

NewEvangelists.org

new
evangelists
monthly

February
2016

New Evangelists Monthly #38

February 2016

- [New Evangelists Monthly - February 2016](#)

New Evangelists Monthly - February 2016

- [Forward](#)
...about this eBook
- [All Life is Worth Living](#)
by Virginia Lieto
- ["What's the Worst That Can Happen?" Reflections on Catholics and Voting in 2016](#)
If I Might Interject...
- [Book Review: The Case for Jesus](#)
by Abigail Benjamin
- ["Quiet"](#)
Campfires and Cleats by Chris Capolino
- [Humorous Funeral Cards: Of Luther, Chicago, and Beating Death](#)
God-Haunted Lunatic by Rick Becker
- [Spina Bifida Baby - She Didn't Ask to Be Born](#)
Designs by Birgit by Birgit Jones
- [How Can You Receive If You Do Not Ask?](#)
by Carolyn Astfalk
- [Babies Do Not Go to Limbo \(And Neither Does Anyone Else\)](#)
Christ's Faithful Witness by Phoebe Wise
- [Euthanasia in Canada: "An Opportunity to Bear Witness to Christ."](#)
Christ's Faithful Witness by Mary Wagner
- [Ladybug Lesson, Book and Snacks to Teach the Culture of Life](#)
A Slice of Smith Life by Tracy Smith
- [Can non-Latinists pray the Latin Mass?](#)
LMS Chairman by Joseph Shaw
- [God's Surprise Gift](#)
Plot Line and Sinker by Ellen Gable Hrkach
- [Gary Scott Reedy \(1958-2016\)](#)
V for Victory! by Anita Moore
- [Only the Good Die Young - Billy Joel on the Catholic Faith](#)
Your Holy Family by Allen Hebert
- [Libraries & Sad Update to Unraveling My Father's Suicide](#)
TASTE and SEE by Kathleen Laplante
- [To be instituted acolyte](#)
Hermano Juancito by Hermano Juancito
- [Mary My Mother - Be at My Side](#)
Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation by Michael Seagriff

- [**Faces of Mercy**](#)
The Koala Mom by Bonnie Way
- [**Ten Things About Saint Thomas Aquinas That Every Catholic Should Know**](#)
BIG C CATHOLICS by Matthew Coffin
- [**Rosary Riff**](#)
Smaller Manhattans by Christian LeBlanc
- [**Rising to Joy: A Year of Wellness**](#)
Blossoming Joy by Melody Marie
- [**Evolution - Why, God?**](#)
Onward and Upward by Joyce
- [**How to Create Your own Topical Study Bible**](#)
Books, Bargains, Blessings by Jennifer Short
- [**What was missing from Spotlight**](#)
by Margaret Felice
- [**Surprised by God: Into the Heart of the Church**](#)
joy of nine9 by Melanie Jean Juneau
- [**Pride vs the Humility of Pope Francis**](#)
It Makes Sense to Me by Larry Peterson
- [**Coping with Change**](#)
by Tony Agnesi
- [**What I saw a Mass last Sunday**](#)
A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars by Ebeth Weidner
- [**The Conversion And Baptism Of Saint Paul In His Own Words**](#)
PURE HOMILETICS by Tucker Cordani
- [**God loves us**](#)
Blog of the Dormition by John Russell
- [**Sexagesima ~ Transitioning To Lent**](#)
Pauca Verba by Fr. Stephen Morris
- [**Living 3D in a 2D World**](#)
Freedom Through Truth by Michael Brandon
- [**Let's Talk About Sex Baby...**](#)
On the Road to Damascus by Robert Collins
- [**David Bowie: A Traditional Catholic View**](#)
Catholic Champion Blog by Matthew Bellisario
- [**On the overdue rubrical change to the Mandatum Rite**](#)
Catholic Deacon by Deacon Scott Dodge
- [**Can You Turn Around Depression?**](#)
Quiet Consecration by Leslie Klinger
- [**To Bury the Dead**](#)
Peace Garden Passage by Roxane Salonen

- [**Remembering Dad: Our Childhood Bedtime Ritual**](#)
by Ruth Ann Pilney
- [**What Kind of Christian**](#)
CF Family by Allison Howell
- [**Through the Looking Glass**](#)
by David Torkington
- [**Ahead of the storm, March for Life 2016 went on**](#)
Leaven for the Loaf by Ellen Kolb
- [**Unorthodox**](#)
With Us Still by John Schroeder
- [**The Intellect of Motherhood**](#)
Kitchen table chats by Denise Hunnell
- [**Things I Could Totally Be Patron Saint Of**](#)
Catholic Cravings by Laura McAlister
- [**I want to be completely Out Of Control this Lent**](#)
the measuring mama by Rebecca Recznik
- [**The Episcopal Ordination of my college friend, Steven J. Lopes**](#)
by Tom Perna
- [**Flight Crew**](#)
Grace to Paint by Sister Maresa Lilley
- [**Worthiness**](#)
Bible Meditations by Barbara Hosbach
- [**Seriously**](#)
Blogging For A Better Life by Rose O'Donnell
- [**Overcoming the World**](#)
Bartimaeus' Quiet Place by Bartimaeus Timeo
- [**The Pope is Catholic**](#)
A Catholic Citizen in America by Brian Gill
- [**A Moment From De Sales**](#)
A Moment From De Sales by Fr. Richard DeLillio
- [**Our brave new world**](#)
Convert Journal by George M. Sipe
- [**A Full Church**](#)
Bucks of People's Heads and Baby Faces by Katie O'Keefe
- [**The Invitation**](#)
The Crazy Catholic Woman by Sandy McCreedy
- [**Laudato Si - How do we dialogue with Muslims?**](#)
In the Breaking of the Bread by Fr. Gilles Surprenant
- [**5 Surefire Ways for New Catholics to Get Involved in their Parish**](#)
A Catholic Newbie by Lyn Mettler

- [**That the Blessed Virgin Mary is called Mother of God is not pious boilerplate...**](#)
Brutally Honest by Rick Rice
- [**Rosary Revival**](#)
Brutally Honest by Kathy B
- [**Merton's Parable: Christ Is The Only Sure Foundation**](#)
Principium et Finis by James Milliken
- [**Leading With the Humility of Love**](#)
Theologyisaverb by Elizabeth Reardon
- [**Mommas, don't let your babies grow up to be food addicts**](#)
Erin McCole Cupp by Erin Cupp
- [**Reader Feedback, with Some Spoilers**](#)
String of Pearls by Laura Pearl
- [**Power of God's Holiness**](#)
A Spiritual Journey by David Wong
- [**The Lives of the Saints and Healing**](#)
Jess by Jess Fayette
- [**The Parish Church in a Changeable Community: Some Basic Requirements for Survival**](#)
Community in Mission by Monsignor Charles Pope
- [**Screwtape Letter #1: Faith**](#)
Mere Observations by Jeff Walker
- [**Full Fishing Nets**](#)
Journey to Wisdom by Deacon Paul Rooney
- [**On the Necessity of Justice for Mercy**](#)
New Evangelizers by W.L. Grayson
- [**Signs of Hope: A Transcendent Perspective**](#)
Justin's Corner by Justin Soutar
- [**This snowman is for the birds**](#)
Catholic Review by Rita Buettner
- [**An Approach to Evangelization**](#)
The Catholic Spiritual Life by Eric Johnston
- [**An Example of St. Padre Pio's Mercy**](#)
The Shield of Faith by Frank Rega
- [**Behind the Scenes**](#)
Sunflower Sojourn by Lianna Mueller
- [**Pray First, Worry Later**](#)
Miss Alexandrina by Alexandrina Brant
- [**Everyday Catholic**](#)
Everyday Catholic by Brandy Miller

- **[The Rights of Evil](#)**
Travels of a New Christian by Reese Cumming
- **[Preparing for Lent](#)**
Under Thy Roof by Kirby Hoberg
- **[Why We March](#)**
by Kim Padan

Forward

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

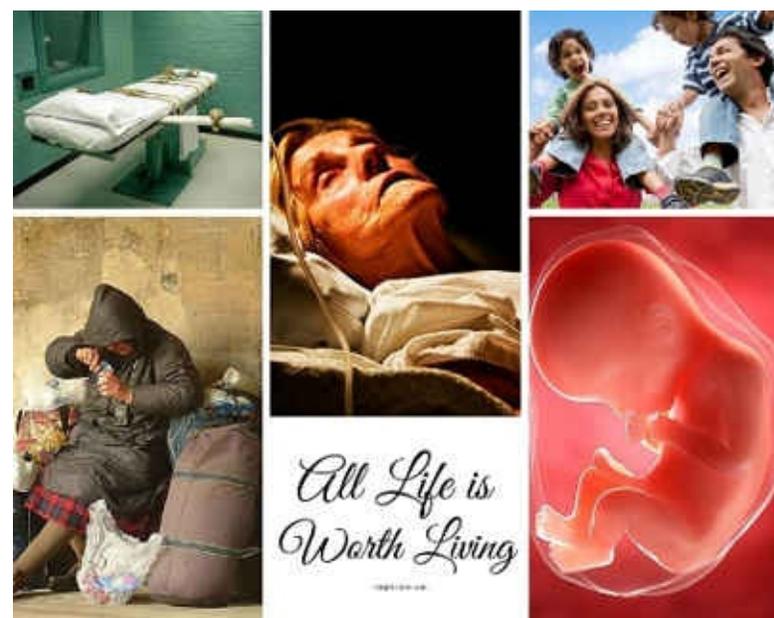
Contributing authors submit their very best piece from the prior month between subsequent first and second Saturdays. Readers are welcome to visit anytime, even while contributions are still being accepted for a new issue. Back issues are available in the archive.

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

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

NewEvangelists.org

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: Regardless of where you enjoy *New Evangelists Monthly*, either online or in this format, note that copyright is exclusively retained by the respective contributing authors. If you wish to use or redistribute any of their content, please contact them directly for licensing information.



Life is Precious

During the Christmas holiday, I was listening to an old Bishop Fulton Sheen episode that was on television, while working around the house. I heard him make a comment that shot directly to my brain: “All life is worth living.” He made this comment decades ago, as if a foretelling of something that we would need to focus on today. He made this prophetic comment well before abortion became legal, or euthanasia became popular; or before the death penalty became the preferred means for seeking justice. I began reflecting on his comment. I began by asking myself some questions:

1. Why do we as a society place more importance on some life issues over others?
2. When we apply human “justice” in the cases of euthanasia, suicide, and death row cases, are we merely embracing relativism (justifying the reason for taking another’s life)? Isn’t it God’s job to apply justice? Isn’t it God’s job to exert vengeance?
3. If we are to truly follow Christ, shouldn’t we be equally concerned about all life issues?

From conception to grave, all life is precious; all life is worth living, even in times of suffering.

Respect Life

I realize the “Respect Life” movement mainly focuses on the unborn, ever valiantly trying to end abortion. We as a society could learn a lesson or two from this movement and expand its reach to focus more on all life issues. Why? Because, God gave each of us life; we are all created in His image and likeness. The Blessed Trinity resides in each human life. When we take the life of another (or ourselves), we literally tell the Blessed Trinity to go do God’s will through someone else.

Dignity in Life

If you really want justice, then give each person the dignity that they deserve as a child of God, even that person on death row. Fight for the dignity of the unborn to have the right to live. Counsel the suffering who

want to end their lives and help them understand that there is merit in suffering for Christ. Get involved and practice the virtues of justice and respect.

This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/all-life-is-worth-living/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

"What's the Worst That Can Happen?" Reflections on Catholics and Voting in 2016 [at If I Might Interject...]

Introduction

With the first primaries yet to be held, I'm seeing Catholics debating the worst case scenarios and what should be the best response if certain candidates get nominated. I try not to use this blog for discussion on the merits of candidates, so I don't plan to discuss why I favor candidate X or deplore candidate Y. That kind of approach tends to turn a discussion into a partisan debate that obscures the Catholic teaching itself. Also, since some people come to this blog to seek an explanation of what the Church holds, I don't want to give someone the impression that my personal views on what candidate is best/worst is Church teaching.

The reason I write this is that I am seeing three views thrown around where those who promote them give the impression that their view is the only one compatible with Catholic teaching. Now it is not wrong that people who sincerely seek to follow Church teaching reach different views on what is the best (or least odious) way to vote given the candidate choices. The problem that I see is that some of these arguments seem to overlook the consequences of their decision. What I hope this article will do is to encourage people to consider the consequences of their choice in seeking to make the best decision out of those available, by pointing out some of the pitfalls of each decision that one needs to consider.

The Proposed Options and Preliminary Considerations

As I see it, when we decide that none of the options are appealing, the options boil down to three:

1. Vote for the candidate of one of the two major parties as the lesser evil
2. Vote for a Third Party or independent candidate on grounds that neither candidate is a lesser evil
3. Refusal to vote on the grounds that neither candidate is a lesser evil

It's not a hopeful view of the slate of candidates in this Presidential election, and many Catholics are struggling to find the choice which they find least offensive to their sensibilities. That is legitimate in itself. After all if a person believes that they cannot in good conscience vote a certain way, they ought not to do what their conscience condemns. However, we are all obligated to form our consciences according to the teaching of the Church and we ought to determine whether what seems least offensive to our sensibilities is actually the proper way to think of it.

Voting for the Candidate of One of the Major Parties

Barring some incredibly bizarre occurrence, the next President of the United States will be either a Democrat or a Republican. Regardless of your opinion of our dualistic political system, enough people vote for one of the two parties to ensure that 2016 will be no different than any other election since 1860. It's reality and we need to be aware of this fact when voting.

It's more than that however. Some people are conditioned to think that their party *is* the only party to vote for and consider voting any other way to be a betrayal of what they stand for. That's a bad way to think

from a Catholic perspective. Partisan rhetoric aside, parties change over time. Certainly conditions in America have changed since the Democrat and Republican parties were originally formed. A party which supports something morally good in one era can abandon that good or embrace a separate evil in another. So to invoke a certain President from the past as the eternal symbol of the party is only accurate to the point that that President reflects the current values of the party.

In addition, we have a case where neither party fully embraces Catholic views. The current Democrats reject the Catholic position on many moral issues and the current Republicans reject the Catholic position on social justice. And when the parties do nominally agree with the Church position (Democrats on social justice, Republicans on morality), they often are either ineffectual in their support or propose solutions which are morally dubious at best.

The point of all this is neither of the major parties is “God’s party” where it reflects what we as Catholics hold to be good. Because of this, the Catholic has to consider what is the good that a party purports to stand for and what evils it supports. Do the evils one party favors outweigh the goods the party claims to stand for? Is the other party’s opposition going to be an obstacle to the evils the first party supports? Is one party’s lukewarm defense of good no different than the other party’s fervent promotion of evil?

To discern this, we need to look at the issues and contrast them with what the Church teaches on right and wrong. The Church teaches that some things are intrinsically evil—that is to say, there can be no circumstances or intention that can make that action good. In other cases, a thing can be morally good or neutral in nature, but is made evil by intention or circumstances. So, when a party supports something intrinsically evil, we need to be very careful before casting a vote in this direction. If we vote for the party in question *because* it supports that intrinsic evil, that is sinful.

But what about if we deplore that evil? Can we vote for that party for other reasons? The answer is, it depends. As the future Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in 2004 in a [memorandum](#):

[N.B. A Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in evil, and so unworthy to present himself for Holy Communion, if he were to deliberately vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate’s permissive stand on abortion and/or euthanasia. When a Catholic does not share a candidate’s stand in favour of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for that candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons.]

That’s not an invitation to vote as you please. The concept of material cooperation indicates that even when the person does not directly participate in an evil act, the more enabling a person’s action is, the greater the proportionate reason is required to justify such an act.

So, when a person insists that the party which supports intrinsic evils, the question to be answered is, “What reason do you see the party that supports an intrinsic evil as ‘not being as bad; as the other party?’” I’m not talking about personal preference here. The Catholic Church teaches us about morality, and the American bishops [speak](#) about specific conditions that we need to be aware of as voting Americans. If we take the perspective of *that’s not ex cathedra, so I can ignore it*, then we have missed the point. While we can be in disagreement on the *best* way to follow Church teaching, Church teaching in itself is not optional. For example, the Church makes very clear as to the importance in rejecting abortion:

Now the first and most immediate application of this teaching concerns a human law which

disregards the fundamental right and source of all other rights which is the right to life, a right belonging to every individual. Consequently, laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law.

John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* §72 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995).

So, when the Church condemns things as intrinsic evils that go against the fundamental rights as defined by the Church, and one party supports those intrinsic evils as “rights,” we have to ask ourselves, “Is the stand of the other party so evil that we must support this party’s stands as the lesser evil? Or are we just voting out of political preference and ignoring real moral issues?” Unfortunately, it’s a question few seem to ask. Instead, we cherry pick Church teaching to find the quote (often out of context) to justify what we were going to do anyway.

Ultimately, we have to be honest with ourselves, recognizing our sinful nature and considering the possibility that our support for one party might be based on our own selfishness and that we are ignoring the Church teaching on the issue. Unfortunately, self-deception is easy if we appoint ourselves the interpreter of what is and is not in keeping with Church teaching. When one starts (for example) using arguments that a candidate who is pro-abortion is really the most “pro-life candidate,” it is pretty clear that self-deception has come into play

Voting for the Third Party or Independent Candidate

Now nobody wants to be forced into an either-or situation where both choices are bad. So some people try to find a third option which says “None of the above.” When it comes to the elections, some try to find a third option. They usually do this because of a few different views. They believe in the candidate, or believe that they need to start supporting third parties to break the monopoly of the dualistic system we have, or they are so disgusted with the two main parties that they say “a plague on both your houses” and vote this way as a protest.

The thing to remember is that historically third parties don’t succeed in America with national office unless they address an important issue the main parties are ignoring. The Republican Party succeeded in becoming a major party because they were formed to address the issue of slavery in a way which neither of the major parties of the time (Democrat and Whig) were addressing. [1] Sure we have local and state races turn out this way, but this is rare.[2]

What a third candidate tends to do historically is to divide the vote of one major party so that the other major party gets elected even though a majority of voters voted against him or her. The most drastic case of this happened in 2000 in Florida. George W. Bush carried the state with 537 votes. What people forget however is that if Ralph Nader had not run for President, the odds are good that those 97,000 votes would have gone to Al Gore, and we would not have had lawsuits over “Butterfly Ballots” and “Hanging Chads.” Other cases where a third party has played spoiler and divided the vote was H. Ross Perot in 1992 and Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. In both cases the third party divided the vote of one major party and resulted in the election of the other major party with less than 50% of the vote. [3]

So, the moral consideration necessary for the Catholic who feels offended by the two major parties is

whether they truly feel that there is no real difference between the two. Their vote for a third candidate *will* take votes away from one of the two major parties...is the voter willing to accept that consequence?

I don't ask this question with the intent of playing "Gotcha!" assuming there is only one right answer. Theoretically speaking, it is possible to have an election where both candidates are equally offensive to Catholic teaching and that great harm will be done regardless of who is elected. In such a case, a "protest vote" may be the only recourse a person has to avoid going against conscience and to demonstrate that not everybody approves of a policy.

But given the potential results (that we could be potentially assisting in giving the election to a morally offensive party), we have to be *very* certain that the evils supported by both parties are truly equivalent and not just a result of recognizing that only one party is morally offensive and the other party against one's own preferences. Remember, we are talking about the impact of the elections on souls here. A government which actively enables evil is more harmful than one which is lukewarm about protecting good.

Refusal to Vote

Some go so far as to refuse to vote for any candidate at all, whether for a specific office or for that entire election. This tends to be a sort of political despair where one declares themselves to find no merit in any potential candidate or else feels their vote is meaningless (for example, a Democrat in a solidly "Red" state or a Republican in a solidly "Blue" State) or even apathy over the whole concept.

This is never an option to be taken lightly. In fact, the Church teaches that voting is a responsibility for which we have a moral obligation:

2240 Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country: (2265)

Pay to all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

[Christians] reside in their own nations, but as resident aliens. They participate in all things as citizens and endure all things as foreigners.... They obey the established laws and their way of life surpasses the laws.... So noble is the position to which God has assigned them that they are not allowed to desert it.

The Apostle exhorts us to offer prayers and thanksgiving for kings and all who exercise authority, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way." (1900)

Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 540–541.

To refuse to vote is to be passive in the face of seeking a greater good or rejecting a greater evil. If enough people who dislike the current system refuse to participate, the result is to ensure that the negative system will continue without hope of change. Effectively, the only time a refusal to vote is a reasonable

response is when there is no real choice and participation seems to give legitimacy to something wrong:

(from *Moon over Parador*)

Making Proper Decisions and Avoiding False Rhetoric Used To Avoid The Discernment Process

We need to avoid using false rhetoric to justify a choice as praiseworthy when that choice is being done out of pragmatism, partisanship or apathy. Likewise, we must not misuse what the Church teaches about the moral issues of voting to camouflage the fact that we would vote that way anyway. The Christian faith binds us to follow Our Lord, even when it is difficult. Sometimes the choice is not clear-cut. There can be choices where there is no “good” candidate and we have to vote so as to block what we see as the most harmful option.

When these decisions have to be made, we have to consider what the Church teaches about evil, and what evils must be placed first in our discernment. If some grave evil is promoted by one party, it is only tolerable to vote for that party if the other party holds to something even worse. The obvious example might be brought up concerning Weimar Germany facing the choices of one party supporting things contrary to the Church vs. the Nazi Party. The question is, do we really claim (outside of silly slogans by college students) that the choices in America have reached that level?

“What’s The Worst That Can Happen?”

I personally believe that we need to ask ourselves seriously what are the negative consequences of our vote that we can reasonably anticipate. Obviously we can’t anticipate something when the candidate lies about it and entirely conceals their intention. But when a candidate makes clear what they do stand for, we have to compare and contrast that with the teaching of the Church and the moral obligation to do good and avoid evil. We need to ask whether our vote will try to block the candidate or party which seeks to do what the Church calls evil or whether it will make it possible for the party which supports that which the Church condemns to come to power.

I want to make clear here that I’m not trying to force the reader to vote for a certain party or candidate. I simply want to point out that voting is a civic duty in the eyes of the Church and we need to cast our vote in such a way that good is promoted and evil hindered to the best of our ability. In some elections, voting for one of the two parties may be justified. At other times, both parties might be going against what God has commanded, requiring a third party or a refusal to vote.

But ultimately, we must make certain that our beliefs as Catholics are forming how we vote, not our political preferences. No party is 100% following the teaching of the Church. So there will be parts of the party platform which do not fit in with the moral teaching of the Church. So in such cases we must evaluate which sins are the worst in the eyes of God and His Church, and not feign ignorance over just how much the preferred candidate supports them.

In doing this evaluation, we seek the truth and strive to do what God calls us to do.

Digressions

[1] I imagine that if *both* parties were to become officially pro-abortion, it is possible that we might see this situation occur again. Of course given our inertia to uncertain change or to go against a party one has sympathy for, it might not.

[2] Murkowski in 2010 and Lieberman in 2006 are examples, but these were both incumbents in cases of the voters disagreeing with the party nomination and reelecting them despite not receiving the nomination.

[3] Adding the Electoral College to our equation makes it more complicated of course. Bush, Clinton and Wilson all received the Electoral vote majority. The third party vote caused certain states to go the other way with the “winner take all” approach than they might have gone without a third candidate.

This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2016/01/the-worst-that-can-happen-reflections.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Book Review: The Case for Jesus

Brant Pitre's new book, [“The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ,”](#) is a must read for all Christian parents. Pitre is a professor of Sacred Scripture at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. His accessible prose in “The Case for Jesus” is gumbo for the soul! With clear diagrams, C.S. Lewis quotes, and bits of memoir, Pitre book turns tired secular complaints about our belief in Christ's divinity into a launching pad for advanced theological study.

Pitre is a curious guy who learned both Ancient Greek and Ancient Hebrew in order to better understand the historical accuracy of Holy Scripture. I loved his deep, almost Socratic, trust that questions about our common belief in the Resurrection can be useful. For 198 pages, Pitre keeps reminding us that real Christian faith is a constant search for truth.

“The Case for Jesus” contains a fresh summary of scholarship on the divinity of Christ. We reexamine the historical background of the Four Gospel writers, as well as St. Mary Magdalene, St. Peter, and St. Paul. Most surprising is his description of the book of the Prophet Jonah. Here's a quote to get a taste of Pitre's reassuring style:

“True confession: For years, when I read [the mysterious “sign of Jonah”], I went away somewhat underwhelmed. With all due respect to Jesus, I always felt like the comparison between Jonah being in the belly of the whale for three days and the Son of Man being in the ‘heart of the earth’ for three days was, well, somewhat *forced*. Don't get me wrong- I got the parallel: three days and three nights. But this didn't seem to me to be the most impressive prophecy of the resurrection you could come up with.” (pg. 186).

Rather than limp along in doubt, Pitre decides to reread the book of Jonah, “carefully, and in its original Hebrew.” He discovers that the book of Jonah is far deeper than traditional sermons recount. Evidence suggests that Jonah died inside the belly of the great fish, and his corpse was vomited out on the shore of Nineveh. Pitre makes us a chart, like notes on a blackboard, to highlight the similarity between the Sign of Jonah and the Resurrection of Jesus. Pitre delights in the synchronicity of our Christian faith. His joy in deep theological scholarship is easily shared with his readers.

Pitre's book idea came from an inspired conversation between Bishop Robert Barron, the Word on Fire Ministry, and Pitre during a car ride from the Pittsburgh Airport ten years ago. Pitre complained how often the “transmission of the story of Jesus” is compared to “the Telephone Game.” Bishop Barron turned around and said “Yes! Someone needs to write a book dedicated to refuting that stupid comparison.”

In “The Case for Jesus,” Pitre reminds us that the belief in Christ's divinity isn't a garbled myth repeated to us like some game at a child's birthday party. In the First Century, a variety of witnesses became convinced that something unique happened in an empty tomb on Easter Sunday. Their united belief in the Divinity of Christ changed the entire pagan culture around them.

I left my reading of “The Case for Jesus,” with a renewed sense in of trust and wonder in the doctrine of the Resurrection. I will never teach myself Ancient Hebrew like Pitre and St. Jerome. However, Pitre reminds me that a good self-study in deep theology is the responsibility of every parent and every

Religious Education teacher.

This contribution is available at <http://www.abigailbenjamin.net/book-reviews/2016/2/5/book-review-the-case-for-jesus>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

"Quiet" [at Campfires and Cleats]



Hushed.

Swirls of dancing snow.

Frigid air, charcoal grey sky.....

twinkling, glittering, aglow with winter.

Heaving wind, eerily soundless.

A cotton - softness is silence..... enveloping wrapping.....

shushing....comforting in its own uniqueness...

It is its own transparent self, this Quiet that comes with the chill, with the wintertide.

So different is it from the world's usual chaos.

So distinct, so separate is the quiet, so disarming.

It begs to be noticed, greeted...

And to remain unbroken.

And now?

Gone is the softness.....

replaced by the swoosh of traffic, the disturbance of engines,

even the honking of stray geese, awry in the now - blue heavens,

bright with sun and awash with our comforting daily clamor.

In our loud world, the soft, soothing balm to our souls is quiet.



please click over and enjoy... xoxoxo

thank you for stopping over and

spending some of your precious time

here at my home on the web!

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

If not, just enter your email address here

so we can be in touch regularly!

This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2016/01/quiet-five-minute-friday-12916.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

HTTP/1.1 200 OK Server: nginx Date: Sat, 13 Feb 2016 15:55:10 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Transfer-Encoding: chunked Connection: keep-alive Vary: Accept-Encoding Last-Modified: Sat, 13 Feb 2016 15:51:55 GMT Cache-Control: max-age=105, must-revalidate X-nananana: Batcache Vary: Cookie X-hacker: If you're reading this, you should visit automattic.com/jobs and apply to join the fun, mention this header. X-Pingback: <https://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/xmlrpc.php> Link: ; rel=shortlink X-ac: 1.dca _dca Strict-Transport-Security: max-age=15552000

Cat and mouse with the Hound of Heaven

Humorous Funeral Cards: Of Luther, Chicago, and Beating Death [at God-Haunted Lunatic]

[3 Jan](#)

*Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.*

~ [Wendell Berry](#)



Tidying up around my house can be an exercise in liberal arts education – you should receive CEUs for it.

Like this morning: A random copy of Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* abandoned on the front table; a Bible (RSV) here, a book of saints there; Stephen King and Christopher Dawson, *The Wall Street Journal* and [The Catholic Worker](#) – a jumbled, lettered mess, like the rest of the house. Who's in charge around here anyway?

And then, some comic relief: a Dilbert collection ([open at random](#)), let's see:

DILBERT: How are you coming on designing your greeting cards for death occasions?

DOGBERT: Okay. Now I'm working on the humorous angle.

That's not the punchline, but it's plenty funny in itself, and it reminds me of a day I was behind the counter at the Chicago [Logos Bookstore](#) many years ago. A coiffed, be-furred woman hastily rummaged through

our greeting cards, and then approached me in a huff. “Are *all* your sympathy cards out?” she demanded.

“I believe so,” was my reply. “Can I help....”

She interrupted – “Don’t you have any *humorous* sympathy cards?”

I paused; my manager, Dale, standing nearby, the perpetual cigarette dangling from his lips, froze; somewhere, I imagine, a cricket sounded. “Humorous sympathy cards?” I timidly ventured.

“Yeah,” she fired back, “like, ‘I don’t give a darn’” – only she didn’t say darn.

Dale prudently turned away, and I managed a straight face somehow – grace, no doubt. “I’m sorry, nothing like that.” She turned and shook the dust from her feet.

It’s a story I’ve told many times (as my longsuffering kids can testify), and I’ve got lots more where that came from. Working at a bookstore in the heart of the city was an adventure – rarely a dull moment – and you could always count on having a story to tell when you made your way home in the evening.

In the case of my card-shopper friend, it was a story with a moral as well. After she left the store, Dale and I chuckled over her request – “Could you believe that?” Of course, it would be wholly cruel to send such a card to anyone, and so it’s unthinkable that any store would sell them (besides, I suppose, some entity like [The Onion](#)).



Nevertheless, the more I’ve thought about it over the years, the more I’ve come to appreciate the encounter’s memorable association of humor with death – never the pain, nor the bereavement and loss, but only the end of life itself. There’s no question that death is an enemy – our “last enemy” in the words of the [Catechism](#) – but we Christians are bound to laugh in the face of that enemy, for he’s *already beaten*. “O Lord God, ought we not to rejoice and not only serve gladly,” wrote [Martin Luther](#) of our response to redemption, “but suffer and laugh at death for the sake of him who has given us such a treasure?”

I love St. Francis, and I get his [Canticle’s](#) embrace of Sister Death, “from whom no living man can escape.” But if death really is an enemy, then it deserves the card-shopper’s insolence and Luther’s sass. “When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell,” he [instructed](#), “we ought to speak thus: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it?’”

There are worse things than death – including not being able to laugh at it.

[Follow](#)

Follow “God-Haunted Lunatic”

This contribution is available at <http://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/2016/01/03/humorous-funeral-cards-of-luther-chicago-and-beating-death/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Spina Bifida Baby - She Didn't Ask to Be Born [at Designs by Birgit]



[Sympathy](#) - the feeling that you care about and are sorry about someone else's trouble, grief, misfortune, etc. : a sympathetic feeling

When others experience hardships in life, an appropriate Christian response is to feel sympathy. Many causes rely on this emotional connection in their quest for assistance and donations. While it is virtuous to offer all we can to those who are less fortunate, today's culture has misdirected these natural inclinations. An example of one such instance came across my Facebook news feed today:

""Flower didn't ask for this life, it was thrust upon her by a greedy breeder who wanted to play God and make miniature bulldogs, what she created was an entire litter of bullies with spina bifida and lifelong challenges. It's NOT fair!!! Like all bullies she deserves to live and be happy and this surgery will give her that " -- THE PAY PAL IS ..."

Upside Down Values

It is true, that we have been called to care for all of God's creation. This directive includes the earth and all of the animals who inhabit it. What fails to make sense is the convoluted thinking of a society where animal rights outweigh human rights. The unborn and vulnerable lack even the basic protections demanded for their animal counterparts. There is no denying that we live in a Culture of Death when it comes to God's most cherished creation - humans. A human baby is killed by abortion every 94 seconds - some for the very condition this puppy is experiencing.

Each and every evening television viewers are inundated with sappy commercials, some set to hymns, featuring needy animals. Somehow, the values of society have been turned upside down. While animals enjoy a richer life than ever before, children and the family are suffering. The experimentation on and death of our tiny brethren is ignored by many. In our commercialized world we have reprioritized humans and animals. Uplifting animals is *in*, while preserving human life is *out*.

An Equal Look

Take a look at the above quoted appeal again and substitute *baby* (babies) for the subject.

- *Babies* don't ask to be born.
- Greedy doctors kill *babies* for profit.
- *Babies* with spina bifida face a lifelong challenge.
- **Babies** deserve to live and be happy.

The injustice of this inequality can certainly not be lost on an honest heart and mind.

Purposely omitted above is the accompanying photo of the dog, dressed in a layered tutu and pink headband, begging for your sympathy and money. That will be left to your imagination. Instead, what should be encouraged is for us all to envision the needy children out there who are either abandoned or aborted because someone chooses not to deal with their struggles.

Realign Values

Before we seek the Nirvana of a world with no suffering pets, let us work toward a world that values human life. All human life is precious. No child is unplanned, unloved, or unwanted by God. Can we do any less than He, Himself, demands?

This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2016/02/spina-bifida-baby-she-didnt-ask-to-be.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

How Can You Receive If You Do Not Ask?

I don't take time to read the Bible as often as I should. Thank God for a four-year-old who provides me with vivid lessons to accompany the verses and stories committed to memory simply from decades of Mass attendance.

My four-year-old daughter has been extremely articulate from a very young age, but that didn't stop her from devolving into an inarticulate, whiny hot mess recently.

She simply wanted a peacock feather on lying out of her reach on the dining room table. (Don't ask. I'm not certain where it came from or why it was there. Last I checked, we had no peacock.)



She groped, groaned, and moaned in frustration as she reached for the feather. It was easily within my reach. She simply needed to ask.

Knowing she has been quite capable of making such a simple request for years, I indulged her by reminding her she needed only ask. I even went so far as to state a request she could simply repeat. "Would you hand me that feather, please?"

Stubborn child she is, she refused to ask.

Stubborn parent I am, I refused to hand it to her.

Had she asked, I would have happily given it to her. Instead, she went away sad, no peacock feather in hand.

If you've never darkened the door of a church, you are probably still familiar with Matthew 7:7: Ask and you shall receive.

Here is the longer passage from which it is taken, verses 7-11:

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish?

If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.”

In my younger days, I would hear that verse and shrug it off. We all know God doesn't answer every request as we would wish. Otherwise, the world would be populated with skinny, happy, healthy, rich, beautiful people. God is omnipotent, and He answers as He chooses. As I matured, I understood that He answers prayer that are in accord with His will, those that are for our ultimate good.

But then, why ask in the first place? He is not only omnipotent, but omniscient. Must I ask when He knows all of my needs? Long before I know them, if ever I do.

If my children don't contribute to my holiness by increasing my patience and reducing my selfishness, there is yet another way they've greased the skids for my becoming a better person.

Like nothing else, parenthood has allowed me to understand, to a limited degree, the mind of the Father.

I wanted my daughter to ask for that peacock feather. I could see that she desired it, and it would make her happy. There was no harm in it for her, no danger, but as it was not necessary for her to have, I had not extended it to her. She needed only ask, and I would have happily given it to her. Even delighted in the fun she'd have with it, admiring its beauty, feeling its fine feathers slide beneath her fingertips, maybe tickling her chin.

But she did not ask.

She went away sad.

That is why I must ask. God wants me to come to Him, to ask, so that he can give me good things. So that He can delight in the pleasure they give me.

Yes, He knows my needs. No, He will not, like a genie, grant my every wish. But, yes, He wants to hear my desires – even if they are insignificant – because He loves me and wants to give me good things.

I'm not great at asking. I prefer to do things for myself. I don't like imposing on others. It makes me uncomfortable. It's a particular challenge when it comes to everything from caring for my family's needs to [promoting my book](#).

(After hearing of TED Talks for ever and ever, I finally watched one, [all about asking](#). The content is strictly non-religious, but its messages about asking, receiving, and relationship apply here as well.)

“Ask and it will be given to you.”

In order to receive, you will most often have to ask. And that's not a bad thing.

Do you have difficulty asking? Have children ever given you a fresh perspective on your relationship with God?



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

This contribution is available at <http://carolynastfalk.com/2016/01/11/how-can-you-receive-if-you-do-not-ask/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Babies Do Not Go to Limbo (And Neither Does Anyone Else) [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

To say that limbo was never an official doctrine does not mean that it never had a great influence on Catholic practice. It did: unbaptized infants were not given funeral rites and typically were not buried in consecrated ground. Where did that leave the mourners? In limbo. They could not have felt very reassured about the hope of seeing their little ones again in heaven.

What changed after Vatican II? In 1969 Pope Paul VI approved funeral rites for deceased children, both baptized and unbaptized, and the words were very consoling, offering the parents hope that they would meet their child again in Heaven. Hope—not certainty. But still, it seemed clear that the tide had turned against limbo.

And we must remember the words of the Council itself. One of the Vatican II documents, *Gaudium et Spes*, holds out hope of salvation for all people, including those outside the Church:

“Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery.”(*Gaudium et Spes* 22 5)

Paragraph 1260 of the Catechism comments on this passage: *“Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity.”*

Since Vatican II and the Catechism teach us to hope for salvation for all, we can ask yet again: what happens to the souls of unbaptized infants, including those killed by abortion?

In the midst of the culture of death, millions and millions of innocent babies have been slaughtered. The crushing weight of these crimes against children causes us to cry out in anguish for their redemption. We hunger and thirst for righteousness on their behalf. Holy Mother Church, tell us they are in Heaven!



EARTH IS
NOW
HEAVEN IS
FOREVER

I had assumed until recently that all faithful Catholics would want to envision these innocent souls in heaven; surely that limbo nonsense went out the window after Vatican II. It turns out I was mistaken. I was listening to one of my favorite pro-life shows on EWTN radio. [Open Line Tuesday 12-29-2015] I admire the host very much, and usually find myself in agreement with everything she says. This time was different. Someone e-mailed the show to express his disagreement with pro-lifers who believe that aborted babies automatically go to heaven, as opposed to limbo. And the host agreed with the caller; she reasoned, quite faultily, that aborted babies must necessarily go to limbo, or else it would have to be said that their abortionists were their benefactors.

I was astounded at their crooked thinking. By their logic, the Islamic terrorist who inflicts a martyr's death on a Christian would also be considered a benefactor. But we know that the unintended result of sending the Christian straight to Heaven does nothing to excuse the terrorist from the guilt of his action. It does nothing to negate the value of the human life that that he destroys, or the injustice of depriving the victim of the opportunity to live out his life to its natural end.

I won't go into all the details of the pro-limbo argument



expressed on the show, but I got the feeling that both the host and the caller were concerned about preserving faith in the necessity of the Sacrament of Baptism and the reality of its saving power. Not a bad thing to be zealous about, to be sure. But their insistence on the necessity of limbo roused an immediate negative reaction in me -- it was almost revulsion.



A lingering belief in limbo could be damaging to the pro-life cause. Though I'm certain the host and her caller didn't intend this effect, the notion that God deprives innocent unbaptized babies of the Beatific Vision helps to trivialize the sin of abortion. After all, if God doesn't consider the souls of these little ones to be human enough or important enough to gather to Himself, then why the big fuss when they are aborted? Just as bad, the doctrine of limbo also works against the gift of the Holy Spirit known as piety. Piety is the filial devotion we should feel toward God—the sense that He is truly our Merciful Father and we are his beloved sons and daughters. What kind of father would put a fence around the souls of little babies to keep them out of heaven, just because they had not received the sacrament of baptism? A pretty nasty and un-fatherly father, I would say.

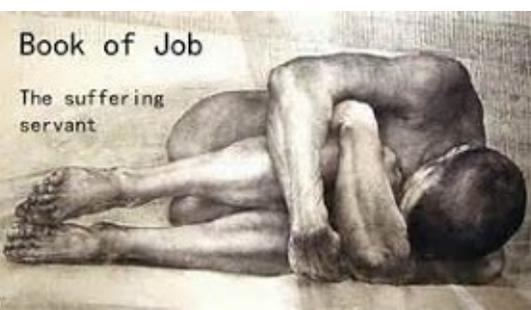
That limbo thing has got to go. We need to drive the last vestiges of it out of the Church. Expunge it from respectable dialogue, just as we did with the idea that Mary could have had original sin on her soul. Long live the Immaculate Conception! Long live All Babies Go to Heaven!

And then I heard another talk show that gave me pause. Not about limbo—I still think we need to drive a stake through the heart of that mistaken notion. But the dialogue on the show made me understand why the Church has been so slow—centuries slow—to declare that all babies automatically go to heaven. Or to express the matter better, why the Church has never explicitly defined what is God's plan for the innocent unbaptized.

Catholic Answers hosted a show [Jan 18,2016] that invited anyone who was pro-abortion to call in and give their reasons. One caller said she was old enough to have been born before abortion was legal, and that her mother would have aborted her if she had had the choice. The caller said she would have preferred to have been aborted, because her mother was mentally ill and had abused her terribly. She reasoned that if she had been aborted, she would have gone straight to heaven to be with God, and that would have been infinitely preferable to living through her childhood. The woman was a non-Catholic Christian, a sincere believer. It was difficult to think of a good argument to counter her logic and her lived experience. In fact, I don't think the Catholic Answers people came up with anything very convincing by comparison. Sure, she admitted that she valued her life as an adult, and had found some measure of happiness, but insisted that, on balance, it would have been better to go straight home to God. Honestly, haven't most of us had the same thought for ourselves at times? Doesn't Job express the same thing in the midst of his suffering?

Book of Job

The suffering
servant



*“Why was I not as a hidden untimely birth,
as infants that never see the light?*

There the wicked cease from troubling,

And there the weary are at rest.” (Job 3:16-17)

After hearing this woman’s argument, I could see why the host on the other talk show was anxious to defend the doctrine of limbo. She was trying to counter precisely this argument: if being aborted sends a baby straight to the arms of a loving Heavenly Father, then perhaps it is not quite the tragedy that the Church is claiming.

To be sure, it could still be considered a sin for the abortionist and the mother to take an innocent life, but from the baby’s standpoint, it might be a gain, maybe even a blessing. And so the host felt driven to support the idea that an unbaptized infant would receive, not a blessing, but the curse of being separated from the Beatific Vision for all eternity. No doubt she thought that limbo would be an argument against the trivialization of abortion; instead of being an “angel maker”, the abortionist prevents babies from going to Heaven and condemns them to be second-class citizens in the after-life.

I would not want to grant abortionists that kind of power. No, God is the only one who decides our eternal destiny. And we have been assured that He wills the salvation of all.

In her anxiety to defend limbo and prevent the trivialization of abortion, the host missed the deeper question raised by the woman on Catholic Answers who would rather have been aborted. In trying to counter her logic we run straight into the greatest obstacle to belief in a loving God, namely, the problem of suffering. If a baby has to endure great suffering, then what is the value of his living out his earthly life? Would it not be better for him to be aborted and go straight to heaven?

And of course the question does not apply just to babies. Since suffering is inevitably part of the experience of any person who lives in this fallen world, what is the point of earthly existence?

The Church is the only institution that insists absolutely on the value of every human life, no matter what sufferings and frailty it must endure. What was God’s answer to Job when he wished he had never been born? He did not tell him he was right. Rather, God let Job know that although he was not capable of understanding the divine plan for each human life, there was a plan. Job was eventually able to accept the mystery of his suffering, saying that he knew he had a redeemer. At the end of the story, he was restored to happiness and fellowship with God.

The Book of Job is considered one of the wisdom books of the Bible, and it still has the best answer to the problem of suffering that we are ever going to get here below: life is precious, in spite of our suffering, and we must trust in God's plan and cling to the hope that happiness will be restored to us in the end.



From listening to the dialogue on these shows I have learned that the question of what happens to the souls of aborted babies touches on more areas of concern than I had first considered. The idea of limbo—sending innocent babies to a place forever distanced from God and the people who have gone to heaven—still fills me with revulsion. It implies an unloving God not worthy of our devotion. And it offers little hope and consolation to repentant post-abortive parents, and certainly not to parents who have suffered a miscarriage. Must they always carry the burden of knowing they have condemned or lost their children to second-class status in the afterlife?

On the other hand, I can see the danger of thinking that being sent straight home to God at the hands of an abortionist is some sort of blessing. This only throws gasoline on the fire of the culture of death that is raging amongst us. I remember talking to a lady outside a Planned Parenthood facility, who told me that she had four angels in heaven. She explained that since she hadn't felt able to raise them, she was at peace with sending them to God. This attitude ignores the reality of all the tiny mangled bodies and the unimaginable pain they endure while being aborted. It ignores the impact on the woman's health and all the social costs brought to the world by its millions of missing people. It is a lie of the devil.

What is the value of human life? What point is there in allowing unwanted or disabled babies to enter a world of suffering? For that matter, what point is there in allowing severely disabled adults or the elderly or terminally ill persons to suffer? Why not put them out of their misery?

Sometimes the best answer is not a perfectly presented logical argument, but a picture. Or a story. Or even better, a story with pictures. Namely, a movie. I would like to recommend a movie to the lady who wished she had been aborted. It is called [The Drop Box](#), and it shows how Christian love can transform suffering. Not eliminate it, but transform it and make life meaningful.



The movie is a documentary about a pastor in South Korea who installed a drop box in his home where mothers could leave babies they could not care for, rather than abandoning them on the streets where they

often die of cold.

The pastor had two biological children, one of whom was severely disabled. It was his disabled son who gave him his motivation to help other children. He and his wife have adopted fifteen disabled children left in the drop box, children who were not wanted by anyone else.

At the end of the movie Pastor Lee says that his disabled children were sent by God to be his teachers, and he has come to understand through them that each human life is more precious than the entire world and everything in it. After watching the film, I believe he is a saint. Saints are God's answers to the hard questions.

The saints who live among us, such as Pastor Lee and Mother Teresa's nuns, can give us God's answers to hard questions. But I also found myself wanting to understand more about the history of the Church's speculations on the fate of unbaptized babies. In order to reassure myself that limbo is no longer a part of official church doctrine, I looked at what the Catechism of the Catholic Church has to say about the matter. Limbo is nowhere mentioned in it, but paragraph 1261 gives a positive reason to hope for the salvation of these babies:

“As regards children who have died without baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them,” allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism.”

The preceding sections of the Catechism, dealing with the necessity of baptism for salvation, cite the following doctrine: *“God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.”* (CCC 1257) In other words, the faithful are under the obligation to use the ordinary means that God has given us, through the Church, to obtain our salvation, and woe to us if we understand the necessity of Baptism and do not avail ourselves of it.

But God can use means outside the sacraments to save his people. Since earliest times the Church has recognized that those who desire baptism, but die before they receive it and are welcomed to Heaven nonetheless. The same is true for those unbaptized who die as martyrs to the faith. These means of salvation are called the Baptism of desire and the Baptism by blood, respectively. We must also remember that the early Church honored the Holy Innocents killed by Herod as martyrs, and we still celebrate their feast within the Octave of Christmas, since they gave their lives for the Infant Savior. Even St. Augustine recognized them as saints.

I say even Augustine, because it was his quarrel with the



heretic Pelagius that led to the doctrine that we know as limbo. In the early 400s Pelagius was denying that human beings contract original sin from their parents, and so believed there was no necessity to baptize infants. In countering his arguments, St. Augustine went a bit far in the opposite direction and said that all the unbaptized must go to hell, though innocent children would suffer only the “mitissima poena,” or “the lightest punishment of all.”

Although the Council of Carthage of 418 condemned the teaching of Pelagius, it did not officially adopt St. Augustine’s very harsh view of the fate of unbaptized infants. “So great was Augustine's authority in the West, however, that the Latin Fathers (e.g., Jerome, Fulgentius, Avitus of Vienne, and Gregory the Great) did adopt his opinion.” This quote is from a Vatican document published by the International Theological Commission (ITC). The document, entitled “The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized,” was published in 2007 with the approval of Pope Benedict XVI. Anyone interested in a thorough review of this question in Church history, its current status, and the direction that future development of doctrine might take, can read it on the [Vatican’s website](#).

The notion that God’s Divine Justice meant that innocent babies had to suffer some sort of pains in hell, however mild, naturally did not seem reasonable to all theologians. Later medieval authors, including St. Thomas Aquinas and Blessed Duns Scotus, held that the babies would not suffer but would instead enjoy a place of purely natural happiness, which somehow still fell short of the Beatific Vision of Heaven, a term which Christians use to describe complete union with God. The term that came to be used for this dwelling place for second-class souls was limbo.

I would have thought that these statements from Vatican II and the Catechism about the possibility of salvation being open to all men would have dispelled the notion of limbo once and for all. But no. It seems the controversy over unbaptized infants stirred up by Pelagius in the fourth century continues today. It is still not a matter of settled doctrine; the comments I heard on the Catholic talk show still represent the view of some faithful Catholics. Limbo has been described as a theological opinion, and evidently it is still licit, if not fashionable, to hold this opinion.

What reason can I give for thinking that limbo for unbaptized babies is still in play in the Church, apart from one radio talk show? After all, Saint Pope John Paul II dealt with this issue in *Evangelium Vitae*, *The Gospel of Life*. Here is the sentence he addresses to those who have lost a child from abortion in section 99 of his encyclical:

“You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and

This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2016/01/babies-do-not-go-to-limbo-and-neither.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Euthanasia in Canada: "An Opportunity to Bear Witness to Christ." [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

On Feb. 6, 2015 the Supreme Court of Canada legalized doctor-assisted suicide, but delayed the implementation for one year. Their gruesome decision bears its wicked fruit next Saturday Feb. 6. People with grievous and irremediable medical conditions (in theory) will be able to ask their doctor to help them die. There's no guarantee that perfectly healthy people suffering from depression will not be able to enjoy the same deadly "succor."

Canadian Pro-life Defender Mary Wagner sits in the maximum-security prison, Vanier Centre for Women in Milton, Ontario, outside Toronto, Canada. Her crime? Pleading gently with a mother awaiting an abortion to spare the life of her child. Now the gentle Prisoner of Conscience wants us to reflect on the consequences of the new law allowing euthanasia in Canada.

My Dear Christian Sisters and Brothers,



I recently had the blessing to speak with a wise Carmelite Mother. While sharing with her my concerns in the wake of the Feb. 6th, 2015 Supreme Court of Canada's decision, she recalled that Archbishop Fulton Sheen used to exhort the faithful to rejoice in the gift of living in such difficult times, because they give us such an incredible opportunity to bear witness to Christ.

Fr. Ibrahim spoke of a woman close to them who was bothered because the neighboring homes, which had belonged to the Christians who fled the terror, were being purchased or rented by Muslims: "She felt that something major had changed - the air of the streets, the eyes of the people - and it made her uneasy. I told her, 'Couldn't it be that God permitted the people and the environment around us to change so that the fragrance of Christ can reach them, too? Could it be a beautiful mission that the risen Lord is asking of us?' If that's the case, there's no reason for uneasiness, but to think only of what our risen Master is asking of us, of how we can witness the faith to the people who come."

Here in Canada, as we face the reality that by decriminalizing physician-abetted suicide, the Supreme Court has set in motion "major change" in our country, Fr. Ibrahim reminds us that nothing is outside of God's permission. We are not called, therefore, to dwell in complaint and lament. This is a

mission God is entrusting to us, to bring His "fragrance" - his Light and his Love - into this beautiful country that has forgotten the Source of its beauty and greatness.

How are we to understand this mission with which Our Lord has entrusted to us? Fr. Ibrahim, who considers his own

suffering “important and invaluable,” whose greater suffering is the sight of his neighbour’s suffering, offers us the following wisdom: “Through a profound posture of listening to

what the Lord says and to the cry of the innocent, we are able to understand how to respond. For those heavy crosses, we really have to learn from Jesus who, during his three-hour crucifixion, still knew how to think of others...”



Who are the “others” who most need our attention? The Supreme Court’s dictate to involve physicians in their patient’s request for suicide would strip vulnerable people of protection in their darkest hour. Those who come to the conclusion that their lives are no longer worth living now have the Court’s agreement, (just as does a mother who concludes that her child in the womb is not worth being given a chance to live). They have been deprived of justice from a judicial system founded on the supremacy of God and Judeo-Christian values. In the wake of this grave injustice, has not our duty to love and protect them become all the more necessary and urgent?

Of this point, doctor-abetted suicide has not become institutionalized, as has the brutal killing of countless of our most helpless and littlest brothers and sisters. Our society, generally, still views suicide as something terribly wrong, an act of despair. This could change completely.

Consider a scenario in which you or I come across someone about to jump off a bridge: Who would not want to do everything they could to help that person- (not to end their life!)- to overcome their despair and receive the love and support they need to find their life worth living?

If this scenario illustrates our clear awareness that every life is worth fighting for, what would make us think differently when a suicidal person asks for “help” from a physician? Does our conviction that life is sacred change due to these circumstances? Does our responsibility for our neighbour diminish under the dictates of an abuse of power? Surely, they do not. The Court’s attempt to bully Canadians into accepting suicide under certain conditions in no way justifies suicide, or any form of co-operation with its process. Again, as our government tramples on justice, are we not called, in our dialogue and encounters with others to reaffirm that every human life is sacred, not counting the cost to ourselves but trusting in God and listening to him?

Having read “The Proposal” to the Canadian Medical Association (offered by the Christian Medical and Dental Society and with the support of the Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians Societies and Canadian Physicians for Life), I fear that these associations, despite their earnest desire to resist doctor-abetted suicide, have succumbed to defeatism. “The Proposal” expresses a willingness to engage in what

I understand to be formal co-operation with a patient's request for abetted suicide:



“The Proposal” states that “physicians have a duty to provide complete information on all options and advise on how to access a separate, central information, counselling, and referral service.” Further, the assertion is made that one’s autonomy includes the right to take one’s life: (“The Proposal”) “respects the autonomy of the patient to access all legal services while at the same time protecting physicians’ conscience rights.” (Let us recall the normal human response to someone on the verge of jumping off a bridge and compare the difference).

In addition, the language employed feeds into the push to accept doctor-abetted suicide. Language matters. Not only in “The Proposal,” but also in Christian/Catholic media, doctor-abetted suicide has been replaced with such terms as “physician-assisted death,” “assisted death,” and “medical aid in dying.” Such language obscures the truth and will contribute to the acceptance of this evil. As Mother Teresa said, “words that do not bear the Light of Christ only increase the darkness.”

We are *Christians*. We know that God will not abandon us, even in death. No matter the circumstance, we are called to witness to the risen Lord with our lives. Our Brothers and Sisters are suffering terrible persecution elsewhere in the world, and Fr. Ibrahim says, “We don’t know when it will end... but it doesn’t matter when it ends; the important thing is not knowing how to save ourselves but to witness to Jesus Christ. We also need to think of a political solution - an action plan - but our first duty is to be witnesses of the Christian life, carrying the cross with love, forgiving, and thinking of the salvation of others as well...”

Our Lord gives us the grace to carry out the mission entrusted to us. He does not call us to defeatism, moral compromise nor to the dismal task of saving ourselves. He is calling us to live the truth with love, which includes resisting the push of abetted suicide; such resistance is an affirmation that every human life is sacred. Every person of goodwill can join us in this necessary struggle for justice, for the dignity of the human person.

As Christians, however, we have received more than the hope of justice. We have the treasure of a Love unsatisfied with the fulfillment of duty alone. Christ, who laid down his life for us, calls each of us to share in his limitless gratuity: “Love



one another as I love you.” (Jn. 15:12)

Our suffering brothers and sisters in Syria, led by their shepherd, Fr. Ibrahim, are an incredible witness to a waiting world that love is stronger than death. Here in Canada, as we fight the darkness of death under other forms, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us entrust ourselves, wholly and humbly, to the Light of Life, who alone can scatter the darkness. Let us pray for each other.

God bless...

Mary Wagner January 23, 2016



Would you like to read more about Mary Wagner's mission to live the Gospel of Life as taught by Pope Saint John Paul II?

This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2016/01/euthanasia-in-canada-opportunity-to.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Ladybug Lesson, Book and Snacks to Teach the Culture of Life [at A Slice of Smith Life]

Recently I came across

[Jessica's blog post at Shower of Roses](#)

and

[Nicole's blog post at Children of the Church](#)

in which they did a lesson on praying for the unborn and teaching the culture of life using the

[free "Ladybug Warriors" lesson](#)

created by

[Culture of Life Studies Program](#)

.

I was inspired to try this activity this past Sunday afternoon with my family since we didn't get to go to the

[March for Life](#)

this past Friday, January 22 like we did in

[2011](#)

,

[2012](#)

, and

[2015](#)

. Instead of being physically present at the March for Life this year, we prayed over the weekend for the end to abortion, the

[marchers' safety while traveling in the blizzard](#)

, and all those who are victims of abortion: the unborn, men, women, and all those effected by abortion in numerous ways.



I decided to make each of my children a booklet out of yellow file folders with the

["Ladybug Warriors" lesson](#)

stapled to the inside. I wanted each of my children to have a printout of the lesson so that if they ever wanted to do this activity again in the future with a friend they will have the lesson on hand. Also, I thought they may remember the lesson better if they had a copy of it.

Then the cover of the folder is the ladybug craft included in the lesson.



I also had several pro-life bookmarks that I saved from a Teens for Life event with my older children so each of my children glued the bookmarks to the inside cover of the yellow folder with a prayer to end abortion from

[Priests for Life](#)



On January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided the case Roe v. Wade (see a picture) that would change the lives of hundreds of millions of Americans. The two decisions allowed all women to abort and required almost guaranteed the date of birth in all 50 states. The impact of these two decisions has been staggering. Over 54 million babies in the U.S. have been lost to abortion since 1973. The generations born after the decisions had as many as 1 out of every 3 babies lost to abortion. And still today, over 4,000 babies will lose their lives to abortion. The impact goes beyond the children. In our country, there are millions of women with emotional scars and millions of fathers full of guilt. The number of lives ended, hurt or damaged by abortion is hard to imagine, and more are hurt every day.

The situation is dire, but not hopeless. You can make a real difference. Abortion is an individual action and it takes individuals to offer the hope, truth, and love that will change minds and save lives.

Pray for those women who have already had or are considering an abortion, for those involved in the abortion industry, and for those working to end abortion. Next, let others know the truth. Share with your friends that the unborn are loved by God. It can and does save lives. Finally, get involved. Support a Pregnancy Resource Center, Right to Life, or church ministry with your time and funds. Vote for pro-life candidates, get involved, and make a difference!

© 2007 Life and Temples, www.life.com 1-888-235-9399 #1202

Prayer to End Abortion

Lord God, I thank you today
for the gift of my life,
And for the lives of all my
brothers and sisters.

I know there is nothing that
destroys more life than abortion,
Yet I rejoice that you have conquered death
by the Resurrection of Your Son.
I am ready to do my part in ending abortion.

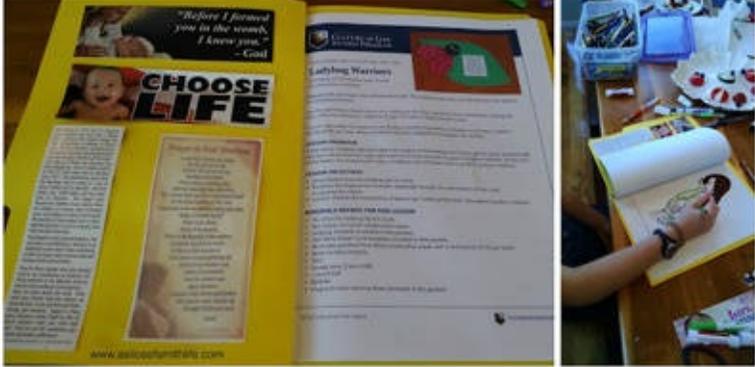
Today I commit myself
Never to be silent,
Never to be passive,
Never to be forgetful of the unborn.

I commit myself to be active
in the pro-life movement,
And never to stop defending life
Until all my brothers and
sisters are protected,
And our nation once
again becomes
A nation with liberty and justice
Not just for some, but for all,
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen!

- Fr. Frank Pavone
www.priestforlife.org

www.asliceofsmithlife.com



After I read from the suggested book,

[The Grouchy Ladybug by Eric Carle](#)

, my children enjoyed making the ladybug craft using the templates in the lesson. There is also a printout of a woman carrying a baby in her womb that some of my children enjoyed coloring. I also pulled from our bookshelves our big collection of Eric Carle books that I hope to read this week. One of our favorite Eric Carle books that we especially enjoy for Lent (that starts very soon on February 10!) is

[Walter the Baker](#)

where

[we make pretzels after reading the book](#)

!





After reading the book and doing the craft I read from the lesson about how the ladybug got its name. My children and husband were surprised that sources say the ladybug got its name from the help of Our Blessed Mother, Our Lady. In Europe during the Middle Ages insects were eating the farmers' crops so they asked Our Lady for help and soon after the crops were growing and thriving. They then noticed that little red bugs with black spots, or "The Beetles of Our Lady" were eating the pesky insects that were ruining the crops. The name was eventually shortened to Lady Beetle or ladybug.



The lesson includes snack ideas and I also went on to find an easy snack made with

[mini Babybel cheese](#)

(and I used

[Wilton Sparkle Gel](#)

to make the dots on the red wax) and my children and I also made ladybugs with strawberries, blueberries, and mini chocolate chips on top of a cucumber slice.



As suggested in the lesson, our family concluded this fun activity by saying a decade of the rosary, the greatest weapon as a "Ladybug Warrior".



Doing this easy, but meaningful lesson with my children reminded me of [the ladybug cake that I made for my daughter on her first birthday](#)

! She is now 15! I don't think I knew back then the history of how the ladybug got its name so I'm thankful our family now knows how very special the ladybug is and to never stop being a "Ladybug Warrior" and supporting and praying for all life in all stages!



I have a Pinterest Pro-Life board called "

" that I created awhile ago, where I have been collecting pro-life posts. Please check it out and repin away to help spread the message of life to all the world!

Prayer to End Abortion

Lord God, I thank you today for the gift of my life,
And for the lives of all my brothers and sisters.

I know there is nothing that destroys more life than abortion,
Yet I rejoice that you have conquered death
by the Resurrection of Your Son.

I am ready to do my part in ending abortion.
Today I commit myself
Never to be silent,

Never to be passive,
Never to be forgetful of the unborn.

I commit myself to be active in the pro-life movement,
And never to stop defending life
Until all my brothers and sisters are protected,
And our nation once again becomes
A nation with liberty and justice
Not just for some, but for all.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen!



This contribution is available at <http://www.asliceofsmithlife.com/2016/01/ladybug-lesson-book-and-snacks-to-teach.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Can non-Latinists pray the Latin Mass? [at LMS Chairman]



Dr Robert Kinney (his doctorate is in Pharmacy, interestingly) has argued over at the

[Homiletic and Pastoral Review](#)

that is it impossible actually to

pray

in a language one does not understand, or with a celebrant who is using a language one does not understand.

[A]

s Catholics, we believe that the Mass is the most powerful prayer on earth. If the Mass is said in an unfamiliar or entirely unknown language, though, can it properly be labeled as a “prayer”? Or, are the words uttered merely beautiful-sounding syllables without willed meaning?

This would have some pretty radical implications for Catholics visiting foreign countries and Masses celebrated for international congregations

: in Lourdes, for example, it is common to find Masses celebrated in several languages, one lection in German, one in English, a prayer in French, another in Italian, and so on. The thought 'they'd be better off using Latin' is one which Dr Kinney presumably shares, since praying just a snatch of the Mass, or hearing just one lection meaningfully, must count as almost pointless.

It also implies that the silent prayers (the 'priestly prayers', such as the Lavabo) of the Novus Ordo are so much mumbo jumbo,

even when Mass is celebrated in the congregation's mother tongue. If you can't

hear

the prayer, you can't understand it, right? As so often, attacks on the Traditional Mass rebound on the 1970 Missal. That Bugnini and Pope Paul VI: they got it all wrong, eh, Dr Kinney?

There is an interesting response to this article over at

[One Peter Five](#)

, which accepts the implication that we should familiarise ourselves with Latin. We should, of course, and you can sign up for the LMS intensive, 5-day Latin Course in July

[here](#)

. But Dr Kinney's argument fails at a more fundamental level.

The real problem with the argument is that he hasn't thought through what 'willed meaning' (and various equivalent phrases in the article) means.

The Canon of the Mass, specifically, and the Mass as a whole, is an offering of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross to the Father in reparation for the sins of mankind. That is a fact which can be inferred from the texts, though such an inference would take a bit of study and effort (particularly, perhaps, in the Novus Ordo), but in any case it should be and, particularly in the context of the Traditional Mass, commonly is, conveyed by preaching and catechesis.

If you understand this fundamental meaning of the prayers of the Canon, then you can make this, the fundamental intention of the prayers, your own as you participate at Mass.

Thus, as far as the most important meaning of the prayers is concerned, you do understand, and you do pray.

This can be done without a great deal of articulation. Someone without much catechism, who is familiar with the ancient liturgy (less so with the Novus Ordo, perhaps) will be able instinctively to grasp that what is going on is an

act of worship.

We can imagine such a realisation, for example, even by a non-Christian familiar with pagan forms of worship, who encounters the Mass for the first time. Such a person would be correct: the offering of Christ's sacrifice is indeed the supreme act of worship. That degree of understanding is enough for the participant to

will

the act of worship with the priest. This is what we call the uniting of intentions: what we should do in Mass, is offer the worship together with the priest. Moving beyond the pagan's realisation that it

is

worship, we intend to

associate ourselves with it.

No doubt Dr Kinney will object that, while this may be true at the most general level, many liturgical texts have specific intentions and messages,

and ignorance of Latin can be a barrier to making these specific intentions our own. It is true that there are specific intentions and meanings in specific texts, but it is not true that missing out on some of these undermines the validity of our union with the most fundamental and important intention and meaning of the Mass. At least, Dr Kinney had better hope it isn't, because

there is really no reason to imagine that this is a bigger problem for a non-Latinist who regularly attends the Traditional Mass, than a non-theologian who regularly attends the Novus Ordo being celebrated in his or her own cradle language.

The ceremonies of the Traditional Mass use a set of symbolic gestures, such as incensing, sprinkling with Holy Water, signs of the cross, and kisses, which any reasonably attentive regular worshiper will pick up and understand without needing much prompting. For example, the priest kisses the Gospel book after reading it: you don't need a degree in liturgical studies to understand that this is an act of reverence and love.

On the other hand, liturgical prayers and passages of scripture do contain some fairly complex theological ideas, whatever language they are declaimed in. In some ways the texts of the Novus Ordo are simpler than those of the Traditional Mass, but in other ways they are harder, because in order to understand them fully one needs to read them in a theological context which isn't provided in the liturgy itself: they require

catechesis -

instruction outside the liurgy - to understand them properly. But don't take my word for it.

On Communion in the Hand, from

[*Memoriale Domine*](#)

:

It is, above all, necessary that an **adequate catechesis prepares the way** so that the faithful will understand the significance of the action and will perform it with the respect due to the sacrament. The result of this catechesis should be to remove any suggestion of wavering on the part of the Church in its faith in the eucharistic presence, and also to remove any danger or even suggestion of profanation.

On Reception under Both Kinds, from

[*Redemptionis Sacramentum*](#) So that the fullness of the sign may be made more clearly evident to the faithful in the course of the Eucharistic banquet, lay members of Christ's faithful, too, are admitted to Communion under both kinds, in the cases set forth in the liturgical books, **preceded and continually accompanied by proper catechesis** regarding the dogmatic principles on this matter laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent.

On receiving Communion standing, from the

[*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* \(American edition\)](#) The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with **proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm. The Novus Ordo, as usually celebrated, is just terribly confusing.**

The confusion undermines the proper understanding of the prayers and ritual actions, which, Dr Kinney must surely worry, can render impossible the congregation's praying along with the liturgy.

Dr Kinney must be even more worried over the mistranslations of the Missal

, so many of which were exposed for all to see in the debate about the improved English translation finally promulgated in 2011. From 1974 to 2011 the faithful were given liturgical texts which failed to express adequately the mind of the Church. This must, I suppose, have prevented them from praying the Mass.

Finally, Dr Kinney must be besides himself with concern over the way that the three-year lectionary

regularly serves up as lections in the Mass passages from the Sacred Scriptures which are obscure, not to say incomprehensible. The Traditional One Year cycle tends not to do this.

Not for the first time, it falls to me to defend the Ordinary Form of the Mass from opponents of the Extraordinary Form.

The reality is that a grasp of the fundamental meaning of the Mass is sufficient to allow the worshipper to unite himself with the fundamental intention of the Mass. A good understanding of the specific meanings of parts of the Mass and the texts proper to particular feastdays is to be heartily commended, but is not absolutely necessary. After all, even a lifetime's study of the texts and ceremonies of the Mass (in either Form) will not exhaust their meaning, or eliminate all controversy among scholars, just as a lifetime's Biblical scholarship will never uncover the whole meaning of the Sacred Scriptures.

It does appear to be the case, however, that the drama of the Traditional Mass does a better job at conveying the central meaning of the Mass to the Faithful than translation into the vernacular does for the Novus Ordo. At any rate,

[this survey](#)

of church-going American Catholics found that only half of them realised that the Church taught the Real Presence. That is clearly a mistake which is less easy to make if you attend the Traditional Mass.

For why the use of Latin actually assists the faithful, even those ignorant of Latin, to participate in the Mass, see

[here.](#)

| [Contents](#) |

God's Surprise Gift [at Plot Line and Sinker]



Today is the day of the U.S. annual March for Life in Washington D.C. (and I hope it doesn't get cancelled due to the winter storm coming to the East Coast!). I'd like to share the following article I wrote entitled "God's Surprise Gift" which was published in *God Moments III: True Love Leads to Life*, released in 2012 by Joseph Karl Publishing.

For several days after my mom shared the news, I remained shocked and surprised but very, very happy. My 47-year-old mother was going to have a baby.

One thing was certain: **I had never seen my mom so joy-filled.** She became a widow at age 44. A short time later, she met and married my stepfather. Although my stepfather had four daughters from his first marriage and my mother had four children from her marriage to my father, neither imagined there would be any children from their union.

The challenges became apparent as soon as she began to tell people. My mom's obstetrician/gynecologist (the same doctor who delivered me 22 years previous) scowled when my mom asked for an "official" pregnancy test, explaining that she had taken an "at home" test and it was positive.

"You're not thinking of having it, are you?"

"Of course I am."

"You can't have it! You have a one in ten risk of having a child with Down Syndrome, not to mention all the abnormalities that come with increased maternal age."

"I want to have this baby."

According to my mom, the doctor continued pressuring her — urging her — to have an abortion. However, my mom had always had a strong and stubborn personality. She didn't back down nor did she acquiesce to his wishes.

Finally, she said, "I'm having this baby."

The doctor replied, "Then you'll have to find another doctor. I won't be delivering it."

When she arrived home, my mom was angry. She spent the next ten minutes yelling and pacing the floor. She was frustrated with **the irony of the words “pro choice.”** She wasn’t given any choice but to abort. She eventually found a Catholic pro-life doctor to deliver her baby. Since it had been 20 years since her last pregnancy, there were some concerns and challenges. However, this doctor took very good care of her.

Of course, her previous doctor wasn’t the only one who reacted negatively. Some friends and relatives thought my mother and stepfather were crazy to be happy about an “unplanned pregnancy.”

“This is obviously an accident,” one person commented. My mother’s response: “This isn’t an accident. It’s a surprise. Those are two different things.” Another person said, “It was obviously unplanned.” My mom would shake her head and say, “Not unplanned, just a surprise.”

The day came for my mom to deliver. It was a rainy Tuesday evening. My siblings and I waited outside the delivery room. Finally, we heard a baby crying. We were soon given the news that my mother had given birth to a baby girl. We were thrilled! We had a new baby sister to love, and my mom continued to call her “God’s surprise gift.”

“God’s surprise gift,” my youngest sister, is now 34 years old. She volunteered, then worked for years at a crisis pregnancy center and spent many Saturday mornings praying in front of abortion clinics. She now works as a director of religious education at a parish in New Jersey.

My mother passed away in 2007. However, our entire family remains grateful that she and my stepfather chose life for my sister. **I can’t imagine the world without her.**

Photo and Text copyright 2016 Ellen Gable Hrkach

This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2016/01/22/gods-surprise-gift-2/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Gary Scott Reedy (1958-2016) [at V for Victory!]



I first met Gary in the doorway between Courtroom 206 and chambers. He struck me as nerdy and eccentric, with a quirky speech pattern and a somewhat nervous laugh. I was poised to dismiss him as a harmless crank and a jovial misfit, the sort that lends color to the workplace but that requires large investments of time and is therefore best kept at arm's length. I did not know it then, but I was standing at another doorway, an unseen doorway, and the course of lives would depend on whether I decided to go in or continue on my way. I decided to set aside the temptation to dismiss Gary and went in that doorway.

And so we became friends. In the fall of that year we were assigned to work together on the same calendar, and we got to know each other more. Gary turned out to be highly intelligent, a shrewd and wily negotiator, and a tenacious fighter. He was also a great talker and possessed a wit of a high order, and we had a lot of good back-and-forths and a lot of laughs. He frequently appeared in my doorway; sometimes he would pace around in my office, tapping on the top of my water cooler with his fingers while recounting some client's courtroom follies, or going over a particularly hairy case; other times, he would sit and talk about his travels, which he relished, or his wife and daughter, to whom he was utterly devoted, or about Rumpole of the Bailey, of whom we were both fans.

It didn't take long in our acquaintance to run into the generosity and sweetness that underlay Gary's gruff exterior. Early in our working partnership, I suddenly found myself between cars. Gary let me have his old station wagon until I could get another car. That he would lend me a car without knowing me very long was extraordinarily generous. How he did it was extraordinarily sweet. He did not give me to understand that he was doing me an immense favor -- though he was -- or make me feel as though I was incurring a debt -- though I was. He and Phoebe and Lizzie brought the car to the office, all washed and cleaned, and he handed me the key as though *I* was doing *him* a favor and placing *him* in *my* debt by letting him help me.

Another time we were working a heavy load of pretrial conferences when one of my clients, unhappy with how I had resolved his case, shot a parting insult at me over his shoulder on his way out the door in front of a packed courtroom. Gary's response was swift and decisive. He immediately got between the guy and the door and would not let him out of the room until he had, in the plainest terms, made him see the error of his ways in thinking that his rudeness toward me was somehow acceptable. His dressing down of the guy was as public as the guy's offense against me had been, and by an amazing coincidence, there was a marked improvement in everyone else's behavior that day. Gary seemed concerned afterward that I would think that he thought I couldn't take care of myself. On the contrary: I don't know if I ever sufficiently conveyed to him how much it lifted my spirits to have him stick up for me. From that day forward, Gary was my hero.

Gary was an authentic tough guy, in the best sense of the word: not a hoodlum or a ruffian, but staunch and passionate in his defense of the underdog, yet courtly and gentlemanly, uncompromising in his pursuit of righteousness according to his lights, keenly aware of being at the service of causes greater than himself. Amid his many trials, in and out of the courtroom, he was always thoughtful and considerate, constantly overlooking wrongs or slights against himself, uncomplaining in his fortitude, and always looking to ease other people's burdens, or at least refrain from adding to them.

Never did these qualities shine forth more brightly than in his greatest and last trial. Through all the laughs and the jokes and the stories and the lunch runs to Winco, I couldn't help eyeing the ever-changing growths and lesions on his head and face. Gary always tried to make light of these uncomfortable reminders of his mortality. He would emphasize that his kind of cancer was among the less virulent varieties, and talk reassuringly about his doctors' experience and qualifications and plans of attack. Even after his prostate surgery, and the discovery of tumors in the lymph nodes in his neck, he referred to his cancer as a "first world problem." He would say that at least he had all the medical care he needed to get these things taken care of, as if they were mere inconveniences. Then came that awful morning when he closed my office door and sat down and carefully and gently worked his way to the news that he was terminal, trying his best to cushion the blow.

Then came the inevitable day that, to Gary, seemed at least as sore a blow to him as the news of his impending end: the day it became clear that the pain and the fatigue were too much for him to go on working. The hard knocks he had taken over the course of his career did not diminish his love for his work, or for his colleagues, and he worked hard to get used to the idea that his part in the battle was over. Now he had to arm himself for a greater battle, one that he knew he would ultimately lose, but that he was determined to fight as well as he could. But he never forgot us, and never tired of keeping tabs on us: even near the end, when he was bedridden and barely able to speak, he wanted to hear about our small triumphs and tragedies at the office, and revel in our victories. And so Gary's last days passed -- all too quickly. Too few were the opportunities left to seek his advice; or to take him out for a picnic at the drive-in after his pain medications made it impossible for him to drive anymore; or to enjoy his cooking, which he loved. As the weeks passed, he grew weaker, and his

lesions increased, and his immune system broke down as he fought to stay alive through the holidays; but his courage and his sense of humor rose to meet every setback. After coming very close to death in November, he rallied, as the dying often do. When I came to see him during his father's last visit, to my surprise, he opened the door to me himself, walking without a cane or a walker. He threw his arms around me and said, "I was dying, but I changed my mind!"

But then came the moment that he -- and we -- could only hope to postpone, and the long-anticipated but dreaded news finally went out. The battle was over. Gary had gone in that last doorway through which we all must pass. He had approached death manfully; "nothing in his life became him like the leaving it." Now there was nothing left for the rest of us to do but pray for his soul, and mourn, and pay him his last offices. And, like Gary's beloved Horace Rumpole, quote Rumpole's beloved Wordsworth:

The rainbow comes and goes, And lovely is the rose; The moon doth with delight Look
round her when the heavens are bare; Waters on a starry night Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth; But yet I know, where'er I go, That there hath pass'd away a
glory from the earth.

The fate of a soul that has gone to stand before God in judgment is hidden from us. While we remain on earth, we cannot know whether that soul has gone to everlasting life or everlasting punishment. But we can hope in God's fathomless mercy. I hope in God's mercy. I have hope that the God Who loved Gary infinitely, and created him from nothing for the express purpose of being happy forever in heaven, poured out His mercy upon him. And so I think of Gary, appearing in my doorway, like he used to. In my mind's eye, he is young, with the youth of the soul that never fades even in old age. He is beautiful, with the beauty that in this life was hidden from all but those who loved him. He is radiant, with the glory of those whom the grave cannot hold forever. He bears the wounds and the lesions and the tumors no longer as torments or disfigurements, but as trophies of victory, set like jewels in the crown of immortality. Every one of them taught him patience and humility and fortitude and resignation; every one was a rung on the ladder to heaven. They could not defeat his spirit, but only his body; but even in his body they will be defeated in the General Resurrection, when the Last Trumpet sounds, and the graves are opened, and hell and death are cast into the lake of fire, and every tear is wiped from our faces forever.

This contribution is available at <http://v-forvictory.blogspot.com/2016/01/gary-scott-reedy-1958-2016.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |



Billy Joel wrote a very popular song back in the 70s named [Only the Good Die Young](#). It is a very upbeat and catchy song in which he sings about prayers, rosaries, confirmation and Catholic family life. The only problem with the song is that the author is not very happy about his encounters with one or more catholic families. Apparently the Catholics he met did not do a very good job of spreading the gospel or ministering to people like Billy Joel.

An opportunity lost

In the song he says about the young lady's mother, "she never cared for me, but did she ever say a prayer for me?" We can learn much about how to share our Catholic faith from this song. Billy Joel is an amazingly talented musician, his music is still very popular and has had a profound effect on our society. If only the Catholics he met in his life had been better at engaging non-Catholics. I have no idea who he met or what they did to leave such an unfavorable impression on him, but it was such a profound experience that he dedicated a whole song to it.

I come into contact with quite a few young people whom my kids bring home. I try to be as friendly as I can and try to meet them where they are in their maturity and journey of faith. Not all of the kids that have come to our home are perfect, but that shouldn't cause me to kick them out or forbid them from hanging out with my children. However, depending on the age and maturity of my child, I may need to talk about some of the issues I see in their friends just to ensure that unhealthy behaviors do not rub off. These discussions should always be in positive terms, working with my child to help them help their friend to be a better person who is able to grow closer to the Lord perhaps with the help of my child and our family.

If I, as a parent, try to forbid any association without the cooperation or consent of my child, that could end up producing another Billy Joel who harbor negative feelings about family and our faith. Even if a particular friendship doesn't last, it is our hope that each young man or woman will at least remember us as a family who was nice to them even if we disagreed on certain things.

Are we having fun yet?

"I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints, the sinners are much more fun" is one of the lines in the Bill Joel song that Pope Francis would take interest in. The Pope, [reflecting on the attitude of Christians](#), wondered who would want to be a Christian if they always looked like they were going to a funeral. It's true! If we believe in the good news of the Gospel, we should be filled with joy and nothing should be able to take that joy away. Bad things do happen to us from time to time, and we may suffer and not feel happy, but we should still maintain a joyful outlook on life.



Good Clean Fun

It is my hope that our home is a home of [joy and happiness](#). I would hope that each person we encounter along the way will leave with the impression that being a Christian is joyful and that we may even have more fun than those who do not believe in the gospel. Hedonist pleasures (excessive drinking, sins of the flesh and the like) are fleeting pleasures that many times you regret in the morning. Hopefully my kids and their friends would say that there is such a thing as good, clean fun and they have experienced that at our home, I know I have.

Evangelize always, when necessary use words

We are always evangelizing others. We are either drawing them towards a life centered on Christ or we are pushing them away from it. It is not possible for us to make everyone happy, there will be people who disagree with us and may even be ugly about it (I experienced it first hand in the Texas Capitol during a very tense legislative session with pro-life legislation up for a vote). It is how we respond to these disagreements that will either leave a favorable or unfavorable impression of Christianity. Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, he doesn't say we have to agree or allow ourselves or our family to be harmed, just refuse to return a slap when we receive one. Anger only begets anger. We can be resolute in our beliefs or in defending ourselves and our family and still do it with love and empathy for the other person.

God is love and Jesus loved us to the end and even loved those who scourged and crucified him and at least one of those soldiers was converted because of it (see [St. Longinus](#)). Love is indeed powerful and it can change hearts and a lack of charity can harden them. The choice is yours, now go out and [make a difference](#) in the world in which you live.



This contribution is available at <http://www.yourhollyfamily.com/only-the-good-die-young/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Libraries & Sad Update to Unraveling My Father's Suicide [at TASTE and SEE]

LIBRARIES

I am a strong supporter of the public library system throughout our country. Once I discovered the one in my neighborhood, a new world opened up to me. From writing articles on their computers to borrowing DVD movies of all kinds to borrowing books to borrowing books & movies from across the state to attending discussions on stone wall building to giving a presentation about my book to the locals to volunteering for them and learning about cataloging.

Since May 2015, I have donated several copies of my book to the libraries in my area.

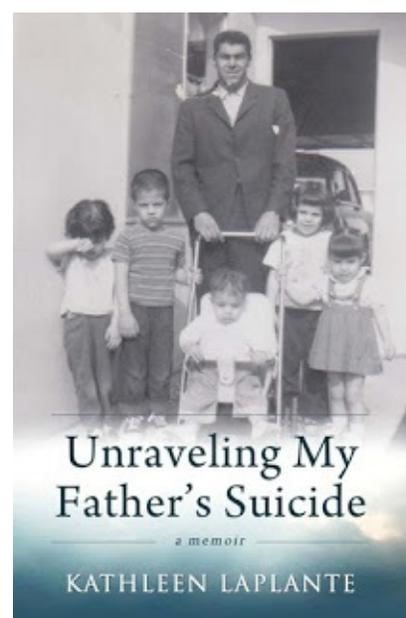
If you would like to donate one to a library in your area anywhere in the United States, please contact me with their mailing address and I will gladly ship them an autographed copy, noting your name as well. My Email: klaplante2@yahoo.com



SAD UPDATE to UNRAVELING MY FATHER'S SUICIDE

It is with much sadness that I share the following news. My cousin Ethan (pseudonym) took his own life on Christmas Eve in the same location his older brother took did the same several years ago. My older cousin shot himself at the top of the Rock Rimmon ledge, while the most recent suicide was done by jumping off that same ledge. Ethan is mentioned on pp. 38 & 50 as having ongoing struggles with suicidal ideation.

I was shocked. For some reason, I thought the suicides in my family tree would stop with the completion of my book. There is no logical reason for that, just an unconscious desire, I guess. I hope you rest in peace, cousins. +



Images - <http://www.amazon.com/Unraveling-Fathers-Suicide-Kathleen-Laplante/dp/0692409882/> -
<http://www.manchester.lib.ia.us/images/signoutside> -
http://www.wherehistorylives.org/App_Uploads_Img/Manitowoc%20Public%20Library/Manitowoc%20

This contribution is available at <http://www.tasteandsee2.blogspot.com/2016/01/libraries-sad-update-to-unraveling-my.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

To be instituted acolyte [at Hermano Juancito]

This coming Sunday, January 17, Bishop Darwin Andino will institute me as an acolyte in a special rite during Sunday Mass in Dulce Nombre. This is part of the road toward the diaconate.

The Second Vatican Council opened the way to the diaconate as a permanent order, open to married, as well as single, men.

In the course of the reform of the liturgy, the Pope reformed the rites and the steps toward priesthood and the diaconate.

Before the 1970s, candidates for the priesthood received the tonsure, four minor orders (porter, exorcist, lector, acolyte) and three major orders (subdeacon, deacon, priest). Only after all these orders could one be ordained a bishop. The process had, in some ways, the sense of a “

cursus honorum,

” a course or ladder of honors – with the higher order seen as more important and honorable. It had all the trappings of a top down ecclesiology.

In 1972, this was changed and the orders of porter, exorcist, and subdeacon were left aside. Only the ministries of lector and acolyte were retained and classified as ministries – which are also open to men who are not going to be ordained deacons or priests. The lector is called to service of the Word and the acolyte to service of the altar, assisting the deacon and priest. But a person is not ordained to these ministries, but instituted in them. As Pope Paul VI wrote in *Ministeria Quaedam*:

It is in accordance with the reality itself and with the contemporary outlook that the above mentioned ministries should no longer be called minor orders; their conferral will not be called ordination, but institution. Only those who have received the diaconate, however, will be clerics in the true sense and will be so regarded. This arrangement will bring out more clearly the distinction between clergy and laity, between what is proper and reserved to the clergy and what can be entrusted to the laity. This will also bring out more clearly that mutuality by which "the universal priesthood of believers and the ministerial or hierarchic priesthood, though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, are nonetheless interrelated: each of these in its own special way is a sharing in the one priesthood of Christ." [*Lumen Gentium*, 10]

What is important is that even the diaconate and the priesthood are not seen as something above the lay members of the church. The ministerial priesthood is to be seen in the framework of the priesthood that all

Christians receive at their baptism.

But why the ministries of lector and acolyte?

In the instruction, Pope Paul VI noted

It is especially fitting that the ministries of reader and acolyte should be entrusted to those who, as candidates for sacred orders, desire to devote themselves to God and to the Church in a special way. ...Both by study and by gradual exercise of the ministry of the word and of the altar, candidates for sacred orders should through intimate contact understand and reflect upon the double aspect of the priestly office... In this way, candidates are to approach holy orders fully aware of their vocation, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, constant in prayer, and aware of the needs of the faithful.

What strikes me is that these two ministries (no longer orders) are meant to help those who are to be ordained more “fully aware of their vocation.”

“Fervent in spirit”

– We, as all the people of God, are called to open our spirits to the Spirit of God so that the fire of God’s love may burn in our hearts. Those who minister at the Word and the altar – whether commissioned, instituted, or ordained – are called to let that fire burn in their hearts, purifying them and making them signs of God, burning bushes and pillars of fire. God wants people with passion.

“Serving the Lord”

– We are all called to put the Lord at the center of our lives, putting aside the gods of power, money, and pleasure, recognizing that there is one Lord and that all must be seen and used in light of the Lord who comes in poverty, in service, in tender love. God’s wants people who are servants.

“Constant in prayer”

– We are called to “pray always,” to make our lives a prayer, so that every part of our life – from kneeling in church to bending over the kitchen sink, from changing a baby’s diaper to sexual love – a prayer, a way of praising God and proclaiming his love. God wants people who are constantly in contact with Him.

“Aware of the needs of the faithful”

– We, especially those called to ministry and to ordination, need to read the signs of the times, to hear the cry of God’s people, to open ourselves to encounter all of God’s people, especially those at the margin. God wants people who see and respond to the other person, especially those in need.

The instituted ministers and the ordained deacons, priests, and bishops are thus called to be signs of God in the midst of God’s People, not

over

them but rather

below

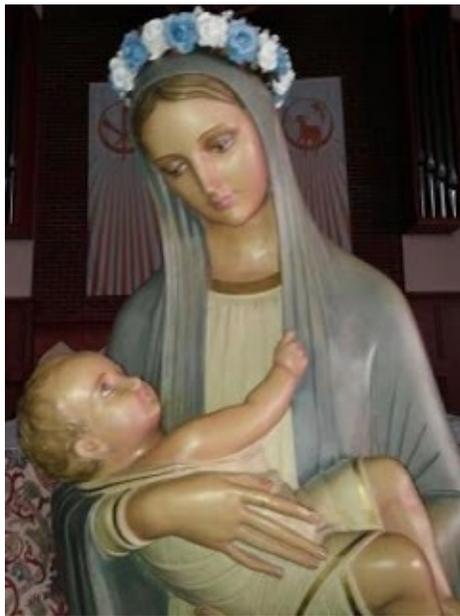
them, kneeling before God and before people – sharing God’s Word and the Body of Christ, as servants who are not adverse to washing the feet (and washing dishes).

This is the first in a series of blog posts on the ministry of acolytes, in preparation for my institution in the ministry on Sunday, January 17, 2016.

This contribution is available at <http://hermanojuancito.blogspot.com/2016/01/to-be-instituted-acolyte.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Mary My Mother - Be at My Side [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]



[The great value of retreats is that the guidance and insight gained during those intense times of prayer and silence never stop giving. Every time I re-read my notes from past retreats I gain additional direction and encouragement. Let me share an example of what I mean.]

On the second day of my retreat, I found myself distracted particularly at Communion. This upset me and I asked God to show me why I felt distant from Him. I asked for the gift of intimacy and stayed after Mass to further give Him thanks for the great gift I had just received and to explore these feelings more thoroughly.

It was my intent to ponder the reflection set forth for the second day in

[*A Novena of Holy Communions*](#)

, written by Father Lawrence G. Lovasik, S.V.D.

But the chapel lights were quickly turned off making it impossible to see the words in my little booklet.

I was immediately struck with this thought: “Now you have to use your own words and not those of others”. After doing so for too brief of a time, I got up to leave, intending to go right to my car and check to see if my blog post for that morning had been automatically posted as I had scheduled before leaving

home.

Right in the front of the monastery is a statute of our Blessed Mother

[\(Our Lady of the Genesee](#)

) holding the infant Christ child in her arms. There is a concrete bench directly in front of her. I had actually taken a picture of this statute years ago and have used it as a Christmas card.

I decided to postpone my rush to get on the internet and to stop, sit and gaze upon our Blessed Mother. As soon as I did so, I remembered that I had not completed the Novena reflection for that day. My mind was still wandering and unfocused. Although I have offered this Novena of Holy Communion monthly for the past three or four years, I could not recall the subject of that day's reflection. I had not yet opened the booklet to that page.

As I was about to do so, I was startled by a loud noise. I paused, looked all about me but saw nothing. As I opened the Novena book, I heard that noise again but was unable to discover its source. I then turned my eyes to the day's intention. I was startled. I looked up and into the eyes of the statute before me. You see the day's reflection was "Marylikeness"

Later it posed this stirring question – one which I have read many times in the past and casually noted to return to but never did: *"Do you often prepare yourself for Holy Communion and make your thanksgiving in union with Mary so that she may make up for whatever is lacking in your devotion and love?"*

Guess God had answered my earlier prayer with a question of His own. He offered me a tool toward greater intimacy with Him - Do as His Mother did and always approach Him with her at my side.

Since that time, I have always approached my Loving Lord with three specific prayers on my lips and in my heart.

"Blessed Mary, my Mother, help me to go to Communion everyday with better dispositions."

The second was written by Vazquez de Prada, the Founder of *Opus Dei*:

“I wish Lord to receive you with the purity, humility, and devotion with which your most holy Mother received you, with the spirit and fervor of the saints.”

The third I composed and is based upon the first two prayers and the reflection of Father Lovasik which I read on my retreat:

“Be at my side Blessed Mother as I approach your Son this day and make up for whatever is lacking in my preparation, appreciation, devotion, love and thanksgiving for this great Gift and Mystery.”

May she never leave my side as I seek greater intimacy with the Fruit of her womb!

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2016/01/monday-musings-mary-my-mother-be-at-my.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Faces of Mercy [at The Koala Mom]

When I worked as an editor, we were encouraged to take courses and attend professional development sessions. So as a mom, I try to remind myself that its good to spend time on personal growth and spiritual development. That's why I'm excited to see the second **Catholic Conference 4 Moms: Faces of Mercy** coming up in February.



I listened to several of the videos during [last year's conference](#) and thoroughly enjoyed them. I love the way that Tami Kiser has put together a conference that's accessible to moms wherever we are! It can be hard to find childcare or travel to a conference, but Tami brings the Catholic Conference 4 Mom right to us.

The 2016 “Faces of Mercy” Catholic Conference 4 Moms will offer:

- 20+ all new popular presenters and presentations ([check them out!](#))
- a Spanish Track, featuring presentations specifically for Hispanic moms
- access to all of the videos all of the time throughout Lent
- Live-streamed sessions on Saturday morning featuring Jennifer Fulwiler (one of my favourite bloggers and Catholic converts!) and on Saturday afternoon of the Divine Mercy Chaplet
- HD videos also available as MP3 /Podcasts for download
- Valuable digital swag bags for all online attendees

For just \$14.99, you get access to all of this. You can login anytime, anywhere to listen to videos. If you're up at 2 am with a sick kid or a nursing baby—get some encouragement! If you're driving across town for an appointment—find some inspiration! If you're washing dishes or cleaning house (like I was last year while listening to the conference)—be energized!

Imagine thousands of moms gathering together online or in their parishes to pray, to learn, to support one another, and to be challenged to live the message of mercy with their spouses, children, families, friends, and neighbors.

Ready to register for the conference? [Drop by the website](#) and use my code **Koala** to save \$2 on your

registration fee!



Tami Kiser, conference founder and organizer, lives in Greenville, SC, with her husband of 28 years. They have 10 children (ages 3-26) and 5 grandchildren. Mr. Kiser is a headmaster at a Catholic school and most of Tami's time is spent managing her large brood, providing family dinners, essay edits, haircuts, rides, stories, and lots of advice (mostly unsolicited). She also teaches dance part-time and works on this exciting conference whenever she gets the chance.

Tami says, **"I understand the need for moms to be encouraged in their vocation and faith.** I also understand how difficult that can be to fit into busy schedules. This conference with the focus on Mercy is the perfect solution. It's even better if moms can find other moms to share it with—in a parish mom's meeting, or at a friend's home while kids play. And if that's not possible, then part of an early morning quiet time or a treadmill run at the gym. The conference has the flexibility that moms need along with the great messages moms need to hear."

Celebrate the Year of Mercy by renewing your faith and your vocation as a mom. Better yet, as Tami suggests, get some friends together and share the encouragement with them. Lent is coming up quick so [register soon!](#)

I am affiliate for the Catholic Conference 4 Moms; I will receive a few dollars per registration, but encouraging moms is something I believe in heartily so I hope you'll register whether you use my affiliate code or not!

The logo for Bonnie, featuring the name "Bonnie" in a dark, rounded font with a green leaf icon above the letter "i".

This contribution is available at <http://thekoalamom.com/2016/01/catholic-conference-4-moms-faces-of-mercy/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Ten Things About Saint Thomas Aquinas That Every Catholic Should Know [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



One of the most brilliant minds in the history of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas was born in 1225 at the castle of Roccasecca, in the present day Lazio region of Italy, the youngest of nine children. Thomas' father was a man of means and nobility. Thomas's mother would try to prevent Thomas from joining the Dominican Order. His family expected him to enter the Benedictine Abbey where his uncle was the abbot. Thomas Aquinas dedicated his life to creating a complete synthesis of Catholic philosophy and theology. In honor of his feast day, [January 28] here are ten things every Catholic should know about the Angelic Doctor.

1. Before Aquinas was born, a holy hermit told his mother that her son would be a great learner and achieve unrivaled sanctity.

From, "

[Saint Thomas Aquinas of the Order of Preachers](#)

," by Fr. Placid Conway, OP, comes this account of the holy hermit's prediction concerning the unborn Aquinas' future life and accomplishments:

The future holiness of the unborn babe was disclosed to his mother by a holy hermit of the neighbourhood, known simply as Buono, or God's good man. Clad in a rough garment, and with hair unkempt, he presented himself at Rocca Secca, and pointing to a picture of the holy patriarch Saint Dominic, who was not yet canonized, he thus addressed the Countess: Lady, be glad, for thou art about to have a son whom thou shalt call Thomas. Thou and thy husband will think if making him a monk in the Abbey of Monte Cassino, where Saint Benedict's body reposes, in the hopes that your son will attain to its honours and wealth. But God has disposed otherwise, because he will become a friar of the Order of Preachers and so great will be his learning and sanctity that his equal will not be found through the whole world. Theodora listened with awe to the presage, then, falling upon her knees, exclaimed "I am all unworthy of bearing such a son, but, God's will be done according to His good pleasure."

The pride Aquinas' mother must have felt at hearing the hermit's words was tempered by disappointment. Her long held aspiration was for her youngest son to join the Benedictine Order. The Dominicans were

mendicants – preaching beggars who evangelized and served the unwashed masses of the poor – a vocation she felt was beneath Thomas. Together with her husband and sons, Theodora would spend the next two decades trying to dictate Thomas' calling.

2. Why was Aquinas called "The Dumb Ox"?

According to popular piety, one day, Thomas' brothers mocked his trusting nature by telling him that an ox had taken flight. As Thomas rushed to the window, his brothers burst out laughing. One brother asked, "Thomas, are you so dumb that you think an ox can fly!" to which Thomas replied, "I would sooner believe that an ox could fly than that my own brothers would lie to me."

Another oft quoted explanation for Aquinas' sobriquet:

Because Thomas was quiet and spoke little, fellow students thinking he was slow named him "the dumb ox". But one of their lecturers [the great Medieval German philosopher and saint] Albertus Magnus prophetically exclaimed: "You call him the dumb ox, but in his teaching he will one day produce such a bellowing that it will be heard throughout the world."

3. Aquinas repulsed an "indecent proposal".

Not long after entering the Order of Preachers, Thomas was abducted by his brothers who imprisoned him at the castle tower in the village of Monte San Giovanni. There he was stripped of his religious habit, deprived of every comfort and humiliated. Despite his treatment, Thomas showed no signs of acquiescing to his family's demand that he become a Benedictine.

So desperate was his family to dissuade Thomas that two of his brothers hired a prostitute to seduce him. According to legend, Thomas drove the woman away with a fire iron. That night as he slept, two angels appeared to him and strengthened his determination to remain celibate with the grace of eternal virginity by girding him with a mystical belt of purity.



Chesterton's account, while dated in expression, is worth reading:

[Thomas'] brothers introduced into his room some specially gorgeous and painted courtesan, with the idea of surprising him by a sudden temptation, or at least involving him in a scandal. His anger was justified, even by less strict moral standards than his own; for the meanness was even worse than the foulness of the expedient. Even on the lowest grounds, he knew his brothers knew, and they knew that he knew, that it was an insult to him as a gentleman to suppose that he would break his pledge upon so base a provocation; and he had behind him a far more terrible sensibility; all that huge ambition of humility which was to him the voice of God out of heaven.

In this one flash alone we see that huge unwieldy figure in an attitude of activity, or even animation;

and he was very animated indeed. He sprang from his seat and snatched a brand out of the fire, and stood brandishing it like a flaming sword. The woman not unnaturally shrieked and fled, which was all that he wanted; but it is quaint to think of what she must have thought of that madman of monstrous stature juggling with flames and apparently threatening to burn down the house. All he did, however, was to stride after her to the door and bang and bar it behind her; and then, with a sort of impulse of violent ritual, he rammed the burning brand into the door, blackening and blistering it with one big black sign of the cross. Then he returned, and dropped it again into the fire; and sat down on that seat of sedentary scholarship, that chair of philosophy, that secret throne of contemplation, from which he never rose again.

Read G. K. Chesterton's

[*Saint Thomas Aquinas in its entirety*](#)

4. Aquinas wrote the *Summa* as an introductory text for beginners.

In 1265, Pope Clement IV summoned Aquinas to Rome to serve as the papal theologian. Later, he was ordered by the Dominicans to teach at the

studium conventuale

, the first school of its kind to teach the full range of philosophical subjects of both the moral and natural natures.

There Thomas wrote his most famous work,

Summa Theologica

, which he deemed particularly useful to beginning students "Because a doctor of Catholic truth ought not only to teach the proficient, but to him pertains also to instruct beginners. As the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 3:1–2, as to infants in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat, our proposed intention in this work is to convey those things that pertain to the Christian religion in a way that is fitting to the instruction of beginners." Aquinas intended the

Summa

to be an introductory text; to be followed later by more advanced treatises. [After reading the

Summa Theologica

it is hard to image a more superlative or developed volume of theology.]

5. Aquinas "baptized" Aristotle.

Combining the theological principles of faith with Aristotle's empirical philosophy, Aquinas was the most influential thinker of Medieval Scholasticism. One often hears said that Aquinas "baptized" Aristotle. It is

an apt metaphor as

[James Kiefer's commentary](#)

illustrates:

"In the thirteenth century, when Thomas Aquinas lived, the works of Aristotle, largely forgotten in Western Europe, began to be available again, partly from Eastern European sources and partly from Moslem Arab sources in Africa and Spain. These works offered a new and exciting way of looking at the world. Many enthusiastic students of Aristotle adopted him quite frankly as an alternative to Christianity. The response of many Christians was to denounce Aristotle as an enemy of the Christian Faith. A third approach was that of those who tried to hold both Christian and Aristotelian views side by side with no attempt to reconcile the two. Aquinas had a fourth approach. While remaining a Christian, he immersed himself in the ideas of Aristotle, and then undertook to explain Christian ideas and beliefs in language that would make sense to disciples of Aristotle. At the time, this seemed like a very dangerous and radical idea, and Aquinas spent much of his life living on the edge of ecclesiastical approval. His success can be measured by the prevalence today of the notion that of course all Christian scholars in the Middle Ages were followers of Aristotle.

Aristotle is no longer the latest intellectual fashion, but Aquinas's insistence that the Christian scholar must be prepared to meet other scholars on their own ground, to become familiar with their viewpoints, to argue from their premises, has been a permanent and valuable contribution to Christian thought."

Aquinas believed that reason – what we know through our intellect, and revelation – what God tells us through revelation, are complementary not contradictory. His revolutionary insight has reached throughout the world and across time.

6. During his lifetime, portions of Aquinas' *Summa* were condemned.

In December 1270, the Bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, formally condemned thirteen Aristotelian and Averroistic propositions as heretical. Critics in the ecclesiastical community feared that the introduction of such concepts would undermine the purity of the Christian faith.

Again in 1277, Bishop Tempier, issued a second more extensive condemnation. Its primary objective was to assert that God's power transcended any principles of logic. Contained within it was a list of 219 propositions that the Bishop deemed to violate the omnipotence of God, including twenty Thomistic propositions. This badly damaged Aquinas' reputation for decades. It took nearly a century for Thomism to regain its standing.

7. Aquinas was beholden to the truth, *not* political correctness.

Aquinas does not discuss Islam expressly, save for two instances. In one, he defends Christianity against Muslim objections [See

[Summa contra Gentiles](#)

] noting that; the blood of Christian martyrs leads to coverts, whereas Islam is spread by the sword. Moreover, Aquinas compares and contrasts Christ's selfless divinity with Mohammed's ruthless humanity.

To wit, in Aquinas' own words:

He [Mohammed] did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration; for a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth. On the contrary, Mohammed said that he was sent in the power of his arms – which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants.

Today, in the increasingly secularized arenas of the academy and the public square, such commentary would be met with condemnation and disdain. Aquinas was more concerned with empirical evidence and objective truth that are at the heart of his marriage of faith and reason. His moral and theological insights are unencumbered by a politically correct sentimentality.

8. On occasion, Aquinas had spiritual ecstasies and could levitate.

For centuries, there have existed recurring claims that Aquinas had the ability to levitate. G. K. Chesterton wrote that, "His experiences included well-attested cases of levitation in ecstasy; and the Blessed Virgin appeared to him, comforting him with the welcome news that he would never be a Bishop."

One contemporary of St Thomas, a Dominican brother, recorded in his diary that Aquinas had levitated while praying in the chapel. Other friars testified to miraculous events surrounding Thomas during his lifetime.

Skeptics of Aquinas' levitation say the stories are the product of subsequent hagiographers seeking to embellish the saint's legacy. Whatever the case, it is beyond doubt that St. Thomas Aquinas knew the mind of Christ and the will of God to a privileged degree.

9. While saying Mass, Aquinas experienced an epiphany and would never write again.

One morning, after celebrating Mass, when Thomas was 48 years old, he stopped writing. When asked why, he answered: "The end of my labors has come. All that I have written appears to be as so much straw after the things that have been revealed to me."

This is what happened. On the feast of St. Nicholas [December 6] Thomas had a vision of Christ, who said to him, "You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward would you have for your labor?" Thomas answered, "Nothing but you, Lord." Jesus gave him what he asked, and Thomas seems to have recognized how infinitely superior this new wisdom was to anything he had ever known. Three months later he passed into eternal life.

10. At the Council of Trent, Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* was placed on the altar alongside the Bible and the *Decretals*. [The Jacques Maritain Center's website features an excellent overview](#)

of Aquinas'

Summa Theologica

and the role it has played in guiding and safeguarding Church doctrine during numerous Ecumenical Councils. From the website:

The greatest praise that can be bestowed upon St. Thomas is to be found in the history of the General

Councils of the Church. "In the Councils of Lyons, Vienne, Florence, and in the Vatican Council," writes Leo XIII, "you might say that St. Thomas was present in the deliberations and decrees of the Fathers and, as it were, presided over them, contending against the errors of the Greeks, the heretics, the rationalists, with overpowering force and the happiest results. And it was an honor reserved to St. Thomas alone, and shared by none of the other Doctors of the Church, that the Fathers of Trent in their hall of assembly decided to place on the altar side by side with the Holy Scriptures and the Decrees of the Roman Pontiffs the *Summa* of St. Thomas, to seek in it counsel, arguments and decisions for their purpose

Over seven centuries since his death, St. Thomas Aquinas' thought still resonates. Its value is universally recognized and respected. Aquinas' intellectual curiosity and life of heroic virtue continue to enlighten and inspire. Reading the *Summa Theologica* in a spirit of understanding, openness and prayer will profit one immensely. St. Thomas Aquinas, Universal Teacher, pray for us!

This contribution is available at <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2016/01/ten-things-about-st-thomas-aquinas.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Rosary Riff [at Smaller Manhattans]



Beyond Standard

I pray the Rosary. I like to meditate on the mysteries, but I've been doing them for a long time, and like to reflect on other themes besides the 3, oops,

4

sets that we have to choose from. So I make my own sets. And if you're familiar with the Rosary, maybe you've prayed a scriptural Rosary, in which a relevant Bible verse is read before each Hail Mary is prayed. At the minor seminary I attended long ago, we used to pray a scriptural Rosary every evening at Vespers. One of the priests had a little book with all the verses, and each evening he'd hand it to whomever he chose to lead the praying. It was a terrific experience, even for a callow teenager as I was then.

Here's one of my homemade sets. I call it the Fruitful Mysteries; each one is named after what in 6th-grade Catechism class we call a Miraculous Mother. Given that they end with the birth of John, I think they make a good lead-in to the Joyfuls, which begin with the most Miraculous Mother of all.

The First Fruitful Mystery: Sarah

1. Gen 1:27 God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

2. Gen 9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the

earth.

3. Gen 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children.
4. Gen 17:15 And God said to Abraham...Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac.
5. Gen 18:10 The LORD said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.
6. 12 Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"
7. 13 The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son."
8. 15 But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."
9. Gen 21:2 And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son... 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.
10. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me."

The Second Fruitful Mystery: Rebekah

1. Gen 25:20 Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah...
2. 21 And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren...
3. ...and the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.
4. 22 The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is thus, why do I live?"

5. 23 And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."
6. 24 When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.
7. 25 The first came forth red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esau.
8. 26 Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob.
9. Gen 25:27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.
10. 28 Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

The Third Fruitful Mystery: Rachel

1. Gen 29:16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 8 Jacob loved Rachel; and he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."
2. 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed."
3. 22 So Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. 23 But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her.

4. 25 And in the morning, behold, it was Leah; and Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me?"
5. 26 Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born. 27 ...we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years."
6. 28 Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to wife. 30 So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.
7. Gen 29:31 When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.
8. Gen 30:1 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!"
9. Gen 30:2 Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"
10. Gen 30:22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb. 23 She conceived and bore a son... and she called his name Joseph.

The Fourth Fruitful Mystery: Hannah

1. 1Sam 1:1 There was a certain man...whose name was Elkanah. 2 He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.
2. 1Sam 1:4 On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters; 5 and, although he loved Hannah, he would give Hannah only one portion, because the LORD had closed her womb.
3. 1Sam 1:6 And her rival used to provoke her sorely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.

4. 11 And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life."
5. 19 And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her; 20 and in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel.
6. 24 And when she had weaned him...she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young.
7. 1Sam 2:21 And the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.
8. Ps 128:1 Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.
9. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Lo, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.
10. 5 The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! 6 May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!

The Fifth Fruitful Mystery: Elizabeth

1. Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.
2. Lk1:5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.
3. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

4. 8 Now while he was serving as priest before God, [an] angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.
5. 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah.
6. 24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, 25"Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."
7. 57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. 58 And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.
8. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John."
9. 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. 63* And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, "His name is John."
10. 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Anything you do to customize your Rosary, leave a comment.

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2016/01/rosary-riff.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Rising to Joy: A Year of Wellness [at Blossoming Joy]

My 2016 Journey begins with a story...

It is a story I have heard more times than I can count... and a story which I am living. It is the tale of Catholic motherhood in which openness to life and the vocation of service requires the stretching of mind, body, and soul beyond what we believed we can do.

We do what we need to do. We suck it up. We learn to live with less sleep. We gain some weight. We lose some strength. We eat cold chicken nuggets so they don't go to waste and guzzle coffee to keep up with life...

We learn about our hidden strengths and that our limits expand when we push against them.

We learn that it feels good to stretch in service of Truth and Beauty and that our deepest joy is found in that service. But we also learn...

That there are physical laws which govern our existence in addition to the spiritual ones... and that there are limits which cannot be breached without harm. We are grateful, joyful, trusting, and prayerful. We learn to push through "survival mode" to get to the other side. But then we learn the very hard truth about our earthly existence....

Our bodies have limits. And some of us are breaking.

My own story is repeated back to me so many times through the words of other Catholic women: "I got away with poor nutrition, patchy fitness, and toxic physical environment for years... decades; but now my body is broken and I can't function. I'm in pain. I'm exhausted every day. I'm depressed. I've hit bottom."

I will be turning 40 this year and I've got a message for all of you mamas:

Wine and Starbucks will only take you so far. They deaden pain and they mimic energy but they do not heal or nourish. There is a way to RISE to a place that isn't perpetual survival mode. As a friend of mine said: *"There are some of us who will be called to unique suffering... even a few who God allows to be victim souls... but not most of us. For most of us, we will be called to heal and to thrive in His service."*

I'm writing to you from the couch. I feel horrendous just like I do in all of my pregnancies. I've been knocked on my rear again. But my perspective is different this time: In 2016, I will give birth to my 8th and youngest child. And also in 2016, I will watch my oldest fly the nest. There are a million miles to travel and 8 other souls in between (including myself and my husband) to care for in that time. Unexpected events and crisis. And I've got... nothing left. Except hope, support, and a plan.

This is my reboot year. My healing year. I'm prioritizing my health so that I can serve my family for the rest of my life and continue to raise children for the next 20 years. When I struggle against the thought that this is a selfish and imbalanced goal, I quickly remember...

I have no choice.

I refuse to spend the rest of my motherhood fighting illness and it's accompanying depression if I don't have to. I refuse to carry burdens that aren't of God, that I have placed upon my own shoulders through bad or sloppy choices.

This Mama Renewal of mine will not be found in wine and coffee. For me, it will be found in radical lifestyle change. I have already begun it but am far from finished. It is a gift to me and my gift back to God. I will be focusing on three primary areas (always with the understanding that the spiritual life will take priority above all):

I have a concrete plan for all and I will be sharing it here in the coming weeks. (And I want to clarify that having a plan does not mean that I'm going to be making an idol of this. Here's a comparison... If I found out tomorrow that I had cancer, I would devote a disproportionate amount of time to appointments, internet research, reading, and also focusing on my faith life, my family, my priorities. I don't have cancer but this journey is mildly comparable in that it is initiated through great need. Although these goals will require more time than I prefer to give them... I also hope that this focus will help to refine every area of my life and restore proper priorities by simplifying what is important and what is not. Since I can't do it all, I will have to streamline. And I hope that if you need it, you will join me for my journey. I need the accountability and I need the fellowship! If you're up for the adventure, I'm so glad to have you. This is not a gloomy journey. Not a deprivation journey. Not a journey of loss. It is a journey of JOY and stretching to uncover a little more of what beauty God has chosen for your life!

If you're pregnant like I am, it is a wonderful time to start... because there is always something you can do to live just a little bit better. Don't wait until the pregnancy is over. The good choices you make right now will bless the postpartum period. I am a living testimony that our small choices can become great miracles... and I'm actively walking, crawling, running the journey with you!

If you'd like a little background on my health journey so far, the following links will provide:

[The Path of Joyful Eating {How God Used Food to Restore My Life}](#)

[Life Without Bread {My Journey to Gluten Free}](#)

[Is She Naughty or Just Sick?: How Diet Can Affect Behavior](#) (The story of my daughter's health crisis)

This contribution is available at <http://blossomingjoy.squarespace.com/blog/2016/rising-to-joy-wellness>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Evolution - Why, God? [at Onward and Upward]



The Garden of Eden is on a map so it must be real, right?

In the 6,000 years or so since civilization got rolling there has been a lot written about the Biblical six-day creation. The Bible actually gives us two somewhat-contradictory stories in terms of when God did what.

Those stories, though, established the entire flow of our society, of our calendar. Six days of work, one day of rest = one week. The very foundational idea of original sin came out of that, as well.

Books have been written about all the nuances of how this six-day creation took place and what it meant. There has been speculation about Adam and Eve's motivation. Was the serpent threatening Eve? Was Adam being a coward in eating the apple instead of kicking the serpent's butt? And maybe it wasn't an apple at all, the Bible doesn't specify. Eve could have bit a big chunk out of the banana of transgression. (Sorry, I just like how that sounds.)

Why is it that we aren't told to just read the Bible through once and then believe ourselves to know everything of religious importance? Why is it that you can hear the same passage every year of your life and get something new out of it every time?

The word of God is so complex and meaty and full of layers and symbolism. It seems like nothing God ever does has only one meaning.

So all that is background for this one thought. "Evolution - Why, God?" I haven't heard any theologians

explain why on earth God would tell us twice that He made the world in this one way, full of beauty and meaning, and then turn around, and without telling us anything, make it in a completely different way. And then Jesus comes to teach us all about God but doesn't bother to mention this little discrepancy.

Billions of years to create everything. What is the symbolism of that? Where are the layers of Truth stacking upon each other, pointing to future events and past, that we see in everything else God does?

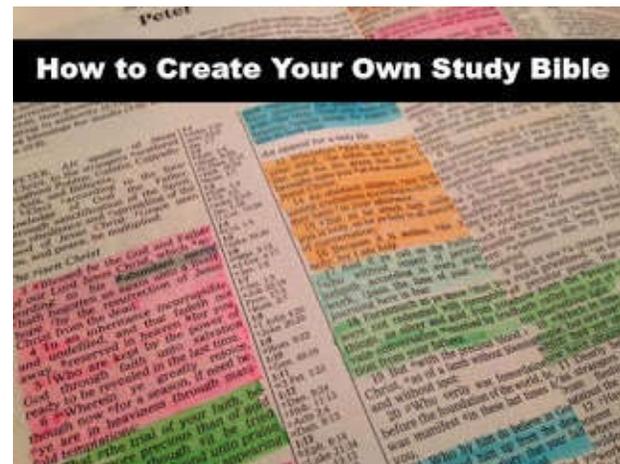
I think the theologian who tells us "why" should be the next Doctor of the Church.



This contribution is available at <http://onwardandupwardcatholic.blogspot.com/2016/01/evolution-why-god.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

How to Create Your own Topical Study Bible [at Books, Bargains, Blessings]



When I was in college, I bought myself a very average, very plain, King James Version Bible. My friends, after some time, thought it was a

[Rainbow Study Bible.](#)

To be honest, I had considered that Bible before purchasing my plain one, but there were topics that didn't interest me, and others that did. So I decided to DIY my own study Bible.

Here's how I did it:

1. I took a plain KJV Bible. At this point I would recommend a

[journaling Bible](#)

because of the extra room in the margins. These didn't exist when I was in college -- and if they did, I didn't know about them because they were price prohibitive to me.

2. I gathered a supply of

[highlighters](#)

in as many different colors as I could find. I used a card to write down the topics I was interested in, and I designated colors. I made this my 'key' I used for the whole Bible. Back when I did this, I could only find about eight different colors of highlighters. There are plenty more than now, but I would recommend not using too many as it's difficult to remember the color key.

3. I was interested in women of the Bible so I purchased the book

[All The Women of the Bible](#)

and had two different color pens (different colors than the one I used to write my own notes in the

margins,

[a four color pen](#)

would be ideal for this.) I put a box around every Scripture that mentioned woman by name in one color. Another color was used for unnamed women. (An unnamed woman might be included in a verse that says fourteen sons and three daughter.)

4. I started reading the Bible. As I went through, I took special notice of every verse that applied to my chart I created. It got highlighted. If it applied to more than one topic, it was boxed in the second color. If it applied to three, once again, it got boxed in the third color as well as the second. Using a journaling Bible, you could extend these highlights out into the margins. Alternately, you could do as I sometimes did and highlight part of the verse in one color and part in another.

5. Take notes. This is why I recommend the journaling Bible. Use lots of Bible reference books, cross reference Scripture, take notes of what you learn.

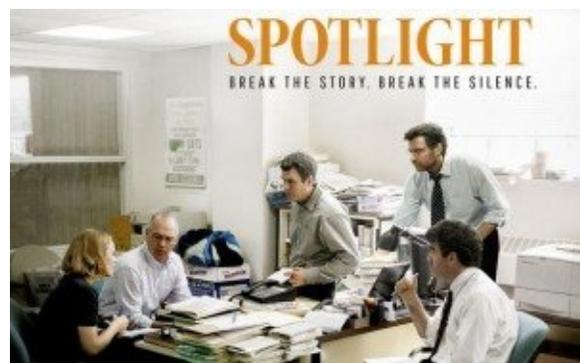
I believe this study Bible will teach you so much more than any study Bible you can purchase.

This contribution is available at <http://www.booksbargainsblessings.com/2016/01/how-to-create-your-own-topical-study.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

What was missing from Spotlight



I saw Spotlight during its initial limited release in Boston before Thanksgiving. It took me a month before I knew what I wanted to say about it, and almost another before I found the nerve to write it all down. I get up and wander around, I check my phone, every few words because I'm not sure I can tackle this. I'm not sure I should.

I was 21 when the sex abuse scandal broke in Boston, living, studying and working across the street from the Archdiocesan chancery. I was an upperclassman at a Catholic college, raised in a family that made the local parish a part of our lives, and this news horrified me. [People had been hurt by representatives of an institution I dearly loved, and that same institution had not done enough to protect victims.](#)

Horrified, but not exactly surprised: it's not that I expected such evil in the church, but that I knew that evil could pop up anywhere. I wasn't old enough to be set in my ways, but was old enough to have my foundation shaken by this news. A few months prior had been the attacks of September 11, and both of these have combined in my memory as a shock so severe that I can barely remember a life before the bottom fell out.

Locations and even people I knew were featured in Spotlight, and I was eager to see it almost as a penance on behalf of my community. The catchphrase "never forget" has unique urgency when the safety of children is at stake. I knew part of me would be humiliated by the portrayal of such sin.

The film was extraordinary. My journalist husband commented that they nailed the process of reporting, as they should have since it was based on a book by an investigative reporter. [I don't have anything new to add to the complaints that some people were portrayed as unrealistically villainous in order to heighten the drama.](#) Skeptical newsmen were heroic, Catholics were scheming or stupid.

I left the theater with a pit of grief in my stomach, hurting again for the abused. But that was where the resonance ended.

There was something in the movie I had expected which was missing. What was missing was me.

Forgive my narcissism. It wasn't until after I saw the film that I realized I was expecting to see the struggle of those of us who stayed in the Church portrayed amid all the other struggles in Spotlight. **What does it mean to love your community, to believe that your community mediates the divine, and learn that part of that community has gone rotten?**

Though it excelled in demonstrating the nuanced guilt of the Globe staffers who had ignored the problem

previously, there was no nuance in most of the other characters, and **I felt indicted as a person of faith by the closing credits.**

Maybe that was intentional. Maybe it was deserved.

It is silly to expect someone else's words to tell my story. The story that was told is of utmost importance. And the parts that were missing: those are my story to tell.

I have tried to tell the story of collective guilt and grief. I have tried to speak of the confusion and inexplicable devotion that kept me and so many others in the church. I have told people to pay attention, to be close to those who are vulnerable, to live in such a way that abuse could not go unnoticed.

This is not just my story to tell, it is my story to live. Onward we go, devoted to this messy, broken body of Christ. I am grateful for the art that calls to light our darkest parts, and I know that if that light is to continue shining I have a role in it, and a stake.

This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2016/01/09/what-was-missing-from-spotlight/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

HTTP/1.1 200 OK Server: nginx Date: Sat, 13 Feb 2016 15:55:20 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Transfer-Encoding: chunked Connection: keep-alive Vary: Accept-Encoding Last-Modified: Sat, 13 Feb 2016 15:52:04 GMT Cache-Control: max-age=104, must-revalidate X-nananana: Batcache Vary: Cookie X-hacker: If you're reading this, you should visit automattic.com/jobs and apply to join the fun, mention this header. X-Pingback: <https://melaniejeanjuneau.wordpress.com/xmlrpc.php> Link: ; rel=shortlink X-ac: 1.dca _dca Strict-Transport-Security: max-age=15552000

[Skip to content](#)



Surprised by God: Into the Heart of the Church [at joy of nine9]

My Conversion Story

I am a convert. As a Protestant kid who went to Sunday School from 3-years-old, I grew up on the stories of Jesus, singing songs about His love and memorizing Bible verses. I was a prayerful kid; I sensed God was close to me even as a small child. One of my Sunday School teachers, who I realize now was a holy man, always turned to me to interpret passages of scripture in class, then beamed at my responses afterwards. Later, after I committed my life to God, my mum told me this teacher repeated told her, " You know Mrs. Myers, Melanie is a child of God."

I was raised in the cool, calm and conservative Presbyterian church where *nobody* talked about a personal relationship with Jesus, *no one talked* about accepting Christ's forgiveness, allowing Jesus to save us or committing our lives to God.



Intimacy with God.

Listening to an evangelical friend in high school stirred a desire in me for an intimacy with God. Like the idealistic teen I was, I dared to stand up in front of a Conference of Canadian ministers, missionaries, and elders,

“After eleven years of faithful Sunday School attendance, why did no one tell me it was even possible to have a personal relationship with Jesus? Do I have to go to the Jesus People or the Pentecostals to learn how to be filled with the Holy Spirit?”

Of course, everyone clapped as I sat down with my heart pounding. A lovely Presbyterian missionary, with her silver hair swept up in an elegant bun and her eyes twinkling with the love of God, asked,

“Have you accepted Jesus as your Saviour?”

I was baffled,

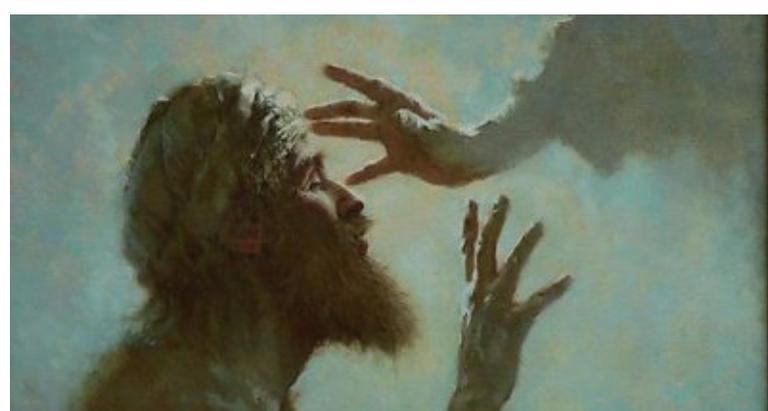
“I am not sure; I don't think so. I am not sure.”

She looked at me, really looked into my eyes,

“I am sure you already have because just now you spoke in the Spirit, with His power and clarity. Just to make sure, when you are in your room tonight, accept Jesus as your Saviour by asking Him to forgive your sins and accepting the salvation He offers you. Then commit your life to Christ. Tomorrow we will pray together for the in-filling of His Holy Spirit.”

That night, I felt foolish like I was speaking to thin air or the wall, but I said the words, committing my life to Christ. The next morning and, in fact, for the next few years, I was flying in the midst of the “honeymoon stage” which swept me right into the arms of the Catholic Church.

When I attended University, the only place alive in the Spirit was a Catholic Charismatic Prayer Group. I was confused how Catholics could be filled with the Holy Spirit but I assumed God simply tolerated their heretical faith and would soon show them the truth that they only needed faith in Jesus and the Bible. Period.



This IS the Body of Christ

Yet God pulled a fast one on me. I decided to accompany fellow students to a University Mass and was so shocked by the power of the presence of God, I could barely stand. When I heard the priest say, “This IS the Body of Christ”, I wanted, no I *craved* the Eucharist. Of course, my Catholic friends told me I could not receive Holy Communion but suggested I make an appointment with one of the young Jesuits the next day.

A couple of months later, I could not sleep for a few nights. By then I lived with a Catholic



Charismatic family. After I stumbled out of my bedroom desperate for relief, they prayed with me and announced God had been shining His light into my heart preparing a room for Mary. Would I invite Mary into my heart? Despite all my Protestant, theological objections, I surrendered to God’s inner promptings and said yes. Joy and peace flooded my soul instantaneously.

Well, when Mary lives in your heart and God places a hunger for the Eucharist in your heart, nobody wants you but the Catholic Church. Within 6 months, I joined the Church much to my family’s despair. As my grandfather lamented, “My God, how did she get herself into that mess?”

There is no greater joy than watching God work in someone’s heart. Of course, the most important thing is to live in God and allow His Spirit to live in us. God can touch someone without us saying a word but we should know the basics about our faith and salvation to be effective servants in the marketplace. I was converted through direct intervention from God but also by a knowledgeable Jesuit priest who answered all my questions and doubts with wisdom and who prayed for me.

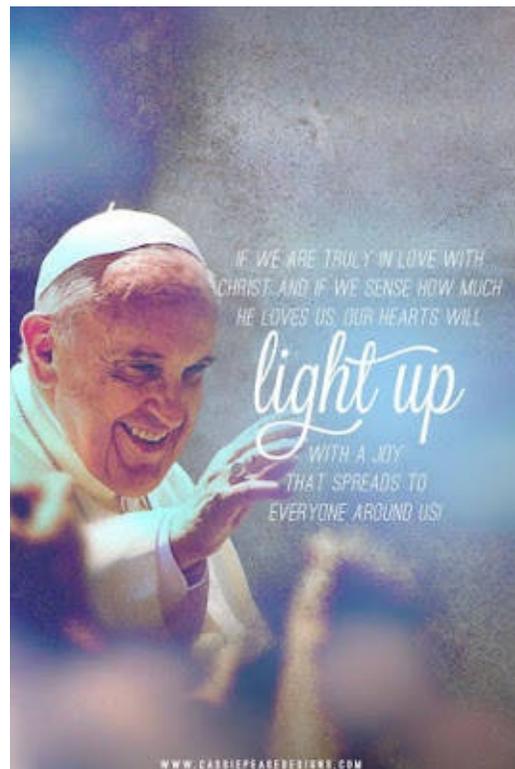
This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanjuneau.wordpress.com/2016/01/11/surprised-by-god-into-the-heart-of-the-church/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Pride vs the Humility of Pope Francis [at It Makes Sense to Me]

IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

This is from the *Gospel of Luke; Chapter 9: vs 46-50*



An argument arose among the disciples about which of them was the greatest.

Jesus realized the intention of their hearts and took a child and placed it by his side and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.

For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is greatest."

This gospel reading is all about the greatest of all the 'deadly' sins, Pride. It is also about the greatest of all 'heavenly' virtues, Humility. This is a "clash of the titans" of evil vs Good. And Pope Francis, without trying and by just being who God made him to be, wears the mantle of humility without fanfare, showmanship, pretentiousness or anything that might be self-serving in any manner. Yes, he wears that mantle and it is fastened to his shoulders with the clasp of Love. In so doing he continually shows the whole world what it means to think of yourself the least among all others. (Was that a Fiat Hatchback or a Ford Taurus?)

Jorge Mario Bergoglio never asked to be a bishop or a cardinal. He never "lobbied" for these positions or sought them out in any way. He did not have "super-pacs" at his beckoned call when the vacancy for Pope opened. He simply loved being a priest, working with the poor and homeless and doing his best to

follow God's call so he would make his life pleasing to Him. Make no mistake, God called him to the Papacy. The secular world may mock that concept but that is why they do not understand. That is why they cannot experience the joy so many millions of faithful are experiencing with his Papacy. If they could only swallow their damn pride a bit and open their hearts to some humility they may find the elusive peace that evades them.

Pope Francis is filled with the Holy Spirit. That Spirit leads him to stop his motorcade and wade into a crowd of children and hug them and kiss their foreheads. It compels him to embrace the crippled, the disfigured, the mentally challenged, the homeless as well as the "uppity-ups". He has no qualms about walking into a prison and embracing hard-core murderers, rapists, thieves, and drug dealers. Pope Francis sees the Face of Christ in EVERYONE.

Last September, during his stop in Washington, D.C., he visited with President Obama and then offered Mass in the National Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. When he finished he made a point of going to the offices of the Little Sisters of the Poor. He had to send a message to the entire world about the solidarity that exists within the Church when it comes to respect for life, ALL life. That message required no words---just action. The Pope gave that message by meeting with the Sisters who take care of the elderly poor, free of charge, and have been doing so since St. Jeanne Jugan founded the order back in 1841.

Pope Francis left our country a more contented and inspired nation. He reached out to everyone and many responded. He represents the Goodness and Love that Jesus Christ brought to us and, despite the horrors of jihad and the emptiness of secularism pervading our lives, his presence and example make our world a better place. He is HIS ambassador on earth and he represents HIM well. We have all been blessed.

©Larry Peterson 2016 All Rights Reserved

This contribution is available at <http://slipperywillie.blogspot.com/2016/01/pride-vs-humility-of-pope-francis.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Coping with Change



“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed (changed) by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” –Romans 12:2

It is said that the only thing certain in life is that things will change. It’s true. Change is something we all resist, dislike, and wish would never happen. It brings stress, discomfort, and makes us feel that we have lost control.

The loss of a loved one; a husband, father or dear friend brings about a change that is totally out of our control. A job loss, financial loss, a move to a new town or college, can add to our stress.

Stress is something we really don’t like. A friend of mine always says, *“The only people that like change are wet babies!”* Funny, but true!

So, how do we cope with change? How do we react to things that are totally out of our control? What promises does our Lord make about dealing with the changes in our lives?

It is important to understand that God is in control, not us. Understand that we didn’t do anything wrong to be facing these changes. God won’t change our circumstances, but He will sustain us and give us the tools necessary to get us through them.

It is important to acknowledge that change is inevitable. Our lives are always changing in some small way, but the big ones require us to face our feelings, manage our stress, and try to understand this unwanted change.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. **God never changes and neither does His love.** Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Be strong, remember that God will always be there for you, won’t abandon you, and has your back.

“Be strong and steadfast; have no fear or dread of them, for it is the LORD, your God, who marches with you; he will never fail you or forsake you.” –Deuteronomy 31:6

“For I, the LORD, do not change, and you, sons of Jacob, do not cease to be.” —

2. **God is with you.** Sometimes following a loss of a loved one, we feel that God has abandoned us, or that we may have done something wrong in our lives that cause God to punish us. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is waiting for us, with open arms to help us and guide us through the stress and pain. Don't fear, turn to our Lord in prayer and he will give you the tools to cope.

"It is the LORD who goes before you; he will be with you and will never fail you or forsake you. So do not fear or be dismayed." –Deuteronomy 31:8

3. **God will guide our way.** Change takes time, it's a process and prayer will help us get the answers. We need to acknowledge the change and our feelings, ask our Lord to help us and guide us. Through prayer, we can face our feelings, be grateful and set goals for moving forward with our lives.

"I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk, give you counsel with my eye upon you." –Psalm 32:8

There is an ancient quote from Socrates that says *"the secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."* Let's pray that God will help us concentrate on what's ahead for our lives, not that we can or want to forget the past but to re-frame our thinking about the future.

Change means growing and learning. We realize that our lives will change over time, and occasionally there are major changes that will challenge us.

Let the change bring us closer to our Lord, closer to the person we are meant to be, closer to God's promise to be always with us, never abandon us, and to lead us to everlasting life.

That is my prayer for you, my friend.

If you enjoyed this reflection, you can have them emailed to you every Monday morning, and not miss a single one. [Subscribe](#) by [clicking here](#). You will be sent an e-mail to verify your subscription. Just click on the link and you're all set.

Did you know that there is a Finding God's Grace podcast too? A new episode is posted every Wednesday. They are less than three minutes long and a great way to start your day. If you would like to [subscribe](#) to Tony's podcast, delivered every Thursday morning at 7AM to your e-mail, simply [click here](#).

I love it when you share my stories with your family and friends. Below are [links](#) to share on your social media sites. Thanks for sharing!

 [Copyright secured by Digiprove © 2016 Tony Agnesi](#)

This contribution is available at <http://tonyagnesi.com/2016/01/coping-with-change/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

What I saw a Mass last Sunday [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

Sometimes, I just need to shake my head....or better yet, not look around during Mass. People are disappointing, not very reverent, or respectful during Mass. Maybe they just don't know why they are there in the first place. So besides the gum chewing and water-bottle drinking, we had a couple of ladies sharing gifts during the readings recently. Yes, one brought in a bag to give to her friend. She sat down next to her friend and her husband and gave her the bag. They talked to each other over the hubby between then to the point that the hubby gave in and moved over for the friend to slide next to his wife. So, then they giggled and chatting continued all the while going through the seemingly robotic motions of the Mass until the readings. That's when the one got out her bag of goodies and proceeded to open it and go through the couple of jewelry boxes. She got out the first one, held up the necklace, gasped at it's beauty, modeled it for the friend, and replaced it in it's box and got out the other box and again, gasped at it's beauty, modeled it and thanked her friend for these lovely items....all during the Word. They then robotically stood for the Gospel and the bag was put aside.

Did they hear the Word of Jesus? Did they get the message...were they listening?

How many people do this...or at least come to Mass not prepared to worship, or give thanks, or offering their time in Mass for someone else in need of prayer? How many people attend Mass not realizing why they are at Mass or what the Mass is?

The Mass is a prayer...the most important prayer we can offer to our God. It is also the one time when we are all together...the we, I mean the Church Militant, Triumphant, praying for the Church Suffering. We are the Church militants working out our salvation for ourselves, but also for our brothers and sisters around us, and those suffering in purgatory the Church Suffering for their sins, and the Church Triumphant are those souls already in heaven waiting and praying for us. We are with the Angels and Saints, and all those that have gone before us.

"What could the prayer of the Church be, if not great lovers giving themselves to God who is love!" – Edith Stein, the Hidden Life

My problem, as you can tell, was that I was completely distracted and annoyed. Sinful, too, I must admit, and not paying attention to the readings either. BUT to my defense, my husband and I read the readings every morning, and this morning was no different. I'm no saint, however.

My prayer for everyone as well as myself, that we focus on Jesus and the amazing gift of Himself to us. That we focus on the needs of our brothers and sisters, praying for the souls in Purgatory, who cannot pray for themselves and loved each of us are by God our Heavenly Father.

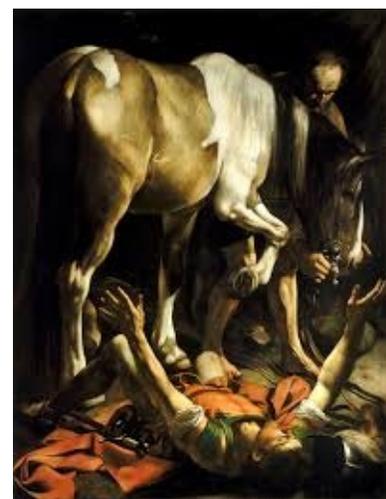
This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2016/01/what-i-saw-mass-last-sunday.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Conversion And Baptism Of Saint Paul In His Own Words [at PURE HOMILETICS]

THE FEAST OF THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

January 25, AD 2016



Call me Saul. In my young and undiscovered days, before I became Paul the Apostle, I worked as a night-court lawyer for the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court in Jerusalem. In those days I was eager to make a name for myself. Someday, I promised myself, I would become someone important. Someday the entire world would know my name.

When I met Jesus on the road to Damascus in AD 36 I was about thirty years old. I was the son of the son of a Pharisee, as I testified in my own letters. Circumcised—*ouch!*—on the eight days after my birth according to the Law of Ol' Moe, the fugitive who led our ancestors out of bondage in Egypt, I came from a family deeply rooted in biblical tradition. I enjoyed an ongoing conversation with Roy (Hebrew for “the God who sees me) who spoke to me through Sacred Scripture and through Mosaic Law. I couldn't get away from Roy; he knew when I slept and when I awoke because he sees all everywhere and in everything but I couldn't see him; I just believed that he was real and that he had big plans for me someday, somehow.

As a boy I began studying the Scriptures even though I could hardly read. In class I rehearsed the oral traditions of the elders by intoning rhythmic passages from the Law and by reciting rote commentaries developed by my mentor, the great Rabban Gamaliel, that crazy ol' coot with whom I lived and studied all the long days of my young age. Days at school were long and spiritually and cerebrally exacting—only through the very Word of Life that I loved did I feel renewed but my voice grew hoarse.

I studied the Mishnah, an ancient resource compiled by generations of rabbis to help serious scholars like me interpret Torah. By the time I graduated *magna cum laud* from the crazy ol' coots Jerusalem Academy of Law I knew the Bible by heart but didn't recognize Sonny Boy as the Word of God even as Ol' Roy kept his eye on me and waited to spring upon me the surprise at Damascus. The Lamb of God spoke to me all the time but I didn't recognize his voice. Not yet.

When I grew up I became a rabbi. In Jerusalem I listened to the stories of my brother Pharisees about how Jesus of Nazareth, some obscure carpenter, an illiterate peasant, denounced the establishment and challenged its authority and this filled me with a terrible resolve. I prayed to Ol' Roy for the courage and power to quash the heretical sect brought about by the members of the 'Way,' the movement created by the rascalion from Galilee.

And so I, Saul, "breathing murderous threats," and my legion journeyed to Damascus bedecked in Roman battle gear. We straddled our warhorses and as we rode I prayed, "Blessed are you, Lord, who created me a Jew and not a pagan; a freeman and not a slave; a man and not a woman." Like a warhorse I prepared myself for battle but not the type of battle I intended to fight.

The details of what happened next are oft-told but worth repeating. Lightning struck. A fragile peal of thunder clapped and a voice spoke from beyond the sun. *Saul. Saul. ... Why?* Suddenly I fell off my horse onto the ground and had the wind knocked from my lungs, engulfed between the dark and the light. What happened? In my mind I was thinking, what is the biblical basis for this mysterious encounter? Where have I heard this portion of the story of God before? *Abraham, Abraham! ... Moses, Moses.* What's my line? Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will, whoever you are.

At last I heard the voice of the Lord over the waters, the voice of the Lord stripping oak tree forests bare. In the Temple at worship we all cried "Glory!" but I didn't know what to think or what to say. That was a pivotal moment in my story, the instance to which I referred to every time I moved forward into the future that God planned for me, to be the prophet of the New and Eternal Covenant. Jesus appeared in *kairos*, vertical time, as opposed to *chronos*, the linear sequence of events in the physical universe where us fools we mortals dwelt—one thing after another.

I was in the right place at the right time because Ol' Roy preordained me encounter with the Risen Son. It was a set-up job. I didn't stand a chance against a man who rose from the dead and stood before me adorned with the authority of heaven. This young Pharisee's lifelong Bible study prepared me to receive the Body of Christ. At noon on that day outside of Damascus I made my first holy communion, first the Word, then the confirmation of Spirit and then the communication with the God-Man. Suddenly I was living and writing the very Scripture I loved.

I wrote letters and kept a journal to analyze and explain the mystery of redemption, my own, and salvation that of my people, the Jews, and the Gentiles who knew little to nothing about Christ Jesus our Lord. How could they understand it when I barely understood it myself? The universe wasn't arbitrary, not rushing aimlessly to destination or destruction when time screeched to a halt. The Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier sustained all things and drew everything to the one supreme Godhead.

From that day forward, the Damascus moment, I received great revelations as I traveled then narrow highway. The Word served as a map to guide me along the narrow road that led to life as opposed as the broad highway that led to destruction. Christ Jesus revealed his will for me and we conversed like God and Moses—one man speaking face-to-face with another.

The disciple Ananias hurried along the Via Recta through Damascus to the house of a man named Judas, a leading synagogue member. The door opened and the occupant admitted Ananias and then led him through a hallway to a room at the back of the house where he found a young man rapt in prayer. "How long had he been this way?" "Three days, during which time he neither spoke, nor ate, nor drank." "Leave us," Ananias said.

"Yes, Ananias, it's true. Here I am, the great Saul of Tarsus, on my knees, exactly as the Lord revealed to you tonight in a vision."

"Rise and walk," Ananias said.

"I can't. I haven't eaten in three days. Can we order out?"

"How can you think of food at a time like this?"

Ananias was a man sent by God; he was also respected in the synagogues, the leader of the Christian community at Damascus, the same group Paul had come to persecute. Word had reached the church that the zealous Pharisee had come to arrest followers of The Way on trumped-up charges of blasphemy and sedition, the same offenses committed by Stephen the deacon, whose recent martyrdom had caused a widespread exodus from Jerusalem to Damascus and Caesarea Philippi.

Through Ananias Jesus told me: “ ‘As you have learned from the scriptures that your fathers the prophets spoke concerning me, and it is fulfilled in me’—this certain thing he said—‘so you must become a leader to them. And every word which I have spoken to you and which you have written concerning me, that I am the word of the Father and the Father is in me, so you must become also to them, as it befits you. Teach and remind them what has been said in the scriptures and fulfilled concerning me, and then I will be through you the salvation for the Gentiles.’ ”

Ananias accepted the truth. The events that came to pass that night in Damascus were too perfect to be coincidences. He rose in the night and found the house where I was holed up. In the vision, the Lord instructed him to receive me into the Christian community. Now he found the me exactly as the Lord had said and with some misgiving obeyed and went to him. So this was the masterful Paul, the victorious conqueror who was now helpless as a child. The hunter became the haunted. My companions led him by the hand into the city where they brought him to Judas as the Lord commanded.

There I remained for three days, praying, refusing to eat, entreating the Lord to restore my sight and my speech, and weeping bitterly over Stephen, whose death I endorsed. Like the blind Tobit, I prayed to be forgiven and to be taken into heaven. That night in the house on the Via Recta the human interacted with the divine, for my encounter with Christ did not happen in a vacuum. Focused, careful, and ongoing formation shaped him for the ministry to which he was called when in that moment Ananias offered him salvation through baptism. I was reborn.

At Judas’s house I woke from my sleep of death to the light of life, awakened by the unfamiliar voice of a man standing over him ready to welcome him into the Church — the Church he tried to destroy—that I might accept the truth and be useful to Christ. That I prayed so fervently for three days—like Jonah in the whale’s belly; like the Son of Man in the heart of the earth—testifies to the seriousness with which I embraced Christianity.

“Saul, my brother,” Ananias said. “The God of our ancestors designated you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the sound of his voice; for you will be his witness before all that you have seen and heard. Now, why delay? Rise and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling

upon his name .”

Ananias laid hands on me, telling me that he had been sent by the same Jesus whom I saw in my prayer-vision, the same Jesus met on my way into the city. At once things like scales fell from my eyes and I rose and was baptized. The minister traced the sign of the cross on my forehead and touched my lips and his ears, claiming me for Christ and enabling me to receive and to proclaim the Word.

That Ananias transmitted Christ’s gift to me, amplified by the visions we shared like reflections in a mirror, emphasizes the supernatural origin of the episode and the connection shared by the baptizer and the baptized. Ol’ Roy brought Annie and I together through time and eternity. I was born again through water and Spirit, cleansed by the waters of baptism that Annie poured over my head, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Now this all took place outside of time in eternity. It is true that in my missionary career I tended to be explosive and argumentative. But there was depth to my discernment and I spent every waking moment after Damascus proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. To fail to see me as a man in full reduces me to a flat character on the pages of a fable in fear of the loss of my vocation. A slave of Christ Jesus, yes, but also I served as a living sacrifice of praise who trusted that the words spoke to Ananias on behalf of the Lord were true.

This contribution is available at <http://pure-homiletics.blogspot.com/2016/01/the-conversion-and-baptism-of-saint.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

God loves us [at Blog of the Dormition]



Our father – the one in the heavens – gives to us everything. All that we have. All that we are. Our life. Our freedom. Our being. And, he loves us. He *is* love – with us.

Sometimes we think – maybe – well, what’s so great about that? I don’t have much. I don’t have as much as some of my neighbors do. Sure, *they* have something to be grateful for – but not me. And so we show God our face of ingratitude.

Do you know that look? If you have children, you probably know that look. Because you know what’s it’s like to give everything to someone – for all that you have to be theirs. And you know what’s it’s like for them to take it all – and to take it for granted.

But you also know, that when they do that, it does not lessen your love for them. It does not quell in you the warmth of your affection for them – not one degree.

When a child says to me, “I hate you” or “I wish you were dead,” it does hurt, but I know that they do not know what they are saying and so I forgive them – though sometimes, in my fallenness, it takes a moment. And I go right on loving them and providing for their needs and also, as I am able, for their wants.

Some of us know something about what it means to be a loving father or mother, though none know so well nor love so well as God, our father, who is in the heavens. All of us, however, are *children* of a loving father – the one in the heavens. And so all of us – believe it or not – know something about being loved.

My friend Ian Gerdon wrote recently that, “all humans are brought into existence with two names: Amati (which mean Beloved) and Amandi (which means Ought-to-be-loved).” We *are* beloved by God and we *ought to be* loved by humans. We are created by love himself, out of his love, for loving, and being loved. While our first name – which is Beloved – describes our true condition and the ground of our being, our second name – which is Ought-to-be-loved – describes how we all should respond to that reality in ourselves and in our neighbor. God loves us and he calls us to love ourselves and one another.

Sadly, we do *not* always love one another. And, we are *not* always loved by others. And, we do *not* always love ourselves.

When we feel unloved, it is always because some human has not loved us as they ought to have. Sometimes that human is another and sometimes that human is myself – but the defect or deficit in love is always on the human side and never the divine.

God’s love never fails. When we feel unloved, God loves us. When we think that God does not love us, God loves us. When we do not love God, God loves us. When we say to God like ungrateful children, “I hate you” or “I wish you were dead,” God loves us. But we humans do fail to love. And our failings and the failings of our neighbors can cloud our vision.

Our neighbors’ and our own unloving thoughts and actions sometimes keep us from seeing that God our father loves us, that he is with us. We fail to see all that he has given us. And so we covet after persons, positions, and things that are not given to us, but given instead to others. Ingratitude and covetousness are ubiquitous and pernicious. To covet nothing that is our neighbors’ is a kind of freedom that few of us know.

We are too often like the ungrateful younger son who says to his father, “Father, give me the share of

property that falls to me.” In the usual course of things, of course, a son receives his inheritance only after his father has died. So, by asking for it while his father yet lives, the younger son is in effect saying to his father, “I wish you were dead.” This is supreme ingratitude. It is a failure to see that the father *already* shares everything with his sons. They are with him always, and all that he has is theirs.

But that is not enough for the younger son. Really, he just seems to want his father out of the picture. Perhaps he mistakes his father’s loving presence for some kind of oppression or limitation on his freedom. As it turns out, taking his inheritance and leaving is not gain for the younger son, it is loss. Though he thinks it will be to his benefit, it is in fact his undoing. He does not know what is good for him as well as his father does. While he briefly increases his possessions and pleasures, for that he loses the loving presence of his father, and a continual sharing in his abundance. His ingratitude leads to the loss even of what he has.

And the elder son is ungrateful, too. The two sons are not as different as we might suppose. The younger son is overt in his ingratitude – taking his inheritance and leaving. But the elder son’s ingratitude becomes clear when he refuses to go into the house to celebrate the return of his brother and when he bitterly says to his father, “you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends.”

The loving father leaves neither son alone in their ingratitude. When the younger son comes in sight of his house, his father runs out to meet him. And when the elder son will not come into the house to the feast, his father goes out to invite him in. The father goes out to them both.

How like these two sons we are!

Being with our father – the one in the heavens – is worth far more than anything we can gain from the world. But all of us are at times like the younger son. We turn away from our father and go into the world to try there to sate our passions. Hopefully, we have learned from this that such squander brings us nothing but emptiness and ruin. And that it is only in the presence of our loving heavenly father that we can find peace or rest. So let us who have turned to the razzle dazzle of covetous worldliness now turn back again to our father. He will run out to meet us.

Or sometimes we are like the elder son. We have always remained partly in our father’s presence – say, by coming often to church – but all the while we try to hide in our hearts our ingratitude and petty jealousies. Let us let go of all of that. Our father will come out and entreat us to come in to the feast.

Indeed, he is even now inviting us into the feast. An antidote to the poison of our ingratitude is available in this Divine Liturgy: the Eucharist. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. Ingratitude, then, is anti-Eucharist. And so, let us give thanks to our father for all he has given us, above all for his loving presence in our lives, and approach holy communion with grateful hearts.

This contribution is available at <http://holydormition.blogspot.com/2016/01/god-loves-us.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Sexagesima ~ Transitioning To Lent [at Pauca Verba]



So last Sunday (Septuagesima on the old calendar) I proposed a Lenten fast from *complaining, blaming and grumbling*. Today is called *Sexagesima Sunday* which is roughly sixty days to Easter. Collectively these three old-fashioned Sundays, with the strange Latin names, is *get-ready-time*. Head's up - Lent is coming!

The Catholic way still attends to some kind of Lenten dietary observance - at least the abstinence from meat on the Lenten Fridays, and the Ash Wednesday and Good Friday fasts. But my proposal might stand a better chance of impacting us for the long term. The check-list below might sound absurd, but really, (if we're paying attention), *it's us who are absurd with all our complaining, blaming and grumbling*. Like living in a room of bad air.

We complain about: *the traffic the parking lot the neighbors the relatives*

We grumble about: *the prices the taxes the weather the food*

We blame: *the waitress the government the electric company the boss*

We complain about: *the long lines the technology the temperature the colleagues*

We grumble about: *the mail delivery the satellite reception everything being made in China the news anchor*

We blame: *the president the politicians* maybe even the pope the newcomers*

We complain about: *the young people our spouses the addicts the gays*

We grumble about: *the railroad the crowds the teacher the high school rival*

We blame *the Muslims the Jews the Mexicans the French*

We complain about *the homeless the new world order the left - the right the waiting room* **We grumble about** *the too long red light the aches and pains the person behind the counter the ethnicity of law breakers*

We blame *the police the ineffective cold remedy the people who should know better and God himself*

OK - we get it, we get it! Oh, one more: the priest, his sermons and his bishop!

It's pathetic really: so much air used up, so much energy and time. *The suffering of our inner discontent!* So for Lent - let's just *cut it out*. Read a happy book. Start some tomato seeds in the house. Get a garden ready. Turn off all the bad news/sad news. Practice silence - not moody silence though. Make our own book of counted blessings. Read the Gospels and high-lite in bright yellow every verse that's happy news. ***Consciously inhale and exhale compassion and kindness on everyone you meet or even think about.*** Pope Francis' Mercy Jubilee will make sense then, because when all the pulpit words go silent, bottom line is: *Mercy means kindness.*

Maybe we can allow **some criticism of politicians - after all, Jesus called Herod a fox. Luke 13:32*

This contribution is available at <http://www.paucaverba.blogspot.com/2016/01/sexagesima-transitioning-to-lent.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Living 3D in a 2D World [at Freedom Through Truth]

Last night at The Next Right Step, the blog of prophet Charlie Johnston, he reissued an article from August 2014, under the general headline

[Tempering Our Expectations](#)

. The reprinted article is actually called Fractured Expectations, and in essence Charlie articulated how our expectations of this prophecy or that one, or this person of God or that one get in our way of seeing the real picture.

I find reading Charlie's blog

[The Next Right Step](#)

, the writings of Canadian prophet Mark Mallett at

[The Now Word](#)

, the writings from prison of falsely imprisoned Catholic Priest Father Gordon MacRae at

[These Stone Walls](#)

, and also prophecies without commentary from a person under the direction of retired Catholic priest of the London Ontario Diocese Father Sam Johnston at

[Life in the Spirit](#)

very helpful for grounding me in my faith, and above all in Love.

The opening line of the most recent prophecy at Life in the Spirit,

["Living in the Present Moment"](#)

seems to me to be providential in light of all that is going on in our world, and in the words being presented to us by the above men.

Transformation of the heart is your life's mission, not of anyone else, for it is only one's own heart that you may change.

My heart needs lots of work, and often times I have no idea how to go about it, though, oftentimes, I find that I have no idea that I really need it.

But, last night at Sunday Mass at Holy Family Parish in London Ontario, Father Ben Huyge delivered an interesting homily that when I read Charlie's article above later in the evening started to coalesce for me.

Father Ben spoke about accompanying the youth of the parish to see the new Star Wars movie. As a Star Trek fan himself, he was prepared to be underwhelmed. But, the use of 3D in the film grabbed him, and so as he said it led to a homily. Father Ben can see a homily in a John Deere tractor, so a blockbuster movie is a step down for him.

As I pondered his words, it came to me. Believers in the lordship of Jesus Christ are called to live in a third dimension in a world that is actually only two dimensional. Hence the title of this article.

The Next Right Step is current and prophetic writings that are not for the faint of heart. Charlie, in his own inimitable style is trying to prepare those who embrace Christ to live today and every day simply, seeking to always take the Next Right Step. He has warned us repeatedly that we are embarking on a Storm, the proportions of which are beyond any type of storm we can imagine, and the repercussions of which will be catastrophic for many, but which are meant to draw all back to the arms of God.

God draws straight with crooked lines, and so he uses people like Charlie, Mark Mallett, Father Sam, you and me, the crooked lines, to get to and take others to the foot of the Cross, to enter into the loving outstretched arms of Our Dear Saviour Jesus Christ.

I imagine that it is often exasperating for Charlie and for anyone who has a prophetic mission that we just don't get it, and so he, Mark and others keep presenting it over and over again, with different nuance in hopes that we will have the aha moments required.

Proverbs 29:18 says: "Where there is no vision the people get out of hand; happy are they who keep the law."

It seems to me that difficulties we face in our daily lives are because of the narrowness of our vision, and this can be seen from time to time in comments that pop up on The Next Right Step.

As much of what Charlie writes on TNRS is about the Storm, and an ultimate Rescue, some comments ask about when and what specifically is going to happen. When is it going to happen, end, get really going, or whatever? When will it end? Can I still get my meds, access my cash, eat chocolate etc.?

These are all two dimensional questions, and typical of the questions we would ask in our daily lives.

We, as Christians, are called to live in the world, not to be of it. We are called to be disinterested in much of what goes on, not in the people to whom things are happening, but in the things themselves. Our home is not here. It is, in fact, in another dimension, heaven. So, we are being called to live in that third dimension of heaven. Matthew presents the words of John the Baptist in 3:2: "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is

close at hand."

So, we do not by our experience, know how to live in 3D. And that is where Charlie, Mark and Father Gordon come in, and others who are trying to be bearers of the same or similar messages.

Charlie gives us three directions that are key to the third dimension. He has been trying to drill into us as a Drill Sergeant would the following: Acknowledge God. Take the Next Right Step. Be a Sign of Hope for others.

Acknowledging God is beyond our 2D world, because this 2D world is all about me (or you), even if we don't think so. Acknowledging God takes us outside ourselves, and without doing so we cannot possibly move on to taking the Next Right Step. But, acknowledging God is not meant to be like we acknowledge someone we pass on the street. That nod of the head, is in fact not real acknowledgement, and not what that word really means. Merriam Webster defines Acknowledge to mean:

:to say that you accept or do not deny the truth or existence of (something)and, among others

:to recognize the rights, authority, or status of

Acknowledging God is not a trivial undertaking. It is serious business. To accept or recognize God we must enter into a relationship with Him, in His threefold personhood, and this cannot be done without effort on our part. Acknowledgement of God is about that transformation of the heart referenced above in the prophecy from Life in the Spirit.

If we try to take the Next Right Step (NRS) without acknowledging God, we will do so only in 2 dimensions. We might get the NRS, but if so, it will be by accident, or divine intervention. The Next Right Step we take, is not about us, and actually has very little to do with us. It is our individual step, all right, but taken properly, is ordered into the full 3D world, not just the 2D image we live in.

Some readers of TNRS are focused on what devotion to undertake, at what time of day, and where, and when and how things are going to happen. Devotions are a means of communing with Our God, but they are not a checklist, and there is no one checklist if they were on one. The many sacraments, devotions and practices of the faith that are available are to draw us deeper into relationship with the God we are to acknowledge. They are means of that acknowledgement.

But, to get overly focused on the particular practices, and not on the one for whom they are means of devotion is to be basically saying that one does not want to make the Next Wrong Step (NWS). If so, the point is missed.

If we are trying to avoid the NWS, then our acknowledgment of God is merely tacit, and there is no way to move to the next item and be a sign of hope for anyone. Trying to avoid wrong steps is a sign of fear of

failure, and that is not helpful.

Pray the Rosary with your heart. Attend Mass with your heart. Go to Confession with your heart. Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet with your heart. Spend time in an Adoration Chapel with your heart. But, do so when each, any or all of these are the Next Right Step to take.

Charlie has guided readers, after Acknowledging God and taking the Next Right Step, to be signs of hope for others. Being a sign of hope for others is actually an advanced Next Right Step and Acknowledgement of God, but cannot be taken by one who has not oriented themselves to Acknowledgement of God and taking the Next Right Step such that their life is by itself a sign of hope.

Today in the article linked above there was an interesting dialogue in the comments largely involving Charlie and a bishop of the Church, who uses the handle Yong Duk. They were mulling over respectfully a weighty matter involving the use of lies for a particular purpose, in this instance the case of the videos of Planned Parenthood and the selling of aborted baby parts. Of great interest is that they are somewhat apart on the matter, but carefully weighing the input of the other, and insertions from other readers as well. In the 2 dimensional world we inhabit, it is all ultimately about me or you, and so I have an interest in being right, and often have trouble laying that down to get to the truth. That is not what I have observed here, as I see 3 dimensional thinking and interaction, and that is a witness to the faith we are called to live. Wow!! It is a sign of hope for us.

There is in fact a Next Right Step for each of us relative to what has been written. The issue of “Truth” and “Lies” is a serious matter, and as our world (the 2D one) keeps unraveling, we will be faced with serious challenges to protect ourselves, our families and our friends in the face of persecution. If we do not contemplate how we will handle serious challenges in the future and prepare ourselves, we are likely to make mistakes that could be disastrous for loved ones, and others God is calling.

Part of taking the Next Right Step is taking right steps today that will set us up to take the Next Right Step again tomorrow when the going gets tougher.

If, and only if, we have acknowledged God, and taken the Next Right Step repeatedly, then and only then can we be a sign of hope to others. Being a sign of hope, though an extension of Acknowledging God and taking the Next Right Step is going to prove crucial to helping our loved ones, and those we have not had occasion to love yet to get to safe and holy ground in the coming days.

This contribution is available at <http://freethroughtruth.blogspot.ca/2016/02/living-3d-in-2d-world.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Let's Talk About Sex Baby... [at On the Road to Damascus]

A friend asked a group of people if they thought he were gay by choice or by birth. Everyone in the group, being sympathetic to his struggle, told him he has born that way and to be proud. For me the source of his same sex attraction does not matter. His real choice is in how he responds to it. Having same sex attraction is not a sin. Acting on it is. Having a strong desire for something does not justify embracing the desire and it does not matter if you were born with the desire or if it developed from an experience.

There is a perceived notion by some that the Catholic Church hates people with same sex attraction. This couldn't be further from the truth. Because every human is fallen every human has been given a cross they have to bear in this life. The Church does not hate someone just because of the cross they have been given to bear. In fact the Church is more like Simon the Cyrene, the man who helped Jesus carry his cross to Calvary. The Church is made up of sinners, each with their own crosses. The Church loves sinners and stands ready to help every sinner bear their cross in this life. There is no cross the Church is not ready to help a sinner carry. One needs only to ask.

The root of the problem with same sex attraction is when one uses their desires as justification to engage in sexual activity. God created sex to be part of a fruitful marriage. Its first purpose is procreative. Procreative = For-creation= to bring about new life. The second purpose of sex is to strengthen the bond between husband and wife. The family is the foundation of all society. Family is the rock that human interaction is built upon. Destroy the family and you destroy society.

Sex was never intended to be about personal pleasure. The road to heaven is selflessness – giving to another. The road to hell is selfishness – taking for one's self. When sex is done for selfish pleasure it leads towards hell. It does not glorify God or honor his design and intent.

Any sex done outside of the bonds of one man, one woman marriage is therefore sinful. It does not matter if it is between people of the same sex, unmarried people of the opposite sex, those cohabitating, or even masturbation. Even sex between married couples that intentionally ends in a way that is not open to life is sinful.

I have a theory that the forbidden fruit mentioned in the first book of the bible was actually sex. Adam and Eve were naked and innocent and did not know each other. The devil tempted Eve into having sex with him and she in turn then had sex with Adam. Their eyes were opened and they were ashamed. The union with the devil could have possibly conceived Cain and this is how evil entered into human nature. Adam's greatest sin was in not protecting his wife in the garden. This is just something to ponder.

Sex is serious stuff simply because sex is holy. It is through the act of sex that man was given something the angels weren't. God shared with man the ability to create life. The devil cannot create life, he can only corrupt it. That is something he has been doing since Adam and Eve were placed in the garden. The devil has convinced man that sex is for personal gratification. He has gotten us to sacrifice our children to him. He has gotten us to believe that contraception is a good thing. Contra-ception = against conception = to stop life. Contraception has led to sterile, fruitless marriages. It has weakened the bonds of marriage to the point that many no longer find a reason to be married. People now come together for what they can get for the self and not what they can give to the other. Once they stop getting it is time to move on. This in

turn has destroyed the family. Once the foundation of a house has been destroyed the house falls. Society is in a death spiral. Most of the civilized world is below replacement rate – the rate of birth needed to just break even in the population. There are places in Europe where entire towns have closed simply because there is no one left to maintain them.

Through all of this the devil is laughing.

Death came into this world through selfishness in a garden.

Life was restored to the world through a garden by a celibate man born of a virgin woman.

Sex is holy and should only be used as it was designed.

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

This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2016/01/lets-talk-about-sex-baby.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

David Bowie: A Traditional Catholic View [at Catholic Champion Blog]



There has been a lot of media hype concerning the recent passing of rock icon David Bowie. Many people are praising him as a genius, a rock legend, one who has "done it all" as if all of these were virtues. This is not surprising coming from the worldly press or worldly people who have no sense of right and wrong, or know the difference between virtue and vice. Coming from Catholics however it is another story.

I have seen many Catholics on Facebook, blogs and websites writing about how great of man and musician he was and how he should be essentially memorialized because of his "artistic" genius. I happen to be a musician who has played and recorded music for over 25 years now. I have had admiration for many musicians and their talent as song writers, and some have influenced me in my musical en-deavours. David Bowie however was never one of my favorites for several reasons, which have grown over the years.



When I was in my teens I only owned one cassette tape of Bowie's it was 'Space Oddity'. I listened to it a few times and was unimpressed and it went into the floorboards of my truck. I found his music depressing and his image quite freakish and weird to say the least. Over the years of course it was hard not to see his appearances in films and hear his different musical releases. I was never drawn to his music or his weird image which I always found disturbing, but I never really investigated as to why.

As years have gone by I have done some investigating into the music industry as well as satanism and the occult. I came to find out that many of my musical "heroes" were into some pretty perverted things including occultism, witchcraft and satanism. As a result, over the years I began to limit myself on what music I listened to, depending on the lyrics and the lifestyles of the artists. I ended up ditching many of my CDs and LPs that I thought were detrimental to my soul.



How does this all come back around to Bowie? It so happens that Bowie is one of the worst cases when it comes to the occult, drug use, perverted sexuality and most other vices. One thing that always bothered me about Bowie was how he looked. He appeared to be a cross between a man and women. Bowie was into many perverted sexual acts, and was an admitted admirer of Aleister Crowley, a famous satanist, "do what thou will." Satanism does not always consist of a worship of satan as a person, but as a lived out attitude which glorifies doing whatever one wills no matter the cultural climate one may find themselves in. Bowie was often referred to as

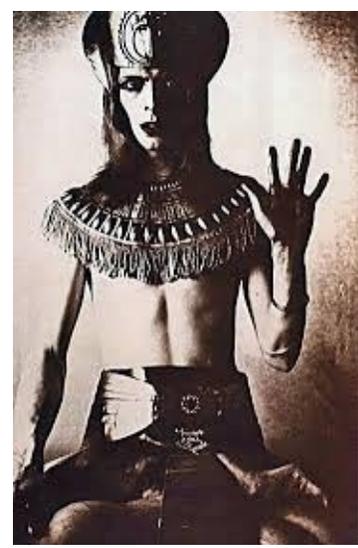
[androgynous](#)

. His on stage antics were often very feminine and thus he spearheaded the modern movement to blur the lines between men and women. It is no secret that he was bisexual and had relations with many other famous people including Mick Jagger.

Bowie was also into occult type "artistic" ventures all the way up to his death. His early fascination with Crowley is certainly disturbing, but his interests changed over time going into different aspects of the occult. They show up in his videos and art throughout his career. A recent interview with the director of Bowie's very last musical movie clip says that he and Bowie had a mutual admiration for Crowley. The director also talks about some of the imagery in his last video which is quite perverted. I caution you on the vulgarity of the interview that I will

[link to here](#)

, for those who do not want to take my word for it. The article also has a link to the 10 minute video released just before his death, which is steeped in occultism. Watch at your own risk, it is very dark and disturbing.



Was Bowie a nice guy? Perhaps. A genius? Perhaps. He made a successful career out of his musical and artistic en-devours and managed to stay at the top of his game nearly 50 years. Does this make him some type of role model for our generation or someone to be admired? Clearly not. Bowie stood against everything that the Catholic faith stands for. The real problem in today's society is not that people happen to sin. The real problem is that sin is now glorified as something good and virtuous. Unfortunately Bowie was instrumental in sensationalizing the image of sin through his "art." He was instrumental in the movement to tear down the moral compass of our society. Catholics should not be holding this man up as an artistic hero, but an iconoclastic bane that stood more for anarchy and hedonism than anything else. We would do better to warn people about his "art" and pray for the repose of his soul.

This contribution is available at <http://catholicchampion.blogspot.com/2016/01/david-bowie-traditional-catholic-view.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

On the overdue rubrical change to the Mandatum Rite [at Catholic Deacon]

Recently Pope Francis wrote a letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments, Robert Cardinal Sarah, regarding the Rite of the "Washing of the Feet" (i.e., the Mandatum Rite), which takes place during the Liturgy of the Mass of the Lord's Supper, which is celebrated on Holy Thursday.

[The Holy Father's letter](#)

is currently only available in Italian. In his letter, Pope Francis directs Cardinal Sarah to amend the rubrics of the Roman Missal that spell out the details of the Mandatum Rite so that women can officially be included among those who have their feet washed in this sacred and solemn rite. In accord with the Holy Father's direction, the Congregation issued a decree,

[In Missa in Cena Domini](#)

(available only in Latin) implementing this change.

The decree went into effect on 6 January and so will apply to the Mandatum Rite celebrated this Holy Thursday, which will be observed by Catholics on 24 March. At least for most parishes in the United States and, I suppose, elsewhere, this is a mere formalization of a practice long since established. Way back in 1987, the USCCB, then the NCCB, determined that the Latin phrase

virī selecti

in the Roman Missal, which literally means "selected men," is to be understood as applying to both men and women, "in recognition of the service that should be given by all the faithful to the Church and to the world."

At least to me, what the Pontifically-directed change in rubrics highlights is the equalizing nature of baptism, expounded perhaps most clearly in the third chapter of St Paul's Letter to the Galatians (see

[Gal 3:27-29](#)

). To wit: women are full-fledged disciples of Jesus Christ. Baptism, to which Confirmation is closely related, is the fundamental sacrament of Christian life, not ordination. Catholics, too, believe in the priesthood of all the baptized. The ministerial, or ordained, priesthood is at the service of the baptismal priesthood.

The witness of women in the Gospels shows that they are often the very best disciples. The witness of the Desert Mothers and other women in the early Church confirm this even further, as do faithful women in our own day. This change does nothing with regard to ordaining women. Sticking with sound theology, Pope Francis has time and again been foursquare against what he calls the "clericalization" of women's roles, as well as clericalizing the roles of many dedicated laypersons, men and women. There is simply no

need to do this. I think this needs to be a particular point of discernment for prospective permanent deacons.

The prominence of women in the Church is one of those aspects of history that is either frequently ignored or grossly exaggerated. I read an article just yesterday that, on one hand, does a very nice job articulating the radical nature of female discipleship in the early Church, but, on the other hand, distorts and exaggerates the role of women in various ways:

["The Rebel Virgins and Desert Mothers Who Have Been Written Out of Christianity's Early History."](#)

With regard to women bishops, the author just states it in passing as a fact with no explanation. Of course, the Greek word

episkopos

simply means "overseer." It may surprise some to learn that the ancient Church, for the most part, was much more sexually segregated than the Church is today. Nonetheless, women often exercised ecclesial authority over other women. So-called women deacons were women set apart - whether by ordination or not is a matter of dispute (they do not seem to have served in liturgy) - to minister to other women, like baptizing them. At that time people were baptized naked. They also served women in circumstances that it would not be appropriate for a man to minister, like visiting a single woman at home.

From its beginning, cenobitic monasticism has had priors and prioresses (abbots and abbesses). They exercised, as they still do today, an episcopal-like function over members of their communities. The author of the article is wrong to state that even today ecclesially-approved women's orders are closely watched over by men. Such orders are not. They are self-governing, according to their approved constitutions, just the same as men's orders. The fact remains that the Church was perhaps the only place, apart from the household, where women held any authority at all. This probably remained true until about the middle of the 20th century.



Linking back to the change in the rubrics for the Mandatum Rite, my main point is that the change points to the fact that baptism is the great equalizer. Women are full-up disciples of Jesus Christ, empowered by Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The essence of ordained ministry is service to the rest of the Church. Those of us who have received the sacrament of orders are ordained to empower, not exercise power over others. Here is Christian leadership summarized by Jesus: "The greatest among you must be your servant" (

[Matt 23:11](#)

). It is

never

a question of equality! Men and women, while different in important respects, our differences being deeply embedded in nature, are equals.

The only justification I could think of for excluding women from the Mandatum Rite is if the rite was restricted to the bishop celebrating it in his Cathedral and washing the feet of 12 priests. Or even in a more concentrated manner, if the celebration of the rite was restricted to the pope washing the feet of 12 bishops. But this is not the theology of the passage from

[chapter 13 of St John's Gospel](#)

, the Gospel for the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday- the Gospel in which there are no apostles, only disciples, even if the twelve are a select group of disciples.

I have to admit that I was disheartened somewhat when someone on a Facebook thread, opposing the change, wrote that the inclusion of woman turned the Mandatum Rite into a "tawdry pantomime." I would counter that for the vast majority of Roman Catholics our annual celebration of the Mandatum Rite is a solemn and sacred event. Indeed, the Mass of the Lord's Supper is about the institution of the Eucharist. Our Gospel reading for that holy night -

[John 13:1-15](#)

- tells of Jesus washing the feet of twelve of his disciples. For St John, this is the institution narrative of the Eucharist. In light of this, I would ask, Why 12 laymen to the exclusion of women, especially when one links Jesus' act of foot washing with baptism, something the sacred author of John's Gospel clearly does? The Church is apostolic not only because of apostolic succession, but because, as a result of our baptism, we are sent: "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it" (

[John 13:14-17](#)

).

Another major theme of the Mass of the Lord's Supper, closely linked with the institution of the Eucharist, is the institution of the priesthood. This, too, at least in my view, harmonizes perfectly well with the rubrical change. The priest, acting

in persona Christi

, in washing the feet of people selected from among those he is called to serve, performs the humblest act of service for them. By so doing, he exhorts them to go forth and serve others. Ideally, he is assisted in the foot-washing by a deacon. Hence, a deacon is the servant of the servant who performs the humblest of services (deacon as dogsbody?). Let's be honest, the priest had no authority or intention to ordain 12 laymen to the priesthood, or even to pretend they were ministerial priests, when he performed the foot-washing for men only.

Let's not forget that Mass is called Mass after the Latin word

missa

, which refers to being dismissed. John's institution narrative, with its strong tie to baptism, is about being sent to serve others, which, along with apostolic succession, is what makes the Church apostolic. At the end of Mass we are all sent. As a deacon the only time I use the simple dismissal "Go in peace" is during Lent and Advent (and at during Easter with the sung Alleluia) the rest of the time I use the other approved dismissals: "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life," or "Go in peace, proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord."

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2016/01/on-overdue-rubrical-change-to-mandatum.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Can You Turn Around Depression? [at Quiet Consecration]

I believe that one of the symptoms of the disease of Alcoholism is being prone to bouts of depression. They come out of nowhere. I go to bed feeling pretty darn happy only to wake up 6 hours later dreading the day and wishing everything in my life was radically different because the very life I had 6 hours ago is now horrible.

In the past I have tried various ways to combat this symptom. Denied medication because "it is not chronic" or "it is not that bad", I have had to face this in ways other people do not. As a result I have acquired some level of self-knowledge and awareness. It has come in handy. I only wish I had figured out a lot of this stuff earlier - it would have saved me and my loved ones a lot of heartache.

In the not-so-distant past my depression would manifest as aggression and anger. I would look at the actions of others, in particular the actions of my family, and take great offense at perceived slights and then chastise them for it - usually in public, on social media. Because I did not understand my what was going on with me I could not see why they would be as angry. After all, I was right and they need to be told how bad they are and how bad they are treating me - right? By the time I did understand my emotional problems it was too late. I have irrevocably lost people. I have only myself to blame and can hope someday they forgive me.

I know that the depression is just another part of the disease I battle. It is not linked to anything in particular, though when I am overly tired or fighting a cold or really stressed out over something at work or home it can hit harder. Recognizing that no one, including myself, is to blame makes my ability to recognize the negative thoughts and feelings for what they are - manifestations of the disease. That knowledge helps me to combat the darkness, to walk through it until it is over with minimal to no damage to others.

It requires me to make deliberate and intentional decisions and take specific actions. I very, very deliberately interrupt my thought pattern and start talking honestly with myself: "Leslie, this is not like you. You do not feel this way normally and you know that the actions of (insert name here) are not really bothering you. It is just one of those days. You have an amazing life, a gift from your Creator. You have job, you have a car, you have a nice house, you have a fantastic dog and two silly cats and when you walk into a room people smile. There is nothing really wrong. It is okay".

Please notice I do not demand of myself to "get over it". I used to do that and then, when I kept feeling bad would also begin to feel guilty for not 'getting over it'. That may work for some - I call it deploying your inner drill sergeant - but it makes things worse for me. Neither do I scold myself or give myself advice. I don't take advice during this time from anyone other than my sponsor or my spiritual director either - most people say the wrong thing (or write the wrong thing on social media) but that's not their fault. See, what they don't get is NOTHING they say to me during this time will be 'right' (unless they are someone who also successfully battles the disease of alcoholism...for some reason the principle of 'One Alcoholic Talking to Another' does work when one CATHOLIC talking to another will not - sorry, Catholic Friends...but it is a truth of my disorder.).

I also make it a point to really drill down on my prayer life during this time - maybe even up the ante on

my Sacramental Life. Get in an extra trip to the Confessional, slip into Daily Mass instead of going to the gym so I can receive Him in the Eucharist, make a clandestine and quiet trip to the Adoration Chapel. Being honest with my Lord and telling Him I need help is essential for me to combat this symptom.

The most important thing I have to remember is to not dwell on what might have been - something that is really tough for me. I am a real Monday Morning Quarterback when it comes to my own life and while I do not wish to shut the door on my past I can jump into regretting it with both feet if I am not careful. Drowning in Self Pity and Despair is a real thing and can lead to jails, institutions or death for someone like me.

In conclusion (and yes there is a conclusion) I can answer my original question with a resounding "YES". I can turn around my depression without medication or a doctor's help (for now) only because I no longer fear it, no longer deny I have it and no longer expect YOU to fix it. It is another symptom, a manifestation of my primary disease and if I am not going to treat the whole person I might as well get drunk today.

And I do not want to get drunk today....bottom line.....

Thank you for letting me share.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2016/02/can-you-turn-around-depression.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

To Bury the Dead [at Peace Garden Passage]

It was my youngest son's teacher who reminded me of it.

I'd shared with her in an email what my son had been up to during break; how his Christmas vacation turned out a little different than we'd planned. I told her about how my grandmother had died on Dec. 28, and how my youngest two sons were with me in Bismarck for an extended stay the night my Mom called with the sad news that Grandma had left us, and how we'd scurried off at midnight to meet Mom and my other son, a few years older, at the nursing home so we could say goodbye. I told her how he and his brother were there for everything. While we planned Grandma's funeral, they were in the other room within earshot, drinking Coke and playing hand-held gaming devices to pass time. They were there for the vigil, for the funeral, for the burial, for the family gatherings throughout, for all of it.

It had been quite a lot and I thought she ought to know, just in case there were any delayed reactions from our youngest.

"As odd as it sounds," she wrote in an email back, "I believe that 'Burying the Dead,' is one of our most important works of mercy. It is important for children to join in this process, because I think it can help them to understand God's plan and purpose for each of us, wherever we are, in His circle of life and death, sometimes needing help, sometimes giving help. What a weekend! Prayers for you and your family."

She validated what I had been feeling about my sons' involvement in the whole thing, and articulated it so very well. Her response blessed me.

But it also reminded me that there was something to this "Burying the Dead" thing that deserved pause. How is it that this always surprises me? To be reminded that burying the dead is one of the corporal works of mercy that, as Catholics and Christians, we are obligated to do in service of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

The other corporal works of mercy, which all relate to tending to the bodily needs of others (as referenced in Matthew 25:34-40), and can affect our salvation, include feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and visiting the imprisoned.

Burying the dead, which is so much on my mind right now, is referenced in Scripture, in the Book of Tobit: "In the days of Shalmaneser I had performed many charitable deeds for my kindred, members of my people. I would give my bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked. If I saw one of my people who had died and been thrown behind the wall of Nineveh, I used to bury him."

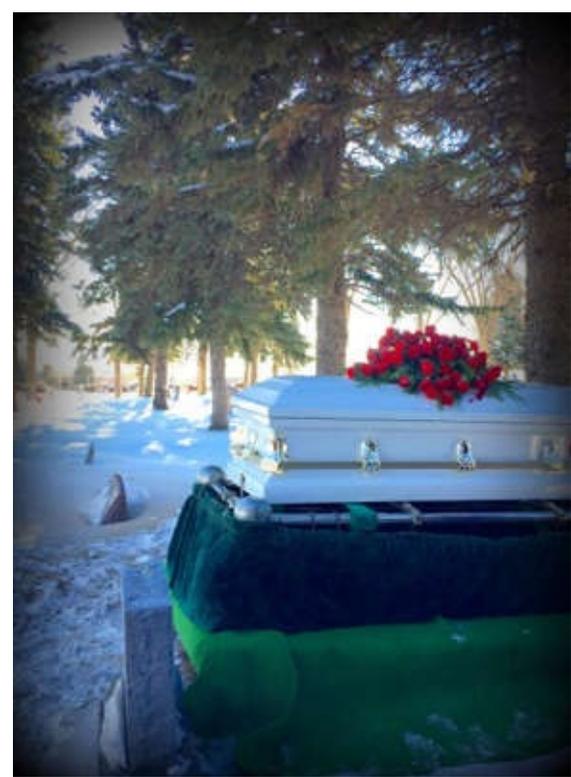
And in a footnote where I found that [here](#), it notes that "Tobit risked his own life to bury the dead. Deprivation of burial was viewed with horror by the Jews." (References within link.)

This last line provides a clue, I think, to why I am surprised to be reminded of this corporal work of mercy. I tend to view corporal works of mercy as sacrificial acts, and yet to me, burying the dead is so much a given; it's just something we do that ought to happen. And it doesn't feel like much of a sacrifice to me at all.

I have gone to three funerals in the past week and a half. It started with the vigil service of Michelle Duppong, 31, sister of my friend Lisa who also died while I was in Bismarck and happened to belong to the same parish as my grandmother. Her vigil was a time to be there for my friend, but all the while we prayed for Michelle, God was preparing me for the phone call that would come just a few hours later, telling me my grandmother was gone.

I attended Michelle's funeral the next day, and afterward, immediately set about helping my mother plan her mother's funeral. Her sisters were in far-away places and would come as soon as they could, but we would get things started and involve them as much as possible by phone, text and email.

It was an intense time, and involved my sister and me preparing some of the music, which we would offer as a parting gift to Grandma — I on voice and her on flute. Yes, it was a little stressful sorting through all of this, but not much of a sacrifice. I wanted to do it for Grandma and our family, just like I wanted to be there for my friend Lisa.



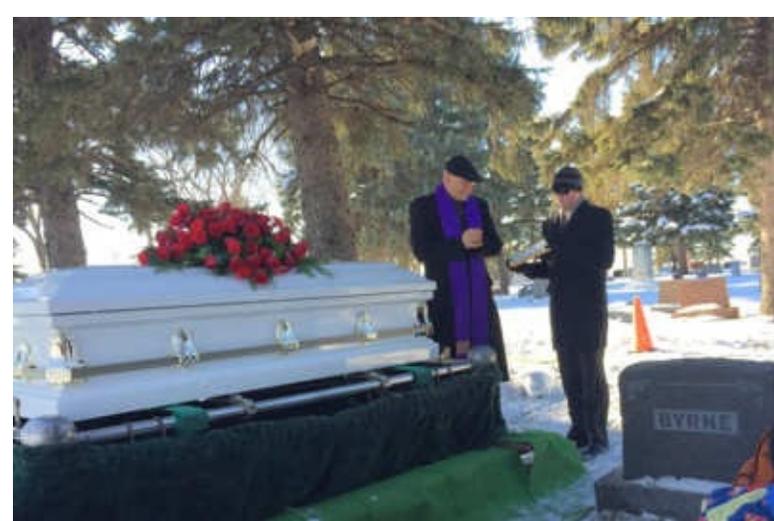
The day I got home from Bismarck, still recovering from Grandma's death and resulting events, I received a call from my friend Judy, who asked if I'd sing at her father's funeral. As she shared with me about his unexpected death just hours before, my heart leapt out to her. I felt I could cry a river for both of us. I was tired still, and grieving myself, but of course I would sing. Of course. I knew her parents — I had talked to them several times at pancake breakfasts after Mass and seen them so often sitting in the pew during my times serving as cantor — and it would be an honor, truly, to be there for them in that way.

See, it just doesn't seem like a sacrifice, and I think it's because love is at the crux of it. But also, in our culture, it's a given that we bury the dead.

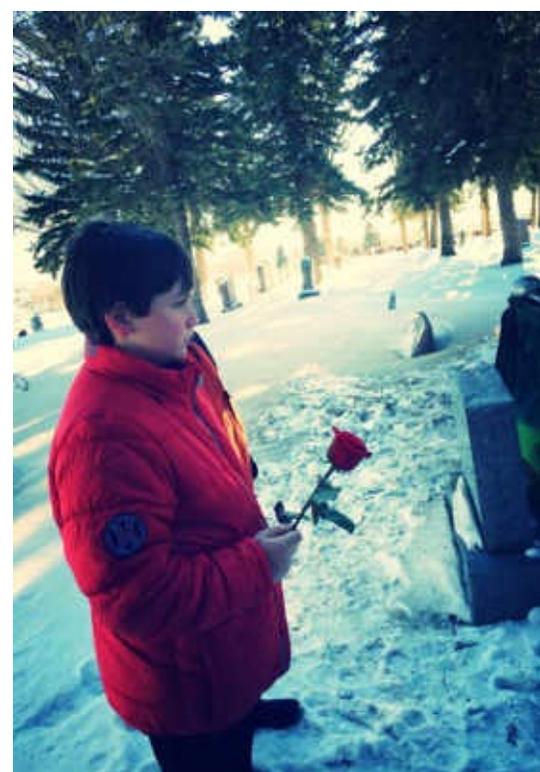


To think of times and situations, even today, when a burial isn't a given...it breaks my heart. It is for the living of course, more than anything, but we are also honoring the body. Because the body is the house of the soul during our earthly time, and it is precious. That is why it is hard for us to see the lid on the coffin go down. We are so human, and so bound to the body. It represents the person we love, and in our humanity, it is exceedingly difficult to let go of that.

So, we bury the dead, and grieve. Though it may not be easy, I don't find it sacrificial. To me, it is an honor to be part of sending someone to heaven, whether through singing or just being there in the pew praying for the family. I am grateful for those chances.



And now, my sons have seen the process up close and personal, and it will stay with them forever. That is a gift all its own.



My youngest indicated the deliberation with which he is processing all of this. On the way to the nursing home that night, knowing what we'd be seeing there, he said, "Mom, it's just so weird. We were just visiting Grandma today, and she was alive then. And now she's not." Yes, these are hard things to process, but they are life, and now he knows.

This will be something that stays with him; that and the prayers we prayed over her, and the blessing I placed on her forehead, and how my mom went in search of her favorite pink outfit for the burial, and how we walked out the door, still a bit in shock yet grateful somehow that we could be there, just as the ambulance was arriving...

It is hard, it is surreal, but it is not a burden, I find, to bury the dead. Giving love back for the love that has been offered is no sacrifice at all.

Soon, I will share more about this amazing woman I am privileged to call "Grandma."

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2016/01/to-bury-the-dead/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Remembering Dad: Our Childhood Bedtime Ritual



We lived a well-ordered life, as did most children of the 1950s. There was a time for everything. When it was time for bed, it was time for bed. Whining would get you nowhere. The ritual began after supper, which would have been about 6 o'clock.

At the appointed time we had our baths. Mother took charge of that. Once bathed, dried, and "pajamaed," Dad took over. Perhaps he had the easy part. For me it was the fun part. One-by-one we joined Dad in our living room. Dad sat in a large stuffed armchair. John and I sat on one or the other of the arms of the chair while little Joan sat on Dad's lap. We sang songs together. Some were crazy little ditties, like "

." This is the refrain, which I still remember:

K-K-K-Katy, beautiful Katy,

You're the only g-g-g-girl that I adore;

When the m-m-m-moon shines,

Over the cowshed,

I'll be waiting at the k-k-k-kitchen door.

But the really fun part was when we sang the parody of it which Dad learned in the Army. It was called "B-B-B Bedbug." Here's that version:

B-B-B bedbug, horrible bedbug

You're the only b-b-b-bug that I abhor;

When the m-m-m-moon shines,

Over the barracks,

I'll be scratching at my b-b-b-back until it's sore.

Another favorite was "

.” This was a song that Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby had popularized. As a child I took the little lessons to heart.

Would you like to swing on a star,

Carry moonbeams home in a jar,

And be better off than you are,

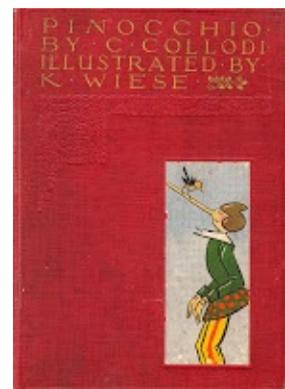
Or would you rather be a mule?

You can hear the whole song on UTube by using the above link. It's very enjoyable.

We also sang Catholic religious hymns, like “Bridegroom of My Soul,” “

,” and “Mother Dearest, Mother Fairest,” to name a few.

Dad couldn't carry a tune, but that didn't matter. He sang anyway and he put up with my laughter when he really messed up the melody.



Then, after our songfest, Dad settled us down by reading aloud from a book. One of them was the original

[Pinocchio story by Carlo Collodi](#)

. It was about a puppet that wanted to be a real boy. Dad would read only one chapter each evening, which was good child psychology. This kept us wanting more. It also gave us time to apply our imaginations to the story and to digest the truths about life and its challenges. I must have been the perfect age for this story, because I really worried about my nose growing long if I told lies.

Once the chapter was finished, Dad escorted us to our bedroom. John, Joan and I shared the same little bedroom when we were young. We had one twin bed and a bunk bed, which mother and dad had purchased at the Merchandise Mart with the help of Uncle George, who worked there. Each of us got into our respective bed. Dad brought a kitchen chair into our room and sat with us for awhile. We talked. Then it was time for our prayers. We didn't kneel at our bedsides. We just stayed in bed. Dad didn't baby us. We learned short as well as long prayers. So we were just as adept at the “

[Act of Contrition](#)

” and “

[Memorare](#)

” as the “

[Hail Mary](#)

” or “

.” I was eight when he taught us the “The Lord's Prayer,” in Latin.

There were no issues about understanding the words to the prayers. I was a questioner. “Dad, what does ‘mourning and weeping in this valley of tears’ mean? Dad, what does ‘advocate’ mean? Dad, why do we say ‘thee,’ ‘thou,’ and ‘thy’? He always knew and I took his explanations to heart.

When we were finished with our prayers it was time to sleep. Dad left the room, closing the door behind him. Now it was dark. The three of us talked and joked. I liked to play tricks on them. But soon we dozed off.

Final thought: We had no T.V. in our home. This was our entertainment.

This contribution is available at <http://ikeepmymemorieshere.blogspot.com/2016/01/remembering-dad-2-our-childhood-bedtime.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

What Kind of Christian [at CF Family]

Our Archbishop Emeritus Francis Hurley passed away this week. The diocesan newspaper ran [this piece](#)

telling his amazing story and these are the first few comments from a local news station's web page:

** I am not even Catholic, but respected this guy! * He was a good man -- he reached out to the Muslim community here in Anchorage, and we considered him a dear friend. Rest in peace, Archbishop Hurley. * Godspeed to a good man. Prayers for the Church. * Rest in your Lord's arms, Father. * My husband and son are named after him. He will be missed.*

My heart swelled to read such sentiments. How much he was loved and respected, even by non-Catholics and Muslims. You see, I know Christians, Catholic and otherwise, who are always angry. Angry about music; angry about sermons; angry about culture; angry about personalities; angry about politics; angry, angry, angry. Their "suffering" at church is all they can talk about. Loudly. Often rudely. But Pope Francis has called us to a culture of encounter, of reaching out in dialogue and friendship outside our usual circles. If we live actively attempting to encounter people, we might not be as angry. We might be nice. We certainly will not insult and mock others, even others with whom we disagree.

I have been the recipient of such an angry attack. An attack in front of others, never apologized for, and spun into alteration. It changed my life. And not over something crucial like doctrine or morals. I dared express an opposing opinion than that of the loud Angry One. Now that I know what that kind of treatment feels like, I resolve not to mock or insult another human, even those on "the other side" of the doctrine and morals I hold dear. Nope. If I cannot reach out in dialogue and friendship then I will pray for their souls. If I have to stay away from those that insult and mock, then I will. I can still pray.

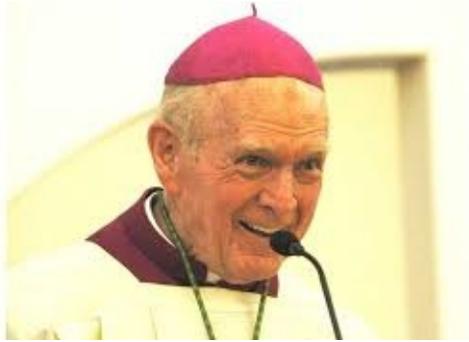
What kind of Christian do I want to be? Yes, I despise how our culture celebrates sin. Yes, I'd like to see some things done differently at church. Yes, I keep myself and my children away from certain people, movies, music, and books. But I do not need to hurt and humiliate. The contrast between the archbishop and the Angry Ones is striking.

I think Archbishop Hurley encountered people. From these comments above, he seemed to have had decent contact with all sorts of folks, both in and out of the Church. I daresay that some of those Catholics embraced different music or practices or politics than he. That's how I want to be remembered ~ as an example of a Catholic who was decent to people without compromising my own Holy Faith. Being nice does not mean I think that everyone is right and sin doesn't matter. It's not either/or. I can attend Mass and receive my precious sacraments. I can vote and dress and sing and read how I like. I can raise my children how I see fit. I can run my household and strengthen my inner life my way. And, I can try to truly encounter people, whether on Facebook or in real life.

As a Catholic, I encounter Christ in His Church first. Then others. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul. This is the first and greatest commandment. And love your neighbor as

yourself. Upon these two rest all the law and prophets (Matthew 22:36-40)."

Archbishop Hurley, rest in peace. We love you and will miss your stories.



This contribution is available at <http://northerncffamily.blogspot.com/2016/01/what-kind-of-christian.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Through the Looking Glass



I saw my grandfather forty years after he died. I loved him with all my heart, not because he gave me toys, bought me ice creams or took me to the Fun Fair, but because he loved me so much. I was only eight years old when he died of a heart attack and I cried myself to sleep. The next day my mother told me that he loved me very especially, so much so that he made special plans for me and so I should always pray for him each day when I said my morning prayers. That's why I felt so guilty when I saw him again forty years later. The truth of the matter is, I had forgotten to pray for him as often as my mother wanted me to, as often as I should have done. It was Christmas Eve when I saw him. I usually shaved in the morning, but as I was going to midnight Mass I thought I better make myself a little more presentable. I had removed all the shaving cream off my face apart from a white moustache under my nose, about the same size as the white moustache my grandfather always wore, that tickled me when he kissed me. I had never thought I looked like him, but there he was looking at me from the bathroom mirror. Oh yes it was him all right, but he didn't look as kind or as loving as the man I remembered!

When my mother died thirty or more years after him I was devastated. I not only missed her more than I could say, but I particularly missed her help and encouragement when I was going through the most difficult period in my life. I not only felt spiritually bereft, but I was physically bereft too without a home to call my own. It was then that my grandfather came to the rescue. When my mother said that he loved me very specially I knew what she told me was true because I had felt his love, but what she said about his plans for me meant nothing at all, at least until a letter arrived. It came from the family solicitors, with news I had known nothing about before. He had left all his money directly to me. My mother only held the capital for her lifetime so that she could live off the interest which in those fairy tale days was considerable. Now everything came to me. At last I was safe and secure, at last I could have a home to call my own, but more important still I felt loved, even though those who loved me were dead, their love lived on and I could now live on to begin a new life. Thanks to them, to their tangible love for me all went well, better than I could ever have hoped, so well in fact that self-absorption and self-satisfaction had

made me forget those who had loved me most. That's why the face that looked back at me from the mirror that Christmas Eve might have looked like my grandfather, but it was covered with a guilt that I had never seen on his face.

When I went to midnight Mass it was to realize that I had forgotten *Someone* else too. Just as my Grandfather had given me all he could to show his love for me, God had done the same. He had not shown how much he cared for me by the money he left me, but by the love he left me – his own personal love made flesh and blood for me in Jesus, who was born on the first Christmas day. This enabled God to do through Jesus what he had never been able to do before. God's infinite love which was in the past too powerful to enter into finite human beings, could do so in the future, thanks to the birth of Jesus. Once his human being was filled to overflowing with God's infinite loving, it was transposed into human loving in him. This enabled all other human beings to receive God's infinite loving through him.

I once nearly blew up our kitchen when I tried to plug my twelve amp kettle into the mains! I soon discovered that 240 volts into twelve volts will not go, at least without a transformer. Jesus is God's transformer, born to enable him to transform infinite loving into human loving, so that we can receive from Jesus what we were never able to receive before. That's why Christmas is such a sublime and inspiring feast, because in the baby in the crib we see the beginnings of God's plan for us that was brought to completion on the first Pentecost day. It was then that for the first time on earth his human nature became 'radio-active' with the infinite loving mercy of his Father, so that on that day and on every day he can pour that loving mercy out, onto and into all who are open to receive it.

The metaphysical poet *John Donne* put it this way: – *'Twas much that God became like man before, but that man should become like God much more'*.

Happy Christmas.

First published in [The Catholic Universe](#) Friday 25 December 2015

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/through-the-looking-glass/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Ahead of the storm, March for Life 2016 went on [at Leaven for the Loaf]

Are we out of our minds? I'm sure I wasn't the only person on the National Mall with that thought as thousands of pro-lifers began to assemble for the March for Life last week. A blizzard warning was in effect. Not a watch, mind you – a warning, meaning it's no doubt coming. The leaden-gray sky promised to deliver Winter Storm Jonas with a vengeance.



In front of the Supreme Court at March for Life 2016. Photo by Ellen Kolb.

I traveled with about 250 other New Hampshire pilgrims – I use the word intentionally; we were united in our religious faith – in a six-bus caravan to the 42nd annual March for Life, coming on the 43rd anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Our particular group was associated with various parishes within the Diocese of Manchester. If you were passed on the Everett Turnpike the day before the March by a busload of rosary-praying Catholics, that was us.

My bus captain was Valerie Somers, who has been involved with bus trips to the March for more than 20 years. She was as close to unflappable as anyone could be with the word “blizzard” floating around. Our driver Ray (or ace driver Ray, as I will henceforth think of him) has been driving New Hampshire pro-lifers to the March annually for almost as long as Valerie's been involved.



The March for Life, January 22, 2016. Photo by Jeffrey Bruno/Aleteia.com via The March for Life Facebook page.

“I do this for you. I believe in what you’re doing,” Ray told us. He probably could have accepted another charter that day that would have kept him safely out of the path of Storm Jonas. He drove to the March for Life instead.

The March is nonsectarian, nondenominational, and as open to secular as to religious participation, as I have noted before. This year, I traveled with fellow Catholics, and our time together was heavily informed by our common faith. My notes here reflect that.

The March’s biggest story came after the March

I didn’t know when we set out that the most remarkable part of the March would come after it was over. As we were returning to New Hampshire, marchers heading home to other states were stranded in blizzard conditions. The response of some of the Catholic students and clergy to being stuck in the snow led to more reporting about the March than I’ve ever seen.

I mention this before recounting my own experiences at this year’s event, because what happened among the stranded marchers was more important than anything I did on the 22nd.

Snow began falling in Washington as the March began at 1 p.m. on the 22nd. By 4 p.m., our New Hampshire contingent had made it back to our buses, and we began creeping up the highway in slick, snowy conditions. Our route let us outrun the storm. Anyone traveling south or west or northwest of D.C. wasn’t so lucky.

On the Pennsylvania Turnpike, a vehicle collision caused a giant traffic backup that eventually became a standstill, in heavy snow. Among the stranded travelers were students from Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio), University of Mary (North Dakota), and several Iowa Catholic high schools, among others returning from the March. Their plight came to my attention via the Twitter feed of writer Kathryn Jean Lopez (@kathrynlopez), who was traveling with the North Dakota group.

Others on the scene took to social media, but none to my knowledge have anything like the following enjoyed by Lopez. She’s the one who drew attention to what was happening.

wonderful [@umary](#) [#MarchForLife](#) students from Bismarck ND are part of those trapped on PaTurnpike since last evening pic.twitter.com/WP3jo12y7i

— Kathryn Jean Lopez (@kathrynlopez) [January 23, 2016](#)

News organizations began paying attention to what was going on, mentioning that some of the stranded travelers were returning from the March for Life. There was more mention of the March for Life on the 23rd than on the 22nd, when it actually took place. ([See links at marchforlife.org](#) to some of the coverage.)

So now we know how to maximize coverage of the biggest pro-life gathering in the nation: get stuck in the snow on the way home. If the same news agencies do follow-up stories, they’ll be able to feature what these students do back home to promote and defend the right to life.

The Catholic students and their fellow pro-life pilgrims were stuck on the turnpike for more than 20 hours. The Catholic community of snowbound travelers redeemed the time. They organized an impromptu

roadside Mass that was attended by students and chaperones and any other travelers, regardless of faith, who chose to brave the cold.

During difficult times people come together. Outdoor mass taking place right now on the PA Turnpike. [#Blizzard2016 pic.twitter.com/RyatGBGnpW](#)

— Shirley Descorbeth (@ShirleyKWWL) [January 23, 2016](#)

That's when things really went viral. Catholics being pro-life is a dog-bites-man story. Young Catholics giving public witness to their beliefs and keeping their sense of humor about it shifts the story to man-bites-dog territory.

Deacon Greg Kandra at [aleteia.com](#) later [snagged an interview](#) with the principal celebrant of the roadside Mass, Fr. Patrick Behm of Iowa, who said, “[C]redit for the idea, and credit for building the altar, and credit for going around to the various buses inviting people to join them belongs completely to the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, particularly Mr. Bill Dill, their youth minister.”

The turnpike was eventually re-opened. Everyone in the traffic jam made it home safely, as far as I know.

Getting to hearings, witnessing outside an abortion facility, raising money to grow a pregnancy help center, providing respite care, visiting the sick: inconvenient? Hard? Not my thing? Those students on the Pennsylvania Turnpike have just shown us all what inconvenience looks like, and they've shown me how to meet it.

Thanks to them, the smallest March for Life crowd I've ever seen has had the greatest impact on media. Who saw that coming?

Still the nation's largest pro-life event

While there are now annual pro-life marches in Chicago and San Francisco near the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Washington event is **the** March for Life. It's not regional.

The weather forecast kept attendance down, but “down” is relative. In other years at the March, I've been in the midst of hundreds of thousands of people, when just getting off the Mall to start marching can take over an hour. No such delay this year, although the crowd was still impressive. Look at [this panoramic photo](#) from LifeSiteNews.com, taken at this year's event.

As our bus left Nashua southbound, my fellow passengers and I exchanged news reports about cancelled buses. I heard about night-before panicky texts and phone calls among New Hampshire's trip organizers. Larger groups, such as the Archdiocese of Boston, cancelled their buses. I knew this was going to be a down year in terms of numbers.

More than fifty students from [Northeast Catholic College](#) (Warner, NH) made it down to D.C., though, as did students from [Thomas More College of Liberal Arts](#) (Merrimack, NH). Our caravan included people from Nashua and Woodsville and Rochester and many points in between. There's no telling how many Granite Staters went to the March on their own or in groups unrelated to the Diocese.

I knew only a few of my fellow passengers before we started out. It was great to meet and talk with new acquaintances. While this is the first year I've been to the March with a diocesan group, it was obvious that many of my companions had traveled together before.

Rally before the March



Sister Esther Marie of Rochester, NH, sporting one of the polka-dot hats our group used to make it easy to find each other in the crowd.

The morning of the 22nd, I looked uneasily at my watch as the pre-March rally kept going on and on. Free unsolicited advice to the March organizers: when the National Weather Service says “blizzard warning,” it’s time to shake up the schedule: less talking, more marching.

But where to cut? Would I have wanted [Jewels Green](#) to get the hook? No, no, no. Would I have cut [Carly Fiorina](#), the only presidential candidate to speak? Nope. And I sure wouldn’t have wanted to miss Sue Ellen Browder, for whom I cheered as she said, “Prolife pro-family feminism is the authentic women’s movement of the twenty-first century.” (That’s from a formerly pro-abortion writer. Note to self: find her new book, [Subverted.](#))

Of course, the rally is the time to look around the National Mall and check out the banners held by other marchers: Secular Pro-Life. Lutherans for Life. Churches from too many states to list. [New Wave Feminists](#). Students for Life. [And Then There Were None](#). Plenty more, reflecting the breadth of the pro-life movement.



At the rally, MRL '16. Photo by Ellen Kolb.

Enjoy this: [15 Epic Signs from the March for Life](#) (churchpop.com)

Also worth checking out, from NewBostonPost: [“‘Pro-life, pro-women’: #MarchforLife hits D.C.”](#) (Storify post, aggregating photos, tweets and social media posts from several sources)

The Expo

This was the first year I actually had time to visit the expo associated with the March, held at a local conference center. Unfortunately, some exhibitors took down their displays early in a rush to get out of town ahead of the blizzard. It was worth the walk anyway, especially in the company of three other Granite Staters who were likewise seeing the expo for the first time.



MFL Expo display from Stand True Pro-Life Outreach. Photo by Ellen Kolb.

I brought a bag with me, knowing I'd probably pick up books and pamphlets and what-have-you. By the time I was done, I had enough reading material for a week (and I probably have the makings of a post or two in there somewhere.)

My favorite discovery was the information table for Brazil 4 Life International, staffed by the mother-daughter team of Ina Silva-Sobolewski and her daughter Rebecca Sobolewski. Ina spoke about the crisis pregnancy centers she has worked to establish in Brazil, where abortion is illegal but also not uncommon.



Ina and Rebecca Sobolewski of Brazil4Life International. Photo by Ellen Kolb.

Vigil Mass at National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception



At the Shrine: Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the unborn and of the Americas.

By longstanding tradition, there's a Mass the night before the March at the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in northeast Washington, D.C. All are welcome, but it's primarily a youth Mass – and it's packed, every single year.

This is one event on which the forecast had no effect. It's been years since I attended one of these vigils, and I was bowled over then and now by the turnout.

The basilica has one of the most beautiful interiors I've ever seen in a church or indeed in any public building. It's worth a visit for that alone, with or without a Mass.

Back to work

No kidding here: I hate traveling when words like "blizzard warning" are flashing on highway signs. I wouldn't have ventured anywhere near the March for Life this year without the aid of an experienced

professional driver. I almost bailed out anyway.

And would that have mattered? In the greater scheme of things, no. Pro-life work is fundamentally local, one-on-one, built on relationships and not on rallies.

But oh, what I would have missed had I done the prudent thing and stayed home! Local, one-on-one work can too easily devolve into a siege mentality: *I'm all alone here. I'm not getting anywhere. Nothing ever changes. What I do makes no difference.*

There's solidarity and strength in meeting other people with the same commitment to the value of human life. There's refreshment and inspiration in finding myself in a sea of pro-life people a generation younger than I. It's good to hear from other people about what they've done in their own areas, learning what has worked and what hasn't. I learn new things from listening to people whose background and beliefs are different from mine in every respect except being pro-life.

And then there's the reason Nellie Gray founded the March in the first place, back in 1974: to put the Supreme Court and the Washington politicians and the news media on notice that *Roe v. Wade* settled nothing.

I'll be back. An annual trip to the March for Life is financially out of reach for me. An occasional trip is essential. It really is a pilgrimage. We said a prayer to that effect on the bus, with a simple antiphon: *whatever happens, help me remember that I'm a pilgrim, not a tourist.*

This contribution is available at <http://leavenforthe loaf.com/2016/01/25/ahead-of-the-storm-march-for-life-2016-went-on/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Unorthodox [at With Us Still]

What's worth holding onto?

For example: [An article I read recently about liturgical practice](#) suggested – strongly – that holding onto another person's hand during Mass is one area where I might consider loosening my grip.

I didn't find the article's logic particularly persuasive, especially the notion that I should be dissuaded because “*the practice of holding hands while praying the Our Father comes from the Protestant world.*”

If anything, that seems like a good reason to *expand* the habit – not *discourage* it. Christ's [fervent prayer for us at the Last Supper](#), after all, was that we “might all be one.” And we've managed to bollix up that instruction up pretty well through the centuries. Internecine battles occupy so much of our attention as Christians that often it seems like there's no energy left to devote to spreading the Good News. (If you think I'm exaggerating, check out the comments to the above-referenced article – which degenerate pretty quickly into a classic blogosphere flame-war.)

Having said that, I am also aware of how deeply blessed I have been throughout my life by the guardrails that the Church has placed around liturgical practices. The priest consecrates unleavened bread and wine at Mass, not saltines and soda-pop. And it's a priest who performs the action—a person who traces the transmittal of this sacramental grace all the way back through the centuries in an unbroken chain to the Apostles (and ultimately to Christ himself.)

If I think deeply about these liturgical forms and rubrics and requirements, I realize that I *need* them. They fuel my belief. They work to open my eyes in faith. They move my heart, our hearts. They help to make Christ present for us as the people of God at every Mass. They are, in short, worth holding onto.

There are times, though, when I wish we Catholics weren't so dismissive of the ways in which other Christians experience Christ. We can get so caught up in the right way to celebrate the Eucharist...that we completely miss the point of having the opportunity to receive Jesus as our sacramental food for the journey.

That thought occurred to me this morning as I reflected on [the Gospel story we heard at Mass](#). The evangelist recounts an episode from early in Jesus' ministry when he was at home in Capernaum. The crowds were so large that “there was no longer room for them, not even around the door,” we're told.

The scribes had a seat up front...but many others had to make do with something much less than Jesus' full attention that day. A few of the more enterprising ones climbed up on the roof, removed a few tiles, and lowered their friend down into the room for a cure.

Jesus doesn't seem to be put off by this unorthodox action, I noticed. Rather, he's intent on ministering to the paralytic. He heals him anyway.

And isn't that just like Christ – to both *love* the rules...and to know when to *break* them?



An iconic image of unorthodoxy: The Master washes feet

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

IHS

This contribution is available at <http://withusstill.wordpress.com/2016/01/15/todays-find-unorthodox/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Intellect of Motherhood [at Kitchen table chats]



What else do you do when you are cooped up due to a blizzard but read? I wish I could say I made a dent in my reading pile of books. I am afraid my reading was much more work related. This meant that I spent more time than usual perusing the

New York Times

. It was there that I found

[this essay](#)

by Carol Hay, an associate professor of philosophy and the director of the gender studies program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. In her piece entitled

Girlfriend, Mother, Professor?

Ms. Hay argues that cultural stereotypes of women hinders the work of female professors. She claims that students go from seeing a woman professor as a possible girlfriend when she is young to a stand-in for their mother as she matures.

I never taught college students during my younger years so I cannot speak to ever having been viewed as a girlfriend by students. However, the college students I teach now are very close in age to my own children, and yes, they do sometimes approach me as a mother. But I also respond as a mother because that is who I am. Their pencil breaks during an exam and they don't have a spare. They come to class with the sniffles and don't have a tissue. You know what? I have both and I gladly offer it to them with a reassuring smile. A professor who teaches the other section of my course is a woman about my age and has experienced the same thing. We laugh about it. It doesn't make us less effective teachers. In fact it might just make us better teachers as students are less afraid to approach us with questions.

Perhaps because Ms. Hay is immersed in gender studies she is programmed to see any difference between men and women as a problem where I see it as a feature, not a bug. But she also has a very demeaning view of motherhood. This quote, in particular, ruffled my feathers:

If I were to serve as their mother, I'd have only compassion and unconditional acceptance to offer, not intellectual lessons.

It was then followed by this claim:

In our culture mothers dispense hugs, not pearls of wisdom, and when they do venture to have opinions we're likelier than not to roll our eyes at them for being nags or scolds.

Really? That is what mothers do? Someone better tell my kids because that is not what they have seen. In fact, I don't know many children who have seen this. Hugs and pearls of wisdom are not mutually exclusive. Lots of smart women are mothers and very capable of dispensing both.

The tough love I meted out to my children prepared me to face a tearful student who forgot an assignment and tell her that I cannot let her make up the work. I will not bail her out. She must take personal responsibility for her academic performance. Ms. Hay laments that standing firm leads students to think of her as a shrew. So be it. I do not seek to be the best friend of my children nor the best friend of my students. The mature students appreciate this and respect me. The less mature students are not going to grow if I worry about how popular I am with them.

I will concede that a mother may exercise her authority differently than a father. But that does not mean she is any less authoritative or any less respected. Mothers are not meek. Mothers are not mentally bland. If Ms. Hay believes that having the aura of a mother is an obstacle to her being an effective professor, it is because she does not understand the intellect of motherhood.

This contribution is available at <http://catholic-mom.blogspot.com/2016/01/the-intellect-of-motherhood.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Things I Could Totally Be Patron Saint Of [at Catholic Cravings]

One of the perks of sainthood, along with eternal happiness with the God of Infinite Beauty and Goodness of course, is learning what God wants you to be patron saint of. Grace at [Even the Wilderness](#) has a brilliant list of [things she could totally be patron saint of](#). I knew as soon as I saw it that I had to be a part of that. Besides, this will come in handy for the *Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum*, right? ;)

So here's my list:

- + Aspiring countesses, obviously.
- + Those who repeatedly boil the kettle because they think to themselves, "oh I need a cuppa right now" and then totally get distracted by Pinterest, until a pin of someone drinking tea (#nofilter!) reminded them they did want that cup of tea. Boil. Leave. Repeat.
- + Feminists in mantillas.
- + People who have to edit out exclamation marks from emails so they seem chirpy rather than certifiably bonkers.
- + The Vatican Women's Cricket Team (it will happen one day, just you wait and see.)
- + Young women who still believe in true love even though they're as single as Elsa in her rebellious ice-palace-phase.
- + People who always pronounce subtle "sub-tle" and often "oft-en" in their head.
- + Collectors of royal commemorative mugs and assorted chinaware.
- + The small Croatian town of Šumanovci, population 139. (Why? Why not, I say? Wouldn't you want to be the patron saint of tiny Eastern European hamlet?)
- + Catholic listicles of dubious quality.
- + Those who are in danger of exchanging the treasures of heaven *à la* Esau for a decadent slice of mud cake with chocolate swirls on top, hmm, and some lemon sorbet to balance it out and a just a little cream and caramel profiterole tower, maybe? Hmm, chocolate...
- + Left-wing conservatives.
- + The 1995 BBC *Pride & Prejudice* Miniseries.
- + Lost things that need to stay lost. Sure, you have St Anthony to help you find things but what if you don't

want to find those directions to your Aunt Tabitha's Silent Poetry and Quail-Hunting Group? That's where I come in, brethren. ;)

+ Finally, anyone who's ever thought, "well, that isn't historically accurate. Clearly, Beauty and the Beast is RUINED."

So how about you? What would you be patron saint of?

This contribution is available at <http://www.lauramcalister.com/2016/01/28/things-i-could-totally-be-patron-saint-of/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

I want to be completely Out Of Control this Lent [at the measuring mama]



There are 19 days until Ash Wednesday. I know because I like to be prepared... all of the time.

There was a knock on my door a few hours ago and I had a mini-heart attack because I wasn't prepared. The house was a Duplo & boxcar obstacle course and I was still in my pajamas. By pajamas, you mamas know what I mean... those sweats I threw on three mornings ago when the baby woke up before me and I just grabbed the first thing I saw ...and that I basically have been wearing ever since (give or take a possible shower or sweater change).

Thank goodness it was just my sweet and non-judgmental neighbor at the door!

But, that and a million other moments of panic, frustration and ill-preparation have convinced me that it is time.

THIS is the year. The year that I LOSE CONTROL.

This year, this Lent, I am going to give up control and focus on the One who holds my world in His



pierced hands.

Because the truth is, I can never be prepared for life- the good or the bad. I cannot prepare for that first time I take a kid to the emergency room for stitches. I cannot prepare to watch my kids grow up and away

from me. I cannot prepare for the grief that comes when you lose a child or a spouse or a parent or a sibling.

I can't control the weather, the kids whining, the electric bill, the traffic on the drive home, or the Presidential election (dang it).

The only thing that I can truly prepare is my heart to be open to God's Will. To trust that His Will IS truly good and perfect, even if it is a little out of my control.

And so, I am embarking on an **Out of Control Lenten Challenge** and I want to invite you to join me. **This is how it is going to work:**

I have set up a post to publish on my blog automatically every single day of Lent*. The post will consist of three things:

1. **a sacrifice, a call to specific prayer, or an act of charity** (*based on the Catechism 1438-1439 – prayer, fasting & alms-giving*)
2. **a spiritual quote to meditate on for the day** (with a printer friendly version)
3. **a specific intention for the day**

**The posts are automatic, so even I do NOT KNOW what is coming!*

This challenge is open to anyone and everyone looking to let go of a little control in this control-freak world and actively work to exercise trust in God. Since I am obviously a stay-at-home-mom, the challenge will naturally lean towards sacrifices, intentions and meditations for the day that speak most directly to my situation; however, I have added optional substitutions that are more general and accommodate any single women, working moms, single moms or men. *Please note: this is a pregnant and nursing mama friendly challenge!*

You can join me by subscribing to receiving emails from my blog (*see my sidebar*)

or by following my facebook page (*also on the sidebar*).

Here is a facebook banner for your profile if you want to join me and spread the word!

(right click, save image as, and upload to facebook. Working on making this a little more sophisticated, but this will have to do for now!)





(They are hard to see with the white background, I know, but I promise they are formatted to fit your fb cover photo perfectly.)

I firmly believe that in order to truly let go of ourselves and let God in, we need OTHERS. We need support and we need community. I hope that this challenge offers a bit of that and unites us on our journey toward sanctification!

Looking forward to losing control this Lent with you,

Becky

p.s. As I was writing this, David walked over and casually hit the power button on my computer. I'm gonna take that as a confirmation!

This contribution is available at <http://www.themeasuringmama.com/i-want-to-be-completely-out-of-control-this-lent/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Episcopal Ordination of my college friend, Steven J. Lopes

On Tuesday night, in Houston, Texas, at the [Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart](#), on the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple (Candlemas), I attended the Episcopal Ordination of my long time [college friend](#), Steven J. Lopes. I met Bishop Lopes nearly 22 years ago when I transferred into the Saint Ignatius Institute at the University of San Francisco in the Fall of 1994.



Although I have been to Ordinations to the Priesthood, this was my first Episcopal Ordination, and it couldn't have been any better, especially since it was for someone I personally know. It's very difficult to explain to you through this limited space the pageantry, pomp, beauty, and sacredness that was the Episcopal Ordination Mass of Bishop Steven J. Lopes. The sheer excitement that began during the day at the hotel and then reaching its peak during the Mass is still penetrating my heart and mind. I think the 24 hours I spent in Houston for this occasion will be with me over the next few weeks as I continue to share it with parishioners at my parish as well as with friends who were unable to attend.

Not to make light of the ordination by any means, but as we were making our way to the cathedral from the hotel, which was a very short bus ride, I said to my three other friends, one a Benedictine brother and one a religious sister, "Between the Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Religious, and so many Lay Faithful, tonight is like Catholic Candy Land."

There are many things that stood out for me during the course of the three-hour Episcopal Ordination, but if I had to narrow it down to three things, it would be the Liturgy itself, the beautiful sacred music, and the Rite of Ordination of a Bishop. The Mass resembled the structure of the Roman Liturgy, but with some nuances from the Anglican tradition. It was very much a "high mass" which I have come to enjoy as I learn more about the liturgy. The *Prayer of Humble Access* before Holy Communion and the *Prayer of Thanksgiving* after Holy Communion, both said by everyone who received Our Lord in the Eucharist, reminded me of the Eastern liturgies I have been to in the past. Both prayers reflect the beauty of the Church's sacramental theology.



Bishop Lopes and I at the reception following his Episcopal Ordination.

The second aspect of the Mass was the intense and most profound sacred music. I am in my early 40's, which means I grew up with mundane liturgical music that often contradicted Catholic theology in the 1980's and 1990's. Although I have been exposed to beautiful sacred music since, the music at the ordination was beyond superb and spiritually elevated us right into heaven and brought heaven down to us. The choir was composed of three individual choirs – the choir from Our Lady of Walsingham Parish (now the Cathedral), the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart Choir and the Archdiocesan Choir. If you watch the remarks from the Bishop, you will get a taste of what the choir brought to the liturgy.

The third and final aspect of the Mass that I enjoyed was the Rite of Ordination of a Bishop. This rite began with the Principal Consecrator, His Eminence Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, and concluded with Bishop Steven J. Lopes taking the reigns from him and finishing the liturgy. The Rite of Ordination of a Bishop had numerous parts. They are:

1. Veni Creator Spiritus (Come, Holy Ghost)
2. Presentation of the Bishop-Elect
3. Reading of the Apostolic Letter (official document from Pope Francis)
4. Assent of the People (all responded with – Thanks be to God)
5. Homily
6. Examination of the Candidate (asked numerous questions regarding his episcopal ordination)
7. Invitation to Prayer (all pray for Bishop-elect)
8. Litany of Supplication (Litany of the Saints)
9. Laying On of Hands
10. Prayer of Consecration (Book of the Gospels held above the head of Bishop-elect) and Prayer of Ordination recited (Calling down of the Holy Spirit)
11. Anointing of the Bishop's Head (with Oil)
12. Presentation of the Book of the Gospels (Teaching is a duty of the Bishop; other two duties – Sanctify and Govern).
13. Investiture with Ring, Mitre, and Pastoral Staff
14. Seating of the Bishop and Kiss of Peace (from this moment Bishop Lopes became the primary presider of the Liturgy).

There is so much I could say about each part, however, this blog post would end up being 2500 plus words in length and far too long for a reasonable post. If you ever get the chance to attend an Episcopal Ordination, my suggestion is – take it! It’s by far one of the most amazing liturgies I have experienced. With liturgies such as this one, it makes me very glad and blessed to be a Catholic.



Embracing and wishing Bishop Lopes congratulations.

As I did in my blog post back in November, I implore that you pray for Bishop Steven J. Lopes. Please pray three Hail Mary’s through the intercession of Our Lady of Walsingham as he begins his new ministry as Shepherd of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.

To learn more about the [Ordinariate](#), please visit their website. I would also encourage you to *Like* their [Facebook](#) page. I did.

[Our Lady of Walsingham](#)...Pray for Us.

This blog post is dedicated to the Bishop himself, Steven J. Lopes. Thank you for your friendship, guidance, and overall support these many years. Unfortunately, I never made it to Rome while you were there. I pray that you will be a good Shepherd to your flock.

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2016/02/04/the-episcopal-ordination-of-my-college-friend-steven-j-lopes/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Flight Crew [at Grace to Paint]



6×8" oil paint on canvas sheet; use "comment" below to inquire.

This is the third painting I have done since the starling flock swooped into the tree outside my window. Their round speckled bodies are somewhat irresistible.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2016/01/25/flight-crew/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Worthiness [at Bible Meditations]



Now remember what you were, my friends, when God called you. From the human point of view few of you were wise or powerful or of high social standing. 1 Corinthians 1: 26

God has a knack for picking ambassadors who aren't significant from the world's point of view. He often works through the weak, the humble, and the over-looked. Worldly success—whatever that might mean—is not one of God's requirements.

Think of David, the runt of the litter shepherd boy who became King. Or Peter, the working class fisherman Jesus chose to lead his church. Although St. Francis of Assisi was born into wealth, he did not become useful to God or others until he abandoned his social rank. And who would have thought a wizened little religious sister from an obscure town in Macedonia could impact the world the way Mother Teresa has?

So if we're not particularly clever or prominent, if we're not on any Top Ten lists, that's okay. God created us as individuals with our unique strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances for a reason. He has a plan for us. We have worth just because God loved us into existence. If we surrender to his plan for us, our lives will be valuable, meaningful, and satisfying. That sounds like success whether the world recognizes it or not.

Prayer: My Creator, who I am to you is who I am.

Reflection: What might God have in mind for you today?

This contribution is available at <http://www.biblemeditations.net/archives/2899>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Seriously [at Blogging For A Better Life]

Have you discovered adult coloring books?

Coloring is becoming a hobby that I'm getting addicted to. Anyone and everyone can color. There really is no right or wrong way to color—that's the whole beauty of it.



I've been reading how doctors are recommending coloring to calm and relax. World-renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung in the early 1900's often prescribed coloring to help his patients stay more focused.

Now I know why some of the happiest, most relaxing, times that I spent with my kids were when they were just learning how to hold a crayon and we would sit around the kitchen table coloring the morning away.

True fact, coloring is helping me become more focused in life.

As I peacefully sit with nothing else pressing on my mind, but a box of crayons and my white color page, it becomes so easy for me to meditate on the big picture in life and God's guiding hand.

On one such coloring episode I found myself mentally focusing on God's Ten Commandments. Contemplating which color should go where, my thoughts centered on the primary ways we are called to

live our lives by listening to God.

It made me question my picture in life that I'm living out. Do I portray true colors that reflect what is right and good? I got out my Bible and found what I was looking for in the book of Exodus. The intensity of God's words saturated my soul.

1. **I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of slavery. Worship no gods except Me.**
2. **You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.**
3. **Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.**
4. **Honor your father and your mother.**
5. **You shall not kill.**
6. **You shall not commit adultery.**
7. **You shall not steal.**
8. **You shall not tell lies against your neighbor.**
9. **You shall not want to take your neighbor's wife or husband.**
10. **You shall not want to take your neighbor's possessions.**

The more I read, the more I began to understand, and the more I felt protected and loved by the many vibrant colors of our Lord.

Seriously, if you're looking for a way to become more relaxed, and want that calming feeling that comes with being focused in a purposeful way you should try coloring.

You might be pleasantly surprised at what mediating thoughts come about.

Enjoy.



This contribution is available at <http://blogforabetterlife.blogspot.com/2016/01/seriously.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Overcoming the World [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

Overcoming the World: The Making of a Disciple

***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*”**

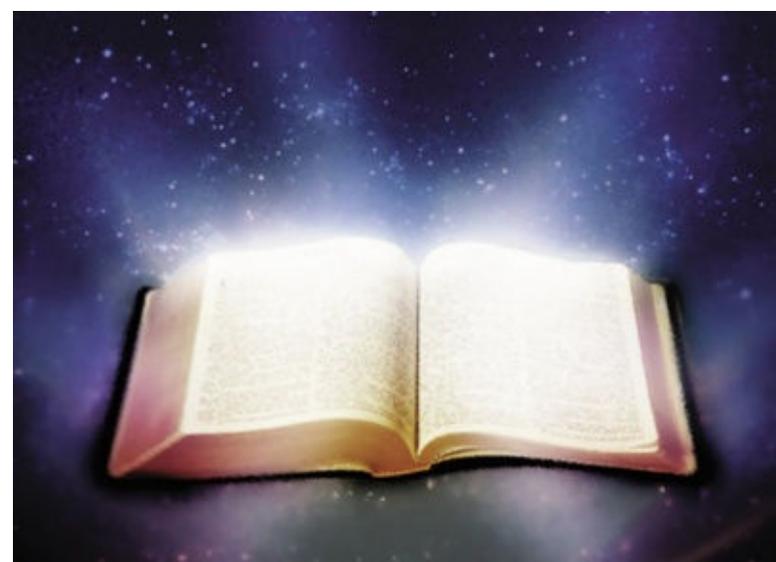


“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (Jn 1:1-5)

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and Fellow Disciples,

The terms “Overcome ...” or “Overcoming ...” are used in very important scriptures in the new Testament, but the Apostle John appears to me as really providing inspired insight into its meaning. An understanding that carries great weight for the disciple, and especially for those of us who are just becoming aware of the Spirit’s call to discipleship and are in the process of opening our hearts to the challenge of following our master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The terms, I have just mentioned, are used by St. John, in his Gospel and Epistles, in two primary senses: “Overcoming the World” and “Overcoming the Evil One” or, its equivalent, “Overcoming the Darkness”. He even begins His Gospel with this theme – the tension between God’s Light and the Darkness of Evil. (cf., Jn.1:5).



John further indicates to us God’s eternal purpose – to bring us His Light, His Life, the Light of the Living Word, His Son!

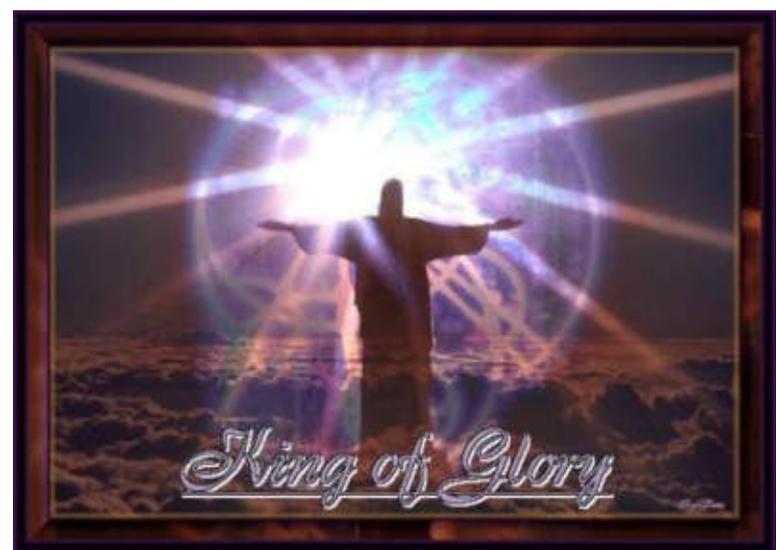
“There was the true light which, [by] coming into the world, enlightens every man.” (Jn. 1:9)

In John’s revealed understanding of God’s intentions in redeeming His creation, the key dynamic behind His plan was the restoration of the Light of His Love into the darkness into which it had fallen due to the deception of the Evil One. In his Gospel, John clearly states that it is this light, the light of God’s Eternal Word that was still shining in the darkness and it was this true light that he was bringing to the world [system] to deliver man from the darkness that envelops us.

Now, the light He provides is the freedom of the light of life, but mankind is darkened to this by the Evil one so he can control us. Because of our fallen state and the deception of Satan, we prefer to live in the darkness of our sin rather than the light of God’s Love.

“And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.” (Jn. 3:9)

In order to “Overcome” the darkness God sent his only Son, The Word of Life” to bring us to the Light of the Father’s Love. So that in bringing all creation under His Light the darkness that envelops us may be dissipated. Jesus tells His Disciples (and us) ...



“I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.”
(Jn.12:46)

Knowing, however, that those who follow Him would be resisted by the world as He was resisted, He prepares His disciples for their calling by telling them...

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (Jn.15:19)

He also encourages them by disclosing to them that, because He has “Overcome the World”, they are to be at “Peace” in this world as long as they are “IN HIM”.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (Jn. 16:33)

The Apostle John further exhorts those whom he has discipled (and thus us) to stand against the World [system] by informing them they also are covered by this same Peace Of God (THE SHALOM) that was promised also applies to them because the “Overcoming Spirit of Christ” dwells in them.

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (1 Jn.4:4)

The apostle Paul, in a similar manner, tells his disciples that we are no longer to serve the Kingdom of darkness because ...

“... He [the Father] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves...” (Col. 3:1-13)

From what has been said, brethren, it must be clear to us now, that if we aspire to follow Jesus as His Disciples, we must also overcome the World and the Evil one who controls it, as he overcame it. The first step we take in entering this “overcoming” state is to turn away from the world [system] and place our faith in Jesus, the anointed Son of the Living God.

Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1Jn.5:5)

In the Book Of Revelation, John relates Jesus’ promises pertaining to those who “overcome” ...

“... To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. (Rev.2:7)

“... He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.” (Rev. 2:11)

“... To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows except he that receives it.” (Rev. 2:17)

Brethren, I truly believe that many right now are being called by the Spirit to enter into a true and overcoming discipleship under Our Lord and Teacher, Jesus, the Anointed of the Father. Are you one of these? If you are, then this article may give you some guidance. And, even if you do not sense a call right now, I feel the themes I will be touching on will greatly enhance your spiritual life, permitting you to go a

step closer to hearing and understanding God's call on your life – a leading to yoke yourself to Him in loving obedience to His Call.

As we enter into a New Year in Christ Jesus it is important to remember our call to discipleship and rededicate ourselves to make Jesus the very center of our lives.



In attempting to live our lives for our Master we will find that the closer we come to Him the more stress the world and the evil one puts on us. The tension between world system of darkness and Our Lord's Kingdom of Light is becoming ever more stressful for us believers as we draw closer to His Coming.

We are the children of the Light and the forces of darkness are doing everything they can to prevent us from shining forth His Light into the darkness of this world. We must always remember that He has called us as beacons of His Light in this present darkness. In order to let our light shine before men, it is therefore our calling as disciples to overcome this world system just as He overcame. And, because we are in Him and He in us, we have every confidence that He is working in us and through us to overcome the World.

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5)

It is through this process of overcoming the world that we are strengthened and progress in our discipleship as the Holy Spirit is continuously forming us in His image.

In another article, I have already mentioned that the [“renewal of our minds”](#) is crucial to our overcoming the world. In this article, I wish to share with you some guidance I received in how to bring some of these concepts into practice in our lives.

One of the things I learned is that, once we have yielded ourselves fully to Christ, we remove our “selves” from the throne of our lives and enthrone Jesus as Lord and King of our lives. We must begin to recognize Jesus is our LORD in all things and that we are merely stewards of every gift and ability The Father has placed in us. We are no longer acting on our own desires and plans, rather, we are literally acting in Jesus' Name and, in this role, we must seek all of the Father's desires that He places in us and, in accordance with His Grace, use our natural talents and gifts to fulfill or carry out those desires.

Except in specific situations, He does not normally dictate the details of what we are to do. He does not want robots for servants. No! What he desires is for us to freely use all our gifts creatively to bring His desires to fruition. When we seek His Spirit to work in us as we seek to manifest His will, the Spirit will augment our natural capabilities with His Spiritual Gifts so, that in this manner He enters into partnership

with us in carrying out the work of the Kingdom!

A simple analogy to elucidate the manner with which we are to carry out His calling, would be to compare, God as the owner of a large piece of property in a large city, who wishes to build a hospital on that property. Think of yourself as acting for Jesus in accomplishing the Father's desires, and as the architect whom He hires to design and build this facility and to whom He has delegated all the resources needed to build it as He desires. Yes, you have to check your plans with the owner every now and then to see if your design is compatible with His wishes, but otherwise, He has given you free rein to design the best facility your creative and god-given talents can produce in accordance with His will and desires (think of this project as the particular "calling" the Lord has given you).

In this analogy, the world of darkness, however, is intent on keeping the hospital from being built and when the Prince of Darkness sees that you have been delivered from His control and have been appointed to this task, he will come up with every obstacle possible to keep you from building it. So besides the main task of designing and building the hospital you have to also deal with the politics, regulations, and pure stubbornness on the part of the city officials in order to bring the project to fruition. In effect, you will be opposed in carrying out your charge by the world and the Prince of Darkness.

One of the things that must definitely be avoided is to think of this as YOUR PROJECT or YOUR HOSPITAL. No! This is the Father's Project and Hospital and you are merely His steward at the service of the Father (just as Jesus was when He was on Earth). So when things get tough you go to the Father and ask Him to intervene to ensure its successful completion. That is, you use the authority and power that has been given you (in Jesus) to move the mountains that stand in the way and to keep the Devil away.

This is merely an allegorical example of how we, as disciples, are called to overcome the forces of darkness that intervene in our lives to keep us from bringing forth the Kingdom of God in our lives and the attitude to which we must take in responding to our calling. I only bring this to you in this manner so that when you accept your calling and enter into the work of the Kingdom, you will draw on the power of God that has been allocated to you to fulfill your role as Jesus' stand-in.

Always remember that without abiding in Jesus you can do nothing. The greatest deception the Evil One will place in your way is to think that YOU are the one behind your calling. NO, brethren, you must NEVER permit yourself to be tempted by pride in what you have been called to do. This is how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and we see how Jesus resisted the tempter through God's Word. In the same way, Jesus will help you resist if you abide totally in Him and renounce your own self-interest by dying to your "self" and living for Christ only.

You must also be aware that these temptations come even when you are doing what you think are religious or spiritual tasks. In fact this type of temptation is even more deceptive because, since you think you are doing the Lord's work, it will meet with His approval. But if your inner motives are for your own self-gratification, these works will merit you nothing and, in fact, may nullify the work of the Kingdom in and through your life. Remember this principle: if you work for your own self-promotion, you are not working for the KING and His Kingdom but for yourself and the Kingdom of Darkness!

I share all these reflections with you brethren to save you from stumbling along your path of discipleship. I tell you these things from the experience of my own failures and so that you may achieve union with Jesus in accordance with His Grace and thus fulfill the Father's will in your lives to the Glory of His Name!

I conclude this message to you with Paul's exhortation to the Church at Colossus (and to us who are also being called into discipleship) ...

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in Him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.” (Col. 2:6-10)

May the Lord strengthen you with His Spirit as you progress along the narrow way of His Love.

Your Brother in Christ Jesus,

Bartimaeus

(© B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus' Quiet Place, [2008-2016])

Related Links

[The Crucified Life](#)

[The Cost of Discipleship](#)

[The Renewal of Our Minds](#)

[The Sweet yoke of Love](#)

[Husbands Love Your Wives](#)

[Enter in by the Narrow Gate](#)

This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/01/18/\\$-overcoming-the-world-2/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/01/18/$-overcoming-the-world-2/)
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Pope is Catholic [at A Catholic Citizen in America]



(From CTV, used w/o permission.)

(Holy Mass for the Opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica. (December 8, 2015))

There are reasons for my writing about science or technology most Fridays, and

not

declaring that you must worship exactly as the Apostles did: in

[1962](#)

Briefly: I'm interested in science and technology, I know a little of what's happened over the last two millennia, and I'm a Catholic.

I'm not a traditional, vegetarian, gummy bear, or whatever, Catholic; just a Catholic.

History, Talking, and Being Catholic



(From sporki, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

(World Youth Day 2000.)

I accept the bishop of Rome as the acting head

1

of my church, so I could say I'm a Roman Catholic.

But I don't, usually, since it's a comparatively new term — it popped up in my language in the early

[17th century](#)

— and it reflects what I'm sure is a temporary situation.

About a millenium back, disputes over technical issues led to what's called the

[East-West Schism](#)

. The last I heard, there's been significant progress in sorting it out. A millennium from now many Catholics may not be aware it ever existed.

Those who do will probably be in the habit of looking up documents like these:

I'm not upset that the Pope talks with folks from all over the world, and thanked the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Like I said, I'm not an [adjective] Catholic: I'm just plain Catholic, and like being part of an outfit that's catholic:

[καθολικός](#)

, universal, not tied to one era or one culture.

Here's part of what Pope Francis said at an ecumenical meeting back in 2013:

"...For my part, I wish to assure you that, in continuity with my predecessors, it is my firm intention to pursue the path of ecumenical dialogue, and I thank the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for the help that it continues to provide, in my name, in the service of this most noble cause. I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to bring my cordial greetings and the assurance of my prayerful remembrance in the Lord Jesus to the Christian communities which you represent, and I beg of you the charity of a special prayer for me, that I may be a pastor according to the heart of Christ.

"And now I turn to you, the distinguished representatives of the Jewish people, to whom we are linked by a most special spiritual bond, since, as the Second Vatican Council stated 'the Church of Christ recognizes that in God's plan of salvation the beginnings of her faith and her election are to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets' (Nostra Aetate, 4)..."

(Pope Francis, in Meeting with Representatives of Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Different Religions (March 20, 2013), quoted in [N.141](#) (and see [Nostra Aetate](#) (October 28, 1965))

I've talked about what happened after the Golgotha incident,

[Matthew 28:18](#)

-

[20](#)

, and our marching orders, before. Fairly often. (

[January 3, 2016](#)

;

[November 22, 2015](#)

;

[October 5, 2014](#)

)

"Great Anxiety"

I sympathize, a little, with folks who get upset when the Pope talks with the 'wrong' people — or doesn't try forcing everyone to worship exactly the way folks did in their home parish, back in their childhood.

Screwball shenanigans committed "in the spirit of Vatican II" don't help their attitude, I suspect.

I'm a bit less patient when folks who yearn for the good old days go ballistic over imaginary events.

The latest nonsense is sound and fury over Pope Francis supposedly saying that Jesus sinned.

If he'd really said that, it would be an issue. The reality is substantially less dramatic.

Apparently this particular 'down with Francis' bandwagon started when the Pope discussed a facet of

[Luke 2:41](#)

-

[51](#)



. That's the account of our Lord's staying behind at the temple, causing Mary and Joseph "great anxiety."

Translated into English, the Pope called our Lord's decision to stay at the temple an "escapade."

It's not the usual stodgy term used to describe 'spiritual' events.

Let's see if it's improper, though.

An "

[escapade](#)

" is "an adventurous, unconventional act or undertaking."

A 12-year-old boy sticking around the temple, discussing theology with the professionals: and making sense?

Adventurous? Yes: arguably, at least. Unconventional? Definitely.

As described by Pope Francis, young Jesus in this account sounds like a 12-year-old boy. I don't have a problem with that, since I believe that our Lord really is human

and

God. (Catechism,

[456](#)

-

[478](#)

)

That doesn't mean I understand operational details of the Trinity. God's God, I'm not, and I'm okay with that. (

[May 31, 2015](#)

)

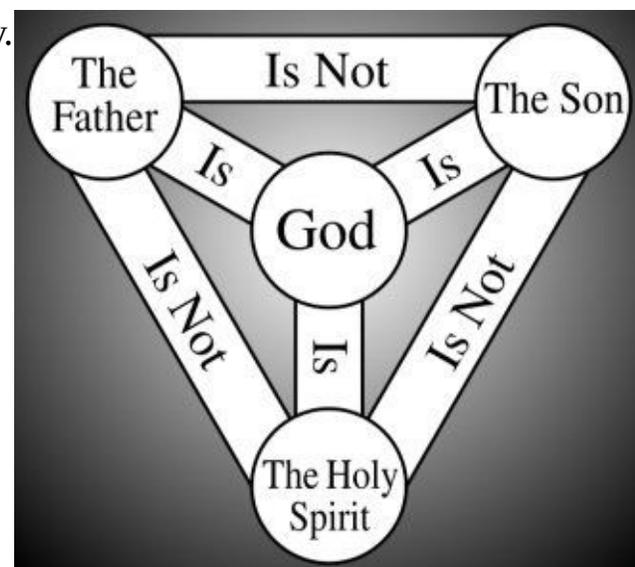
I can almost see how someone who hasn't gotten over the

[Council of Trent](#)

, let alone the

[First](#)

and



[Second](#)

Vatican Councils, might assume that

anything

said since 1545 is suspect.

However, although speculating that "Jesus probably had to beg forgiveness of his parents" raises some interesting questions — in context, I think getting upset about the statement makes no sense.

Here's an excerpt from the homily:

*"...At the end of that pilgrimage, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was obedient to his parents (cf. Lk 2:51). This image also contains a beautiful teaching about our families. A pilgrimage does not end when we arrive at our destination, but **when we return home and resume our everyday lives**, putting into practice the spiritual fruits of our experience. We know what Jesus did on that occasion. Instead of returning home with his family, he stayed in Jerusalem, in the Temple, causing great distress to Mary and Joseph who were unable to find him. For this little 'escapade', Jesus probably had to beg forgiveness of his parents. The Gospel doesn't say this, but I believe that we can presume it. Mary's question, moreover, contains a certain reproach, revealing the concern and anguish which she and Joseph felt. Returning home, Jesus surely remained close to them, as a sign of his complete affection and obedience. Moments like these become part of the pilgrimage of each family; the Lord transforms the moments into opportunities to grow, to ask for and to receive forgiveness, to show love and obedience...."*

([Homily](#), Pope Francis (December 27, 2015)³)

I suspect that some of the alternatively-sane hubbub over Pope Francis comes from his taking our Catholic faith seriously, and that's as snarky as I'll get today.

Options

Some of the world's billion or so living Catholics are probably upset that we've got options for Bible readings:

These aren't cases like

[Exodus 20:15](#)

,
[Leviticus 19:11](#)

, and

[Deuteronomy 5:19](#)

, which all say pretty much the same thing. The pair from Isaiah talk about justice and comfort; the two



New Testament readings are a bit more similar to each other, now that I think about it:

"¹ Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, Upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations,"
([Isaiah 42:1](#))

"Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God."
([Isaiah 40:1](#))

"¹² Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, ¹³ 'In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.'"
([Acts 10:34](#))

"² For the grace of God has appeared, saving all"
([Titus 2:11](#))

My guess is that these options exist to accommodate regional customs. As I keep saying, the Catholic Church really is catholic,

[καθολικός](#)

, universal, united and diverse, for all times and all people. (

[January 3, 2016](#)

;

[December 13, 2015](#)

;

[July 19, 2015](#)

)

Where was I? Being Catholic, the Pope, options. Right.

Today's reading from Acts started me thinking about having reasonable standards.

"God shows no partiality"



(From John Martin, via Wikimedia Commons, used

w/o permission.)

('Now that I have your attention....')

"¹² Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, ¹³ 'In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.

"Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him."

([Acts 10:34-35](#))

I've talked about fear of God, Jonathan Edwards, and getting a grip before. (

[March 15, 2015](#)

;

[July 20, 2014](#)

)

Basically, fear of God isn't being scared silly. It's more like respect. (Catechism,

[2144](#)

)

I take

[Acts 10:35](#)

, and all Sacred Scripture, seriously. I have to: it's in the rules. (Catechism,

[131](#)

-

[133](#)

)

But I won't claim that God wants you to do things my way: or the way I'd like to act. That's not what acting uprightly means.

As our Lord said, "the whole law and the prophets depend" on two commandments: love God, love my neighbor. (

[Matthew 22:36](#)

-

[40](#)

)

He also said "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets." (

[Matthew 7:12](#)

)

That makes sense, at least to me. If I love God and my neighbor, I'll treat my neighbor the way I'd like to be treated.

Recapping, the rules are simple: love God, love my neighbor, see everyone as my neighbor, treat others as I want to be treated. (

[Matthew 7:12](#)

,

[Matthew 22:36](#)

-

[40](#)

,

[Mark 12:28](#)

-

[31](#)

;

[Matthew 5:43](#)

-

[44](#)

;

[Mark 12:28](#)

-

[31](#)

;

[Luke 10:25](#)

-

[30](#)

; Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[1825](#)

)

These rules never change. (Catechism,

[1956](#)

)

Loving our neighbors was a good idea when

[Osroes I](#)

ruled the

[Parthian Empire](#)

, it's a good idea now, and it'll be a good idea when the

[Third Dynasty of Ur](#)

,

[Han Dynasty](#)

, and

[Maratha Empire](#)

seem roughly contemporary.

How we apply these rules has changed since my youth, will continue to change — and that's okay.
(Catechism,

[1952](#)

[1954](#)

[1960](#)

"The Words of Eternal Life"

We've had good popes recently: included two certified Saints; St. John XXIII; and St. John Paul II. (

[April 27, 2014](#)

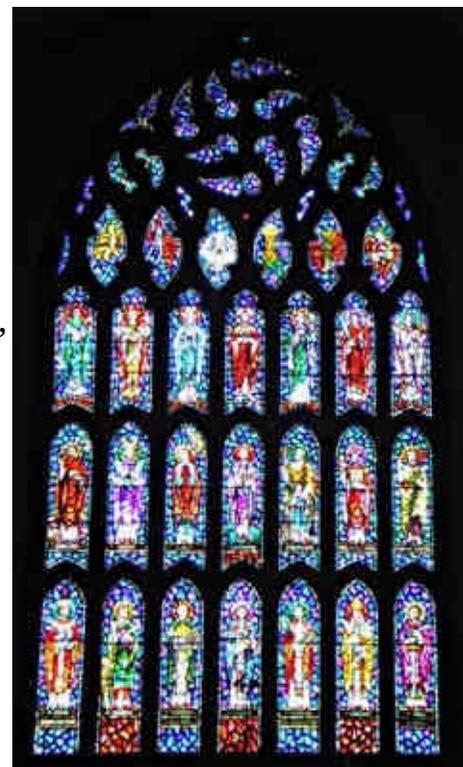
)
Then there was the spectacularly unethical pope who was kicked out twice, and sold the papacy once. That was about a millennium back now. We hit another rough patch, a few centuries after that. (

[September 14, 2014](#)

)
I like what I've seen and read of Pope Francis: but even if I didn't, I'd stay with the Catholic Church. Like I've got a choice: I'm in the same boat as Peter, figuratively speaking, when he said "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...." (

[John 6:68](#)

)
I follow Jesus of Nazareth: the man who is God, who died and then stopped being dead, who lives, and opened the gates of Heaven. Jesus gave Peter authority that's been passed along in unbroken succession to the current Pope.



At the end of all things, I do

not

want to be explaining why I walked away from the authority our Lord left here. That kind of trouble I don't need.

"⁶ But a Pharisee in the Sanhedrin named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up, ordered the men to be put outside for a short time,

"and said to them, 'Fellow Israelites, be careful what you are about to do to these men....

"...So now I tell you, have nothing to do with these men, and let them go. For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself.

"But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God.' They were persuaded by him."

([Acts 5:34-35](#), [38-39](#))

And that's another topic.

More of my take on being Catholic:

1

Popes are

[vicars](#)

of Christ, deputies filling in while our Lord is away. More about that:

- Code of Canon Law, Book II, Part II, Section I, Chapter I, Article 1, [331](#)
- Catechism, [882](#)
- "[Lumen Gentium](#),"
Chapter III
Pope Blessed Paul VI (November 21, 1964)

2

Unity

and

diversity:

"The diverse liturgical traditions have arisen by very reason of the Church's mission. Churches of the same geographical and cultural area came to celebrate the mystery of Christ through

particular expressions characterized by the culture:..."

(Catechism, [1202](#))

"Besides sacramental liturgy and sacramentals, catechesis must take into account the forms of piety and popular devotions among the faithful. The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals,¹⁸⁰ etc."

(Catechism, [1674](#))

"...Our Liturgies of the Eucharist are well attended and constitute a real feast and celebration with an active participation from the faithful expressed in joy, song and a dignified dance..."
("The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church," H.E. Most. Rev. Angel Floro Martínez, I.E.M.E., Bishop of Gokwe (Zimbabwe); Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin, XI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2-23, 2005))

"...Traditional stories and symbols, music and dance, rites and celebrations, all of which are expressions of human memory and imagination, are deeply part of the cultures of Oceania. Through a proper application of inculturation, the Church seeks to incorporate elements of a particular culture into Her liturgy, devotional practices, catechesis and sacred art. In this way, She expresses faith in God and communion among the faithful..."

("Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life Lineamenta," Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Oceania, 11 (1997))

3

Full text of the Pope's homily:

4

As I said

[September 14, 2014](#)

— We're guided by Sacred Scripture, Tradition (with a capital "T"), and the Magisterium. (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[75](#)

-

[95](#)

)

Our Tradition is the apostolic teaching authority, a "living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit."

[3](#)

(Catechism,

[77](#)

-

[79](#)

)

For two millenia we have persevered: through the rise and fall of kingdoms, empires, and civilizations; despite Manichaeism, Benedict IX (we've up to Benedict XVI now), and paparazzi. I expect 'more of the same' until our Lord returns: no matter how long "soon" is.

"Jesus said to him in reply, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood [12](#) has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

"And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, [13](#) and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

"I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. [14](#) Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' "

([Matthew 16:17-19](#))

"[11](#) Then Jesus approached and said to them, 'All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

"Go, therefore, [12](#) and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit,

"teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. [13](#) And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.' "

([Matthew 28:18-20](#))

"And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time...."

("Dei Verbum," 8)

This contribution is available at <http://catholiccitizenamerica.blogspot.com/2016/01/the-pope-is-catholic.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

A Moment From De Sales [at A Moment From De Sales]



Trust is freeing. When we trust we believe that those we love will do what they promise. And our faith in them builds when they do. If we have a problem in the middle of the night, faithful friends can be counted on to get up and help. If we feel we're sinking under the weight of difficulties, loyal friends give kind and considerate answers. And when we ask for forgiveness and understanding, we trust friends to offer that support. Trust surely proclaims the promises faith generates.

It works the same with faith in Jesus. Jesus calls us to follow Him in friendship. As a loving friend, Jesus makes good on all His promises. We need only trust in His words.

We do this when we fall off our path, losing our way. We glance upward, knowing Jesus waits to lead our way, and soon the light shines anew.

Or those times we speak hurtful words to those we love, forgetting all the good deeds Jesus does for us. Once we remember Jesus' words of forgiveness and mercy, we get up, and try again. We remember then that Jesus never forgets us.

When trust like this floods our hearts, we rise up and start anew. Trust helps us remember what Jesus declares by His actions. It is this trust in Jesus' promises that fashions a far deeper faith.

Our trust and faith also frees us from life's fears and anxiety; making us "doers" in life rather than life's "spectators." With faith in Jesus strong, and trust in His promises flourishing, we see more clearly what our time on earth is – "loving God in this world to be with God in the next." We now better appreciate God's love for us, and our love for God. And so when it comes to God, and our love for Him, **trust and faith do go hand in hand.**

This contribution is available at <http://livetodaywell.org/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Our brave new world [at Convert Journal]



Consider...

Women in the United States of America are forced by law to a life of servitude in support of unwanted biomass known as “toddlers.” Yes, small pre-person clumps of tissue who contribute nothing to society but who pollute the environment and tax the healthcare system. Enslaved women suffering loss of time, space, financial resources, sleep and emotional distress are forced to turn to illegal methods of post-birth abortions to free themselves of these burdens.

The Supreme Court must act to stop this war on women! It is truly uncivilized to recognize the right to terminate these things at any point prior to their emergence from the birth canal, then arbitrarily criminalize the same termination methods upon exit. Compassion, not prosecution; healthcare, not judgment!

Yes, these are difficult decisions women must make, but no one has the right to infringe on their lives. It is their choice. Once legalized, healthcare professionals will be able to safely provide the same full spectrum of pregnancy services both before and AFTER the pregnancy period ends. Pharmacies will stock “Plan C” (those who refuse to will be swiftly punished). This is basic healthcare and as such, will also be mandated for all government sanctioned health plans.

OK, that is not literally a manifesto of most pro-choice supporters — yet. Pro-life readers are horrified at such an outrageous idea while more than a few on the “pro-choice” side see some sense in it. This lady for instance:

It has been 4 years since the *Journal of Medical Ethics* published an academic paper on the topic. The abstract explains:

Abortion is largely accepted even for reasons that do not have anything to do with the fetus’ health. By showing that (1) both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, (2) the fact that both are potential persons is morally irrelevant and (3) adoption is not always in the best interest of actual people, the authors argue that what we call “after-birth abortion” (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled.

If this idea only popped-up once, we could dismiss it. It is persistent and a logical, progressive step. 50 years ago no one thought abortion would be legal, sodomites would be celebrated (and legally marry), or discrimination against Christians would be essentially legalized and encouraged. If the pro-life movement fails, expect this next.

[Planned Parenthood](#), the abortion industry’s most enthusiastic promoter and largest beneficiary, sees the obvious business opportunity. Here, their lobbyist testified that PP believes (post birth abortion) should be left up to the woman and her abortion doctor. Of course.

We need to get back to a point where movements such as this, all abortion and all euthanasia are inconceivable.

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2016/01/our-brave-new-world/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

A Full Church [at Backs of People's Heads and Baby Faces]



In my family it's not a matter of

if

you will get cancer, but where and when. All four of my grandparents and one of my uncles have tangled with (and lost to) cancer. I have already battled thyroid cancer and I am staring down a second biopsy for breast cancer in just a couple of weeks. I don't really want to talk about dying here, though that's an inescapable part of the conversation. I want to talk about the way we live.

I was very young when my grandfather was diagnosed with lung cancer. He died when I was 7 so I don't remember many of the details of his illness. What I do remember is being at the funeral home the day of the funeral and all I could see were knees in dark dress pants. I actually got lost in the crowd of business suits thinking I was still standing next to my dad. Later that day, I remember exiting the limousine at St. Patrick Church and walking through a crowd of people standing all the way out to the sidewalk. I didn't realize what that meant as a small child.

It wasn't until my uncle died of cancer about 7 years ago and there was a similar traffic jam at the funeral home and the church that I realized that both of these men had made a tremendous impact on the community around them. The church was absolutely packed for both of their funerals and the crowds spilled out onto the sidewalks with people whose lives were touched in a very real way by these men. At my uncle's funeral, I heard story after story from people who he had cared for and whose lives were better for him being in it -not because it was him, but because God called him to serve the poor and the lonely, and he heeded that call.

When I think of these men, I think of the Just Man as described in Psalm 112: 9 "Open-handed he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn shall be exalted in honor."

My brother is currently fighting cancer and right now he's fighting off pneumonia and a sinus infection, too. It's hard to watch him go through this. John has always been the one who was more active, more in shape, more driven, more generous, really - kind of more "everything". He is a great friend and a

wonderful and supportive brother. To see him scrambled and gasping for breath was disturbing to say the least.

In my grief over my brother's illness, I have realized that John's church will be full. Over the years, he has served the community in many ways - inviting those without family around to share Thanksgiving with us; donating time, money and toys to struggling local families; working as a volunteer firefighter; giving of his substance to people when ever and where ever they needed him. He, like his grandfather and uncle before him, has made an impact on his community, and, God willing, will continue to have an impact for years to come.

I want my church to be full when I die, too -not because I am so awesome (I am not), not because I am ready to die (again, I am not) -but because I am ready to live. I am ready for God to use me to really make a difference in people's lives. I am not so sure that my life right now is one that inspires a full church at my funeral, but I hope that I can live up to that charge. Just like the cancer, it seems to be a family tradition.

Photo Attribution: St. Patrick Church, Columbus, OH by Nheyob (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

This contribution is available at <http://peoplesheadsandbabyfaces.blogspot.com/2016/01/a-full-church.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Invitation [at The Crazy Catholic Woman]



I usually publish my blog entries on Mondays. I write all week and then on Friday, after prayerful contemplation, I schedule the post for early Monday morning. I do this because it allows me the opportunity to “back out.” If you haven’t noticed, I’m a horrible proofreader. I love to write but when I attempt to make corrections, I fail miserably. So, I give my blog a final once over on Sunday night before my words hit the Internet. This past Friday was no different, I scheduled my post entitled “My Crazy Catholic Cabinet” for publication on Monday, January 18th and for some unknown reason it posted immediately! Realizing this snafu I frantically attempted to remove the post and reschedule it for Monday, but the program failed! Right or wrong my words were out there for the world to see and I was powerless. I looked at the clock, I had promised a friend I would attend a prayer service at her church at six o’clock, it was already a quarter past five and I wasn’t even dressed yet! By five thirty the post had already been viewed by five people; the horse was out of the barn, there was no point in trying to close the barn door now. Maybe that particular post needed to be seen at that exact moment. Who am I to question the Holy Spirit?

I previously mentioned I had promised a friend I would attend a prayer service at her church. I hadn’t talked to this woman in over nine years. You see, we had a minor disagreement about a particular religious teaching. Well, it was more than a little spat; it was a full-blown screaming match. We had been attending a Pentecostal “mega” church together for about a year, but I was struggling with their teaching on “being saved” and eternal damnation. I had prayed about my doubts and received a revelation I believed to be of God that supported my Catholic belief. I was excited about my spiritual experience and was anxious to share with my friend how God had spoken to me. When I shared my personal miracle, she became angry. I was going against everything the Pentecostal church believed to be true. I don’t know why I fought with her that day. My usual stance was to surrender and accepted her truth no matter what. This woman was like a sister to me. I loved her, but this time, I stood firm in my belief and refused to retreat! A few weeks later I left that Pentecostal ministry and began my journey back to the Catholic Church. I am now certain my personal message was inspired by God.

Over the past nine years, we played a silly game of cat and mouse, but we couldn’t escape the reality that we shared a thirty-five year history. I was present at the birth of her son, and she witnessed the birth of my two children. Over the course of our thirty-five-year friendship, we had experienced traumatic life altering events and been a source of support for each other. She was Godmother to my first born child and I was Godmother to her son. Unfortunately, we are both extremely stubborn women, so over the past

nine years, we avoided one another at all cost. I don't know why we acted so childish, maybe it's not for me to understand. When she sent me a friend request on Facebook last week I was shocked. I hesitated at first and suspiciously asked myself, "Why now?" A devout Catholic friend of mine once told me "In times of uncertainty take three deep breaths and say a prayer to the Holy Spirit", so I did just that and then clicked "

accept

."

A few days later, she sent me an invitation to attend a Women's Praise Night at her church. Once again, I was apprehensive, but I prayed about it and

accepted

her invitation. Later that evening I told my husband about the invitation to attend the Women's Praise Night, he surprisingly said "Maybe this will be good for you. You can be with other women, share your thoughts and beliefs, I think it's a good idea." His reaction was shocking because he wasn't her biggest fan. My husband doesn't react kindly to "in your face" evangelization tactics and viewed her as a, for lack of a better word, "Jesus Freak". I sensed his prompting to

accept

her invitation as a sign from God! In fact, this was a "call the Pope" bona fide miracle!

After my blog publishing drama, I rushed out the door at ten 'till six to get to the Praise Night. I prayed all week and played out all these scenarios in my crazy mind. Was I walking into a Pentecostal ambush? Should I dig out my Catholic apologetics notes and prepare myself for battle? My friend and I had not parted on good terms. Maybe she heard I had suffered a mental breakdown and was looking for an opportunity to repair my soul and bring me back to her way of thinking. But, the more I prayed, I felt the Lord moving me to abandon my anxiety and just

accept

what would be. If you haven't noticed yet, "

accept

" seemed to be the word of the week!

When I entered the church gathering space, my friend was nowhere to be found. Apparently, she was picking up a few more women and was on her way. It was a very welcoming atmosphere, the lighting was dim, candles were placed decoratively around the room and appetizers were being served. I didn't know anyone so I was a little nervous. Believe it or not, I tend to be a bit shy in new social settings. After a few uncomfortable minutes, I reluctantly put on my "big girl panties" and began shaking hands and introducing myself. As I talked with these women, I noticed a distinct theme... they were broken and they were searching for something outside themselves for answers. I could relate to their pain, I had been there, but my faith had led me past that emptiness. I wasn't the same broken woman I was ten years ago. When I suffered my breakdown in 2006, I was spiritually bankrupt and felt God had abandoned me.

When I experienced my depressive episode this past October, I was confident that God was with me, helping me carry my Crazy Cross. So the nagging question returned, "Why had God brought me here?"

When my friend finally arrived, she hugged me and then disappeared. I became frustrated. For the next half hour, I would seek her out, she'd introduce me to another woman and then disappear. We hadn't spoken for nine years and this was our grand reunion? So I prayed for guidance and felt compelled to stay. I had already stepped through the looking glass, I was now curious about what was on the other side. So I

accepted

the Lord's guidance and stayed.

Modern praise music was playing as I walked into the sanctuary. I knew what to expect, this wasn't my first rodeo! I had been a member of a Pentecostal church before; I had been baptized in the Holy Spirit and received the gift of tongues. The scripture reading from

Matthew 18:20

repeatedly came to mind -

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them".

I thought to myself, "I can pray alone at home or pray here with a group of women....I guess I'll stay". At first, I sat quietly in my pew and just observed. Women were scattered everywhere throughout the Church. Some were sitting prayerfully in their seats, others cross-legged on the floor and still some standing hands lifted in praise. There was even a woman sitting at an easel painting a picture. It was at this moment that I had a choice, walk out because the chaos was uncomfortable or stay and praise God. I decided to stay.

I closed my eyes, listened to the music and prayed. At one point I stood up and just felt the warmth of the spirit around me. It was good to be with women of God and be free to praise Him this way. I was reminded of

2 Samuel 6:12 "Then David came dancing before the LORD with abandon."

Sometimes a little chaos is good! About a half hour into prayer I opened my eyes and caught a glimpse of my friend. She was in the front row, praising God with her entire body. Her hands were lifted high and I was positive she was filled with the Holy Spirit and interceding for every woman in that room. I felt a sense of pride. This is my friend and she is doing exactly what God willed. She is literally traveling to the deepest, scariest sections of our city and bringing women out of the darkness and showing them the light of Christ. She is saving souls and changing lives. My friend is a

voice crying out in the wilderness

. Seeing her Friday night filled my heart with joy.

I had to leave before the service was over, but as I drove home, I thanked God for allowing me the opportunity to praise Him with my dear friend. I also thanked him for revealing to me that I was on the

right path. You see, today my faith is strong. Over the past nine years, I have discovered that the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the Catholic Church. I witness a miracle at every Mass when bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. I experience the presence of Jesus in Eucharistic Adoration. Where else in the world can you go and know you are indisputably in the presence of Jesus? I have held hands with women in charismatic prayer and witnessed the miracles of those prayers. I have had the Word of God revealed to me in Catholic Bible studies. I have been inspired by the words of Catholic evangelists such as Mother Angelica, Father Albert Haas, Johnette Benkovic, Chad Judice and Hector Molina. I am a Catholic woman, strong in her faith.

My friend and I have traveled very different paths but I believe that our time apart was what God intended. God directed my friend to join a smaller ministry where she could grow and bring people to our Lord. God moved me to learn more about my Catholic faith and bring them to our Lord through the Church. Both paths lead to the ultimate truth...Christ. I'm glad I

accepted

my friend's invitation. Last night, I sent her an invitation to have coffee and talk. Perhaps, this time, we can agree to disagree on what divides us and build on what unites us....our love of God. I wonder if she'll pray about my invitation and

accept

.

This contribution is available at <http://www.thecrazycatholicwoman.com/2016/01/the-invitation.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Laudato Si - How do we dialogue with Muslims? [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

In "Laudato Si" Pope Francis invites all Catholics, Christians, and indeed all of humanity to consider that much of our distress in the world today is caused by human beings valuing many things more than the human person, family, and the common good. Pope Francis calls us to hear anew Jesus' teaching and example in the Gospel and to embrace the Holy Spirit who wants to realign our beliefs, thoughts, priorities, decisions, and behavior in such a way as to be in accord with the will of God for all of humanity and for the common good of all human beings.

Due to the unceasing acts of terrorism in our world today, especially those acts of violence claimed by people who identify themselves as Muslims acting for the glory of Allah and Islam, people not only in the western nations but also people in Muslim nations are increasingly subject to fear. It is not only Christians who are targeted for violence and murder but people of other religions and no religion and even Muslims of other Islamic sects and views.

Against these fears the quintessential Catholic and Christian response is what Saint Francis said and did, that is, a literal and complete trust in God expressed in prayer and loving outreach to even those violent extremists. We believe as Jesus taught that the Good News of abundant life offered by God is for everyone who will listen, hear, and accept it. This is manifestly the attitude and approach of Pope Francis as spelled out in his "Laudato Si", and so it is a very Christian way of looking at the world, at life, at religion and society.

For Muslims the views are radically different and not unlike what our views were in the Middle Ages. During those centuries all of society at all levels was permeated by religion. In that context, as people saw things, the Spanish Inquisition seemed to make perfect sense. It made sense to them not to spare the physical body in the process of trying to convince people to repent of their errors and in this way return to true faith in God and allow Him to save their immortal soul.

The most deadly danger was understood to be those beliefs that were erroneously in contradiction with the divine revelation of God as expressed in Christian faith and morals. They understood that errors in belief gave rise to thoughts, words, and behaviors inconsistent with the Sacred Scriptures or with the teachings of the Church and put one at risk of walking away from God.

In such world views that we could call "medieval" there are no distinctions between religion and government, between the church and society, because it is all one reality. Until today westerners look at Islamic states and expect their leaders to be like those in our own societies where religious and civic leaders are independent of one another. Under Islam religious leaders are in sync with the government which operates according to religious principles to the point that there are no longer any distinctions between "church" and "state". An Islamic state is under Sharia Law and all laws and civil judgements and punishments are in accord with the Qur'an and other Muslim writings and traditions.

Since the 1928 foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt a wave of renewal or revivalism, to use a Christian term, has been sweeping the Muslim world in a very deliberate and unrelenting effort to bring successive generations of Muslims to return to their roots in Islam and the Islamic impulse to bring the

whole world into the subjection of Islam, that is, into "submission" to Allah and his prophet Mohammad and to make the whole world governed by Islam.

What Christians point to as the "peaceful" verses in the Qur'an are considered by Islam to be "early" verses before Mohammad was called to become a militant warrior. The "violent" or "later" verses are seen as the final call of Allah to subjugate the world under Islam for Allah. In this widespread view Jews and Christians are the first who must be subjected because they are considered to have lost the original truths revealed by Allah and to have corrupted the "Book" of Scripture.

[Tim Staples](#)

is a Catholic evangelist who made an exhaustive examination of Islam through the lens of the Christian faith in talks available on

[CD](#)

entitled "Islam Exposed - The Crescent in Light of the Cross".

The Muslim societies that aspire to conquer the world for Allah under Islam are not interested in dialogue with the Christian faith which they consider inferior and surpassed and perfected by Islam. The conviction of being superior generally held by Muslims makes authentic dialogue with Christians very unlikely. Nevertheless, dialogue and the willingness to dialogue is intrinsic to the Christian faith as shown in the Gospels witnessing to Jesus' eagerness to dialogue with everyone.

Christians aspire to a world united in peace and love under Christ and in the Holy Trinity; whereas Muslims aspire to a world united in submission to Allah and the principles of Islam. These are fundamentally irreconcilable views. Muslims who show true and authentic understanding, sympathy, and agreement with our Christian view are at times called "moderate" Muslims but in the eyes of the fervent Muslim world they are heretics or traitors and hence considered irrelevant.

This is why our world is in God's hands and all we can do is continue to walk with our Lord Jesus Christ, remain faithful to Him, live our faith and bond of charity with others and the world, proclaim the Good News, accept to endure persecution for the glory of God, and pray for our enemies or those who make themselves our enemies.

I welcome your views, either to agree or disagree, and only ask that you substantiate your claims.

This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2016/01/laudato-si-how-do-we-dialogue-with.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

5 Surefire Ways for New Catholics to Get Involved in their Parish [at A Catholic Newbie]

5 Surefire Ways for New Catholics to Get Involved in their Parish



Are you struggling to feel a part of your parish? Do you walk into Mass only feeling like your fellow Catholics are passing acquaintances? Tried different activities with no luck?

Here's the bad news: It took me 3 years at my parish before I really felt like I belonged.

The good news: I think I've figured out the key to success!

After three years of actively trying to get involved and really get to know others at my parish, here are my 5 surefire tips to help you feel at home:

1. **Get active and involved** – The first step is on you; you have to make the effort and be willing to keep trying until you find the right thing. Don't give up after your first activity or two or three or four are not a success. Keep on, keepin' on! If I can do it for three years, so can you :). Showing up at Mass is NOT enough to get to know others.
2. **Choose small group activities** – You are not likely to get to know people well by attending big events like parish missions, Mass or even being one of 100 eucharistic ministers. While these are all wonderful — and Mass, critical — things to participate in, they are not necessarily the activities that lend themselves to making friends. Select intimate book groups, small committees, small group outings and Bible studies.
3. **Look for activities that require interactivity** – Can you help with food prep for the Seder Meal where you'll interact with others in the kitchen, go on a volunteer outing to the local food pantry, participate in a study group that requires discussion? This is how you'll start to become more than just a face to these people.
4. **Go on a retreat** – If your parish has a retreat, such as Christ Renews His Parish, DO IT! Over a retreat, where you spend many hours with the same folks, you'll develop a rapport and special camaraderie with some (not all) of the attendees. I highly recommend Christ Renews His Parish (CRHP) specifically, which has an ongoing component after the retreat. CRHP is designed to give you a group of people that you get to know REALLY well and whom you can count on to be a support

group for you within your parish.

5. **Learn people's names** – Once you meet someone, make an effort to commit their name to memory. Whenever you see them or give them peace at Mass, USE THEIR NAME. Make a point to ask them how they are doing, or how the weather is treating them, or how their kids are getting along in school. Continue to break the ice until it's broken! Plus, everyone likes to hear their own name



(that's an old Dale Carnegie trick).

Now, with those tips in mind, I'm going to tell you how it all finally turned around for me. Since becoming interested in Catholicism 3 1/2 years ago, I've been going to daily Mass quite a lot. I saw the same people over and over but never got to know them, because Mass is just not the place for chit-chat or in depth discussions.

Last Lent, thanks be to God, it all changed. The wonderful Catholic evangelist Hector Molina led our parish mission. I was SO excited, having heard him on Catholic Answers on EWTN radio, that I wanted to attend everything he participated in. While he was visiting, he agreed to attend coffee after daily Mass to socialize with any interested parishioners, so you'd better bet I was there everyday. This ended up being only a small group of about 8-10 people (what a shame that so many missed out on his wisdom), and through these intimate, one-on-one discussions with Hector, where we all asked deeply personal and nagging questions about Catholicism, the ice broke. Suddenly, I had 8-10 new people I knew by name and knew personally about!

Around this same time, a woman who worked for our parish, whom I knew in passing because we had children the same age, invited me to coffee to ask for some public relations advice, since that is my profession. In meeting with her, I offered my time to help with several projects she had going on at church and as a result of those, met a few women, who I also could call by name.

I also finally signed up to participate in CRHP that Lenten season, and that was the final turning point. Not only did I get to know the personal stories of the women leading the retreat, but I met 8 other wonderful women who attended with me. We continued to meet weekly through last fall and now meet monthly for a Bible study. Now I feel comfortable enough to call on them for anything I need, to call them to meet for coffee or just to ask advice or lend an ear.

Another great activity I joined last fall was an educational study where we weekly watched the video series Epic on early Church history, and then broke into small groups to discuss afterward. This is the most like-minded group I've found within my church to date and is the activity I most look forward to. More friends made :). I've also gotten involved with RCIA and gotten to know that team of parishioners and new Catholics, as well as agreed to teach my 6th grade son's religious education class where I've met yet another amazing woman who co-teaches with me.

Now, I have the problem of being asked to help out more often than I can, but I'll take that any day. And I know SO many people at Church. This, literally, all in the course of a year. You can do it, too!

I must point out that over those three years, I signed up for many things at church that just were not a fit for me. Please know it's OK to realize something just doesn't work and move on to something else. You will hit upon the right thing eventually and the dividends will be marvelous!

What tips do you guys have for getting involved at your parish? How did you do it? What didn't work?

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/5-surefire-ways-for-new-catholics-to-get-involved-in-their-parish/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

That the Blessed Virgin Mary is called Mother of God is not pious boilerplate... [at Brutally Honest]

Happy New Year to one and all on this day, the day we Catholics commemorate and celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, a Holy Day of Obligation.

While we all look forward to 2016 and hope and pray for good things, personally and beyond, [we Catholics look in this instance, with the help of Father Steve Grunow, at the Mystery of Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church:](#)

Today, while much of the world marks the new beginning of the calendar year, the Church commemorates the great solemnity of the Mother of God.

What does this mean?

That the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God means that the child— conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, carried in her body for nine months, and born into this world— is God. As such, this celebration highlights the pivotal truth of the Church's Faith- that God has, in Jesus Christ, accepted a human nature, chosen to be born into this world as we have all been



born into this world, and has lived a real, human life.

In doing so, God has accepted the full implication of what it means to be human, including the experiences of suffering and death.

...

The "how" of God accepting a human nature is an absolute mystery. It is a revelation that while it can be appreciated and believed, it can never be fully explained.

That the Blessed Virgin Mary is called Mother of God is not pious boilerplate, a kind of title by which we honor the woman who is the mother of Jesus Christ.

To testify that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God is simultaneously a statement about

her and a statement about Christ. On the one hand, it highlights the identity and mission of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an identity and mission that is absolutely singular and unique. No one else is or will ever be the Mother of God. No one else knows Christ as God in the manner that the Blessed Virgin Mary did.

God chose her in such a way that he does not choose us. God made the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary something that our lives will never be. There are points of contact between her experience and our own. She is fully and completely human, like we are. She is not divine. Nor does she, as a result of her unique identity and mission, turn into some kind of divine being. She is like us, but there is something so radically different about her identity and mission that while we can love her, we cannot fully understand her. She is a mystery.

So it is with her Divine Son.

When we identify the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, the emphasis is only secondarily on her- it is primarily about Christ. Mary being referred to as the Mother of God tells us that Jesus Christ is God and was always God. Christ did not "turn" into God, and calling Christ God is not just some kind of projection by which we make Jesus of Nazareth someone very important. That Jesus is really and truly is God is a fact. God accepting a human nature in Christ and lived a real, human life is not just a story we tell that is all symbol, myth and legend- it is all true and it really happened.

Now, you might be waiting at this point for the "lesson"- a point of contact between the testimony I have given and your experience. We are accustomed to think that preaching must always deliver a lesson, but in this case, if there is a lesson, it is that God will always exceed human expectations and will do so in ways that are absolutely extravagant. What God had done and will do will not fit neatly into our categories of understanding nor will he be bound by what we think he should do.

What God will deliver to us are mysteries, and it is through these mysteries that we will be able to see and, even in our own limited way, understand who God is and what he asks of us. But even as this happens, what is given to us is not a way of figuring God out. The Incarnation of God in Christ is the singular and privileged way by which God reveals himself to the world. We see in Christ with the greatest clarity possible who God is and what he is all about.

For many years, I joined the throngs of believing Christians who thought the Catholic focus on Mary was too much, was idolatrous, was extreme and even cultic. That thought was borne of ignorance in many respects but also from my own intentional desire to be as completely Christ centered as I could possibly be as I chased being a faithful guy.

Now I'm finding that the more I come to honor Mary, the more devoted I am to her, the more I venerate her as the Father's chosen salvific vehicle, the more aware of Christ I become.

It is truly a God delivered mystery, one I've come to embrace fully.

Mother Mary, pray for us, now and at the hour of our death.

Crossposted at [Wizbang](#).

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2016/01/that-the-blessed-virgin-mary-is-called-mother-of-god-is-not-pious-boilerplate.html

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Rosary Revival [at Brutally Honest]

Posted by guest blogger KathyB.

The Holy Rosary is a vast wealth of...everything. Everything you could ever fathom to need and more, *literally* right there at your fingertips. Countless volumes have been written extolling the spiritual,



mental, emotional and physical benefits of regularly praying the Rosary. Time and again, it has been dramatically shown to be the most powerful prayer. Through the Rosary, wars have been won, miracles performed, tragedies averted, and lives saved. Souls have been redeemed. Perhaps less dramatic, but no less sublime, the Rosary can also result in many more-subtle gifts over time...graces, comfort, direction, understanding, and hope, to name a few. From personal experience, when I am on track with praying the Rosary, even if everything else is falling down around my ears, I at least have that one thing going for me. And even better, it is a thing that does actually help.

So with not only a brand new year out ahead of us, but also a fairly new *Year of Mercy* thrown into the mix, here are some ideas that may not only help you to have a more well-rounded rosary life in 2016 – but also if you are struggling to rosary, may be just the thing to help you get your beads rattling more.

1. Personally pray the rosary daily. Obviously, this is the ideal. The rosary is the most excellent base you can build a meaningful prayer life around. Whether you start the day with it, end the day with it or grab 20 minutes of peace and quiet from the chaos in the middle, it's critical to the success of the mission. When you are going through hard times, it can help to fill your time and help to mark time. You might pray your daily rosary while alone in a quiet room, in the car, or while walking, running or exercising. Some people gather together with their families to pray the rosary each day.
2. Ever have trouble settling your brain down? Me too. Find a rosary you like online and pray with that. You can access the rosary with Mother Angelica (plus a few other versions) via the EWTN cell phone app, as well as online. I love how soothing and beautiful the nuns sound on this version. And if my mind is jumping around all over the place, hearing the sisters rhythmically praying the rosary helps to keep bringing my mind back to it.
3. Carry a rosary with you at all times, preferably one that you really like. Nine times out of ten, I will wear mine around my neck because if I stick it in my pocket, I end up breaking it. I know it is a good idea to keep the Rosary infused in my life as much as possible so it helps me to have it with me wherever I am. If I have rosary beads with me, even if I am not praying the Rosary, I am at least likely to think about it at some point.
4. If all else fails, if you think it is important (which it is), then make yourself do it for a while. Maybe you won't always have to. Maybe you will. But in the end, you will be glad you did.
5. Pray the rosary before Mass. Not all parishes do this, but it is sure nice when they do (hint-hint all parishes in the universe). I like the rosary before mass because it is typically a down-to-business, no messing around rosary. You are in, you are out. Simple, yet effective. Even if this is the only rosary

you pray – it’s a good one. Plus, ““For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Matthew 18:20) You can’t beat that in any way.

6. Pray with your parish rosary group. Please do yourself a favor and throw out any preconceived notions you have about this. Praying with the rosary groups at my church has turned out to be one of the best things I have ever done in my life. If you are having trouble praying, at least you know that you will pray the rosary one time that week. There have been times I have really appreciated the comfort of that small achievement. But more than just adding additional minutes of meaningful prayer time, regularly going will add some new dimensions to your prayer life. For example, with a regular once-a-week rosary group, there will be a lot of good continuity and followup on your prayer intentions. If you miss a week or two, you are likely going to be prayed for anyway (and if you miss a week, you could probably use the prayers anyway). We also have a couple of menfolk who come to this group sometimes, so please don’t think all this heavenly help is just for the wimmen, speaking of preconceived notions. Stressed out, sick, sad, depressed, tired, scared, disgusted, or getting too caught up in the rat race? Praying the rosary with a familiar group can be a soothing meditative experience, which is beneficial to the heart, mind, body, and soul. If you are not a daily rosary person, maybe you are a once-a-week rosary person. There are even once-a-month rosary groups. And even that is one more rosary, my friends.
7. As much as I have stressed regular Rosary praying here, you also do not want to go into complete autopilot with the Rosary because praying the Rosary is not the destination. It is part of the journey (adventure!) we are on to get to our Father in Heaven.

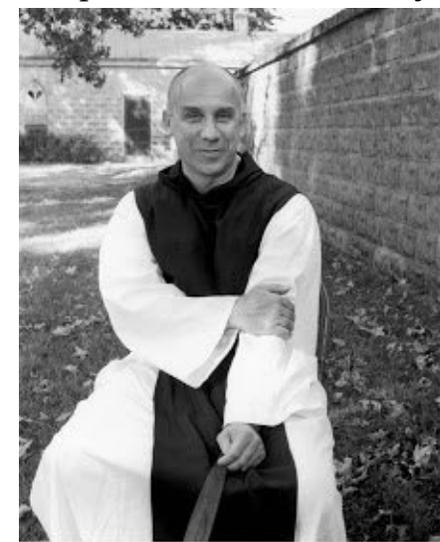
And finally, just some encouragement. Even though it is simple, praying the Rosary is not always easy. Keep doing it the best you can, as often as you can. It will make a difference.

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2016/01/rosary-revival.html
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Merton's Parable: Christ Is The Only Sure Foundation [at Principium et Finis]

An earlier version of this Throback post entitled "Merton's Tale of the Trappists vs. the Icarians" was published on February 13th, 2015



A piece by Carl Olsen at Catholic World Report (["More on Merton"](#)) brings to mind one of the more interesting and controversial Catholic figures of the Twentieth Century: Trappist monk and writer Thomas Merton. *The Seven Storey Mountain*, the autobiography he published in 1948, is the beautifully written and compelling story of his conversion to Christ and to Catholicism. He was not without his failings, however, some of them rather serious. Not only that, but toward the end of his life in the mid to late 1960's he became increasingly enamored of Zen Buddhism, and it was not clear that he could still be truly considered a Catholic at the time of his unexpected death in Thailand in 1968.

The Founding

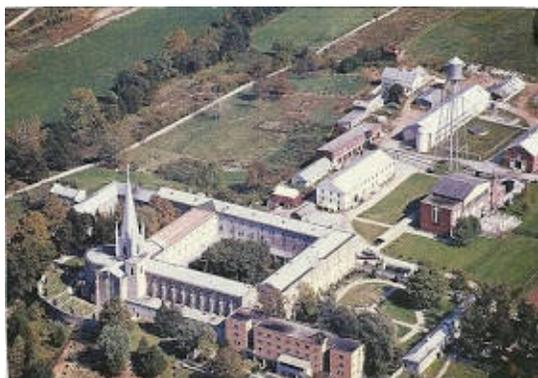
Prior to his later turn toward Buddhism, however, most of Merton's writing was thoroughly Catholic and often inspirational. One of my favorite pieces, from his 1949 book *The Waters of Siloe*, is his account of the founding of the monastery in which he was living, Gethsemani Abbey, which had been established in Kentucky by French monks a century earlier. The tale starts with the departure of the founding monks, in the dead of night in the pouring rain, from their monastery in France; it details their many adventures in getting to, and then across, the Atlantic Ocean, and finally their arrival at their new home in the rolling Kentucky hills.

I had at one time hoped to write a children's book drawing on Merton's story (which is itself based on a contemporary account in the monastery's records). My own kids liked the idea, but, sadly, the late monk's literary trustees did not share our enthusiasm for the project, so it was not to be. Too bad.

Nonetheless, it's worth reading Merton's version of the story. He has a wonderful way with a narrative, and makes the most of some of the amusing twists in the story, as when the reclusive Trappists lose their luggage in the worldly sprawl of Paris, or when (again in the pouring rain) the "Silent Monks"

need to find a way to wake up the Jesuits under whose roof they were planning to spend their first night on their arrival in Kentucky.

The Parable of the Icarians



What most strikes me in Merton's story, however, is a little parable which he weaves into the larger narrative. As it happens, among the other passengers on the ship that carries the Trappists to America are members of a secular communal group called the [Icarians](#). Merton doesn't miss an opportunity to contrast the peace and order of the Trappists, whose little society is founded on Jesus Christ, with the Icarians, who follow the ideas of the socialist utopian Etienne Cabet: the trappists feed the other travelers, including the Icarians, from their mobile kitchen, while the Icarians prohibit their members from taking spiritual sustenance at the monks' masses; the Trappists "owned all their property in common. They were, in fact, vowed to the most uncompromising poverty, forbidden to possess anything as individuals," whereas when the Icarians decide to divide up their wealth one member attempts to make off with all of it and another "wrote a letter of delirious invective against Cabet and then blew out his brains." The Trappist superior is shocked when one Icarian, who had fallen overboard, confided that he was prepared to stab himself to death rather than drown if nobody came to save him; later, the monk is bemused to discover that another Icarian, who is asking to join the Trappists, is in fact a married man.

Merton himself explains the difference between the two groups as follows:

... the monks had Christ living and working in them by faith, by charity. The monks were united by the Holy Spirit in the peace of God, which tames and dominates and sublimates man's nature and ordains it to the highest possible ends. But the Icarians were united only by the frail bonds of an "armed neutrality" of insatiable animal appetites.

Merton's thesis is a simple one (which I address from a somewhat different angle in my recent post [:"What Would Darwin Do? Random Selection Favors Religion"](#)): Jesus Christ is the foundation of all truth, and a society built on Christ will be orderly and flourishing; a society that relies exclusively on human wisdom is doomed to futility and disintegration. The Icarians (who were actually more successful than most such groups: their last community didn't disband until 1898, fifty years after they began) are neither the first nor the last example history offers. Merton saw it himself in his own history, in the contrast between the disorder and unhappiness of his early, worldly, life, and the joy that he found in the Christ-centered world of the monastery (and one hopes he found his way back to the Lord before the final end). His tale of the Trappists and the Icarians is just one more illustration that only the house built on the

Rock (see **Matthew 7:25**) will stand.

Today is the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas. Please also see "St. Thomas Aquinas And Conscience: A Sin Is Still A Sin" [HERE](#) at Nisi Dominus

This contribution is available at <http://vitafamiliariscatholica.blogspot.com/2016/01/mertons-parable-christ-is-only-sure.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Leading With the Humility of Love [at Theologyisaverb]



LEADING WITH
THE HUMILITY
OF LOVE

Theologyisaverb.com

In our society today, these concepts of leadership and humility might seem to contradict one another, and yet they are essential to what it means to follow Christ.

“...and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28

Take a moment, and think of whom you might consider a good leader. Odds are they possess not only charisma and determination, but genuinely express care and concern for those whom they lead, placing these needs above their own. Going a step further, they might just realize that they are not the protagonists in the story at all. Conversely, think of the most humble people that you know of... do they not lead and inspire others by their sheer ability to authentically witness love?

So what does it mean to lead with humility?

First, it is to see ourselves as God sees us- blessed, broken and infinitely loved. It is to know that our weaknesses and failures are but reminders that we cannot, nor are we intended to, go it solely on our own. It is to put God in the driver's seat and to allow him to work through us in best utilizing the gifts he has given us for the task. Even, gifts we may not recognize that we even possess.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body, all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:14-16

St. Ignatius extends this discussion further to consider the different degrees of humility or ways we show our love for God and one another. **The 1st degree** is an adherence or commitment to the commandments

or laws of God seeing these as both necessary for our salvation but also a governing spirit in our life. Having accepted this, and discovering that the love of God is calling forth “more” from us, we are surprisingly more content with what we have and less attached to the pursuit of riches, power or glory. In this, the **2nd degree**, we still are not completely free from its attraction but understand that it is less satisfying. Finally we come to the **3rd degree of humility** where the choice of suffering, experiencing poverty or being foolish for Christ is no longer a real struggle but a continual choice.

Quite honestly, it would be wonderful to feel that I have successfully attained my 3rd degree belt in humility..but alas I know that I am not yet there! Am I willing daily to endure persecution, face contempt or ridicule for Christ? While sometimes a “yes”, and other times a “no”, I am learning gradually that God is asking me to bring my whole self to every situation. Through my weakness, and vulnerability he is able to show the magnitude of what he can truly do. In seeking to persevere, there is also such immense gratitude for those glimpses given to this selfless authentic love in our lives.

Lord, help me to let go of every spiritually unhealthy desire for acceptance, financial comfort, or worldly success. If considered a fool, then let me be a fool in love with you Lord. Let the world come to know this as a testament to the daily transformation that you work in my life. May this convincingly inspire others to discover the meaning and joy found in striving to embrace the humility of love.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:28-34

Peace,



This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2016/01/25/leading-with-the-humility-of-love/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Mommas, don't let your babies grow up to be food addicts [at Erin McCole Cupp]

Hi. Have we met formally? I'm Erin. I'm a food addict.

-1-

It seems like I'm having gallbladder problems. I say "seems." It looks like a duck, walks like a duck, acts like a duck, and responds to dietary changes like a duck, but they still want to ultrasound the bejezus out of me before cutting me open. My reactive airways do not take kindly to the general anesthetic process, so, inconvenience and waiting and uncertainty aside, I can respect that.

-2-

Assuming my gallbladder is the source of the quacking, **there's no denying that I put myself here.** I've now been obese for nearly half of my life, and mildly overweight for much of the preceding.

-3-

During the "much of the preceding," I lived in a world where food was both god and devil to the one side of the family raising me.

Out of one side of their mouths: **Eat this. Eat that. Don't eat this. Don't eat that. You don't wanna be fat. Fat is ugly. Nobody wants a fat girl.**

From the other side: **What do you mean, you don't want to eat all these fatty, sugary foods? You think you're better than us? You're one of us, so you can't say no. Bad food makes bad people, but isn't being bad so much more fun—not to mention delicious?**

-4-

I was also put through some rather barbaric early '80s food allergy testing and resulting elimination diet. Why? Because I was a pain in the ass—placed by God with people who really don't like having their asses pained. I mean, *really* don't. I don't know if it was just the prevailing wisdom of the time or the family-of-origin culture coming from that one side of the family, but I was fed a diet devoid of sugar, dairy, chicken, chocolate, peanuts, and soy but full of "bad food makes you a bad person that nobody likes."

Funny enough "good food" wasn't making me that much more likable... **but at least I was losing weight!** Really, those extra 5-10 pounds were really making me so sexually unappealing, after all. Nobody likes a fat **ten year-old**, after all.

When the crazy diet showed that, even without the sugar I was still a pain in the ass, the food restrictions were mysteriously if gradually abandoned.

The "bad food = bad person=bad food=fun" thing sure stayed.

-5-

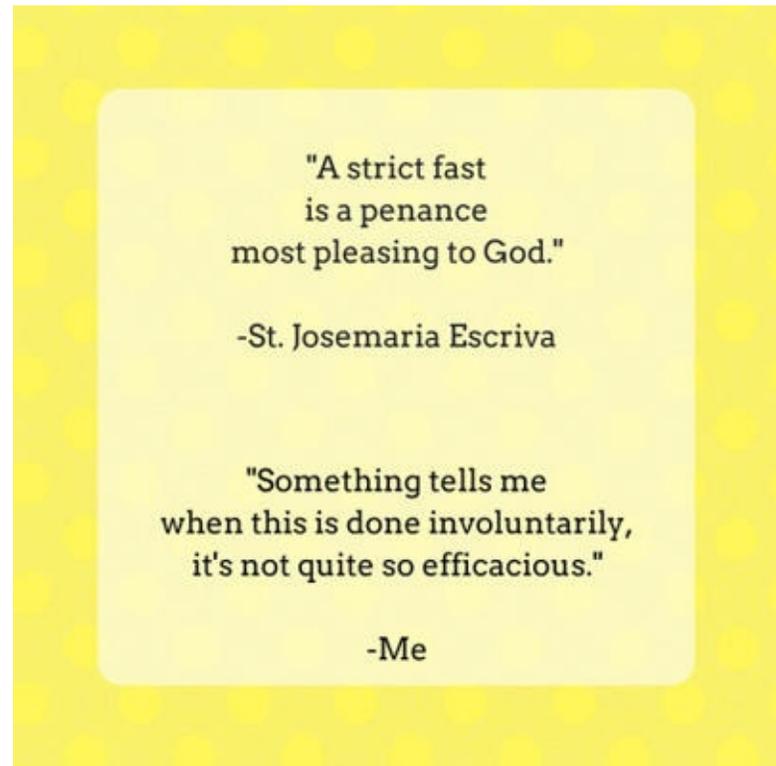
Back to my current innards. I made the mistake of venting about my likely gallbladder probs on my personal Facebook page. I got some sympathy and prayers–yay! I got a couple of recipes–nice. I got at least one wisecrack–Hey, *you're* my kind of commenter!

I also got a lot of unsolicited advice. **Eat this. Eat that. Don't eat this. Don't eat that.**

Sounds familiar. Painfully familiar.

-6-

I am in some level of pain just about nonstop. That pain is being somewhat relieved by some inconvenient, bland dietary changes. At first I bristled at the inconvenience, the deprivation.



"A strict fast
is a penance
most pleasing to God."

-St. Josemaria Escriva

"Something tells me
when this is done involuntarily,
it's not quite so efficacious."

-Me

I soon realized how good God is. Thankfully. **I always want to fast for Him and, food addict that I am, just never, ever, ever succeed. Not for very long. [I've tried this.](#) [I've tried that.](#) [I've even tried this other thing.](#)** None of it ever "took." Not even when I did it for God.

Now I'm living my penance for my gluttony, a penance as well for the people whose sins lured me into this addiction: **a penance chosen for me by a God who knows I want to please Him but knows I'm too weak to choose and stick with a penance on my own.** I am miserable, and

-7-

It's the Year of Mercy. I've [blogged a lot lately](#) about how much more [I need to live mercy](#) in my daily life, in my reactions to others.

Now it's my time to ask for mercy, for myself and all the other fat girls, fat guys, and food addicts out there.

Look, I know those people want to be helpful. You've found something that helped you. That's awesome. Praise the Lord. But before you offer someone suffering the effects of addiction unsolicited advice, take a moment to think about what that person might hear.

"Eat this. Make yourself less of a pain in the ass."

"Don't eat that. Make yourself more appealing to me."

"I don't care about you. I care about how you look in my eyes."

"Your mind doesn't matter to me. Just your appearance."

"I don't like you the way you are."

"You are not adequate to me."

"It's not difficult. It's easy."

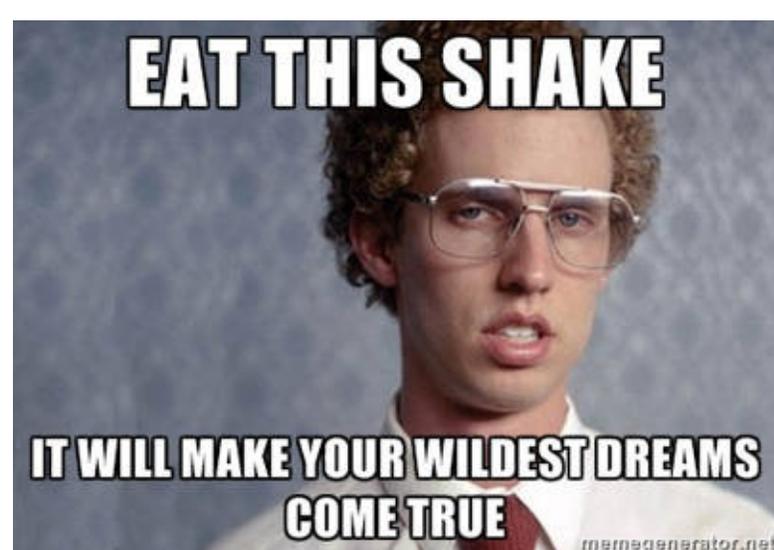
"You're weak."

"All I see of you is your fat."

"Your good qualities will never overshadow your sins."

"All you are to me is your addiction."

Oh, and from the people selling something:



Again, I know you mean well. I really do. At least I hope you do.

I just encourage you implore you to pray before you advise, to have mercy on the addict's pain before you advise, to seek to understand what the addict—what *that particular addict* might be suffering—before you offer unsolicited advice.

Maybe take a moment to realize that you can't possibly know the pain that drove that person to seek solace in substance rather than in the God of all consolation.

Yes, Admonish the Sinner is a Spiritual Act of Mercy, and gluttony of any kind is a sin, but there's a reason [there's a whole lot written on the art of fraternal correction and the conditions for offering this act of mercy are quite limited.](#)



"Sometimes
the only way
the good Lord
can get into some hearts
is to break them."

-Venerable Archbishop
Fulton J. Sheen

I do covet your prayers. I am offering my currently imposed penance up for not only my (numerous, visible) sins, but also for your invisible ones.

Thank you to [Live the Fast](#) and [Neil Combs of A Body in Prayer](#) for inadvertently throwing the above quotes into my path just when I needed them.

This contribution is available at <http://erinmccolecupp.com/2016/02/05/mommas-dont-let-your-babies-grow-up-to-be-food-addicts-7qt/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Reader Feedback, with Some Spoilers [at String of Pearls]

Okay, before I begin, I thought I'd share a new meme that I'm working on for the book club. I've still got some kinks to work out (because I don't really know what I'm doing!), such as inserting the blog address into the image. But for now, this is how it looks.



Many of you who read this blog are probably well aware that this is Catholic Schools Week. So in honor of celebrating these fine institutions and the good work they do in helping to form the minds, hearts, and souls of our youth, I thought I'd share some snippets from an email I received from a young Catholic school student not too long ago. She is an 8th-grader at one of the Tampa Catholic schools I visited in January. She was able to get in touch with me because I handed out some business cards with contact information on them, in case any of the kids wanted answers to any questions that hadn't been asked during my presentation. (I wrote briefly about the experience of speaking to my nieces' and nephew's--the triplets'--class, as well as several other 5th through 8th grade classes,

[here](#)

, if you'd like to read that.)



The incredibly articulate young lady who wrote to me had read

Finding Grace

, devouring it during a four-day stretch, and deemed it her "favorite book by far"--something that was both gratifying and humbling to hear.

I have been fortunate to receive a good deal of positive feedback since

Finding Grace

was published in 2012--people have in general been very kind. But some of the comments from this satisfied reader touched me more than any I'd heard before; her insights were so sharp and so well expressed, especially coming from such a young person. (Reading through her email just made me more convinced than ever that Catholic schools are doing an amazing job and are worth every penny that parents sacrifice to spend on them!)

My young pen pal aspires to be a writer herself, so I was especially thrilled to be able to correspond personally with her, and to share a bit of information about how the story and characters for this novel came about and then evolved over the years that I worked on the book

[Before I proceed any further, I should warn you that there are some spoilers for my novel

Finding Grace

coming up

.

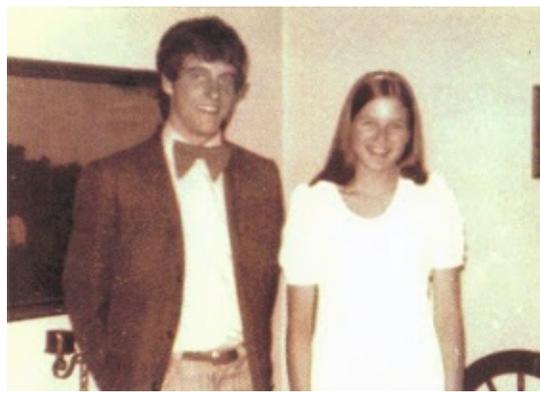
So if you plan to read it and don't want any hints about how it ends, you should probably stop here.]

I loved her comments on the various characters, who had become dear friends to me during the writing process. It pleased me enormously that she not only liked Grace, Tom, and Jimmy, who aren't perfect, but are basically very good and relatively uncomplicated teens who never go too far astray; but she also identified with/had empathy for Irene and Kate, two sisters with very human flaws who commit the same grave sin, but then make different decisions afterward--with life-altering consequences. Although I loved Grace, with her shyness, lack of confidence, and desire to mimic the saints, I loved the misguided Pomeroy sisters, too. Kate changes so much in the course of the book that in the end, it appears she has won the heart of one of Grace's brothers. (And I couldn't love those Kelly boys more, as they were definitely inspired by my own five sons!) Of Kate, my young reader had this to say: "As she matured into a responsible adult, I felt pride, because she became selfless and accountable for her actions." Yes! That is exactly how I felt about Kate, and the way the book ended for her was almost as important to me as the way it ended for Grace.

One of my favorite comments in this young reader's email was, "Don't get me started on Tom and Sully!" She said that they were the type of friends she hoped to make in high school next year, because "They were able to have fun, but follow God's teachings at the same time, a true talent!" She loved those "two trouble makers," and I did, too. I always knew which one Grace would end up with (that much, at least, never changed, even though the plot ended up going in different directions than I'd thought it would at the

outset); but it was funny to me how many readers early on (including my publisher!) said they secretly hoped she was going to end up with the other guy.

My husband and I have always been strongly Team Tom. If you've read the book, do tell: which team are you on? Team Tom, or Team Sully?



As I typed away in my basement office, from August 2007 through December 2011, I kept telling myself (and my husband) that if this book helped even

one

impressionable teen to grow in the Faith or to make a better decision than some of my struggling characters, then I would die a happy author. "In a way, it has shaped my decision making and thoughts on the Church as I've read it," wrote this young reader. "Subconsciously, I found myself asking, 'What would Grace do in this situation?'" Thank you, God, for this concrete evidence that the one goal I had in mind when I set out to write my first novel has been accomplished!

In closing, this thoughtful 8th-grader told me that

Finding Grace

is "a model for what I want my novels to do: impact young readers and bring them closer to our Father." The idea that someday, this budding future author will write novels with that purpose in mind, and that she will do so in part because she was inspired by

Finding Grace

...well, dear readers, my heart is so full thinking about this. I feel that any purpose for my own books has already been fulfilled--and then some.

I thoroughly enjoyed corresponding with this reader, and I would love to answer any questions you have for me as well. Just look for the "EMAIL ME" button on the side bar, and send me a message. I promise I'll get back to you!

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2016/02/grace-filled-tuesdays-book-club-meeting.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Power of God's Holiness [at A Spiritual Journey]

Communion experience. The holiness of God is awesome and most powerful. No sin can exist where his holiness reigns. Therefore, go humbly before the Lord to let his holiness obliterate all your sins so that you may be clean again. How beautiful it is to bask in God's holiness to remain pure!

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2016/01/power-of-gods-holiness.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Lives of the Saints and Healing [at Jess]

* If you are just now joining in, I've been addressing the subject of the sacrament of marriage and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

[Part I](#)

[Part II](#)

, and

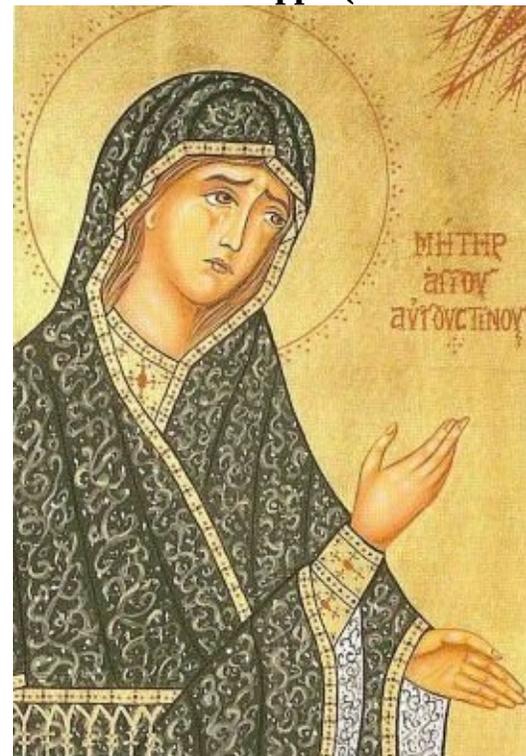
[Part III](#)

can be found by clicking the links.)

While the last post in this series seemed to be directed towards those in a violent relationship, this post is more for everyone.

As Catholics, we often turn towards the lives of the saints to help find inspiration and strength in living our lives faithfully. Naturally, there are a few saints worth bringing up in our conversation about the sacrament of marriage and IPV.

St. Monica of Hippo (331-337 AD) Patron of Wives and Abuse Victims



St. Monica is well-known for being the mother of St. Augustine of Hippo, but she lived quite the life

herself. At a young age, she was married to a Roman named Patricius. Patricius was said to have a violent temper. While he was not religious, it is said that he respected Monica's commitment to her beliefs, though there seems to have been some level of disagreement over how they would raise their children when it came to religion. Monica prayed tirelessly for the conversion of her mother-in-law as well as her husband, both of whom converted about a year before Patricius' death.

St. Rita (Margherita Lotti) (1381-1472) Patron of Impossible Cases, Difficult Marriages, and Parenthood



Margherita Lotti was born in 1381. At the tender age of twelve, St. Rita became a wife and mother, despite pleading with her parents to allow her to enter a convent. Rita's husband Paolo was known to have a violent temper, and she suffered physical and verbal abuse at his hands. He was also known to engage in affairs outside the marriage. In time, Rita's prayers for Paolo and her influence positively effected Paolo. He began to renounce his ways, but in the end he still was killed as a result of his feuding and violent temper. When her sons vowed to avenge the death of their father, Rita prayed for their deaths before they could kill, and her prayers were answered. Before she could enter the convent as she had always desired, she was asked to end the feud that took the life of her husband (and nearly the lives of her sons.)

What We Can Learn From Saints Monica and Rita

Without a doubt the strength of these women is admirable. Today, often the lives of these women are brought up when talking about IPV and solutions for women of faith. Surely, if these saintly women could not only endure years of violence and abuse but then also convert their abusers into men of faith, this is a path we can and should strive to follow. I do not doubt the power of faith. I do not doubt the strength of these women or the seriousness of what they endured. I do have a few things we should consider:

- These women lived in periods of time where women's rights were scarcely a thing. Daughters were married for political or financial gain. There was no choice.
- It most likely would have meant death to try to leave a violent marriage. (This is still many times the case now, but then it was legally safe to kill your wife for leaving. She was your property.)
- Today, women more often than not have a choice who they marry. St. Monica and St. Rita were both "married off" by their parents. This alone might change the dynamics of the abusive relationship, because we know abusers look for certain things in their partners that make their particular brand of abuse effective. During the centuries where women were simply married off to men, abusers did not have to have their tactics "well-honed", they had a right to assert their dominance, and they had the ability to to be physically violent without penalty. (Of course, **this does not mean that IPV survivors are just more susceptible to abuse. This means that IPV has changed: abusers have had to become more cunning, more manipulative, and the violence without the beatings can leave deeper wounds.**)
- Not only do we know more about IPV and the ripples of harm it causes, we also know more about rehabilitation for abusers. St. Monica and St. Rita lived in times when violence in a marriage was not really talked about or generally considered to be an injustice.

I greatly admire the courage, strength, and faith of saints Monica and Rita. However, I must caution against believing that physically staying and enduring abuse is akin to a shortcut to Heaven. **It is okay to need a physical separation. It is okay to take time away to heal and get help for yourself and your children. There is not shame in recognizing that you need support.**

A Modern Day Saint: Dorothy Day

Over the past few years, I have become quite fond of Dorothy Day. Day was a founding member of the US [Catholic Worker's Movement](#).

The Catholic Worker's movement had a similar grassroots beginning to the domestic violence movement. While Day's focus was on workers, her cause lives on today as a resource for many, including victims of violence. From US Catholic's piece on

[Catholic Worker communities](#)

:

Today the 200 or so Catholic Worker communities scattered around the United States and other countries are grounded in the belief that every human has God-given dignity, just as co-founders Day and Peter Maurin espoused. According to Jim Allaire, webmaster for catholicworker.org, these houses are “beacons of hope in this time of powerlessness.” The movement is significant to the church today, says Allaire, because Catholic Worker communities help “keep an eye on injustice, the poor, and immigration issues.

It is no wonder why these communities are a Godsend for survivors of IPV.

The Process of Healing

What answers do we have here, all things considered? Probably nothing concrete. A decision to leave or stay within a sacramental (or the decision that the marriage is in fact null and void) is not mine to make for someone else. It is my strong belief that the victim of abuse is capable of making this decision, and the help of a spiritual director, counseling, and a support network is vital for an informed decision.

Recognizing that you are in an abusive relationship is difficult. It is even more difficult to know how to proceed. It is challenging to begin to think about your relationship as an abusive relationship, rather than a relationship based in mutual respect and love.

It is not easy to accept that the person who is supposed to join their life with yours is abusive.

The elements that should exist in the process of healing from IPV, are the same elements I believe we must have to eradicate IPV:

- **Support for Survivors-** This means a network of friends, family, spiritual leaders, counselors, advocates, and any other support our communities can think to offer parent and children. Survivors did nothing to deserve the abuse.
- **Rehabilitaion for Abusers-** One of the best ways to keep survivors safe, is to address what is making them unsafe. According to our friend Lundy Bancroft (paraphrased from *Why Does He Do That?*), effective rehabilitation programs for abusers will include the following elements:
 - A focus on the abuser's *thinking*, not *feelings*.
 - Requires a commitment to change. All physical violence and threats must end, and they must continue to show progress on reducing verbal aggression.
 - A high-quality abuser counselor will speak to the victim of the abuse about progress.
 - The program will address central causes of abuse: entitlement, control, disrespect, etc.
 - Provide education about abuse, counsel on applying this education in their lives, and confront abusive attitudes and excuses.
- **Shifting the Focus-** We have to stop focusing on the behavior of the victim (Did she deserve it? Why doesn't she leave? She is sinning if she leaves!) and start focusing on the behavior of the abuser (Why is he violent? Why doesn't he stop? Why does he think it is okay to hurt his wife?!) When we are focused on questioning the behavior of the victim, we fall for the abuser's games. We do exactly what the abuser wants: we see the victim exactly how the abuser wants.
- **Raising the Next Generation-**The value of life and the inherent dignity of every human being is a lesson we must teach our children. Abuse and sexual violence go against the inherent dignity of victims and this must be taught from day one.

If you have any questions you would like me to answer, please do not hesitate to ask. You can leave a comment, or contact me via email (You can find it listed in the About Me section of this website.)

Other Resources and Posts:

[The FaithTrust Institute](#)

: Rev. Marie Fortune spends a great deal of time writing about and providing resources to various faith communities about violence. While there are few Catholic-specific resources, there is some really great information to address scripture and violence. (I am not endorsing everything on the site: I invite you to use your own discretion.)

[Pregnancy and Domestic Violence](#)

: This is a piece I researched specifically on the issues surrounding pregnancy and IPV. Pregnancy is also a volatile time for a victim, and it's important to talk about this issue specifically.

This contribution is available at <http://www.jessfayette.com/2016/02/part-iv-lives-of-saints-and-healing.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Parish Church in a Changeable Community: Some Basic Requirements for Survival [at Community in Mission]



For my first assignment as a priest I was sent to a large parish located in a suburb just inside the Washington Beltway. At the time it was flourishing, with four well-attended masses each Sunday. The people there loved their parish and spoke with devotion of the former pastor who, though he had died a dozen years before, loomed large in the memories of both Church and neighborhood. He was from that generation of pastors who had an almost kingly status. He stood 6'4" and his physical stature was matched by his personality. He was so strong a leader and had such a booming voice that people swore you could hear him from outside the Church when he preached. Parishioners loved or feared him; city/county officials respected him and knew that little would be politically feasible without his support.

When I arrived, the congregation consisted mostly of older families headed by World War II veterans, many of them retired. They had worked at blue-collar and white-collar jobs, government jobs and industrial jobs at the nearby Navy Yard. They were proud and remembered the sacrifices it had taken to build the parish "after the War." Indeed, the parish was one of those "factories" we used to build. The grammar school, a three-story solid brick structure, had once been filled with 1500 children. The church seated over a thousand and in the halcyon days of late 1950s and early 1960s the rectory housed five priests; the convent was built for 25 religious sisters and was full. Right next door was the high school, staffed by another religious order. In all, the parish stretched two blocks along the main street of that town. Thousands moved through its facilities each day.

But by the time I arrived in the late 1980s an era was ending. The demographics of the neighborhood had already begun to change in the early 1970s. A white (Caucasian), blue-collar community became steadily black (African-American) and blue-collar. Many longtime parishioners began to locate south of the Washington Beltway into southern Prince George's County and northern Charles County. Yet through the 1980s, even though they moved farther and farther away, older parishioners and even their children (now adults with families of their own) remained intensely loyal to the parish. They often drove past several other parishes to come back to the family parish. When I arrived in the late 1980s, the neighborhood was 90% African-American but the parish was 85% white.

I learned over the years that when a parish starts to rely on "commuter" parishioners instead of those who actually live within its boundaries, two things happen. First, necessary changes to reach new

neighbors are resisted. Second, attendance erodes as older members die. And while the children of the founding families may still have some loyalty to the parish, it tends to fade when the matriarch or patriarch dies; and the loyalty is seldom shared by the grandchildren.

Add to all this the fact that during the 1970s and 1980s large numbers of Catholics fell away from the practice of the faith. With each passing year the numbers dropped significantly. By 1995 the average Sunday attendance had fallen below 1000 and the downward trend continued from there; today 400 is typical.

The scenario above has been repeated in countless congregations throughout the country, especially in the Northeast and Midwest where demographic shifts have been seismic.

Demographic shifts are generally not something that parishes can control. However, there are internal issues that can help or harm, especially when the issue is not depopulation but rather changing ethnicity or race in the neighborhood.

1. **Avoid merely lamenting the passage of the “good old days.”** Scripture says, “For here we have no lasting city” (Heb 13:14). Change is part of life. The parish may once have been Polish, or Italian, or black, or white, but now it is changing. One thing, however, has not changed: there are still human beings who need to hear the Gospel and be saved. No less than in the past, we need to go out and meet our new neighbors, welcome them, and proclaim the primordial call: Come to Jesus.
2. **Catechesis is critical.** Most Catholics have little instruction that the entire world is divided up into parishes. Every parish has a pastor and a territory. Since there is only one Church, the Pastor (together with his parish to help) is the shepherd of every human person within those boundaries: Catholic or Protestant, Christian, Muslim, Jew, or atheist. The parish has a responsibility to connect with every man, woman and child in their boundaries and invite them to know Christ, through his Word, Sacraments and his Body the Church.
3. **Connecting with actual neighbors is crucial.** In my own parish, due to demographic shifts involving race, we became very disconnected from our neighborhood. Most parishioners were “commuting.” Our actual neighbors knew little about us and we knew little about them. In order to try to address that, twenty teams of us went out to meet our neighbors and listen to them. It meant reaching across racial divides and generation gaps (most of the neighbors were young, single adults). Older African-Americans met with younger, single white neighbors and invited them to come and see our parish. One thing we learned was that our Mass schedule was not convenient for many of our new neighbors. In response, we added a Sunday evening Mass, which has become very popular and is growing. In so doing, we showed our neighbors that we heard their concerns and cared about them.
4. **Challenges are not always bad; they can help people and parishes gain strength.** I have seen parishes, including my own, rise to the challenges. We grew stronger in witness and we reached people we might never have reached had we not been called out our comfort zone. I know of one parish in nearby Maryland that became quite empty and sleepy when demographic change swept away many of its original members (blue-collar, ethnic whites). But today it is bursting at the seams; there is standing room only at the main Sunday Masses and hundreds of children attend Sunday school. Parishes have lifecycles if they are willing to adapt, retool, reach out and welcome new members, speak new languages, and listen to the needs of new neighbors.
5. **Organic change and growth is usually best.** While parishes should not be overly resistant to change, it does not follow that radical change is healthy either. Adding new things that reach new people and groups need not mean neglecting those who have been the bread and butter of the parish.

Respecting those who have loyally attended over the years is important. People matter, not just numbers. In my own parish, adding a new Sunday evening Mass has meant that the liturgical format at our principal Mass can continue as well.

6. **Continuing to rely on “commuter parishioners” and niche marketing alone is not healthy.** The genius of Catholicism, and its mainstay, has been geographically based parishes that minister to and are responsible for their neighbors. Some parishes can survive for a time on folks who have moved away but come back each Sunday, but they are living on the fumes of a receding past; I have never seen this model work for more than 15 – 20 years. Other parishes seek to survive through niche marketing; some examples of this are offering special forms of the Mass such as Latin, or Gospel Music, or certain special language or ethnic outreach. Here, too, such things seldom last and cannot survive personnel changes or further demographic shifts. The prevailing model has been and continues to be that parishes must be connected to neighborhoods. Since human beings have bodies, proximity matters. Getting to a distant parish becomes problematic over time and is affected by things like weather, age, gas prices, and the general hurried pace of modern life. There may always be some who willingly drive past five other parishes in order to come to their favorite one (with a liturgy or pastor they like), but in general this sort of model cannot sustain parishes for long.

I know that posts like this provoke controversy. People and priests get very attached to particular parishes and formats and to what is familiar. But after forty years of working in parishes as choir director, organist, seminarian, priest, and pastor, I can say that all of them have changed in profound ways over the decades. I have seldom found a parish locked in commuter mode or niche marketing that remains strong and healthy for long without deep connections to their actual neighbors.

It is true that certain parishes (e.g., shrines, or those in downtown settings with few Catholic residents) may have a stable focus or need to do specific things to attract congregations. But for most parishes the meat and potatoes is going to have to be the people who actually live in the area. They are, after all, the people a parish is supposed to reach. When a parish prefers to reach other people, or despairs of reaching its actual neighbors, it strays from the will of Christ, who bids us to go unto all people and nations and make disciples. And if a parish strays from its job as Christ has set it forth, can it expect to be blessed? Well, you decide.

I suspect that some of the comments to this post will be ones that defend a particular scenario that is at variance with the “neighborhood model.” You are free to do so, but at least factor in the traditional stance of the Church: divide the world into territorial parishes and ask each parish to tend to its particular vineyard first. Does your parish meet that goal? Even if you are from a “national parish” (which is rare today), the mandate to go into the whole world, starting at our front door, cannot be set aside. The Church should never be a “strange building” in a neighborhood. It is not an island set apart. Rather, it is an oasis in the desert of every neighborhood, deeply connected to its neighbors and their salvation.

This contribution is available at <http://blog.adw.org/2016/02/the-parish-church-in-a-changeable-community-some-basic-requirements-for-survival/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Screwtape Letter

[Click [here to read the introduction](#) to this series.]

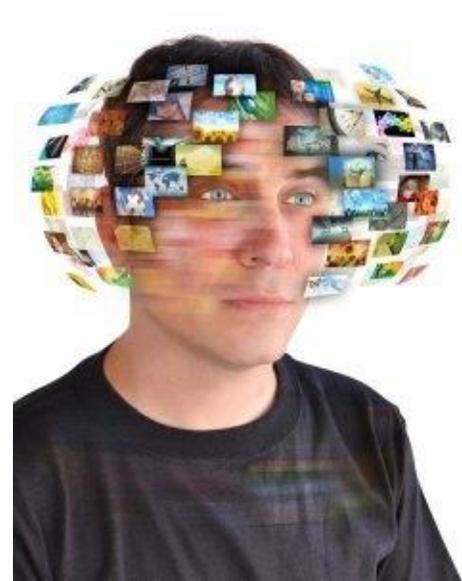
The first letter that Screwtape writes to his under-study, Wormwood, boils down to one thing: the use of jargon and appetites to undermine science and reason. Screwtape wants Wormwood to keep his “patient” (the unnamed man in our story) preoccupied with ordinary, everyday “real” life—not arguments or science. Those are the paths that lead to a man engaging in the use of reason. Wormwood is to deaden his patient’s mind with jargon and distractions. Thought about things beyond human experience is to be discouraged by any means necessary.

How is Wormwood to accomplish this? Screwtape explains (emphasis mine):

I note what you say about guiding your patient’s reading and taking care that he sees a good deal of his materialist friend. But are you not being a trifle naïve? It sounds as if you supposed that argument was the way to keep him out of the Enemy’s clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning. **But what with the weekly press and other such weapons we have largely altered that. Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head.** He doesn’t think of doctrines as primarily “true” or “false,” but as “academic” or “practical,” “outworn” or “contemporary,” “conventional” or “ruthless.” Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church. Don’t waste time trying to make him think that materialism is true! Make him think it is strong, or stark, or courageous—that it is the philosophy of the future. That’s the sort of thing he cares about.

He goes on to explain:

You begin to see the point? Thanks to processes which we set at work in them centuries ago, they find it all but impossible to believe in the unfamiliar while the familiar is before their eyes. Keep pressing home on him the ordinariness of things. Above all, do not attempt to use science (I mean, the real sciences) as a defense against Christianity. They will positively encourage him to think about realities he can’t touch and see. There have been sad cases among the modern physicists. If he must dabble in science, keep him on economics and sociology; don’t let him get away from that invaluable “real life.” **But the best of all is to let him read no science but to give him a grand general idea that he knows it all and that everything he happens to have picked up in casual talk and reading is ‘the results of modern investigation’.** Do remember you are there to fuddle him.



And fuddled, you are. Remember that Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters* over 75 years ago. Since then you have seen an explosion in news and entertainment outlets competing for your attention in ever more outlandish and brash ways. Ironically this has only served to isolate you more than ever from differing viewpoints as you make time only to read or listen to those outlets that support your viewpoint. You are not growing more diverse (ironic in this golden age of *diversity über alles*) but instead are increasingly intolerant of other viewpoints (again, the irony).

Basically the opening salvo advised by *Screwtape* is to sway the individual away from genuinely seeking truth. Here we see an attempt to keep the man from developing an authentic faith with an emphasis on keeping the human mind continually preoccupied with things outside of reality and with the trivial.

Rather diabolical, no?

Lewis alludes to the importance of having developed a strong faith through the use of your reason in order to avoid the distractions of our moods in his book *Mere Christianity*:

Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes. I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable: but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable. This rebellion of your moods against your real self is going to come anyway. That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue: unless you teach your moods “where they get off,” you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion. – *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Ch. 11

It has just been whispered in your ear (and indeed it has been whispered on many occasions before) that materialism is courageous and true. A quick glance around you as you observe the people, the media, and the things around you would seem to reinforce that false claim. You have heard it said there is no truth, let alone an absolute truth. Doctrine and dogma are words spoken in chilled tones by tongues dripping with condescension. When confronted by dozens of false alternatives by the media or friends who haven't taken the time to think too deeply (they, too, are parroting what is told to them) you've shrugged your shoulders and busied yourself with the routine of your daily “real life.” The ordinary and the familiar occupy all your reflexes except those of your mind. Your faith, the belief in things seen and unseen, is being slowly stolen from you.

How is this being done? By throwing an overwhelming flood of alternatives to the truth at you all at once. Accomplished author Walker Percy interviewed himself on the subject in a [1977 Esquire magazine article](#):

Q: Are you a dogmatic Catholic or an open-minded Catholic?

A: I don't know what that means Do you mean do I believe the dogmas that the Catholic Church proposes for belief?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes.

Q: How is such a belief possible in this day and age?

A: What else is there?

Q: What do you mean, what else is there? There is humanism, atheism, agnosticism, Marxism, behaviorism, materialism, Buddhism, Muhammadanism, Sufism, astrology, occultism, theosophy.

A: That's what I mean.

In a [2005 homily delivered at the Mass for the Election of the Supreme Pontiff](#), Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger said:

Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.

Attempts have been made to erode your faith (and quest for truth) while programming relativistic tendencies. Yet inherent within all men and women is the continuous search for truth. And here pride, that age old nemesis, is being used against you. Take the Creed of the Church for example. Also known as The Apostles' Creed, it consists of many "I believe" statements. But how can this be? How can one be so bold (or so ignorant) as to recite these statements of supposed truth to ourselves or (horror of horrors!) communally? Has not relativism discredited faith as a reasonable way to answer any questions? The world will tell you "yes."

The Apostles Creed

*I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;*

*he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.*

Saint Anthony of Padua described earthly riches as being “like the reed. Its roots are sunk in the swamp, and its exterior is fair to behold; but inside it is hollow. If a man leans on such a reed, it will snap off and pierce his soul.”

Saint John Chrysostom went further when he said that “our condition needs much endurance; and endurance is best produced when doctrines are deeply rooted. For just as there is no wind that is able to tear up an oak tree by its assaults because it sends down its root deep into the earth, so too the soul that is nailed by the fear of God—not just rooted but nailed—will not be able to be overturned.” (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 54.1.*)

Doctrine, by its very nature develops for the purpose of discovering deeper truth from the original source. These truths are discovered through the use of thinking and of reason. They are not discovered in the mundane distractions of reality television or social media.

You are free to choose which you wish to be: a reed or a mighty oak. Hollow and easily snapped in the breeze, or able to withstand the winds of popular opinion, materialism, and relativism by having roots deeply embedded in the truth...roots nailed to the cross itself.

You are free to choose. But if you choose poorly you will no longer be free.

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2016/01/19/screw-tape-letter-1/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Full Fishing Nets [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday Feb 7, 2016

A Reflection on Luke 5:1-11, N.A.B.



Galileans ate little meat besides fish. So fishing on Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias, was big business. The shoals just offshore were a fisherman's paradise. In Jesus' day, hundreds of fishing boats trawled the lake. Simon, Andrew (Mark 1:16), James, and John had fished the entire night casting umbrella shaped fishing nets from the side of their boats into usually productive waters without catching a single fish. Imagine their weariness and frustration.

This Sunday we read about how these empty-handed fishermen first listened to Jesus teach the crowd about the Kingdom of God, then reluctantly followed his instructions to "Put into deep water" where they caught so many fish that their nets were tearing and their boats were in danger of capsizing from the weight. Aside from being a really great fish story, what is the point of this Gospel reading? What can we learn from it?

¹ *While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.*

² *He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets.*

³ *Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.*

- ⁴ After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”
- ⁵ Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.”
- ⁶ When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.
- ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking.
- ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”
- ⁹ For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him,
- ¹⁰ and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”
- ¹¹ When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

We can only guess at what Jesus taught the people about the Kingdom of God, but the power of his reputation and teaching was enough to convince these bone weary fishermen to obey his request to “Put out into deep water . . .” Astounded and excited at the size of their catch Simon Peter threw himself at Jesus’ feet and exuberantly blurted out, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” We should understand Simon Peter’s declaration that he was a *sinner* not primarily in moral terms but as an expression of awe before the power of the Holy One of God. These fishermen abandoned their belongings and family to follow Jesus because they believed him to be the Anointed One. They became part of the foundation on which Jesus was to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

What was the world like in their time? It was a dangerous, brutal, and violent time. Robbery, murder, extortion, assassinations, and public executions were common happenings. Taxes levied by the Romans drove many people into poverty and even slavery. Corrupt politicians and public officials added to the people’s misery. Judaism had divided into four factions: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. And the militant Zealots were determined to overthrow the Roman Empire and expel it from the Holy Land by force of arms. What did Jesus bring to this world? Did He bring world peace? Did He bring universal prosperity? Did He overthrow the Roman Empire and restore the Davidic Kingdom thereby eliminating oppression? Did He eliminate corruption? If not, what did Jesus bring to the world of his time, to the world of our time?

Concerning what Jesus brought to the world, Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “*He has brought God, and now we know his face, now we may call upon him. Now we know the path that we human beings have to take*”

in this world. Jesus has brought God and with God the truth about our origin and destiny: faith, hope, and love. It is only because of the hardness of our heart that we think this is too little. Yes, indeed, God's power works quietly in this world, but it is the true and lasting power. Again and again, God's cause seems to be in its death throes. Yet over and over again it proves to be the thing that truly endures and saves. The earthy kingdoms that Satan was able to put before the Lord at that time have all passed away. Their glory, beliefs, and common opinions, have proven to be a mere semblance. But the glory of Christ, the humble, self-sacrificing glory of his love, has not passed away, nor will it ever do so."

On the surface our world might seem to be crumbling. Everywhere we look we see abortion, wars, terrorism, corruption, murder, immorality, drug abuse, and refugees fleeing for their lives in unprecedented numbers, and so on. If we aren't careful we could easily be convinced that our civilization is circling the drain. That is, unless we remember that *"the glory of Christ, the humble, self-sacrificing glory of his love, has not passed away, nor will it ever do so."*

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2016/02/full-fishing-nets.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

On the Necessity of Justice for Mercy [at New Evangelizers]

We have now entered the Year of Mercy, a wonderful year when we focus on the incredible love and forgiveness that Christ brought to the world. Mercy is a truly heavenly thing. As Shakespeare wrote, “The quality of mercy is not strained; It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest; It blesseth him that gives and him that takes...” (Merchant of Venice, Act IV Scene I)

And that is the mercy we find in the Gospel. But what about before the Gospels in the Old Testament?

A common cudgel used by secular society against the Church is the harsh justice presented in the Bible before the birth of Christ. Our opponents will point to God sentencing whole populations to death for infractions that are rampant today. What cities in the modern world could pass the test of Sodom and Gomorrah now? Capital punishment was enforced by the Jewish people for idolatry, adultery, blasphemy, and the like. The severity of the rules handed on by Moses sometimes appear at odds with the gentle forgiveness offered by Jesus. But the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. We didn’t get a different God with Jesus. And God is not schizophrenic. He was not all fiery and angry at first but then mellowed out for the Gospel.

So how do we explain the relationship between a God of severe justice and gentle mercy?

Simple: You cannot have mercy without justice.

We live in a society built upon a solid foundation of justice. This isn’t to say that our society always acts with justice, but we understand what justice is and that it is something at the bedrock of civilization. When you look at the land in which the Israelites were living and the cultures that surrounded them, you do not see this same phenomenon. These were societies with a strong tilt towards vengeance, which is hurting another because of an injury.

In a culture of vengeance, if you were to injury me by, for example, knocking out my eye, then I would return upon you whatever my rage desired. I might say “You took my eye! You injured me! You dishonored me! You deformed me! I go to see a 3D movie now and it has no effect! I KILL YOU! I KILL YOU!” Perhaps this is an over-exaggeration, but the point is that in a culture of vengeance, reprisals were based on a subjective sense of hurt.

Justice, however, works by a different principle. There are many ways to define justice. For the purposes of simplicity, let us take the definition as “paying a debt that you owe.” If I steal \$5.00 from you, I owe you \$5.00. If I break your window with my baseball, then I owe you a new window. And if you knock out my eye, then the most I can take from you is your eye. Hence “and eye for an eye” is a limitation of vengeance. No matter how I might want to do more injury to you, justice allows only the amount of injury that you have caused because that is your debt to me.

“You owe a debt, you pay a debt.” This is the essential mantra of justice. And this is one of the big messages that God tries to teach the people throughout the Old Testament. It is not an easy lesson to learn and it takes hundreds of years. By focusing His people on becoming a people of justice, He is teaching them the truth about the moral life. Morality is not something that based in subjective feeling. It is based

on objective standards. And those standards are universal and binding. The Israelites therefore know where they stand in relation to God by their sins.

But then Jesus comes with His message of mercy. To be sure you will find this theme of mercy in the Old Testament just as you will find appeals to justice in the New Testament. But with Christ we have the forgiveness of our sins. And this is an act of mercy.

If justice is “You owe a debt, you pay a debt,” then mercy is “You owe a debt, and your debt is forgiven.” Mercy is something that is not owed. It is a grace that comes undeserved and unearned. Christ’s gift to us on the cross is not something for which I can ever be worthy. He has offered me a chance for Heaven. I will never be good enough for this gift. Sometimes I think we get the wrong impression that when we die, God will give us what He owes us for our good deeds. I cannot speak for any of you, but the only thing that the Lord owes me is damnation. If I did an honest account of my sins and my lack of love, it would be just for Him to bar me from paradise. I am relying not on justice to save me, but His mercy which is beyond my ability to understand.

So why didn’t God simply begin with a message of mercy instead of justice?

Because mercy makes no sense without justice. Justice establishes that there is a right and there is a wrong. That is the first step out of a culture of vengeance. But if you skip this step of justice and go right to mercy, then people will never learn that sin is bad.

Take a look at children. As they grow, loving parents punish them when they do bad things. If they are never punished, then I would submit that the parents do not love that child. Have you ever met children whose parents never discipline them? Aren’t they most loving, kindest, peaceful, generous children you could meet? Of course not! That is because when they did wrong their parents skipped justice (punishment) and went right to “mercy” in turning a blind eye to the offense. Imagine a child bites someone and the parent instead of disciplining simply says, “That’s okay, that’s okay.” What will the child learn? He will learn that there is nothing wrong with biting others.

Mercy without justice is empty.

That is because giving mercy without justice skips over the fact that there is a right and there is a wrong. Going from vengeance to mercy without justice is to tacitly approve of sin.

I sometimes see this confusion in my students who don’t understand this connection between mercy and justice. Sometimes I am asked, “If God forgives (insert sin here), then why is it such a big deal?” For this student, the fact of God’s mercy removes the badness of the act. For them it is a cold economy. It would be like saying it costs \$5.00 for a meal, but you don’t have to pay. For them that means the meal is free. In the same way if you say to them that sin is wrong, but God forgives it, then what they hear is that the sin is not wrong. The key is to get them to understand the wrongness of the act before the forgiveness. The best way to do this is to put it not in economic terms but in terms of relationship. My usual response is, “My wife told me that if I ever cheated on her, she would forgive me. Does this now make it morally okay for me to be unfaithful?” At this point some begin to understand.

It is only when justice is firmly rooted in the person that mercy can then flourish. If justice is in the soul or the person or the society, if we can understand that when it comes to sin we owe a debt, then we can appreciate the significance of the action when that debt is forgiven. Just as a good parent knows that

disciplining a child in justice will help shape the moral contours of their soul, that same parent will know when to apply mercy when they see that the child truly understands rightness and wrongness of their actions. In this case, mercy does not circumvent justice, it highlights it. The child knows that they did wrong, but they are pointed to the gratuitous nature of unconditional love.

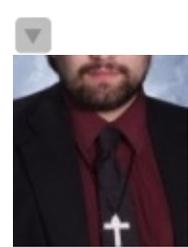
By the time Jesus came to the world, the Jewish people and much of the rest of the world understood that they owed a debt of sin to God. They understood that they did not live as they should. With this understanding, Jesus did not say that their sins were no longer sins. Instead, He acknowledged the sins of the world and then died for the sins of the world.

So when I go before the cross, I do not go filled with my own sense of entitlement and virtue. I am fully aware of the debt of sin I owe to the Lord. But with this awareness, I am all the more grateful that the Lamb of God took my sins upon Himself and set me free in His mercy.

I owed a debt. That is justice.

He paid my debt. That is mercy.

Copyright 2016, W.L.Grayson



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/2016/02/01/necessity-justice-mercy/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Signs of Hope: A Transcendent Perspective [at Justin's Corner]

A blessed and happy New Year to all of my readers, Catholic and otherwise! As we leave the Year of Our Lord 2015 behind and embark on A.D. 2016, it's a good time to step back a bit from the daily frenzy and turmoil of national news and world events as brought to us 24/7 by the radically secularist mainstream media machine and put these temporary passing things within a broader historical context, as well as to view them from the transcendent perspective of God and eternity.

While it's undeniably true that we live in an era of great turmoil and confusion, injustice and deception, materialism and hedonism, violence and conflict, destruction and upheaval in which many bad things are happening that seem to portend a dark future for our planet and its inhabitants, we must keep in mind that there are also many good things happening that represent signs of hope for a brighter future-- seemingly insignificant things that are often hidden and go unnoticed by the proud and the great, the rich and the powerful of our time, things that are either minimized or entirely overlooked by the worldly mainstream media, just as the birth of Jesus Christ to a humble Jewish girl in a Bethlehem cave-stable more than two thousand years ago escaped the attention of the elite rulers of ancient Rome. In the six thousand years of recorded human history to date, we have been through many dark periods when hope for the future seemed faint, yet with the help of God, our loving Creator and merciful Redeemer, we survived those dark periods and emerged from them into the light of justice and peace, development and achievement.

Indeed, it is very often when things are darkest that the seeds of a brilliant future are quietly being sowed and their growth carefully nurtured, just as the Benedictine monks of the Dark Ages in their scattered monasteries sowed the seeds of learning and culture that triumphantly burst into full flower during the Middle Ages. No matter what dreadful and evil things may happen on this earth due to the sin and wickedness of fallen humanity, Almighty God is still the sovereign Lord of the world and its history, and nothing bad happens unless He allows it to happen as a mysterious part of the unfolding of His plan for the universe. In His masterful divine wisdom, which is far above our limited human thinking and reasoning, He knows how to bring good even out of evil, and His Spirit is constantly working in the hearts of countless men and women of good will to inspire a remarkable diversity of good works and initiatives, all of which contribute harmoniously to the renewal of this planet of ours, the jewel and masterpiece of His planetary creation. If you want proof that this is happening all over the world right now, just step outside the box artificially created by the mainstream media and start looking around carefully for yourself. You'll discover signs of hope everywhere, even in the most unlikely of places.

We also know that, whenever the end of this passing world comes, Jesus Christ our Lord will return to earth as the glorious Just Judge of all humanity to raise the bodies of the dead and pronounce final judgment on all of human history. Those who have died or met Christ in friendship with God will be rewarded with eternal life in the unimaginably magnificent City of God in Heaven, while evildoers who died or met Christ without repenting will be punished with eternal death in the unimaginably horrific dungeon of the damned in Hell. Every single human being who ever lived will ultimately find a permanent and irrevocable home in one of those two places based on the choices freely made in his or her life and the state of his or her soul at the moment of death or the moment of Christ's return. Thus it behooves us to spend our short earthly lives well, preparing as best we can for admission to Heaven in the next life by doing God's Will and striving to grow in union with Him here and now.

It would be well for us to keep these truths in mind as we continue to be bombarded by the deafening clamor of the incessant drumbeat of bad news churned out by the radically secularist mainstream media outlets. It's not a matter of burying our heads in the sand like ostriches and pretending that nothing bad is happening, or of attempting to insulate ourselves completely from the suffering and misery of our innocent brothers and sisters in the human family. Rather, it's a matter of viewing things from the correct perspective, the perspective of the Almighty and Eternal God who holds the universe in His hands and providentially guides the course of world history, the One in whom we can safely place our full trust, our Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier with whom we are meant to share perfect happiness for all eternity in the world to come.

This contribution is available at <http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2016/01/signs-of-hope.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

This snowman is for the birds [at Catholic Review]

I had suggested that we build a snowman several times over the past few days, but no one ever seemed interested.

So we have spent most of the time throwing snowballs. It's hard to top snowball throwing.

But today while I was brushing snowballs off my coat—our younger son has a decent arm and I am not good at hiding in the fort the boys built for me—I noticed that our kindergartener had finally decided it was time to build a snowman.



“Mama,” he said, kneeling in the snow, “do you have any seeds?”

“Seeds?” I said. “I’m not sure I do.”

“You do,” he told me—with the confidence and knowledge that only a 6-year-old who is building a snowman on his own can possess. “You have pumpkin seeds.”

So I went inside and looked. He was right. I had pumpkin seeds and a few cashews. I brought them—and a carrot—outside.

He was pleased with the carrot, which was obviously "Snowshoe's" nose. Then he very carefully placed the cashews in a plastic container and balanced it on the snowman's head.



Then he pressed the seeds into the snowman's face.

“They're for the birds,” he said. “And the nuts too.”

That's our boy, always thinking of the little creatures he encounters in the world.

“I love all little animals, Mama,” he said. “Why won't you let me get a dog?”

Ah. That. So we talked for the 4,973rd time about allergies and why we aren't getting a dog. We talked about allergies and cats and dogs and what fun pets are but how some people can't have them. We

covered a lot of ground, standing in 2 feet of melting snow in our yard, waiting for the birds to come and eat the food off our little boy's snowman.

“OK,” he said, as I relaxed. I had obviously handled that well.



Then he smiled sweetly up at me. “But what about a baby bunny?”

Hmm. Well. Let's start by waving at the birds who stop by to eat our seeds.

1/26/2016 10:01:36 PM

By

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2016/01/26/this-snowman-is-for-the-birds>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

An Approach to Evangelization [at The Catholic Spiritual Life]



I recently had coffee with an old friend who leads a local chapter of a nationwide Catholic evangelization group. They are a lay organization working mostly with college students, but some of the ideas they've developed over the years seem to me like they could work well in many contexts. I have seen good fruit from this organization. Perhaps there are ways you can put these ideas into practice in your community.

A first principle is what they call 80/20: they tell their missionaries to spend 80% of their time with the top 20% of their contacts.

Another way to put this is, preach to the choir.

My friend made the point that the best way to reach a lot of people is to focus on a few. Their organization can do the most good by growing. If I want to bring a lot of people to Christ, the best thing I can do is nurture other people who will bring others to Christ.

Too often, perhaps, we turn this proportion on its head, and spend 80% (or more) of our time on the weakest 80% of our contacts. At first, this seems generous and anti-elitist. All people matter. We shouldn't just worry about the best Catholics! That is true – and we should reserve 20% of our evangelization time for the other 80% of the people.

But the thing is, 80/80 ends up being a bit arrogant – as if I am the only person who can reach those others. To the contrary, the best way to reach the 80% might be through strengthening and sending the 20%.

In a parish, for example, rather than trying to gear events, or preaching, or liturgical preferences, to the majority, it might be better if the priest focused on helping the strongest to grow – so that they can go out and evangelize the others.

(That said, in a parish, there are good reasons for not going too far. Since the priest really is essential – since Mass is the lifeline for the weak as well as for the strong – the priest needs to be available to everyone in a way that a lay evangelizer does not. Make sure you keep 20 for the 80! Nonetheless, priests

might consider how the 80/20 strategy could apply to them.)

Perhaps it need not be said: I write this blog for the 20% (or less).

A second aspect of this strategy is an emphasis on formation. For most of our conversation, we discussed how hard it is to form college students in our current culture. Everything they see tells them to act in ways contrary to the faith.

Teaching young people healthy (non-)dating behaviors, for example, is hard work in a culture that does not take marriage seriously. But this is true also of cultivating a life of prayer, of beauty, of helpful speech, careful use of the media, etc.

This contribution is available at <http://professorjohnston.com/an-approach-to-evangelization/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

An Example of St. Padre Pio's Mercy [at The Shield of Faith]

I recently began to re-read parts of a book on St. Padre Pio I had written about a dozen years ago. As time goes by, even authors have to refresh their memories about the content of their own work. I had been contacted by an organization interested in the saint's interaction with the American military during World War II. In fact, not far from Padre Pio's friary in the town of San Giovanni Rotondo, the Army Air force had established a ring of air fields girding the town of Foggia.

Foggia was on an enormous plain, situated just below the Gargano mountain, upon which sat San Giovanni Rotondo. Often the soldiers and airmen would explore nearby towns, and exchange candy and cigarettes for fresh eggs and vegetables from the locals. During these interchanges, the troops began hearing stories about some mysterious holy man on the mountain.

Before long, many soldiers, with some Protestants joining the Catholics, were making the trek up the Gargano to attend Padre Pio's early morning Mass. One of these men was Ray Ewen, who was attached to a bomb group of B-24s based near Foggia. From 1943 to 1945 Ray made so many trips up the mountain that he became friends not only with Padre Pio but also with the saint's father Grazio, who was residing near the friary. Ray would often sit on the little stone wall surrounding the elm tree in front of the friary, listening to Grazio Forgiore talk about his famous son.

Quoting directly from the book,

Padre Pio and America

, pp. 120-121, is the following occurrence that Ray Ewen spoke to me about:

"On one of his visits to San Giovanni, Ray was inside the church while Confessions were taking place, and he heard Padre Pio order someone out of the confessional. After hearing Padre Pio say this, some of those waiting their turn in line lost their nerve, got out of the line, and left. They had witnessed one of the distinctive marks of Padre Pio's ministry of bringing souls to God. He would refuse to hear a Confession on those occasions when he was aware that the penitent was insincere, or required a jolt to make him realize that he needed to examine his conscience. It is said that invariably such people would undergo an inner conversion, and eventually return to make a sincere Confession either to Padre Pio or to another priest."

Padre Pio and America

is available at

[Amazon.com](#)

or from the publisher

[TAN Books](#)

This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2016/01/an-example-of-st-padre-pios-mercy.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Behind the Scenes [at Sunflower Sojourn]

2016 started out totally uncertain.

I sat with my parent's on New Year's Day at a coffee shop, discussing my plans for the coming year. They asked about when I planned to do this or that. *The one thing I knew is that I have dreams for this year, big dreams that I have hoped and prayed for a very long time.* However, I have no idea of the timing! I laughed when they asked me about my plans. The fact was, I didn't even know if I would be going into work on Monday! I had received a summons for jury duty, and was told to call a certain number, and then I would know whether to report on Monday or not. (I didn't find out for sure until 6 AM on Monday! Crazy, right?) **Yes, my Heavenly Father is teaching me that I am not in control! I must rely on Him, moment by moment!**

God is working behind the scenes. As I live out my life each day, I don't know what the next minute will bring, the next day, or the next month. I have no idea of what is going on backstage. **But I know that it is for my good.**



courtesy of unsplash.com

When I look back on my life, I am amazed at the events God has pulled off. The experiences I've had, the people I've met, and the blessings that God has poured out upon me are simply astounding. I especially remember the unexpected email from a former boss that led me to my current job. Our Father in Heaven was definitely working behind the scenes, orchestrating a chain of events to put me into this position. Even at this very moment, God is working behind the scenes to orchestrate events that I have no idea about. 2016 is all in His hands. **He is doing the same for you.**

Remember that the behind the scenes work takes much time and preparation. But when the curtain is drawn, a wondrous scene will play out, one much awaited. **Trust Your Heavenly Father as He works behind the scenes for you, my friend. Trust.**

This contribution is available at <http://sunflowersojourn.wordpress.com/2016/01/06/behind-the-scenes/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Pray First, Worry Later [at Miss Alexandrina]

[January 3, 2016](#) by [Alexandrina Brant](#) [Leave a comment](#)

In an offhand comment made about the ecumenical community in which I live, my conversation partner and I discussed how to find God in the silence. By Grace, this coincided with the homily/sermon given by the pastor this Sunday morning, focusing on today's passage of 2 Corinthians 12:

7 Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

It is human nature to fret, is it not? Evolutionarily, to draw defences around ourselves at the very sniff of threat to us and ours. We are inclined to worry.

Yet, I may add, we have also been conditioned by our modern society to do so, with its implicit/unsaid rules about being, doing, and having. So, by that logic, it's contrary to society that God is enough for our safety and security. – Yet, what does Paul say? He admits that it's worth his boasting about his miseries and worries – because in weaknesses, we rely on God for our true happiness. Not mortal trappings—God. Not our own sheer will-power—God. Even our natural instinct to worry is outdone by God's power to provide for us.

To provide salvation.

That's why I called this post *Pray First, Worry Later*. Offer your issues up to God and He is already at work for us.

Happy Sunday. I hope your week (and year!) goes well.



Everyday Catholic [at Everyday Catholic]

Tonight, I was given an incredible insight into why hope is so hard to find when faith is missing. Faith is being able to believe in something even when you can't see it. You start out believing because someone tells you this is how things work. But you keep believing because you see evidence that confirms your initial belief.

Planting Seeds

For example, when I was a little girl, my mother used to garden in the back yard. I know the first time I helped her plant seeds, it was frustrating waiting for those seeds to begin sprouting. I started to lose my hope that they would grow.

In my impatience, I was tempted to go dig them up to be sure they were growing, but my mother told me that not only was it normal for it to take more than 2 days for the plant to sprout but that trying to hurry the process would only kill the plant.

Instead, Mom encouraged me by letting me know that the waiting time was normal. She assured me it was important to continue watering that plant and getting rid of weeds so it could continue to work on growing until it was ready to push itself above the soil. My mom was right, of course, and 10 days later the work we'd been doing all along to nurture that plant began to pay off. The first green shoots showed above the soil.

Faith and Hope

My mom believed that the seeds she planted would grow eventually. That's faith. She couldn't see the growth but knew it was happening anyway. Her faith in the process of the seed's growth, confirmed over years of watching it happen time and again, allowed her to keep hope alive that these seeds would grow. With hope, she was able to water the plants and eventually experience the growth she'd had faith would happen.

People with no faith are like that impatient, inexperienced little girl. Only there is no one around them to help them understand that just because they don't see something happening doesn't mean it isn't happening. So they either try to rush the growth and kill the plant in the process or they give up because it doesn't seem to be working and kill it through neglect.

They never get to see the evidence of what was happening because of this. That's why they tell you, and

they are speaking the truth, that they see no evidence to support God's existence.

Eventually they stop hoping that the seeds will grow at all and they stop planting the seeds because they don't see the point. People with no faith may have hope temporarily, but it doesn't last long before their inexperience or their impatience kills it off.

Lessons from Kindergarten

When I was studying to get my associates in education, I was assigned to help teach in a kindergarten class. I will never forget the day the teacher gave everybody (including me) a small, damp cotton pad, a pumpkin seed, a jewelry sized zipper baggie, and a piece of string. We were instructed to put the cotton pad and the pumpkin seed in the baggie, then close it securely. The string was then threaded through a hole at the top of the baggie and we wore these around our necks for the rest of the week.

It was fascinating to watch the normally hidden process of a seed's growth. Within 12 hours of contact with that damp pad, there was a tiny bump at the bottom of the seed. Another 12 hours and the long thin strands of a root had pushed its way out. Over the days that went by those roots grew and grew and branched off and grew and branched off again and grew until eventually the seed began to shake off its outer covering and begin to uncoil in preparation for pushing itself up above the soil.

The lesson was so clear. Just because you do not see something happening, does not mean it isn't. In fact, long before you see the seed poke its head above the soil, there is a lot of work taking place to be sure the plant's roots are firmly embedded and able to support that growth upward when it does happen.

The Waiting Time

I said this hit home powerfully with me tonight because I am going through a crisis of faith in the process of following my calling to spread messages of hope to others. There are plenty of seeds being planted, but nothing has appeared yet and I was beginning to doubt whether or not I was on the right path. I told God how I felt and asked for consolation, for a confirmation that I was doing what I needed to be doing.

The lessons from that time in the kindergarten class floated to my mind, and I knew what I was being told. Just because I do not see things happening does not mean that they are not happening. Quite often it simply means that the roots to support the answer to my prayers are being put down and multiplied so that when it does finally spring up, it will be healthy and strong.

Waiting times like these are never easy. They are agonizing and, if you don't have a stockpile of evidence to rely upon, can lead you to give up. I have a great deal of experience with prayers being answered, so I

know what to expect and I have hope even when I don't see things working.

My lack of faith, though, in my own ability leads me to give up too soon on the seeds I plant. Too often, I try to rush them along because I'm worried they won't grow, and I end up killing them. Or, I plant them but neglect them because they seem to take too long and so I assume nothing is coming from them.

The Gift of Encouragement

That's why encouragement is such an important ingredient in helping people to hold on to faith and hope during that waiting time. Encouragement passes on the experience and the knowledge that you've gained through trial and error to help the doubting person believe. If my mother hadn't encouraged me in the growing of things, I might well have given up trying, assuming it just wasn't something I was meant to do.

This contribution is available at <http://brandy-miller.blogspot.com/2016/01/finding-hope-when-faith-is-missing.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Rights of Evil [at Travels of a New Christian]



God's Biological Love – The Second-Person Relationship

“People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other.” Martin Luther King Jr.

The second obstacle to the secularist goal, is the natural superiority of the second-person relationship over that of the first-person and third-person relationships. An individual is a finite creature in that he or she can only interact with others on an intimate and transformative level to the degree in which they can physically place themselves in contact with others. In the practice of second-person relationships down through the last several millennia, its evolution assumed a pace that permitted a relatively smooth assimilation into the society. For there to be true cohesion between the members of a society, there must be the constant opportunity to directly permit the gentle persuasion of the second-person relationship to overcome the individual inclination to self-centeredness. We call this liberty. However, since the late Middle Ages and on into the Enlightenment, where man changed the final cause for his advancement as a society through science – that of the final cause or will of God – to its efficient cause – man himself – our ability to communicate in the second-person relationship has diminished greatly; despite the technological wonders that have afforded us the opportunity to be closer than ever to one another.

Can one really compare the physical, personal contact between children and their parents as equal to a letter, a telephone call, an email, or a text message on a smartphone? The memories of parents and children baking cookies, going to a fair, or sitting on the back porch and watching the fireflies strike up their chorus of illuminated notes in the darkened sky are deeply embedded convictions of the good nature of mankind and all have a final cause for peace, happiness, and contentment. These are things that can never be replicated in anything less than a truly physical and personal experience, and the almost

unlimited amount of those arts – writing, poetry, song, plays, movies – that extol the personal and spiritual riches one receives in such second-person relationships is a true testimony that cannot be argued. It makes no difference whom the two or more parties are, the transformative effect goes to the very goodness of man. All else falls well short and leaves the door open to indifference to the very core of humanity. And in accepting that which falls short is to objectify mankind; degrading him and all that he has worked for to attain a conscience that can stand the scrutiny and malicious inspection by a judgmental society.

I suspect that secular man drives, with his own ignorance, today's technologies that pursue the first and third-person relationship, and in so doing it deceives mankind into believing they are participating in qualities of communications that offers all of the same rewards as the second-person relationship. Of course, it is a lie. And the result of this deception, the limiting of man to effectively communicate on that transformative level, is that the society is deprived from holding onto or finding those truths that run contrary to the secular goal. If one is busy in entertaining the mind over educating the mind, or too busy in the free acquisition of things to consider the benefits of the acquisition of things through work and merit, then one has little time to consider and act against a philosophy and practice of centralized power that provides but a mediocre existence and an indifferent equality for its adherents.

Perhaps one of the finest examples of just such a philosophical practice is the recent American healthcare program, The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, of 2010. I need not go into the specifics of this program, but to merely note that this very secular government, that spawned such a legislative effort for its people, promoting it as a step up towards equality for all of its citizens, has exempted itself from its own program and mandates. I somehow doubt that the American government humbly considers itself as unworthy of such a good legislation for themselves, and I rather consider the possibility that while it is good enough for the people, some (government officers and employees) are simply more equal than others (the people). Indeed, some in the secularist world do eat steak while others eat hamburger. And this can only be foisted upon a society where second-person relationships have been diminished to the point that it impedes the access of its citizens to the absolute truths that are born from second-person relationships. This exemption from The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is the government's admission to its secular child, one in whose truths are increasingly relative, that absolute truths do indeed exist and mankind must submit to them in order to continue to receive the benefits of those absolute truths (financial, housing, nutritional, healthcare, clothing, cell phones and on, and on benefits of survival). Why else would those in power exempt themselves from something of their own creation unless they knew it was insufficient to their own absolute nature?

The Scientific Method

Sir Francis Bacon, poor soul for my use of him as an example as there are many I can point my finger at, possessed a deep conviction of the future path for mankind. He lived in that era of man, the late half of the 1500's and early 1600's, when the library of man's thoughts achieved a breakthrough in the understanding of his world. It led many to ponder the limited past in light of a future that appeared to be limitless in its potential to lift mankind up into a more secure, stable, and progenitive society. The view of the future far eclipsed the past, and as man will seize the day through the dissolution of the night, he saw the past for its deprivations over that of its provisions. Divisive emotions and feelings are always a stronger ally to man's purposes than love will ever be, and so an imperative was set forth in that enlightening age; change for change sake, regardless of the prodigious and practical truths that brought man to this ledge and the unseen risks of a change that is shaped and paced more by rejection than by

acceptance. While words like enlightenment and reformation are preferred, this period in Western history was more fully a violent revolution, and we are still in this revolution today; perhaps more now than ever.

“Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”
Martin Luther King Jr.

For Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, Galileo, Isaac Newton and others, their projected world would be found through empirical study for the advancement of mankind; science as we know it today. Its hope was for a world where man would be the final cause or explanation for the existence of all things; the receiver of his own gifts, and the dispenser of universal equality. We know this, and teach it routinely in all of our classrooms, as the scientific method. I remember learning it as a child in school, and up to the writing of this essay, considered it the only logical manner in which to approach the study of our world. While it did not, in its necessity see religion and the Christian god specifically as an obstacle to its goal at that time, it did see religion and the Christian god as an unnecessary component and burdensome to the foundation of this new system. The scientific method – bypassing the many intractable traditions of the Western society – propelled its system of thinking into a standard practice within the scientific community; in large part to its esoteric nature, but long term implementation into the society at large would require considerable pruning of many of the now-thought, moribund traditions, especially religion, if this new engagement of man and nature were to yield all of the hoped-for fruit.

“So much concerning the several classes of Idols and their equipage; all of which must be renounced and put away with a fixed and solemn determination, and the understanding thoroughly freed and cleansed; the entrance into the kingdom of man, founded on the sciences, being not much other than the entrance into the kingdom of heaven, where into none may enter except as a little child.” Sir.
Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Aphorism LXVIII.

I insert this quotation of Sir Bacon’s to illustrate a significant fact; that evil must first assert its rights to exist before it can ever carry out its intent. Bacon uses religious language and references to Christian Scripture in his aphorism in order to connect an immature, fledgling of a man idea to the most profoundly stable and reverent foundation of mankind of the past few millennium; Christian faith directly and God, the ultimate authority, indirectly. Bacon’s plan was obvious; to lend credibility to his cause, and thus give it an authority that it had not yet earned fully on its own merit. Odd that he would wish to do so in the light of his assertion that there is no place for theology in the scientific method:

“And there is yet a third class, consisting of those who out of faith and veneration mix their philosophy with theology and traditions; among whom the vanity of some has gone so far aside as to seek the origin of sciences among spirits and genii.” Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Aphorism LXII.

So, is it just odd that a body of men and women, who see theological reasoning as a burden upon their scientific reasoning, use Christian language and associations in their proselytism, or is it diabolical? If one were to look into the social turbulence of today, would one not find this same method of deception at work within many of the various minority causes that are counter-cultural to traditional thinking? To me, it appears that new powers seem not to ask society to simply hold its nose while the “medicine” is poured down their throats, but rather insists, in the most insidious of manner, deception, to embrace the “medicine” that which might very well kill them. In tolerance, intolerance.

True Evil

Now, steering away from the deception to the protagonist, I cannot help but question this practical and progressive, scientific method given the profound and elevated and sacramental torment it has brought to mankind. I question not the empirical methodology itself, but rather the intent, or final cause, or explanation for its use by mankind. As in all things used by the hand of man, when he does so for the ultimate and end goal of his own desires, feelings, and ego, we find evil the ever-present spectator and groupie; more than willing to compliment and encourage, to console and lift up, and to reward that wielder of power with pleasures of the mind and body through the debasement of others.

I have no doubt that the scientific method – as a process of investigating the natural aspects of our world and expounding the concepts gleaned from such research – is an invaluable tool for man. The resultant, fertile production of advancements in all of our endeavors has done much to preserve a valid ecosystem in which to live, to alleviate suffering, stabilize a divergent world society, and promote unity between hostile factions. Unfortunately, it has also scourged our earth in ways we cannot fathom, created more suffering than it has alleviated, destabilized a divergent world through its endowment of unearned resources, and promoted power over unity. It is, in fact, a wolf in sheep's clothing.

I have no doubt that the scientific method, used not for the glorification of mankind, but for the thanksgiving to mankind's cause, God, would craft and yield unimaginable technology; equal to that which has been brought about by man's own efforts to enrich himself at other's expense, and surpassing in its ability to cause real equality, real freedom, real stability, security and spirituality. Our visions of the utopian world are nothing like we live in today, nor can the road we currently progress on ever provide us with that utopian world. The true, utopian world in our minds have no roads nor vehicles, no obstructive architecture, no wanting communications, no fear, and no evil. Our true, utopian world lives in the public conscience, where man may freely express himself through the considerations of others, and not for his own aggrandizement and intent of power over others. Our true, utopian world is without a hidden conscience that holds guilt and shame like a slow poison that would drain the life from the souls of generations to come. Our true, utopian world is the primacy of the second-person relationship – the agape of God – the agape with God – the agape of mankind.

And what is this “agape”, this second-person relationship? It is love. It is a love that is narrowly seen today with its remnants in the maternal connection of mother to child, the paternal connection of father and child, and the union between man and woman for the good and procreative purpose of the family. All else are shams, imitations, falsities, lies and selfishness; vanity, as Koheleth decidedly singled out in his work, Ecclesiastes. Love, only in its sacrificial form, can ever achieve transformation for a person's soul, and in so doing it transforms the mind and body to conform to the good of all. It breaks down the red lines drawn between one another, and makes hatred and jealousy a silly illusion to be evaporated by the warmth of a rising sun. It makes the search of another's well-being paramount over the well-being of oneself, and in so doing, it lifts all together into lives rich with relational capital and a harmonic voice that endows all with good intent. It gives rights to no one for nothing has been taken from anyone. It is a feast for the soul. It suspends law. But, when we divest ourselves of that second-person relationship in favor of binding our meager hoard of self-possession, we divest ourselves of the love I have just epitomized and leave ourselves open to nothing more than that which can be held in our hands or contained within our strongboxes and mausoleums.

“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Martin Luther King Jr.

Now, why am I talking about the scientific method in this discourse on evil, when I could be pointing to what many of you would consider to be direct and clear evil? I'm pointing to the fact that while Western society concentrates on the perceived evils – mortal crimes, sexual crimes, mental crimes, and the “isms” of today – through direct and clear action, foundational evil weaves itself through the society disguised as rights, freedoms, equalities, responsibilities, preferences, desires, and feelings. Murder will not stop through incarceration and disposal, sexual equality will not banish rape, twitter quips will not drown out bullying, and marches on Washington D.C. will never eliminate bigotry. Yes, all these efforts do afford us some assistance to bar the gates from being completely blown off, but these types of evil are merely the manifestation of the real, foundational evil that has been granted its right to exist by the very species that suffers from its onslaught; man's insufferable fear of his own mortality. So he flees from the second-person relationship by structuring a society, a playground, of his perceived delights so as to avoid having to face the truth.

You see, evil is not murder, rape, intimidation, racism, or the joy of speed that the train engineer in Spain so relished; evil is that silent dispenser of death and destruction that man grants full membership to his cultural disposition, and then rewards it despite the price the culture pays. The scientific method is one of many processes that man uses to progress those rights, freedoms, equalities, responsibilities, preferences, desires, and feelings that lead him away from that which he knows is true; that God is there, that truth is real and absolute, that natural law cannot ever be overcome, for man is of nature – though divinely created – and he must submit in order to receive that which he seeks most; love. It seems so desperately ironic; that which man seeks most is kept from him by his own means. He truly is inclined to his own suffering, and his hidden conscience is the dark pressure of the ocean deep where it collapses the lungs and silences forever.

And man has drowned his hidden conscience so deeply within his societal processes and daily actions that even the most intelligent and aware of us just don't get it. An example of such lack of understanding came to me recently, courtesy of George Will, journalist, author, and television commentator on political and social issues. Now here is a steady, highly intelligent man with a conservative background, and is highly regarded for his consistent and astute understanding of the American scene. He was recently interviewed for a solid hour; delving into various subjects that seem to flow from his slow conversion to a mildly libertarian viewpoint of American politics. There were several good moments I enjoyed where his approach to the various subjects discussed were illuminating, intuitive, and revealing, but it was near the end of the interview where I almost came unglued.

The subject of the disintegration of the family structure in America came up in reference to the alarming rate of babies being born, 72% amongst African-Americans, where the parents are not married, nor even in a serious relationship. And it was here where I could clearly see that Mr. Will was confused and at a loss for answers:

“We've seen family disintegration in war, famine, pestilence. This happened in peace time; in prosperity. We've seen this sea change of mores. I don't know what has caused this, and until you know what has caused it, you don't know how to address it.... And because the family is the primary transmitter of social capital, they will continue to reproduce themselves. Whereas, down lower, these norms among those people who most need the accumulated social capital that the family represents, are doing the most damage to the family.” George Will

I find it fascinating that a man like George Will says he does not know what has caused the disintegration

of the family structure in America. He even references John Wesley as reviving England from its drunken stupor through his 30,000 sermons that galvanized the wives, who in turn steeled the men, yet he states he does not know the why or the answer to America's greatest threat to its stability. At one moment I could almost sense futility on his part, and I have to say that it appeared he knew the answer, but chose not to speak on it, so as to not incur the wrath of particular interest groups that have the power to destroy careers of people just like him.

I make this point on two grounds. First, a question of same-sex marriage came up and his answer was that he was not much interested in that subject. The subject was then immediately changed by the interviewers. Two, because when he said the words – “This happened in peace time; in prosperity.” – Mr. Will's eyes flashed a sadness and his voice came to the verge of cracking; just as someone who just cannot bear their heavy heart any longer and break under the strain into uncontrollable tears. But Mr. Will is a man of control and control himself he did. He went on to offer up some thought on this grave matter, and it was here where he offered up the story of John Wesley; an Anglican theologian. Perhaps he saw it as a way to offer a truth without crossing the line of political correctness. I give him honors, though, for stating a simple truth; that the family is the foundation of economic stability in any society and any government. With the secular world in place in America, one can rest assured that there will be no generational, accumulative effect of stability and security for an American society that places the true family unit at the bottom of its concerns. This is not about religion, not about politics, not about sociology, and not about economics. It's all about genetics. It's all about God. And it's all about man's diversion from that which he seeks and needs the most.

Yet, can there be any light that might pierce this darkness?

God Bless and Buen Camino – Reese

This contribution is available at <http://travelsOfANewChristian.com/2013/11/15/the-rights-of-evil-part-8/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Preparing for Lent [at Under Thy Roof]

Today is officially two weeks until the beginning of Lent everybody!!

I could feel the anxiety level rise from here.

But it's going to be ok!

I promise.



The two week marker is where I get serious about planning out my goals for this Lent: discerning what I need to work on within myself, and how I can incorporate my family into those decisions.

I like to do a three part version of doing Lent: take on, give up, and prayer focus.

1. Take On

I take on a particular devotion or discipline for the duration of Lent. In past years I've done: daily rosary, lauds and vespers from the Liturgy of the Hours, or tackled longer spiritual books (like

City of God

).

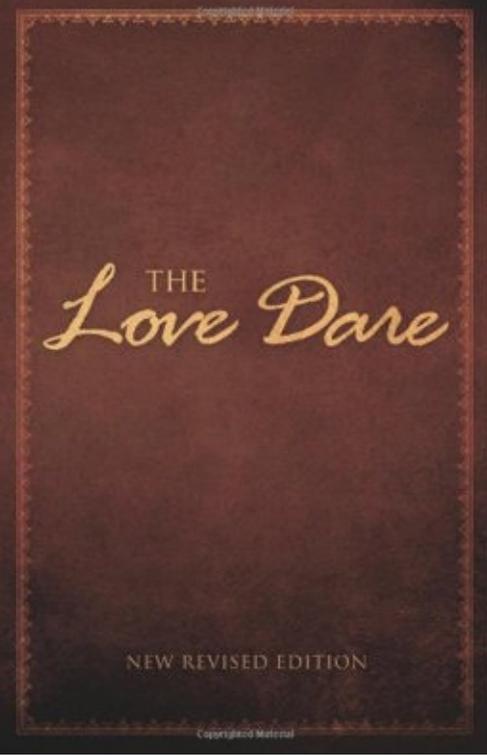
This is a great opportunity to try out a devotion that is new to you, or something you've been meaning to get around to learning but have not yet done so.

Ideally, this is something that can become a regular part of your life even after Easter.

This year I'm doing something pretty different. My take on is going to be following the

[Love Dare](#)

.



THE *Love Dare*

NEW REVISED EDITION

Copyrighted Material

It's a 40 day challenge to better love your spouse.

It is not explicitly Catholic, but it is very much Christian and brings in a lot of biblical readings. I like that it has a journaling component so that at the end of the 40 days I can look back and see what worked and what did not.

I also like that it is not necessary that your spouse do the love dare at the same time. This is about getting better at loving your spouse as you are meant to do, not expecting something out of them on your own timeline.

Obviously, I won't be doing the love dare itself post-Easter, but I can use what I learn to be a better spouse to Matt post-Easter.

2. Give Up

This is the part of Lent practices most people are familiar with. The time when it becomes a minefield of temporary avoidances and conflicts when trying to host events.

I have done the typical give up sweets, coffee, meat, alcohol, etc. but I found that I just lost my craving for those things. (Excepting coffee, ok everyone. Just so we're clear, me and coffee are still besties.)

One of my rules for what I give up is that my mortification should not mortify others. It should not be difficult to accommodate or place restrictions on other members of my family.

Last year I gave up technology during naptime. I had to plan ahead to have books ready, sewing projects, and any computer work done before naptime began. I had to get used to doing things without Pandora going in the background.

It was hard! Harder than I expected, but I also realized how much time I was wasting checking email, facebook, and pinterest during naptime. Without doing that I could read so much! And sew so much! And really journal everyday!

I am going to do it again this year. It was a good practice in becoming conscious of how I use my free time, and I could always use a little of that!

3. Prayer Focus

This is the first year I am explicitly adding this to my Lent planning. I have found myself, in past years, naturally having something that would keep coming up in my prayers during Lent.

Sometimes I was pregnant and it had to do with preparing for the birth and welcoming that baby.

Sometimes it had to do with discerning what I was called to be doing in my life in the coming year.

Sometimes it was reflecting on particular virtues and striving to live those out in a better way.

Once I pick *the thing* I add it whenever there is opportunity: as a rosary intention, at the end of my intentions during morning and evening prayer, and during the intentions at mass.

I try not to tell people what my prayer focus will be until Lent is over. It helps keep the focus on listening to God and cuts down on the noise.

But what about the kids?

As much as possible, I have the kids participate in Lent with us. They also give up meat on Fridays, I try to have some extra church trips with them during the week, and we talk about what we are doing and why.

I start that right off the bat. I figure it's easier to start a habit early than to learn a discipline later.

That means no pepperoni for the one year old either.

I'm home with the kids all day, so I try to keep up a mix of solo prayer and prayer with kids. Using naptimes is great for a solo prayer time that has a starting trigger. Mealtimes are excellent opportunities for sneaking in a bible story or short life of a saint.

Experiment a little and be enthusiastic - the kids will probably follow your lead.

This contribution is available at <http://underthyroof.blogspot.com/2016/01/preparing-for-lent.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Why We March



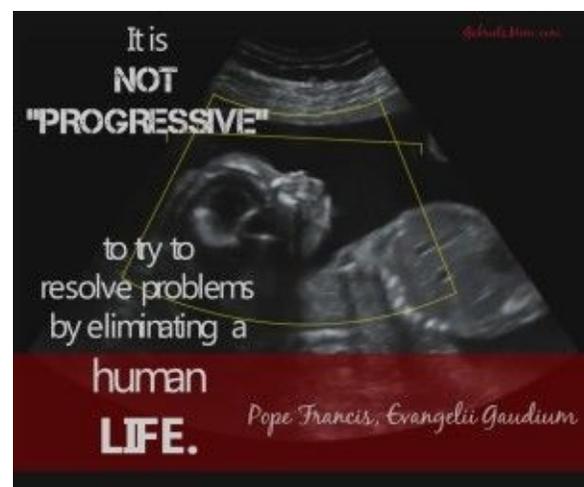
It is late on a Saturday night. I should be in bed, but my head is racing with plans for tomorrow. Like every Sunday morning, I will attend Mass with my husband. After Mass, we will head home for a hearty breakfast, then bundle up in many many layers.

Tomorrow is the March for Life in Chicago!

Last year was the first year I attended this March. I had never been able to go to the March in Washington DC, usually because of our own Sanctity of Life programs here in Danville. Last year was my first January since leaving my position at WCC, and I saw lots of #March4LifeChi posts on Facebook. What a perfect opportunity! Bruce had surgery the week before, so he could not go with me. This year, we are going together...and I am so excited!

It is likely to be much colder this year, but organizers are also expecting a much bigger crowd. Many of my friends think I am crazy...going to Chicago for a March outside in January?? Wasn't I just scratching my head at all of the football fans who were watching the Vikings play the Seahawks last week? Yes, I was.

But there will inevitably be a sense of warmth tomorrow. I mean that quite literally in a spiritual sense. I know there will be secular proliferers present, but nonetheless, I truly believe God will be present in a deep, abiding way. I believe He will be pleased that we are gathered together, but He will also challenge us to do more than just march. Our efforts have to go way beyond balloons and signs and chants. Even so, the March for Life is important for many reasons...



#WhyWeMarch... because over 58 million children have died legally by “choice” in this country alone, and we must let people know that will never be acceptable to us.

#WhyWeMarch... because women deserve to know the truth about fetal development and the violent realities of abortion procedures. Yes, the legal ones.

#WhyWeMarch... because telling women that the best way to succeed in their careers is by killing their children is a despicable lie and the antithesis of feminism

#WhyWeMarch... because the Right to Life is unalienable, and not dependent upon one’s physical strength, stage of development, or potential to do anything, good or bad

#WhyWeMarch... because an unborn child’s Right to Life is not dependent upon her mother’s level of education or his mother’s income, or the condition of a home where he or she may live

#WhyWeMarch... because science clearly tells us that a separate human being is created at the moment of fertilization, and solutions to difficult pregnancies should strive to help both mother and baby survive

#WhyWeMarch... because the powers that be must see that we are a force to be reckoned with; a growing community who recognize that our civil laws must reflect what science tells us; a community that will not be silent until Roe vs Wade and Doe vs Bolton are overturned

#WhyWeMarch... because we love life! And while our resolve is strong, so too, our joy is unwavering! We want people to see peaceful and joyful gatherings, because we must “Give a reason for the hope that is in us” and “speak the truth in love.” (1 Peter 3:15)

I could go on and on...this means so much to me! But now, I am going to call it a night. It’s going to be a Big Day tomorrow!

This contribution is available at <http://gabrielsmom.com/2016/01/whywemarch-2016/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).