)



)

That can include situations like the old "friends don't let friends drive drunk" public service ads. It's a matter of showing love and respect for another person. (Catechism,

[1929](#)

-

[1933](#)

,

[2284](#)

-

[2301](#)

)

[1 Corinthians 13:4](#)

-

[7](#)

sets a high standard for that sort of love: and I'm drifting off-topic.

In the end, I must trust God's justice and mercy. (Catechism,

[1861](#)

)

Bottom line? Forgiving others is vital.

"[11](#) If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you.

*"But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."
([Matthew 6:14-15](#))*

"[1](#) [2](#) 'Stop judging, that you may not be judged.

*"For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you."
([Matthew 7:1-2](#))*

"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

([Luke 23:34](#))

"¹ Therefore, you are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgment. ² For by the standard by which you judge another you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the very same things. ... There is no partiality with God."

([Romans 2:1-11](#))

Here's part of what Pope Francis wrote about forgiveness:

"...I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope. **The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it. May priests fulfil this great task by **expressing words of genuine welcome** combined with **a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed**, besides indicating **a path of authentic conversion** by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence...."**



("Letter of the Holy Father according to which an Indulgence is granted to the faithful on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy," Pope Francis (September 1, 2015) [emphasis mine])

That seems reasonable to me. So does this:

"Lord, hear my cry! May your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

"If you, LORD, mark our sins, Lord, who can stand?

"³ But with you is forgiveness and so you are revered."

([Psalms 130:2-4](#))

More of my take on following our Lord:

1

It's Mary's immaculate conception, not our Lord's. (

[December 9, 2011](#)

)

The Immaculate Conception is when Mary was conceived. She's as human as I am, with an extremely important distinction:

"Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, 'full of grace' through

God,¹³⁴ was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

"The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin."¹³⁵

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, [491](#))

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Waiting Like A Champion [at Dancing in the Rain]

Before the touch down dance and before the Hail Mary pass, before the QB sets his feet and even before the ball is hiked, there is a moment where they all stand still. Yet, they all stand ready. Crouched, they await the execution of the call.

Champions know winning is a process. For behind the Sports Center highlights, they know a myriad of sacrifices and smaller victories that the world won't know were necessary to make the magic happen. They live each sacrifice with active attention to what is before them while concomitantly recognizing the now is always a part of a grander plan, a bigger picture. It's like struggling through wall sits. As much as you are waiting and hoping for the timer to go off, your legs are shaking and

your synapses are firing. The waiting is an active struggle; it is a part of the journey.

We often think of waiting in our spiritual lives as a passive endeavor. Yet, the example of Our Lady exhorts us to reconsider this limp notion of waiting

as s

he teaches us to stand ready for the snap.

During the miracle of Cana, she interceded. At foot of the cross, she received John as her son. In the shadow of death, she believed He would rise again. As she knelt at the manger and during the Annunciation, without knowing the specifics, she waited with joyful hope though she was told her heart would be pierced by the sword. Mary's waiting was not fraught with anxiety or worry but rather trust and wonder for "she pondered these things in her heart." Mary prepared to live His will for the future by living the gift and grace of each day. Hers was an active waiting.

Let us trust our waiting is never in vain. Let us wait well knowing we are building strength for what is to come by being attentive to what is asked of us now not only for the sake of the future but for the sake the gift the struggle itself can be.

Mary, teach us to wait like a champion.

“Blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her would be fulfilled. ”

This contribution is available at <http://dancingintherain401.blogspot.com/2016/01/waiting-like-champion.html>
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Caili is Practically CCD Class, Y'all [at Under Thy Roof]

We have an awesome place in Berkeley called the

[Starry Plough](#)

. It's an Irish pub that has hosted a ceili every Monday night for the last 40 years.

It's also a hotbed of practical Catholic theology.



Not by design mind you, this is Berkeley after all, but it accomplishes it regardless.

Ceili is a social dance. In order to learn the dance one must first learn how to move as an individual. It is important to learn what to do with your feet, and how to keep time with the music.

But one can't stop there, otherwise it's not ceili, one must also have a partner.

This partner is complementary to you, ideally in male/female pairs. You typically come back to this partner and you help each other throughout the dance.

It is up to the two of you to figure out how to make the dance work. You might be very dissimilar in height, ability, and experience, but your job as a partner is to get the other where they need to go.

But it is not enough to have a partner. The partners must also meet each other in groups - small groups or the whole room together, depending on the specific dance.

This makes the dance into a living organism of sorts, while still maintaining the integrity of the relationships of the partners and individuals within it.



I contend that the ceili lets us practice in an evening what we are meant to be doing in the larger world - working on getting our individual game together, interacting in a mutually beneficial way with a partner, and relating all of that to the wider community.

It also teaches a very important, but practical, lesson: how to physically relate in a respectful manner with someone of the opposite sex you have just met.

The dances are riddled with bows, courtesy turns, and rules about exactly what to do with your hands.

It's awesome.

You know what would have made middle school and high school dances a lot less awkward?

Knowing what to do with your hands!

Structured social dances, like ceili, teach us about physical boundaries and communication in a quick and fun way. It teaches respect for the bodies of others, awareness of space, and forces us out of our own heads.

It's Theology of the Body in an evening. No thick volumes of words required.

This contribution is available at <http://underthyroof.blogspot.com/2015/12/caili-is-practically-ccd-class-yall.html>
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10 Things I Wish Non-Catholic Christians Knew About Catholicism [at A Catholic Newbie]



Photo credit Nheyob, Wikimedia Commons

I've had several interactions with non-Catholic Christians since my conversion where I've realized they are not aware of some basic tenets of our faith that I think would go a long way in bridging any divides between us and provide them, at least, with some perspective of where we are coming from and a more accurate understanding of our beliefs.

We shouldn't expect non-Catholics to know about the Catholic religion unless they've taken the time to explore it for themselves. I certainly did not know any of these things before seeking out the Church, but I definitely wish I had!

So, non-Catholics, here are 10 things I (a former non-Catholic :)) want you to know about Catholicism:

1. **We believe that Jesus is physically present in the bread and wine we consume at every mass.** I think this one fact explains so much about the Catholic faith that is misunderstood by non-Catholics. This is why we have to go to mass every week, this is why our churches are ornate and our vessels are made of precious metals, this is why non-Catholics cannot receive communion unless they have professed their belief, this is why a wafer falls on the floor is it treated with the utmost reverence. This is why we cannot be satisfied in any other church — we cannot leave Jesus behind. This belief in the physical presence of Jesus dates back to the first Christians. Read the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch (who knew the Apostle John and was born in 35 AD) in his [Letter to the Romans](#) about the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.
2. **We believe you can go to heaven, too!** I think many non-Catholics may wrongly assume that

Catholics think they are the only ones getting into heaven. We are not God; only God knows such things. We do believe that we have found the path that gives us the most assistance in entering heaven through the sacraments Jesus left behind (communion, marriage, reconciliation/confession, confirmation, etc.) but we certainly don't think the doors are only open to us.

3. **We believe in the authority of the Pope and the Church of Rome because that is what early Christians practiced.** Again, see the Letters of St. Ignatius in his deference to the Church of Rome along with the example of many other early Christian leaders ([email me](#) for more). We are following the example of what the apostles taught the early Christians. [Great article on this topic](#). I highly recommend doing this research and reading early Christian documents for yourself. Don't take my word for it!
4. **We follow what the early Christians practiced in our Tradition, because there was 300 years before the New Testament was compiled.** The Catholic Church's teachings are based on both Scripture and what the Church refers to as "Tradition." Tradition is factored in because there was a period of 300 years after Jesus' death and before an official compilation of New Testament documents was compiled. We follow the tradition that was practiced during that time because it was comprised of the beliefs, teachings and rituals handed down from Jesus to the apostles and on to their successors. This includes teachings like Mary's Immaculate Conception (she was conceived without sin in order to give birth to God as man), her Perpetual Virginity (she never had any other children and remained a virgin) and her Assumption body and soul into heaven, beliefs that were held by early Christians and only made "official" by the Church when they were challenged over time. Many wrongly hold that these doctrines were *created* at the councils where they were affirmed, but rather the councils simply *made official* these doctrines long held by early Christians.
5. **We hold many of the same beliefs!** We are not so different. We believe in the sanctity of all life from conception to natural death. We believe in Jesus, the son of God who came to reconcile us with the Father. We believe that everyone needs to hear that news and that it's our job to go out and tell the world! We believe in the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman. That's just the beginning...
6. **Confession is not a place to get rid of all your wrongdoings without contrition only to go back and do them again.** I remember watching a movie of a young man returning to the priest every week to report how often he masturbated, only to go back and do it all again. That's not the goal and your sins are not forgiven that way. The idea is to go confess your sins with true repentance (not with plans to go right back and do them again), receive forgiveness and graces (heavenly assistance) to keep from doing those sins again from Jesus (**Did you know that we believe that Jesus is present in the priest in the confessional?**), and to try earnestly not to commit those sins in the future.
7. **There is an unbroken line of succession from Jesus to Peter to all Popes and Bishops.** This fact initially blew me away during my education on the Church. The Catholic Church can trace a laying on of hands (as was done in the Acts of the Apostles when they added deacons) all the way back from Jesus to Peter to all Popes and Bishops. That is powerful stuff!
8. **We read the Bible, too!** Over a period of three years, if you attended daily mass, you would hear readings from nearly every book in the Bible. And, of course, we do plenty of Bible reading on our own, as well.
9. **The Catholic Church is made up of sinners.** Yes, we are a Church of sinners. That is why Jesus came to reconcile us, but despite his help and graces we still remain in the fallen state of sin inherited by Adam and Eve. Yes, we have child molesters. Yes, Catholics have done bad things in the name of religion. Yes, we have murdered, stolen, been greedy, disobeyed God and more. But so has the rest of the world; it's part and parcel with being a part of fallen humanity. Such wrongdoers should justly be punished and will certainly be judged by their actions on the last day. Jesus,

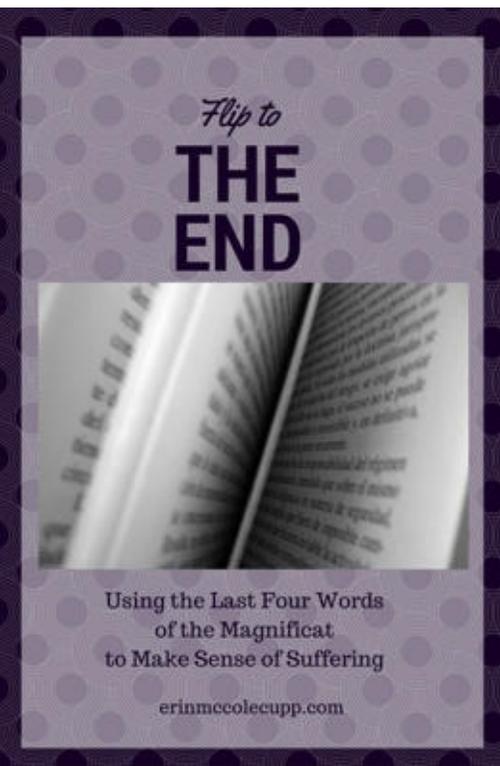
however, promised that nothing would prevail against the Church (not even sinners) and left us with the Holy Spirit (not humans) to guide it. That's why we hold true to the teachings of the Church, no matter its sinners, and why even if a priest is a sinner, his sacramental actions still hold. They are not his works, but those of the Holy Spirit and Jesus within him.

10. **Don't let hypocritical Catholics mislead you.** I've often been pointed to examples of Catholics who don't follow the truth of the church in the way they live their lives as reasons why the Catholic church is wrong or bad. As above, we are made up of sinners just like the rest of the world, and there will be these people, but don't let them cloud your image of the Church left by Jesus. The priest that asked for a bribe for an annulment was wrong; the Catholics shouting obscenities at the Notre Dame football game are wrong; the politician promoting abortion rights receiving communion is wrong. But like all sinners, Jesus welcomes them to repent, stop their wrong actions and come back to the fold. Rather, I challenge you to seek devout Catholics who live their faith fully. You will find models of holiness and witnesses of Christian joy beyond your wildest imaginings.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/10-things-i-wish-non-catholic-christians-knew-about-catholicism/>

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This past Sunday, December 13, Gaudete Sunday, I was honored to have the opportunity to talk with the women at the [St. Pius X Parish](#) in Bowie (pronounced BOO-ee), MD at their Advent Women’s Dinner. Folks, this was a lovely event. For the past 17 years, the ladies of St. Pius have put together an evening of music and prayer and teaching for 200-ish women, followed by a catered dinner *served by the men of their parish*. Great idea, huh?

This year, I was asked to visit for their teaching time, and so we talked about Mary’s Magnificat ([Luke 1: 46-55](#)). Because their clergy has been preaching on this whole canticle one section at a time all Advent, I felt led to focus specifically on the last four words: HIS CHILDREN FOR EVER. In effect, I made us flip to the end before their last homily in the series. **Is that a bad habit, flipping to the end? Getting spoilers?**

The day after the talk and dinner, an attendee emailed me (Hi, you-know-who-you-are!) and asked if I could make the talk available for folks who couldn’t be there. Here’s my attempt at solidifying my talk notes. I hope that those who read (and those who listened) receive this as another tool in the toolbox of making sense of suffering.

When the dinner coordinator contacted me about choosing a topic for this talk, she mentioned that their parish was [focusing on the Magnificat this Advent](#).

“Well, that’s interesting,” I replied, “because I have the Magnificat up on my computer right now.”

Kinda hard to deny the Holy Spirit when He’s *literally* staring you in the face.

Anyway, as the coordinator ran down the four titles their clergy would be using—Blessed, Strengthened, Filled, and Promised—my eyes were drawn to the very last words of this canticle: **HIS CHILDREN FOR**

EVER. As she described for me the audience of 200-some women of a wide variety of ages, that solidified for me what the talk needed to be about. Some of us are mothers, some of us are wives, some of us are grandparents... but not all of us. However, **we're all children. His children. His children for ever.**

I'll admit I worried, however, about leapfrogging over the pastor's planned messages, jumping to the end, throwing all those spoilers out there. Would that upset anyone? Was God asking me to flip to the end, or was this impatience, arrogance on my part, like I do whenever I pick up a new book to read?

Wait a sec—who said those words, “his children for ever”? **Mary Immaculate, Mother of God.** If God picked someone who flips to the end to be the mother of His perfect Son, then in this context, flipping to the end can't be bad.

But why would our perfect Mother need to look ahead to the end? Well, what were [Mary's plans before Gabriel showed up](#)? No matter what kind of Christian you profess to be, you're probably pretty confident Mary's initial plans did not include unwed motherhood. And then along comes this angel telling her not to be afraid—of the accusing looks, the gossip, the stones that would careen toward her and destroy her body until she breathed no more.

Nope, that was *not* her initial plan. How about you? **Have you ever had plans that got frustrated by God's plan? How did you react?**

How did Mary react? Mary trusted in God's goodness. She acted as if **THE BATTLE IS ALREADY WON!** The end is already decided. She knew the end before it began; that's how she was able to walk into the danger of single motherhood.

So let's do that. Let's get spoiled for the eternal story. Let's flip to the end of God's plan for us. Let's look at each word in turn and find those spoilers Mary is leaving for us.

HIS

“His” is a possessive pronoun. If we are His, then we belong to Him. He possesses us. Now there are two ways to belong to someone: you can be needed or you can be chosen. I remember, very early in my walk as an [intentional Catholic](#), visiting my Granny in the hospital. It was Easter Sunday, and it didn't look like she was going to make it. In fact, she didn't seem all that invested in making it.

“God don't need me,” she said, not bitterly, just peacefully, with confidence.

I was appalled. “Of course God needs you!”

“Nah, He don't need me.”

It wasn't until later, after she did come home from the hospital, that I realized what she was saying: God doesn't need us, but He *wants* us. He could have done anything, but He, the creator of the universe, chose to make us and call us His own. God then generously gives us images of what it means to be chosen: by a spouse, by a parent, by the captain of the playground basketball team, by... [a pet](#)...

Anyway, we are His. We are chosen. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise. However, belonging to someone else isn't a guaranteed easy path. I have a friend who lost her middle child when that child was

only 10. **I remember her saying, “God, I’ve seen your plan. It sucks.”**

It’s hard to argue with that take on suffering, because, at heart, we’re all still...

CHILDREN

What are some words used to describe children?

- Innocent
- Vulnerable
- Needy
- Stuck in an eternal now, *now*, **NOW!!!!**
- Have a lot to learn
- Inexperienced
- Still developing
- Compare to each other badly: There is a six year difference between First Shift and Second Shift of Kid in our family; imagine the comparing they do with each other and you’ll see what I mean.
- Don’t come out knowing how to serve others
- Too small to see the end goal
- Can’t see others perspectives
- Don’t do the planning
- Don’t get to make all the choices: if you doubt this, give a five year-old the job of planning and executing your next big holiday dinner. Then let me know how long into it you needed to call the fire company.
- Sometimes there are things a child must learn without the parent doing it for her ([ever feel like God abandoned you](#))?
- Can choose to fight back against the parent
- Seeking purpose: everything they do is for *some* reason

So we can see that some aspects of being children—the *childlike* ones, like innocence and vulnerability—help us in our striving for God. Others—the *childish* ones, like the comparing and the now *now* **NOW!**—hinder us. Either way, we do ourselves no favors when we deny the fact that we are, compared to God the Eternal Father who made us, just little children.

That’s not all on the word “CHILDREN,” however. Our fallen world has complicated things further yet. Sure, for some of us, childhood was this delightful romp; [for some of us, less so](#). Thus the idea of being *anybody’s* child for ever is terrifying. Especially when the Father’s goodness is colored by lenses forged in a fallen world, a world damaged by death and sin. What does that even mean?

Well, remember that friend who’d lost a child? **“God, I’ve seen your plan. It sucks.”**

Hard to argue with the perspective of a mother who’s lost her son. What was the point of that, God? What’s the great plan with that kind of suffering? **What’s it all for, anyway?**

Which brings us to our next word...

FOR

“For” is a tiny word, but it says a lot. It indicates purpose. God has a reason for each one of us to exist. Do kids always know the reason that things happen to them? No, and that’s usually because they’re just too small to see the endpoint (check our “CHILD” list above if you need a refresher on that). “For” also indicates a plan. Humans were created for relationship with God and each other—for *whole* relationship. We were designed to delight in reality, not suffer from it.

Again I say, our world is fallen. The prince of this world doesn’t want us to be any of those good things that children are; he’s going to do everything possible to convince us that we aren’t even children, that we don’t belong to God, and that we weren’t chosen to be exactly who we are—that we need to be something else... that God’s plan is wrong.

But is it? It sure feels wrong sometimes. It’s easy to understand the friend who says God’s plan sucks, because we’ve all been there. So what would it take to convince us that God’s plan is right and good and worthy of trust? Why should we trust God to turn our suffering around?

Because of the evidence:

- **Abraham:** Through decades of infertility, God planned for us to be the faith descendants of Abraham before time began so that we could be adopted as His children.
- **Joseph** (Jacob’s son): If his brother’s hadn’t left him for dead and sold him into slavery, he wouldn’t have been around to save not just those brothers and their families but the entire nation of Egypt and all who came to that land in that time of famine.
- **Esther:** If she had not been orphaned in a foreign land where her people were in danger, she would not have been in a position to save them from the deadly dangers of calumny.
- **How many saints do we have again?** Read the story of just one and you’ll see how God turns suffering around.
- **Examples from our own lives**, like how God used [infertility to change my agnostic husband’s heart](#), or like how I was bullied as a kid but through that experience learned to love and forgive and [wrote a novel illustrating the power of forgiveness](#).

So we see all these examples... but let’s face it: sometimes even millenia of examples of God’s plan at work is still not enough to convince us in the here and now of our suffering. It is always hard to argue with the friend who lost a child when he was 10 and her phrase, **“God, I’ve seen your plan. It sucks.”**

It’s hard, but it’s not impossible. After all, what is the one thing that phrase forgets? **It forgets the last word of the Magnificat, the easiest word to forget:**

EVER

The Creation account tells us that we weren’t designed for death. We were designed for eternity. God **chose** us to be His forever. God made us to be **children** so He can be active in our lives *and* so we can still choose Him back. Best of all, God’s plan pretty much revolves around us.

WHY?

LOVE

That image we have of God as Father falls a little short if you forget God is outside of the Fall. God is perfect love, unending relationship. [You don't have to look hard to find reminders of the Trinity everywhere](#). God is so much relationship that He's three whole people in just one God.

Mary, the perfect woman, trusted all of these things, all that is involved in being God's child for ever, but being a child is HARD. It's hard not knowing the plan. It's hard to be powerless. It's hard not knowing the end of your story...

BUT YOU DO! MARY KNEW THE END OF HER STORY, AND SO DO YOU! YOU CAN FLIP TO THE END ANY TIME YOU LIKE!

How do we know our current plot point as suffering children is a good one? *Because God himself chose it for himself as well.* He did not exempt himself from our pain—in fact, He chose it all, accepted the worst of it, to show us that this world is not the end of the story. He became a child born of woman. He became the child of a woman who would lose her Son. In response, she would not declare that God's plan sucks. She would forever be captured in God's word, stating plainly:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.*

*From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.*

*He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel,
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
The promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and*

his

children

for

ever.

Mary proclaimed the end of the story to Elizabeth. She proclaims it to us today. We as Church proclaim

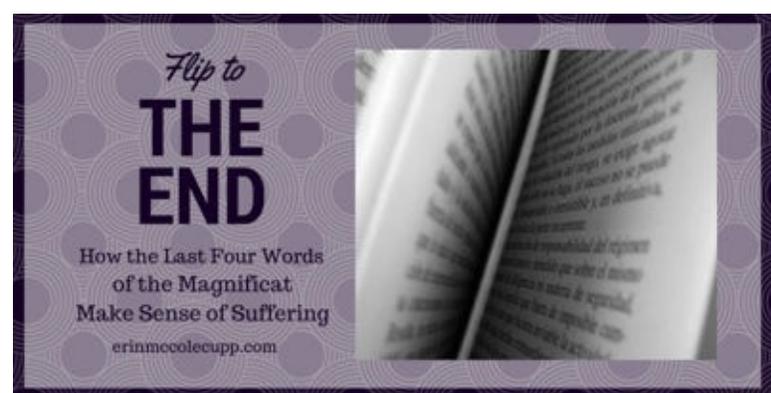
it every day at every Mass, in every Vespers. In the Great Commission, God asks us to go tell the whole world the Good News, that this world is not the end of the story.

We all face the cross. We all look like we're gonna die and not come back. But that's not the end. The beginning looks like a disaster. The middle is veiled from us. But the future? The future is right there waiting for us—complete union with the Body of Christ FOR EVER.

When in doubt, be like Mary: Flip to the end. Just as knowing what that last page of a book says motivates me to keep reading, let a flip to the end motivate you forward to Christ's forever with you.

Four questions for you to consider as you head into Christmas or whatever the next part of your story is:

- **Where have you been in your story?**
- **What are some things you can do to proclaim the end of the story to yourself?**
- **Who is one person in your life who needs to hear the end of the story? How will you help that person flip to the end?**



This contribution is available at <http://erinmccolecupp.com/2015/12/22/flip-to-the-end-using-the-magnificat-to-find-meaning-in-suffering/>
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Fr Ratzinger, von Balthasar, and demolishing the bastions [at LMS Chairman]



Considering the reactions (mostly on Twitter) to

[my post](#)

about Fr Ratzinger's 1969 remarks about how once all the 'edifices' and 'privileges' of the Church had been completely wrecked, 'a great power will flow' from the Church, it strikes me how difficult many people find recognising liberalism when they see it. Even after all this time, many people with conservative, even traditional, instincts, don't really grasp what liberals are all about.

It should be obvious that the 1969 passage is an expression of liberal views; it is a perfectly clear, indeed a classical exposition of them. In his (much criticised) early book,

Principles of Catholic Theology,

Fr Ratzinger wrote:

The fact is, as Hans Urs von Balthasar pointed out as early as 1952, that ... she [the Church] must relinquish many of the things that have hitherto spelled security for her and that she has taken for granted. She must demolish longstanding bastions and trust solely the shield of faith.

This is, clearly, the same thought as that expressed in the passage I quoted in the earlier post. Far from him

regretting

the loss of the Church's institutional baggage, as one might call it, Fr Ratzinger thought it was *necessary and good*.

This is simply the application to the Church of what political liberals have been saying since Rousseau, and are saying today more loudly than ever. Destroy the institutions, destroy the structures, customs, traditions and expectations of traditional society, of morality, of the family, and of the state, and a great awakening, a great liberation, a great flowering of humanity will take place. Haven't we all heard this? And isn't its absurdity sufficiently evident?

Political liberals like to say that what they call 'the nuclear family' and 'capitalism' are 'intrinsically oppressive'. They are no more friendly towards the extended family or to small-holders: Stalin and Mao reconfigured industry to serve the state rather than shareholders, but faced with people living traditional, pre-industrial, ways of life, felt the need to starve and machine-gun them by the million. No, liberals hate 'feudalism' even more than they hate 'capitalism', because its social institutions are more powerful, and for the liberal therefore by definition more powerfully oppressive. Since they don't believe in Original Sin, it must be the oppression from these 'structures' which is stopping everything from being wonderful.

Don't blame the Communists for not planning how things should be organised after the revolution. Don't blame secular liberals for not thinking through how children will be brought up once divorce, contraception, welfare, and gender theory have finished off the institution of marriage once and for all. Don't blame liberal Catholics for not thinking how young people will acquire the Faith without systematic catechesis or habituation into pious practises. These are not chance omissions. They honestly believe that no one needs to worry about that glorious future. Without the crushing of the human spirit by the institutions of oppression, it will all be wonderful, wonderful, wonderful! Don't you see? The dawn is breaking! If obstacles remain, they will be destroyed just as the first opponents of the Revolution were! Oh yes, we may have to break a few eggs to make the omelette, but it will be worth it.

We know this story, and we know it has been tried - oh, how it has been tried - and it always fails, because the most potent obstacles to peace and harmony are within us, the selfish and disordered desires of fallen human nature. Of course there have been oppressive customs and institutions over the centuries, and the Traditionalist is faced with the complex and subtle task of reforming and purifying while maintaining, strengthening, and passing on, the institutions which have grown up, because while they can be abused, they exist to limit the opportunities for crime and sin and to cultivate virtue and facilitate mutual aid.

The crisis of the Church mirrors the crisis of Society, because the revolutionary ideology which has been destroying the Church's institutions is no more than a religious variant on the revolutionary ideology which has been gnawing at the vitals of secular society for two centuries and more. Society's crisis of marriage and the family is matched by an ecclesial crisis, not only in the practise of marriage and the family, but in the theology as well. In both cases, numerous 'conservatives' are determined to resist what the liberals want to do tomorrow, while accepting what the liberals did yesterday, and accommodating what the liberals are doing today. We need to see things more clearly than that; we need to work not for a slowing down of the revolution, but a restoration of those 'edifices' or 'bastions' which sustained the life of our predecessors.

What are we talking about? Practises and customs, institutions and laws, which incarnate the Faith, proclaim it to others, bind the Catholic community together, and help the individual to live a good life. Fish on Fridays, head coverings for ladies in church, the Angelus, Catholic schools and hospitals, canon law, and above all the Traditional liturgy, as well as the institutions of Natural Law like the family, and of Divine Law like the Sacraments and the Church herself.

Why would anyone prefer to live as Catholics without the full range of such things, given the choice? Because in some confused way people like von Balthasar and the young Fr Ratzinger, not to mention the more hard-line liberals, thought they made for rigidity and unhealthy regimentation, contrary to spontaneity and authenticity. (No doubt they made an exception for those 'bastions' established by Natural and Divine Law, though this exception seems arbitrary from the point of view of liberal ideology.)

The liberal objection to the 'bastions' is based on a grain of truth in the way things were done in a certain period, perhaps, plus a mountain of Romantic and Rationalist ideology. Habitual and formal actions can be the most heartfelt things we do; they can be the ones most expressive of our deepest commitments. Think of solemn promises, such as wedding vows, or habitual expressions of affection. They are formal because they are important; they are habitual, because they have become part of our very souls.

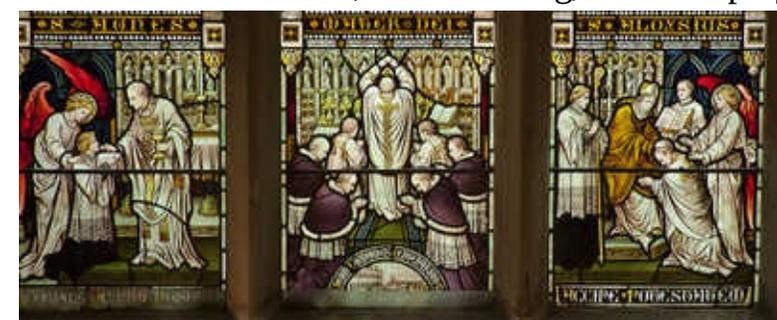
Bishop Fulton Sheen addressed the argument about the demolition of bastions very well with a little parable [from Chesterton, I'm told: see the combox]. (I've heard him tell it in a recorded talk, but I found the text online on

[Rorate Caeli blog](#)

.)

"In the midst of a great sea there was an island with a great wall, a high wall. On that island lived children, who sang and played. One day some men came to the island in a rowboat. They called themselves 'liberators' and said to the children, 'Who put up these walls? Who built these barriers? Can you not see that they are restraining your freedom and your liberty? Tear them down. Be free.'

"The children tore down the walls. Now if you go back, you will find all the children huddled together in the center of the island, afraid to sing, afraid to play, afraid to dance, afraid of falling into the sea!"



See also the Position Paper on the

[Extraordinary Form and Western Culture](#)

This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2015/12/fr-ratzinger-von-balthasar-and.html>
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Seven Amazing Facts About the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



In honor of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, [December 12th] here are seven amazing facts about the image of Our Lady as seen on

[Saint Juan Diego](#)

's tilma that defy scientific explanation and argue in favor of its miraculous origin and divine provenance.

The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe first appeared on December 12th, 1531. According to the account, the Virgin Mary told Juan Diego, an Indian convert, to tell Bishop Juan de Zumárraga to build a chapel. Bishop Zumárraga asked Diego for a sign as proof that it was truly the Mother of God. Our Lady instructed Diego to gather some roses in his tilma [popular piety attests that Mary arranged the roses in the tilma herself] and present them to the bishop. As Diego did this, the roses fell to the floor, revealing the miraculous image.

1. There is no under-sketch or under-drawing on the image.

Infrared photography has demonstrated that there is no sketching on the image whatsoever. Dr. Philip Callahan, a research biophysicist from the University of Florida explains: "It is inconceivable that an artist in the 16th Century would paint a portrait without first doing a drawing on it." Making an under-sketch prior to painting a portrait goes back to antiquity. The existence of such an exquisite depiction on textile made from cactus fiber is inexplicable given the lack of sketching.

2. The image has lasted and shows no signs of deterioration.

Juan Diego's tilma is made of a rough cactus fiber which normally disintegrates in 15 to 30 years. Yet, the image of Guadalupe has remained intact for 484 years without fading or cracking. Moreover, it was subjected to candle smoke for many years, which should have accelerated the process of deterioration.

In 1778, a worker accidentally spilled strong nitric acid onto a large portion of the image. To everyone's astonishment, only slight stains appeared which can still be seen in the upper right side. Additionally, in 1921 a bomb concealed in some flowers was placed on the altar directly under the image. When the bomb detonated, the marble altar rail and windows 150 feet away were shattered, a brass crucifix was twisted out of shape, but the image was left unharmed.

3. The stars that appear on the image are astrologically correct.

In 1983 Dr. Juan Homero Hernandez and Fr. Mario Rojas Sánchez discovered that the stars on the image correspond precisely to the constellations of the winter sky on December 12th, 1531. Incredibly, the constellations are shown as viewed from outside the heavens, in other words in reverse. It is as if we have a picture from someone looking at it from outside the universe, it is a snapshot of heaven and earth from the very moment that Juan Diego saw Our Lady.

Also, the constellation Virgo, representing virginal purity, appears over the area of Mary's heart signifying her immaculate and virginal purity, and the constellation Leo the lion is over her womb. The lion represents Jesus Christ, because Christ is the lion of the tribe of Judah. This emphasizes that Christ the King is present in Mary's womb. The perfect placement of stars in their various constellations illustrates the infinite intelligence behind the miraculous image of Mary.



4. Mary's eyes are astonishingly life like.

Of all the characteristics of the image, this is perhaps the most astounding. The microscopic likeness of a bearded man was discovered in the pupils of the Virgin; first in 1929, and again in 1951. The bearded man corresponds to contemporaneous pictures of Juan Diego. No human painter could have foreseen putting infinitesimally small images of Juan Diego in the eyes of the Virgin so that later advances in human technology could detect them. Furthermore, it is impossible for any human to have painted the images because they are simply too miniscule to produce.

Jose Aste Tonsmann, a Peruvian ophthalmologist, examined Mary's eyes at 2,500 times magnification. He was able to identify thirteen individuals in both eyes at different proportions, just as a human eye would reflect an image. It appeared to be the very moment Juan Diego unfurled the tilma before Bishop Zumárraga.

Dr. Jorge Escalante Padilla a surgical ophthalmologist considers these reflections to belong to the type which have been described by Cherney on the back surface of the cornea and by Watt & Hess at the center of the lens. Such reflections are very difficult to detect. Dr. Escalante also reported the discovery of small veins on both of the eyelids of the image. In the 1970s, a Japanese optician who was examining the eyes fainted. Upon recovering he stated: "The eyes were alive and looking at him." [Janet Barber,

Latest Scientific Findings on the Images in the Eyes

, page 90.]

5. Mary assumes a different ethnicity depending on one's vantage point.

It is remarkable that at one distance Our Lady appears to be a Native American, but at another distance she appears of European descent. This miraculous feature is meant to show the unity of the two peoples and the two cultures in light of the true faith of Christ.

Dr. Philip Callahan explains that the image achieves this effect of appearing to be different colors at different distances by a trait that is only seen in nature:

At a distance of six or seven feet the skin tone becomes what might best be termed Indian olive, grey green in tone, it appears somehow the grey and caked looking white pigment of the face and the hands combines with the rough surface of the un-sized hue, such a technique would be an impossible accomplishment in human hands, it often occurs in nature however, in the coloring of the bird feathers and butterfly scales and on the elytra of brightly colored beetles.

This change in color at different distances occurring in nature happens on the tilma in a miraculous way. The pigment combines with the rough surface of the cloth to impart alternating colorations. No human artist can duplicate this effect. Such evidence strongly suggests the image was fashioned by a divine hand.

6. The image's temperature is always 98.6°F; the temperature of the human body.

The sixth miraculous feature concerning the image is its temperature. It is a demonstrable fact that no matter what the surrounding temperature, season, or weather, the image itself remains at an even 36.5°C or 98.6°F, the normal temperature of the human body. [Janet Barber,

The Tilma and Its Miraculous Image

.]

What is more, Carlos Fernandez del Castillo, a Mexican gynecologist, after carefully examining the tilma and the image of the pregnant Madonna concluded that the dimensions of Mary's body were that of an expectant mother at the end of gestation.

7. How the native Indian population interpreted the image of Our Lady.

The indigenous Indian population recognized in the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe specific signs that Christianity was superior to other belief systems, including their own. As recorded by Father Harold Romm in,

Am I Not Here

, page 56:

The Indians saw something in the image of Our Lady that the Spaniards did not comprehend. In that period, the Indians did their writing in hieroglyphics, so to them the image was a hieroglyphic letter. The fact that the natives read the image is most important in understanding the purpose of Our Lady's apparitions. To the Indians the image depicted a beautiful lady standing in front of the sun, a sign to them that she was greater than the sun god Huitzilopochtli whom they worshiped; the crescent or the moon beneath her feet showed that their moon god

Tezcatlipoca was less than nothing since she was standing on it; the stars they thought so much of were only a part or portion of her mantle. At her throat was a brooch with a small black cross in the center reminding them that this was the emblem of the Spanish Friars and there was one greater than she.

The intelligence that constructed the image of Guadalupe conveyed exactly the message that the Indians needed to hear and to see to abandon their false notions of God and their idolatrous practices. It is infinitely insightful, well beyond anything humans could imagine. Reading the image caused millions of Indians to convert to the Catholic faith.

For more about the miraculous aspects of the image of our Lady of Guadalupe see this video, a transcript of which is available

[here](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2015/12/seven-amazing-facts-about-miraculous.html>
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Why Is EWTN Boycotting Ben Carson? [at Justin's Corner]

by Justin Soutar

(NOTE: This article was originally published by

Catholic Online

Dec. 28, 2015 at <http://www.catholic.org/news/politics/story.php?id=66141>)

Like tens of millions of Catholics and others throughout the United States and hundreds of millions of people around the world, I am immensely grateful to God for the priceless gift of the Eternal Word Television Network. From the day of its founding by a Poor Clare nun named Mother Mary Angelica in a Birmingham, Alabama garage some thirty-five years ago, this great tool of catechesis, inspiration, and evangelization has been faithfully proclaiming the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church both “in season and out of season,” strengthening and assisting those of us who are “inside the fold” while attractively presenting the beauty of our faith to those outside the Church, leading to many conversions to Catholicism. As someone who has been watching EWTN since 1993, I have been delighted to observe the steady growth of this Catholic cable and satellite network in national and global reach, professionalism, and the quality and variety of programming offered. Since its initial foray into shortwave and AM/FM radio back in the nineties, the advent of twenty-first century media technology has further extended the network’s reach to the Internet, satellite radio, mobile devices, and social media. Along the way, EWTN has acquired a new studio along with its own publishing house which offers our nation’s leading Catholic newspaper, the

National Catholic Register,

in both print and digital format together with an array of high-quality Catholic books. All of these providential developments have transformed the network from a small amateur TV station of humble origin into the world’s foremost Catholic media apostolate, which is now reaching well over one billion people across the globe.



Thanks to the ongoing prayers and sacrifices of Mother Angelica and her Poor Clare nuns as well as to the spiritual and financial support of its ever broader base of viewers, EWTN has continued to remain remarkably faithful to its mission, in general doing a fantastic job of nourishing and spreading the Catholic faith. Because of that, I have rarely felt the need to question or criticize a policy decision of the network’s leadership during my twenty-two years of watching EWTN. At the present moment, however, I do feel that it is important to raise a question and offer a little dose of healthy criticism regarding one aspect of the network’s programming and publishing that has been bothering me for some time. We are commanded to speak the truth in love, so that is what I will attempt to do here.

My current bone to pick with EWTN has to do with the network’s news programming and publishing—

and specifically with its overall coverage of the 2016 presidential election campaign—in light of its mission to faithfully proclaim the truth of the Gospel. I have no objection whatsoever to the network offering extensive and in-depth coverage of this election campaign from a faithful Catholic perspective, as it has been doing over the past year on TV and radio programs such as

The World Over Live, EWTN News Nightly

and

Candidate Conversations,

as well as through the

National Catholic Register.

My problem lies with the fact that this coverage has been noticeably slanted—that is to say, unfairly biased—in favor of certain Republican candidates and against others, under the influence of the godless, radically secularist, worldly, dishonest, immoral, corrupt, and money-driven mainstream media establishment whose values are diametrically opposed to those of the network itself.

As a civil nonprofit corporation run chiefly by lay Catholics, EWTN has long prided itself, and rightly so, on its independence from official Church institutions as well as from corporate entities of both a religious and secular nature, which has allowed it to strike its own path and pursue its mission without unwelcome interference. Unfortunately, when it comes to covering American politics and world news, in recent years the network has gradually but perceptibly drifted from its core mission to be an independent voice of truth, and it is now almost slavishly following the lead of the worldly mainstream media both in the stories it is choosing to break and discuss and in the presidential candidates on whom it is focusing. Whereas EWTN News was once accustomed to offering a fresh and balanced perspective on well-known current events and highlighting important stories neglected by the mainstream media, the network's journalism division is now largely caught up in the Beltway news cycle, airing and discussing much the same headlines and focusing on the same presidential candidates as Fox News, CNN, the

New York Times, Politico,

and all the other D.C. establishment media outlets. This is quite a sea change from ten years ago, when Raymond Arroyo and other Catholic journalists at the network were known for their refreshingly independent and investigative approach, often digging up interesting stories off the beaten path, occasionally presenting a different angle on well-known stories, and not infrequently interviewing news makers who were being unfairly attacked by the mainstream media--or who might otherwise never appear on television, radio or in print.

A paradigm shift has clearly occurred within the journalism department at EWTN. Prior to this shift, the network was focused on the objective truth of what is happening in the world today, and its priorities were to seek out and discover that truth and share it with viewers as an independent source of faithful Catholic news and commentary. Now the focus is on what is happening in the world as seen through the dirty and short-sighted lenses of the worldly and highly subjective mainstream media, and the priority seems to be to highlight and discuss whatever the mainstream media is highlighting and discussing at the moment. While EWTN News was once prized for original Catholic news and analysis you couldn't get

anywhere else, now its programming is often almost a lock-step imitation of secular mainstream media news broadcasts—secular news with Catholic overtones, if you will. Although faithful Catholic perspectives are still routinely offered on current events, the global Catholic network’s overall news agenda is now largely dictated by the mainstream media. It’s like an orchestra whose members have remained the same, but they now have a different conductor and are playing different music.

This shift seems to have begun back in 2008 when the TV studio for the network’s flagship news magazine,

The World Over Live,

was permanently relocated from Birmingham to Washington, D.C. Whereas prior to this big move, the weekly news program was produced in a small, devoutly Catholic media enclave on the outskirts of a large city in central Alabama, now it comes to us from Capitol Hill, where the idols of money and power generally hold sway and where the alluring yet toxic influence of the mainstream media is difficult to resist. Over time, this significant change of environment has led, regrettably yet predictably, to a noticeable change in both the content and tone of the EWTN News programming. Without constant vigilance and the help of God’s wisdom and grace, how could any good Catholic journalist who lives and breathes this radically secular environment not find himself being gradually influenced by it as time passes? It will increasingly reshape his ways of thinking and acting, until eventually he is hardly distinguishable from his worldly peers.

Yes, it must be acknowledged that a certain degree of worldliness has crept into the journalism department at EWTN. This is clearly evident from just a cursory glance at its coverage of the 2016 presidential election cycle thus far, which—with the notable exception of Raymond Arroyo’s brief interview with Senator Rand Paul, a true statesman of character and principle—has generally mimicked the mainstream media coverage. This coverage has been unfairly skewed in favor of wealthy Republican candidates such as billionaire real estate magnate Donald Trump, former Florida governor Jeb Bush, and former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, with insufficient attention given to the moral character, voting records, and issue positions of these candidates—the things that really matter to faithful Catholics looking to cast their vote responsibly in next year’s elections. Trump, a longtime Democrat and a good friend of Hillary Clinton, has donated money to Planned Parenthood, supports ObamaCare, and earned much of his fortune by forcing other companies into bankruptcy. That EWTN’s news director would unhesitatingly embrace him as a good candidate and give him so much positive attention on a faithful Catholic TV network this past summer was an example of irresponsible journalism that betrayed a serious lack of wisdom and discernment.

Meanwhile, just about every other leading and longshot Republican presidential candidate has been interviewed or discussed at some length on one or more EWTN news programs during this past year, indicating that some degree of fairness and balance does still prevail within that realm. However, there is one leading Republican candidate who, for no good reason, has been glaringly conspicuous by his near-total absence from the network’s news programming and publishing. Perhaps there is no better way to highlight the problem under discussion here than to pose the following simple question: Why is EWTN boycotting Ben Carson?

Now, it’s true that the term “boycott” usually refers to a consciously activist, deliberate and explicit decision to exclude a certain person, product, or service from one’s support or patronage because he, she or it in some way violates the principles held by the one engaged in the boycott. I am not aware of any

conscious or explicit decision on the part of EWTN executives to ban Dr. Carson from the network airwaves or press; nor am I aware of anything in Carson's character, achievements, or issue positions that would warrant such a boycott by a faithful Catholic media powerhouse. Yet the fact remains—having grown painfully obvious over the past few months—that, aside from occasionally mentioning him briefly in passing on a few programs and in one or two news articles, EWTN News has been avoiding Carson like the plague, neglecting to interview or discuss him and in general refusing to have anything to do with him. There seems to be an implicit, unspoken decision by the network's journalism staff to simply ignore Ben Carson. And the answer to the simple question posed by this article is unfortunately also quite simple: EWTN is boycotting Dr. Carson because the corrupt and worldly mainstream media—from which the network's journalism department now takes its cues—is deathly afraid of this particular presidential candidate and hates him with a passionate vengeance.

This, of course, leads to another question: Why does the Washington, D.C. media establishment so deeply fear and loathe Ben Carson? And the answer to this is that the Beltway media elite correctly perceives that Dr. Carson's candidacy poses a major threat to everything it stands for. And what exactly does this radically secularist mainstream media empire stand for? Moral relativism, religious syncretism, unbridled materialism and hedonism, abortion on demand, continued funding for Planned Parenthood, the retention of ObamaCare and the unjust HHS mandate, unlimited government growth, higher taxes, endless national debt accumulation, the destruction of the nuclear family through sexual immorality and deviant lifestyles, the radical homosexual agenda, the continued stranglehold of powerful special interest groups on our national politics and economy, the recension of our Constitutionally guaranteed rights and liberties, and the thorough de-Christianization of our country.



By contrast, Ben Carson is a devout Christian who stands for moral absolutes, hard work and sacrifice, the right to life of the innocent unborn and an end to legalized abortion, the repeal of ObamaCare and the HHS mandate, smaller government, lower taxes, a balanced budget, traditional marriage and family values, personal responsibility, and a return to strict Constitutional government. However, Dr. Carson's values alone cannot adequately explain the malicious ferocity of the mainstream media's coordinated vitriolic assault on him or why he is perceived as being such a formidable threat to the establishment. Other Republican and Tea Party presidential candidates claim to stand for these things as well, yet they are not being half so viciously attacked by the mainstream media. Why is Ben Carson being treated differently?

The answer is that he is different from the other Republican presidential candidates in key respects—and

these differences may collectively afford him a decisive advantage over his rivals when it comes to winning both the Republican nomination and the presidency. Among the unique characteristics that set Dr. Carson apart from the rest of the field:

1. He is a citizen statesman running for president by popular demand for the good of our country, not a career politician seeking high office for his own benefit.
2. He is a devout Christian man who reads the Bible daily and puts his faith into practice, not a Christian in name only.
3. He is a trustworthy and courageous man of impeccable character and principle who always strives to do what is right, or what he thinks is right, in any given situation regardless of public opinion or other external pressures.
4. He is a clear and independent common-sense thinker whose issue positions are not predetermined by partisan rhetoric.
5. He is a great communicator, blessed with a unique ability to discuss and explain complex issues and topics in simple terms that anyone can understand.
6. He has a clear vision for America's future based on a return to sound Constitutional government and the wisdom of our nation's Founders.
7. He is a splendid example of the American dream and a role model for American youth, having risen from childhood poverty to become one of the world's greatest neurosurgeons.
8. As a philanthropist, he has made a significant contribution to improving America's education system through the Carson Scholars Fund.
9. He is the most highly decorated American civilian among all the presidential candidates and the only one to have received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
10. He has built up, and continues to steadily build up, a massive following among the American people, having already sold far more books, recruited far more campaign volunteers, and received far more individual donations than Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, or any other presidential candidate.

Those running the mainstream media establishment are all too happy to promote politically correct presidential candidates like Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump who are in line with their own radically secularist philosophy and values. But the mere thought of a principled citizen statesman like Dr. Carson even approaching the White House is enough to send them into panic. The fact of the matter is that, despite his lack of political correctness, Ben Carson stands a significant chance of being nominated and elected President of the United States. The media elite is clearly aware of this, which explains their vicious and despicable attempt to destroy Carson's candidacy. They desperately wish that he would just go away.

But the biggest reason of all for the mainstream media's fear and hatred of Ben Carson is this: polls consistently indicate that he is the only Republican presidential candidate who can decisively defeat

Hillary Clinton in the 2016 general election. Another unique characteristic of Dr. Carson as a presidential candidate is that, as an African-American who is deeply respected among his own people, he is the only Republican candidate who can realistically win a significant percentage of the black vote. If he were to win only 17 percent of the black vote in the general election, he would defeat Hillary Clinton and win the presidency. Furthermore, despite the mainstream media's all-out effort to destroy his candidacy, polls reveal that Ben Carson has now gained the support of about 20 percent of African-American voters—and that percentage is likely to grow in the near future. In other words, Dr. Carson is the only Republican presidential candidate who can put an end to Hillary Clinton's hope of finally becoming president herself. And therefore, Ben Carson is the only Republican who can realistically win the White House in 2016.

As the Second Vatican Council reminded the Church, those who are in charge of the communications media bear a serious responsibility to transmit the truth and to help shape public opinion in accordance with what is objectively true and good and right. When it comes to the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign, the truth is that Ben Carson is the only viable alternative to Hillary Clinton as America's next president. Therefore, EWTN should be taking advantage of its unique position as an independent and massively influential bully pulpit to help promote Dr. Carson's candidacy among its U.S. viewers, listeners and readers and to galvanize millions of faithful American Catholics in support of his presidential campaign. I am not asking the network or its journalists to explicitly endorse Ben Carson for president (although that might not be such a bad idea); I only ask that they candidly recognize his providentially unique qualifications to lead our nation in light of the basic realities of the current presidential landscape and give him the fair share of attention he deserves.

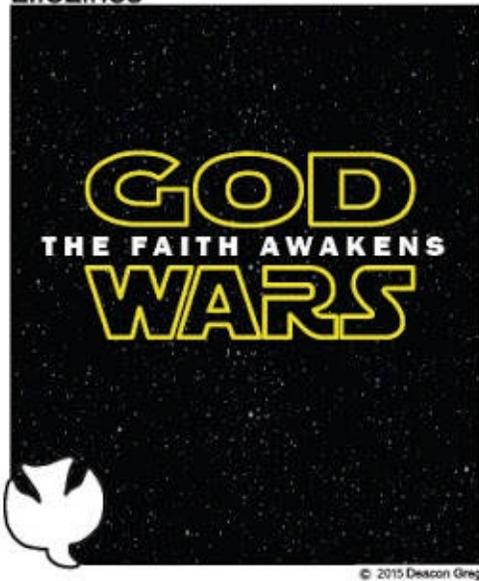
EWTN's beautiful and appropriate motto is "Sharing the Splendor of Truth," and the network continues to do just that in admirable fashion as far as Catholic doctrine, liturgy, the sacraments, morality, prayer and spirituality are concerned. But when it comes to the Catholic media apostolate's news coverage of the critically important 2016 presidential election season, the truth is not served by sweeping the best and most promising candidate in the race under the rug. It seems clearly apparent that Ben Carson has received so little attention on EWTN thus far because he has been so perniciously attacked, maligned, and belittled by the morally toxic Washington mainstream media establishment. That's a shame. A faithful Catholic television network should not be permitting the lies and deceptions of worldly mainstream media outlets to influence the decisions of its own journalism department. On the contrary, EWTN should do whatever is necessary to reclaim and preserve its original identity as an independent voice of truth and reason, clarity and common sense in a world ever more filled with lies, irrationality, ambiguity and craziness. Instead of allowing itself to be dragged along by the Beltway media machine, EWTN News should be setting its own agenda based on its own values and striving to influence political discussions and events in a wholly different direction.

The unjustified and irrational EWTN media blackout of Ben Carson must end. The network can, and should, utilize its tremendous influence to support and further advance the presidential candidacy of Dr. Carson with the true good of our country in mind. As Catholics vote, so goes our nation. If we can get a majority of American Catholic voters firmly committed to Ben Carson, we can elect a new president who shares our Christian faith and moral values and prevent another radically secularist, scandal-ridden career politician from succeeding Barack Obama. That is a goal worth achieving, but it may be very difficult to achieve it without the vital support and assistance of the Eternal Word Television Network.

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God Wars [at LifeLines]

LifeLines



By the way..

GOD wins!

...gives new meaning to the phrase, "...I am your Father..."

This contribution is available at <http://deacongh.blogspot.com/2015/12/god-wars.html>
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What was Mary Thinking the Week Before She Gave Birth to Jesus?

Historically, in the Latin calendar, December 18 was the *Expectation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, however the feast is not in the current calendar. To learn more about the history of the feast, I encourage you to visit the Catholic Encyclopedia on New Advent [here](#).

Trying to understand what the Blessed Virgin Mary was feeling one week before giving birth to Jesus is difficult since nothing about her thoughts has been revealed to us in the Sacred Scriptures. At this point, it's purely speculative at best. We know what St. Luke tells us in Chapter 2 of his Gospel, however, we don't know much more than this revelation.

Was it difficult on Mary to be away from her family and *her mother* during this time? Even though the birth of Jesus was miraculous, as was his conception, what was Mary feeling? Did she know what was to occur? Was she ready for it? Did she think she would be a good mother?

As tradition has shown us, the Blessed Virgin Mary completely put her *trust* in God, just as she had done nine months prior at the Annunciation. Mary is the great sign of perfect *faith* and *joy* for us, but especially during the Third Week of Advent (Gaudete Sunday), which we celebrated in the Latin Church this past Sunday.

We may not know exactly what Mary was feeling one week before the birth of Christ, but based on the 12 quotes below from mothers sharing what they were feeling one week prior to having their child, I would imagine Mary's experience may not have differed much from some of these –

My daughter was actually born 3 weeks early, so I finishing my last week at work. I do remember nesting really bad. Everything needed to be ready. I was a cleaning fool. I remember feeling anxious, nervous, excited and scared. I wanted nothing more than to be the perfect mom. I think that is why she came early, God's sense of humor, I was the mom she needed. – Kristi

My first child was nine days post estimated due date, so with this in mind...I wasn't anxious, nor fidgety, but very at peace, feeling good about being ready for the birth. We had a plan, we had things packed...I somehow knew, everything would be perfect, just because it was in God's hands...prayer was my constant companion. There was a joy in waiting, knowing that it was just time, and this sense of treasuring every moment leading up to the big day. – Maggie

My last week of pregnancy was Christmas week and I was overdue. I loved being pregnant but was now more than ready to meet this little person God was entrusting me with. I was anxious and excited, what a wonderment pregnancy is! We didn't know the gender of our baby so there was that added anticipation. We went to Midnight Mass that year, 10 days past my due date. I remember feeling so connected to Mary that night. – Kristin

The week before my first child was born I was so anxious to see my baby's face and hold the baby in my arms and learn if "Little K" was Kathleen or Kevin. At the same time, even though I had been reading and rereading a couple of books about babies, I felt as if I was not prepared for such an awesome responsibility. I placed my trust in The Lord and prayed to be a good mother and do His Will with His

awesome blessing. – Helen

As the birth of my first child was approaching I was filled with a potpourri of emotions. The anticipation of finally seeing his little face and learning about his personality filled most of my thoughts. Mixed in that joy was some apprehension about being responsible for another human being. I wondered if I would be a good mother. – Kay

Just before having my son, I remember an overwhelming feeling of joy and entrustment. I couldn't wait to hold my baby boy, but knew that once he was born, I would have to share him. Others would hold him, would smile at him, and yes, could hurt him. I couldn't keep him in the safety of my arms forever. Today, he is four and this is still my heart's desire: to simply hold, love, teach, and protect him. I know each day he grows he will be more independent. – Allie

My due date was May 22 and as that day came closer I was nervous, scared, and excited but never had that "done" feeling other moms talk about. Well-meaning friends and relatives were becoming increasingly frustrated as each day came and went without a baby. The truth is I was not at all upset. I cherished every hour that I was allowed to assist God in this most precious creation. – Kim

One week before giving birth to my first born I was feeling anxiousness, excitement, and I was uncomfortable because it felt like his feet were lodged in my ribs, but the anticipation of pushing this gift from God, this little miracle out of my body was and still is the most overwhelming sense of happiness I've ever experienced. – Sydne

The week leading up to giving birth to my first child was a roller coaster of emotion. Fear, excitement, anxiety, anticipation, all wrapped up in the blessing that would soon arrive. Physically I was exhausted and I worried if my body could handle the natural childbirth I had opted for. So many questions ran through my mind...would I be a good mother? Would my baby be healthy? When that day came, there are no words to describe the experience of giving birth and feeling your newborn laid on your chest for the first time. It is truly a miracle and gift from God! – Kasandra

I was working full-time for an optometrist and on the go and on my feet most of days. Nothing really set in until my last workday, which happened to be 3 days before I had our son. I didn't experience much honestly until I wasn't working. I think once I finally relaxed from being on the go, my body decided it was time for a baby. – Christine

The anticipation was overwhelming as I waited for the birth of my first son. He would be 5 1/2 weeks early and a 72-hour labor. As a new Mom, the timing initially was scary but God provided me with a sense of peace knowing we would both be healthy. It was an exciting time but also a sense of nervousness, hoping and praying I was ready to take on this new role of Mommy that God was entrusting me with...pure excitement and joy! – Karyn

The final week leading up to the birth of my first child was filled with much anticipation, joy, excitement and exhaustion. It was also a time fear of the unknown. Fear about being ready to welcome a child into this world...It required so much trust in the Lord and placing it in His hands...The meaning of love had changed drastically after carrying a baby within my womb for 9 months. I was blessed to be given the gift of life. – Lindsey

Motherhood is so important. Thanks to the women above for hearing the call to be Mommies. If you are

Mom and would like to share your experience of what you were feeling one week before giving birth, please do so in the comment box below. We would love to hear them.

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2015/12/18/what-was-mary-thinking-the-week-before-she-gave-birth-to-jesus/>
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Risking Community [at Loved As If]

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ([Isaiah 61:1-2](#))

At coffee hour today, we discussed our goals for the New Years. I've long known to set goals for myself rather than make resolutions. Goals are what I seek to reach. Resolutions are what I expect to impose upon myself. The first contain a certain fluidity. Reaching them may take longer than I imagine. They will change if I discover they're inappropriate. The latter seem to me more like an exam that I cannot miss and must pass with a minimum score: I must lose X amount, must learn Y, must somehow, some way do something and if I don't, I will have failed at my New Year's resolutions.

Discovering that others have similar perspectives on setting goals for the New Year was lovely. In surprise, I stammered out, "I want to supplement my income doing things I love and finish my book." It's true but I don't usually tell the truth. Instead, I deflect the conversation or weave so many words around my answer the truth is hidden in a dense cloud. When asked what kinds of things I might do, I further surprised myself, "Sewing and teaching dance." Then my best friend reminded me that I will be teaching him, and perhaps others, to sew. I amended my list of income enhancing activities.

Then the big surprise came. We actually discussed what I wanted and how I could accomplish it within the community. One new friend told me there'd probably be enough opportunity to do light tailoring within our parish. Another told me there was a market for teaching people to sew. Others have asked that I teach dance. I need not figure it all out on my own. This Christian community delights in encouraging each of us to be who God has created us to be. I find it baffling. They owe me nothing. They don't even know me and might not like me very well if they did. Still, they open their arms and gather me in.

When we consider how selfish we are, any experience of community at all, particularly in the civilized West, is a miracle. Most of us can survive without each other even though we can't thrive. With all the distractions in our lives, many of us don't know what thriving is.

Christian community is an even greater miracle. The spontaneous gathering in of strangers who have no claim on us requires us to risk loving as Christ loves us. There are no guarantees. Love may never be returned. And we will simply not like some people; some will never like us. Still, there are those who choose to allow Christ to pour them out as He poured Himself into our world over 2000 years ago. They make miracles happen. They bind up the broken hearted, support captive making their way from cold, dark prisons into warm, blinding light. They confirm that the year of favour is indeed come. Christ is born. God is among us.

Plan B [at Blogging For A Better Life]

It's a big world and I want to see it all!



When it comes to vacation travel, I have a whole boatload of plans.

Along with my list of wishful travel destinations, I have plans to change this and that in my life. Plans to straighten out every nook and cranny in my home, plans in which will allow me to maintain control of my days and my ways.

I'm always dreaming dreams that will make me a superstar. Okay—not really, but I am always plotting ways to get ahead in life. I can get stuck on the me factor. I want the best life possible.

What I didn't plan on was how often I struggle to hold on to these crazy plans. All these me, me, me plans!

How often do we stop and consider if our plans are solely for our benefit? When will we allow Christ to guide our plans?

Most of us want total control of our lives, with Christ as a back up plan. We think that it is fine to keep

Jesus as plan B—in case things become too messed up.

Is that a good plan? Proverbs 16:3 reads:

“Ask the Lord to bless your plans, and you will be successful in carrying them out.”

It is only when I have truly taken the time through prayer, and asked our Lord to bless my plans, do I have a clear vision of what I should and should not pursue.

Our Lord can't be our back up plan—that plan B when things don't end up as *planned*

. No, Jesus needs to be the driving force for all our plans and actions; otherwise we're just floating around in this big world with no steadfast plan.

Dreams are empty space if they only benefit self.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and He will show you the right way.”

(Proverbs 3:5-6)



This contribution is available at <http://blogforabetterlife.blogspot.com/2015/12/plan-b.html>
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Catholic Treatments of Divinization [at Eastern Christian Books]

Just before Christmas I heard a bewildering story from a trusted friend about people at Mass at a Catholic university reacting negatively to a homily that suggested theosis or divinization (deification) is a part of Catholic tradition. I thought such fatuousness was slowly dying out, aided by any number of recent books on the topic, not least Daniel Keating's careful 2007 study,

[*Deification and Grace \(Introductions to Catholic Doctrine\)*](#)

, or the several articles on theosis in Catholic tradition in

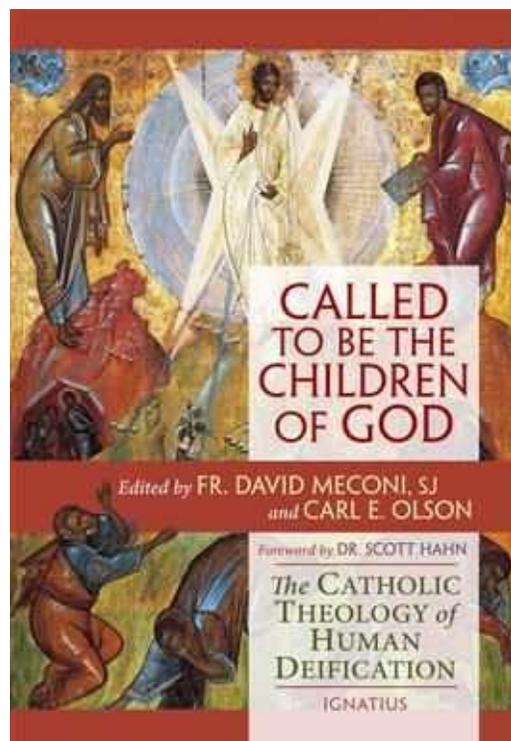
[*Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*](#)

. But apparently there are still people who think this.

I am happy to report that such people really will have no excuse whatsoever for persevering in their ignorance and prejudice after the appearance, early in the new year, of a rich collection which I have perused in draft form. My editor at

[*Catholic World Report*](#)

, Carl Olson, has teamed up with the Jesuit theologian David Meconi of Saint Louis University to edit a very rich and promising looking collection with articles on deification from some prominent Catholic scholars.



Meconi is no stranger to the topic, having authored

[*The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification*](#)

(Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 296pp.

Olson, too, is no stranger to the topic, having authored

[this lengthy essay](#)

in 2008 on how he came to the topic.

Their new collaborative collection is entitled

[*Called to be the Children of God: the Catholic Theology of Human Deification*](#),

and it is to be published in 2016. I've already talked to the editors about an interview once the book is in print.

Ignatius tells us this about the book:

The first generations of Christians saw in their new lives in Jesus Christ a way to transcend all the limitations of sin and death and become new creatures. St. Peter expressed this as "participating in the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), while St. Athanasius stated it succinctly 300 years later: "God became a human, so humans could become God." This is the heart of the Christian faith and the pledge of the Christian promise: that those baptized in Christ become "divine" through their partaking in God's own life and love. This is why Christians can live forever, this is the source of their charity and their holiness, this is why we do not need to live in a world ruled by fallen instinct and sinful desires. We have been made for more, for infinitely more.

This book gathers more than a dozen Catholic scholars and theologians to examine what this process of "deification" means in their respective areas of study. It offers fifteen chapters showing what "becoming God" meant for the early Church, for St. Thomas Aquinas and the greatest Dominicans, the significance it played in the thinking of St. Francis and the early Franciscans. It shows how such an understanding of salvation played out during the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent, as well as in French School of Spirituality, in various Thomist thinkers, in John Henry Newman and John Paul II, at the Vatican Councils, and where such thinking can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church today.

No other book has gathered such an array of scholars or provided such a deep study into how humanity's divinized life in Christ has received many rich and various perspectives over the past two thousand years. This book therefore hopes to bring readers into the central mystery of Christianity by allowing the Church's greatest thinkers and texts to speak for themselves, showing how becoming Christ-like, becoming truly the Body of Christ on earth, is the only ultimate purpose of the Christian faith.

"Rescue from sin and death is indeed a wonderful thing—but the salvation won for us by Jesus Christ is incomparably greater. And that is the subject of this book. In all its parts, this book, like Christianity in all its parts, is about salvation. But that means it's about everything that fills our lives,

on earth and in heaven."

— Dr. Scott Hahn, Author, Rome Sweet Home

This contribution is available at <http://easternchristianbooks.blogspot.com/2015/12/catholic-treatments-of-divinization.html>
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Facing Our Immortality In The Light Of Christmas [at Musings of a Missionary in the Modern World]



Anyone who has ever received an unexpected diagnosis of cancer or some other serious disease knows the power of the experience to suddenly and radically change the inner world in which we normally live. Anyone who has lost a loved one especially without warning, experiences the same thing. Perception, understanding, the hierarchy of what we have up to then considered important suffers a seismic shock and shifts the plates of our current existence into a completely changed landscape which can seem foreign and strange and certainly frightening in many ways.

Having been through this myself several times, and watching those around me, I've come to realize that the shock comes not so much from facing our own mortality as it does from not having faced our immortality. That's the real problem. To say we now are brought to a place where we have to face our own mortality is actually to stand before an untruth and feel forced to embrace it. Our whole being revolts against it and all the classic stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and resignation follow.

And with good reason. We are not mortal, and the light of Christmas announces that definitively. Jesus doesn't come into our darkness to commiserate with us. He comes into our world to rescue us from the fetters of our darkness, including the weight of our own corruptible bodies, so that time, (however much we have), in its proper place, can launch us safely and happily into eternity.

It is true that death is a kind of limit, the line past which nothing more can be done in this world in our present state. But it is not the end. We are immortal, and it really is not necessary to defend this belief because anyone truly in touch with themselves knows deep in their being that something infinite, something eternal abides in their very substance. And this something is personal. It is not an energy or a memory or a force. It is of the substance of who we are, how we know ourselves, and how we are known. It is our very person, and it is never lost by trial or suffering or disease or death. The person does not die. The body gives way for a time. But we do not die.

Because our body is corruptible in this fallen world, we shed it in dying, in order to be completely healed and made ready for immortal bodies which we will receive, at the end of time. And like anyone who goes through the decline of their own bodies in aging, sickness, losing parts here and there, I've come to understand that it is in keeping with God's plans to hold fast to the promise of eternal life and the glorified body rather than trying to hold on to our present existence, attempting by our own might to make our bodies immortal as though we can somehow transfigure them under our own power. Sickness quickly

disabuses us of the illusion that we have the capacity to do this. But it doesn't take away from us the desire to be completely restored, whole and transcendent.

The other darkneses we hold onto in our lives are also often rooted in this failure to embrace our immortality. At Christmas Jesus comes to us, "to a people who walk in darkness" to show us a great light. To those of us living in a land of gloom, His light shines." Is 9:1 This is a light that comes from eternity and causes joy and great rejoicing. It doesn't matter if I live in the gloom of a corruptible body which I am losing piece by piece or in the decay of old age. It doesn't matter if my darkness is the bondage of alcoholism or weariness, doubt, indifference, fear, wounds, worldly aspirations, pride, unforgiveness, bitterness, depression, a hard heart. This is a light that actively seeks out every darkness in order to dispel it and banish it forever. It is the light of the promise of immortality which we are created for and which Jesus comes to restore to us if we can just let go of our mortal clings.

I cannot tell you exactly why I am no longer afraid to die. It is not imminent at the moment that I know of. I have, as I said, faced my own death before. The first conscious time was full of all the shock and fear that is normal for anyone who receives an indefinite diagnosis and is told they may die. "If the disease is anywhere else in your body then all bets are off." That is the way it was put to me. All the human emotions and questions coursed through me at that time, leaving me sleepless and isolated within myself, knowing no one else could really stand with me in the place I had suddenly found myself.

The most frightening realization had to do with time. Time, always seemed without limit. There seemed to be plenty of it. Without measure. Now it was quantifiable. There was only so much left. How is it I was not used to thinking of time here as something limited and then gone forever. To manage time now seemed overwhelming. A great number of things which had always seemed possible, now had to be definitively rejected. They would not, could not be done any longer. My mother, as she was dying, recognized this watching a slide show of Hawaii. She said matter-of-factly and somewhat sadly: "I guess I will never get to see Hawaii." And we in our denial said: "Well, let's see. Maybe." The fact was she never got to see Hawaii. And she knew it.

My fear in relationship to time had very much to do with its ending for me. I was frightened by my lack of preparedness for what would come next, for what would come as soon as the measurement of things in this world was no longer the reality I lived in. The most unsettling thing was the thought of suddenly standing before God, Face to face, and not knowing what I could possibly say to Him, fearing He would be so utterly disappointed with me for having done nothing, really nothing of any importance for Him! My fantasies of accomplishing great things were suddenly wasted hours of vainglorious daydreaming, all dissipation, nothing of substance to present, because I had only been thinking of myself. And nothing of the accomplishments or achievements I held within me amounted to much in this different light of eternity. They didn't have much meaning there, as far as I could tell, not because they were without value, but because I would have done them for myself and now I, as I knew it, was coming to an end. The prospect of death has a funny way of de-centering you from yourself, causing you to step outside yourself, making you realize at a deeper level than you have ever been aware of before that you are not the nexus for meaning in life. Our egoism runs much deeper than we think.

I did not come to a reorientation in my awareness until, in the peace of an evening sky in which the Father's presence was written large, I, as small as a child, touched by His majestic power, was lifted out of myself, above myself, into another embrace of reality that made my whole life different.....In an instant, there was peace in living or dying. It didn't matter which it would be. I would be held in this love

and nothing, not even death, was frightening in that love. Whatever happened would come from that love; and in that love I was always/already held.

Time was no longer the same issue because I now knew with my very being that,

“... when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that we are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” So we are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.” Galatians 4:4-7

This is what His love for me, and for you, is really about. This Gift is always being offered. Christmas is always present. Our deepest regret at the end of time will not be what we did or didn't do. It will be how deeply we underestimated and misunderstood the infinite goodness and love and mercy and tenderness of our God. Christmas lights up this incredible love of God.

Jesus came, says the Liturgy of the Hours in Evening prayer I of Christmas, to "bring joy to all peoples with the promise of unending life.." In the fullness of time, He came to break the boundaries of time by giving the hope of heavenly birth to each of us. He did not cling to His time here. He was born to die for us that we could live with Him for all eternity. And Mary, most of all, knew this bittersweet mystery from the time She said: Fiat!.

The old catechism tells us we were created “to know, love and serve God in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.” But, it does not tell us what was in God’s Heart as He created us. Christmas does. Our older Brother Jesus, the First Born of all creation, comes to rescue us, to bring us back into the Family, our Family, the Father’s Family. We were created because God wanted us to be a part of His Family, and that’s where we belong. Christmas is that promise of rescue finally made Incarnate, finally come to us in the Flesh that is the Way to our true home.

May your Christmas be filled with the sweetness of God’s love made present in the light of the smile of the tiny Christ Child. And may that smile be ever present to you all the days of your life to lead you to your everlasting homeland!

Sr. Anne Marie, SOLT. 12/24/2015

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The Rights of Evil [at WordPress.com]



God's Biological Society – The Family

The first component, and an obstacle to the secularist goal, is the authority of the genetic family. There is no continuation of the species of man without procreation. As such, it is the physical center of humanity and has been such since man climbed out of the mud of the bog. With such an understanding, all cultures in the past have naturally delegated authority to the family; first to the father and mother, second to the community, third to the state, and so on. It had always been a fundamental practice that generated opportunity and stability for all, and despite its frequent inequities due to the abuse of authority by self-centered individuals and groups – a condition that exists in all authorities across all philosophies – it is a proven model. It works because that is God's creative plan and it is His genetic formula for created man.

Secular man sees another model; one not based upon genetics, but rather upon desires. The first is stable and evolves at a pace that society bears easily and without notice. The second is continually disruptive by nature for it gives preference to immediate and temporal desires, and redistributes resources, which had been acquired through the stability of the family structure, to those who have not had to work for those resources. The secularist, in pursuit of providing resources for the impulse of feelings and desires, has to separate work from reward. Individuals and groups that had spent their lives working for what they thought was theirs, are left to watch those things of value taken away from them and given to another individual or group so that a new desire may flourish. Institutions that struggled for generations in order to reach the higher echelons of quality provisions for specific purposes have found their successful programs sacked and redefined by those who merely desired what that institution earned and offered, and saw no reason why they should have to meet the very requirements that made the institution desirable to them to begin with. The secularist creed is, "Take what you choose not to earn or accomplish".

In advancing desires, the secular society must reverse the order of authority, giving first authority to the state, second to the community and third to the father and mother. The simple reason for this is that the family structure is definitive, finite, and authoritarian due to the genetic makeup of the family, where children are naturally dependent upon the parents; thus the authority of the parents are insured and enshrined. Parents are the gatekeepers of desires. In order for secular society to appease desire it must demote the authority of the parents beneath that of the community and state. Hence we see practically all

of the institutions of the family of man being redefined or eradicated.

And so the dissolution of marriage is but a step in the reassignment of authority from the family to the society. Deacon Keith Fournier, in *Catholic Online*, recently gave a good definition of God's sacramental and genetic form of marriage.

“Marriage is ontologically between one man and one woman, ordered toward the union of the spouses, open to children and formative of family. Nothing else is a marriage. Family is the first vital cell of society; the first church, first school, first hospital, first economy, first government and first mediating institution of a truly human and just social order. Heterosexual marriage, procreation, and the nurturing of children form the foundation for the family, and the family forms the foundation of civil society.”

There is little in that statement that secular society is not attempting to convert and redefine to its own purpose of degraded equality. I came across an excellent example of such infected backwater of secular thinking in an online newspaper article in the *Alomogordo Daily News*:

On August 14th, 2013, Chaplain Richard Frazier was offended while attending a rodeo that included a Christian prayer at its beginning, along with a Christian flag being displayed by a rider on horseback. His comment afterwards was:

“We are a country founded on religious freedom, and with that freedom comes responsibility. We have a responsibility to respect the fact that not everyone shares in the same religious belief, and we must be mindful not to impose our beliefs on others.”

His argument here is that, in order to have religious freedom, those who wish to practice it must never display their faith in any manner in the public realm. He argues that religion must be only be kept within one's personal experience and only made visible for others within the context of a clearly designated event and location that promotes that religion. This an interesting form of freedom; is it not?

If I were to carry his logic forward....

The Declaration of Independence, in its Preamble states:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The declaration appears to be defining these rights as freedoms of man's consciousness and action within his society, but Chaplain Frazier seems to be arguing that in order to have Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness, one must experience it privately or only within a designated event and location that promotes one's Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. To Chaplain Frazier, a rodeo is not such a place.

And what about America's Bill of Rights? Just looking at the 1st Amendment:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Chaplain Frazier has already adjudicated on the religion portion of this amendment, so what about the other portions? By Chaplain Frazier's interpretation of freedom this would mean that human communication is a private concern and only permissible at a clearly specified event and within the walls of a clearly designated location that promotes communications; of any kind. It means that no person may assemble with another person or persons, except in those locations that are clearly designated for that purpose, and only after notifying the general public of their intent to communicate. And it means that no one may petition – a form of communications – the American government for anything except through those clearly designated locations for communication and after due notification had been set forth. Of interest here is that Chaplain Frazier has not defined who is to approve of these clearly designated events and their locations, nor how they are to be designated, but he has clearly designated that this rodeo is not one of those places, as it did not clearly inform its audience that a Christian prayer and flag would be on display as part of the ceremony. Obviously, I could proceed through the rest of the Bill of Rights, and it would become increasingly obvious the flawed nature of such thinking.

Chaplain Richard Frazier went on to defend his opinion two weeks later; writing an open letter in the same online newspaper:

“As a Marine combat veteran, I carry the steel of my country's enemies inside my body. To see the Griffin bunch parade my country's flag and promote their intolerant, bigoted, fundamental religious view offended me and many other veterans.”

Putting aside the chaplain's obvious, vitriolic tone, by his own words he is making the argument that to demonstrate a religious conviction or belief in public is in itself an intolerant and bigoted act, and as such is not protected by our 1st Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. So what makes his statement any less bigoted than that which he is condemning?

And what of the recent decision made by the Supreme Court of New Mexico, in its ruling against a photography company for its decision not to take pictures of a same-sex marriage? The court decided that the company had no right to deny their services to this same-sex couple; that to do so was to discriminate against them as the New Mexico Human Rights Act details.

In a separate, written opinion, Justice Bosson stated that, “at some point in our lives all of us must compromise, if only a little, to accommodate the contrasting values of others.” He went on to clarify that the photographers would have to put aside their religious beliefs in order to accommodate an act (same-sex marriage) by a protected group, under the NMHRA, that is not recognized by the state itself, in order to promote the good of the society.

What is being missed here is the obvious. The photographers are being told they must compromise their religious conscience, their right of religious freedom as expressed in the 1st Amendment of our U.S. Constitution, in order that the society may enjoy its traditions and laws in an equitable fashion. We have before us a simple redefinition of our own Constitution in order that the secular ideology of society may be supported, promoted and made mandatory over all other religious belief and action.

Now, this is a prominent boulder in our vision of a future, but I find it but a pebble in the degradation of mankind. By far the larger rock is the reinterpretation of man's free will and choice; that very condition that secular man so pursues. The court endorsed the growing concept in Western society that a business, in its goal to be non-discriminatory in its conduct, cannot deny anyone their product and/or services. If one wishes to live – through the means of commerce – one cannot choose whom they will provide product

or service to, and must put aside their free will and choice for the betterment of society as a whole. To stretch this logic into the future conduct and actions within a society is another discourse of some great length and some true dystopian vision.

The point in my several examples of the nature of things, from the realities of architecture, transportation and communications, to the examples of ideas regarding freedoms, institutions, and the dignity of man, is to illustrate the nature of evil, and how it always establishes first its right to existence before it enacts its judgment upon mankind. In so doing, one's rights become the focus of responsibility for evil and one's intent the path to an evil act:

Though automobiles kill approximately 1,200,000 people each year around the world, according to the World Health Organization, we see no purpose or desire to curtail the automobile. As a result, the architecture of man and how he communicates is fundamentally redefined in order to ensure the right and intent to drive an automobile. I learned the word "technocracy" recently, and I find it an appropriate word now to describe the state of our world.

Though man's selfish inclination to his own desires kills approximately 44,000,000 people each year though intentional abortion, with an additional 70,000 maternal deaths each year due to unsafe procedures and facilities, we see no purpose to curtail abortion. As a result, the dignity of mankind is fundamentally redefined to ensure that one group of people (women) are more equal than another group of people (children), a condition of people (the haves) is more equal than another condition of people (the have-nots), and one period of time (the present) is more equal than another period of time (the past and the future).

Though the secular society prizes scientific justification for their mission statement, they pick and choose from the barrel of scientific information for that which they embrace with their preferences and desires, and discards the rest. Take for example divorce and the effects of it on the children from broken marriages. Science has demonstrated that children suffer from lack of attention by divorced parents. Children receive less financial support and lack strong emotional support from their divorced parents. Children from a divorce experience depression, less happiness, less satisfaction and contentment, diminished social skills, poor academic performance, chronic substance abuse, and generally suffer from a loss of well-being and confidence. Relationships are harder to come by in a healthy manner for children of divorce. Their own marriages suffer through greater conflict and increased divorce, than for those children, now adults, who come from married parents.

And yet the parent(s) only see the further appeasement of their own desires over that of their children's needs. To achieve such an end, the secular society redefines marriage as merely a convenience that all parties should have access to in the belief that traditional marriage is a stigma of moral proportions and to separate marriage away from such a condition is to alleviate marriage from such a false and inequitable burden; hence it becomes a true bond of relationship between any two or more people or things. With a magic wand, the secularist believes that all of the anxieties of mankind, that have been maliciously brought about through genetics, evolution, natural selection, traditional marriage, and theistic reasoning, is dissipated as gas in the air, and children everywhere will reap the holistic and real benefits of the new marriage in the new society. Bold plan, indeed.

I must say that evil truly appears to be a woven tapestry of human rights and intents; rights and intents that are all meant for the good, but when woven only for the warmth of man and not for his conjugal nature and existence with natural authority, God and His will, we have a living, authoritative evil in our midst. If

this is the case, then we have no one to blame for evil but ourselves. I have to become quite hard here and state that, if this is a truth, we have little right or reason for sadness and grief, for moral outrage and indignation, or for a claim of innocence in a society where all are guilty of damnable complicity with evil. How anyone could love another in this world is a gruesome testament to our ability to hold all our collective breaths, and noses, while standing defiantly in front of our father, God.

Again sorry for being quite direct. This came upon me with the truth of our fallen nature and its true depth of depravity. Though many of us may be proclaimed Christians or moral people, the truth of the matter is that the Christian society has long been replaced by the secular society and its doctrines in America. We have all been indoctrinated into secularism from our birth, and while we profess morality, our secular-bred assumptions silently lead our minds, tongues and toes in a direction that we refuse to admit as our true path of darkness; preferring to walk our hypocritical, public existence down the appearance of God's path, knowing all too well of its false ability to save us or the one's we love from the hammer of evil. Personally, and as an under-educated person in the arts of philosophy and sociology, to call out an efficient cause of this type of thinking, I would have to look into the Enlightenment Period of Western Man, the Reformation of his Christian church, and the resultant confusion that holds primacy in man's mind between the authoritative powers of physics and metaphysics.

I'll be returning to the Second-Person Relationship as God created it in my next post.

God Bless and Buen Camino – Reese

This contribution is available at <http://travelsOfANewChristian.com/2013/09/29/the-rights-of-evil-part-7/>
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On the Demise of the True Love of Friends in an Age of Lost Innocence [at Community in Mission]



One of the casualties of the sexual revolution has been the love that is friendship.

The Greek language has several different words for love. The love between friends is *phileo*, and is different from *eros* (physical, sensual love), *storge* (family love), and *agape* (selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love of God or another). Modern English sadly lacks such distinctions. However, in the past we were pretty well able to navigate the different types of love and not read inaccurate motivations into them.

But in this hypersexualized world our capacity to distinguish among them has largely been lost and “love” between two human beings is simply presumed to mean erotic attraction.

Consider the awkward moment that might well be generated if one man were to say of another “I love that guy!” Or if a man says to another as he punches him on the shoulder, “Love you, man!” Even two (blood) brothers are almost forbidden to say to each other “I love you.” These once-common expressions from men might today create an awkward moment at best, perhaps arousing suspicions of homosexuality or unwanted advances.

Women also suffer. Consider the following incident, related by Denise C. McAllister in a recent piece in *The Federalist*.

“Bye, I love you!” I said as I hung up the phone. My 15-year-old daughter was in the car at the time and asked who I was talking to. “My friend, Leslie, from Texas.” “A woman?” she said. “That’s just weird, mom.” I laughed. “No it’s not. She’s my friend and I do love her very much. Why shouldn’t I tell her that?” My daughter just shook her head and said, “It’s kinda gay, don’t you think?”

*“No, it’s not gay ... I have friends who captivate me with their beauty and intelligence. I tell them so. I tell them I think they’re beautiful and amazing. It’s nothing sexual. It’s *phileo*.”*

*“What’s *phileo*?” she asked. “It’s friendship love,” I explained. “It’s passionate, but not like erotic*

love. It's wonderful and stimulating. It's probably the best kind of love when you really experience it, but so few of us do." She shook her head again. "Mom, you're weird."

Ms. McAllister goes on to lament,

I guess I am kind of weird. I confess: I'm very passionate about my friends. But am I the abnormal one, or is there something wrong with our society? My daughter isn't unusual, and her response was pretty typical. Many people have that reaction to women who are passionate about their friends—and even more so for men!

Instead of friendship being noble, nonromantic, and normal, it has become the exception ... [Friendship love is] a kind of love we desperately need in our lives—passionate, nonsexual love.

Anthony Esolen, writing in his book [*Defending Marriage*](#), **expresses the same concern** regarding the demise of the love of friendship, but focuses more on its impact on men. Esolen begins by recalling the love of friendship between David and Jonathan in the Bible:

Your love to me was finer than the love of women," laments David in a public song, when he learns of the death of his friend Jonathan.

Observing that such language (quite common, normal, and non-homosexual in the past) today shocks people, Esolen then ponders,

How have we come to this pass? For corrupted language has driven out the natural. We no longer have words to describe these friendships, or even conceive of them ...

Friendship and the signs upon which it most subsist are in a bad way ... The sexual revolution has nearly killed male friendship ... beyond drinking and watching sports. (pp. 65-66)

He goes on to describe the mechanism by which hypersexualizing and "celebrating" aberrant sexual behavior has led to a loss of innocence. Once-innocent words and behaviors are now charged with meanings that are far from innocent; suspicion is everywhere. Esolen writes,

The bad behavior condoned is [now] suspected everywhere ... At the same time, the defiant promotion of homosexuality makes the natural and once powerful friendships among boys [and men] virtually impossible (p. 69).

Thus the libertine views meant to "free" a small minority of men to openly celebrate disordered sexual passions, restricts most other men and hinders their ability to even speak of the love of friendship let alone develop deep (non-sexual) male friendships. If they do develop such friendships, the result is often awkward and leads to many untoward suspicions. It is largely the same with women now as well.

Esolen proposes the following analogy:

Imagine a world where the taboo [of incest] has been broken, and is loudly and defiantly celebrated. [Now imagine] your wife's unmarried brother [putting] his hand on your daughter shoulder ... [or] a father hugging his teenaged daughter ... That gesture, once innocent, now means something (p. 63).

In a hypersexualized world, nothing is innocent. Denise McAllister makes the same point in her article and also adds some other causes:

The problem with our modern culture is friendship has been corrupted. C.S Lewis says it began with the age of sentimentality and romanticism ... with its return to nature and exaltation of sentiment, instinct, and the “dark gods in the blood.” ... A culture riding the wave of passion abandoned phileo for eros, and the effects on society have been devastating in ways people don’t begin to understand ...

Puritanism and Victorian sensibilities have also played a role in friendship’s decline. Puritanism put a damper on passions as if they are the seat of evil within the soul ... This tight control on feelings seeped into our culture, worsened by Victorian aloofness ... Posture, decorum, and propriety put space even in the most intimate associations ...

The sexual revolution, [is] a reaction to America’s puritanical attitudes. Everything became about sex, and this sexualization of our culture has become more intense over time. Just look at advertising ... Everything is about sex. We’re saturated with it.

The effect of these two warring attitudes—Puritanism and sexualization—has had a distorting effect on friendship. On the one hand, people don’t feel free to show emotions. On the other, when they do, those feelings are sexualized. The more friendship is misunderstood and ignored, the more people will identify as homosexual and bisexual.

The more we condition our perceptions in a sexual way and the more children are exposed to sex even before they develop meaningful friendships, the less likely they will be able to separate healthy nonsexual feelings from sexual ones. Sex will become the defining feature of all their feelings. Eros will have slain phileo (op. cit.).

Anthony Esolen agrees. While not excluding the issue among women his chapter focused more on men and he concludes:

On three Greek bonds of love all cultures depend: the love between man and woman in marriage; the love between a mother and her child; and the camaraderie among men, a bond that used to be strong enough to move mountains; the first two have suffered greatly; the third has almost ceased to exist ([op. cit.](#)).

The demise of friendship is serious; it has deprived many of us of one of the more essential ingredients for life. Friends are not the same as acquaintances. True friends know almost everything about each other. Friendship involves deep sharing, loyalty, honesty, and commitment.

The ancient philosophers often spoke of the love of friendship as being deeper and greater than romantic love. Romantic love (a love that our culture overemphasizes in relation to marriage) is rife with tension, elevated feelings, and quick resentments. It is complex to say the least. Friendship is often less tense, more honest, and less easily offended. Friends can often be powerfully truthful in ways that romantic lovers cannot. The ancient philosophers had some of this in mind when they spoke of the love of friendship in a very elevated way:

1. Seneca said, “Friendship always benefits; love sometimes injures.”
2. Euripides said, “Life has no blessing like a prudent friend.”

3. Plautus said, “Nothing but heaven itself is better than a friend who is really a friend.”
4. And speaking of the piercing truth of true friendship, Plutarch said, “I don’t need a friend who changes when I change and who nods when I nod; my shadow does that much better.”

Scripture praises friendship in places too numerous to mention, but here are just a few:

1. *Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man’s counsel is sweet to his friend (Prov 27:9).*
2. *A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity (Prov 17:17).*
3. *A man of many acquaintances may be ruined, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov 18:24).*
4. *Let those who are acquaintances to you be many, but one in a thousand your confidant ... Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price, no amount can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; those who fear God will find them. Those who fear the Lord enjoy stable friendship (Sir 6:6, 14-17).*

Do not underestimate the need to reestablish in our culture a healthy notion of friendship and the love of friends. As Anthony Esolen points out, strong, healthy, loyal friendships are a pillar of culture. Yet the demise of friendship and friendship love (*phileo*) is well-advanced today.

Some may object, saying, “That’s not true; I have lots of friends.” Perhaps you are an exception. But be clear that an acquaintance is not the same as a friend. A friend knows almost everything about you. A friend is someone with whom you can be yourself. A friend is able to affect the very core of your life through consolation and rebuke alike.

The loss of friendship and of our ability to speak openly of loving our friends is yet another way that the sexual revolution has wreaked havoc on us. Waving the banner of freedom, the revolution has actually eclipsed our freedom. By sexualizing almost everything, the revolution has sullied the innocence necessary to pursue rich, deep, satisfying non-sexual relationships.

Love is not a word that should be equated with sex. There were once many relationships that people spoke freely of as involving deep love and appreciation that had nothing to do with sex. In fact, the thought of sex even entering the minds of such friends would have been shocking and rejected with confusion or even revulsion.

We are not *more* free after the sexual revolution; we are *less* free. Expressing tenderness between friends and speaking of love between friends were both once possible with little or no fear of misunderstanding. In today’s hypersexualized world, they are met with cynicism and suspicion.

Here’s to friendship and the love of friendship, properly understood! Oh, how we miss you!

This contribution is available at <http://blog.adw.org/2016/01/on-the-demise-of-the-true-love-of-friends-in-an-age-of-lost-innocence/>
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Nick's First Two-Pointer [at God-Haunted Lunatic]

*I need help, ladies and gentlemens
I need someone to stand beside me
I need someone to set a pick for me
at the free-throw line of life
~ Cheech & Chong,*

“We want Nick to play on the 5th-grade team this year.”

Todd Mowers was speaking with my wife, Nancy, about our son Nicholas. Todd knew well that Nick has Down syndrome and would have difficulties on the court that the other boys wouldn't face. Still, he was adamant – along with his high-school son, Connor, who would be doing the actual coaching for the team and who went his dad one better. “I want Nicky on the team, and I'll start him every game,” Connor insisted.

Now, you have to understand that our Nicky is an athlete and a fiery competitor. In fact, he wants to play football for Notre Dame – and I'm not about to discourage him. On the other hand, because of his Down's related underdevelopment and delays, we know Nick's unlikely to make the cut. Still, nothing stops him from keeping up on the game, practicing outside with his brother Crispin, and competing on the electronic field thanks to [EA Sports](#). Nick's eager to get out there and mix it up.

Consequently, I'm embarrassed to say that it never occurred to me – or Nick – that he might play basketball for his [school](#). He prefers football, it's true, but he does enjoy shooting baskets in the backyard, and Crispin has drilled him in the basics. Even so, basketball sign-ups weren't even on our radar when the Mowers men approached us, and so I'm grateful that they could see Nick's potential and the contributions he'd make – and then acted on what they saw.

And that brings us a recent Saturday and Nick's first two-pointer in competition – an event worth celebrating for sure! Here it is, as recorded by our friend and fellow Nick-fan, Chris Quinn:

There are lots of videos showing kids with special needs making baskets and touchdowns and goals – and they're so inspiring! I think Nick's triumph is similarly inspiring, and Chris's rough-cut video highlights some key features that all such moving athletic accomplishments have in common.

1. *The coaches:* In Nick's video, you'll see Todd sitting on the bench, and his son, Connor, standing near the officials' table. Needless to say, this whole event wouldn't have taken place without their initiative and mentoring, and it's to their credit that they had a vision for their coaching well beyond merely winning games. Their cheers are totally for Nick, no question. Two more points was just a bonus. It's also noteworthy – and not so obvious on the replay – that the coach from the [opposing team](#) cheered as well. Apparently, just before Nick's basket, Todd briefly consulted with that other coach and pointed to my son. In other words, it was a conspiracy – everybody was in on it, both sides! It's edifying to see that a broader vision of coaching is not a rare commodity after all.
2. *The players:* The coaches' vision for Nick and the game was contagious it seems, and the players on

both sides picked up on it. Note in the video how they all kept playing, but at a modified pace to allow Nick to set up his shot. Special recognition goes here to Keegan Quinn, Chris's son and Nick's good buddy. Do you see how Keegan not only tosses Nick the ball, but also directs him to center court? And then – **swish!** – it's in! Keegan is first congratulate his pal, slapping him on the back as they run together to take up defensive positions. Even then, he's reaching out to Nick, reminding him of his assignment and offering encouragement.

3. *The referee*: The coaches? The players? Even from both sides? I get that. There's something about a kid like Nick that elicits goodness from people, and, frankly, what happened on the court that day is what you'd expect in a [Catholic sports league](#) – at least at the 5th-grade level anyway. But the ref, too? You'll see in the video where he gives Nicky a low five at the other



end of the court. Technically, that has to be some kind of violation of referee objectivity and decorum, right? Not here, though – and there's more. I was told after the game that even the ref was in on the set-up for Nick's shot – that it was even kind of his idea. I didn't have a chance to thank him, but I'm guessing that the sight of Nick's beaming face and fist pumps after the basket were plenty gratifying in themselves.

Coach Connor and his dad would deny that they had any extravagant motives in including Nicky on the team – that it was some kind of charitable exercise or good will gesture. Instead, it's clear that his welcome participation – to the degree that he's able – is in continuity with the solidarity that Nick has enjoyed from his [first days at our parish school](#), which is itself in continuity with the spirit of the Gospel. "We are able to live this journey not only *because of* others, but *together with* others," Pope Francis has [reminded](#) us. "In the Church there is no 'do it yourself,' there are no 'free agents.'" Put another way, assists are the norm – on court and off.

Go team!

To Honor the Innocents [at Theologyisaverb]



“When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”

Matthew 2:16-18

As Augustine noted these “infant martyr flowers”; they were the Church’s first blossoms, matured by the frost of persecution during the cold winter of unbelief”. In remembering them, I cannot help but also be reminded of the countless martyrs that have given their lives long after them.

This Christmas, Pope Francis spoke to the “brutal acts of terrorism, particularly the recent massacres which took place in Egyptian airspace, in Beirut, Paris, Bamako and Tunis. These are “our martyrs of today,” those brothers and sisters, he said, “who in many parts of the world are being persecuted for their faith...”

ABC News on Dec. 23, 2015 reports that Iraq’s Christian population has dropped from 1.3 million people in the 1997 census to about 650,000 now. Lebanon, who has taken on many of Syria’s refugees, is an area where according to the NY Times Christians in 1925 constituted 85% of the population now constitute less than a quarter. The recent bombings in Beirut and Paris, as well as the attacks in Mali, and Tunisia this November show little regard for unarmed or innocent citizens.

What can we do?

Pray and...work – with courage towards promoting change, real substantive change. This means having a goal that involves more than just eliminating Isis, for as history has proven, there are others that will merely step into their place. Looking at the underlying problems of poverty, unstable governments with recruitment of child soldiers, not to mention human and drug trafficking we see that there is fertile ground for violence. **Are we ready not just to fight but to witness God kingdom in the world? Are we prepared to get to the work of education, justice and peace?** Then, there is also a true need for dialogue, and reconciliation.

My mom, a high school math teacher in a very poor area of the south, understood this well. Her classes consisted of students who others had already given up on, those who were absent due to fights, arrests, drugs or early pregnancies. An expected typical day or life for a student, or child was not typical for them. Many were living the only life they knew, in cycles of violence, dependence and poverty where few had ever taken an interest in their potential. That is, before my mom. Meeting with students before and after school to mentor, she also created homework and make up for long extended absences and most importantly...let them know she cared. Years later, on innumerable occasions she would be stopped by a former student, all grown up who would tell her the difference she truly had made in their life.

Though a seemingly small step, these are the actions that each of us can do in promoting peace, and justice in our communities, in living out our faith with courage. In serving as spiritual mothers and fathers we too can nurture the children we encounter and give voice to Holy Innocents whose lives ended too soon.

Peace,

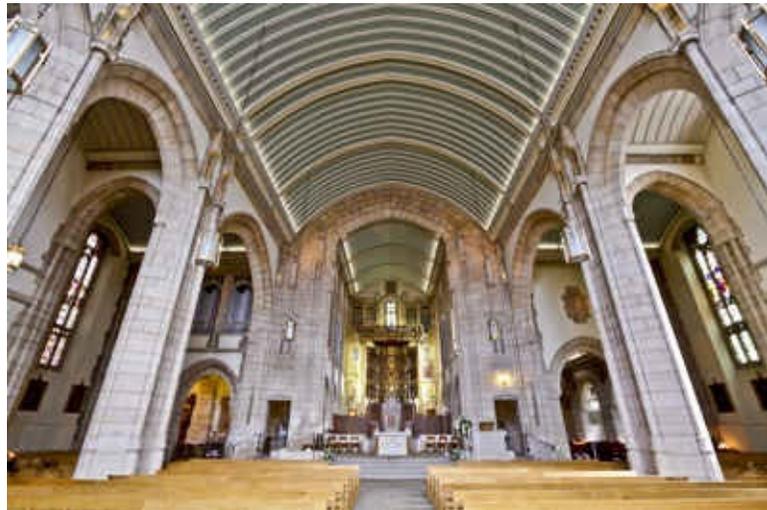
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'z'.

This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2015/12/28/to-honor-the-innocents/>
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The Christmas Spirit [at Miss Alexandrina]

[December 20, 2015](#) by [Alexandrina Brant](#) [Leave a comment](#)



I went to Mass in Leeds Cathedral this morning. It was a beautiful building (new to me, as I'm still learning about Leeds life) and an energising service to celebrate the last Sunday of Advent and Mary's Yes to the Lord. I've always loved the fact that John jumped in Elizabeth's womb when in Mary's presence – he recognises Christ even before he sees Him with his physical eyes, proving the power of the Holy Spirit extending even to the very very young.



The famous painting of Mary and Elizabeth, The Visitation by Mariotto Alberti

That's an incredible thought; and a greater blessing for those Christians who are expecting around this

time of the year.

This year in particular, I've not felt the most Christmas-y. I have never much overly enjoyed Christmas, simply because I've never overly enjoyed commercialism, and I feel that the older I get, the easier it is to see commercialism at every turn. Nevertheless, today, 5 days before the actual event of Christ's Nativity, I've finally started to feel the emotion and wonderment that is Christmas, the gathering of family and friends together to celebrate how much God loves us by giving us the greatest Gift.

Here is the Spirit Incarnate to come and save.

Even if you only enjoy Christmas for its holiday aspects, I wish you safety and comfort this December.

This contribution is available at <http://missalexandrinabrant.wordpress.com/2015/12/20/the-christmas-spirit/>
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New Year's Resolution: learning how to read again [at Mere Observations]

During a relaxing weekend at my in-law's farm in south central Nebraska I read an article in the San Francisco Chronicle online by Hugh McGuire that immediately caught my attention. Titled [Why can't we read anymore?](#) McGuire writes of his own frustrations regarding his inability to concentrate long enough to read more than four books last year.

The reasons for that low number are, I guess, the same as your reasons for reading fewer books than you think you should have read last year: I've been finding it harder and harder to concentrate on words, sentences, paragraphs. Let alone chapters. Chapters often have page after page of paragraphs.

It just seems such an awful lot of words to concentrate on, on their own, without something else happening. And once you've finished one chapter, you have to get through another one. And usually a whole bunch more, before you can say "finished," and get to the next. The next book. The next thing. The next possibility. Next, next, next.

The irony of this sad fact is that McGuire's professional life revolves around books. He started [LibriVox](#) and [Pressbooks](#) and co-edited a book about the future of books called [Book: A Futurist's Manifesto: A Collection of Essays from the Bleeding Edge of Publishing](#).

So he knows books. Just can't read them. And he's not alone.

So what does McGuire think has caused his frustration and shorter attention span? The same thing most of us do: our connectivity to the Internet through our smartphones.

Most nights last year, I got into bed with a book — paper or electronic — and started. Reading. One word after the next. A sentence. Two sentences.

Maybe three.

And then ... I needed just a little something else. Something to tide me over. Something to scratch that little itch at the back of my mind — just a quick look at e-mail on my iPhone; to write, and erase, a response to a funny tweet from William Gibson; to find, and follow, a link to a really good article in the New Yorker. E-mail again, just to be sure.

[snip]

I find myself in these kinds of situations often, checking e-mail or Facebook, with nothing to gain except the stress of a work-related message that I can't answer right now in any case.

It makes me feel vaguely dirty, reading my phone with my daughter doing something wonderful right next to me, like I'm sneaking a cigarette.

Or a crack pipe.

Once I was reading on my phone while my older daughter, 4 years old, was trying to talk to me. I didn't quite hear what she had said. I was reading an article about North Korea. She grabbed my face in her two hands, pulled me toward her. "Look at me," she said, "when I'm talking to you."

She is right. I should.

You really should read it all.

As I read this (ironically, on my smartphone) I was laying on the couch digesting the third large holiday meal in 24 hours sitting amongst friends and family that we only get to see a few times a year if we're lucky. Among these was my oldest son enjoying his first visit home in ten months. Yet here we were, half of us with our faces lost in the soft glow of our smart screens (the other half were out cold, sleeping off the roast beast).

I've been a reader all of my life, but most especially for the last twenty-five years. But even I have to admit that during the last 2-3 years I've noticed a large slowing down in my ability to read. I do most of my reading at the end of my day and have experienced the same frustrations as McGuire. It is taking me much longer to get through a book. Or, more likely, I begin a book only to lose interest a third or halfway through because it is taking forever for me to read. I've got two stacks next to my bed: those books I want to begin, and those books I've started but have not finished. The second pile has grown as large as the first.

At first I attributed this to my tendency to read books that, to be honest, might be a little above my pay grade. Theology, philosophy...stuff that should take you some time to digest. To test this theory out I picked two books to read during Advent: [Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives](#) by Pope Benedict XVI (144 pages) and [The Christmas Box](#) by Richard Paul Evans (125 pages). Both are smallish books and similar in size and typesetting. After two nights of struggling with Pope Benedict's book I set it aside and opened Evans' short story. I finished it in 4-5 nights. There was a time when I would have finished it in two (and in fact I read it in one night when I first received it as a gift in 1995.)

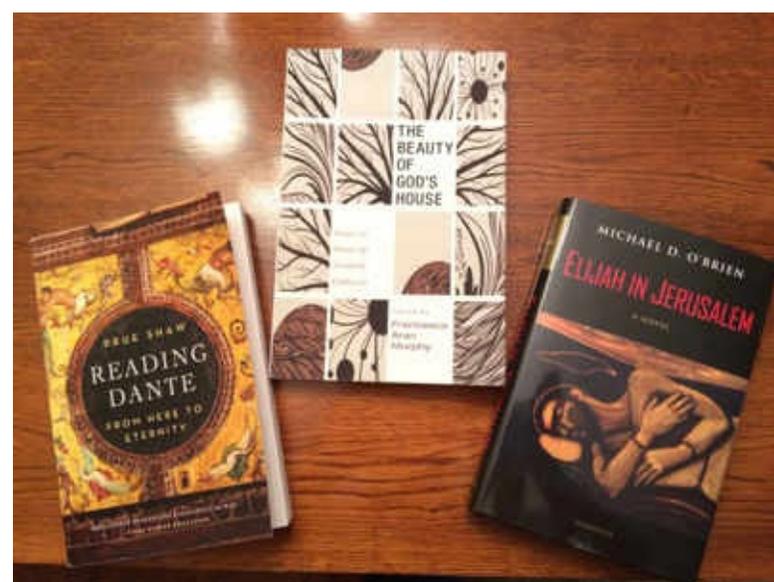
Is any of this scientific or definitive? No. Yet I have been feeling for quite some time that my time spent flipping through tiny screens devouring and re-devouring facts, opinions and information has diminished my ability to concentrate. But I also do not like the social effects of a group of people, especially family, sitting in the same room but otherwise disconnected. This has also attributed to my very sporadic writing/blogging this year. I just can't seem to pull my thoughts together in an organized manner. It got to the point where I am undecided on whether to continue or not with the frustration of doing something that used to come so easily to me.

So what to do?

For one, Twitter is no longer accessible on my phone. This means I'll probably rarely check use Twitter at all as I tend to shy away from it on my laptop at the office. This was a hard choice because the bulk of the best articles I discover and read I find on Twitter (like McGuire's). Facebook remains, but I'm setting a timer on my phone to limit the minutes I spend on Facebook's screens. I've also resolved to cut back even further on television. After cutting cable off two years ago I find that I've replaced it with an endless streaming of Netflix or Amazon Prime. Rather self-defeating.

My stack of books right now consists of around ten, a few of them rather smallish. The ones I'm most

interested in finishing are the following:



A book nerd's Christmas present

I've already written of how much joy I'm getting out of *Wisdom from the Monastery*. I am really looking forward to reading the other four. Several months ago I had sent an email to my family stating that all I wanted for Christmas was a book from that list of three pictured above. I stated my reasons why and listed them at the top of my Amazon Wish List to make it easier for them. On Christmas morning before Mass I opened my present and found all three. Book nerd ecstasy.

I have begun to read books containing essays for whatever reason. I've begun (but alas, not finished) books containing essays by Chesterton, Joseph Pearce and Jay Nordlinger. But the beauty of those books is that you do not have to finish them all at once. They are usually disconnected essays of varying subjects so you can take your time. Stratford Caldecott was a favorite author whose writing I very much enjoyed before he was taken too soon by cancer a few years ago. What better essays than those on beauty by his friends as tribute?

Inspired by my reading of Rod Dreher's book *How Dante Can Save Your Life* this past autumn I've decided to dedicate 2016 primarily to the reading and journaling Dante's *Divine Comedy*, some of which may wind up posted on this blog. Dreher recommended a few books, Shaw's among them, so I'm excited to get started and began to read it while on the farm last weekend.

Elijah in Jerusalem is the long-awaited sequel to O'Brien's first novel *Father Elijah* (1997). I hadn't read that book in almost fifteen years so I re-read it in November. O'Brien has become my favorite author and I own all of his books. *Island of the World* remains perhaps my all-time favorite novel. Although it had been many years between readings I rediscovered why I'd enjoyed it so much the first time. In 2005 O'Brien wrote a prequel, *Sophia House*, and I haven't decided whether I'll pull it from my shelves to read before diving into *Elijah in Jerusalem* or not.

These are the books I'm committed to reading in 2016. While I know I'll read more, my goal is to read these five for sure and drastically cut back on my "started-but-not-finished" pile. So I'm going to tackle the problem of my "digital dopamine" hits on my brain and utilize the strategy successfully employed by McGuire:

No more Twitter, Facebook, or article reading during the workday (hard).

No reading of random news articles (hard).

No smartphones or computers in the bedroom (easy).

No TV after dinner (it turns out, easy).

Instead, go straight to a quiet room or to bed, and start reading a book — usually on an e-reader (it turns out, easy). The shocking thing was how quickly my mind adapted to accommodate reading books again. I had expected to fight for that concentration — but I didn't have to fight. With less digital input (no pre-bed TV, especially), extra time (no TV, again), and without a tempting digital device near at hand ... there was time and space for my mind to settle into a book.

What a wonderful feeling it was.

I can't wait.

For more information on Michael O'Brien, read [The Urgency of this Present Moment: Learning from C.S. Lewis and Michael O'Brien](#). It is an interview with Rev. John Morrison, an Episcopal priest who is also a retired English teacher, speaker and author. Do not let the titles such as Father Elijah scare you into thinking he writes books of simple-minded religious twaddle. All the great themes regarding humanity are within his books. *A Father's Tale* is another favorite. You would be doing yourself a grave disservice to dismiss him so easily. It's been five years since I last read *Island of the World*. I'm adding it to my list in 2016. You should too.

This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2015/12/30/new-years-resolution-learning-how-to-read-again/>
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Padre Pio's Christmas Meditation [at The Shield of Faith]

I have been enjoying Jeanette Salerno's newest book,

[Padre Pio's Christmases](#)

, a delightful collection of factual encounters with Padre Pio and the Baby Jesus. The book also includes my translation of St. Pio's Christmas Meditation, which appears in the Italian edition of Volume IV of the letters of the saint. Jeanette and I thought it would be appropriate to blog this beautiful rendition of the Christmas story, so that the lessons Padre Pio delineates can bring joy, comfort and light to as many people as possible.

Far into the night, at the coldest time of the year, in a chilly grotto, more suitable for a flock of beasts than for humans, the promised Messiah – Jesus – the savior of mankind, comes into the world in the fullness of time. There are none who clamor around him: only an ox and an ass lending their warmth to the newborn infant; with a humble woman, and a poor and tired man, in adoration beside him.

Nothing can be heard except the sobs and whimpers of the infant God. And by means of his crying and weeping he offers to the Divine justice the first ransom for our redemption.

He had been expected for forty centuries; with longing sighs the ancient Fathers had implored his arrival. The sacred scriptures clearly prophesy the time and the place of his birth, and yet the world is silent and no one seems aware of the great event. Only some shepherds, who had been busy watching over their sheep in the meadows, come to visit him. Heavenly visitors had alerted them to the wondrous event, inviting them to approach his cave.



Padre Pio carrying a statue of the Infant Jesus at Christmas

So plentiful, O Christians, are the lessons that shine forth from the grotto of Bethlehem! Oh how our hearts should be on fire with love for the one who with such tenderness was made flesh for our sakes! Oh how we should burn with desire to lead the whole world to this lowly cave, refuge of the King of kings, greater than any worldly palace, because it is the throne and dwelling place of God! Let us ask this Divine child to clothe us with humility, because only by means of this

virtue can we taste the fullness of this mystery of Divine tenderness.

Glittering were the palaces of the proud Hebrews. Yet, the light of the world did not appear in one of them. Ostentatious with worldly grandeur, swimming in gold and in delights, were the great ones of the Hebrew nation; filled with vain knowledge and pride were the priests of the sanctuary. In opposition to the true meaning of Divine revelation, they awaited an officious savoir, who would come into the world with human renown and power.

But God, always ready to confound the wisdom of the world, shatters their plans. Contrary to the expectations of those lacking in Divine wisdom, he appears among us in the greatest abjection, renouncing even birth in St. Joseph's humble home, denying himself a modest abode among relatives and friends in a city of Palestine. Refused lodging among men, he seeks refuge and comfort among mere animals, choosing their habitation as the place of his birth, allowing their breath to give warmth to his tender body. He permits simple and rustic shepherds to be the first to pay their respects to him, after he himself informed them, by means of his angels, of the wonderful mystery.

Oh wisdom and power of God, we are constrained to exclaim – enraptured along with your Apostle – how incomprehensible are your judgments and unsearchable your ways! Poverty, humility, abjection, contempt, all surround the Word made flesh. But we, out of the darkness that envelops the incarnate Word, understand one thing, hear one voice, perceive one sublime truth: you have done everything out of love, you invite us to nothing else but love, speak of nothing except love, give us naught except proofs of love.



The heavenly babe suffers and cries in the crib so that for us suffering would be sweet, meritorious and accepted. He deprives himself of everything, in order that we may learn from him the renunciation of worldly goods and comforts. He is satisfied with humble and poor adorers, to encourage us to love poverty, and to prefer the company of the little and simple rather than the great ones of the world.

This celestial child, all meekness and sweetness, wishes to impress in our hearts by his example these sublime virtues, so that from a world that is torn and devastated an era of peace and love may spring forth. Even from the moment of his birth he reveals to us our mission, which is to scorn that which the world loves and seeks.

Oh let us prostrate ourselves before the manger, and along with the great St. Jerome, who was enflamed with the love of the infant Jesus, let us offer him all our hearts without reserve. Let us promise to follow the precepts which come to us from the grotto of Bethlehem, which teach us that everything here below is vanity of vanities, nothing but vanity.

The Mystery of Godliness [at Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman]



Tonight we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” The Incarnation is the great mystery that reveals God’s wonderful love for mankind.

In this sermon from the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* Newman draws from texts throughout the Scriptures to describe Jesus the Son of God, foretold in the prophets and revealed in the flesh.

He begins commenting a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews: “Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Heb. ii. 11.

As He was born, so are we born also; and since He was born, therefore we too are born. As He is the Son of God by nature, so are we sons of God by grace; and it is He who has made us such. This is what the text says; He is the “Sanctifier,” we the “sanctified.” Moreover, He and we, says the text, “are all of one.” God sanctifies the Angels, but there the Creator and the creature are not of one. But the Son of God and we are of one; He has become “the firstborn of every creature;” He has taken our nature, and in and through it He sanctifies us. He is our brother by virtue of His incarnation, and, as the text says, “He is not ashamed to call us brethren;” and, having sanctified our nature in Himself, He communicates it to us.

After the fall of Adam the birth of a Savior was prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah and later in Genesis. And at last it was announced by an angel to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to St. Joseph. To Mary the angel says: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” [Matt. i. 20, 21. Luke i. 28-35.]

Newman comments:

This is the great Mystery which we are now celebrating, of which mercy is the beginning, and sanctity the end: according to the Psalm, “Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” He who is all purity came to an impure race to raise them to His purity. He, the brightness of God’s glory, came in a body of flesh, which was pure and holy as Himself, “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish;” and this He did for our sake, “that we might be partakers of His holiness.”

He continues, insisting as at the beginning of the sermon, that through the Incarnation God communicated his divine life to our human nature:

He came in that very nature of Adam, in order to communicate to us that nature as it is in His Person, that “our sinful bodies might be made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious

Blood;” to make us partakers of the Divine nature; to sow the seed of eternal life in our hearts; and to raise us from “the corruption that is in the world through lust,” to that immaculate purity and that fulness of grace which is in Him.

In the rest of the sermon Newman narrates the life and redemptive death of Jesus and invites us to meditate on the mystery with wonder and gratitude:

Let us at this season approach Him with awe and love, in whom resides all perfection, and from whom we are allowed to gain it. Let us come to the Sanctifier to be sanctified. Let us come to Him to learn our duty, and to receive grace to do it. At other seasons of the year we are reminded of watching, toiling, struggling, and suffering; but at this season we are reminded simply of God’s gifts towards us sinners. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” We are reminded that we can do nothing, and that God does everything. This is especially the season of grace. We come to see and to experience God’s mercies.

Pope Francis has just led the Church into the celebration of a Year of Mercy. In the Season of Christmas we will begin to fathom God’s mercy with his children. And in doing so we will grow in desires to imitate the holiness of his Son. In this light Blessed Newman closes his sermon bidding us: “May each Christmas, as it comes, find us more and more like Him, who as at this time became a little child for our sake, more simple-minded, more humble, more holy, more affectionate, more resigned, more happy, more full of God.”

This contribution is available at <http://www.cardinaljohnhenrynewman.com/the-mystery-of-godliness/>
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Remarkable Dip in Millennials' Views of Church [at Patheos]

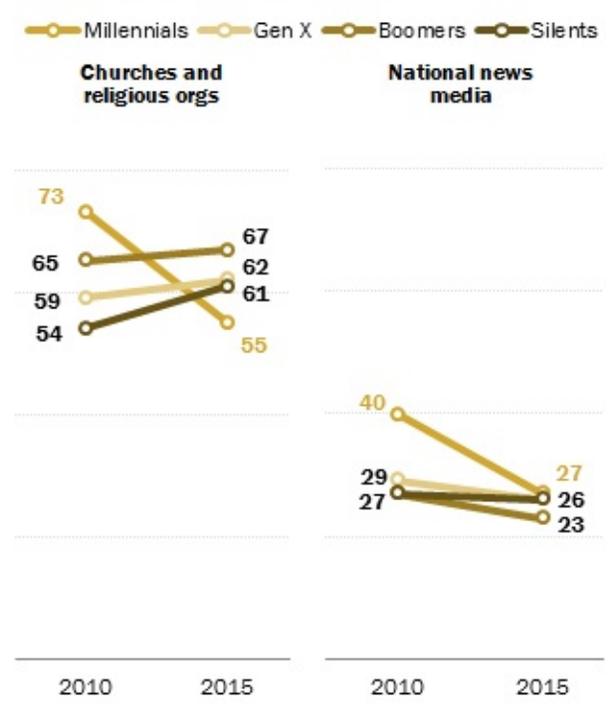
*When confusion's my companion
And despair holds me for ransom
I will feel no fear
I know that You are near
--For King and Country*

[A new study by Pew Charitable Trust](#) reveals that only 55 percent of Millennials believe church has a positive impact on the United States of America. Just five years ago, in 2010, that number was 73 percent. What do you think has led to the astonishing 18 percentage-point decline?

The following graphics were published along with a report. (Creative Commons License applies.)

Millennials' ratings of news media, religious organizations decline

% who say _____ has a positive effect on the way things are going in this country today ...



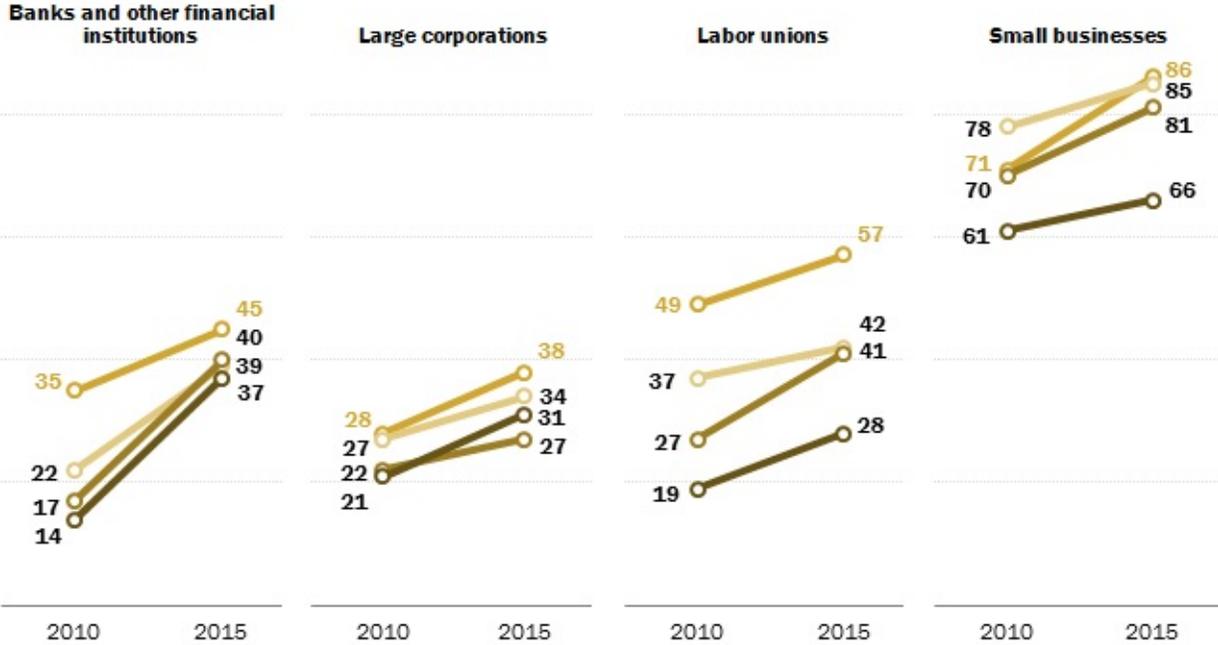
Source: Survey conducted Aug. 27-Oct. 4, 2015.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Views of banks, large corporations, small businesses improve since 2010

% who say _____ have a positive effect on the way things are going in this country today ...

Millennials Gen X Boomers Silents

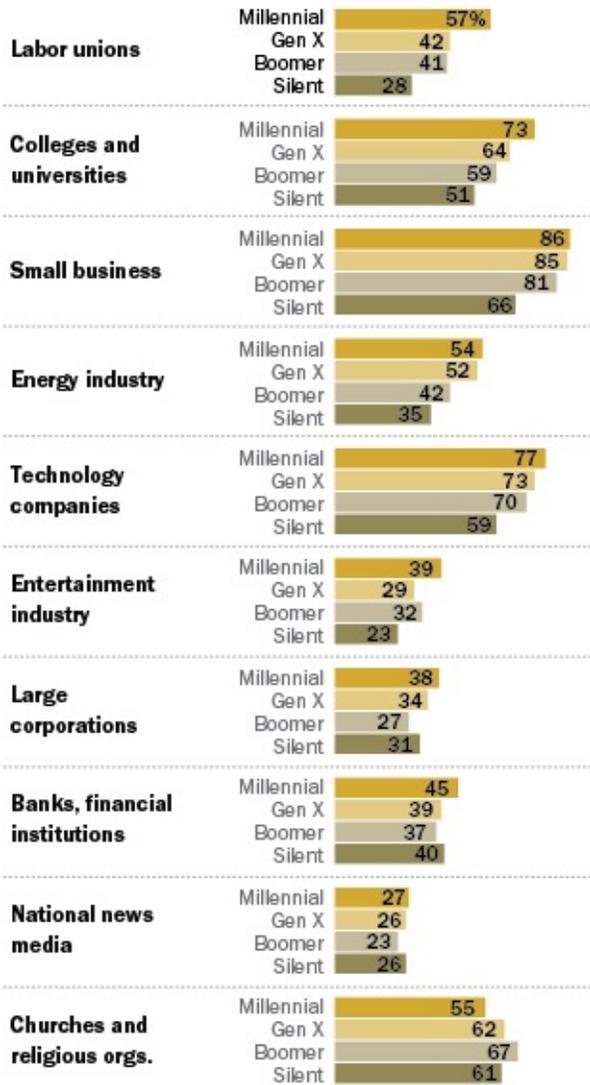


Source: Survey conducted Aug. 27-Oct. 4, 2015.

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Generational differences in views of key institutions

% who say ___ has a positive effect on the way things are going in this country today ...

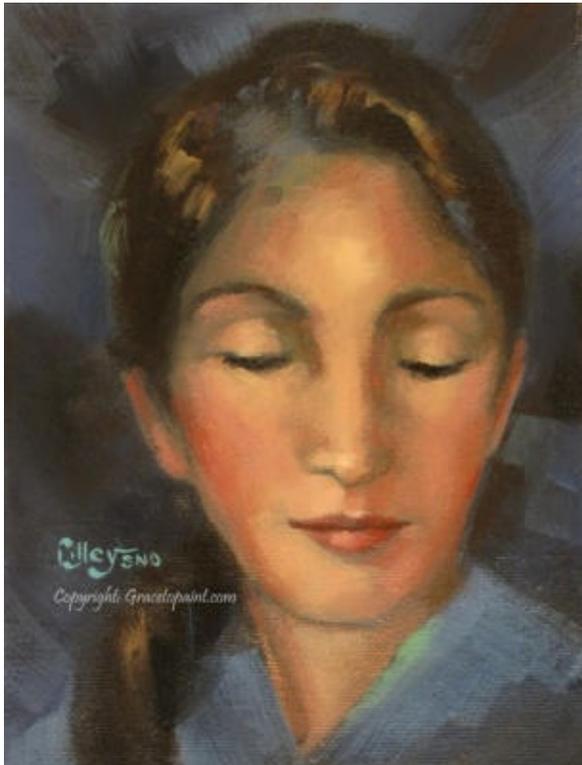


Source: Survey conducted Aug. 27-Oct. 4, 2015.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jenx/2016/01/remarkable-dip-in-millennials-views-of-church.html>
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Theotokos (Mother of God) [at Grace to Paint]



6×8" oil paint on canvas sheet; use "comment" below to inquire.

She was a daughter of Israel, but all of heaven waited on her response: "Fiat" (Let it be). While much of the world celebrates the First Day of the New Year, the Church also celebrates the Solemnity of the Mother of God as the first Feastday of the New Year.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2015/12/31/theotokos-mother-of-god/>
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Latin Mass Serving Role: The Acolytes



Editor's Disclaimer: As always, what is stated here is not the be all and end all for Latin Mass Serving. In addition, priests or parishes may have some slight variations on what they do for the minutia of the actual Mass. This may include a slightly different vestment setup, what is laid out on the altar, order of building the Chalice, etc. Always consult the priest/parish instructor for that.

In addition, this guide will cover the role of Acolyte as done for Missa Cantata level Masses and Higher. For information on how to serve as acolyte for low level Masses, please consult my Solo serving guide, and my Low Mass for two servers guide. This guide will NOT cover Eucharistic processions.

Brief Statistics

Plays a Role in What Level Masses? All levels of the Latin Mass. Even in a solo Latin Mass, the server is traditionally termed, the "acolyte."

How Many? In low Mass, there can be up to two acolytes, though there is one most of the time. In the Missa Cantata/High Mass and higher, while all servers are acolytes so to speak, the formal position is given only to two servers.

What parts of the Mass is the acolyte featured? The entrance procession, the foot of the altar (Low Mass), the preparation for the Gospel, the Gospel, the Offertory, possibly certain parts of the Mass of the Canons post-offertory, the Sanctus (if substituting for a torchbearer), the consecrations of the Sacred

Species, Communion (receiving and possibly being paten bearers), exit processions.

Relative time to master the role? Sufficient time to master. Regardless whether one starts out with Low Masses, or High/Solemn Masses, it will take time to be proficient in your role. In addition, most groups/parishes will NOT thrust an inexperienced server into this role for their first few Masses, even if server training is done for all roles in a group setting.

Introduction to the Role of the Acolyte

In the general context of the Church, regardless of the form of the Latin Rite, the altar server is traditionally termed, the "acolyte." While this term has been generally disused in modern Novus Ordo writings and server instruction, due to a desire not to offend female servers, and/or general modernist/feminist tendencies, all altar servers in the Mass are still termed acolytes.

In the context of the Latin Mass/Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, the acolytes are designated (or visibly seen) in nearly the same way as they function in the Novus Ordo, via certain actions: They hold their tall candles in processions and at the gospel beside "Christ" (e.g. Crucifix or the Book of the Gospels), they assist the priest at the offertory with the unconsecrated species (wine/water and ciboria with bread,) and water ablutions, and possibly other duties not exclusive to the crucifer, boat-bearer, and thurifer, though they might substitute those servers' duties in certain cases when they are not present, or the master of ceremonies cannot perform such duties.

By the time you, as a server, take on this role in a higher level Mass, you likely have served a number of Masses, whether be they higher level, or the simple Low Mass. Should your parish/group start you with Low Masses, you will gain the requisite skills for this position in higher Masses via the Low Mass. In my personal opinion, one should also be able at this point to say all the Latin responses in the Mass the public/servers are to give. In fact, if you serve the Low Masses, you MUST do it as a server.

A Brief Scriptural Overview of Serving, Relevant to the Position of Acolyte

It is best to start with understanding your role, via examining where in Scripture one can see serving and/or the usage of the symbolism of "light" are present.

Serving/Servitude

We can begin by looking at the word, acolyte. According to Wikipedia, (

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acolyte>

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he word "acolyte" would have been in Latin acolythus, which is derived from the Greek word ἀκόλουθος (akolouthos), meaning an attendant. This could also be translated as a follower. When one looks at the Bible in Greek, Ἀκολουθεῖ is used for the command, "Follow!" In serving Christ, we are asked, even commanded, to follow him. Christ does this on numerous occasions, for example, in **John 1:43 (DR)**, he tells Philip to follow him, making him one of the Disciples. So, in essence, one who is an

acolyte, follows Christ.

Service also appears in the Miracle of the Feeding of the 5000. In that miracle, it was a young boy who brought up 5 loaves and 2 fish to the Lord. This example is referred to in the old Latin Mass serving program, the "Knights of the Altar."(see here:

<http://www.sanctamissa.org/en/serving/knights-of-the-altar.pdf>

) One can think of the acolyte(s) bringing the sacred species (bread in ciboria when needed, and the cruets) in retrospect, with which the miracle of "feeding" is performed, though in the miracle it is literal, whereby on the altar is is divine via the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Passover Seder demonstrates some Scriptural References with regard to serving the Lord and helping prepare in the Seder, which Christ instituted the Mass. For example, In

Matthew 26: 17-19

, the disciples help prepare the Seder for the Lord: "....

And on the first day of the Azymes ... Jesus said: Go ye into the city ... the disciples did as Jesus appointed to them: and they prepared the pasch.

" This is also accounted for in

Mark 14

,

Luke 22

(where it's revealed Simon Peter and John were the two Disciples sent out, interesting as they are key players in the Church's history: John for being at Christ's side the whole time, and Peter for being our first Pope).

Further, the pivotal passage of "servitude" that is exemplified by our Lord, is that of

John 13: 4-17,

whereby after Christ demonstrates for all of us (Douay-Reims)

: "14 If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, : you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also. 16 Amen, Amen, I say to you: The servant is not greater than his lord: neither is the apostle greater than he that sent him. 17 If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them.

"

Other Passages that refer to Serving include:

- **John 12:26 (Douay-Reims, herein DR:)** "*If any man minister to me, let him follow me: and where I am, there also shall my minister be. If any man minister to me, him will my Father honour.* "
- **Revelations/Apocalypse 7:14-15 (DR):** "*.... These are they, who are come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, they are before the throne of God: and they serve him day and night in his temple. And he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell over them*"
 - Does this not remind you of something, server? While the language is symbolic of souls and sinning, your vestment prayers you say before donning the surplice and Cassock, allude to such imagery in the prayers of being made a new man in the service of the Lord.

Light in Scripture

Because the main "tool" that identifies the acolyte is his acolyte's candle, he is, in essence, a bearer of light. Thus one should examine some passages of note where in Scripture light is presented to us. Of the many present to us, we should have these in mind when considering the acolyte's position:

Matthew 5:14-16 (DR):

"

*You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, **but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house.** So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*

." This is part of the rite of investiture of acolytes in the Extraordinary Form.

Revelations/Apocalypse 1:12-13:

"

And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks. 13 And in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like to the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

" One can see that in the Mass, Revelation`s reference correlate significantly with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Luke 2:29-32 (DR, The Canticle of Simeon):

"

Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace: 30 Because my eyes have seen thy salvation 31 which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: 32 A light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.

" This is part of the Feast of Candlemas/Purification, said during the portion whereby the candles are to be distributed and blessed. However, Simeon in this is clearly referring to Christ as the light for all

peoples.

MOST IMPORTANTLY,

JOHN 8:12 (DR): "... *Jesus spoke to them, saying: I am the light of the world. He that followeth me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

" When one thinks of how the acolyte's candles surround the deacon/priest with the Book of the Gospels at the Gospel, is it not Christ, being the Word Made Flesh, through His Written Word which is Scripture, is giving us that which is the Good News, our salvation?

History of the Position of the Acolyte (including Candles/Light)

While the usage of candles/lights in religious ceremonies can date back to those of ancient cultures, where it comes into play with the position of acolyte can possibly be traced back to Roman and Jewish tradition and/or ritual. Candles were used by the Ancients as a mark of respect to civil functionaries. In the Roman Empire, some officials were accompanied by attendants with tapers. (2,

Candles in the Roman Rite

). In the Jewish Ritual, there was a lamp of 7 candles that stood before the Holy of Holies in the temple, and each synagogue had a lamp that was never extinguished (2-3, *ibid.*)

Lights were not part of Christian/Catholic worship for a number of its first few centuries. A possible starting point might have been in the fifth century (400-500 AD) in the Eastern churches as St. Jerome noted that in the East, lights are lit when the Gospel was to be read, giving a visible sign of joy (5, *ibid.*). Where this would eventually slip into Western tradition, leading into the current history of the Roman Rite/Latin Mass, would be in that same century. St. Jerome noted that in his lifetime, lights came into major Sacramental liturgies or parts of them (e.g. Eucharist, Ordinations, Baptism), and the Feast of the Purification (a.k.a. Candlemas) became instituted in the Catholic Church. (6-7 *ibid.*)

As for the position of Acolyte itself, it is generally agreed upon that young men were brought into this position, expected to progress and become ordained clergy of the Church. I currently cannot find out when this practice started to occur. Eventually, it became part of what is the Minor Orders of the Church, those being porter (doorman), exorcist, lector, and acolyte. These orders were given gradually to men who entered into the seminary to become priests. In societies/institutes in the Church with mandate or mission to carry out the Roman Rite in the Extraordinary Form (e.g. Fraternal Society of St. Peter; Institute of Christ the King, Sovereign Priest ...), these minor orders still exist, including that of acolyte, including formal investiture via a liturgical ceremony.

In today's modern times, while there are still

instituted acolytes

via the EF priestly orders, there is a Novus Ordo equivalent that when a seminarian progresses through the seminary at a certain point, they obtain this "order" via investiture in a Mass. While this is the 2nd edition of the Roman Missal (70's printing),

[here](#)

is an example of the ordo for that investiture. This process of the Minor Orders was changed by Paul VI in his Motu Proprio

[Ministeria Quaedam](#)

. Even rarer, some dioceses have formal institution for lectors and acolytes for the laity, should one follow the instructions of the Motu Proprio, such as seen

[here](#)

with an archdiocese in the United States.

However, in today`s Church, most of the time the "acolyte's roles" are done by youth and adult altar servers and trained internally. These "acolytes" are

commissioned

, that is NOT formally instituted by the Church, but trained in the functions of the role for the purposes of serving Mass.

Symbolism of the Position of the Acolyte

The symbolism of the position of Acolyte is best discerned from the formal investiture rite used for the minor order, by Extraordinary Form orders/societies. If you have read my other posts, you would have seen this in the Torch Bearer post, as the symbolism of light was gleaned from the rite. This time, we look at the Acolyte specifically, and the rite will be displayed in full.

De Ordinitorium Acolythorum

-
The Ordination of Acolytes

THE ORDINATION OF ACOLYTES.

After the ordination of the Exorcists, the Bishop returns to the Missal and reads the versicle after the third lesson; then he reads the fourth prayer and the fourth lesson. He then sits with his mitre on. The Acolytes are called by the Archdeacon.

"Let those who are to be ordained to the office of Acolyte come forward.

The names are then called by the Notary. When they are on their knees before him, the Bishop admonishes them saying:

"Dearly beloved children who are about to receive the office of Acolyte, weigh well what you take upon yourselves.

For it is the duty of the Acolyte to carry the candlestick, to light the lights of the church, and to minister wine and water for the Eucharist. Strive, therefore, worthily to fulfill the office once you have received it

For you shall not be able to please God, if, carrying in your hands a light before him, you serve the works of darkness,

and thereby set an example of faithfulness to others.

But as Truth says: "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven." And as the Apostle Paul says: "In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation shine as light in the world, holding forth the word of life." "Therefore let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands, that you may be children of the light."

Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

''

"For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light."

What that light is upon which the Apostle so much insists, he himself points out, adding: "for the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and justice, and truth." B

e, therefore, solicitous, in all justice and goodness and truth, to enlighten yourselves and others and the Church of God. For then will you worthily supply wine and water in the Divine Sacrifice, when, by a chaste life, and good works, you shall have offered yourselves as a sacrifice to God. Which may the Lord grant you through His mercy. After this the Bishop takes a candlestick with an unlighted candle and presents it to all, each in turn touching it with his right hand, while the Bishop says:

"Receive the candlestick with the candle and know that you are bound to the lighting of the lights of the church, in the name of the Lord.

R.

Amen.

Then he takes an empty cruet and presents it to them, which likewise they touch, while he says to all:

"RECEIVE the cruet for ministering wine and water for the Eucharist of the Blood of Christ, in the name of the Lord." R. Amen.

Afterwards, they remain kneeling and the Bishop standing, with his mitre on, turns towards them and says:

Dearly beloved brethen, let us humbly beseech God the Father Almighty, to vouchsafe to bless

+

these His servants for the Order of Acolyte,

so that bearing before themselves a visible light in their hands, they may also show forth in their conduct a spiritual light

. We beg this through the assistance of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with Him and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth God, world without end.

R.

Amen.

Then the Bishop turning towards the altar and stand-ing with his mitre off, says

: "Let us pray."

And the ministers :

"Let us bend our knees."

R

. Arise.

Then the Bishop turning towards those who, have been ordained, who are still kneeling, says:

O holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, Who,

through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord and His Apostles didst send the light of Thy glory into this world,

and Who, in order to blot out the

ancient handwriting of our death, didst will that He should be nailed to the standard of the most glorious cross, and

that blood and water should flow from His side for the salvation of the human race,

vouchsafe to bless

+

these Thy servants for the office of Acolyte, so that

in lighting the lights of Thy Church, and in presenting the wine and water for the consecration of the Blood of Christ in the Eucharistic oblation they may faithfully minister at Thy holy altars.

Inflame, O Lord, their minds and hearts with the love of Thy grace, so that,

illuminated by the sight of Thy splendor, they may faithfully serve Thee in Holy Church.

Through the same Christ our Lord.

R.

Amen.

Let us pray. O holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, Who didst speak to Moses and Aaron, and tell them to light the lamps in the tabernacle of the Testimony, vouchsafe to bless + these Thy servants, that they may be Acolytes in Thy Church. Through Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

Let us pray. O almighty, Eternal God, Fountain of light and Source of goodness, Who through **Jesus Christ Thy Son, the true Light, didst illumine, and, by the mystery of His Passion, didst redeem the world,** vouchsafe to bless + these Thy servants, whom we consecrate for the office of Acolyte, beseeching Thy clemency to **illumine their minds with the light of knowledge, and water them with the dew of Thy piety,** that, with Thine aid they may so fulfill the ministry which they have received as to deserve to attain to an everlasting reward. Through the same Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

After this, by direction of the Archdeacon, those who have been ordained return to their places.

(23-27,

Ritus Ordinandi)

Hence, what we have here from the rite of instituted acolyte, a number of symbol-isms of the role, aside from the physical tasks of holding candles and bringing up gifts:

- In the first paragraph/the bishop's admonishment,
 - It is clear that the acolytes are not just servants, they are **leaders**, as they set the example in their servitude to the Lord, how one must conduct themselves with our Lord. Do not forget that lay servers represent the people when they are on the altar.
 - Their "actions" on the altar, represent YOUR actions both physically and spiritually, with which you should conduct yourself, that your good works glorify our Heavenly Father.
 - In their service, representing the people, you are demonstrating a turning away from the sinful acts of self, to those acts of the Lord and being made anew in his Light.
- After handing the candidates the empty candle and cruet, as plain as can be seen,
 - you ``... **bearing before [yourselves] a visible light in [your] hands, ... show forth in [your]**

conduct a spiritual light.]

- Further on, the bishop mentions that Christ send HIS light into the world. that blotted out the penalty of our death (thanks to Adam, a penalty of Original Sin). More light symbolism.
- Once he speaks to the kneeling instituted acolytes
 - The water and wine is mentioned. That which you carry up to the altar, represents the water and blood which was shed from his side during his crucifixion. This blood and water flowed from his as part of Him saving the human race from their spiritual punishment and opening the gates to Heaven
 - More light symbolism related to your candles: "... Jesus Christ Thy Son, the true Light, didst illumine, and, by the mystery of His Passion, didst redeem the world,"
 - Also, he prays that Christ, for these acolytes, will "... illumine their minds with the light of knowledge, and water them with the dew of Thy piety," In representing the laity, it is also the hope that Christ illumines the faithful with the knowledge of Faith, and watered with piety.

How to Serve in the Role of the Acolyte

Prior to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

Equipment for the Role of the Acolyte

Unlike some of the other roles, the Acolyte deals mainly with his vestments, and the candles he holds, as well as those on the altar. All he pretty much needs to fulfill his role are the following:

- Basic Surplice and Cassock
- Altar Server Candles



Source unknown.

Here's what a "traditional" Acolyte candle looks like. It is NOT the same as the torch bearer's torches (although, as will be said below, acolytes can substitute for torch bearers at times ...)

- Source of fire, preferably a long lighter OR a Taper with wick
- Cruets for Water and Wine
- Ablution bowl
- Ablution Towel

Preparations for the Holy Mass

As acolytes, you will come ahead of time to the sacristy, after brief reflection and prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament. You should arrive at least 20 minutes prior to Mass, or whenever you are asked to by your priest/instructor/MC. You will need time to do certain tasks.

Unless assigned to a different server or taken by another, either of you will be responsible for lighting the candles on the altar. Remember that for High/Solemn Masses that you are to light the 6 main altar candles. To jot your memory,

[from my highest rated posting from my "toolkit" series](#)

, here's a refresher on lighting the candles in the right order:

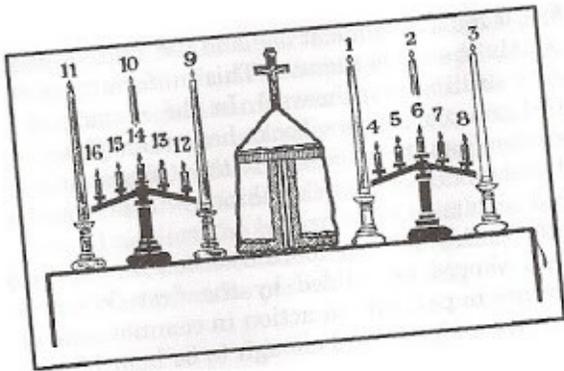


Figure 1: The Order of Lighting Candles in the EF. (12, How to Serve ...).

You light the candles in the order of the numbers, starting at the closest candle to the tabernacle on the Gospel side, going outward. Also, **remember to genuflect when you cross the center going to the other side!**

When the clergy arrive to start preparing for the Mass in the sacristy, the second acolyte is ``paired`` to the sub-deacon, and the first acolyte is ``paired`` to the deacon. In essence, think of the analogy, fittingly so, is that you are that clergy member`s personal servant. Think of it as quite the honour to be serving an *alter christus*

in the Mass, or one in formation to be so. You might help them place their dalmatics and/or stole over their person, or help to tie their albs/amices. Once the celebrant is vested, each acolyte hands the maniples to the deacon/subdeacon to kiss, and then put on the left arm of each cleric. (115,

The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described

). Be forewarned, however, that the clerics possibly may not need your help. That's fine too. Just don't forget to say your vesting prayers and don your cassock and surplice before Mass begins.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

The Mass of the Catechumens

Entrance Procession

Regardless whether there is an Asperges ritual or not, your place in procession will remain the same going to the Altar. Using my common diagram for the procession to the altar for the Solemn Mass, your

places are as follows:

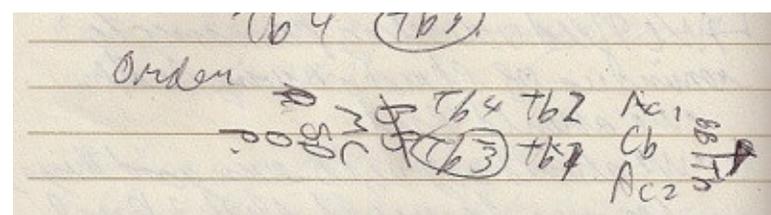


Figure 2: Order of Procession in Solemn Latin Mass with guide below:

Arrow - Direction of the procession train.

BB - Boat Bearer (if present)

Th - Thurifer with censer/thurible

Ac - Acolyte 1 and 2 (arbitrary numbers were jotted in my notebook only. "2nd" acolyte is to the left, "primary/1st" acolyte is to the right of Cb)

Cb - Cross Bearer

bb - boat bearer (scratched out for that Mass)

Tb - Torch Bearers (in groups of two)

MC - Master of Ceremonies

SD - Sub deacon

D - Deacon

P - Priest/Celebrant

1a) The Asperges Takes Place (109-111 The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described; 8, 11, Traditional Latin High Mass Illustrated with Pictures.)

In the event that there is an Asperges, the acolytes play no significant role in this part of the liturgy. They approach the altar with the cross-bearer (if present), genuflect upon reaching the foot of the altar, and place their candles at the credence tables. They then retreat to their designated seating area either in the sanctuary, or behind the clergy members. The acolytes will kneel from the *Asperges Me* prayer on, until the Priest has finished sprinkling the altar, and any other clergy if the Mass is Solemn. They will then be sprinkled with blessed holy water, and remain staining as the rest of the ritual is carried out.

After the priests and accompanying clergy (or servers in a High mass,) return to the sanctuary, and the clergy member(s) return(s) to the sediliae, the acolytes might, or will be needed, to help the clergy vest

for Mass.

- High Mass: Acolyte 1, helps the priest remove his cope, and places it in the sanctuary. or an appropriate location in the meantime. Afterwards, both acolytes at the priest`s sides, help him don the chausable. They will then, with the MC, come to the foot of the altar and make the proper reverences.
- Solemn Latin Mass: *Unless otherwise instructed not to by your clergy, MC, or instructors,* You will be helping the clergy. When the Priest returns to the sanctuary with the other clergy, the priest will take off his cope to be handed off to a server. The MC usually will do this, or acolyte 1 might take this away, as per the High Mass. While the MC will attend to the celebrant to help him don his maniple and chausable, Acolyte 1 will do the same with the deacon`s maniple, and Acolyte 2 with the subdeacon`s maniple. The acolytes will then remain in their designated place to kneel upon the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar.

1b) No Asperges

When there is no Asperges, the acolytes will still be aligned with the cross-bearer. They may either genuflect with the cross-bearer at the foot of the altar, and then proceed to their spots while setting their candles at the corners of the credence table, OR they will assume positions like in Figure 3 below, genuflect all at once with the clergy at the foot of the altar, and then go to the credence table to deposit their candles. Regardless, after depositing their candles at the credence, they go to their spots near the credence table, or behind the clergy they are paired up with (Acolyte 1 = Deacon, Acolyte 2 = Subdeacon).

The Foot of the Altar to Preparation for the Gospels

During these parts of the Mass, the acolytes play no primary roles in the liturgy. They remain seated near the credence table, and stand, kneel, etc. at the various parts of the Mass. As a reminder of when to do what action, the acolytes do the following:

- Prayers at the F.O.A. - Servers are kneeling
- Incensation of the Altar - Servers not assisting P or other roles, are still kneeling. This will usually apply to the acolytes.
- * Gloria - Servers stand, as clergy recite the Gloria. Once the clergy return to the sediliae, and sit, so do you as well. As the choir *sings the Gloria*, whenever the priests take off their biretta you will do a head bow.
- Collect - Servers are standing
- Epistle - Servers are sitting
- Gradual/Alleluia - Servers will remain sitting, until the Alleluia (or solely the gradual) is sung.

* Note, though, that should a Gloria be present, you as an acolyte behind your "paired" minister, *unless otherwise instructed not to by your clergy, MC, or instructors,* will assist the ministers in sitting down. Both will go to the sediliae of their paired clergy member to get their biretta. *Missa Cantata:* *Missa Solemnis:* Acolyte 1 will hand the deacon his biretta, while Acolyte 2 hands the deacon his biretta.

After handing their birettas, they will help their clergy member sit down by gently lifting their dalmatics and tunicle, over the sediliae.

Preparation for the Gospel

Once the thurifer (Th) approaches the altar and allows the celebrant to put incense into the thurible, this is the cue for the acolytes to gather their candles from the credence table. They will wait at the epistle side corner of the altar, until Th comes down from the altar, and Th starts to turn and process to the center.

Missa Cantata/Sung Mass (Traditional Latin High Mass Illustrated by Pictures. 27-31; Ceremonial for the Missa Cantata, 38-44)

What occurs during this part of the Latin Mass

[is highly similar, and attached with, the role of the thurifer](#)

, as they process and stay together as a group for this portion.

While Th is standing at the side of the predella and doing the incensation preparation, AC1 and 2

come to the center below the predella in front of the tabernacle, genuflect, and go and get their candles from the credence table. They return to the center of the sanctuary and create a space in the middle for the Th.

Th will now go to the spot in between the acolytes after stepping away from the predella. The MC retrieves the missal, and does a shorter "V" pattern transfer, stopping midway in front of you, behind P. All the servers below the predella genuflect at once. Here's the Formation:

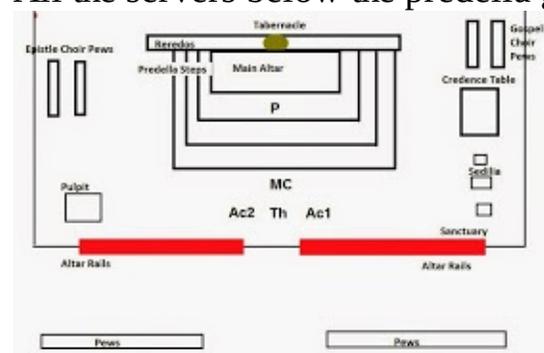


Figure 3: Positions in the Missa Cantata including Thurifer in Preparation for the Gospel.

MC then completes the missal transfer while ACs and Th proceed to the Gospel side of the altar, but the "long way" around, not the short way/"V" like the MC. You should end up like this:

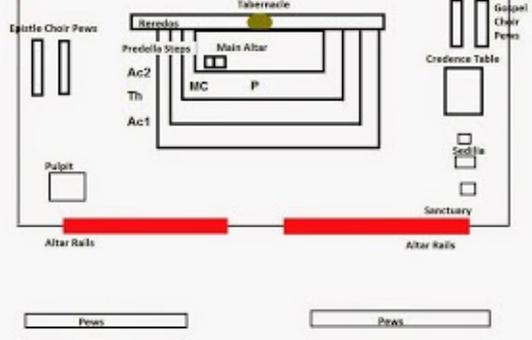


Figure 3: Positions after Missal transfer of main servers.

Once all servers are in place, the MC walks down the steps of the Altar on the Gospel side and comes to the Th. You and Th bow to the MC, and Th gives MC the thurible. MC will then take the censer to the right of P for the incensation of the Gospel.

Once the gospel is being read, the MC will give Th back the thurible, and they bow to each other. The Th will remain in place with the acolytes until the end of the Gospel.

Missa Solemnis/Solemn Mass

The Acolytes (Ac's) walk with Th to assume the standard 6-person formation before the Gospel:

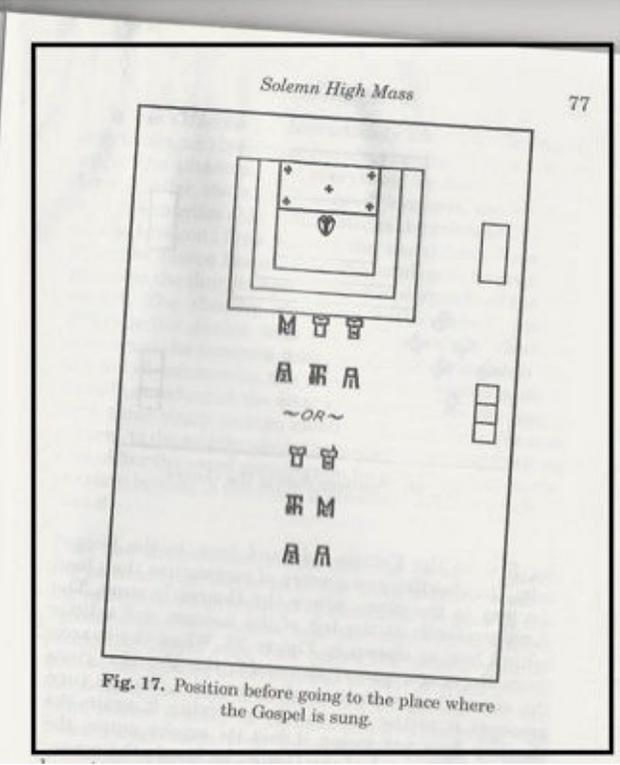


Figure 3: Solemn High Mass positions for Gospel. (How to Serve ..., 77). Ac2 is to the left but behind Th, with Ac1 to Ac2's right, behind the Master of Ceremonies.

Once in the position, wait for your cue from the MC at the appropriate time, do a single genuflection, then turn inward 180 degrees to start processing down the altar, and then to the "left side" to be in the formation for the Gospel.

What your left side will be, will depend on the Church.

The ``IDEAL Standard,``

would be that the party of 6 does their formation

inside the sanctuary

. However, in smaller churches or ones without altar rails, this might be done on the floor of the body of the church, just before the sanctuary, on the Church's left side. If brave and determined, one can do the full Gospel formation in small, gated sanctuaries. It's a tight fit though.

Regardless, small, large, rails and gates or not, you will be the first to process to the designated spot. When you and your fellow acolyte arrive, you will turn inward 90 degrees, and face each other until the subdeacon (SD) arrives with the Evangelarium between you. Once the SD is between you, you will either stay in position, or you might turn another 90 degrees to face towards the D (with Th and MC by his sides). Your final positions should look like this:

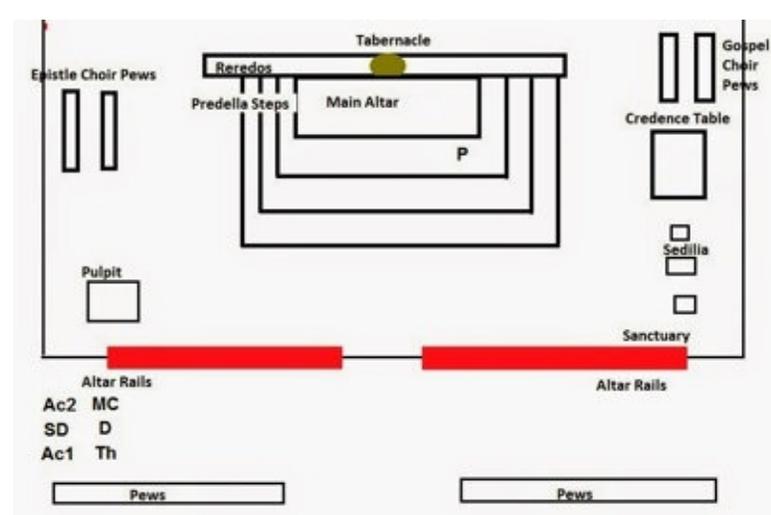


Figure 5: Solemn High Mass positions at Reading of Gospel

The Gospel (including returning to the Sanctuary)

Missa Cantata/Sung Mass

After, You and Th go back to you places at the center as before the Gospel in **Figure 3**, and genuflect with the P and MC. You then retreat with Th back to the credence area/epistle side, put your candles back on the stand, and take your seat.

Missa Solemnis/Solemn Mass

Once there, Deacon (D) will incense the Gospel. Th hands the thurible behind D's back to the MC, who will hand it to D. D incenses the gospel, and then Th receives the thurible back from the MC behind D's back. After the Gospel is finished, there are two variations of proceedings:

1. You, the MC, and subdeacon will go back to their places on the altar. The ACs will be at the sides of MC and SD, will genuflect together, and retreat back up to the altar. This is the proceeding that has been done with masses I have served.
2. *As per Fortescue 117-118 in Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described*, The MC and AC's lead the deacon to the foot of the altar, while SD goes ahead and back onto the altar near P. All will genuflect with D when he does so. D will incense the celebrant from the foot of the altar (or just outside the sanctuary in the middle) after Th gives the thurible to him, At a signal from the MC, all genuflect and retreat to their positions on the altar.

Post Gospel to the Offertory

You will remain seated for the homily in your designated spots.

During the Credo,

if not excused from doing so for the Mass by your priest/MC/instructor,

you will repeat your duties as per when a

Gloria

is sung, that is attending to your clerical "partner" when it comes to the biretta and lifting up the dalmatic and tunicle for sitting down. (see:

The Foot ... Gospel.

)

The Offertory

1a) Normal Proceedings

High Mass (Cantata

): If it is customary of your parish/organization, etc. to do so, upon the priest preparing to offer the Host, the acolytes may rise and come to the center of the sanctuary before beginning their primary duties, genuflect, and then return to the credence table (

Traditional Latin High Mass Illustrated by Pictures

, 35.) Ac1 OR Ac2 might be responsible for bringing up the chalice veil and leaving it on the right side of the altar. Offering of the water and wine may be done in two ways:

- Ac1 brings up the water and wine on the cruet tray, and leaves it on the right side of the altar. He waits patiently, *in plano*, until the water and wine has been poured into the chalice. Once the cruets are not in use anymore, he takes the cruets on their tray, gives a head bow to the Priest, and returns with the items to the credence table. (The Altar Server`s Handbook, 46)

- Ac1 takes the wine cruet and Ac2 takes the water cruet. They wait *in plano* away from the epistle side predellae. As the priest comes to the Epistle corner with the chalice, together, the Ac`s approach the predella on the epistle side and go up to the lowest steps. (Technical note: *please have the handle of the cruet facing the priest, away from you. It`s easier for P to handle the cruet that way.*) Ac1 kisses the wine cruet and gives it with his right hand to P. Ac1 kisses the hand of the priest, receives the cruet with his left hand from P, and then kisses it. Ac2 repeats the exact way in which Ac1 handed over and received his cruet with P, except that after kissing the water cruet, P will bless the water, then take it for the offertory. Both Ac`s then do a slight to P in unison, turn towards one another and descend the altar steps, back to the credence table. (Traditional Latin High Mass Illustrated by Pictures, 35-36).

Solemn Mass (Solemnis): After the ``Oremus``, SD will go to the credence table area to be donned with the humeral veil, and to retrieve the chalice. If the MC does not assist the sub-deacon with donning the humeral veil, it will be Acolyte 2 who will assist. While being donned with the humeral veil, Ac1 folds up the chalice veil if handed to him and places it on the upper right corner of the altar, while Ac2 puts on SD`s veil. Once those tasks are carried out, Ac1 will carry out offering the cruets with their tray, as per the first option above in the *Cantata*.

BOTH Cantata & Solemnis: After presenting the cruets for the offerings of water and wine, at the credence table, Th, and BB if present, will do their actions for the incensing of the altar. While incensing of the altar is taking place, one of Ac1, Ac2, or the MC, will remove the altar missal, already at the Gospel side, from the altar, prior to incensing the epistle side of the altar:

- In most altar serving books and guides, the action of removing the missal in the *Cantata* is usually cited as being performed by Ac1. In the *Solemnis*, the MC is usually cited to be the one to remove the altar missal. Be advised that at your P`s/MC's/instructor's request, Ac1, Ac2, or the MC could do this, if P does not desire the accompaniment of Th and MC at his sides for incensing the altar. This is at their discretion AND does not invalidate the sacred liturgy.

The person removing the missal will come the long way to to the center of the sanctuary below the steps, genuflect, and go to the Gospel side of the altar, next to the Missal. That person will be up at the altar just before the Priest with accompaniment (MC+Th or SD and D), bows in the center of the altar during the incensing, and have the missal in their hands. The person with the missal does a head bow when the priest genuflects, and goes down the steps. He waits *in plano* until the incensing of the Gospel side of the altar is done, and then places the altar missal back, returning the long way to their spot. They will genuflect if they must cross the center of the sanctuary back to their position.

Now, the acolytes will get ready for the ablutions while the MC or SD in the

Solemnis,

is incensing P. Normally, Ac1 becomes responsible for the abluion towel, and Ac2 will take the water cruet and the abluion bowl. However it is possible that these roles might be reversed. If reversed, this does not invalidate the liturgy.

Regardless, the server with the towel MUST be at the right side of whomever has the bowl.

The acolyte with the finger towel can hold it one of two ways:

1. You drape your towel over your right arm, like a butler, and then put your left hand on your chest, flat palm and fingers together.
2. The towel goes over the fingers of your hands, while they are in the "prayer" position. Your fingers together form "the rack" for the towel.

Continuing on in this guide, assume that Ac2, as usually cited, has the water and ablution bowl, and Ac1 has the finger towel.

Once P has been incensed, and Th departs from the epistle side of the altar, the AC's approach the epistle side of the altar. The Ac's do a head bow.

Ac2 pours water over the fingers of P. Ac1 extends his arm out with the towel to P. P then takes the ablution towel from Ac1's arm and dries his fingers. Once dry, Ac's bow, turn inward, and return to the credence to put back their items. They return to their spots. They are to then pay attention to the Th, because they will be incensed. When Th looks their direction to incense them, they are to stand, do a head bow with Th before being incensed, be incensed, then bow in unison with Th.

Ac's may then proceed in unison to the center of the sanctuary, genuflect, separate to the corners of the predellae of the altar closest to their side. They might come to the predellae before the consecration at a later point in the mass as well, remaining at their spots until then. If they do come after incensing, the bell should be with Ac1 on the right side, having been placed there before Mass begins.

Once the Th starts to incense all the other servers, he will eventually come to incense the acolytes. Both will bow with Th before he censes them. Either each acolyte receives a single "ping" of the thurible, or the acolytes be incensed in a group of servers (including possibly the boat bearer and/or torches.) After being censored, you bow with Th.

1b) When the Acolytes Substitute for the Torchbearers

In the instance that there are not enough servers for torchbearers, and your priest/instructor/MC has deemed it necessary, after you assist with the offertory duties above in 1a, you will go retrieve your candles from the credence table, genuflect in the center together, and then split slightly apart to both sides, to become "pseudo-torchbearers" You might flank the corners of the predella steps, OR in the sanctuary, where the altar rails come to the center on both sides.

You will be assisted by other servers and/or the clergy when you are to receive communion. They will take your torch if needed, to allow you to receive communion in your places.

You remain as torch bearer until either a) after the tabernacle is closed, if communion is distributed to the faithful, or b) until after the elevation of the Precious Blood in the case communion is NOT distributed. When they are finished their role, Ac's get up, go to the center of the sanctuary, genuflect, and return their candles to the credence table.

As for your "normal" duties during the Canon of the Mass until you return your candles/torches to their place, do not worry. These duties will be taken up by other servers in the mass. such as the MC.

Post-Offertory to Pre-communion Under Normal Proceedings

BOTH Cantata & Solemnis:

Once the offertory is finished, you will remain at your place in the sanctuary, following the cues of the priests. When it comes time for the consecration, one of the acolytes will be responsible for ringing the bells. This task usually is assigned to Acolyte 1. Acolyte 1 will ring the bells at the following instances:

- The Sanctus: Ac rings the bell once, at each "Sanctus"
- The Hanc Igitur: The priest spreads his hands flat over the Chalice.
- The Consecration (major elevation) of the Body of Christ: Ring once when P genuflects, 3 times 2-3 rings, ring once when P genuflects after elevation.
- The Consecration (major elevation) of the Blood of Christ: Ring once when P genuflects, 3 times 2-3 rings, ring once when P genuflects after elevation.
- The minor elevation: Ac rings the bell one time.
- *Optional:* When the priest consumes the precious blood, the bell receives a minor ring. This is up to your priest/instructor/MC.

When the Deacon kneels at the consecration, that is when the acolytes kneel as well.

Missa Cantata:

The servers will remain in their place, kneeling, sitting, and/or standing at the appropriate times.

Missa Solemnis:

At the Pater Noster, when P says "*Dimitte Nobis,*" Usually Ac1 takes the humeral veil from the SD (at the epistle side of the altar,) then genuflects with SD before returning the veil to the sacristy, and returning to their seat. Of course, at the instruction of P or your MC/instructor, this role may be delegated to AC2.

- *Optional:* Ac's and Crucifer might receive the "Pax," and then kneel once again. This is not mandatory for the Ac's to participate in this part of the liturgy, and is at the discretion of the P/MC/instructor.

Communion of the Servers and Laity

After the celebrant received the precious blood (Ac1 might ring bell at this point if asked,) the servers will follow the MC to the front of the altar to prepare to received communion. However, the last server to come out from the right should take the communion paten from the credence table, with them to the lineup.

They will line up, genuflect together, then kneel together. When the SD and D receive communion, rise on signal from the MC, and ascend the predellae to the 3rd or 2nd closest step to the altar. Kneel on signal from the MC.

In addition, if your community/parish allows it, you are allowed to say the "2nd" Confiteor as a group with the clergy.

You will say the Domine, non sum dignus 3x. It is HERE you will pat your chest each time and say the lines. This is the Latin for what we currently say in the revised Novus Ordo Mass responses (Lord, I am not worthy that thou should enter under my roof ...)

Your communion will be distributed from left to right. After you have received, you will in orderly fashion, return to your places in the pews to pray in reflection of the great gift of the Lord you have received. If one of the Ac's is the last server to receive communion, and has the paten, he will likely be asked to assist the priest/D/SD with the communion of the laity. I put all three positions, because in a Mass where your clergy consist of members with major orders, another of those clergy might be a second priest handing out communion to the laity. The MC or the 3rd clergy member would go with P and use the actual paten with the Chalice.

Upon completing handing out communion to the faithful, you will give the paten to the clergy member to be taken up to the altar for cleaning, ensuring that no particle of the Body of Christ is wasted. Return to your seat until it is time for your individual duty as Ac1 or Ac2.

Post Communion Ablutions Cantata - Both Acs-

Both acolytes will be part of the ablutions. Ac1 gets the wine cruet and Ac2 gets the water cruet. they wait

in plano

at the epistle side of the altar. When P holds out the chalice, that is the cue for Ac1 to approach P at the altar. Ac1 pours wine into the chalice. P might indicate by raising the chalice slightly for you to stop pouring wine in. If so, stop, and go back to the top step of the predella. Once P comes to the side and holds out the chalice with his fingers over it, that is your cue for both Ac's to approach P. Ac1 pours wine over his fingers, and the signal to stop is like before. He will then want Ac2 to pour water over his fingers, with the same stopping signal. Bow to the altar, and go back to the credence table with your cruets.

Be warned, however, that if P/MC/instructor requests it, you might just be handing your cruets over to the MC first, who will do the actions of the pourings for you, and hand you the cruets back.

(Crumly. "Serving at Missa Cantata (The Acolytes at Missa Cantata)")

Solemnis - Ac1:

Once the Priest places the consecrated Body of Christ back in the tabernacle, this is the cue for Acolyte 1, to go and retrieve the water and wine cruets on their tray again from the credence table. He will then wait

in plano

at the sides of the predellae for Ac1 then places the cruets on the table, and waits

in plano

for the time to retrieve them. Once finished, Ac1 will take the cruet tray with cruets off the altar, returns the set to the credence table, and then takes his seat.

Post Communion Altar "Clean-up" Missa Cantata - Ac2:

Ac2 will NOT be responsible for taking the chalice veil from the right corner of the altar. He might, however, have to move the missal from the Gospel side to the epistle side, if the MC does not do the duty.

Missa Solemnis - Ac2:

Ac2 will be responsible for taking the chalice veil from the right corner of the altar, and waits at the right side of the MC, or slightly off to the side, ready to enter the center of the sanctuary, in front of the altar.

Ideally,

When D removes the Missal from the gospel side and descends, Ac2 crosses behind the MC, genuflecting behind the SD, who is in line with D. A figure of the movements pre-formation, and at formation are provided.

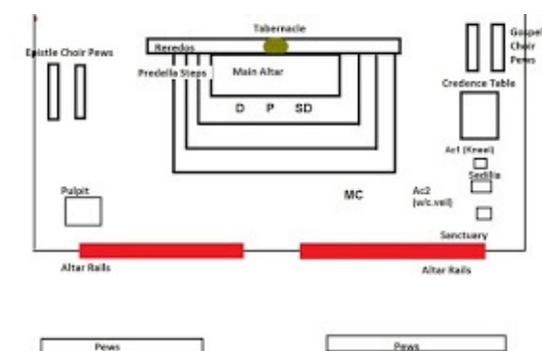


Figure 6: Position of Ac2 with Chalice Veil prior to Crossover

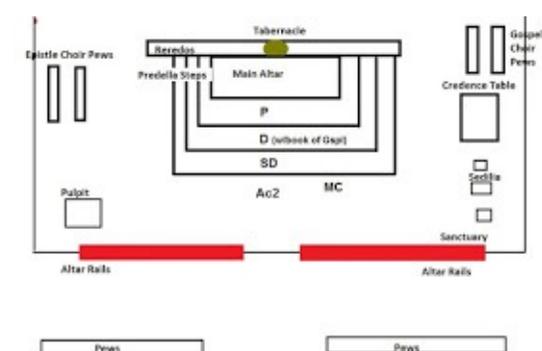


Figure 7: Ac2 and Sacred Ministers at Crossover

However, Ac2 might simply be alone in taking the long way, genuflecting in the center, and not lining up with the D. Ac2 then goes to the Gospel side of the altar to deliver the chalice veil, going around the bottom step to get there. He will help the priest "build the chalice" by giving him the veil. Once the chalice is "built," Ac2 proceeds to the credence table with the SD, genuflecting behind the SD when crossing the front of the altar.

Dismissal and Last Gospel, and Final Blessings inside the Sacristy

The Ac's do the usual cues that are expected of the faithful at this point. They remain in their places. During the Last Gospel, they will kneel at "In facta Caro est" Once this is complete, they will arise, get their acolyte candles, to process down the centre aisle with the crucifer between them. Th and BB should go first, followed by crucifer and Ac's, then torchbearers. They go until they are a short length away from the sanctuary, a length that gives enough room for the MC and clergy to complete the formation. Once they have reached this point, the whole party stops and turns to face the altar from their positions.

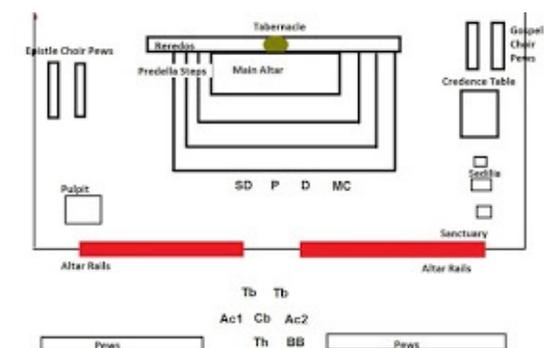


Figure 8: Exit Procession Positions Facing the Altar

When the Last Gospel is finished, and the last genuflection in the sanctuary has been done, the MC will come down with the clergy. All will genuflect at a given command except the crucifer (who does a slight head bow), and then everyone turns inward to face the entrance of the church and process out, and back to the sacristy in their formation.

Inside, they are to remain in position facing the crucifix, until P arrives to give a final prayer and blessing. After, you are finished, and can perform your clean up duties of the altar.

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Version 1.0. Completed December 12, 2015.

This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.ca/2015/12/latin-mass-serving-role-acolyte.html>
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March of the Magi [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday January 3, 2016

A Reflection on Matthew 2:1-12, N.A.B.

Who were the “*magi*”? Were they wise men, kings, or astrologers? In this Sunday’s Gospel reading the *magi* are astrologers/astronomers who looked to the movement of stars and planets as signals of major events. Since they do not know where the Christ is to be born, they are presumed to be Gentiles. Where in the east they came from isn’t clear, but *magi* suggests Persia, and their practice of astrology points to Babylon.



¹ *When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem,*

² *saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.”*

³ *When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

⁴ *Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.*

⁵ *They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:*

⁶ *‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”*

⁷ *Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance.*

⁸ *He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage."*

⁹ *After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.*

¹⁰ *They were overjoyed at seeing the star,*

¹¹ *and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

¹² *And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.*

How did we get to know the *magi* as kings? The tradition of their kingship rose from the Church's reading of Psalm 72:8-10 as part of the Christmas story:

⁸ *May he rule from sea to sea,*

from the river to the ends of the earth.

⁹ *May his foes kneel before him,*

his enemies lick the dust.

¹⁰ *May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute,*

the kings of Arabia and Seba offer gifts.

¹¹ *May all kings bow before him,*

The only known continents of the time were Africa, Asia, and Europe. At some point the idea that one king came from each continent became popular; in this light they were seen as being universal representatives of mankind. Furthermore, the existence of the black king promoted the belief that in Jesus' kingdom there are no distinctions of race and origin. In Him and through Him, all humanity is united.

In time the three kings even came to be associated with the three phases of human life: youth, maturity, and old age. For Christians there is wisdom in this because in each of the stages of human life Jesus is the sole gateway to true meaning and inner harmony.

Still yet, Bethlehem is nearly 500 miles from Babylon. Why would these three Gentile astrologers set off on such a perilous journey in search of the newborn “king of the Jews”? In one sense they are successors of Abraham, who set off on a journey in response to God’s call; like Abraham they represent a new beginning for humanity. In another sense they represent humanity subjected to the gravitational pull of Jesus. Moreover, the very first step of their journey initiated a procession toward the Lord that will continue to the end of time.

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2016/01/march-of-magi.html>
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