

NewEvangelists.org

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New Evangelists Monthly #39

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Forward

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

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

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

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Seek Virtue this Lent!

Rather than giving up chocolate, only to devour the solid chocolate Easter Bunny on Easter Sunday, seek virtue this Lent. Rather than giving up drinking alcohol, only to pop the cork on the Champagne this Easter Sunday, seek virtue this Lent. Rather than giving up television, only to sit in front of the TV all day Easter Sunday watching your shows on demand, seek virtue this Lent.

So many times, year after year, we temporarily give up something we love as a sacrifice for Lent in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. I suggest taking a different and possibly more difficult route this year. My idea will not only show Jesus how much you love Him, but you will get something from the process, rather than give something up.

Take an honest assessment of yourself regarding how well you are doing in practicing faith, hope, love, prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. Which virtue is most greatly deficient? During the season of Lent, pray for the Holy Spirit to grace you with a sufficient amount of the virtue in need, and begin practicing it (that's the difficult part). For me it is Fortitude: More specifically, I lose my patience too quickly, because I don't have the strength to wait. I am going to pray for and practice patience this Lent. If you will join me, then by Easter Sunday, you and I will see ourselves in a more favorable light, a light that will continue well beyond Easter, for we will be on our way to developing virtuous habits. That's exactly how Jesus wants us to be: more virtuous; for when we are virtuous, we are united to Jesus; we will have turned away from sin.

Are you with me this Lent? Are you up for the change? Let's get praying now!

Lenten "Limit" [at Campfires and Cleats]

Welcome friends

Thank you for, the prompt and the community to spend just five minutes writing...

no editing in or overthinking...

Just writing.

GO:

It is our emptiness and lowliness that God needs, and not our plenitude.

Mother Teresa

There is no limit to what we can accomplish ...

when we let it all go and leave it with God...

leave the worry, the cares, the questions, the decisions.

Along this journey of 40 days, this dark night of the soul,

the only limit to

doing for our brothers, coming closer to the Lord and walking

hand in hand through the dessert with our Savior is....what?

Will it be fear? Distraction? Drama of the day?

Or will we accept the irrefutable love of the cross...

will we lean into it, enveloping ourselves into it...this miracle....

This love which is the only thing which can take down Satan and make us whole

I once believed my being full.....yet without Him, no.

It was emptiness., limiting, binding.

Dust you are and to dust you will return.

Genesis 3:19



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/2016/02/five-minute-friday-lenten-limit-21216.html>
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Do We Realize What We Are Singing? [at Designs by Birgit]



You will find this post to be short and to the point. I, among many others, am weary of church songs, masquerading as hymns, portraying something other than Church teaching. First we have every Tom, Dick, and Harriet, who wants to see himself (herself) as a composer, leaving us with what amounts to a roller coaster ride up and down the scale. Empty words, loosely connected to scripture in some vague way, mostly out of context, and unpoetic poetry are like clanging cymbals in my ears.

I may only be passably musical, my husband describes my voice as ‘a good voice for blending with others’, but I do have a hearing ear. Tempo, imagery, and melody do matter but, what matters more is accurate adherence to scripture, dogma, and faith. Adding synthesized beats, twirling and whirling through the octaves, and being ‘unique’ does not a hymn make. What it does is create a song, albeit not a very good one, which fails the faith test.

Mere Songs or Real Hymns?

There are many such songs in our hymnals today. They prance around, pretending to be hymns but are really only annoying songs. They are in our pews because of a tacit sin of omission. It goes something like this. The Church asks potential hymns to have the approval of the diocesan bishop. Only then should they appear in our hymnals.

What happens, instead, is the cart is put before the horse. Creative juices flow within the breast of an aspiring music minister and a song is born. This song (not hymn) is added to the ‘music issue’ and makes its grand entrance. The bishop isn’t told, nor does he notice, so there is no

[objection](#)

to this melodious piece of heresy. Viola! Inferred approval is invoked and a new pseudo-hymn is born. Consequently, the people, gnashing their teeth, are bound to sing or to stand by, silently praying for relief.

Below you will find one such song. In the past, we’ve been forced to sing about being Christ for one another, a loosely applicable notion given that we are to lead Christ-like lives. But making the jump from that to actually being the Bread of Life, broken and shared, is just too much. The allusion to the Eucharistic Sacrifice just brings my voice to a screeching halt.

Singing Heresy

Words have meaning and power; within the context of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, it's vital that composers adhere to Church teaching. Some concepts are simply not true nor are they acceptable. It's one thing to dislike a song as a

[matter of taste](#)

; it's quite another when a hymn fails to follow Truth.

O Lord, please spare us and bring us back to the [hymns](#) of old. If that can't be done, won't you please at least bring back faithful, God-centered hymns? Amen!

Which songs cause you to grind your teeth? Is it a matter of taste or theology? Weigh in by commenting below.

+ + +

I Myself Am the Bread of Life

Refrain

I myself am the bread of life.

You and I are the bread of life.

Taken and blessed, broken and shared by Christ

That the world might live.

Verse 1

This bread is spirit, gift of the Maker's love,

and we who share it know that we can be one:

a living sign of God in Christ.

Refrain

Verse 2

Here is God's kingdom given to us as food.

This is our body, this is our blood:

a living sign of God in Christ.

Refrain

Verse 3

Lives broken open, stories shared aloud,

Become a banquet, a shelter for the world:

a living sign of God in Christ.

Refrain

Rory Cooney

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This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2016/03/do-we-realize-what-we-are-singing.html>
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The Problem With the Church is not the Pope. It's Us. [at If I Might Interject...]

¹⁹ You give your mouth free rein for evil;

you yoke your tongue to deceit.

²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother,

slandering your mother's son.

²¹ When you do these things should I be silent?

Do you think that I am like you?

I accuse you, I lay out the matter before your eyes. (Psalm 50:19-21)

So I started to see some Catholic blogs publish articles that take a different slant about the Pope. Now, instead of accusing the Pope of being heterodox, this tactic takes the truth that not everything the Pope says is an authoritative teaching and uses it to attack people defending the Pope as if they argued everything authoritative. They say that it's OK to be upset by certain comments the Pope makes, and apologists shouldn't be defending the Pope in those circumstances.

However, that is not the problem. The problem is that some authors use controversial phrases from press conferences to imply (or state outright) that the Pope is heterodox. Some do it subtly. Others come right out and say they think the Pope is not Catholic. But either way, they argue that the Church is worse off because Pope Francis is Pope. That's different from saying "I like St. John Paul II better." We're not talking about a person who prefers the style of one Pope over another. We're talking about a person who thinks Pope Francis is a menace and needs to be opposed.

That's an important distinction. One can wish the Pope did not say or do a certain thing because of the confusion it caused without being a bad Catholic. For example, I recall two incidents during the pontificate of St. John Paul II which I find regrettable: the 1986 Assisi conference and the kissing of the Qur'an. I recall being unhappy with Pope emeritus Benedict XVI and his lifting the excommunications on the bishops of the SSPX and his ill-advised example of the "Gay male prostitute with AIDS" in the book interview *Light of the World*. These things caused scandal. But these things did not mean that these two Popes were heterodox. When foes of these Popes tried to accuse them of heresy, [1] that's when those foes were in the wrong. These were simply examples of Popes being human and making mistakes in judgment that did not involve the teaching authority of the Church.

Likewise with Pope Francis. We've had cases where he said things that sounded confusing in soundbites, but turned out to be legitimate when read in context. We've also had a few instances where he confused Catholics who couldn't figure out what point he was trying to make. Those things are unhelpful for the life of the faithful. Nobody denies that. What we do deny is the claim that these instances "prove" the Pope is heterodox.

I think the problem is that we have forgotten that the media was also scrutinizing the words and writings of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, constantly asking if an unfamiliar phrase meant a change in teaching. We have forgotten that these two pontiffs have also spoken about social justice, immigration and the environment (back then, they called it *ecology*), and spoke against the excesses of capitalism just as much as they spoke against communism.

Back then, it was easier to overlook the Papal statements on issues outside of the right to life and sexual morality. From an American perspective, we saw the statements on these issues mostly as an indictment against our political opponents. Since the Popes spoke on the right to life and about sexual morality, we could point to the Papal statements in order to condemn our opponents—especially if those opponents were also Catholic (like Mario Cuomo and Geraldine Ferraro back in the 1980s). The problem was, we overlooked the fact that the Popes warned against other injustices as well. (For example, from what I recall, the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* was dismissed as being out of touch or even anti-American).

In other words, we approved of the Popes when they said what we wanted to hear and we ignored or dismissed the Popes when we didn't like what they had to say. Also, at this time, the media took the attitude of trying to portray the Popes as being “neanderthal” in their stand against “choice.” They seldom covered the other topics that the Popes taught on except to ask whether the Church was beginning to “liberalize.” Then midway through the pontificate of Benedict XVI, tactics began to change. The media began to report on Papal addresses and encyclicals by picking out the elements that seemed to mesh well with the desired political slant. His writings began to be promoted as anti-capitalistic and in favor of more government intervention. This tactic was solidly in place when Pope Francis was elected Pope. Even though his actual words did not support it, the media invented an image of a “liberal Pope” who was “overturning Tradition.” And many Catholics bought into the lie.

Another factor was the access to information. We forget that what we take for granted now was not as wide reaching during the reign of Benedict XVI and absent for much of the reign of St. John Paul II. Without the instant access to smartphones and the like with access almost anywhere, we did not have instant access to all the misinformation that now gets transmitted across the globe by a reporter who wants to be first with breaking news about the Pope “changing teaching.” A reporter had to get a copy and actually read the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (or get someone to read it for him) to report on it. Media reports on the documents were quickly followed by in depth Catholic analysis. Information didn't move as swiftly, so there was more time to respond.

Now, instead of looking to theologians to help explain to people what could be misunderstood, now people think that they can read unofficial translations of quotes—often devoid of context—and understand the “plain sense” of the words. When someone tells them that the context does not justify this, the response is to charge the person of “explaining away” the words. In other words, people don't want to be told they made a mistake about interpreting the words of the Pope or that they are doing wrong in how they apply them.

So I'd ask the reader to consider this. With all these factors in play, do you really think we can justly claim that the Pope is to blame? Or is it more likely that our own antics in speaking against him are creating far more chaos than anything he said? I'll be honest. I think the answer is the second one.

[1] People today seem to forget that St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI were bashed as being “modernists” when they took a stand that these critics disliked. It only changed for Benedict XVI after he issued the motu proprio about the extraordinary form of the Mass.

This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2016/02/the-problem-with-church-is-not-pope-it.html>
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Mercy Means Stopping [at Pauca Verba]



During a visit to Calabria, Pope Francis spotted a sign in the roadside crowd that read: *Holy Father, please stop for Roberta, this angel who would like to meet you.* And so Francis had the motorcade stop, and he got out and walked over to Roberta and her friends. Here's a picture of their short visit.

In his newly published interview, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, Pope Francis teaches that mercy is the *heart torn open for humanity in its wretchedness*. But we must be sure to understand the word: *wretchedness* refers to humanity in its shame, need, pain, littleness, vulnerability, rejection, nakedness, poverty, fatigue, hunger, fears, tears, hunger, loneliness. *Mercy is the heart torn open to the world in all of this.* Do you feel it?

Recently I heard about a joint funeral celebration in Ireland for two persons with disabilities: neither ever spoke or walked. Apparently the family of the deceased hadn't been in a church in years.

After the Funeral Mass, as the hearses carrying the caskets proceeded to the cemetery, they drove past the residence where the two adults had lived for many years. Seeing dozens of residents in wheelchairs lining the road and serving as an honor guard, the parents of the deceased got out of the cars and walked over, stopping to touch and thank each resident personally.

Mercy means stopping. Mercy means touching. Mercy means comforting. Mercy means gratitude.

This contribution is available at <http://www.paucaverba.blogspot.com/2016/02/lenten-mercy-meditation-mercy-means.html>
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I hadn't planned on writing about crosses today. Sometime around the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14), I'd snapped a picture of the old hymn "Take Up Your Cross" (below) with the idea that I'd return to it. Maybe meditate on crosses and the words of the hymn. (Or spend ten uninterrupted seconds considering, which is what passes for meditation in my life these days.)

723
GREAT CH. HEBB

1. Take up your cross, the Sav - ior said, If
2. Take up your cross, be not a - shamed! Let
3. Take up your cross, which gives you strength, Which
4. Take up your cross, and fol - low Christ, Nor

1. you would my dis - ci - ple be: De - ny your - self, the
2. not dis - grace your spir - it fill! For God him - self on -
1. makes your trem - bling spir - it brave: 'Twill guide you to a
4. think till death to lay it down; For on - ly they who

1. world for - sake, And hum - bly fol - low af - ter me.
2. dured to die Up - on a cross, on Cal - vary's hill.
3. bet - ter home And lead to vic - t'ry o'er the grave.
4. bear the cross May hope to wear the glo - rious crown.

Text: (M. Charles W. Forrest, 1814-1877, alt.)
Music: L. Kug's Geistliche Lieder, Wittenberg, 1543; adapt. by Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750, alt.

Today I was going to share an advance review of *The Young Messiah*. But my screening link didn't work last night. Then Monday happened. Someone had to scramble for a hat for Dr. Seuss Week at school. One kid missed the bus. I discovered our kids' puzzle pieces were dumped together in the bottom of a cardboard box. Again. I had nothing to write for #MondayBlogs. And my husband and I argued about the state of our house, yet again.

To be truthful, while I'd like to chalk it all up to Monday, there's nothing unique about the day, even if it is Leap Day. It's every day. And really, it's not so bad. We're in good health. Our finances are okay. We're blessed in innumerable ways, so many there's no room for complaint or deprivation of any sort.

Yet those crosses. The little niggling ones. The big ones that weren't anticipated. The ones that steal hope. The whispers that come with them saying, "Things will never change. It will never be better. This insufferable cross will be lashed to your back until you take your final breath."

The temptation is to throw back a dose of positive thinking. Work harder, work smarter, be better, do better, pray more, et cetera, and kick that cross to the curb. The discipline and positivity are good as far as they go, but to think the crosses will ever disappear is delusion at best.

Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

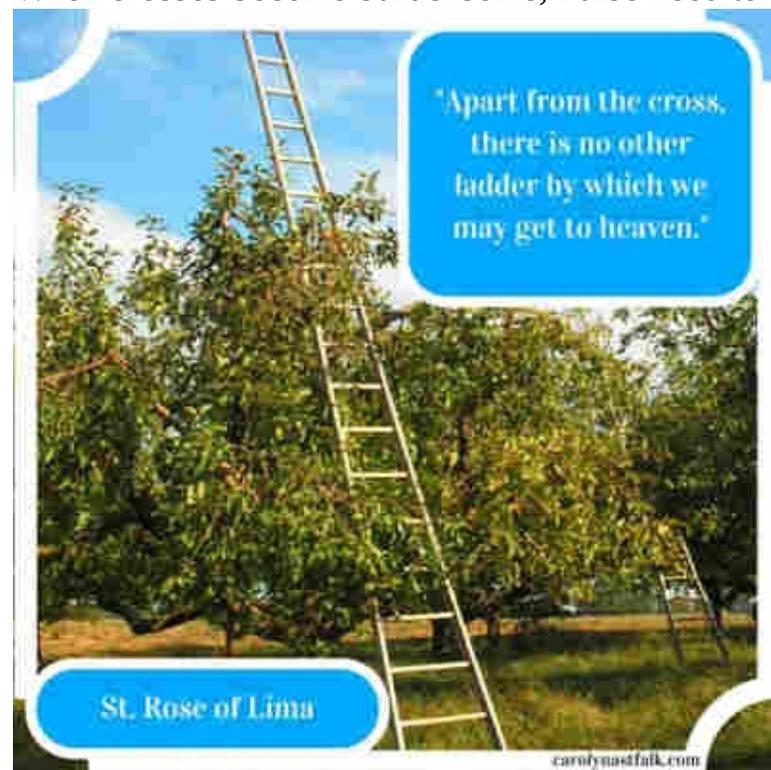
-Luke 9:23

The word "daily" is unique to Luke's Gospel. Where a near identical verse appears concerning the conditions of discipleship in Matthew's Gospel, it could be taken as referencing Jesus's imminent

persecution. Luke reminds us that suffering for us is not once and done. It's the normal course of life.

We have crucifixes hanging in multiple rooms in our home, and yet I forget.

When crosses become burdensome, I also need to be reminded of this quote from St. Rose of Lima:



How do we climb ladders? One rung at a time, moving hand then foot, then hand and foot again.

[Jesus fell three times under the weight of his cross](#), yet I'm confounded and disappointed when I fall. He gets up, and so must I. Again. And again.

Because what follows? At the end of the wooden ladder, beyond the foot of the wooden cross?

Resurrection.

“Take up your cross and follow Christ,

Nor think till death to lay it down;

For only they who bear the cross

May hope to wear the glorious crown.”

How do you feel about having to take up your cross daily?

Illusion or Reality? Pride or Humility? [at joy of nine9]

During Lent, God presents us with a fundamental choice. Will we choose to continue to live in our human illusions or will we allow God to reveal His reality to us? Will we cling to false pride or embrace true humility? All too often we think we are more humble than we really are, especially if we have been striving to grow spiritually for a long time.

The Pharisees were also earnest about their religious practices. As Christians, it is easy to denigrate the Jewish Pharisees, thinking we have risen above such behaviour because we live in New Testament times, no longer under the burden of the Old Testament Laws. However, before we judge these men too harshly, we should remember they were simply striving to be good, observant Jews. In their zeal, they inadvertently ended up seeking respect for themselves rather than inspiring love for God.

When Religious Duty Becomes a Burden Rather Than a Joy

The Gospel reading for February 23 is Matthew 23: 1-12. Jesus chides the scribes and Pharisees for their religious practices because their religious duty became a burden rather than a joy. It is also a mistake which most Catholics fall into when they first become serious about spirituality.

I know I did. Just like the Pharisees who slipped into the very human tendency to live an illusion, an illusion which stated they could be holy through their own efforts, Catholics can also fall into the mistake of living under the burden of expectations and rules, attempting to live up to them through their own strength of will. Unfortunately, it is difficult to catch ourselves falling into this ego trap because we are trying so hard to be humble, we are blinded to the fact that all our sacrificial actions and acts of service are in fact rooted in pride and illusion, not in reality.



Through My Own Efforts.

I had to struggle for years, reaching the end of my own strength before I realized I was trying to save

myself through my own efforts. Even though I thought of myself as a humble, faithful servant of God, in reality, I was living in the centre of my own little kingdom. How many of us really live every day plugged into God's Mystical Body, gazing at Christ, loving the One who is at the centre of the universe?



Even fewer Catholics can say with St. Paul, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20). Yet this is the normal Christian life, a joyful, Christian reality which is available to all, not just the saintly few.

Reality

When we see ourselves, in reality, the way God sees us, we finally understand how desperately we need the power of Christ's death and Ressurrection to save us from ourselves.



Christ was a servant for our sake. He humbled himself, even to death on a cross. Humility is self-knowledge, seeing ourselves in reality as God sees us. The humble do not trust in themselves, but trust in God and in the power of His love and saving grace. True humility is living in reality, in joy and simplicity.

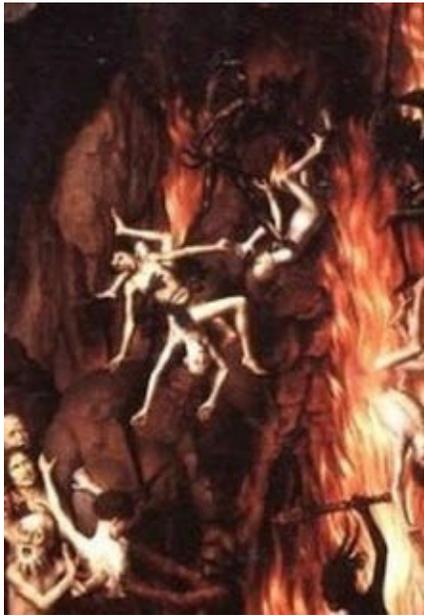
Jesus closes the passage in Matthew with strong words which reiterate the crux of His message to His disciples, “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”



This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanuneau.wordpress.com/2016/02/21/illusion-or-reality-pride-or-humility/>
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The Most Consequential, Church Approved Apparitions in the 20th Century Testify to the Reality of Hell [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



The two most consequential apparitions in the twentieth century were the appearance of our Lady to the children at Fatima and that of our Lord to Saint Faustina. In these visitations, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ urge humanity to reject sin and to pray unceasingly. Our Lady extolled

[the power of the daily Rosary](#)

for conversion and repentance. Our Lord taught Sister Faustina

[the Divine Mercy Chaplet](#)

to call upon God's mercy – especially for sinners and those near death.

God's message to us is unmistakable: Life is tenuous. The time for mercy and forgiveness is now. When Christ comes again, at the end of history, it will be as a just judge who separates the good from the wicked. The righteous will experience the Beatific Vision in Heaven. The lost will burn forever in the unquenchable fire that is Hell.

Since many today deny Hell's existence, it is worth remembering that during these apparitions, both Sister Lucy and St. Faustina witnessed Hell first hand and wrote about its horrors. At Fatima, Mary told Lucy, Jacinta and Francisco that many people go to Hell because they have no one to pray or make sacrifices on their behalf. She then showed the children a glimpse of Hell which Sr. Lucy describes in her book,

[Memoirs](#)

:

[Mary] opened Her hands once more, as She had done the two previous months. The rays [of light]

appeared to penetrate the earth, and we saw, as it were, a vast sea of fire. Plunged in this fire, we saw the demons and the souls [of the damned]. The latter were like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, having human forms. They were floating about in that conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames which issued from within themselves, together with great clouds of smoke. Now they fell back on every side like sparks in huge fires, without weight or equilibrium, amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fright (it must have been this sight which caused me to cry out, as people say they heard me). The demons were distinguished [from the souls of the damned] by their terrifying and repellent likeness to frightful and unknown animals, black and transparent like burning coals. That vision only lasted for a moment, thanks to our good Heavenly Mother, Who at the first apparition had promised to take us to Heaven. Without that, I think that we would have died of terror and fear.

Throughout her life, Sister Faustina Kowalska, a barely literate, Polish nun, received visions of Christ, during which our Lord instructed her. Faustina recorded these conversations in her diary, later published as:

[The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul](#)

. Here, St. Faustina recounts her experience of Hell and graphically details the various unending torments inflicted on the damned:

Today, I was led by an angel to the chasm of hell. It is a place of great torture; how awesomely large and extensive it is! The kinds of tortures that I saw; the first torture that constitutes hell is the loss of God; the second is perpetual remorse of conscience; the third is that one's condition will never change; the fourth is the fire that will penetrate the soul without destroying it — a terrible suffering, since it is a purely spiritual fire, lit by God's anger; the fifth torture is continual darkness, and a terrible, suffocating smell, and despite the darkness, the devil and the souls of the damned see each other and all the evil, both of others and of their own; the sixth torture is the constant company of Satan; the seventh torture is horrible despair, hatred of God, vile words, curses and blasphemies. These are the tortures suffered by all the damned together, but that is not the end of their sufferings.

There are special tortures destined for particular souls. These are the torments of the senses. Each soul undergoes terrible and indescribable sufferings, related to the manner in which it has sinned. There are caverns and pits of torture where one form of agony differs from another. I would have died at the very sight of these tortures if the omnipotence of God had not supported me. Let the sinner know that he will be tortured throughout all eternity, in those senses which he made use of to sin. I am writing this at the command of God, so that no soul may find an excuse by saying there is no hell, or that nobody has ever been there, and so no one can say what it is like.

[The Church affirms the existence of Hell, its eternity and nature](#)

[i.e., the chief pain of Hell is one's separation from God; there are also physical privations in addition to spiritual death]. It does not describe eternal damnation in detail. The visions of Sr. Lucy and St. Faustina are private revelations, not the infallible Word of God. Nonetheless, the accounts of these heroic women of faith cannot be dismissed. Those who ignore such testimony do so at their own peril. Ultimately, it is our decision to sin or to love that determines whether we spend eternity in Hell. God respects our free will, even if we chose perdition over Him.

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A reminder of NH's Safe Haven Law [at Leaven for the Loaf]



Phyllis Woods at State House event, Concord (Ellen Kolb photo)

The New Hampshire Knights of Columbus have launched a project to bring higher visibility to New Hampshire's [Safe Haven law](#), which permits the parent of a newborn child to surrender the child to anyone on duty at a "safe haven": a hospital, police or fire station, or a church. Most states have some variation of this statute, differing mainly in the age limit for the child and the places that serve as havens.

New Hampshire's law was passed in 2003. Ten co-sponsors led by then-Rep. Phyllis Woods of Dover shepherded the law through a 327-45 vote in the House followed by passage on a voice vote in the Senate.

As explained on the [Baby Safe Haven web site](#), an online clearinghouse for information about these laws,

The purpose of Safe Haven is to protect unwanted babies from being hurt or killed because they were abandoned. You may have heard tragic stories of babies left in dumpsters or public toilets. The parents who committed these acts may have been under severe emotional distress. The mothers may have hidden their pregnancies, fearful of what would happen if their families found out. Because they were afraid and had nowhere to turn for help, they abandoned their babies. Abandoning a baby puts the child in extreme danger. Too often, it results in the child's death. It is also illegal, with severe consequences. But with Safe Haven, this tragedy doesn't ever have to happen again.

Woods spoke about the law at the recent Knights of Columbus Birth-Right dinner in Allenstown, and later posted to Facebook: **"Thirteen years after we passed the Baby Safe Haven law in NH, the State Council of the K of C is taking up the mission of publicizing the law with a spokesperson, radio and TV appearances, and signs in Safe Haven locations. We are excited and deeply grateful for their efforts."**

News of the recent deaths of newborns in [Virginia](#) and [California](#) underscore the fact that even in states with Safe Haven laws, too many people are unaware of the safe-haven option. Thumbs up to the NH K of C for working to change that.

This contribution is available at <http://leavenforthe loaf.com/2016/02/15/a-reminder-of-nhs-safe-haven-law/>
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From Repentance to a Renewed Life [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

From Repentance to a Renewed Life



The Word is a Double Edged Sword

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12)

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,



Assessing Our Inner Self

Yes, God does make a distinction between “Soul” and “Spirit”, but it takes the inspired Word of God to help us discern between them.

The inspired Word of God is key to discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Without access to the inspired Word and prayer we cannot fully come to the sincere self-assessment appropriate to this season of Lent.

As we enter the season then, let us remember that the main objective of this liturgical season is to stir our minds and our hearts to look at ourselves in God's spiritual mirror and, upon seeing what God sees in us, to turn to Him in sincere and deep repentance, asking not only His forgiveness, but also for His transforming grace to conform us to the image of His Son.

This is, a transformation that activates the Spirit of Christ in us so that His will, His thoughts, and His desires become one with our own. This transformation does not happen automatically – one must yield and permit the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us!

We must also remember that the traditional group or personal devotions we observe during lent are only meant to act as spiritually inspired catalysts to enable us to go deeper into our very spirits and hear what His Word is telling us about where we need to change.

The Holy Spirit must also lead us to open ourselves for Him to work in us and through us, to effect the changes that will enable Him to fulfill His purpose in our lives – that is, to permit God to use the circumstances of our earthly lives to form us to His Image, thus fully becoming another of Jesus' spiritual brothers and sisters.

<> ***This Season we need to Re-affirm Our On-Going Transformation***

“For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son; that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren.” (Rom.8:29)

As always we should never enter this season with fear and trepidation regarding our sins and failures for the Lord has already reconciled us to Himself through the sacrifice of His Son on the Cross. All we need to do to continue our progress is to sincerely repent and reaffirm our commitment for Him to continue our transformation.

Because of God's Mercy at our sincere repentance, our sins and failures can no longer impede us. As St. Paul indicates to us, ***“Therefore there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”*** (Rom. 8:1).

And again, we find words of encouragement in the Letter to the Hebrews:
“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

<> ***Confession and Sincere Repentance Is Gateway to Reconciliation***

In order to ensure our access to the reconciliation procured for us in Christ Jesus we must come before the Father in Faith and sincere repentance.

Listen to what scripture tells us about our ability to enter into fellowship with Him if our sin get in the way: ***“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”***—Psalm 66:18

So it is that without confession and repentance our sins impede God's ability to hear our prayers and thus

hinders us from cooperation with His Grace for His purposes.

“If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 Jn 1: 6-10)

Thus Scripture makes it clear that Repentance is key to the Good News of His Reconciliation that is freely offered through His Son’s sacrifice on the Cross and His Resurrection. As Jesus told His Apostles ...

“...Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24: 46-47)

Since our sins have already been forgiven by Him in eternity, All that the Father wants us to do receive His Reconciliation is to reach out to Him in sincere repentance, as an act of faith – to freely draw in His eternal forgiveness for the salvation of our souls to meet our present day need for justification through the Blood of Jesus.

<> *Our Practice of Repentance Needs to be Continuous*

Saint Paul, in order to help us cooperate with the Father’s Grace in conforming us to the image of His Son, explains our need to continuously receive the Father’s Reconciliation ...

“...namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2Cor. 5: 19-21)

And, at the same time he (Paul) exhorts them (and us), that because of the above we are to consider every day of continuous repentance as a day of “Salvation”...

“Working together [with the Spirit], we entreat also that you not receive the grace of God in vain, For he says, “At an acceptable time I listened to you, in a day of salvation I helped you.” Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. ” (2 Cor. 6:1-2)

Our main challenge, then, to freely and continuously to receive this Grace of Reconciliation, is to remain in Christ, as branches on the Vine, so as to maintain our attachment to the Vine, through Faith, otherwise, unless we repent, we may fall from Grace and be cut off and cast into the fire (cf., Jn. 15:5ff).

Now, even though the Father has eternally reconciled us to Himself, we can only cooperate and receive that reconciliation in our present “today” through the continuous practice of sincere repentance. This is so because we can only “sincerely” repent of our past and present sins and, thus, we must also continue in our practice of repentance to receive our share in the “eternal” reconciliation until we come into the heavenly realm where day-to-day “time” no longer reigns.

<> ***Our Continuous Repentance Reaffirms Our Continuing Transformation***

The Father cannot begin His process of conforming us to His Son as His adopted Children until we have first been reconciled to Him, and since it is beyond our ability to do so, He, through the death of His Son, has paid the price for all the sins of humanity, to reconcile us to Himself for all eternity. So, since in order to remain in the sanctifying Grace of Reconciliation, we must likewise practice continuous repentance in order for the Holy Spirit to continue His work of Conforming us to the Image of Christ, whose Spirit Lives in us.

If we break this process through our sinfulness, The Father has graciously provided provided us the necessary Graces through the sacraments of Confirmation, Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. These sacraments restore us to the necessary state of Reconciliation and provide us the spiritual strength to overcome the World and the evil spirits that control the world system that surrounds us.

<> ***Understanding Sincere Faith-Inspired Repentance***

From the above reasoning we understand why “repentance” is most certainly one of the Keys for entrance into the Kingdom.

The only condition placed on our repentance is that it must be a sincere act of faith on our part. That is, it must be a result of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts through His Word to give us the awareness that we done something that is against God’s will for us and, at the same time, an awareness that by turning to The Father for mercy we immediately receive access to the “eternal forgiveness” which has already been obtained for us through Jesus’ death on the Cross.

“Repentance in faith”, then, is the manner which the Lord has ordained through which we humans are to access the eternal blessings of His eternal forgiveness for all humanity. This, without doubt qualifies, the grace of repentance, as a primary Key to the Kingdom.

Just remember that we can only sincerely repent of our past and present sins – we cannot sincerely repent of the sins we commit in our futures. Thus the Lord has ordained that through such a faith-inspired repentance we can continue to draw on His forgiveness as we live out the span of our lives.

Also, Remember that “True Repentance” includes a sincere commitment to turn to God and His grace to keep you from committing, not only the sin(s) you are confessing, but also all thoughts, words, and actions that are counter to God’s will for you. Without such a commitment your “repentance” cannot be considered “sincere”.

<> ***Carrying Out Our Commitment***

Since we as fallible human beings are not capable of living a transformed life out of our own effort, the way the scripture indicates for us to truly live a life surrendered to Christ is to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to Him so that the the Spirit of Christ that is in us may live out His Life through us, in our submitted body and soul.

St. Paul expresses this commitment to a New Transformed Life in Christ as follows:

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

what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2))

He also tells us the effects such a commitment had on him and, through inference, the effect it will have on those of us, who commit ourselves to live a New Life In Christ.



It is finished!

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
(Gal. 2:20)

<> *Living out Our Renewed Life In Christ*

In conclusion. I add the exhortation Paul gave the Colossians about how to begin to live out this Renewed Life in our Communities:

“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 Bless You and Keep You and may the Holy Spirit inspire you, to not only make this commitment (see below), but also provide you the faith, strength and graces you need to carry out the Father’s purposes for you in your Renewed Life in Christ Jesus.
Praised Be His Holy Name! Amen and Amen!

Your Fellow Pilgrim In Christ Jesus ... Bartimaeus.

(© B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus’ Quiet Place, [2008-2016])

PS: The following are some additional items that may help you in making your decision:

<> ***A Quote from St. Ignatius:***

“There are very few people who realize what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves into his hands, and let themselves be formed by his grace.”

<> ***A prayer of personal commitment:***

“Lord Jesus, I am deeply aware that my sins have separated me from you and from the eternal life which you have promised to those who believe. I also acknowledge that these sins impede me from fulfilling the Father’s purposes for me. I, therefore, repent of my sins and turn to you in faith for the salvation and forgiveness you won for me on the cross through the shedding of your blood even when I was yet a sinner and without merit before God.

In addition, I abandon my life to you totally, body, soul, and spirit as a Living Sacrifice So that Your Spirit in me may be the driving force to let your Love work through me. Come into my heart, be the Lord of my Life, as well as my Savior and my King. Live in me and through me so that I can truly represent you in my service to others in your Name.” Amen.

This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/02/23/\\$-from-repentance-to-a-renewed-life/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/02/23/$-from-repentance-to-a-renewed-life/)

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Strengthen Your Lenten Journey Through Fasting [at Plot Line and Sinker]

When you hear the word “fasting,” do you automatically cringe? Do you dread Ash Wednesday or Good Friday? Or do you embrace the self-denial of fasting on those days? If you’re like most people, you might not look forward to Ash Wednesday or Good Friday, the Church’s compulsory days of fasting. However, when you become accustomed to the regular practice of fasting throughout the year, these “compulsory” days are opportunities for abundant graces and spiritual growth.

Many people mistakenly believe that fasting belongs only in the Penitential Season of Lent. However, the regular self-denial of fasting is a positive and generous act that we can do all year round. After all, Jesus fasted — and He fasted before every major event in His life — and His apostles fasted. In Scripture, fasting is mentioned numerous times in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” Matthew 6:16-18

“But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it (demon) out?’ He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting.’” Mark 9:27-29

Peter said to Jesus, “You have the words of eternal life.” John 6:68

Eternal life...isn’t that our goal? How do we get there? A virtuous life, one that is sacrificial, one that is obedient to God’s laws, this is the way to eternal life. Lent is an ideal time to embrace the practice of fasting. And not just on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday! Fasting can happen on every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year. The regular self-denial of fasting is definitely one of the ways to get to heaven and eternal life. Why?

Fasting opens our hearts to conversion, gives weight to our prayer intentions. Fasting strengthens us in resisting temptations, promotes peace in our hearts and peace with one another. Fasting teaches us the difference between wanting and needing. Fasting reminds us of the plight of the poor and those who are perpetually hungry. Fasting and prayer can free us from addictive behavior. Fasting invites the Holy Spirit in to heal our hearts, our relationship with God and our relationship with others. Fr. Slavko Barbaric said, “Fasting will lead us to a new freedom of heart and mind.”

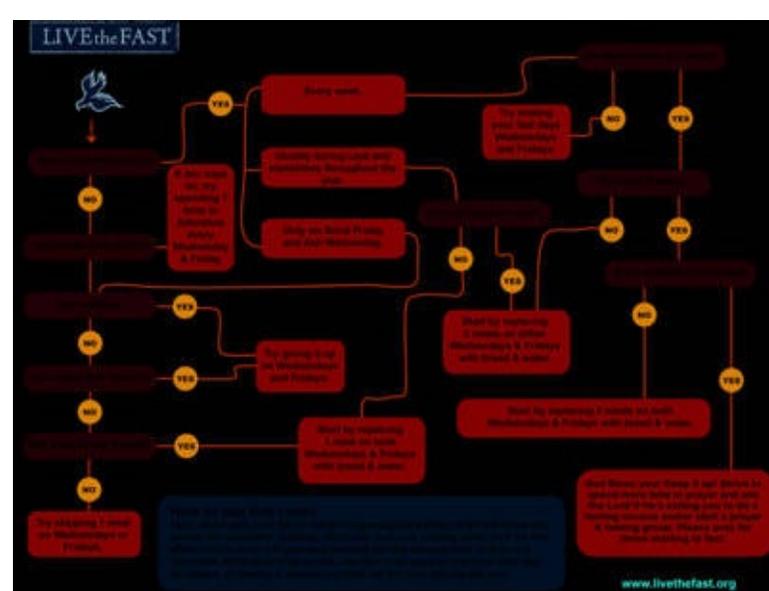
St. Jean Vianney once said, “The devil is not greatly afraid of the discipline and other instruments of penance. That which beats him is the curtailment of one’s food, drink and sleep. There is nothing the devil fears more, consequently, nothing is more pleasing to God.”

There are so many great reasons to fast and Lent is an ideal time to begin this regular practice of self-denial. For the elderly and those who cannot fast from food, they can fast from TV, social networking, treats or coffee on Wednesday and Friday.

Lent is a time for change and sacrifice. If you can do penitential acts during Lent, you can do them all year round! To get started with fasting, please check out the graphic below. And always check with your physician before beginning any fasting routine.

For testimonies, prayers and more information about fasting, check out the Live the Fast website at www.livethefast.org or contact us at info@livethefast.org if you have any questions.

[Live the Fast](http://www.livethefast.org) is a Roman Catholic Apostolate that is focused on bringing more awareness to the discipline of fasting by offering educational resources on prayer and fasting, a prayer community that will inspire one to live the fast and providing nutritious fasting breads. (Priests and religious receive fasting breads and resources free of charge.)



Fasting graphic by Darcie Nielsen

This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2016/02/10/ash-wednesday-strengthen-your-lenten-journey-through-fasting/>
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Nancy Ward is interviewed by Dave Palmer, KATH 910 AM, at Sacred Heart Books, Dallas, 1-25-16 (photo by Phil Ward)

In [Five Ways to Share Your Faith](#), I encouraged you to always be ready to evangelize through your personal witness.

Remember that every baptized Christian is commissioned to be an evangelist. The most effective way we can evangelize is by sharing our unique story — the faith story only we can tell.

What about the mechanics of knowing and sharing our story? My recent interview at Sacred Heart Books and Gifts in Dallas covered this. I spoke on our local Catholic radio station, KATH 910 AM. Here are five questions about getting started:

1. What different kinds of faith stories are there?

Faith stories are circumstances or trials unexpectedly or slowly resolved with supernatural solutions that boost your faith. They include stories about:

- Miracles that God worked in our lives,
- Conversion from atheism or a non-Catholic denomination.
- Reversions or returning to the Catholic Church.
- Physical or emotional healings from supernatural means.
- Answered prayers that seemed impossible or came about in a supernatural way.

2. How do I structure my story?

The basic three parts to any faith story center around that God-moment when you knew God loved you personally. Ask yourself:

- Who were you were before this experience happened?
- What happened in that God-moment to change you so that you knew God loved you?
- Who are you now and how has your life changed?

If you are a cradle Catholic, you may think you don't have a conversion story. Think of the moment you made an adult commitment to the Lord. That is your conversion story.

3. What different ways I can share my story?

- In person – One-on-one occasions are our most frequent opportunities for evangelizing,
- Two-minute elevator speech – A quick summary to see if the listeners want to hear more.
- Social media – Challenge yourself to write the essence of your faith story in a few Twitter characters or a few sentences on Facebook, Google+ or a chat entry.
- Videos – Show your sincerity on the Tube.
- Blogs – If you don't have a blog, send your story to editor@JOYAlive.net
- Magazines – Attend a local or on-line writers group and get feedback on your story and market suggestions.

4. How do you know when to share your story in person?

Often you will find yourself with one person or a small group, handpicked by the Holy Spirit. No coincidence there! An opening comes in the conversation just when the Holy Spirit urges you to tell a significant incident in your faith story. A miracle. A healing. An answered prayer. You're on! Go for it!

5. What about self-consciousness?

Sharing your conversion or renewal story encourages others tremendously — and encourages you as you express what God is doing with your life. Scary — but you are doing what God wants you to do—proclaiming the greatness of the Lord. And proclaiming it as only you can!

Don't worry about your *ability* to share your story. God cares more about your *availability* than your ability. He's already there waiting for you. Expect his presence to carry you through what you say and carry it beyond what you can ever imagine. His grace makes your story a little step or giant step in the spiritual life of someone else because you were available and let God use you.

Take courage! God is with you. He tells you in 2 Timothy 1:7,8:

“God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord.”

However you share your faith story, just know that the Holy Spirit is guiding you and God is with you.

Three specific ways I can help you always be ready to evangelize in by sharing your unique faith story:

1. I can help you shape your personal witness, and post it on JoyAlive.net or suggest other markets.
2. You can use the [Sharing Your Faith Story DVD](#) for guidelines and examples of preparing and sharing faith stories many ways. I tell my conversion story, my renewal story and give ten tips for sharing your story. You can complete the free study guide on your own or with a prayer partner.
3. I can come to your parish or Catholic group to give a seminar or workshop on ***How to Share Your Faith Story in the Year of Mercy.***

However you share your faith story in the Year of Mercy, just know that the Holy Spirit is guiding you and God is with you.

Take courage! God is with you. He tells you in 2 Timothy 1:7,8:

God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be

ashamed of your testimony to our Lord.

Where can you go to pray, write, and ponder your faith story?

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This contribution is available at <http://joyalive.net/answered-five-questions-on-how-to-share-your-faith/>
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Recalling Life Changing Moments [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

Here is what I am sharing this week:

Recalling Life Changing Moments

(Originally posted August 18, 2014)



[There are times when we should just stop, sit and silently recall some of the life-changing moments we have experienced in our lives but may have buried in the stone piles of our mind. My writing group recently suggested that we resurrect and record some of those memories. It was a good exercise and one I hope you will be encouraged to follow after reading the three little vignettes I shared.]

I wasn't nervous - really. "Should I be?" I asked my best man.

“Good grief, man,” responded my not too clear headed buddy. “She’s a half hour late and lives just one block away from the Church! That’s a sign man – a bad sign. If I were you, I would leave this place pronto.”

There was no chance to even consider responding. The Church’s interior rattled with the reverberating sounds flowing from the organ pipes. I glanced down the aisle. There she was - my bride, my soon to be wife. Gorgeous! Smiling! Radiant! Not a care in the world! - unconcerned about her tardy arrival.

I did not care. She was worth waiting for!

Multiple thoughts rushed through my mind. What awaited us? How would we change? Would our love last? Would we survive the stresses and strains that too often tear marriages apart - financial pressures, demands of work, illness, parenthood?

“Yes, certainly we would,” I assured myself. “We love each other. Nothing would separate us.”

I was ready to say “I do!” and to share the rest of my life with this lovely woman.

And even during the most difficult challenges we would later face, I would never look back. My wife has loved me more than I could have imagined or deserved.

Something did not seem right. But I did not know what it was.

“I’ll be back next week to help you move,” I said.

Mom turned her head to avoid looking directly at me, and whispered “I love you, son.”

I did not think much of this at the time. I thought she was anxious about leaving her long-time residence

and relocating with Dad to a strange apartment in an unfamiliar place near my upstate home.

I kissed her forehead, hugged my Dad, told them I loved them and left.

My parents looked so apprehensive, so tired. I knew my wife, children and I could lessen their burdens and help them regain some normalcy as they struggled to cope with their illnesses and the aging process.

But Mom knew something I didn't.

Less than twenty four hours later, while my wife was in an operating room some 250 miles from my parents' home, my sister called to tell me my mother was dying.

When I kissed her goodbye the day before, Mom knew that we would never see each other again this side of heaven.

Had she looked me in the eyes, I would have known too.

Barely a year and one month later, we buried Dad.

Now both of my parents were gone.

Despite my wife's loving attempts to comfort and console me, the anguish and void in my heart and my soul were crippling. I missed Mom and Dad immensely. There were so many things I wish I had had a chance to do for them. It was too late.

Early one morning while on retreat trying to make sense of my life, as well as the loss of my parents, I

sought shelter in the silence of the facility's chapel. No one else was there save for the Divine Resident locked behind the tabernacle doors.

I slowly approached the altar rail and knelt down. For the very first time in my life, I spoke to my Heavenly Father as if He were at my side and in a way I had longed to speak to my earthly Dad. I minced no words. I spared no tears.

Up to this point in my faith life, I believed intellectually that God was here with me. But I had not experienced that Truth in my heart. As I continued to bare my soul, I felt an unseen "presence" wrapping Himself around me, followed by a tingling sensation that started at the top of my head, radiated down through my entire body and into my feet. I can only describe this satiating feeling as an overwhelming sense of being loved and at total peace.

I no longer doubted that God is real, that He desires a personal relationship with me, and that I had to align my will with His.

As far as I was concerned then, there was no better place to be. I had no desire to ever get off my knees or leave this sacred space.

A sudden tap to my left shoulder abruptly ended this most intimate and undeserved experience.

I turned around. The gentleman who had touched me bore such a startling physical resemblance to my father, that I gasped for air.

"Hi, I'm George McGivney," he said. "I wanted to tell you how much God loves you."

Have any memories that you would like to share?

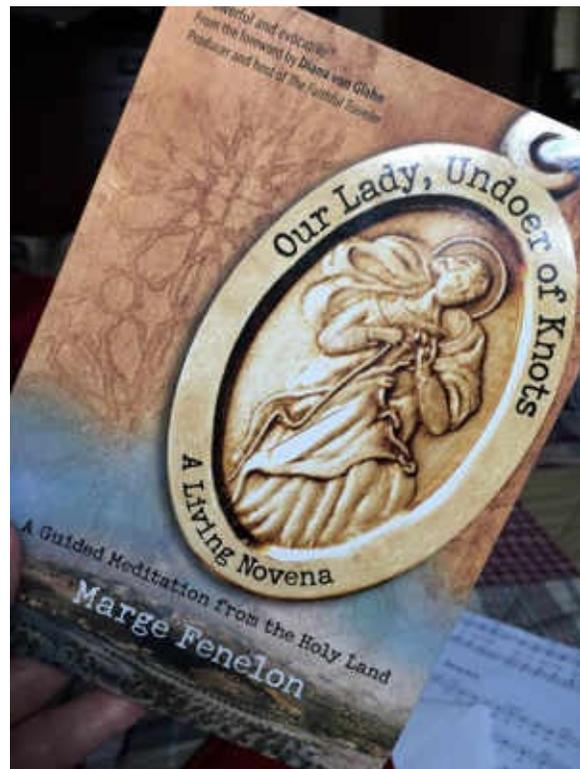
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Fenelon's 'Our Lady, Undoer of Knots' overdue review [at Peace Garden Passage]

I'd received my copy just days before leaving on a plane bound for Philadelphia this past September. I knew I might bump into its author, fellow Catholic writer/author Marge Fenelon, at the World Meeting of Families, so I slipped the book into my bulging bag, hoping to garner a "fresh from the press" author signature.



The size of the book, "Our Lady, Undoer of Knots: A Living Novena," gave me confidence I could have it read by the journey's end. And how perfect would it be, since I was on my way to see, along with thousands of others, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who is a devotee of the book's topic. Everything had merged in a beautiful way.

And though breathless and sweaty by the time I found Marge in the large Philadelphia Convention Center, I was blessed to see her. She was smaller than I'd anticipated – we'd never met in person before – but a real delight. Our brief crossing was a special part of the day for me.



That said, the best-laid plans... Indeed, caught up in the din of the day, I forgot to pull out my copy of her book from my backpack during our brief meeting, and I didn't realize my blunder until it was too late. To add to the plans-gone-afoul scenario, I didn't have a chance to so much as crack the cover during that whirlwind trip. It stayed at the bottom of my suitcase as the literature and badges and trinkets accumulated through the days.

And so it is that my intended review comes much later than I had hoped. Even after I had a moment to open the book and begin taking it in, I discovered it was one that begged to be absorbed slowly. And so it became a treasure during my Wednesday night sessions at Adoration. A chapter a week approach, with a few weeks missed, was how I journeyed with this magnificent little book.

By the time I'd reached the end, the journey had become so much more meaningful than it could have been had I rushed through it at the airport last fall. For one, the book features Marge's reflections from a trip she took alongside Pope Francis to the Holy Land, so like Marge, I'd had a chance to encounter our pontiff.



Adding to that, I worked on [this article](#) for The Forum newspaper, for which I write as a weekly faith columnist and features writer. Interviewing this local couple who had gone to the Holy Land only made my appreciation for Marge's travels all the more interesting.

I'd also come to realize just how dear this devotion is to Pope Francis, as evidenced through his movements in Philadelphia. My friend Pat took this photo of the knots that people left at the Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul in Downtown Philly.



This was symbolic, a way of tying the pilgrims who'd journeyed to Philadelphia with the Holy Father. The day after this photo was taken, he touched these ribbons and blessed them with his prayers.

So when I finally got to the book, it came alive to me. Marge's guided meditation was so real, I felt like I was right next to her as she explored the very relevant and deep topics of the different knots of life with which we all find ourselves entangled at one point or another: injustice, separation, confusion, hopelessness, grief/loss, discord, betrayal, envy/pride, and affliction.

I was first introduced to Our Lady Undoer of Knots by my friend Patti McGuire Armstrong, during a time my life seemed very much in tangles. Through this image, I was introduced to a mother who understands the brokenness and messiness of everyday family life, and how mired we can become.

Through Our Lady Undoer of Knots, we can begin untying, with the Lord's help and Mary's intercession, the knots that complicate our lives to the point of seeming insurmountable. Alone, we are helpless. With our Lord and his mother, we have what we need to make progress.

Marge brings the reader with her as she observes the trek of Pope Francis in the Holy Land, and offers us insight from the heart of an ordinary soul. Through her, the spans of time and space shrink, and we are able to glimpse what God wants for us — healing and wholeness.

Chapter by chapter, knot by knot, we come away more equipped to begin unraveling the knots that have bound us for so long. And through Marge's little but profoundly insightful book, we can start the journey with a gentle companion. What a gift.

Q4U: What are the knots that keep you bound? What have you done to begin untying them?

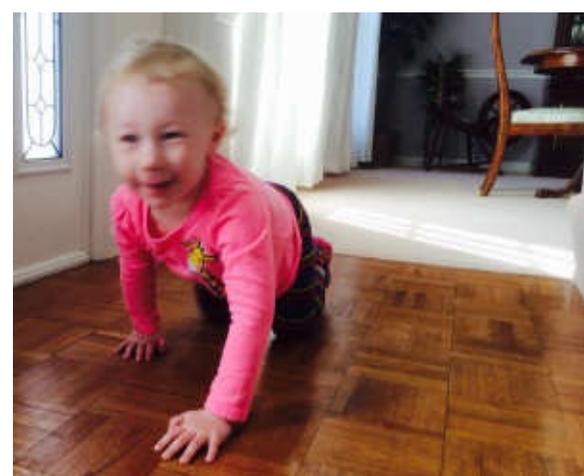
This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2016/02/roxis-reviews-fenelons-our-lady-of-undoer-of-knots-review-overdue/>
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Leap Day [at With Us Still]

A precocious walker, our granddaughter Hannah has been toddling (and dashing) about upright for well over a year now...so it caught me by surprise when she resorted to crawling for a brief spell this morning.

Ironic: On Leap Day, She-Of-Boundless-Energy reverts to hands-and-knees.



A blur of energy...even on her hands-and-knees...

Not that I'd expect Hannah to know how to act on such an occasion: It is, after all, the very first February 29th she's ever experienced in her short life. There's absolutely [nothing about this odd date](#) that she'd be able to consider "routine."

I wonder if the Church's liturgists had a similar outcome in mind when they selected the scripture passages to be [proclaimed at Mass today](#). The response to the Psalm, in particular, caught my attention – much like seeing Hannah crawl about on hands-and-knees.

Not once, but FIVE times I heard myself repeating this verse aloud, along with my fellow worshippers:

Athirst is my soul for the living God; when shall I go and behold the face of God?

While on one level, it certainly expresses the deep truth of my heart – I would very much like to see God face-to-face – it occurs to me that I'd just as soon NOT have the prayer answered on Leap Day 2016. Personally, I'm very much in favor of making it to March 1st...and beyond. In fact, I wouldn't mind adding a few MORE Leap Days to my life's run...before I behold the face of God.

As I wrestled a bit with that contradiction embedded in my spirit, I realized that it's a good thing, indeed, to have a Leap Day every once in a while...

...An "extra" day to remind me that EVERY day is a gift – even the ones I consider "ordinary."

...Especially the ones I consider ordinary.

In the meantime, it would probably be fruitful for me to make like Hannah – and get on my knees for a spell. To spend part of my Leap Day...praying in gratitude for every good gift, every ordinary day...and every extraordinary one...that God pours out into my life.

Praying for God's mercy, too: So that my conversion of heart continues during this holy season...and I become less attached to "my" time, "my" schedule, "my" priorities.

Make my heart truly thirsty for You, O Lord!



The blessings of Leap Day: Something to ponder...

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

IHS

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Forgiveness, the Greatest Gift



“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.” — Matthew 6:14-15

In just a few days [we celebrate](#) Christmas, and as we do we begin to experience the anticipation of the holiday. We look forward to being united with family and friends. We hustle to purchase and wrap the final presents. We prepare for the great meal we will share. We can't wait to continue the family traditions that have become an integral part of the season.

We recheck our shopping list and stress out over the possibility that we might have forgotten someone, someone that we love.

Could we be forgetting someone that we once loved, someone that hurt us, someone that we may have hurt? Is there someone that you haven't forgiven or asked to forgive you?

Yes, we try to put the incident or situation out of our mind, but somehow, at Christmas, it all comes back to us. And, it limits the joy and happiness that Jesus' birth should bring us. We are locked in a prison of unforgiveness.

In a spiritual sense, the greatest gift we have ever received from God, our Heavenly Father, is His Son, Jesus Christ. He became man, destined to suffer, die on the cross, and rise again for the forgiveness of our sins. Through Jesus, we are forgiven!

“In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another.” —John 1 4:9-10

That forgiveness comes with a price, we must forgive too! As Jesus' death on the cross unlocks the chains of our sinfulness, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to forgive those who have hurt us.

So, who is it? Who is the one person in most need of your forgiveness? Whether you visit them, call them, e-mail them, or send a text message, forgive them! Isn't it time to put the past behind you? Isn't it time to look ahead, with our eye on the prize of heaven and everlasting life. Isn't it time for forgiveness?

“Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 3:13-14

Unlock the prison of unforgiveness that burdens your heart this time of year. Then, the celebration of Christ's birth will bring you joy and happiness greater than you ever imaged. It might just [be the one](#) gift you'll remember for a lifetime.

Merry Christmas!

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!

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During the Lenten Season Forgiveness Rules. Look at "Dutch" Schultz. [at It Makes Sense to Me]

IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

We are now into the third week of Lent and the road to redemption has been halfway traveled. Throughout the world Catechumens have almost reached their goal of full inclusion into the Catholic Church which takes place during the Easter Vigil. It is a beautiful thing. In addition, this past December 8, Pope Francis started us on our journey into the Holy Year of Mercy. Forgiveness is everywhere.



To give an example of how God's mercy is ALWAYS available to those who seek it I would like to briefly mention a man by the name of Arthur Flegenheimer. Arthur was born in New York City in 1901. A German-Jew, by the time he was 27 he was known as

[Dutch Schultz](#)

and was quickly becoming one of the most feared mob bosses in New York. The "Dutchman" was a bootlegger (running illegal whiskey), a number's boss operating in Harlem and a "shakedown artist" within the NYC restaurant industry offering protection while using the restaurant unions as cover.

His main enforcer was the infamous, Vincent "Mad Dog" Coll, a brutal killer who did Schultz's bidding without hesitation. Eventually the "Dutchman" got tired of Coll's wanting more money. As "Mad Dog" sat in a telephone booth talking on the phone he was machine-gunned to death by Schultz's henchmen. Dutch actually proved to be a more brutal killer than "Mad Dog" Coll. So how does my brain combine Dutch Schultz, The Holy Year of Mercy and Forgiveness together? Actually, it is not that hard to do, is it? This is the phenomenal redemption available to all through the Church and her Sacraments.



Dutch Schultz wanted to kill U. S. Attorney Thomas E. Dewey (Later to be Governor of NY and the Presidential Candidate losing to Harry Truman in the 1948 election). The Mafia Commission told Schultz, "NO, it would cause us too much trouble." Schultz refused to listen and decided to kill Dewey anyway. The mob, under Lucky Luciano, sent "Murder Inc." after Schultz. On October 23, 1935, they gunned him down in a restaurant in Newark, N.J. Enter the sacrament of Penance and Forgiveness. Enter Mercy.

When Dutch Schultz was acquitted on tax-evasion charges he converted to Catholicism. He believed that Jesus had saved him. When he was shot he did not die right away. He was taken to the hospital for surgery and he immediately asked for a priest. He was 34 years old and his last thought while he was dying was to ask Jesus for forgiveness and mercy. The "Dutchman" went to confession, received absolution and was administered the Last Rites of the Church by a priest. Then he died. Did Dutch Schultz go right to heaven? Did he get to the "pearly gates" and have St. Peter say, "Sorry Dutch, that priest made a mistake. What you did was unforgivable. You are not welcome here." I think not.

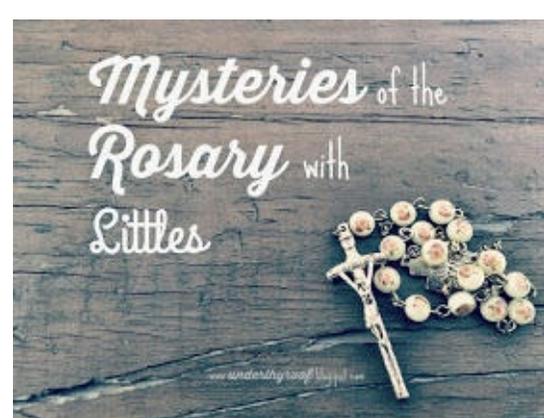
In a few weeks it will be Good Friday. Catholic/Christian people all over the world will mourn and honor the bloodied, tortured and crucified Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus, the God-man who embraced forgiveness for all people and extended love to everyone. This is also what He wanted us to do. This is why he suffered and died for us. He offered Himself to His Father for us. Then we celebrate His Father's gift back to us, the Risen Christ. We all have been saved and we all can get to share eternal life with the Blessed Trinity. All we need to do is seek forgiveness. Because of God's Mercy even Dutch Schultz can join in the celebration. It is a beauty beyond description.

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Mysteries of Rosary with Littles - Joyful Mysteries [at Under Thy Roof]



I've been trying to pray the rosary with the kids more often this Lent. They are currently 3.5 years and 18 months old so attention spans are short. In order to get through an entire rosary I have taken to making the rosary mystery announcement into an exciting little story.

All of them start like this.

Me: Who knows what the ___th _____ mystery is?

John: ME!

Me: What is it?

John: I don't know....

Repeat for all mysteries. Eventually, he'll say something besides I don't know. (Maybe? Hopefully?)

From there I tell a little story about the mystery. Because this is mostly to draw their attention back to the rosary, these stories have become kind of hilarious due to John's responses. I wanted to write them down before the kids get too big to do this anymore.

Joyful Mysteries

1st Joyful Mystery - The Annunciation

Me: This is when the angel Gabriel came to tell Mary she was going to have a baby!

John: Where?!

Me: A long time ago.

John: Is the baby going to want to play with my toys?

Me: John, the baby was Jesus.

John: Oh....so he only play with church toys then?

2nd Joyful Mystery - The Visitation

Me: This is when Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth to help her have her baby John the Baptist!

John: ME?!

Me: No, different John.

3rd Joyful Mystery - The Nativity

Me: The Nativity is when baby Jesus was finally born - Christmas!

John: Momma, it's not Christmas time. It's not Advent time. It is Lent. Time.

Me: I know John, but Jesus was still born on Christmas.

John: Oh, maybe he get presents later then.

4th Joyful Mystery - The Presentation

Me: This is when Jesus' mommy and daddy brought him to the temple. It was a very special day, like how your mommy and daddy brought you to the church to be baptized.

John: He got water poured on his head?

Me: No, that came later.

John: Oh good. Jesus not very dirty. He don't need no water.

5th Joyful Mystery - The Finding in the Temple

Me: One time, Jesus went missing for three days! He did not tell his parents were he was going.

John: What?!

Me: Yup. His mommy and daddy were very worried. They looked everywhere for him. Eventually they found him in the temple teaching the teachers.

John: He got in trouble?

Me: He got in a little trouble. But then he decided to be very good and listen to his mommy and daddy. He always listened to them after that.

John: Jesus was a good boy?

Me: I think so.

Let's hope John doesn't get any sneaky ideas from that last one. I'm hoping we cling onto the "listen to mommy and daddy" part.

Stay turned for the Sorrowful Mysteries!

This contribution is available at <http://underthyroof.blogspot.com/2016/03/mysteries-of-rosary-with-littles-joyful.html>
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NPR, Lent and Kidneys [at Onward and Upward]

From Luke 3:11 - "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none . . ."

. . . and be thankful all you are being asked to give up is a coat.

There's nothing like a National Public Radio pledge drive during Lent. This is the season when you want to just wallow in misery and BAM!, NPR is there to help. They are like, "Well, we were going to give you the news right now but . . . NAH." Or "Calm soothing music anyone? I DON'T THINK SO!" It is an equally miserable time for those who have given and for those who have not. From Matthew 5:45 - [your heavenly Father] "sends rain on the just and on the unjust." Et tu, NPR?

So the guys at Freakonomics, on NYC public radio, decided to approach pledge drive season a little differently. They asked their listeners to tell them how their lives were different because of their show.

[You can listen to the podcast here.](#)

There are lots of little ways mentioned but the most interesting is that a listener actually donated his kidney to a stranger because of a previous episode on the subject. (I certainly hope he got a coffee mug or fashionable tote bag as a thank you gift.)

But all this whining aside, the spiritual possibilities here are fascinating. People are normally born with two kidneys and, if all goes well, only end up needing one. The podcast listener who donated the kidney talked about his "wholly redundant" organ. What if what we really have is a "holy redundant" organ. An organ filled with spiritual possibilities!

I actually have a friend, who lives far away from me, who is really suffering for need of a kidney. His wife was all set to donate hers to him but she turned out to not be a match.

On Freakonomics they have been talking about starting a kidney donation chain. The donator on the podcast, after lots of screening and preparation, donated his kidney to a stranger that he was a match for. The recipient's father, who was not a kidney match for his daughter, then donated a kidney for someone he was a match for, and so on. On the podcast they say you can get up to 43 pass-it-ons from a person's kidney gift in a best case scenario. (I don't understand that number yet, I need to study more.) The donator didn't get 43 kidneys passed on for his one donation but he did get 3. So his one act of charity cured three strangers from a miserable health condition.

I think this is fascinating.

You should know about me that I am neither a blood donator nor an organ donor. Some friends were teasing me about the latter. However, if you give a kidney while you are alive you can make a leisurely decision about if and when. With organ donation, some stranger makes those decision for you, possibly in the middle of a crisis.

Consider the saints. Many chose ascetic lifestyles that involved self-inflicted pain. Why would they do this? Why do we fast? Some of the same reasons. First, there is just the matter of proving to yourself and

to your passions who is in control. And there is an element of practice in there. You can practice telling your body "no" on little things to help prepare you to tell your body "no" on big things, should the need arise.

There is the unity with Christ that comes from sharing in his sufferings. Honestly, unity with Christ as experienced by many or all of these ascetic saints sounds like it is a rich return for one's sufferings.

And then suffering, when offered to Christ is just sheer power. Power to make the sufferer holy. Power to make prayers for friends and loved ones more powerful. Power to, in some degree, help save the world. What's not to like!? HA.

If you are seeking suffering, here is a perfect way to do it. Besides all the intangible spiritual benefits, you know that you have directly, physically touched, maybe SAVED, some people's lives in this world.

Kidney donation is a pretty recent development. Would any of the last few thousand years of saints have donated kidneys if they had had the option? In 500 years will the stories of saints from this age include this ascetic act of charity?

Being the huge chicken that I am about needles, I wonder if I would be capable of doing this. Could I do it as a gift of love? What would it feel like to offer such a gift for a specific person as a deliberate act of love in action? If I faced the scalpel focused on my love for that person or another person, would that make the needles more bearable?

And then there are all the people who "face the scalpel" as I put it, and worse, every day involuntarily for a zillion reasons. And I am not getting any younger - my time will come for medical misery soon enough.

I ask myself, "What's the THEREFORE?" Hey, it's Lent! Maybe I should at least donate some blood. There's nothing on the radio this week anyway.

This contribution is available at <http://onwardandupwardcatholic.blogspot.com/2016/02/npr-lent-and-kidneys.html>
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Love in Hell [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



All that are in Hell, choose it.

~ [C.S. Lewis](#)

Getting ready for work one day last week, I was bantering with Katharine, my 9-year-old, who snuggled under the covers and tried to focus on her book. She had a snow day; I didn't. My tongue-in-cheek resentment gave rise to a steady stream of playful paternal pestering.

At one point, it became clear that she wasn't listening at all. "Go ahead and ignore me – I'll still love you," I pouted. "I'll still love you till the day I die."

Without looking up from her book, Kath idly responded, "Even if you die, you better keep loving me in heaven." Then, as a hedge, she added, "Or in hell."

In that brief statement, Katharine skirted the edges of some weighty theology – the Four Last Things, for instance. Note the prominence of the word "or" with reference to my ultimate destination. Kath takes it for granted that there's a final stop for us all after death – that everybody, including her dad, will wind up spending eternity in paradise or the pits. "Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death," is how the [Catechism](#) puts it, "either entrance into the blessedness of heaven...or immediate and everlasting damnation."

Note, too, the assumption that her own pop could very well be damned – a loaded comment perhaps? Was my daughter implying that her dad was falling short in the sanctifying grace department? I imagine not, for she never looked up from her book, and when I jested back that I hoped to love her from heaven, she took it in stride.

Even so, it was a comment that reflects reality, for nobody should take the state of one's soul for granted. Yes, we can be confident in the salvation that Christ won for us through his life, death, and Resurrection, and, yes, we can be sure of the Church's ministration of that salvation to us through the Sacraments and her very existence – "the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and men" ([CCC 780](#)).

Nonetheless, our appropriation of salvific grace requires our assent – and that's not a one-shot deal. Yeah,

it'd be nice if we totally embraced Jesus once and for all, but it doesn't work that way. Every day requires conversion, every moment requires turning toward God and away from sin. Over and over we stumble, fall, and get up again, slouch forward and stumble some more – no turning back! No giving up! Why, it's built into the system itself – we have the [Sacrament of Penance](#) after all.

OK, so there's all that orthodoxy embedded in Katharine's minor aside, but what of her contention that I'd better keep loving her even if I end up permanently down below? It was a provocative idea that came back to me later in the week at Mass. The [Gospel](#) on Thursday was the story of the rich man (“Dives”)



and Lazarus, with its stark representation of ultimate reversal of fortune based on earthly human conduct. The rich man paid no heed to the destitute Lazarus as his doorstep; after death, the condemned Dives still seemed to treat the now glorified Lazarus as a nonentity who ought to do his bidding – that is, the rich guy still had no clue and evidently no hope.

Yet, there's that incongruous entreaty of Dives on behalf of his family near the parable's end:

He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send [Lazarus] to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.'

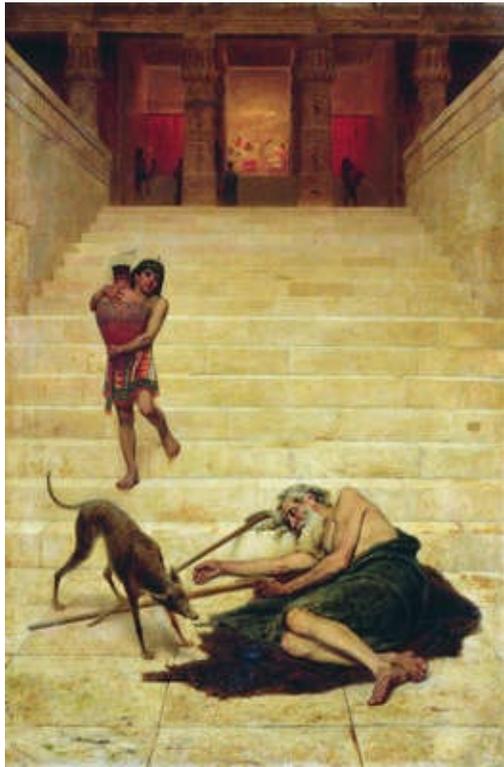
[Jerome Kodell](#) writes of the rich man's plea that it's “the first sign we have that he is concerned about others.” Although it's too little, too late, could it be a tantalizing Biblical hint that even the accursed retain some tenuous link to charity? Will damned dads, in other words, be able to keep loving their daughters as Kath presumed? And, if so, could that lend credence to the idea of an [empty hell](#)?

Maybe – [maybe not](#).

What's certain is this: My young girl is apparently so trusting of my ongoing fatherly affection and solicitude that she can't conceive of a circumstance in which they'd go wanting – not even endless perdition. That's a boost to my confidence, for sure, but also a spur to my pursuit of holiness. Regardless of what's possible in hell, I have no doubt that I'd be able to keep loving her from heaven, and I've got a reputation to live up to.

This contribution is available at <http://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/2016/02/28/love-in-hell/>
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Why don't your eyes see me? [at Ordinary Time]



In [tomorrow's Gospel](#) we see the familiar passage in which Jesus speaks a parable about Lazarus and the rich man. He tells the Pharisees in his presence about these two men and how they lived their earthly life. One was a poor beggar who sat at the rich man's doorstep begging for scraps. The other an extremely wealthy man. A man not just presented as well to do, but extremely wealthy. Dressed in purple and fine linen, he dined sumptuously.

sumptuous[suhmp-choo-uh s]
adjective

- 1.entailing great expense, as from choice materials, fine work, etc.;costly:a sumptuous residence.
- 2.luxuriously fine or large; lavish; splendid:a sumptuous feast.

Here is this man who has these magnificently lavish feasts daily, not just on special occasions. His life is full of excess, full of carnal pleasures. How great a contrast we have with Lazarus, the beggar. This man has no fine clothing. He sits begging at the door of the rich man's abode desiring to even eat the crumbs that fall from his table. Alas, they are consumed by the very dogs that lick the poor ragamuffins' wounds. He has no one to support him, no one to bandage and dress him that he might get better, but is tormented by the very animals that eat the food he so ardently needs to survive.

Oh how this speaks to my heart during Lent as we try to raise money to build a well to bring clean water

to those in distant countries who do not have any, or have very little access to them. We who sit lavishly in our homes with an unlimited supply to be had. They who just wish to drink of the drops that we so dishonorably waste in our excess. *How can we not recognize Lazarus, the hungry beggar in the parable (cf. [Lk 17:19-31](#)), in the multitude of human beings without bread, a roof or a place to stay? How can we fail to hear Jesus: "As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" ([Mt 25:45](#))? ([CCC 2463](#))* During the super bowl this year, the only football game I actually chose to watch, there was this amazing commercial about water conservation. Colgate took a moment to highlight how much water we truly do waste, how much we take for granted, how much we let fall to the wayside to be consumed by the dogs of our sewers, instead of protecting for those who have none. They sit at the gate of our hearts and beg to partake of just our scraps, and are we aware?

When the disciples begged Jesus for their own crumbs, he fed them exorbitantly from the masters table. They said Master teach us how to pray and he so obliged, not holding back but opening up the floodgates of heaven with the prayer that is familiar to Christians of all backgrounds. In the *Our Father* we ask specifically for our daily bread. This speaks of trusting in God for God's provision, not that we should become lax in our duty to try and earn our bread, nor that we should just stop providing and protecting our families, but that we should be aware of the blessings we receive.

But the presence of those who hunger because they lack bread opens up another profound meaning of this petition. The drama of hunger in the world calls Christians who pray sincerely to exercise responsibility toward their brethren, both in their personal behavior and in their solidarity with the human family. This petition of the Lord's Prayer cannot be isolated from the parables of the poor man Lazarus and of the Last Judgment. ([2831](#))

How felicitous it is that the Church has been guided by the Holy Spirit to share this pericope of scripture with us at this point during Lent. To remind us of our duty to the poor as we are reminded of one of the three pillars of the journey through the desert, almsgiving. What are we doing to help those in need? How are we using our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to bring that change into the world and into our own hearts? It's not enough to simply conserve water, we need to be sharing it. God does not give us these wonderful blessings in our lives to be hoarded in our cabinets for future meals of our own. He intends them to be given out to those who have none. That is why the goal of Lent should not just be to reduce our consumption through fasting, but to then take that money that we have saved and use it to feed another.

It's an opportunity for us to go out to the gate of our own hearts, lift up Lazarus as he sits watching our comfort, bring him into our home and bandage him, clean him up, care for him and nourish him to health. Lent is supposed to change us. It's supposed to draw us closer to who Christ is. Christ heals. Christ

cures. Christ feeds. Christ loves. As I sit here in my heated home, typing on my chromebook, surrounded by loved ones, books, comforts.. blessings, I realize I am not doing enough. How about you? Remember too that there are two responses to Jesus message today. Lazarus was downtrodden, a broken man who sat at the mercy of the world. Yet, we see from his presence in Abraham's bosom that he never blamed God for it. He never turned his back on his faith. The rich man had every material comfort needed, but when he died he went to eternal torment. It's apparent that in his faith he knew he needed to repent, he knew he needed to serve, he knew what he was doing was wrong. He kept it all for himself.

Which are we today? Are we Lazarus? Do we put our faith in God no matter what comes? Are we the rich man? Do we ignore God's prompting to do good and simply lavish ourselves with comfort in a grand hedonism? Today if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your heart. Trust in God. Find comfort in his promise. Find a way to reach out to those in need materially, physically, and spiritually. You have been called to the greatest feast of all time, the wedding feast of the Lamb. You receive the most extravagant meal in the entire universe in the Eucharist... are you sharing those crumbs? Or keeping them for yourself? We are the hands and feet of Christ, we have work to do Church!

His servant and yours,

Brian

“He must increase, I must decrease.”

This contribution is available at <http://the-friar.blogspot.com/2016/02/why-dont-your-eyes-see-me.html>
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The More the Merrier [at Smaller Manhattans]



We would love to pray for your mother-in-law. Seriously.

I like praying the Rosary. But I also bore easily. As I mentioned in last month's article

[Rosary Riff](#)

, to keep the Rosary fresh I make up my own Mysteries. But sometimes I won't use a mystery set at all. Instead I'll adapt the Hail Mary as needed to complement whom I'm praying for, and that keeps me perked-up and engaged.

Let's recall there are 53 Hail Marys in a Rosary. To me that's 53 opportunities to ask for individual intercessions. As time and memory allow, I will get in all 53. Here's how I do it.

First, here's the prayer with my standard change:

Hail Mary, full of grace.

The Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,

and blessed is Jesus, the fruit of thy womb. (I prefer this phrasing.)

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

pray for us sinners,

now and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

That's what I'll pray if I can't think of someone to pray for as each bead rolls around. But typically it'll be like this:

Hail Mary, full of grace.

The Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,

and blessed is Jesus, the fruit of thy womb.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

pray for Andrew Jones

now and at the hour of his death.

Amen.

And if Andrew has a particular problem, let's say cancer, then:

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

pray for Andrew Jones' healing.

Amen.

So Mary and I pray together for Andrew. That's good; would it be better to have more people pray? Of course- I could pray like this:

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and St. Andrew,

pray for Andrew Jones' healing.

Amen.

For someone who has died, like this:

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and St. Elizabeth,

bid Elizabeth Kelly eternal rest.

Amen.

In fact if I invite a saint to pray along, it may go like this:

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and St. Michael,

pray for Michael Jones' cancer, Mike Smith's marriage, Michael Green's search for a wife, and whatever Michelle White might need, because I have no idea but her name just popped into my head which may be Jesus' doing.

Amen.

In the above cases, I'm matching names. But I might also match saints to sinners thematically:

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and Fr. Damien

pray for Doctor Black and Nurse White, now and at the hour of their deaths.

Amen.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and St. John Bosco

pray for Frank Taylor who runs our parish Youth Group, and Scout Leader Butler, now and at the hour of their deaths.

Amen.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and Saints Stephen and Lawrence,

pray for Deacons Smith, Jones, Black, and White, now and at the hour of their deaths.

Amen.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and St. Isaac Jogues

pray for Father Smith who is serving in Peru, and all missionaries, now and at the hour of their deaths.

Amen.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and Saint Francesca Romana

pray for the Jones family whose daughter died last week.

Amen.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, St. Thomas and St. Francis de Sales

pray for Jane Hall who is falling away from the faith.

Amen.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, Cardinal John Henry Newman, and St. Augustine

pray for Bill Howard who is considering becoming Catholic.

Amen.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, and St. Joan of Arc,

pray for Sgt. Aaron Tate who is in Iraq, now and at the hour of his death.

Amen.

See...it's an inexhaustible prayer algorithm. You could go for, you know,

decades

and not repeat a combination! Get fired-up about all those folks in heaven! Keep 'em busy! Learn about new saints, and keep them busy too!

And one last thing- I have my own problems, and I pray that they go away, or diminish, as God sees fit. But there's nothing like praying for other people's problems to put mine in perspective.

If y'all pray the Rosary in any particular ways, please post a comment about it. Don't be shy- inquiring Catholics wanna know.

This contribution is available at <http://platytera.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-more-merrier.html>
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What RunnerCacher is doing for Lent! [at Ramblings of a Runner Cacher]

Every year I have big ideas on how to make Lent meaningful (i.e. grow closer to God) but I always end up doing something lame like giving up chocolate or wine. This year I've come up with some specific things that I plan to give up and take on (mostly take on—check out Catholic blogger William Newton's [post about that subject](#)), which will hopefully help deepen my relationship with Jesus. Perhaps I'll update you from time to time on how things are going.

BLOGGER'S NOTE: I'm posting this here instead of my [Eat Play Work Love](#) blog because I'm hoping to ease into just having one, which leaves me with the challenge of figuring out how to incorporate my everyday life and my Catholic faith into a blog mostly about running and geocaching (although there hasn't been much of that lately, I'm sorry to say).

Here ya go, in no particular order:

–1–

I'm finally going to sit down and write thank-you notes to family members and friends for our Christmas gifts. That's this weekend's task!

–2–

Set my alarm 10 minutes earlier to study the Catechism. Last week I picked up *The Rosary Workout* by Peggy Bowes (one of the many books that I've had for a long time that I started but never finished—and I'm sure I will tell you more about my journey through that program in a future post). One of the things that Peggy recommends is to read Part Four of the Catechism of the Catholic church about Christian prayer. I may or may not finish, but I've already gained some insight from what I've read just over the last few days.



(Too much spiritual reading to tackle at once?)

-3-

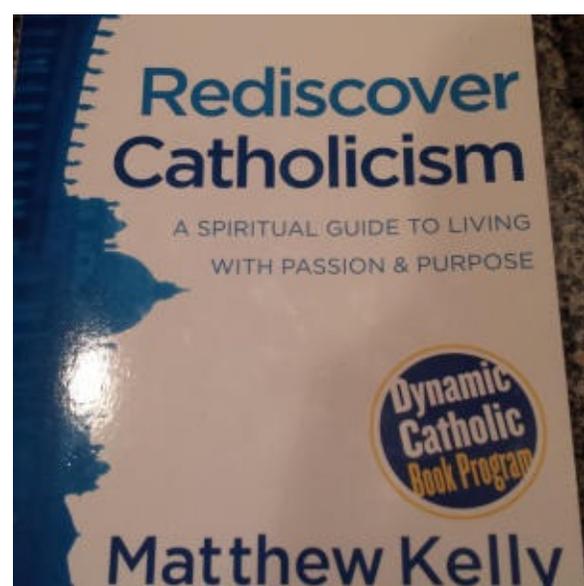
For the last several years Ray and our two older boys have made it a tradition to go to the 6:30 am daily Mass every Tuesday during Lent, and then have breakfast at McDonald's before heading to school and work. Now that our youngest is in high school and I'm no longer driving him to the Catholic school up the road every morning (I sure as heck don't miss fighting the traffic on Route 17!), I'm planning to join them. Minus Matt the college boy of course; and I'll pass on McDonald's...

-4-

Study the Gospels, one of the spiritual exercises in *The Rosary Workout*. I don't know if I'll read all four by the end of Lent, but as soon as I'm finished with the book I'm reading now (*Older, Faster, Stronger* by Margaret Webb—it's taking forever but I'm almost done and it's VERY interesting) I'll start with Matthew and see how far I get.

-5-

I signed up for Matthew Kelly's "[The Best Lent Ever](#)" program on his website *Dynamic Catholic*. Every day during Lent I get an email with a link to a short video, a reflection (usually an excerpt from Kelly's book *Rediscover Jesus*), and another short video on the same topic. Ash Wednesday's topic was making a fresh start, and Thursday's was getting to know Jesus better. It's a quick little devotion that I can do while I'm eating breakfast. Seriously, the videos are like a minute and a half long.



(I found this book in Matt's room right after we took him off to college back in August. I read about three-fourths of it and then I just stopped for no apparent reason. Hopefully sometime in 2016 I'll start over and read it all the way through. It's good stuff.)

-6-

I should give up social media because I keep reading about all these great Lenten programs online! Today I signed up for yet another one—blogger Hallie Lord's [40 Days to Fearlessness](#). When you sign up, you identify a fear that you have—not necessarily a big one like the fear of dogs or heights, but something small that eats away at you and keeps you up at night. Things like being afraid of what people will think if you speak out about something that just isn't right. Or of going to the next level in your fitness because of the

fear of getting injured or that you'll fail or that people will think you're crazy. So I went on her website and identified my fear, and every Monday Hallie will post a challenge to help me overcome it. (I have so many fears it's hard to choose just one! You should [take a look](#) at some of the things people are afraid of. I can identify with so many of them, and just reading through what people wrote down helped me realize that I'm not alone and that perhaps I'm not as big of a loser wimp as I thought.) Meanwhile I should look at the list of people who signed up and pray for the person whose name comes before mine.

I think this is the one I'm most scared of...but I've heard I should do one thing every day that scares me, so there's that. (By the way, did you know that Eleanor Roosevelt never actually said that? [Check this out.](#))

-7-

If #6 is the scariest, then #7 may be the hardest: No music during my runs. Instead focus on prayer and meditation. I do pray while I run, but often I find myself rushing through the prayers so I can turn on the music already. I've run an entire half marathon without music, so I know I can do it; in fact, I didn't turn on my music until Mile 16 of the [Richmond Marathon](#). Those were races, though; when I'm slogging out a 12-mile run by myself it won't be easy. Perhaps I'll be more diligent about finding other people to run with on a regular basis, which was one of my [RunnerCaching resolutions](#). And if I must listen to something...well, maybe I'll put on a good Catholic podcast.





(On Friday I ran just over 7 1/2 miles with no music. I prayed the sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the Rosary instead, taking some time to reflect and really think about each mystery as I ran. It wasn't nearly as hard as I thought, and I was able to appreciate the beauty of my surroundings and truly run with Jesus and Mary.)

BONUS TAKE #8

Participate in [40 Days for Life](#). I've signed up to pray at the Richmond Medical Center for Women on Wednesday February 24 at 4 pm, if you'd like to join me! I've prayed there before with 40 Days for Life; in fact since it's right on the [Richmond Marathon](#) course I was able to stop for a minute during the race and pray a little bit. You can find a 40 Days for Life campaign near you [here](#).

OH, and I'm hoping by the end of Lent there will be, a Fredericksburg chapter of [LIFE Runners](#), or that we're well into the process of establishing one. If you're in the Fredericksburg area and are interested, let me know in the comments or email me! You don't have to be a runner; in fact I'm hoping that some of my non-running pro life friends will join. Another one of this weekend's tasks is to get with one of my newest friends (:)) and fellow LIFE Runner and set up an initial meeting, or at least pick a date. THIS is by far the Lenten project I'm most excited about, and perhaps the *second* scariest one!



There you have it. I'm not giving up wine, as I had planned to do, but I will be limiting it to the weekends; and there's no point in giving up geocaching because I hardly ever do it anyway especially this time of year, so no sacrifice there, really.

Are you an observer of Lent, and if so what are your plans?

This contribution is available at <http://ramblingsofarunnercacher.wordpress.com/2016/02/13/what-runnercacher-is-doing-for-lent/>
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The Lightning Rod [at Freedom Through Truth]

In His day, Jesus was a lightning rod for the people. Today, we have Pope Francis. And today we have the Internet, so when lightning strikes it spreads like wild fire. The problem with lightning spreading like wildfire is that it breaks containment and covers the earth in excrement.

When Jesus entered into Jerusalem heralded as the Messiah, the people were elated. At least that was so, until the gossip and rumor mill kicked in to full swing. Political correctness reigned even then, though not with such a high sounding name. Jesus died as the victim of gossip. The people were too lazy to see through the lies that were perpetrated against Him and that fomented the mini rebellion that led to His crucifixion.

Not much has changed, except today we have the Internet, so lies and gossip spread at Internet speed around the world. And as each lie compounds its predecessor, it becomes a spiritual tsunami.

Is there help for our addiction to needing to be right and being contentious to prove our rightness?

To answer that I turned to two philosophers of the 20th century, one fictitious, and one who would never believe himself to have been philosophical, just pragmatic.

The fictitious philosopher is Pollyanna Whittier from the book and more from the subsequent Disney film "Pollyanna". When Pollyanna was living with her aunt, she encountered the pastor by the river one day. The pastor was a fire and brimstone preacher and was practicing a sermon by the river that particular day. In the exchange between them Pollyanna noted: "If you look for the bad in people you're sure to find it, so look for the good in them instead."

The real philosopher I refer to above is my long deceased father Alvin Brandon. My Dad was a very good man, who flew Spitfires in WWII, courtesy of the RCAF, and returned home physically damaged with their courtesy as well. He was a humble man, and though well schooled for his time, was largely educated by the school of hard knocks, and was humble enough to learn the lessons taught in that school.

When I was about 16 years old, I knew everything. Of this I have been subsequently disavowed. But, then I was all that and a bag of chips, or so I thought. I was on the verge of that time period that many teens enter into where they discover that their parents know nothing, or at least barely enough to know how and when to breathe. The piece of advice I am about to share from him was the tipping point that led me to several years of certainty in my own brilliance, which ultimately was knocked out of me both literally and figuratively. But those are other stories, some of which I have shared already.

I was having a particularly difficult time with my mother over some MAJOR thing or another for a 16 year old that was really a mere triviality in the scheme of life in our family. My father taught me a lesson that I rejected out of hand, and wish I could have gotten. It was so fundamental to successful relationships that I would love to go back to that moment, receive it again, and thank him for it.

I was in our den complaining to my dad about my mom over this catastrophe, and he interrupted my self righteous indignation. He then said: "Your mother may be wrong, but she is your mother, and therefore she is right."

I could not grasp the nuance of what he said. I was too angry to do anything but parse the words to fit what I wanted them to fit. My dad was not only right, he was correct in his assessment of the situation, and the remedy for it. That his son behaved like an idiot was not his responsibility.

And this is how it is with the lightning rod that is Our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

One writer intent on justifying his own piling on of Pope Francis reminded readers that St. Paul had upbraided St. Peter over matters in the early Church where he witnessed that St. Peter was in the wrong. He was anointed to do so. He also had first hand knowledge of the particular situation, which is referenced in Galatians Chapter 2.

When Pope Francis spoke on his plane ride back to Rome from Mexico recently, he responded to a spate of questions, and at least one particular question that has begotten so much controversy for some. The particular one was about a theoretical wall across the Mexican border, and a statement alleged to be from Presidential candidate Donald Trump. Our Holy Father spoke in Spanish. It has been translated to English, which is a degree of separation from the original to begin with. The context of preceding and following questions is not present, and if it were they too were translated from the original language. Yet another degree of separation.

But, much of the brouhaha over the original statement occurred because those intent on being right left out the key words "if" and "only". This is less a degree of separation than it is a total misconstruction of the words and probable intent of Our Holy Father, to serve their own purposes.

So, I return to Pollyanna, and my father.

Our Holy Father is our parent in the Church of Jesus Christ. As such, he like my own parents is anointed to be in the position that he is in. The meaning in my father's statement restated as "Your Holy Father may be wrong, but he is your Holy Father and therefore he is right," is that Our Holy Father warrants our respect for his position, and our love. Unless you have lived in his shoes or been around him you have no real idea of what is behind whatever he says, or does.

So, then you should take Pollyanna's advice and look for the good in Pope Francis. Whatever you look for you will find. The problem is that what you will likely find is support for your own presumptions, not for the truth.

We might be wise to take the words of Blaise Pascal to heart that I have on the left side of this blog as a reminder. He said: "He that takes truth for his guide, and duty for his end, may safely trust to God's providence to lead him aright."

This contribution is available at <http://freethroughtruth.blogspot.ca/2016/02/the-lightning-rod.html>
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Radical Hospitality [at Theologyisaverb]



There has been much talk in recent years within ministry about the notion of radical hospitality. Not merely seeking to embrace those we know, it is an openness albeit a willingness to authentically meet and walk with one another in our weakness, suffering, and challenges of life. This is the experience of encounter, and as such cannot be superficial or thought of as just an act of charity. Each of us must be vulnerable, and ready to extend ourselves beyond our pew, well past our comfort zone, beyond even the doors of the church to welcome the stranger with love.

Yet, what does this look like in REAL life?

Some 23 years ago, my then fiancé and I were traveling the 1,400 miles to visit my family in Arkansas when the blizzard of 93' hit. Praying that the weather would let up the further south we went, we pushed onward. However, that was not to be as the interstate in front of us was closing and we found ourselves in uncharted territory on a long stretch of road near Winchester, KY. With only 2 choices available, a 6 ft. tall snow bank to our right or a jackknifed semi to our left...we chose the snow bank. Sitting there in a car now engulfed in snow, I admit, I felt utterly despondent. For, as far as the eye could see was snow and farmland and we knew no one. We couldn't stay there forever, as our tank of gas and thereby the heat would only last for so long. So, there my later hubby and I prayed together. And, no sooner had we done so did we see a shadowy figure approaching from a distance.

With a steaming cup of coffee in hand he gingerly made his way to check on both the driver in the semi as well as us. "How are you?, he asked" "We are ok, but a long way from home", we answered. "Where are ya'll headed?" "Arkansas, to visit my family but traveling from Massachusetts", I replied. "Well, why don't ya'll come on in the house, warm up, let them know you are ok, and join us for dinner." As we walked across the field and the house came into view I breathed a sigh of relief, finally ceasing to calculate fuel reserves.

With two young children in tow this beautiful family welcomed these two strangers into their home and lives that day. Inwardly, I wondered if they had even considered whether or not we were harmless or the

gift that they were offering. Their gift of generosity came so natural and was so heartfelt that we very readily felt as if we had known them for years. A very good thing too, since it would be a couple of days before the roads cleared and our car could be unearthed. Even this was another example of the breath of their commitment to radical hospitality. Knowing that we had very little extra income to spare, Mike, our gracious host, called his friend who volunteered to use his tractor with chains to help rescue the stranded Camero. Then placing heaters under the engine they were at last able to bring it back to life.

The morning we left, well rested and well fed, John and I knew that God had placed these incredible people in our lives to teach us the true meaning of hospitality and Christian love. Not only exchanging Christmas cards, with the advent of social media we have made it a point to stay connected. Their children now grown, are married and beginning young families of their own. What a legacy of Christian discipleship Mike and Connie have modeled for their children, for my husband and I, and all those they encounter.

This is the challenge for each of us in our everyday-to go forth living out our faith with radical hospitality. To accept the invitation to meet the lost, abandoned, marginalized and wounded with generous love. Since some wounds we cannot see, and anyone of us can be in need of radical hospitality at any time, we must begin to see with the eyes of the heart. This takes practice and reminders of the moments when God has taken the initiative to rescue us, unleashing his otherwise unimaginable love and mercy.

Reflect:

When and how have I been a recipient of radical hospitality? In what ways might God be asking me to witness his radical hospitality today?

Peace,



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The late Fr. Andrew M. Greeley once remarked that the Vatican not only doesn't tell the left hand what the right hand is doing, it sometimes operates not knowing that coordination is required. Nowhere was that tendency more evident than in this latest kerfuffle over reporting clerical child abuse. Here, the lack of coordination has led to another episode of Vatican foot-in-mouth disease, another piece of evidence that the Vatican just doesn't get the sex-abuse problem.

“Comply with Requirements of Law”

Prior to 2001, bishops and ordinaries weren't required by canon law to report suspected predator priests to the local authorities. (Then again, neither were schools, Boy Scout troops, or Little League officials required by civil law to report their suspicions about any adult in their organizations.) Even after Pope St. John Paul II, at the prompting of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cdl. Joseph Ratzinger, issued the

motu proprio [*Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*](#)

promulgating newer, faster procedures for removing said priests from the clerical state, no requirement for reporting was written into the Code of Canon Law.

However, the CDF did eventually create a “

[Guide to Understanding Basic CDF Procedures concerning Sexual Abuse Allegations](#)

”, which was posted on the Vatican website. When the

SST

norms were updated by the CDF in 2010, Vatican spokesman Fr. Federico Lombardi referred to the Guide

[in his prefatory note](#)

, stating that “in the practice suggested by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith it is necessary to comply with the requirements of law in the various countries, and to do so in good time, not during or subsequent to the canonical trial.”

Sexual abuse of minors is not just a canonical delict but also a crime prosecuted by civil law. Although relations with civil authority will differ in various countries, nevertheless it is important to cooperate with such authority within their responsibilities. Specifically, without prejudice to the sacramental internal forum, **the prescriptions of civil law regarding the reporting of such crimes to the designated authority should always be followed [bold type mine.—ASL]**. This collaboration, moreover, not only concerns cases of abuse committed by clerics, but also those cases which involve religious or lay persons who function in ecclesiastical structures.

Getting the Message

By this time of course, scandals had rocked not only the US but Ireland and other countries, the main feature of which were that bishops had either failed to report or actively covered up for abusive priests. More and more Western bishops were forced to realize that the game had changed, that they were no longer allowed to keep a potentially scandalous situation quiet.

However, one of Murphy’s unwritten but better-known laws is that, in every organization, there’s at least one person (usually more) who didn’t get the message. Moreover, for all Pope Francis’ good intentions — he did after all create a commission for this very problem — he doesn’t seem to fully understand its ramifications. Witness, for example, his appointment of Belgian Cdl. Godfried Danneels to the Synod on the Family despite the latter’s having been involved in the cover-up of an abuse case; even the staunchest of the Pope’s defenders were left shocked and baffled.

It’s said that some Europe-based cultures don’t get the Anglo-American obsession with sexual issues. If so, that may be why Francis created his Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors but left it out of the loop in training new bishops on handling such cases. For that was the core complaint of

[a recent Crux post by associate editor John L. Allen, Jr](#)

∴ “What’s the point of creating a commission to promote best practices, and putting one of the Church’s most credible leaders on the abuse issue, Boston Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley, in charge of it, and yet not having it address the new leaders who will have to implement those practices?”

But that's not what's causing the new uproar.

“No Duty to Report”?

At one point in his story, Allen focuses on French Msgr. Tony Anatrella, a psychotherapist based out of the Collège des Bernardins in Paris and a consultant to two pontifical councils. Monsignor Anatrella, apparently in charge of the presentation to the latest crop of new bishops, “did a credible job of slogging through components of the Code of Canon Law governing clergy accused of sexual crime with a minor,” said Allen, though the presentation was “long on therapeutic analysis”.

Then Allen lowered the boom on him, and in the process set up a firestorm:

In other ways, however, his presentation seemed seriously wanting. For instance, **Anatrella argued that bishops have no duty to report allegations to the police, which he says is up to victims and their families [emphasis mine.—ASL]**. It's a legalistic take on a critical issue, one which has brought only trouble for the Church and its leaders. Why, one wonders, was it part of a training session?

The text in question,

[as reported by The Guardian](#)

, is: “According to the state of civil laws of each country where reporting is obligatory, it is not necessarily the duty of the bishop to report suspects to authorities, the police or state prosecutors *in the moment when they are made aware of crimes or sinful deeds [italics mine.—ASL]*

.” Allen states that the Prefect for the Congregation of Bishops, Canadian Cdl. Marc Ouellet, invited “suggestions for improving the experience” of the training course.

The most obvious suggestion: *Re-write that stupid passage*. For while it simply suggests that bishop doesn't have to report his suspicions *right away*, it's lent itself too easily to the interpretation that the bishop doesn't have to report anything *at all*. And although Msgr. Anatrella is a low-level functionary, a small cog in the Vatican machine, the fact that this passage slipped through without check or comment to make it into the final training materials gives it an accidental yet embarrassing “officialness”.

He Who Is Silent

Father Lombardi dismissed the common interpretation

[in a press conference Thursday](#)

, saying, “Anatrella does not say anything new or different than what has been said by the competent ecclesiastical institutions,” directing reporters to the circular letter referred to earlier. And it’s possible Allen misunderstood Msgr. Anatrella, and that The Guardian took the statement out of context in following Allen’s lead; I’ve yet to find a link to the actual document.

But even in this best-case scenario, the damage has still been done — lede after lede has been printed throughout the English-speaking world saying that the Vatican tells bishops they don’t have to report clerical sex abusers *even when law requires it*. Given recent history, who can blame people for not believing otherwise?

To wrap this up: The one problem that has persisted through the pontificates of Benedict XVI and Francis is the Vatican’s inability to “stay on message” where clerical sex abuse is concerned. For myself, I have no doubt that all the various clerics on the left side of the Tiber mean well, and are as interested as anyone else in doing away with the problem insofar as is humanly possible. But some of them still believe that some kind of discretion is possible. They still believe that they can prevent scandal through silence.

They’ve forgotten the old Latin maxim: *Qui tacet consentire videtur*: “He who is silent must be seen to consent.”

This contribution is available at <http://impracticalcatholic.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-vaticans-chronic-case-of-foot-in.html>

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A Walk Through My Week [at Veils and Vocations]

To all those blogging, homeschooling mamas out there who manage to post regularly all the time, kudos to you! I don't know how you do it because I seem to be struggling to keep up with everything. So, while I had at least three posts in mind for this week, this is the only one you are getting, dear readers. There's always next week, right? {Little Man's new desire to "help" with typing hasn't really made posting easy either. When I posted my

[To-Don't List](#)



1

I have mentioned before that I am working on another

[mother/daughter](#)

retreat series. This is actually going to be published into a manual with all the talks, craft instructions, resources, and more. It will be available through my etsy shop in late April. If you would like a sneak peak, please become an email subscriber for a free sample file.

2

As part of writing the mother/daughter retreat manual, I have been researching and gathering lists of resources for the girls and their moms. I had planned on putting together a #5Favs post about places to find modest teen clothing--as you can see it didn't happen. Now, I realize that modest teen clothing is almost an oxymoron these days, but I didn't realize just how hard it would be. Many of the places advertising teen or tween clothes either had nothing for sale in that department or just a black skirt and a turtleneck. So, I am still searching and hope to have the list up next week. If you have any suggestions,

please let me know. I have found a few places, but am still in search of more every day clothing vendors-
-apparently formal wear is easier to come by.

3

Tuesday was Candlemas and we invited dear friends over to celebrate with us. I decided to make these [votive jars](#)

with the kids, except we used jars from the recycling bin. I like that they are refillable and I had battery operated tea lights for the old kids to use when they want to light a candle for a special prayer request. They had a great time and the jars turned out so pretty. We used prayer cards that I picked up from our parish store and the nice thing is the prayer on the back is still readable through the top of the jar.





After making the votive jars, we rolled some beeswax candles. I contemplated making jar candles, but that seemed very complicated and pouring hot wax with very active little ones about seemed like a recipe

for disaster. I purchased two kits from

[Sunflower Candles](#)

. The

[first](#)

made two candles and came with extra pieces of colored beeswax for decorations. The

[second kit](#)

made three tapered candles. Ann is a wonderful shopkeeper, I have ordered from her in the past and am always satisfied. She graciously included an extra ready made candle to use as a sample for the children. The children were so creative with the colored beeswax and enjoyed that part of the craft time best. Aren't they lovely?



5

This Sunday we will bring our candles and candle holders to church to be blessed and try to light one of the candles each day when we pray the St Michael prayer and for special liturgical feasts, like Easter. If

rolled correctly, these little beeswax candles last a long time.

6

So, you know all those blogs with smiling children who pose beautifully and look like magazine models? Well, this isn't one of them. I tried to get Buddy to display his votive jar in such a way, and this is what I got. At least he is smiling, kind of. Little Man had to get in on the act, too, with his cheesy picture smile.



7

I posted this on Facebook, but would like to ask again for prayers for

[Lizz](#)

. My heartbreaks for her and her children. I have thought a lot about having to say goodbye to my children and what their life would be like without me. I have friends who have walked that road and I have marveled at how they handled it, but still questioned why God would take a young mother whose

children need her so! God has a plan, I know. Please pray that this family will be wrapped in His Love and Protection, and if it be His Will may receive the miracle they so desperately need.

This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2016/02/a-walk-through-my-week.html>
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Jesus saves! [at On the Road to Damascus]

It was the storm of the century. Hurricane winds pounded the coast as the torrential rains fell. The waters crested their banks and began their march toward the houses. An old Evangelical sat on his porch watching the approaching waters. Soon his house was surrounded and the muddy waters kept rising. A rescue boat came by and beckoned for the man to climb onboard.

“God provides. Jesus is my salvation.” He calmly said and refused to board the rescue boat.

As the flood waters got higher the man was forced to retreat to the second story of the house. Looking out his bedroom window another rescue boat tried to get the man to leave.

“God provides. Jesus is my salvation.” He again stated defiantly.

The waters did not stop and the man had to climb upon his roof to keep from being swept away. This time a helicopter descended and a billowing voice called to him over a loud speaker. “Climb on board. We’re here to save you.”

“Only Jesus saves!” The man screamed back as he shook his fist at the helicopter.

And with that his house buckled and was washed away by the enraged waters. The man was lost amid the destruction. In the blink of an eye the man stood before Jesus in heaven. The man was dumbfounded.

“Lord, I had unshakable faith. Why didn’t you save me?”

Jesus looked at the man a bit bewildered. “I sent two boats and a helicopter. What more should I have done?”



This is a popular anti-Catholic meme that is floating around Face Book that demonstrates this same kind of thought. It is a great illustration on how something can be 100% factually correct and completely wrong at the same time. It is 100% factually correct that only Jesus can save us. Where it goes wrong is how Jesus goes about doing this.

Jesus was a tekton, a trade craftsman. English commonly translates tekton as carpenter. As a craftsman

Jesus used many tools to do his job. He used hammers, saws, canons, and many other tools to build what he built. When he goes about the job of saving man he also uses tools to accomplish this. Jesus gave us things to make it easier to live a holy life. Let's examine each claim of this meme.

Only Jesus saves, not a priest.

Correctly stated, Jesus saves through a priest. Jesus lived with and taught the twelve for three years. At the last supper he taught them how to offer sacrifice in his name. Between the resurrection and Pentecost he continued their instruction and passed on to them his divine authority to do things like forgive sins, consecrate the Holy Eucharist, and cast out demons. A priest cannot do any of these things on his own authority or through his own name any more than I can come to your house and demand that you let me in, in the name of the FBI. The FBI has not given me that authority and therefore I cannot act with their power. The twelve were deputized and given a badge to act in the name and authority of Jesus by Jesus. Jesus acts through a priest to provide the things that will assist us in living a holy life.

Only Jesus saves, not Mary.

Once again, 100% correct. Mary is not God. She is the mother of God and the best example of what a human person can be. She was the first Christian, conceived without original sin, the new Eve. Catholics do not worship Mary. We venerate her and give her, her proper place as the queen of heaven, as stated in the Book of Revelations. Jesus said ask and it shall be given, knock and the door will be opened. If he is willing to do this for us how much more so will he do this for his mother, the only sinless human person, and one who never denied or lost faith in her son? Behold your mother. Jesus gave us his mother as the example on how to live and her intercession to him on our behalf is second to none.

Only Jesus saves, not Baptism.

Yup, no argument there. Baptism alone cannot save you just as much as not being baptized sends you directly to Hell. Neither is correct. Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation and the doorway to all of the other Sacraments. A sacrament is an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is 'dispensed' to us. In other words, baptism is a tool used by Jesus to give us grace to live a holy life. A holy life leads to salvation; it is not salvation in and of itself. Baptism cleanses us, puts an indelible mark on our souls, and brings us into God's family as an adopted child.

Only Jesus saves, not good works.

That is correct. There is nothing salvific about works of any kind. Heaven will be filled with people who did not do a single good work. Take the repentant thief as an example. His faith alone was rewarded with paradise. Yet, there are many, many passages in the bible where we are told that it is not only expected but commanded that we do good works if we truly love Jesus. Obedience is more pleasing to God than even sacrifice. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, give shelter to the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, and to bury the dead. These are good works and we have been commanded to do them. He also went on to tell us that anyone who does not do these things will be separated out with the goats at the end of time. If we truly love Jesus we will naturally do the good works that he has commanded us to do.

Only Jesus saves, not a church.

Spoiler alert – there will be many who attended church services faithfully their entire lives in Hell at the completion of time. In 1820 the whaling ship Essex was sunk by a sperm whale. The crew escaped to the lifeboats and spent the next ninety-five days at sea. Just because they made it into a lifeboat did not mean that they survived. The crew lived off of the bodies of five of their shipmates who died. When those bodies were not sufficient they drew lots on who would be sacrificed so the rest may live. Seven of the crew were cannibalized to save the rest. Just because you are physically in a church does not mean you will be saved.

Yet, Jesus did start the Church. With a little understanding of Jewish culture and the significance of the number twelve this becomes very clearly evident from Holy Scripture. Jesus did not just start any church or every church; he started only one Church, the Catholic Church. This has nothing to do with religion. It is a historical fact. He started the Church because he wanted us to be all one body, one family. That body is his Church. We are many parts but we are all one body. Jesus uses the Church as a tool to lead lost sheep to a saving knowledge of his love.

Only Jesus saves, not the Pope.

Ah yes. How often we hear this especially in today's world of social media and around the clock news coverage. Non-Catholics so often mistake the reverence Catholics hold for the Pope as worship. Like with Mary, we do not worship the Pope but we do hold him in a place of honor because he sits in the Chair of Peter. Simon bar Jonah, the Rock, is the man whose faith Christ built his Church upon. Jesus appointed Peter the first "pope", the leader of the twelve in his absence. Peter was to lead and guide, not rule over, the early Church. Why does the Church need a visible head? Well, we have one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Catholic Church that teaches the same truth in every one of its parishes and 30,000 plus Protestant churches that cannot agree upon what is true. The Pope in union with his bishops make up the Magisterium. The primary responsibility of the Magisterium is to ensure that the truths that Jesus taught the twelve are handed down exactly as he taught them. The Pope is the visible face of the invisible Christ. It is through the authority passed down to him from Jesus that the Pope acts.

If this meme represented the Catholic understanding of salvation it would say:

Jesus saves through....

through the priesthood.

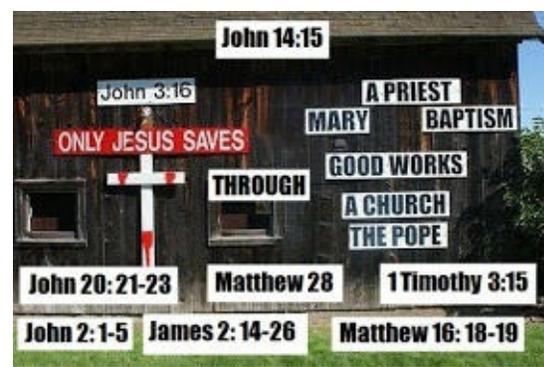
through Mary.

through Baptism.

through good works.

through the Church.

through the Pope.



Jesus saves through the tools that he gave us to use to live a holy life.

*“Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “**This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!**” And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.” Luke 9: 28-36*

My heart is full because the tomb is empty.

This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2016/02/jesus-saves.html>
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Unfinished Business [at Third Place Project]



Photo Credit: JCD1981NL [[CC BY 3.0](#)], via Wikimedia Commons

I'd like to say I'm a gamer – but it's probably more accurate to say I'm a wannabe gamer. I've almost always played on outdated consoles – I had the original Nintendo when other people were running 16-bit systems; and today I'm still the proud owner of a Nintendo Wii and about a dozen games that I play occasionally – mostly on nights that I can't sleep.

One of the great frustrations on the original Nintendo was the fact that many of the best games had no save points – meaning if you ran out of lives, you were forced to continue or start over, without the benefit of either the progress you had made or any upgrades/achievements you may have unlocked. It was incredibly frustrating – and more often than not, I would just turn the system off and walk away. Luckily, this was a challenge that went away as gaming systems progressed – so much so that many of today's gamer's probably consider this memory to be ancient history – right up there with rotary dial phones and black and white TV's.

While I can't blame the technology anymore, my gaming habits haven't changed much. I've got at least ten games started that I've never bothered to finish – partly because, as a husband and father, I now have other priorities – but if I was to be completely honest, it's also partly because I find them hard and I can't be bothered to dedicate the time and effort required to get better at it.

You might be reading this and saying “*So what? You're a grown man now, a father of five... who cares about your inability to master video games? Aren't you a little old for this?*”

If it was *just* video games that get treated this way, I'd agree with you. But this lack of perseverance carries over into many other parts of my life. I've got a stack of books on my dresser – 26 to be exact – that I've been meaning to read (some of which I've had for more than four years!) I've got two virtual courses (public speaking and music lessons) that I've been putting off for months. There are many things I'd like to do to build up my spiritual life or to improve my general health and well-being... but my good intentions don't always end up producing great results.

Fortunately for me – and you, if this sounds like you -it is the perfect time of year to do something about it.

Lent starts this Wednesday ([Ash Wednesday](#)). For the next 6.5 weeks, everything our Church says and

does is about letting God complete the good work He has started in our hearts (see Philippians 1:6). If you struggle to pray, there's no time like Lent to start or restart the conversation with God. We'll talk about giving things up – both bad habits (sin) and good things (fasting). There'll be more chances to go to the Sacrament of reconciliation than any other time of year. Parishes host missions, youth groups run rallies and retreats, and online communities offer daily spiritual food delivered right to your device of choice. There are numerous chances to serve others and to donate to those in need.

You can look at Lent a lot like that new game (or even a new book) you open for the first time. There's an excitement and a newness that comes with the season... but there's also the danger that we treat our resolutions to pray, fast, or give with the same dedication we give to Mario Kart – One too many blue turtle shells from a computer that cheats, and we give up.

It doesn't need to be that way.

The biggest difference in the Lenten season is that we don't do it alone. Look around on Ash Wednesday and you'll see others marked with the same Ashes you may have received – ashes that are meant to remind us of a call to change. Every single one of us – from my four-year-old daughter giving up some sort of yummy thing for Lent right up to Pope Francis and the sacrifices he'll be making – are walking together on the same journey through these days. Furthermore, God Himself (the Holy Spirit) is working in your heart to make this Lent the time we might finally turn the corner on that sin or bad habit, or to build up our discipline to actually pray. And our part in this journey is the same it has always been: to open our hearts and cooperate with all these opportunities and the grace of God, to pay attention to the God who speaks as well as the needs of those around us, and to quiet down some of the things (good and bad) which may be keeping us from Him.

As we head into these incredible forty days, take stock of those things in your life you may have shelved because you've found them to be hard. Is it prayer? Is it a relationship you find particularly difficult (but know you are called to be a part of)? Is it getting over yourself and looking around for others? Is it a bad habit you've been trying to kick for awhile, but you can't bring yourself to change? Have you been meaning to head back to Church and/or to start reading the Bible? Whatever it might be, 'tis the season to start. Let these forty days be the moments you start finishing what God has begun in you... not simply another forgotten game on the shelf.

And here's a few places to help you get more out of Lent:

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We Are Not Traveling Alone [at String of Pearls]

I'm on the road today, but it's a little different than usual: I'm traveling alone, for one thing.

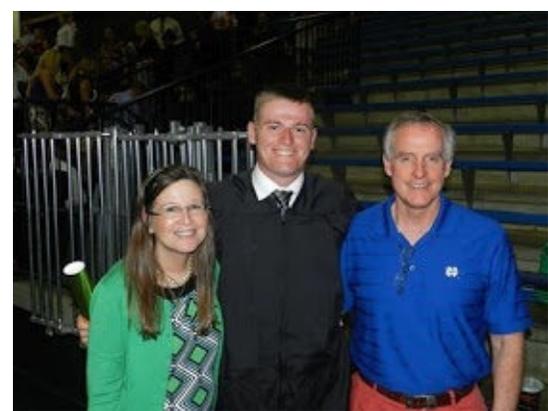


Normally, my husband and I are driving or flying off somewhere together, most often to visit with our kids and grandkids. But today I'm going solo, heading across the Atlantic--and my better half is not going to be the pilot up front, which makes the experience a first for me. [Bites fingernails nervously.] Unfortunately, he'll have to travel to other destinations in the days/weeks to come. (Work can really get in the way, sometimes, can't it?)

I was privileged to go along on some working trips with my favorite captain--to Nice, Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, and twice to San Juan--back when we first became almost-but-not-quite empty-nesters (our youngest son was still in college during those jet-setting days, so he was back home with us during his breaks). I haven't accompanied my guy on any trips to exotic locales for the past few years, however, as our brood of grandbabies has been growing exponentially and going to see them beats anything Europe has to offer. (By a mile, truly!)

So why the trip, you ask? Well, I've been having a rather difficult time lately dealing with the fact that
my

baby--who really did leave the nest in earnest, when he graduated from college in May of 2015 and shortly afterward reported to military training--will call Germany home for the next few years. I know it's easier to stay connected despite long distances in this modern era of technological wonders like Skype and FaceTime; but the bottom line is that it will be much tougher for him to spend the kind of time he's always enjoyed spending with family while he's over there.



A little over a month ago, when we were staying at our Oyster Haven house on the lake, working to get it ready for its VRBO opening, I woke up from a deep sleep one night (something that almost never happens to me; I mean, I pretty much always sleep like a rock). I was chilled to the bone, but at first I was too tired to get up and get another blanket. As I lay there shivering in bed, for some reason I couldn't stop thinking about my youngest son. I knew he was out in the field at the time, and I found myself worrying about whether he was warm enough. And over the past few weeks, I've been feeling blue at random moments. It's as if a little gray cloud follows me sometimes, and I know it's because I miss him so much and have a bit of separation anxiety (something I've always had a problem with when it comes to my boys!) because he's so far away from us. (No matter how big or how old they get, moms can't really ever let go of that primal urge to take care of their chickies.) So I thought that if I just went over there and saw where he lived and what his life was like, I could finally relax a bit.



This son of ours has always looked up to his older brothers. We had our first four in four years, and then after a five-year break, he came along. And all he ever wanted to do was be like them. He was in such a hurry to grow up and feel like "one of the guys." I know he misses being able to see his brothers, whom he considers his best friends, on a regular basis now; and I don't want him to feel as if he's traveling alone. So this former white knuckle-flyer is doing what would have been unthinkable even five years ago: I'm traveling across the ocean, alone.

By the time I board my international flight in less than two hours, I will have spent about ten hours in the Atlanta airport today. I had to fly here early this morning, as there weren't a lot of options out of the VA city where sons #3 and 4 live. I had to break away [rip that Band-Aid off

fast

, Grammy!] from all the cuteness at our middle son's home, where my husband and I have been staying for about a week, offering what help we could as he and Preciosa transition to having two kids under two

(make that two kids 16 months and under!). It was tough to leave all that cuteness, I'll tell you. Not just the wee ones, but my cute boyfriend of 42 years/husband of 35 as well.



I don't mind long waits at the airport, though. What can I say?--I am not easily bored! And I was thrilled to hear this announcement over the PA system at about 11:25 a.m.: *"There will be a Catholic Mass at 11:30, at the chapel located on Concourse F."* I quickly shoved all of my various gadgets, which I'd been charging up for the trip, into my carry-on bag and ran to the train that would take me from Concourse C to Concourse F. I arrived at the small chapel late, but made it in time for the gospel--and soon afterward, about eight others joined me (including an angelic one-year-old girl holding a chunky wooden toddler Rosary).

I cannot even tell you how thrilled I was to be able to attend Mass before getting on that plane tonight! I was tearing up throughout the service, so filled with emotion was I. And I was a little sad that I'd been chewing gum when the announcement was made and would be unable to receive Communion. BUT--the priest gave all of us a dispensation, since we hadn't been given enough notice to properly fast before receiving the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist. What joy! What a wonderful experience that was for me! As many times as I've been in this airport, I didn't even know that Masses were held there! (I only wish I'd known I could have gone to Confession, too!)



So--to tie this post up as neatly as possible, I'm not traveling alone today, because I have a family that loves me and God is with me always, watching over me. And I'm making this trip to remind my boy that

he never has to travel alone either. (And who knows? The fact that I'm actually coming over all by myself, without my favorite travel buddy, indicates that he might be seeing a whole lot more of his dad and me than he ever thought he would when he was given this assignment!)

Now in closing, a prayer of thanksgiving. Thank you, God: for these five wonderful boys whose care you entrusted to my husband and me; for the many blessings you have bestowed on our family; and finally, for air travel (and giving me a husband whose job makes it affordable for us!).

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.de/2016/02/we-are-not-traveling-alone.html>
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Forewarned [at Blogging For A Better Life]

I could be a judge. Believe me when I say that I've got plenty of experience.

I'm very good when it comes to looking at someone and making a quick judgment. I don't even need to hear all the circumstances.

Sometimes I judge others—and it is bothering me.

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

(Matthew 7:1-5)

A good judge looks at everything with a panoramic lens. A qualified judge knows how important it is to view all cases with an open perspective. An honest judge does not let anything cloud his/her vision.

Do not judge

. . . your parents, your spouse, your children, your siblings, your friends, your co-workers, your boss, your neighbors, your former classmates, your in-laws, your pastor, your distant relatives, your doctors and nurses, your fellow churchgoers, your spouse's friends, your various group members, your walking partner, your partner in crime, your hairdresser, your waiter, your lawyer, your sales clerk, your political leaders, your past and present teachers, your people that you see who are homeless and in need of so much more than just a home.

Do not judge

anyone,

so that you will not be judged

. . . unless you are comfortable being judged by

your standard of measure

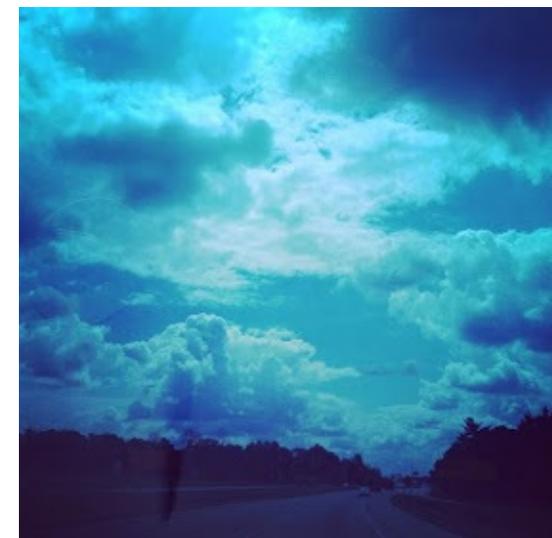
that you judge others.

For in the way you judge, you will be judged

.

On second thought, I could never be a judge. I have no experience. I'm terrible when it comes to looking at someone, and making a quick judgment. I don't even take time to hear all the circumstances.

We've been given fair warning on this subject of becoming a judge. What's your stance?



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Prayer - How to Get Started



Many years ago I used to run a retreat and conference centre in London. As I had to run the place on a shoe string I tried to do as many of the odd jobs myself to save money. But I always had to call in the plumber when the drains were blocked. One day when he was having his lunch I went to look inside his tool box to see if I could find the tool that he used to save me calling him again. It was then that I saw these words written in Latin inside the lid. *'All for the greater honour and glory of God'* (Ad maiorem Dei gloriam). This was the 'be all and end all' of all that he said and did each day, as it has been for all sincerely practicing Christians from the very beginning, as it had been for Jesus himself.

When in the first century the Martyr St Justin was writing about the celebration of the Mass, he said that, when at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, the priest said, – *'Through him with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all glory and honour is yours almighty Father for ever and ever.* The *'Amen'* of the faithful was so loud that it nearly raised the roof. Their *'Amen'* was so strong so loud and so vibrant because the priest was not just summing up the offering that they were making at that Mass, but the offering that they were making with their lives. It was the offering that they were making with every fibre of their being, at every moment of their lives, in and through all that they said and did each day. When the high priest made a sacrifice in the temple trumpets would sound, to draw the attention of all the worshippers. No trumpets were needed to remind the early Christians when they should offer themselves to the Father at Mass. Yet strangely enough this supreme moment in the Mass is not appreciated, as it once was. When I was looking for a picture to illustrate this, the key moment in the Mass, I could not find one, although there were many hundreds of other illustrations. When I last went to Mass the *'Amen'* was no more than a murmur just loud enough to assure the celebrant that his congregation were still awake!

The incredible mystery of God's love is that he doesn't actually need us to praise him and give him all honour and glory, he teaches us to do this because it is in doing this that we are taken out of ourselves to centre our attention on him, and to receive what he gives in return. This is the highest form of human action that eventually leads to moments of great happiness on earth and to eternal happiness in heaven.

From the very first centuries Christians would begin their day by offering all that they were about to say and do throughout the day, for God's honour and glory, so that their whole day would become the Mass. Later this offering came to be called *The Morning Offering*. This is how my own morning prayer begins the moment I wake up. However I have found that just before beginning it's a good idea to try and fix the mind on a depiction of the glorified Christ through whom we are making our offering to the Father. If it helps picture an Icon of the Risen Lord, or of Jesus after the Resurrection as depicted by one of the great

Renaissance artists, or some other such depiction of your choosing. It might be the image of the Sacred Heart or a more modern picture of Jesus in glory, radiating the uncreated life and love that he has received from his Father. If it helps, place the image of your choice on the wall as a reminder. Then, when this is done, repeat those last words of the great Eucharistic prayer to help prepare you to transform the day ahead into a daily Mass:- *‘Through him with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all glory and honour is yours almighty Father for ever and ever Amen’*.

Once the great *‘Amen’* had assured the celebrant that the whole congregation had joined him in offering themselves in, with, and through Christ to the Father, he would intone the *‘Our Father’*. So now the whole assembly could now pray to the Father, in with and through Jesus using the very words with which he had taught his disciples to address him. This then, could be the time when the *‘Our Father’* can be said in the Morning Prayer.

On a personal note let me explain how I pray each morning to give you some idea of how the principles that I am trying to explain can be personalised by each one of us. For instance once I have visualised the abiding presence of Jesus I pray: -*‘Lord Jesus I know that you are here now, as you always will be, for you promised to be with us to the end of time. Help me to pray with you, in you, and through you, to God the Father, who is always drawing us together in the love of the Holy Spirit, now, and for ever’*. When I have done this I try to say the *‘Our Father,’* as slowly and prayerfully as I can. Then I call to mind all who are with me when I pray in Christ asking for their prayers, and praying for family, friends, and for all whom I have promised to pray. In this way I can, not only pray for them in words, but in all and through all that I say and do in the forthcoming day. Finally I review all the things that I have to do in the day ahead and resolve to do them as best and as kindly as I can. That’s how my day gets started!

Less than ten years before Constantine granted religious tolerance to all in the Roman Empire one of the last of the Christian Martyrs, St Euplius, was tortured on the rack before having his ears ripped off and then scourged like Christ before him, and finally beheaded. All this took place in Catania in Sicily by the orders of the prefect Calvisanus in the reign of Diocletian. In his interrogation he was asked why he would not offer sacrifices to the gods. He said he did, but his God was the father of Jesus Christ. Nor did he need to go to a temple to offer sacrifices, for his whole life was a sacrifice to God, as it had been for Jesus Christ before him.

Two hundred years before him Christians used to insist that they had no temples, no altars, nor any priests for that matter. The same was true of their founder Jesus Christ. Although he was brought up and practised his faith in every other respect like a good orthodox Jew there is no evidence that he ever offered any physical sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem. His mother and foster father did, like all his friends, relatives and disciples, but he never did. Why? Because the very essence of what he had come to do was contained in his total commitment to introducing a new form of worship that he had promised to the Samaritan woman. It was a form of worship that would come from the heart and entail the complete and unreserved offering of oneself to God, in with and through him, just as he had offered his all to his Father, every moment of every day to his death on the Cross. His followers were asked to do the same, and that means us too!

After Jesus’ glorification, St Peter taught that Jesus himself was the new temple, a spiritual temple and every Christian was built into him, as spiritual bricks and mortar to offer themselves in, with, him and through him to God the Father (1Peter 2:5). Furthermore they were not only to do this on Sundays, but on every day too, and at every moment of that day, as Jesus had done throughout his life while he was on

earth. The precise nature of the offering that God wanted in order to give him ‘*all honour and glory*’ was defined, so that there could be no misunderstanding. Before the resurrection it was to *love God with your whole heart and mind and with your whole soul*. After the Resurrection the Old Testament commandment was given a new meaning and a new power that made what was impossible before, possible. Now the new offering was made possible, because it was offered *in, with, and through Jesus himself*. He was not just the New Temple, but the new High Priest too. In the early days of the Church the word priest was only used for Christ himself and for every member of the Christian Community, who daily offered themselves to the Father through him. The first thing that the early Christians would do each morning therefore, was each in their own way, to renew the offering that they had made at the Sunday Liturgy. Remember that for over a thousand years daily Mass was hardly practised at all, it was certainly never the norm. Although many practices of the early Church have been forgotten, this one has persisted in what we have known since childhood as the *Morning Offering*. The Curé d’Ars once said that, “*All that we do, without offering it to God, is wasted,*” and I think he was right.

First published on [Catholic Stand](#) 4th February 2015

David Torkington is the author of – ‘[Wisdom from the Western Isles](#)’, a book that teaches the reader how to pray, from the very beginning to what St Teresa of Avila called the Mystical Marriage.

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/prayer-how-to-get-started/>
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God, religion, freedom n' stuff [at Catholic Deacon]

Last summer, I let myself become overwhelmed and weighed down by everything happening in the world. In response, I wrote what I called an "on-the-fly" post:

["Being overwhelmed and stultified."](#)

My post was about the necessity of living my own life because I don't have another one available to me—as vexing as the purveyors of fantasy might find such an observation. More importantly, I wrote about true freedom, focusing on how important it is to experience it for yourself. If you don't, paraphrasing Seinfeld's "Soup Nazi," then there is no freedom for you.

Yesterday between Masses I spent time reading

[*Lapsed Agnostic*](#)

, John Waters' account of how he (re-)discovered faith as an adult. In the final chapter of the book, entitled "After Don't," Waters observed: "Religions generally teach us to think in terms of our duties towards God." Hence, for many people, especially in the West, our experience of religion, of church, is simply about adhering to a set of proscriptions (don'ts) and prescriptions (dos). Even though, apart from approximately 2 years in my early 20s, I have been a religious person virtually all my life, this is my experience too, both as a layman and now as a cleric.

Taking his cue from Msgr Luigi Giussani, founder of

[Communion & Liberation](#)

, Waters went on to point out that in conceiving of religion as a set of rules, or reducing "being religious" to adherence to such rules, we forget "that what defines our relationship with [God] is the knowledge of what He can do for us that we cannot do for ourselves." It is

only

this realization, which comes through experience, that religion ceases to be either fire insurance against the day of wrath, or a depressingly pragmatic existential move. I must note that Waters, wisely in my view, endorses faith as a pragmatic move at least in the beginning, advising his readers "fake it until you make it." C.S. Lewis advised much the same thing when it came the difficulties involved with loving one's neighbor.

Waters went on to insist that God's "most vital role" in our lives is to relieve us "of the responsibility" of taking His role upon ourselves. As a result, one can reach the liberating conclusion that what truly matters is not whether "I am sufficiently devout," let alone whether "God is pleased with my piety, but my awareness of the fact that I myself am not God." More than adherence to moral injunctions "or anxiety concerning the afterlife," the most persuasive argument for God, according to Waters, is "if God does not exist, I have an urgent need, in my own interest, to substitute for Him."

While Waters' observation may sound like a variation of Feuerbach's theme that if God did not exist we would need to invent him, it isn't really. I think Waters takes the temperature of the contemporary Western person more accurately. In my view, the difference is a matter of experience. Either I take the heavy burden of existence upon my shoulders, or I recognize the impossibility of so doing, even if only by being crushed under its weight. The experience of being crushed forces a question upon me. To be experienced, as it were, at least in the sense that Giussani meant it, requires me to attune myself more to reality as it presents itself to me and engaging it according to

all

the factors that together make it up. Stated in a simpler way, reality reaches out to me and so I must cultivate my awareness of it by paying attention, even if this reaching out sometimes consists of a slap to my face.

Giussani insisted that, when functioning properly, religion "proposes to man a question regarding everything he does, and thus becomes a much broader view than any other." The problem with people like the everything-old-is-new-again-atheists and those of a reductively empiricist bent of mind is that their view of reality is badly constrained, it's way too narrow, it simply ignores obvious aspects of reality.



Reading

[Lapsed Agnostic](#)

yesterday reminded me of a book, which contrasts with Waters as much as it coheres with him. The book is

[Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense](#)

, by Francis Spufford, which I read about a year ago. The part of the book of which I was reminded is the second chapter, entitled "The Crack in Everything." One of the major points Spufford made in this chapter was, unlike it's parent and sibling (i.e., Judaism and Islam respectively), which bear more resemblance to each other than to being Christian, Christianity "isn't interested in coming up with a set of sustainable rules for living by." According to Spufford, Christianity "makes frankly impossible demands." Rather than insisting on specific repeatable actions, Christianity, he continued, "offers general but lunatic principles." Among other things, this is why there is a three volume set of conferences Luigi Giussani delivered to aspiring members of

[Memores Domini](#)

entitled

[Is It Possible to Live This Way?](#)

Nonetheless, Christianity is taught and, therefore, understood by many Catholics and other Christians, as well as semi-Christian sectarians, as living by a set of sustainable, repeatable rules by which one gains merits, or de-merits, with the Almighty. It seems to me that it's a short trip from there to the nonsense of Joel Osteen or

[The Secret](#)

Having been raised LDS and still residing in Utah, I have met Catholics with a Mormon background who want to live Catholicism in what I can only describe as a Mormon manner, which is highly rule-bound. In one of the three books, apart from the Bible, Mormons revere as scripture, the Doctrine and Covenants, which consists largely of revelations Mormon founder Joseph Smith, Jr. claimed to receive directly from God, one can read - "There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which

all

blessings are predicated— And when we obtain

any

blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (

[130:20-21](#)

- emboldening and italicizing emphasis mine). The next verse states that God the Father "has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (

[130:22](#)

), which lends credence to the so-called "Lorenzo Snow couplet" (i.e., "As man is, God once was, as God is, man may become" - see

["Becoming 'like' God, or becoming Gods?"](#)

).

According to this irrevocably decreed law, God

only

blesses us when we're obedient. So, while "God helps those who help themselves" is

not

in the Bible, it's certainly in the Doctrine and Covenants. So, Mormonism, like unbelief, insists that we must take on the role of God because, on a Mormon view, God is only a god. This constitutes but one reason why I am so happy that the only LDS convert to the Catholic faith being considered for sainthood, at least of whom I am aware, the Servant of God

[Cora Louise Evans](#)

, was a mystic. Since I am mining this vein, it bears noting that

[Giussani's sainthood cause](#)

is also under way.

In her forward to Giussani's book

[The Religious Sense](#)

, which I am re-reading as the result of reading

[Lapsed Agnostic](#)

, the late University of Chicago political philosopher, Jean Bethke Elshtain, wrote: "How sad it is that our quest for self-mastery and a widespread sense of emptiness and loss-of-meaning go hand-in-hand, yet we often fail to see the connection." More relevant to the point I am trying to make here, she noted, "Giusanni helps us to fit the broken pieces together by refusing seductive schemes and manipulations,

including a quest for perfection that can only end in ashes and misery

" (italicized and emboldening emphasis mine).

I come by my tendency towards rule-bound perfectionism quite honestly, but reality has a way of steering me back around. I am very glad that Pope Francis, on whom Giussani made an impact (see

["Pope Francis moved by Msgr Giussani"](#)

) has made a practice of calling out Catholics who want to live faith in such a constraining way. Many don't much like it and sometimes the many includes me. As a result, some don't much like him. Apparently it's easier to say the Pope is in error and keep on keepin' on. When it comes to living it's not so much the "what," but the method, the "how" to so live that leaves much to be desired. As Bl. Pope Paul VI noted, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (

[Evangelii nuntiandi](#)

, par. 41).

Thoughts in this time of Lent [at Renew The Church Blog]

Catholics who pray the Liturgy of the Hours in this time of Lent can recite, with the Invitatory Prayer, the antiphon: “Today, if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts.” Just repeat that antiphon – out loud – slowly – and listen to the words!

“Today, if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts.”

There is so very much spiritual power in this brief and simple exhortation! The spiritual power I speak of, which is at risk for the possibly inattentive human heart, is the power of the voice of the Lord – the power of His Word – the power of His Spirit – power to effect conversion, life-giving transformation, supernatural renovation in the soul. The antiphon can be found in Scripture in Psalm 95, and is quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews – similar exhortations are found in other places in Scripture as well.

Ps 95: 7b ... Oh, that today you would hear his voice:

8 Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
as on the day of Massah in the desert.

9 There your ancestors tested me;
they tried me though they had seen my works.

10 Forty years I loathed that generation;
I said: “This people’s heart goes astray;
they do not know my ways.”

11 Therefore I swore in my anger:
“They shall never enter my rest.”

This portion of the psalm points us to the trial of the Israelites in the wilderness, as they went their way under the leadership of Moses and Aaron – thirsty for water in the desert, and untrusting of God in their understandable desert thirst. “Meribah,” and “Massah” indeed mean “the place of strife, of quarreling”, and “the place of the test,” respectively, and that place and that event was thus named in the verse, “Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the desert”. God gave them water – water from a rock, and “the Rock was Christ.” (1 Cor 10:4)

The lesson is clear for us, today. The water is the Holy Spirit, and the Rock is Christ the Lord. From Him the Spirit is out-poured to mankind, out-poured through His Cross, and that Holy Spirit brings His life to humanity. From the death of Christ flows life for humanity – eternal, unending life even now – for men in the desert of a world of sin and hardness of heart.

The Spirit has a mission, which includes this promised by Jesus to His own, in His last hours before His last hour, and the Passion of His Self-offering: “But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.” (Jn 16:13) This truth includes, specifically, truth concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

Jn 16:8 And when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation:

9 sin, because they do not believe in me;

- 10 righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me;
- 11 condemnation, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

In this way, the Spirit can lead a believer into life – the life of Christ – and out of the death of this world, a world condemned in the light of His holy truth. If we will listen! If we will “harden not our hearts”! If we will become “convicted” concerning our sins, “convicted” concerning sin in us, in the Church, in the world. If we will become convicted – and convinced – concerning His righteousness, and our call into His righteousness, and we grow in a life-long journey into His holiness, for His name’s sake. In this way, in the guiding and leading of the Holy Spirit, we can turn from the world condemned because of sin, and turn to salvation unto life in Christ.

If we will listen, and hear, and turn: “Today, if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts.” The Spirit speaks to us today, in the voice of conscience, in the quiet of our hearts, in the solitude of prayer, in the truth of Jesus Christ and His grace. We read in the Letter to the Hebrews,

Heb 3:12 Take care, brothers, that none of you may have an evil and unfaithful heart, so as to forsake the living God.

13 Encourage yourselves daily while it is still “today,” so that none of you may grow hardened by the deceit of sin.

14 We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end,
15 for it is said:

“Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
‘Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion.’”

This contribution is available at <http://renewthechurch.wordpress.com/2016/02/27/thoughts-in-this-time-of-lent/>
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Wednesday, 10 February 2016

Reflecting on the



Ash Wednesday, 4pm. Only *one* person so far has drawn my attention to the fact I have a "dirty mark on my head" - testament to the fact we live in a very Catholic town, if ever there was one! Walking round with a pre-schooler and a baby who are also wearing ashes probably helps, too - it looks rather less accidental when there are lots of you ;-). Today's Gospel, from Matthew 6, raised a lot of questions in my mind in relation to the ashes. We're not supposed to "make a scene", to publicise the fact that we're fasting; we're supposed to do these things "in secret"... but then we walk round with ashes on our heads, which is, well, kind of visible... When I lived in France, the general practice (at least in our area) was to sprinkle ashes over our heads, getting around the issue. I suspect the reasoning behind the method relates to the French focus on *laïcité*, notably the fact that public service workers (such as teachers) are not permitted to display outward signs of their religion, like crucifixes, and ashes would be a Bit Of A Problem (BOAP). Over the last few weeks, I've been thinking more about Matthew 6 and about the positive implications of walking around with ashes on our foreheads one day a year. So, without further ado:

- **The opportunity for evangelisation:** People are inclined to stop and let you know about your "dirty mark". Often, they will ask questions, giving us a great opportunity to share our faith.
- **Humility:** Yes, it's a bit of an odd thing to do, in a society which values conformity. People may think we look a bit silly - but it's a great reminder that what *people* think of us is not important. We are children of God, our duty is to be pleasing to Him. The ashes are also an important reminder of our mortality - from dust we were created, to dust we will return.
- **Community:** for one day in the year, "spot the Catholic" becomes so much easier! There's a beautiful feeling of fellowship when you spot another person wearing their ashes in the street, you exchange glances, smile at each other...
- **Profession of faith:** we belong to God; we are marked out as sons and daughters of the Most High. Every time I catch a glimpse of my reflection, I am reminded of that fact. The ashes are a sign to us, more than to others.
- **A gentle nudge to others:** hey! It's Lent! *That's* what all the pancakes were for yesterday!

Since that (conveniently) makes five,

Equality with God [at My Classic Creedz]



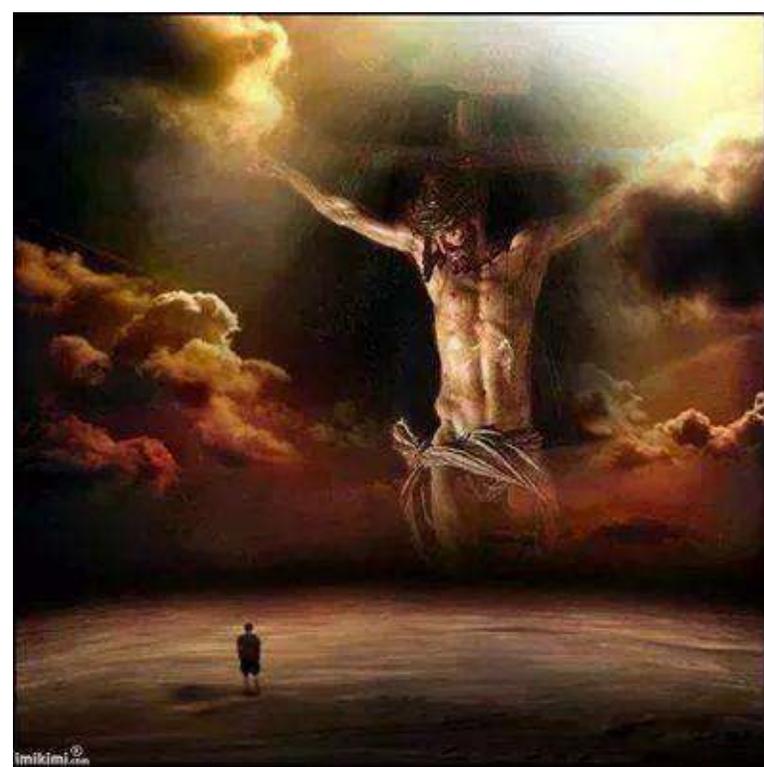
I thought to myself that I couldn't leave the month of September without sharing with you my favorite bible passage from this month. And guess what, it's a passage many of us are very familiar with but yet most times we miss the vital message from this passage. This favorite passage of mine is Philippians 2:1-11. So if you could read along with me... PS This will be long...

Here St. Paul starts out by admonishing the people of Philippi to imbibe some certain virtues in communion with one another, and for me, this forms the basis or background for what he is going to be telling us in the next 10 verses. What was St. Paul saying? That if there was any **encouragement in Christ** to be found amongst them, any **incentive of love**, any **participation in the Spirit**, any **affection or sympathy**, the faithful of Philippi should complete his Joy by being **of the same mind, having the same love and being in full accord with one another**. He advises them to shun selfishness or conceit, but that rather in **humility** they should **'count others as more important than yourselves'**, looking out for other people's interests and not their individual interests alone. (cf. Philippians 2:1-4). These may sound like mere virtues which are extrinsic or external and which the faithful of Philippi should acquire to, in a way, garnish their Christianity and make them look nice before other people, but St. Paul disagrees with this notion. For him, this mind which he want us to have is not extrinsic to our Christian heritage but indeed flows from it, because this mind was also in Christ Jesus. (cf. Philippians 2:5).

How was this mind in Christ Jesus? St. Paul tells us, 'who though he was in the **form (Gr. morphe)** of God, **he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (Gr. harpagmos) but emptied himself (Gr. Kenosis) taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.'** The Greek for 'grasped' here could also mean 'exploited' or 'used to his own advantage', as Pauline scholarship agrees, and so there we have it. It is clear therefore that the central theme of Paul's message can be said to be **'humility=divinity'**. Most times we tend to think that God exercises his divinity by 'superiority' or by 'Lording' himself over us. We have the conception that He is God because He is creator. This is indeed a false conception. God is indeed eternal but **He is not an 'Eternal Creator'**,

Creation is by no means an intrinsic attribute of God, God was never compelled to create, either by something within himself or outside himself. There is however one thing God is eternally, and that is an **'Eternal Father'**. When we read 1 John 4:8 and learn that God IS Love, we realize that Love is indeed an intrinsic attribute of his being. His **being** goes concurrently and is indeed synonymous with his **love**. And so being an eternal Father, what he does eternally is to make his very being a gift of love, his very being an outpouring or an emptying (**kenosis**) of his life in love to another.

It is here that belief in the Trinity comes to mind, for God being the principle of existence and being love could see no other and know no other but his very self, this very self of his, as the venerable servant of God Fulton J. Sheen tells us, consists in his thought, for God to be an intelligent being, it means he thinks. He thinks a thought, and the same way thoughts such as 'Justice', 'Charity' and 'Fortitude' are thoughts born or 'generated' in the mind of man and yet they are so real to us, the same way we humans can invest our personalities in our thoughts that when the products of our thoughts are heard, our whole personalities are perceived, eg. 'Shakespearean thought', the same way too God the Father thinks a thought in his mind which is eternally generated or born and which in a more infinite way than man's thoughts carries in itself the very personality and spirit of the Father. This thought is therefore both a Word like 'Justice', and 'Charity' but yet more infinitely, and also a 'Son' since He is eternally born in the Father's mind, and so since God is perfect, this one thought of his is so perfect as He is and carries in Himself all the divine attributes of the Father such that He is as Perfect as the Father, God from God, True God from true God. And so this perfect image of the Father is the perfect object of Love of the Father, and so fruit of the father's outpouring of life and love, he himself pours out his perfect life and love back to the father, and the fruit of this mutual outpouring of love is the Holy Spirit.



What happened on the cross therefore was not that God looked at his son and seeing our sins rendered unimaginable punishments on him but the Son doing for humanity what the Father has done for him for all eternity, emptying himself, and so the same way that emptying of self of the Father gave the Son life in the Godhead, the Son therefore goes ahead to empty himself for humanity to give human beings Life in the Godhead. As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:9, 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor,

so that by his poverty you might become rich'. And where else do we see that the crucifixion of Christ was not an execution but a Sacrifice where Christ willingly gave himself, emptied himself that we may become Sons of God in Him than in the ***EUCCHARIST*** where he said 'Take, eat, this is my body...Take, drink, this is my blood of the new covenant that will be shed for you' (cf. Luke 22:19-20. And so what God does by highly exalting him, giving him a name that is above every other name such that at this very name every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, is not a resuscitation and vindication of an innocently condemned man but ***a ratification of Jesus' interpretation of what Divinity or Equality with God really means which is NOT COUNTING EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED OR USED TO OUR OWN ADVANTAGE BUT HUMBLING OURSELVES AND TAKING THE FORM OF A SERVANT FOR OTHERS.***

Dearest friends, for Paul this is the mind we should have if we have received the gift of redemption, this message is indeed timely for all of us, the fact that we have received the life of God does not mean that we should look down on others, does not mean that we should be consumed with some sort of '***spiritual pride***', but rather it means that for us to maintain our divinity or equality with God, we should empty ourselves and make our own lives a gift of love for others, and so by so doing cooperate with Christ in making them sons and daughters of God in the one and only Son of God. Equality with God means that we should constantly count ourselves unworthy before the all holy God who without his grace we would have been but nothing. An example of this is seen in St. Paul himself, who in 1 Corinthians 1:15 considered himself '***least of the apostles***', 10 years later in Ephesians 3:8 considered himself, '***less than least of ALL the saints; not only of apostles and prophets, but even of all believers***' and much later in 1Tim. 1:15 he referred to himself as '***the Chief of Sinners***'. It therefore seems that the more St. Paul grew in grace and fellowship with God, the more he realized his unworthiness and humbled himself before the all holy God. We read the gospels and hear Jesus say to us, 'Whoever must be the greatest must be the servant'. 'He who loves his life will lose it but he who loses his life for my sake will find it', 'The first shall be the last and the last shall be the first', 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, It shall not bear fruit', 'He who humbles himself will be lifted up' etc., and we think they are just Jesus the good teacher dishing out moral maxims, nay, these are the very secrets to becoming and maintaining Equality with God.

I thank my mentor and teacher Dr. Scott Hahn who continues to open up the Word of God and the truths of the Most Holy Catholic Faith to me.

This contribution is available at <http://myclassiccreedz.wordpress.com/2015/09/26/equality-with-god/>
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How to forgive anyone... [at Blossoming Joy]

Now close your eyes and pray. Beg the Lord to help you SEE. Beg Him to help you have COMPASSION. And MERCY. Ask the Holy Spirit to flood your mind and soul and vision... that you may only see now through God's eyes. And that you may be able to forgive.

Open your eyes and examine the pictures before you. Imagine holding that infant. Look into the eyes of the child and SEE the innocence and the beautiful plan that God intended. Think like a mother. Think of all of the hopes and dreams that you would have for such a little person. See the little one smiling up to you and reaching. See baby fall... and the tears... and running to dry them and kiss them away.

God's baby. God's little one. At this moment, that little heart is in your hands. Now, even if you don't feel it, Say out loud:

You are His beautiful child and I forgive you for His sake.

I have done this a few times. All times but one it was an accidental (providential) moment. Once, I was sent a childhood photograph by a person who had hurt me. Perhaps she knew me well enough to know the effect it would have. It was her First Holy Communion portrait and her eyes were shining with a beautiful innocent joy. I could SEE her for the first time and all bitterness left my heart. Forgiveness does not always mean reconciliation but it is still necessary. There is still brokenness. There is still division. But I cannot see the radiant face of God's little girl and withhold my forgiveness. The image from that photograph has not left me.

I found a picture of my own childhood one day and really *looked* for the first time. And I wept at what I saw because *I saw what I thought was lost*. Then I knew that God still *sees* and loves and forgives His little girl. He always has the face of my innocence before Him.

We ought to do this for each other. We should continually **see** each other through the Father's eyes and **recall** each other to our purpose... to the image in which we were made. We should practice seeing what may be hidden and calling out to the little soul in hiding.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta habitually saw our Lord in every person. I am not so good as that. The mother in me sometimes needs to start with a baby picture.

Originally posted in 2011

This contribution is available at <http://blossomingjoy.squarespace.com/blog/how-to-forgive-anyonehtml>
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The Poor in Spirit [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

While Nancy waited in the doctor's office for her appointment time, she noticed an elderly woman across from her. Mid-seventies, Nancy guessed. Maybe five feet tall. She looked well-put together in her nicely tailored pink pant suit – until she stood up and shuffled behind her walker to the receptionist. It was then Nancy noticed the woman's pant legs were so long that she'd rolled up about a foot of material to keep it from dragging on the ground. Nancy wondered if she had no one to hem them for her, or to take her to a seamstress.

As she told me this story, lyrics of an old Beatle's song passed through my thoughts:

Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church

where a wedding has been

Lives in a dream

Waits at the window, wearing the face

that she keeps in a jar by the door

Who is it for?

All the lonely people

Where do they all come from?

All the lonely people

Where do they all belong?

Father McKenzie writing the words of a sermon

that no one will hear

No one comes near

Look at him working, darning his socks in the night

when there's nobody there

What does he care?

All the lonely people

Where do they all come from?

All the lonely people

Where do they all belong?

When Nancy finished talking I sat in silence for a few moments, pondering the well-put together woman with the rolled up cuffs. What can the gospel – the good news of Jesus – what can it mean for all the lonely people? What can it speak to those who don't speak because they've learned no one cares to hear what they have to say? What message can the good news have for those who won't look others in the eyes because they know by experience their place is always beneath and behind and in a corner?

Does God really have good news for the Father Mckenzie's and the Eleanor Rigbys and for those who don't have someone who cares enough to hem their pants?

Yes. Of course He does. That's why Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*"

He was talking to the discouraged ones, the desolate, the rejected, the lonely, the forgotten. He was talking to the invisible ones in every employee break room, in every church, in every classroom, in every doctor's office, in every family.

Their God – called "Immanuel, God with us" – their God aches for their sadness. He listens intently to every word whispered by their heart. He catches their every tear in His bottle. He cups their chin in His hands and invites them to look into His eyes.

The good news of the gospel is this: Though no one else knows them, God-With-Us knows them. His gaze follows those who are poor in spirit, each Eleanor Rigby, Father McKenzie, and each old woman with rolled-up cuffs. Each is immeasurably important to Him, so important that He says it again and again, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy burdened."

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-poor-in-spirit.html>
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Drop the Nets... [at A Catholic Moment]



15 years ago, I sat on the Northeast coast of the United States, on a pier in Maine. It was a beautiful August day on the North Atlantic, and as I was up in Maine for training, we took a long lunch and went to the outskirts of town, and just across the road from a small country store and deli was a small pier where lobster and crab fisherman were coming in, emptying their pots. We took our lunch out to the pier and ate, and watched these men work.

As I was up there for work, this too was their work. It was their livelihood. It's just what they do. And even though it's outside, and not every day is like that day in August, I have to believe they love it. Just as there is something I love about writing and computers, there's something they love about being out on the water, the salt in the air, the sound of the wood as it creaks, and the ropes as they stretch, and the waves lapping up against the boat. This is their life. Surely at times it's a struggle, but it seemed so peaceful to me.

And so when I read today's Gospel, and other readings like it that take place on the Sea of Galilee and the Disciples fishing, it makes me think of those docks in Maine. I think about the men I watched, doing what they do best. What if a man came up to them, showed them some great things just had a divine aura about him, and said, leave your boat here, drop your crab pots, and your bait, all your tools – and follow me! What would they have said? What would I say? What if someone came up to me tomorrow and said to me – drop your career, your job, your source of income, and come and follow me? Even if he performed a miracle for me, what would I do? What about my family? What would you do?

So was the life of Peter, and James and John out on the Sea of Galilee. Their life was a hard life, but I'm sure it was a fulfilling life. I'm sure they had pride in their work, and that they loved being on the water. They loved the sites, the sounds and the smells. They loved the freedom.

And then comes a man named Jesus.

He talks to them, performs a miracle for them, and they don't feel worthy to even be in His sight, let alone follow Him and be His disciples. They are just fisherman after all, they think. What do they know, they ask? But He comforts them. He tells them what they are going to see and do, and that He will show them, and they are just so compelled by Him and His personality, His charisma, His Love, and they can't imagine not being with Him. They don't know how they are going to do the things He's mentioning, but

they just know it feels right. They are good Jewish men, and they know that they are not worthy, but they believe that God will give them the ability. God will give them that grace, even before they truly know what His grace is.

Paul is the same way in today's second reading. As is the Prophet Isaiah, Neither one of them feel worthy to follow their calling. Yet God gives them His grace, and the ability and the means to do His will. They just need to trust. The same with Peter. And James. And John. And all of us.

They are “just fisherman”, but Jesus knows their personalities, their strengths, and their natural abilities – and He knows that they are the perfect ones for His Mission. Every one of them fulfills a purpose, a purpose that God designed them to do from the very beginning. But at first, they are apprehensive. They don't feel worthy. Why me? I can't do this... But then Jesus looks deep into their eyes, into their soul, and says ‘Yes, you can! You were made for this.’ And they believe Him. They don't think. They can't explain it. They just do.

I've had one experience like this in my life, just a minute fraction of the amount of what the Apostles and Prophet experienced. But an experience nonetheless. And it's why I write for this website. I've written a little about this before, but a year and a half ago, I was really struggling with purpose in my life. I continued to think that it revolved around happiness and passion in my career. I asked God to help me, and show me what I should do with my life, that I wanted to use my talents to make a difference, to be happy. But I always thought this only revolved around my job. I was seeking something more, but I just did not know when to find it.

That's when Laura posted a message asking if people really get anything out of this website, and if anyone was interested in helping to write. As soon as I read that, I contacted her. I had been reading A Catholic Moment for several months, and getting a great deal from her reflections. And so while I had never written for anything like this before, let alone about sacred scripture, I knew I liked to write, and I just knew that I had to be a part of this ministry. I didn't know how well I would do, or what I would say. I didn't think I had the knowledge or experience to write reflections about the Mass readings, but I just felt called to do this.

I felt the biggest push from the Holy Spirit that I ever had, and it was really a no-brainer. It's truly been one of the best things to ever happen to me, because I get to hear amazing things from all of you about how the words God gives me to say make such a difference in your lives. And I know this experience just continues to nurture and cultivate my own soul and spiritual life as a result.

It was a “**drop the nets**” moment for me, like Peter, and James, and John, who dropped all their nests and fishing gear to follow Jesus.

Surely I'm not dropping my career or being knocked down by a bright light, but I do sacrifice time. I've dropped a certain mindset to follow a calling. It's a commitment, and it does take time, and many weeks I wonder just how I can relate and what I have to say about certain readings, but writing for this website, with all the wonderful writers we have, and all you awesome readers from around the world show me every day that we are doing Christ's work. Reflecting and writing about God's Word, Sacred Scripture, and how it relates to daily life – as an introspective person – is there anything better? But I had to “drop the nets” that contained some other mindsets. The journey is amazing!

So what is your “drop the nets” moment? Have you had one? Or many? Have you let some go by where

you've stayed on the boat, and held onto the nets, searching for the fish where they are not? I know I've had plenty. I've let plenty of opportunities go by where I know Jesus was calling me to do something, and I just did not do it. And I know, many times, I will never get that same chance again. But it seems the more I seek, and reflect, and the more I do drop those nets, and all that other gear that holds me down.

As this is the last Sunday before Lent – I encourage all of you to look for those callings in your life. Those areas where you can “drop the nets” and get closer to Jesus, and perhaps follow something you are called to do.

God Bless.

[\(IS 6:1-2A, 3-8; PS 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8; 1 COR 15:1-11; LK 5:1-11\)](#)

This contribution is available at <http://www.acatholic.org/sunday-2716-drop-the-nets/>
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A missionary martyr [at Hermano Juancito]

A missionary martyr from Oklahoma?

Ash Wednesday I finished a new book about a missionary martyr,

The Shepherd Who Didn't Run: Father Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma

by María Ruiz Scaperlanda.

I have read Henri Nouwen's book,

Love in a Fearful Land: A Guatemalan Story,

as well as the chapter on Fr. Stan Rother in

Murdered in Central America: The Stories of Eleven U.S. Missionaries

by Donna Whitson Brett and Edward T. Brett

I have twice visited Santiago Atitlán, once with a Guatemalan who spoke one of the languages spoken there and knew some of the people. I remember the shrine with Fr. Stan's heart on the right side as I entered the church. I took some pictures a few of which I scanned. But I only have one of the cross and retable available here in Honduras.



But this book helped me to understand even more deeply the witness of this US missionary and to make it personal.

María Ruiz Scaperlanda gives us a moving portrait of Fr. Stan. What comes through in the book is Stan's humanity which included his struggle with anger. He is no plaster saint, but a real person.

I was particularly impressed by his simplicity – an Oklahoma farm boy who flourished in a different context, because of his love for the people.

Reading the book, I was reminded of Father Ron Hennessey, a Maryknoll missionary and Iowa farm boy, who also served in Guatemala about the same time as Father Stan Rother. (I wrote about Ron

[here](#)

.)

As María Ruiz Scaperlanda writes (p. 228):

Because he understood the Gospel values, not as a set of ideas but an affair of the heart, Father Stanley could take care of the most menial duties with his whole being. Whether listening to someone's pain, fixing a car, changing a diaper, driving someone to the doctor, or shopping for supplies for the mission, he understood the reality of God's presence in each act — and by doing so, he proclaimed the Gospel of love, joy, and hope with his whole being.

At the end of the book, the author compares Fr. Stan with Saint John Marie Vianney, the Curé de Ars. They both struggled with seminary studies. They both served in out of the way parishes where their love of the people was exemplary.

But what really hit me as I finished reading it on Ash Wednesday evening was Fr. Stan's commitment and his total giving of himself to the people. The word often used here is

entrega,

giving oneself over. It stirred me to examine what I am doing here. Am I really given myself to the people, really moving out of myself in order to serve the people here.

I especially appreciated the author's discussion of the importance of presence. For me, one of the

essential aspects of missionary life is being present. What we do is often less important than our presence, or accompanying the people in their lives and in their struggles.

As the author wrote (p. 228):

By constantly striving to deliberately be present to the people in front of him, to the needs in front of him, Father Stanley proclaimed a God who lives and suffers with his people.

Fr. Stanley Rother explained it this way (pp. 181-182):

“[O]ur presence here means a lot for the people,” Father Stanley wrote to Frankie Williams. He continued: When I hear the people during Mass here on Sunday or Thursday, the cacophony of prayers going up to the Lord, His presence must be there. I am delighted to be a part.... At first signs of danger, the shepherd can’t run and leave the sheep fend for themselves.”

A few years ago, before the 2009 Honduras coup, a friend here asked me if I’d leave in the face of violence or military invasion. I said no because I am here with the people and they are for me God’s security.

I therefore take great comfort and courage from Father Stan’s note to a friend (p. 158):

I haven’t received any threats as such, but if anything happens that is the way it’s supposed to be. I don’t intend to run from danger, but at the same time I don’t intend to unnecessarily put myself into danger. I want to live like anyone else. What I have told you here is just for you, not to say any of this to the folks.... We just need the help of God to do our work well and to be able to take it if the time comes that we are asked to suffer for Him.

I treasure this book as reminder of my mission and as a challenge and consolation in the midst of my ministry in western Honduras.

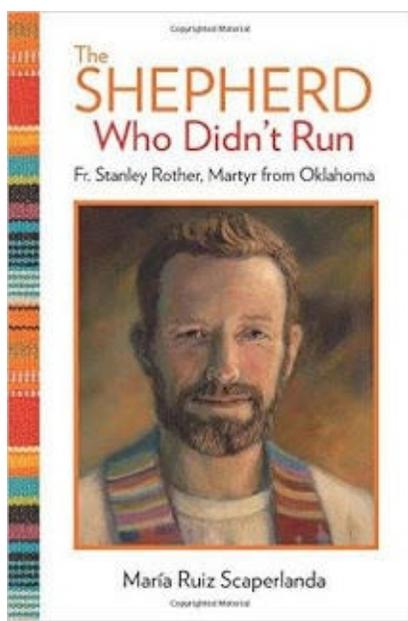
The Shepherd Who Didn't Run

can be ordered on

[Amazon](#)

or from

[Our Sunday Visitor](#)



Thomas Melville's book on Ron Hennessey,

Through A Glass Darkly: The U.S. Holocaust in Central America

is available on Kindle from

[Amazon](#)

This contribution is available at <http://hermanojuancito.blogspot.com/2016/02/a-missionary-martyr.html>
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The Baby Loss Club



I am at Thomas' wake. I have his memory box on my knee and I take out a few photos and pass them to a friend.

"He was a chubby baby!" she exclaims.

I reply, "He wasn't really. Those photos were taken at the funeral home. He looked different at the hospital."

I think about this. I remember how much I longed to see Thomas once more at the funeral home before his burial. He was in his coffin at the far end of the room and I hurried towards him. And then suddenly I stopped. He didn't look like my baby. In some way, he'd changed since I'd left him at the hospital. Tears rolled down my face and I wondered, "Did they get the babies muddled up? Is this really Thomas?"

My friend's voice interrupts my thoughts. She is asking me another question and I open my mouth to reply. My lips move but the words won't form. I try again, and again I fail to say anything. I have lost control of

my speech.

My friend notices my difficulties and hurriedly says, ‘You don’t have to say anything. It’s okay.’

But it’s not okay at all. I want to tell her about my son but I can’t. I don’t want her to move off and leave me alone. But she thinks she’s upsetting me. She pats me on the shoulder and hurries away. And I am helpless.

Yes, I remember the day I lost control of my speech. But it wasn’t just the ability to form words that I’d lost. I’d lost control of my whole life.

Life can go on the same, day in and day out. It is known and comfortable and we feel secure. We think we are in control. Yes, we have problems to deal with but we cope. And then one day we wake up and life has changed forever and we know there is absolutely nothing we can do about it.

I am very aware of how life can change so quickly. I travel through my comfortable days where I am seemingly in control and I wonder how long it will last. What plans has God got for me? Will He allow my world to be turned upside down again? Will I once again sink into that pit of suffering?

I remember going to town a few days after Thomas died. As I walked through the shopping centre, I noticed two happy young women. As I passed them, I wondered how they could continue to laugh and chat together about nothing of real importance. Didn’t the air around them turn cold as I walked by? Couldn’t they see I was no ordinary woman but one gripped by the arms of grief? Why were their lives so normal and happy? How could they enjoy the trivial things of life?

The trivial things of life? It’s strange how unimportant some things seem when we are grieving. What if my world fell apart today? Would I continue my normal routine? Would I be interested in the little things of life? No, I don’t think I would.

I think of the possibility of more suffering, and my heart skips a beat. A feeling of dread and fear overcomes me that threatens to spoil the present moment. And then I tell myself not to be silly. I say, trust. Live life to the full and don’t look ahead. Be thankful for the joys of today. Don’t let thoughts of possible pain-to-come spoil the present. The future is God’s concern, not mine. My job is to concentrate on the

little things of life.

So I get involved in the little things of life. I think about what I am going to wear for the day. I stand under the shower and enjoy the tingling of the hot water upon my skin. I spend time with God: I pray and read. I hang washing on the line and feel the warmth of the sun. Later I challenge my body to a long run. Afterwards, I sit at the lunch table and devour my sandwich as I answer the girls' eager question: "How far did you run today, Mum?" We work; we share books; we chat; we laugh; we write; we discuss what we shall cook for dinner. Then my husband Andy arrives home. We hug. I pour a glass of wine and we exchange news. Eventually, our ordinary day comes to an end.

My children arrive one by one to say goodnight. I think about how much I love my family. I love them so much it hurts and the present moment threatens to be spoilt by the question, "What if...?" But I don't let it. I really have no cause to worry.

I think about Thomas' death when I lost control over every aspect of my life, even my speech. I was sure my life was over. But here I am full of joy, surrounded by love and loving. I still have no control over my life. I don't even want control anymore. Yes, I am aware that God could allow any sort of sorrow and suffering to touch me. But I also know He will always be there to bring me through it. For hasn't He already done that before?

So I live in the present moment and I enjoy the ordinary things of life which I suddenly realise aren't so ordinary after all. Ordinary becomes powerfully extraordinary when combined with love.

So as each child comes to say goodnight, I enfold her within my arms and I hug. I hug tightly, my eyes closed, my heart overflowing with love. This is today. This is what is important. This is an extraordinary ordinary moment.

This contribution is available at <http://thebabylossclub.blogspot.com.au/2012/07/extraordinary-ordinary-things-of-life.html>

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Prodigal Sons and Daughters [at Quiet Consecration]

No person I know is without sin.

I have never met a perfect person. I have however met a lot of saints in the making; men and women determined to do their best one day at a time with their ultimate goal being the promise of eternity in heaven.

But what of the prodigals? How do we deal with those people who, through a series of circumstances, reject our religion and our values - and, sometimes, us - and go about their merry way seemingly unaffected by the ugliness of their lives? It is made worse, often, because their lives do not

seem

ugly. In fact, my experience has been that sin never looks like its effect on my soul; rather, it is beautiful and shiny and glittery and holds forth a promise of adventure and fun. I maintain that if sin looked like its effect - if, in fact, I had a my personal portrait of Dorian Gray and could actually see the toll sin takes on me - I would have a much easier time of it. Sin would not be difficult to resist and I would be able to walk confidently through the gates of heaven, nodding a quick, 'hello!' to St Peter as I passed through those Pearly Gates.

When I lived the way I wanted, with little regard for other people and certainly no real respect for myself, I gave little thought to how my actions were impacting my immortal soul. I was a little concerned for how my behavior might impact my ability to con people out of money and resources but even that did not cause me too many sleepless nights. I did what I did, took what I wanted and lived according to my feelings and emotions because of some vague sense of entitlement. I wanted what I wanted when I wanted it. Simple.

Getting sober in the manner I chose to get sober meant taking look at myself - my past and my present - and asking myself how much of the mess I was in was a direct result of my own selfishness. That required some introspection, an honest evaluation of what had happened in my life and why, and the pain that kind of evaluation caused was real and deep. To confront my own failings, taking out of the equation everyone else's actions or inactions as well as everything that had been done TO me by some pretty awful people, required courage and resilience. It required grace.

Most prodigal sons and daughters stay away from The Church and the families who love them out of fear - fear that they are going to be asked to do stuff they do not feel comfortable doing as well as fear that they will not be fully forgiven and accepted back into the fold. I certainly had that fear - how could those perfect members of my family (moms, aunts, cousins) who had never killed their own children, slept with too many men, taken all those drugs and drank all that booze, want to sit around the family dining room table eating ravioli with ME?

And how about that Church of mine? I mean, okay - Jesus founded it so there is really no place else for a thinking Christian to go to worship but what about THOSE people? Would I need to keep my sordid past a deep and dark secret? Would the mere scandal of my presence be too much for them? Would I be allowed back in and accepted in a way that would translate into movie invitations and being allowed to

sit next to them at the Knights of Columbus Fish Fry Dinner?

The reality of life is this - sometimes the answer is Yes and sometimes it is No. Some members of my family are so thrilled with the return of the Prodigal Daughter that they are willing to overlook my past mistakes, forgive me when I make new ones and move forward in relationship with me. Others are not. Some members of my Church welcomed me home and see my dark past as one of my greatest assets. Others think I should never be allowed in the front door and discount anything I have to say because I am a former drunk, a post-abortive woman and a reformed slut (for want of a better word).

In other words, you cannot please all the people all the time - especially when it comes to redemption.

My life today is centered upon one thing - The Eucharist - and nothing is ever going to keep me from being able to receive Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, again. Because I made that decision over 20 years ago I have to go forward no matter what - no matter if I am loved on this earth or not, no matter if I have friends in my parish or not and no matter what the political beliefs of others may be or become. I cannot allow myself to be driven from either sobriety or The Church because of petty conflicts or desires. God wants me...and He cares that I accept Him, His Teachings and His Church as Truth.

Being a Prodigal means being willing to stand up and say, "That's what I am - a survivor. I am a survivor of my own abuse. I may be imperfect and I may be annoying as hell - but I am home."

Here's hoping you get home too.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2016/03/prodigal-sons-and-daughters.html>
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Prescription for Death: Pro-Life Canadian Doctors Want to Inform Patients about Euthanasia [at Christ's Faithful Witness]



The doctors conferred. My mother was dying, they concluded.

It was left to me to talk to her. “Mother, the doctors say you have sepsis and kidney failure. They say that kidney failure is a comfortable way to die, and they wondered if you wanted to just let go? ”

To let go and do what? Why die, of course, comfortably die. The doctors were suggesting she stop fighting for her life.

Tora Hutchison was only 82 years old, and death wasn't on her schedule.

“That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard in my entire life!” she almost shouted. She said it in the same tone of voice she used when saying, “You haven't got the sense that God gave a goose!”

So the game was on. My mother was going to fight for her life. We would shift her to a better hospital in a bigger city, and she would have her second leg removed so she might have life. She was in this position because her doctors – out of false pity – had dillied and dallied and delayed the amputation of her second leg for a solid year. Now she was dying from it.

My grandmother had her period every month she was pregnant with my mother, and the joke among my goofy Scandinavian family was that Mom hit the floor when she was born because Grandma didn't know she was pregnant! This happened in 1919.

But mother lived, a premature baby, she said, because grandmother was a good mother, and she, too, loved life. She passed that trait to her daughter and granddaughter, Mother and me. Grandma was a U.S. immigrant from Finland. Grandpa was the same from Norway. Neither of them could speak a single word of the same language when they got married.

Now almost 100 years after Tora's birth comes the Supreme Court of Canada legalizing euthanasia on Feb. 6, 2015, to take effect one year later. In the 1960s, Tora, seeing abortion was about to be legalized, predicted "Euthanasia will be next." Did she realize she would be swept up in the right to die business? She, who fought for life, her entire life?



As I write this, death has already come for Canadians. Since Feb. 6, 2016, they are legally free to go to their doctor and ask to be put to death. This puts Canadian physicians, who still retain a conscience, into a quandary. How can you write a prescription for death when God said, "Thou Shalt Not Kill."?

Canadian physicians with consciences wrote up ["The Proposal"](#) to the Canadian Medical Association. It was offered by the Christian Medical and Dental Society with the support of the Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians' Societies and Canadian Physicians for Life.

In it, they developed a "safe" approach to saving their consciences and staying out of jail. They could not in good conscience refer a patient to be euthanized, but they could, in fact, inform them that they might self-refer themselves. Patients are autonomous agents, after all, and able to make their own choices.

In the physician's defense, they propose to try and "cure" the patient first of whatever is causing him to choose death.

But what is the difference between *referring* and *informing* someone about euthanasia? Catholic Theologian in Training, Lawrence Fox, who grew up on the rough streets of



Baltimore, answered the question. "You tell them you can't condone stealing, but you'd be happy to tell them where nobody's looking!"

"I fear that these Canadian 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," said Canadian Witness for Life Mary Wagner, whose [letter regarding euthanasia](#) appeared in this blog Jan. 30, 2016.

She herself has not chosen the easy way out of this dilemma with respect to abortion. She sits in the Vanier Centre for Women, a maximum-security prison for women located outside Toronto, Canada. Her Crime?

She gives voice to the

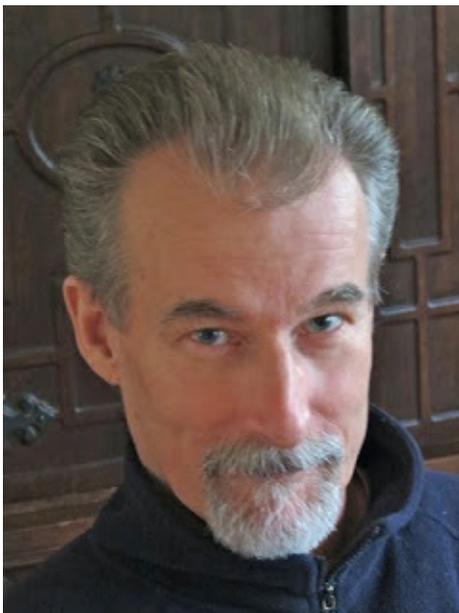


child who cannot speak for himself. She uses her freedom to plead gently with a mother awaiting an abortion for the life of her child. And then under Canada's insane "law," she goes to jail!

However, Canadian Douglas Farrow, writing for the respected [First Things](#) magazine questioned if Mary was confused: Does she have the "a full grasp of the principles, circumstances, and strategies in question?" Is she "entirely fair to these associations?" the McGill University theologian inquired. To be fair to the professor himself, he is as admirable a pro-family martyr himself as is Mary Wagner. He is outspoken against the new Canadian euthanasia "law" and he has stood up for traditional marriage and against the blurring of the distinctions between the sexes.

However, I think he is wrong if he meant that one **could** morally *inform* someone about their right to kill themselves, while not *referring* them to be killed.

This is what he said in "Letter From a Toronto Jail": "I'm not sure that Mary is entirely fair to these associations, or that she has a full grasp of the principles, circumstances, and



strategies in question, though I won't try to offer my own analysis of the Proposal. I will only note, in case you are wondering, that it does draw a clear line in the sand between *informing* the patient of all legal

options and *referring* the patient for an option that, while legal, is most certainly immoral. It roundly condemns the latter as cooperation with evil, while Mary's letter condemns the former as well."

Now Mary Wagner, myself and Professor Farrow are all Christians. In fact, Mary reminded us of that fact in her Letter from A Toronto Jail concerning The Proposal: "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."



As such we recognize a form of discernment, which is called putting on the Mind of Christ. His thinking can be found in Scripture and the Teachings of the Catholic Church. And in fact I am often dismayed how many times Christians forget to read the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 in order to sort out their moral dilemmas.

Imagine Jesus going throughout all of Galilee, teaching and healing the sick and exorcising demons. Seeing He was followed by multitudes, he went up a high mountain and sat down.

Then He began to teach the people. The thinking in these chapters of the Bible are the summary of the whole Old and New Testament, but believe me, few people in Jesus' day were ready for this thinking, and scant few Christians today pay attention to the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. We've grown indifferent to God's manner of thinking. It is so alien to our own.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men." (Matt 5:13) And today here we are -- Christians who are no longer tasty. We have lost our flavor.

"You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be

in danger of the judgment. But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca (Idiot), shall be in danger of the council. And whosoever shall say, Thou Fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” It isn't just murder that can put us in danger of the Barbecue Pit. If we call the driver engaging in dangerous moves on the freeway a “fool,” we also step closer to the fiery pit. Anger is not pro-life, Jesus tells us.

“You have heard that it was said to them of old: “Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt 5: 27-28) We can't even look with lust in our hearts? We thought we were being so good, even faithful to our wives because we didn't act on our lusts.



Christ identifies in the Sermon on the Mount that sin originates in the mind and the heart. So how can you explain to a patient how they can arrange their own death? To tell them euthanasia services are available and they can self-refer would be to suggest to a vulnerable person that they could choose to die. And then, have you not in effect invited the person to examine the option of self-murder, to in effect choose death? One step closer to the Barbecue Pit.

I suppose that Professor Farrow when he asked if Mary had understood the “principles, circumstances, and strategies in question,” he was expecting that we would all agree that it is a good thing to keep a vast number of Canadian physicians out of prison. But in fact, if a large group of pro-life physicians went to prison, wouldn't it be all that is necessary to bring down the tyranny of the Canadian government and end the murder of innocents?

As Christians, are we not required to civilly disobey unjust laws even to the point of prison or death? The 16 Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne daily offered themselves as victims to divine justice for the restoration of peace to France and the



church for two long years during the tyranny of the French Revolution. God accepted their sacrifice. Each and every one of the 16 Carmelite nuns was beheaded. The terror of the French Revolution ended a few days after their collective sacrifice.

“Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection,” wrote the prophet Pope Saint John Paul II in the Gospel of Life.

“Human law is law inasmuch as it is in conformity with right reason and thus derives from the eternal law. But when a law is contrary to reason, it is called an unjust law; but in this case it ceases to be a law and becomes instead an act of violence,” he concluded.

This Canadian law – euthanasia and abortion – are contrary to right reason, and therefore they constitute an unjust act of violence. And should the Canadian people in good conscience find comfortable accommodation with laws that commit violence against them?

Or another way for the Christian to answer the question is, “Am I called to love the Lord my God with my whole heart ... or just part? Do I love my neighbor as myself, or do I love him as much as I love my dog?”

“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?” Mary Wagner concluded.

Yes! One thousand times, Yes! We cannot cooperate in any way with the unjust law that forces physicians to terminate human life! We cannot inform. We cannot refer. And we cannot kill. Jesus told the multitudes

on the mountain, He did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it! He came so we could live a life of deep virtue, a form of happiness far surpassing that of the Pharisees or the scribes, the best people of Jesus' time!

That is the sort of happiness Tora knew. She wasn't pretty. She wore frumpy clothes, but she embraced a life of suffering and holiness when she converted to Catholicism in 1953. And in 2001, she stubbornly refused to die when the doctors were ready for her to give up.

Are you interested in the end of her story? Well once she reached the big city doctor, it was too late. He did not dilly nor dally, but he flatly refused to do the amputation necessary to save her life.

And I was given two more beautiful weeks in the company of my mother, my dearest friend, before she died on Friday, June 29, 2001, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul during the hour of Divine Mercy.

My mother herself was blinded during the last three weeks of her life from the things going wrong in her body. The doctors were unsuccessful at instituting kidney dialysis, although they tried. But through this, she savored life completely. She was a salty Catholic!



Now many will say what happiness can anyone have in two weeks of suffering and death? Many, who want to avoid just such an end, favor euthanasia. But they don't recognize true happiness. Hers was the happiness of doing what is right, loving God with her whole heart, and loving her neighbor as Christ has loved us.

In the car on the way to the hospital, my husband and I prayed the Rosary. She was very sick, but she said with joy – as if she was a long ways away from us, “Why you are praying the Rosary for me!”

I left her in the hospital room with a tape playing. A song on the Holy Eucharist written and sung by [Catholic artist Simonetta](#) was playing. When I returned to the room, my mother had one big long tear coming from one eye. She loved. She was happy. The name "Tora" is Norwegian for teardrop. Tears are salty.

I brought in herbs from my garden, and she teased me, "You didn't want to garden when you were young." But she smelled the herbs with intense enjoyment. Blind, she taught me that we don't deny the enjoyment of our senses, but Christ purifies them.

God accepted her sacrifice. In her last hour of her life, realization dawned. On her face she wore such a poignant look of joy and sadness. Yes, she again shed the one tear. In those last moments, she seemed to realize what she had always said to me, "Isn't life good? And then you die."

But don't let anyone push you out the door before it is time.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15)

"We are the victims of the age, and we ought to sacrifice ourselves to obtain its return to God." – Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne

I Was Thirsty and You Gave Me to Drink [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by John Zwicker

"I was thirsty and you gave me to drink." (Matt. 25:35)



Beginning on Ash Wednesday, a handful of Catholics began working together on Twitter in a Lenten hope of raising funds to build a well for a desperate Catholic Mission in Africa. We use the Twitter Hashtag: **#YearofMercyWell.**

It is a formidable task. Preliminary guesstimates for the cost of well construction, including storage tank and plumbing, is \$45,000 in U.S. currency. This grassroots collection of promoters are hoping others will come on board to promote the need. They pray, with this increase in numbers, they will have a successful campaign.

Currently, the water for the Awasi Mission in Kenya comes from seasonal natural sources such as streams, creeks and ditches. Awasi is



one of 17 missions, 11 secondary schools, 25 primary schools, plus chapels and hospitals served by Father Joseph Mungai, a Third Order Franciscan Missionary from the Archdiocese of Kisumu, Kenya. He estimates he serves 50,000 of God's people.

During the dry season, water is not available, except through vendors who sometimes resort to unscrupulous means, such as high prices or more alarmingly, the vendors expect sex for water.

“That's what is happening” says Father Joseph, “Sex for water, it's disgusting.”

Those campaigning for Father Joseph are very concerned for the well being, safety and lives of the people of the Awasi Mission. David Ives, managing the campaign's gofundme account, [Father Joe's Water Well](#),



writes: “Their only clean water nearby comes from unscrupulous vendors who may force them to pay with their bodies or with their lives should they refuse. All they need is a well. We can help them.”

Catholic blogger [Peg Pondering Again](#) writes, “They do not have clean drinking water and help is needed.” Recently, as a result of drinking tainted water, some, including children, were hospitalized.

If fundraising is successful, a well will be installed for the parish, rectory and convent. Importantly, Father Joseph estimates 10,000 to 20,000 people will have access to this clean water.

It is hoped that funds will be raised and the well installed during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, which began on Dec. 8, 2015 and will end Nov. 20, 2016. Father will dedicate the well in honour of Canadian Mohawk Saint Kateri Tekakwitha whose homeland is shared by both the U.S. and Canada (where it is



presumed most donations will originate). The Lily of the Mohawks took a vow of perpetual virginity after she converted to Catholicism at the age of 19. Noted for her practice of chastity, she is the first Native American to be canonized by the Catholic Church.

A recent newscast detailed the plight of this Awasi Mission and motivated the participants to assist Father Joseph in a Lenten Campaign, commencing Ash Wednesday:

All are welcome to assist in promoting the message.

Donations are accepted at:

OR

2.) Sr Lorraine

11714 Main Street, Middletown Ky 40357

Those wishing to assist in the promotion of this cause may contact any of the following:



"For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in. Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall the just answer him, saying: 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and feed thee; thirsty, and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and covered thee? Or when did we see thee sick or in prison, and came to thee?' And the king answering, shall say to them: 'Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.'" (Matthew 25:35-40)



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Carry Me Home [at Grace to Paint]



Sometimes we need a lift.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2016/02/22/carry-me-home-2/>
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Faithful Catholics: Get Your News about the Catholic Church from Reliable Sources

Yesterday, I received an email from a person I know worried about the things that Pope Francis said on the plane between Mexico and Italy. This person's main concern was that his non-Catholic family members, and even some of his Catholics friends, were giving him a difficult time about the way things were being reported by the media on what Pope Francis said to certain questions from reporters. I realize this seems to happen more and more with our current Pope, but we must breath easy, answer them with reason and charity, and really first of all – **Get Your News about the Catholic Church from Reliable Sources.**

Below are a few things to keep in mind when speaking with non-Catholic family/friends or even Catholic family/friends –

Take a deep breath and say a Hail Mary that you answer things with charity and reason. You might even take 24 hours before answering your family members or friends.

You need to obtain information from reliable Catholic sources. If its not coming from these sources, I would tell you to avoid it. You should read the [National Catholic Register](#), any of their bloggers (Jimmy Akin is excellent), [EWTN](#), [New Advent](#), [Big Pulpit](#), and [Catholic Vote](#). These are good places to start, although there are other reliable sources that are faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church as well.



Avoid anything written by the National Catholic Reporter. They are “catholic in name only” and deep down inside really despise the Catholic Church. Definitely avoid reading the mainstream media such as CNN, Yahoo News, Associated Press, MSNBC, New York Times, and the other ills that compose the mainstream media associated with these sources. Although Fox News tends to report more objectively than the others, they still have their agenda as well. Tread with care. If you are reading these sources to get your news about the Catholic Church, stop it and start reading good Catholic media outlets.

With this being said, here are two links that will assist you in understanding what was said and not said by Pope Francis –

[Did Pope Francis change Church teaching on contraception?](#)

[Abortion is a crime and not the solution to the Zika Virus.](#)

If you are getting upset that your Pastor/Priests in your parish are not speaking about what the Holy Father is saying in their homilies, I have three words for you – get over it! The primary purpose of a homily is to focus on the readings for the day and how to apply the readings to our daily lives. They are not meant to be commentaries on what the Pope says or doesn't say in an off the cuff press conference.

When I see people freaking out on social media about what the Pope supposedly said in a press conference, I usually ignore it and move on with my day. The majority of the time the media either deliberately takes things out of context, or they don't understand Church teaching enough to report on it properly. The vast population of journalism today does not properly research their material before writing. They use sound bites and poorly (or not so poorly...agenda driven) written headlines to grab your attention. I believe the days of good journalism are way behind us.

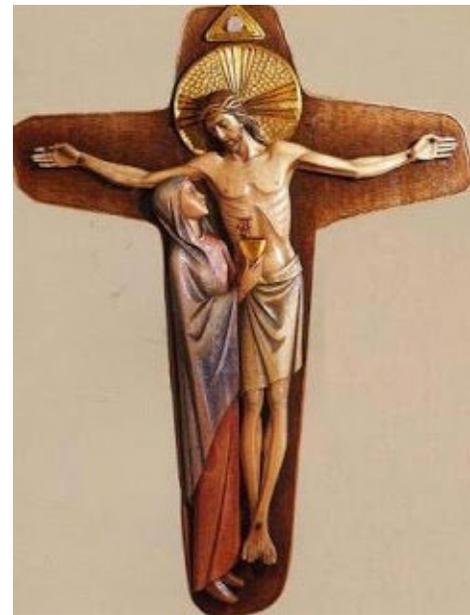
With this all being said, I will agree that Pope Francis tends to not be the most clear when he speaks off the cuff on some matters in these press conferences. I think he believes he is answering these questions well, but for some reason we have confusion. I believe that God is in control when it comes to the Catholic Church and the Papacy. The Holy Spirit knows what He is doing. If you think I am engaging in blind faith, I don't really care. The Catholic Church has faced many challenges and even some rather corrupt Popes in her 2000-year history, but you know what – The Church still remains! We will get through these times as well.

Breathe easy and say a Hail Mary. She's got our back.

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Mary At The Cross [at casual theology]



“So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” ([John 19:17-18, 25-27](#))

It is only John’s gospel that tells us that Mary was at the cross. Only John who recorded the dying words of Jesus addressed to his mother. It was only John because he was there too.

It seems odd, even a bit cold, that Jesus would call his mother “woman”. But this one word carries so much weight.

Eve was the first woman and it is by “woman” that she is addressed in [Genesis 3](#): “The serpent said to the woman”.

Eve stood at the foot of the tree in the garden. Eve chose to believe the lie of the devil. She looked up at the fruit hanging on the tree with purely physical eyes, considering its beauty. Eve lost faith, and disobeyed. She did this because she was promised greater understanding and knowledge. Scripture then tells us that Eve handed the fruit to Adam. God rebukes Adam, “Because you listened to the voice of your wife, and eaten of the fruit of the tree...”

Mary, whom the Fathers of the Church called the new Eve, stood at the foot of the cross which would become the Tree of Life. Where Eve believed a lie, Mary believed in the promises of God, that her son was the Messiah and Savior of the world, the King of an everlasting kingdom. Where Eve brought the fruit of sin to Adam, Mary brought the “fruit of her womb” to Elizabeth, and John recognized the presence of Jesus in the voice of Mary and leapt for joy in the womb. Where Eve’s words to Adam brought a curse, Mary’s words to Elizabeth brought a blessing.

Imagine Mary at the cross looking upon the cruel execution of her son. They say that losing a child is one of the most traumatic experiences a person can deal with—and I hope I never do. She had to have been thinking about the words of the Angel so many years before,

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ([Luke 1:30-33](#))

St. Augustine said that “Mary first conceived in her heart by faith and then in her womb” And now at the cross as she looks at her son she receives a second annunciation of sorts. She is asked once again to become a mother, the mother of the Church born from the blood and water flowing from the side of Christ. She becomes my mother, your mother, the mother of all believers at the cross.

There’s a scene in the movie *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* where Dumbledore says to Harry, “Once again I must ask too much of you.” Once again, so much is asked of Mary. To take on the burden of being the mother of all the faithful, is also asking her to take on the heartbreak of all who lose faith, all who reject Jesus, and even those who would accept her son, but reject her. But once again she says yes.

This brings me back again to that word: woman. Jesus calls his mother “woman” one other time in John’s gospel, at the wedding at Cana. The bridal party has run out of wine. This was much more of a big deal in that time and culture than we really appreciate now. It was a crisis. Mary’s response was to intercede with Jesus on behalf of the bride and groom. She brought the troubled servants to Jesus and told them “Do

whatever he tells you.”

John ran, just like all the other apostles. He followed Jesus at a distance during the trials. But only John came to the cross. Is it a coincidence that he was there with Mary? I suspect that John went to Mary and it was she that brought him with her to Calvary. Once again Mary was leading a troubled servant, in a crisis, to her son. And John did as Jesus told him; he took Mary into his home.

As the “beloved disciple” John is supposed to represent all who would follow Jesus. When reading the gospel of John we should be putting ourselves in the place of the “disciple whom Jesus loved”. We should allow Mary to lead us to Jesus, to the cross, to learn from her how to fully and completely surrender everything to God. To come to Jesus and learn from him what he would have us do. (Note: This is a re-posting of [an older blog post](#) a few updates.)

This contribution is available at <http://www.casualtheology.com/2016/03/mary-at-cross.html>
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Why Confess to a Priest? [at Serviam Ministries]

Written By: Gregory Watson

“The Catholic religion does not bind us to confess our sins indiscriminately to everybody; it allows them to remain hidden from all other men save one, to whom she bids us reveal the innermost recesses of our heart and show ourselves as we are. There is only this one man in the world whom she orders us to undeceive, and she binds him to an inviolable secrecy, which makes this knowledge to him as if it were not. Can we imagine anything more charitable and pleasant? And yet the corruption of man is such that he finds even this law harsh; and it is one of the main reasons which has caused a great part of Europe to rebel against the Church.

“How unjust and unreasonable is the heart of man, which feels it disagreeable to be obliged to do in regard to one man what in some measure it were right to do to all men! For is it right that we should deceive men?” (From Self-Love by Blaise Pascal)

A former co-worker once challenged me regarding the Catholic teaching about Confession, saying that the Bible says that we can and should just confess our sins to God directly. So I challenged her in return, asking whether she'd change her mind if I could show her, from the Bible, that Jesus wants us to confess to a Priest. She gave me a look that seemed to imply that being drunk at work was inappropriate of me, so I upped the ante and told her I would demonstrate the Sacrament of Confession, from the Bible, on our next 15-minute break (New Evangelisation tip: such challenges work better when you bring your Bible to work with you). Exceedingly incredulous now, yet also quite intrigued, she said “You're on!” By the time break rolled around, she seemed to have forgotten about our conversation, and I had to track her down in the designated smoking area. As soon as she saw me, though, she remembered and pressed me for my answer (while the other smokers listened quizzically). So I pulled my Bible out of my bag, and this is what I said:

Suppose I stole your iPhone. Since you don't have a home phone (because who does, anymore?), all of your contacts, and your primary means of getting in touch with anyone are gone. Now say, not only have I stolen it, but I've destroyed it, as well—so there's no hope of you getting it back. You've been seriously inconvenienced. Your daycare can't get a hold of you to tell you that your kid is sick. Your family can't get a hold of you and fear you're in trouble or something. Perhaps worst of all, no Facebook! What kind of monster would do this to you?!

Now say I realise that I did something horrible to you, and I'm sorry, and I still want you to be my friend. Would you still be friends with me? No? Not even if I said I was sorry? Really sorry? Really really sorry and I'll give you \$5 to make up for it? \$10? \$20? At this point, my co-worker thinks I'm completely off my nut, and I tell her I think she's right to think so. So I zero in on what she finds wrong with the scenario, and I ask, “When someone wrongs another person, who has the right to set the terms of how they are to be reconciled? The one who did the wrong, or the one who was wronged? Obviously the one who was wronged. When we sin, we wrong God, and so it's God who has the right to tell us how we are to be reconciled to Him. When we just “go straight to Jesus and tell Him we're sorry”, it's the same as me destroying your iPhone and expecting you to be cool about it because I said I'm sorry. The Bible is pretty clear about how Jesus wants us to reconcile to Him. The fact that through His death and resurrection, He's

made reconciliation possible, doesn't negate the fact that we still have to come to Him, and come to Him on His terms. So what are His terms?

In John 20:21-23, Jesus appears to His Apostles after His resurrection and commissions them, saying, "Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." That is, Jesus imbued His Apostles with His Spirit and authority to forgive sins. But how would they know what sins to forgive (or which to retain) unless people confessed them? It's no coincidence that the same person who wrote this Gospel (himself one of the Apostles just commissioned by Christ) also wrote, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity" (1 John 1:9). My Protestant friends and family like to assert that this passage is the proof that we only need to confess our sins to Jesus, and not to a Priest, but the verse doesn't say that. It doesn't say to whom we are to confess, only that we are to confess. Still, the same Apostle who told us that Jesus commissioned him and his fellow Apostles to forgive sins, is here telling us to confess those sins. It doesn't seem like much of a stretch to conclude that he meant we were to confess to the Apostles or those appointed by them as they were appointed by Christ.

However, if more proof is required, in the book of James, that Apostle tells us that, in the context of a different sacrament (the Anointing of the Sick), that we are to call the priest (or "elder", Gk. Presbyteros—which is where we get the English word, priest), who will anoint him and pray for him so that the sick man will be healed, and if he's committed sins, they'll be forgiven (cf. James 5:14-15). St. James goes on to say, "Confess therefore your sins one to another: and pray one for another, that you may be saved. For the continual prayer of a just man availeth much" (v.16). In other words, with the priest present, we should confess our sins to "one another" (that is, the Christians present). In the early Church, this public confession of sins in the presence of the priest was in fact the practice, but after a while, the Church in her wisdom realised that publicly confessing placed too hard of a burden on people, and so private Confession to the priest became the norm, since as James 5:15 affirms, it's through his ministry that sins are forgiven, in keeping with Jesus' own instructions in John 20:21-23.

How is it that the priest forgives sins? It isn't the priest, in and of himself, who does so, but Jesus working through the priest. Recall again Jesus' words, "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you" (John 20:21). The Church, following St. Paul, refers to this as the priest acting in persona Christi ("in the person of Christ"). In 2 Corinthians 2:10, the Apostle writes, "And to whom you have pardoned any thing, I also. For, what I have pardoned, if I have pardoned any thing, for your sakes have I done it in the person of Christ" (emphasis added).

In summary, then, Jesus commissioned His Apostles to forgive sins; they instructed us to confess our sins to them in order to receive that forgiveness; and they in turn ordained other priests in order to perpetuate the Church through the generations, bestowing their Christ-given authority onto them. Protestants, claiming to follow "the Bible alone", insist on teaching that we only need to confess to Jesus directly, but the Bible teaches otherwise. If anything, it teaches that we need to confess before everybody! I'm thankful that in the Holy Spirit-led wisdom of the Church, private Confession became the practice. That alone is often difficult enough for our sinful pride to handle. These are, however, the terms Jesus laid out for our reconciliation with Him.

Now, when you're challenged by friends and family about Confession, you'll be able to offer a convincing explanation. After all, my co-worker was convinced.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.serviamministries.com/blog/why-confess-to-a-priest/>
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The Apostles' Creed - a short Catechism [at Catholic365]

I believe in God,

I'm not an atheist. I believe that God exists, that He is good and worthy of my trust and love.

the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth;

I believe that God is the Father of all people and the Creator of all which we see and don't see. He created the material universe where men and animals live and the spiritual heavens, where angels dwell.

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son Our Lord,

I believe that Jesus Christ is God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The eternal Word of God, the reflection of the Father.

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

I believe He was conceived in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.

born of the Virgin Mary,

And that Mary was a virgin before and after His birth until the day she was assumed into heaven.

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

I believe that He suffered and died for the sins of mankind.

He descended into Hell;

I believe that He went into the Bosom of Abraham, which is also called the place of the dead, to bring the faithful Jews into heaven.

the third day He rose again from the dead;

Then rose again on the third day in order that those who live may turn to Him and be saved.

He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father almighty;

Then He went back into Heaven to take His place at the Throne of God, the Father.

from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

But He will return on the last day to judge the sins of all men.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

I believe that the Holy Spirit is God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

the holy Catholic Church,

I believe that the Catholic Church is the instrument which God placed on this earth to communicate to mankind all His saving power.

the communion of saints,

I believe that we are united to the Body of Christ and that we can pray to and communicate with the saints on earth and in the next life, in heaven and in purgatory.

the forgiveness of sins,

I believe that God is merciful and forgiving. I believe that I can approach His Throne in the Catholic Church and He will wash away my sins in the waters of everlasting life.

the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

I hope that, by God's grace, I will rise to eternal life, on the Last Day.

Amen.

So be it! I believe, profess and live according to all that I have just recited.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholic365.com/article/3674/the-apostles-creed-a-short-catechism.html>
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Creating a picture for God [at Catholic Review]

When you're 6, sitting still during Mass is so hard.

At Sunday Mass our little boy was looking every which way, smiling at the people behind us, dropping things on the floor, wiggling and wriggling and craning his neck to see everything he could—in every direction.

“There’s a baby crying, Mama. Way back there. See?” he whispered.

“Mm-hmm. Ssssh. Use your quiet church voice,” I whispered back.

Then, as we were saying the creed, he started rummaging in my purse. I glanced down and saw that he had found a small notepad and a pen.

My first thought was to take the pen away, but he was sitting very still—for once—in the pew as he started drawing a picture.

When he was finished, he handed it to me.

“Mama,” he whispered. “This is for you.”

Then he made another.

“This one,” he whispered, “is for God. See, this is us going to church. And this up here is the Eucharist with the bread, and then this over here is the tabernacle.”

This came from our child who didn’t even want to go to Mass today. In fact, I didn’t realize he knew the

words “Eucharist” and “tabernacle.”

Maybe when we take our children to Mass, they are paying closer attention than we think they are. Maybe they are retaining pieces of the celebration we think they are missing. Maybe, just maybe, the wiggling and crawling under the pews and the giggling and the loud talking and all the other ways young children misbehave—intentionally or not—have nothing to do with how much they are opening their hearts to God and hearing His Word.

Of course, I might have been surprised to see that picture, but the recipient? He wasn’t surprised at all.

“People were bringing little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples scolded them, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ Then he embraced them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.” Mark 10: 13-16

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2016/02/21/creating-a-picture-for-god>
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Who can say what is "true Islam"? [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

The Catholic News Agency on February 27th

[reported on the talk](#)

given by Professor Saeed Khan, an expert in Islam, at the Cor Unum conference a few days ago and CNA's interview with him. The report speaks of "true Islam" but I would put the question: who can authoritatively state and demonstrate what is true Islam and what is false Islam?

I find it difficult to understand and accept such interpretations of Islam and to reconcile these statements with the reality. I also believe it is long overdue for us to make necessary distinctions whenever we make such public statements. Otherwise we mislead the faithful and the general population because we all risk feeling guilty about what we think and feel about the condition of Islam in the world, not only today, but throughout history.

As Pope Francis and his predecessors have done, so I also try to do and so engage in dialogue with Muslims. That is something we as Christians and Catholics must do.

It is one thing to dialogue with people who are Muslims in name only, or who practice their faith as they understand it, with emphasis entirely on a spiritual reading of Islam, and quite another to try to dialogue with a Muslim who fervently adheres to the overall movement of the Qur'an and the history of Islam.

For us Christians, it has ever only been splinter groups that were found to be heretics, with the exception of the Arian period when almost all the bishops adhered to Arius. It has been relatively easy in Christendom to make a distinction between the faith and society. St Augustine wrote of it in terms of the "City of God" and the "City of man". None of the abuses and atrocities committed by Christians and their civil and ecclesial institutions in the past two millennia could ever be traced back to or founded on or claimed to be derived or inspired by the New Testament, or even the Old Testament for that matter.

Abuses of power by kings and princes as well as by ecclesiastics could not be founded on even erroneous interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures because in the Bible there are no statements attributed to God anywhere telling the faithful to go out and kill unbelievers.

The contrary however is true of Islam. History clearly demonstrates that its many periods of militaristic conquest and expansion were driven by tenets of the Qur'an and, at the outset, by commands issued by Mohammad himself, which he attributed to Allah.

While the Qur'an does contain some "mild" verses directed toward fervent faith, mercy, and peace, the general movement of the Qur'an, Muslim traditional teachings and documents, and public statements made by Muslim leaders all clearly go in a single direction: the conquest of the world for Allah. We have yet to hear Muslim leaders competently and authoritatively refute the militaristic claims made the those who consider themselves and are generally accepted to be fervent Muslims. We are unlikely ever to witness such refutations because such arguments cannot be convincingly based on the Qur'an nor on Islamic tradition.

As I understand all that I have read, the conferences I've heard, and the most objective reports I've seen, the only authentic dialogue we Christians can have is with Muslims that the world of Islam considers heretics or traitors to Islam.

Muslims sincerely open to Christians, or to Christ and his life and message, may be more than we think, but they live under the domination of those who correctly state the true nature of Islam, which is militant and bent on the conversion of all of humanity and considers the "people of the book" to be following falsified versions of the Scriptures. Those we consider "moderate" Muslims are incapable of refuting the claims of "fervent" Muslims, such as those following the revival initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, because the overwhelming intent of the Qur'an and all the Islamic documentation and tradition coherently goes in the militant direction.

Moreover, while Christianity left its world of theocracy behind in the Middle Ages, Islam has ever always been a theocratic society, in which there can be no distinction between religion and life, between mosque and city hall, between Islam and society. It is all one and as fervent adherents to the letter and spirit of the Qur'an and Muslim tradition, they are bent on imposing Sharia Law on the whole planet.

If I am in error in any point of my understanding of the situation I hope that someone would be so kind as to point it out to me.

This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2016/02/who-can-say-what-is-true-islam.html>
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Self-worth [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 all that significant in the world's opinion. He often works through the ones who tend to be over-looked. Jesus himself is "the stone the builders rejected as worthless."

Worldly success—whatever that might mean—is not one of God's criteria. Think of David, the shepherd boy who killed a giant with a sling and eventually became King. Or Peter, the uneducated fisherman Jesus chose to lead his church. St. Francis of Assisi was born into wealth, but he didn't become useful to God or anyone else 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 did?

What about us? Not wise? Or influential? Not on any Top Ten lists? That's okay. God created us with our individual uniqueness for a reason. He calls us to be who we are. We have value because God loved us into existence. If we surrender to His plan for our lives, who know how he will use us? We can trust His plan.

Prayer: My Creator, who I am to you is who I am.

Reflection: How does it feel to be valuable in God's eyes?

Making the Most of Lent as a New or Returning Catholic [at A Catholic Newbie]



Joining the Church this Easter or just going through your first Lent as a Catholic? Or maybe you're getting serious about your faith again after many years away. Congratulations on all counts! Lent is the perfect time to dive in and really get to know your faith and to begin to root out any unholiness that has crept into your life.

As a now 3-year Catholic veteran of Lent, here are my tips to maximize this penitential season as a newcomer:

1. **What to give up?** Probably the first thing you associate with Lent is giving something up. We do this for many reasons including reminding ourselves that we are more than just a body and need not be slaves to its every earthly whim. It helps [develop self-control](#), and also, dare we say, creates some discomfort, and we can offer that up in union with Christ's suffering to have redemptive benefits (to help others in some way). MY favorite reason to give up something is to begin to change bad habits that lead to sin — or are sinful. Look for something in your life you've gotten too attached to, that creates a habitual pleasure, pride or reveals an attachment to money. Start rooting that out by giving it up for Lent. [Here's a quiz](#) that can also help you decide what to give up.
2. **Remember to add something** – Lest we get all focused on the bad, let's remember to add something holy to our lives this Lent. Can you spend 15 minutes in quiet daily, [pray the rosary every day](#), attend daily mass once a week, go to confession more than once, finish a Catholic book, do an act of mercy weekly, read the Church's daily Bible verses?
3. **Surviving the fast** – Yes, as a Catholic, you are now required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (that means one regular meal and two small meals that add up to no more than one regular meal) and abstain from meat each Friday during Lent. This is a tough one, as we don't like to be hungry (see my blog on the [benefits of fasting](#))! The [Lenten Mercy Challenge](#), created by [MyConsecration.org](#) (which promotes Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary) is offering help by asking you to simply fast on bread and water for lunch each Lenten Friday, along with praying just one decade of the rosary for a special intention. They hope all of us doing this in solidarity will help cause God's Divine Mercy to be poured out on the world, which is so in need of it! Get help being accountable for your prayer and fasting in their [Facebook group](#). You can also [watch my story](#) of how

prayer paired with fasting brought about a blessing in my life.

4. **Take advantage of your parish offerings** – Lent has brought about many blessings in my life and it was because I put myself out there and attended services and events offered at my parish. For example, a wonderful Lenten speaker, Hector Molina, greatly inspired me last year and helped me [break the ice in getting to know my fellow parishioners](#). I love going to Stations of the Cross on Fridays, our parish's fish fries, all the services during Holy Week and I take off Good Friday entirely to basically spend my day in worship and prayer. It will do wonders for you spiritually.
5. **Don't overdo it** – All that said, don't overdo it or you will fail on your intentions and get discouraged. Focus on 1 thing to root out, 1 thing to add, make sure you're fasting/abstaining, get thyself to confession at least once and attend what you can at your parish. Ok, that still sounds like a



lot... If you do mess up, don't let that stop you from going further. Just get right back in the game. We all fail and sin and that's why God provides us with His neverending mercy. He's cheering you on to succeed!

What tips do you have for those new or coming back to Catholicism for Lent?

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/making-the-most-of-lent-as-a-new-or-returning-catholic/>
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Immigration [at Convert Journal]



The United States immigration system could use improvement, but is not as unjust or restrictive as many believe. A very strong case can be made for the exact opposite.

Did you know that our foreign-born population has tripled following the 1965 Hart-Cellar immigration act? Per US census data, in only 4 decades from 1970 it increased as follows: 9,619,302 to 14,079,906 to 19,767,316 and 31,107,889 (in 2000). By 2015 it reached 45 million and is on-track for a staggering 78 million by 2065.

Since the 1965 law, almost 59 million people have immigrated to America (so far). This is much more than at any other time in our history by a wide margin. It is 4 times more than any other country. We alone account for almost 20% of worldwide immigration per year.

Where are all the new immigrants from? Latin America mostly (51% – 30% from Mexico alone). When President Kennedy signed the 1965 immigration act, he said “it will not upset the ethnic mix of our society.” That was true of immigration before the 1965 law, but is far from true today. The ethnicity of the population has shifted significantly and will continue that trend. The ethnic makeup of 2100 will be nothing like 1900.

The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him.

Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants’ duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.

We are unique in the world by welcoming a flood of immigrants year after year. Many countries accept few permanent immigrants as citizens. Mexico, for instance, has had a terrible record on immigration. Even with our generous welcome, illegal immigration is huge, holding at a level of 10 million since 2004 (annual deportation is less than 5% of that). The US is one of only two developed countries that automatically grant citizenship to children of illegal immigrants (“anchor babies”).

Before the 1965 law, the poverty rate among immigrants was about the same as non-immigrants. Today it is almost double, thus requiring a significantly larger portion of taxpayer support.

Immigration to the United States is supported at a steep cost. A whopping 52% of legal immigrants receive welfare and, perhaps surprising to many, 71% of illegal immigrants receive this expensive taxpayer support. It costs California alone \$12.3 BILLION dollars per year to educate just the illegal immigrants. The net cost (welfare, less any taxes paid) *averages* over \$14,000 per household of illegal

immigrants. This currently costs taxpayers about \$113 BILLION per year. Of course, all the money spent in support of legal and illegal immigrants is money not spent on our veterans, on our failing infrastructure, on improving education, on healthcare or on our senior citizens. It contributes to our already monumental national debt. Let that sink in. We must BORROW over \$14,000 per year for each of these households. That is money we do not have, debt that saps opportunity from the economy and a burden for us and future generations.

Additionally, the United States Sentencing Commission (USSC) reports that while illegal aliens are 3.5% of our population, they account for 36.7% of federal convictions. These convictions are primarily for drug trafficking, kidnapping/hostage taking, drug possession, money laundering and murder.

All this is not to say we should seal our borders, prohibit immigration or fail the persecuted. What this does say is that **we are very generous and anyone who says otherwise is at best, irresponsibly misinformed**.

Moreover, it is right and just that we consider who to welcome into our home and support by the sacrifices of our people. Should it be those closest to our borders and willing to violate our laws to enter uninvited? –OR– should it be those in most desperate need around the world who are literally perishing under the most extreme poverty or by the sword of radical Islam? Which is most just?

Consider also our capacity to welcome immigrants. It is not unlimited. Yes, we can always accept one more, but not without incremental risk little different than continuously adding just one more to a life boat — until it sinks. This boat is already packed and taking on water. If it sinks, no one is helped but many are unjustly harmed.

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2016/02/immigration/>
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On Straining out Gnats and Swallowing Camels, as Seen in a Persistent Biblical Debate [at Community in Mission]



The teaching contained in the Gospel for yesterday (Tuesday of the 2nd Week of Lent) is one that is easy to miss by overanalyzing the details. Catholics are frequently questioned about the passage: Jesus says, “Call no man on earth your father.” That one line spurs a battle! On one side, Evangelicals stand poised to rebuke the Catholic practice of calling priests “Father,” and on the other are Catholics ready to defend the practice.

Yes, before the sentence is even fully uttered, many folks are locked and loaded. Let the debate begin!

It’s strangely ironic that such a debate springs forth from a Gospel reading that is about humility. While debates can be civil, they seldom display humility. This does not mean that there is no right answer to the issue; it’s more about the way we get to the answer: trying to score “gotcha” points and making sure that we win the debate.

But again, the irony of all this is that Matthew 23:1-12 is really about humility. It is not about banning words or titles like Rabbi, Teacher, Master, or Father. Rather, this Gospel passage is about the problem of pride and vainglory among the clergy, leaders, and those who follow them.

Sadly we would often rather debate the details than listen to the actual teaching. We tend to do this with a lot of things in life: we maximize the minimum and minimize the maximum. As Jesus puts it, we like to strain out gnats while swallowing camels (cf. Matt 23:24).

Let’s examine this teaching about humility.

The Gospel begins with a salutary reminder to all those who are under authority that they consider to be less than perfect:

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you.”

This reminder is for all of us: we are to obey lawful authority in all things that do not contradict God's higher law. This is the case even if we do not like them, or they are not conservative or liberal enough for our tastes, or have moral flaws (real or perceived). Even Jesus submitted Himself to be judged by Caiaphas and Pilate. Although Jesus would eventually establish the New Covenant and the apostles would come to authority, for now they must learn humility through obedience to lawful authority, even though all lawful authority in this world is exercised by imperfect human beings. Humility through obedience is the essential point.

Jesus next proceeds to exhort humility in those who have authority:

... but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation "Rabbi." As for you, do not be called "Rabbi." You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called "Master"; you have but one master, the Christ.

Those in authority, especially within the Church, must first be humble servants. Their humility must begin by being obedient to the gospel they preach. They are to practice what they preach and to admit humbly that to do any less is sinful. They must pray humbly and do good works even when no one is looking, when no one can or will applaud them. They are not to seek the favor of men, whether through ostentatious acts or clothes, titles, or seats of honor. To the extent that they do, they incur sin through pride and vainglory.

The main point is humility. The Lord is not forbidding clothes, or seats of honor, or titles *per se*; rather, He forbids seeking after these things. Good works are obviously to be done. Prayers are to be done. Of course these are not forbidden! The point is that they are not to be "performed in order to be seen."

It is not forbidden that there be seats of honor in worship and in public gatherings. People instinctively want to esteem leaders, invited guests, and honorees (e.g., a bride and groom or a person celebrating his birthday) with seats of honor or a place at the head table. But while seats are not forbidden, the "love of places of honor" is forbidden. Titles such as "Father," "Reverend," "Your Honor," "Teacher," and "Rabbi" are not banished either. People of every nation and tongue use titles to honor those who hold offices. What is banished is the "love" of these titles, either by the one having the title or the one bestowing the title. For indeed it sometimes happens that people bestow excessive titles and honorifics as a manifestation of a kind of communal pride; in exalting their leaders they are really exalting themselves.

Regarding the specific the term "Father" (some seem to single out that particular title and not Rabbi or Teacher), if Jesus' purpose was to forbid the use of the word "father" in reference to human males why did the other New Testament authors do so? In the New Testament alone there are 195 uses of the word "father(s)" to refer to human males. Hence, it seems clear that interpreting this passage as an absolute banishment of the term "father" for anyone but God Himself is not supported by the practice evident in Scripture.

So once again, the point is humility. It is not the outright banishment of words, or seats of honor, or public praying, or the performance of good works. By engaging in endless debates about who is right or wrong in this or that practice, we risk missing the entire point of this Gospel reading. Our debates can too

easily become about winning, with no hint of humility.

Don't miss the point (humility) by straining out gnats and swallowing camels, by maximizing the minimum and minimizing the maximum.

This contribution is available at <http://blog.adw.org/2016/02/on-straining-out-gnats-and-swallowing-camels-as-seen-in-a-persistent-biblical-debate/>

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In favour of liturgy shaming [at LMS Chairman]



I was struck reading

[this](#)

, from my

[old friend](#)

William Bornhoft (linked to by the normally sensible

[Deacon Greg Kandra](#)

), about people who posted negative comments on a parish's Facebook photo album of grotesquely inappropriate and mostly illicit liturgical frolickings.

Parish problems should be dealt with on the parish level, when possible. If that fails, they should be dealt with on the diocesan level, and so on.

Excuse me, but

have you tried it?

Bornhoft is a young man, and doesn't know any better. Indeed, his naivety on this subject might even be said to do him credit, insofar as it is not a matter of wilful refusal to face the facts. The reality is, however, the course of action he recommends will very rarely have any tangible positive effect, but unless handled very carefully can easily do harm.

As Chairman of the Latin Mass Society I know a thing or two about appealing to the proper authorities, and I have heard the stories of people who have been in this game since the 1970s. Whether it is liturgical abuses, heretical school textbooks, or refusals to allow the Traditional Mass, the pattern is the same. Yes, we have had our successes, but success requires a combination of factors which rarely occur.

1. An exceptionally clear-minded and brave parish priest, bishop, or Roman curial official, who must be prepared to suffer the consequences, including removal from office, of enforcing the law once too often. Naturally, such men pick their battles, so there are further conditions.
2. It must be a really extreme and clear-cut violation of norms.
3. You must be able to provide totally irrefutable evidence that the violation took place.

I have written to Rome on a number of occasions, having gone through all the proper channels, with full documentation, and expert canonical advice. It hasn't been a complete waste of time, but getting an acknowledgement is not to be taken for granted. And I am writing on behalf of a lay association in good standing with the Church, with 2,000 members.

I think it is worth doing this because it leaves a paper-trail and goes into files. When history comes to be written, no one will be able to say that the laity acquiesced in what is going on. Historians with access to the files will be able to see that we constantly tested the system, and were constantly, with rare exceptions, rebuffed.

But we pay a price for this activity. Mr Bornhoft will be mortified to learn that this kind of thing is regarded, and denounced, by many of the people who hear our complaints or see our letters as aggressive, uncharitable, and contrary to a proper Catholic attitude. The accusations he makes of those posting comments on Facebook are exactly those made of those who are doing what he thinks they should be doing. It has happened to me, it has happened to people with far more native tact and personal skills than I can lay claim to. When push comes to shove, these accusations against whistleblowers and 'delators' (those who 'delate', denounce, to Rome) can be made public. There can be public scandal, division, and bitterness; the whistleblower can find himself

persona non grata

in the parish and diocese; he can lose friends, be excluded from activities and ministries, and be ostracised.

This of course is exactly what happened to those complaining about clerical sex abuse. For while the Church has gone a long way to institute procedures and change attitudes about sex abuse, few people have noticed the parallel. In abusive liturgy, the laity, seminarians above all, but often ordained clerics as well, are treated unjustly by those with power over them. They are humiliated and made to suffer. They are forced to act against their conscience. They are persecuted in subtle ways if they do not acquiesce, or at least stay silent. And many, sadly, are driven from their vocations, from the practice of the Faith, and even from the Church, by this injustice. And there is nothing they can do: the 'proper procedures' and 'proper authorities' do not want to know.

Now we have a new situation, with social media. It is possible to use ridicule, larded with references to Canon law and other authoritative documents, to raise the issue of liturgical abuse, not personally, in a parish where one can be punished for it, but with a degree of anonymity, about parishes the other side of the world. Parishes which, in the example Bornhoft raises, glory in their abuse, boast about the injustice which they visit on the wounded body of the Church, and plaster their Facebook pages with photographs to leave us in no doubt about what they have been up to. Should good Catholics stop themselves responding to this kind of thing? Out of

charity?

Well here's a thing. I too have qualms about the kinds of things which can be said by social-media lynch-mobs. I too have concerns about the deformation of soul which can result from endlessly using vituperation to attack easy targets like liturgical dancing. As Bornhoft says, people can be too quick to attribute base motives for what they see, and don't always understand the niceties of liturgical law. I myself gave up banging on about liturgical abuses - I had got to the 'letter to the parish priest' stage of irritation - when I started making the Traditional Mass my habitual form of worship. Thereafter, forays into the Novus Ordo simply confirmed me in my decision: it wasn't very prayerful to see abuses, but it no longer drove me to despair. I think it would be better for the souls of those unhappy folk who don't like liturgical abuses to make the switch, if it is physically possible for them, to regular attendance at the Traditional Mass. We sometimes disagree about specific liturgical practices, but it is vanishingly rare to see anything which is actually sacrilegious. Come over, calm down, and say some prayers.

But I know not everyone is ready to do that. And as one priest said to me, about his own celebration of both Forms, you can't just let the Novus Ordo 'collapse like a soufflé'. And I will not condemn those who take the

only means available

to express their entirely justified anger and to oppose liturgical abuses.

What is more, contrary to Mr Bornhoft, this method

works.

Yes, it has worked, not every time, but again and again. The priest

[with the hoverboard](#)

in the Phillipines: suspended. The Australian priest allowing 'help yourself' Communion, leading to

[Communion being given to a dog](#)

: excommunicated. Even in the weird and wonderful diocese of Linz in Austria, they aren't still having the Blessed Sacrament procession with a

[foccacia in a huge pair of tongs](#)

. It is almost inconceivable that a written complaint to a bishop would have resulted in action in cases such as these, had not the incident gone around the world's media. In the case Bornhoft mentions, the parish took the FB page down. The deacon whose preaching implied

[Pope Benedict was a show-off](#)

for wearing red shoes took his sermon off YouTube. Again, the Gay activists who used to gather in Our Lady of the Annunciation, Warwick Street, in London, learned eventually that they could not put their

[Bidding Prayers of thanksgiving for Civil Partnerships](#)

online, without generating the wrong kind of publicity. Small victories, you may think, but significant ones, because it means that they will never again gloat over their implied heresy or their liturgical abuses, and say to each other: well, no one cares about the rules any more, we can be as open as we like about what we do.

There is an

enormous

difference between doing these hideous things in secret, worrying that there might be someone in the congregation with a hidden camera in his lapel or a microphone in his pocket, and bragging about them online. Can Mr Bornhoft not see it? The latter is vastly more scandalous, vastly more dangerous to souls, vastly more undermining of the Faith, to a potentially vastly larger audience. Feeling able to do these things openly gives them far more confidence, it emboldens them in going further and doing more. If only the social media had been around in the 1970s, when parishes in the USA were encouraging people to bring honey cookies they had made to be used in Mass - despite their being invalid matter. This scandal, public in the sense that the recipes were in parish newsletters, went on for years and years before pressure from Rome finally suppressed the sacrilege, which actually involved not only depriving the Faithful of Holy Communion but idolatry: the worship of biscuits. Social media would have blown it open in a matter of weeks, and the ridicule and outrage would have made it unsustainable, at least in months.

Conservative prelates and indeed Curial officials hate this kind of pressure. But if they had been doing their jobs, it wouldn't happen. As it is, it is the Savoranola, the St Catherine of Siena, the Erasmus, the Robert Grossteste, of our times. It should be done with care, with charity, dispassionately, with reference to authoritative documents, but it would be completely wrong to say that it should not be done at all. And it can be done with humour, and it can be done, with persistent offenders, with the kinds of measured mockery used by so many saints and great men in the Church, and by the Prophets and by Our Lord himself, when faced with a situation in which appeal to the 'proper authorities' gets you nowhere.

So no, Deacon Kandra, it is

not

a Lenten good work to allow Our Blessed Lord to be trampled underfoot, sometimes literally, and turn a blind eye to it. It is

not

something to be recommended to those outraged by abuses, as a good action, that they should see their fellow Catholics spiritually abused over and over again, and give it tacit consent. And unless you are doing it just to prove a point,

and

know how to write a letter,

and

have a good canon lawyer, a liturgical expert, and a Latinist, to help you,

and (above all)

can't be harmed by the reaction of those who could see your letter, then you'd better think twice about using the 'proper procedures'. You will be doing far more good, dear reader, sharing the latest scandal with your Facebook friends. It might even make a difference.

But don't forget to feed your own soul with the liturgy and the sacraments. Don't only go to Mass to make a list of abuses. Don't only go online to vent your fury. Come to the Traditional Mass. Calm down. And say some prayers.

This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2016/02/in-favour-of-liturgy-shaming.html>
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Byzconsin! [at Every Home a Monastery]



Three and a half years have now passed since we moved from the High Desert in sunny California to the farm country of crisp and cold Wisconsin. Time has gone by quickly and life has been interesting—full of surprises, both good and bad.

You know how we pray to live in peace and repentance during the Divine Liturgy? Well I really thought the move here was about us making a big step towards doing that. Nice, quiet, peaceful country life in a small village by the [monastery](#). Lots of peace and opportunity for repentance.

My definition of peace since moving here has changed. My understanding prior to moving was that peace meant living with little conflict, with everyone in my little circle getting along well, with lots of time to pray and cultivate those wonderful “inner peace” moments. No, that’s not what I think peace is now.

My definition of repentance is different too. I was expecting frequent confession, ample opportunity for liturgical prayers, peace and quiet in order to work out my salvation and pray for forgiveness of my sins. I mean I know I am a mom and wife and busy with my normal duties so it’s not like I thought I would be [Saint Mary of Egypt](#) going to the desert to repent, but yeah, in some ways I thought I was gonna be Saint Mary of Egypt going to the desert to repent!

Ironically, life’s circumstances have been that regular liturgical prayer has been lessened since being here (for me and the kids at least) and I really miss the prayer life we had, not only at home but at the parish we joined after the monks moved from California to Wisconsin. I wouldn’t say prayer has lessened, my own personal prayer has certainly deepened, I think Manny would say the same, but formal prayer has been sporadic, and that makes me very displeased. Much hasn’t turned out like I hoped.

Thankfully, life seems to be settling down and becoming “normal.” We bought a home here in Saint Nazianz about a year after we moved here. This past Christmas was our second one in the house (I will be

writing about the house in a separate post). Buying the house has helped to have some sense of home and normalcy. It was also a huge answer to my deepest prayers of not wanting to move around and rent but give the kids a stable home to call their own. This has by far been one of the biggest blessing of making the move from California to Wisconsin.

Many people have asked us lots of questions about moving so far from home to live by the monastery. Basically, we have known the monks since before we were married (we discuss that in more depth on the [‘Our Story’](#) page). When they moved, our family (along with a lot of our friends from the monastery) ended up at the local OCA parish. It was a good year there but most of our friends had plans to move and we were struggling financially to maintain our lifestyle in California. We hoped for better things for our family. We didn’t want Manny to have to commute in such crazy traffic every day (about an hour one way), we wanted to buy a home (house prices had gone through the roof in our hometown), we wanted to afford a healthier lifestyle, eat better, have a garden, and just live life less stressed out by regular day to day living. We longed for a simpler, healthier, and a more peaceful life. All of this lead to our decision to move. We considered several places but starting over from scratch with a new church community wasn’t appealing and Wisconsin seemed to meet a lot of the “wants and needs” on our wish list. Living by the monastery was also appealing because we would have access to all of the services all year long; being Eastern Catholics we are already limited on churches anyway. After months of discussion, prayers, and planning, and without even visiting the place, we packed up and moved over 2000 miles from home, friends and family. We wanted out of the rat race and made a leap of faith, hoping for the best.

Now back to the peace and repentance. I know some people have assumed that we live in some kind of utopia, but just as the word means, there is no such place. A monastery (just like a family) is a group of Christians who have come together to work out their salvation. Community is needed because in it we find two things (hopefully): 1) Love and a safe place to grow. 2) A mirror. You cannot run from your sins or true nature easily when you live in any close community. These two reasons are why marriage or monastic life are important to the Christian life. So just as there are no perfect marriages there are no perfect communities, each are made up of sinful people struggling along to attain salvation and hopefully help one another out along the way.

So, peace meaning everyone in my little circle is getting along beautifully is so far from reality. We may all have our great moments together but reality is we are a struggling group of sinners. And I am a sinner and it is within my own soul I struggle the most to find peace. I have come to understand more and more that inner peace is found deep within, in the depths of the heart where God dwells. It is my own sin that keeps me from seeing and feeling that peace, but even in spite of my own sinfulness, I have come to find the comfort of Christ within. I need to purposely seek Him out, but He is always there. That is peace—knowing I am a child of God and knowing that He will never abandon me.

Repentance doesn’t have so much of a Mary of Egypt look to it. At least not externally. Certainly, internally, repentance is that constant inner struggle, the constant battle against one’s passions and selfishness. Life is so busy and hectic with raising and homeschooling children that I struggle to get to confession and extra prayer services even though the monastery is just up the street. The nearness in location doesn’t make things any easier. The quiet and solitude here in this small village have aided in facing my own demons, but having been a stay at home mom for 19 years now I’ve always had a lot of solitude. Nevertheless, it has increased.

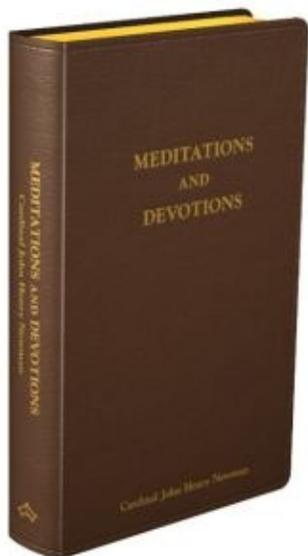
So life has been interesting! Blessed yes, but also full of struggle and surprises. We plan on writing a

series of Byzconsin posts to explain further the different aspects of making this crazy life changing move, and the realities of close community and family life here in rural Wisconsin as Byzantine Catholics. So stay tuned!

This contribution is available at <http://www.everyhomeamonastery.com/byzconsin/>
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The Awful Difference [at Rides the Sun]



On my nightstand I keep a copy of *Meditations and Devotions* by Cardinal John Henry Newman. It's a smallish 4" x 6" book published by Baronius Press in 2010. Every now and then I will reach for this book instead of one from the pile sitting on the floor next to the nightstand. Each time I do I find something to chew on before falling asleep and this last time was no different. What struck me is the last sentence, boldfaced below (by me). You see, I'm going through a particularly rough transitory time right now in a few matters in my life. I'm 48 years old and I still recognize with great frustration that I am no where near where I ought to be.

I thought this a wonderful paragraph for us all as we begin Lent for 2016.

O my God, I confess that before now I have utterly forgotten this, and that I am continually forgetting it! I have acted many a time as if I were my own master, and turned from Thee rebelliously. I have acted according to my own pleasure, not according to Thine. And so far have I hardened myself, as not to feel as I ought how evil this is. I do not understand how dreadful sin is—and I do not hate it, and fear it, as I ought. I have no horror of it, or loathing. I do not turn from it with indignation, as being an insult to Thee, but I trifle with it, and, even if I do not commit great sins, I have no great reluctance to do small ones. **O my God, what a great and awful difference is there between what I am and what I ought to be!**

Meditations and Devotions, Part III: Meditations on Christian Doctrine, Chapter IV: Sin, Section 1: Against Thee only have I Sinned, paragraph 3.

*It appears that Baronius is not currently publishing their edition, but I found a few paperback editions on Amazon as well as this [online text](#).

Carrying Heavy Crosses [at Sunflower Sojourn]

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me.”~Matthew 16:24

A new year seems to signal hope for many people. Yet many are struggling with heavy crosses, wondering when the joy in a new year will come. One family lost a baby. Others are struggling with cancer diagnoses. Marriages are shaky and fighting to make it. I myself felt like January just wanted to knock me down, as trial after trial came my way.

Jesus warned us that we would have crosses. He never promised we would have it easy. In fact, He told us just the opposite. “I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. ***In this world you will have trouble.*** But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)



We must learn to lean on Jesus as we struggle with the weight of heavy crosses. Our crosses unite us closer with our Lord. ***Yet, do you recall that even Jesus had help in carrying His cross?*** Simon the Cyrenian assisted at a time when Jesus continually fell and could no longer bear the weight alone. ***This shows us that we are not meant to carry our crosses alone.*** We need community to strengthen us when we feel powerless.

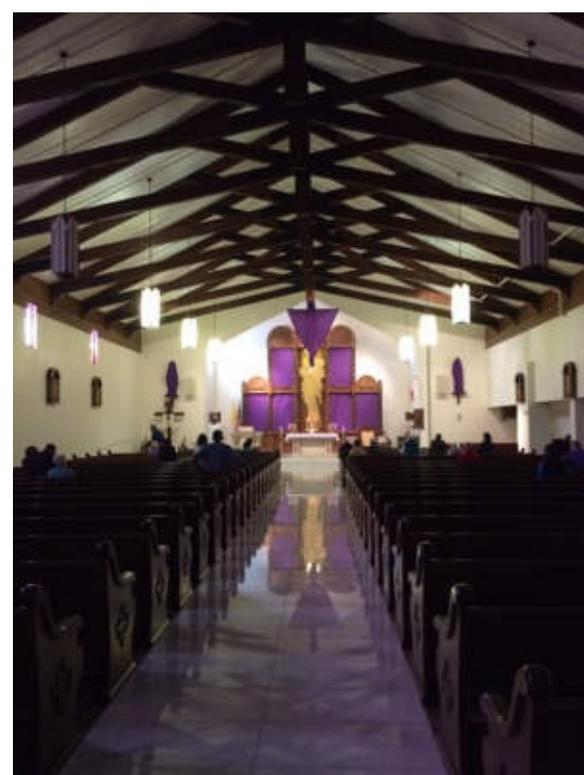
As that cross bears into your shoulders, know that He is walking alongside you. He’s helping to carry the weight so that you won’t fall. Yet there are people from the Body of Christ placed in your life to help you also. (If you don’t know who they are, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal them to you.) It is good to ask for prayer, for help when needed. There is no shame. Let others use their gifts. And as you see others struggling with their crosses, help them. Pray, but also take action and do what you can.

Keep walking, dear disciple. One foot in front of the other. Your resurrection will come.

This contribution is available at <http://sunflowersojourn.wordpress.com/2016/02/08/carrying-heavy-crosses/>
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A Look at My Parish Church [at From the Pulpit of my Life]

This is how my parish church has looked since Ash Wednesday.



Sanctuary, altar, crucifix and shrouded statuary: only the Stations of the Cross that depict Jesus' journey to Calvary were left un-shrouded.

Look at the clean, brightly polished white marble floors! They reflect the surroundings like a mirror.



Symbols of Christ's Passion and Death

Located to the left side of our sanctuary is this Lenten display. It's located in the same place that the Christmas creche occupied several weeks ago.

Do you recognize all the symbols of Christ's Passion and Death?

The **cross**, of course, is the central symbol. Jesus was crucified on a cross of wood on which a sign displayed the words, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Those words were written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek.

The **crown of thorns** was an instrument of Jesus' Passion. It was placed on Jesus' head when the soldiers who had charge of Him mocked and ridiculed Him because he had claimed to have a Kingdom, though it was not of this world. Jesus silently endured this humiliation.

The **cloth with an icon of Jesus' head** represents Veronica's veil. It was used, according to Catholic tradition, by Veronica, a woman who had compassion on Jesus as He carried His cross toward Calvary, the place of crucifixion. Veronica wiped the blood and sweat from Jesus' face and His image appeared on the cloth.

The large **nails and spear** were instruments of torture. Nails were pounded into Jesus arms and legs so His body would adhere to the cross during the crucifixion. A Roman soldier used the spear to pierce the side of Jesus. Blood and water oozed from that wound.

The **chalice** represents the cup used at the Last Supper when Jesus instituted the Eucharist. In Matthew 26 it is written, "Then [Jesus] took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to [the disciples] saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of the many for the forgiveness of sins.'" In Christian iconography of the crucifixion a chalice is sometimes shown being used to catch the stream of blood that issued from his wounded side. Here is an example of angels doing so. I have a small statue of Mary, Jesus' mother, standing at the cross doing the same thing.



Image of blood issuing from side of the crucified Lord being caught in a chalice.

The **rooster** represents the cock that crowed after Peter denied Christ three times, as Jesus had predicted He would do.



Close up of items at the foot of the cross: Jesus' tunic, whip, coins and purse, dice, and iron chain

The **tunic and the dice** go together. After the soldiers crucified Jesus they took his clothes and divided them into shares for each soldier. His tunic had no seams, so instead of tearing it apart, the soldiers cast lots. St. John's gospel account quotes an excerpt from Psalm 22:

They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea, ordered that Jesus be scourged with **whips**. It was after the scourging that the soldiers crowned Him with thorns. Then Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

The **coins and purse** belonged to Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' 12 apostles. He betrayed Jesus to the Jewish authorities for the price of thirty pieces of silver. Judas regretted his betrayal and returned the blood money, as it was called, to the chief priests and elders of the temple. Mathew's gospel account says Judas hanged himself, while Acts of the Apostles says he fell, probably from a high place, and died of his injuries.

The last item appears to be a **chain**. I believe this might have been used to represent the instrument used to break the legs of those who were crucified. In John's gospel the legs of the thieves crucified with Jesus were broken to assure that they were dead and could be taken from the crosses on which they had been hanged. But, in Jesus' case, the soldiers didn't break his legs because he was already dead.

This contribution is available at <http://www.fromthepulpitofmylife.com/2016/02/lent-day-14-a-look-at-my-parish-church/>
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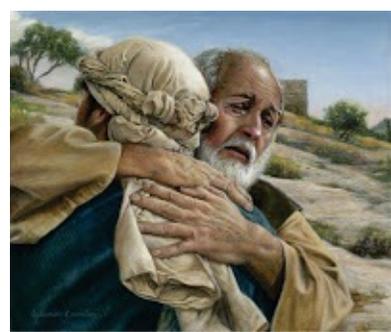
Bring the Finest Robe! [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday March 6, 2016

A Reflection on Luke 15:1-3, 11-32, N.A.B.

By: Larry T

The *Parable of the Lost Son* is arguably the most beautiful of Jesus' parables. In a non-biblical publication such as Aesop's Fables the story might begin with, "Once upon a time there was a man who had two sons . . ." Upon reading the story we might shake our heads in wonderment at the young son's foolhardiness; we may well marvel at the father's love and understanding, and puzzle over the older son's bitterness. Aesop's fables always had a point; the wisdom of this story might be a lesson for young people and their inheritances.



¹ *The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him,*

² *but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

³ *So to them he addressed this parable.*

¹¹ *Then he said, "A man had two sons,*

¹² *and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them.*

¹³ *After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.*

¹⁴ *When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.*

¹⁵ *So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.*

- 16 And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.*
- 17 Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger.'*
- 18 I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.*
- 19 I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."'*
- 20 So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.*
- 21 His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.'*
- 22 But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.*
- 23 Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast,*
- 24 because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.*
- 25 Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.*
- 26 He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.*
- 27 The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'*
- 28 He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.*
- 29 He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.*
- 30 But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'*
- 31 He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.*
- 32 But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"*

The faces of any Jews in this group of tax collectors and sinners would have contorted with revulsion at

this story because for Jews pigs were the most unclean of all animals. Moreover, in Jesus' time, Jews simply did not associate with Gentiles. They were permitted to have business dealings with them, but upon leaving a Gentile town they ceremoniously shook the dust from their sandals to show their complete separation from Gentile practices. For any Jew the image of feeding pigs and depending on a Gentile for starvation wages would have been revolting.

The Pharisees and scribes listening to this story would have probably recognized themselves in the older son. For them the very spirit of God was expressed in the six hundred and thirteen commandments set out in the Torah (Mosaic Law). As administrators and interpreters of the law, they saw themselves as being in a right relationship with God. When they saw Jesus welcoming tax collectors and sinners they might well have shuffled their feet and muttered angrily, "*Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders*". Jesus was telling the Pharisees and scribes to convert from their Law-God to the God of love and mercy. We should note that the father in the parable doesn't dispute the older son's fidelity, but asserts his love for him: "*My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.*"

Early Church Fathers saw the lost son as an image of humanity. To them the younger son's journey "*to a distant country*" was willful and intentional alienation from the father – the world of God. The freedom-seeking younger son wanted to taste everything life had to offer, especially forbidden fruit. He didn't want to be subject to any commandment, rule, or authority and felt that he had the right to govern himself. The eventual consequence of being forced to work for a gentile as a swineherd and craving pig food was an expression of man's extreme misery and poverty in living a life without God. In the end the totally free man became a miserable slave. At this point a *conversion* takes place: the lost son decided to return home, to the father. In the parable the father orders the servants to bring quickly "*the finest robe.*" For the Church Fathers, this "*finest robe*" meant the lost robe of grace which man had been originally clothed with, but which he forfeited by sin. But now this "*finest robe*" is given back to him and the joyous celebration begins.

At one time or another most teenagers can identify with the younger son. And if they are honest, most parents will admit to harboring some of those same feelings when they were teenagers themselves. Some teenagers become so desperate for a life without rules that they run away from home; sometimes they end up living on dangerous city streets. All the while their parents can only wait for them to *grow up*, to *come to their senses*, for a *conversion*. Imagine the joy of the parents when their wayward son or daughter does repent and returns home! In this story Jesus shares an aspect of the Father's character by presenting us with a vivid image of the Father's love for his children, for us. Only Jesus who knows the Father could reveal the depth of the Father's love and mercy in such a beautiful way.

Jesus' story about the lost son is about conversion and love: the tax collectors and sinners had repented and converted or were in the process of repenting and converting; the lost son did repent and convert; the older son needed to repent and convert. But what does conversion look like to us?

Admit it or not, a number of us have some things in common with the older brother: we faithfully fulfill our Sunday obligation, pray, tithe, and try to good people. Still yet, some of us haven't truly converted from the Law-God to the God of mercy and love where we will find joy in our faith. We can begin by recognizing the love that the Father has for us as described by Jesus in this parable. The next step is to love the Father – as he abides in us so should we abide in him. Finally, we must love our brothers and sisters because this is when our love for God is brought to perfection:

²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

²¹ This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

We cannot claim to have a right relationship with God if we hate our brothers and sisters because there is no room in God's Kingdom for bigotry of any kind.

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2016/03/bring-finest-robe.html>
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The Saints and Holy People at Death [at *Servimus unum Deum*]

Hello Everyone,

Hopefully after

[reading my 1A posting.](#)

you would have come to see that St. Alphonsus Liguori is quite holy and serious about the state of your soul, and has described in accordance with Church teaching about sin and those in a state of mortal/obstinate sin at the hour of death.

However, perhaps you are not into scare tactics, but rather, would be moved by what is the positive benefits or experience of being in a state of holiness before death, to be hopefully obtaining Salvation in Heaven.

That is, that at the moment of death ...

one desires to be, and die as, a SAINT.

Now, I understand, especially in this sickened world by which the Lord has "allowed" us (I mean that loosely. He never wills SIN for us, that is our choice of free will,) for greater temptations and abuses of technology, and a major loss of desire and respect for the Church and a holy life.

However, it is in his writings, that St. Alphonsus gives us an alternative to the fates that befall those who choose that life of death and sin. He does not leave us hopeless and implores of us to pursue the alternative, by showing us how they die. He presents to us a beautiful alternative.

The just individual at death ... different from those unjust souls

From reading my posting in 1A, you can tell that the souls who are "unjust" will experience a lot of pain and suffering at their moment of death, aside from medical based ailments. Much is spiritual and psychological.

A just man takes his/her death differently. Alphonsus says of just men, that "The torments which afflict sinners at death do not disturb the peace of the saints." (88). Also quoted is the Book of Wisdom, 3:1: "

The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them.

"

Just why is a person who is just in such a state at death, this way? It is because "... the just man is not afflicted at the thought of being obliged to take leave of the goods of the earth ... he has constantly said to the Lord:

Thou are the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever [Psalm 52:26]

..." (88).

Now, this of course, does not mean the person will experience a painless death necessarily. Rather, they will be happy and willing to bear such pain, in light of having kept the Lord's will, and can die bearing those pains. "He who dies loving God is not disturbed by the pains of death ... he offers to God these last moments of life, and feels consoled in uniting the sacrifice of his death to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ offered for him on the Cross to his eternal Father." (89)

Furthermore, the "just person" at death, is filled with the greatest of hopes! "... The greatest consolation which a soul that has loved God will experience in hearing the news of death, will arise from the thought that it will soon be delivered from the many dangers of offending God ... many troubles of conscience, and from so many temptations of the devil." (91).

[In the "style" of St. Alphonsus]

My reader, inquisitor, or curious onlooker. The world, so filled with the pains of the flesh and devil, brings upon us many a burden to our mind, body, and soul. Those who embrace what I have stated before

[here](#)

, shows the torment of those at death's door, having lived a lifetime of selfishness and sin. Their minds fear the impending end to come, the loss of time to correct maladies among themselves and their friends and family, and of the finite pleasures of this world they held onto so dear. Yet those who did not are at peace with themselves. They look forward to the cessation of their earthly life, peaceful and joyful on their death beds. Hope fills them in that death is just the beginning, the coin of payment to the Lord for entry to everlasting joy, for all eternity. Now is the time to pursue that future, a future of a happy death, without regret nor self-inflicted torture for time wasted and not used wisely. Now is the time to embrace the mercy of the Lord, and to repent of your ways. Seek the happy death that fills those with joy through the Lord!

The Rewards for those who die in the State of Grace, who are "just souls"

You might be asking now, "what are the rewards I will get for taking that path of a happy death, one in the state of Sanctifying Grace, and doing the Lord's will

ABSOLUTELY?

"

The first of the rewards, actually comes at the period of dying before the moment of death. Remember above, how those who die in the state of grace, fear not death's scythe, and are joyful about approaching it? Well, God will aid you and allow you to achieve that! You are not alone in your joy!

"... God knows well how to console his children in their last moments; and even in the midst of the pains of death he

infuses

into their souls certain sweetnesses, as foretastes of Paradise, which he will soon bestow upon them."

(102). Do you see that? While the judgement of your soul does happen at the moment of death, even before that, you are already reaping rewards on your death bed! God is rewarding you for your loyalty to him!!! What a King of Kings, to be even rewarding you before the task is done!

St. Alphonus discusses what God will do [though the Lord Jesus Christ, God made flesh] to the soul in a state of grace upon the moment of death: "God bestows on it a great favour ... He who dies in the grace of God can never more offend him." (92-93). Finally!!! No more does the person have to deal with a muddled conscience of "am I doing the right thing?" or "am I pleasing the Lord?". The dying person will be relieved to be lifted of that burden of thought in their mind, and the scrupulous person will be relieved of that mega-ton burden even more so!

Further,

"

Whosoever, then, is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the Son of God Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God." (194-195). It is as if you are esteemed and of the most high, favoured by him! "The Lord appears never to take His eyes off the soul that loves him, nor to close his ears to its petitions.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and His ears unto their prayers.

[Psalm 33:16]" (196).

Based on Revelations 21:4, St. Alphonsus tells us that in Heaven, "When the soul has once entered into the happy kingdom of God, ... In heaven there is no infirmity, no poverty, no distress; there are no longer the vicissitudes of days and nights, nor of cold and heat; but a perpetual day always serene, an eternal spring always delightful. There are no persecutions; no envy ... There are no fears; because the souls, being confirmed in grace, can no longer sin nor lose her God."

Also, upon entering heaven, we will experience the Beatific Vision, that is, the meeting of God face-to-face and seeing his truest form:

"During the present life, we cannot comprehend the delight of seeing and loving God face to face: but we may form some notion of it by considering that divine love is so enchanting, that, even in this life, it has sometimes raised up from the earth, not only the souls, but even the bodies of the saints At present there is a veil before our eyes, and God is seen only with the eyes of faith; but what will be our joy when the veil is removed, and we see God face to face? We shall then see the infinite beauty of God; his infinite greatness, his justice, his perfection, his amiableness, and his infinite love for us."

Finally, one's soul will be in eternal bliss, truly happy and joyful, enjoying a fantastic utopia for all eternity, never doubting the love of any one or anything, free of all evils of the finite world, and free of all ills and evils:

"... in heaven the soul is certain that it loves God, and that He loves it. It sees that it is happily lost in the love of the Lord, and that He embraces it as a beloved child, and that this love will not be dissolved for

all eternity Then also will the soul clearly see all the graces which God has bestowed upon it in delivering it from so many temptations and so many dangers of perdition [it] will see that it is saved, that is in the possession of God and secure against all danger of ever losing that Sovereign Good for all eternity. The blessed then will forever enjoy that felicity which during each moment of eternity, will be always as new as the first moment of its enjoyment. The soul will always desire and always possess that joy. It shall be always satisfied, and always thirsty: forever thirsty, and always satisfied with delights: because the desire of heaven begets no pain ...the blessed are vessels filled with happiness, so that they have nothing more to desire ... the soul will be so inebriated with love that it will happily lose itself in God - that is, it will entirely forget itself, and will think only of loving, of praising, and of blessing the infinite Good which it possesses. (297-299)

Conclusion

Having read the above, readers, don't you see what treasures and joys await those who decide to take the nobler path? Such magnificent joys indeed! To think of no more sorrows, pains, and depression, it is a marvel indeed to never have pangs of hunger or wants that cannot be satisfied by anything on this earth!

When you look back at what those who are not in favour with God are, why would you want to experience Hell early, and then truly? It is like making the choice between: a \$200,000 Ferrari at full price, despite being on its last years, which gives you one good ride and then suddenly dies halfway to your destination, or a reliable quality car that isn't the flashiest, yet will take you through your journeys to those you love and your true home.

So with yourself, why choose the "Ferrari" when nothing but pains, an empty wallet, and a sudden end to happiness is all you will get with being not in God's favour? One should choose the ride that, approaching the end of your life, will already fill you with peace and joy, and then the party continues on into the eternal, with no end!!! In addition, many of us have felt how our addictions and wants continue to gnaw at us, and even when satisfied, they come back, having not been.

Or how many of us have not experienced love with total assurance, whereby those around us fail us, our friends, family, our spouses, our partners, even our parents, to give us the secure love without faltering that we desire. No, not even they provide it in their human sin and fault at times. Only GOD can provide that end to all hurts and lovelessness, in the eternal. It is that which we must pursue, to be one of the ``just`` at death, so that our truest and deepest hurts can be ultimately filled with His Eternal Love in Heaven, when we are with Him forever.

END

NEXT POSTING: 1C: WHAT TO DO FOR ETERNAL SALVATION.

This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.ca/2016/02/liquorian-series-1b-saints-and-holy.html>
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I meet lots of people in my line of work and in the work with our non-profit ministry to families and I am always amazed when someone shares with me the struggles they or members of their family are going through. No one and no family is immune from trials and tribulations, some are just better at hiding what is going on behind closed doors.

Bearing and Sharing the Burden

Personal and family trials are difficult and are very hard to deal with on your own, sharing your struggles with another person can lighten the load significantly. Sometimes it is just helpful to share your difficulties with someone else who will

listen and tell you they are praying for you. Many times, it is not that you are looking for someone to fix it or provide the perfect advice, you may just need to tell someone how you feel and how much you are hurting. We should do this in prayer also and pour out our sorrows to Jesus. He always listens and will answer our prayer for consolation. The situation may not change immediately, but many times we will feel the weight of the situation to be lighter or perhaps we are strengthened and therefore able to shoulder the load easier.

Discretion

Not every trial can or should be shared with every person we meet. I suppose this goes without saying, but there is such a thing as sharing too much information with someone whom we just don't know well enough. When we get to know someone, we gradually let them get to know us and as trust is built, we may share more intimate details about our lives and our struggles. Even Jesus himself didn't just come out and tell everyone he met everything about himself and his mission. When we share our struggles with someone, we should do it with caution. If someone doesn't know us well enough, they could draw incorrect conclusions about the situation or feel awkward and avoid interacting with us in the future simply to avoid that awkward feeling.

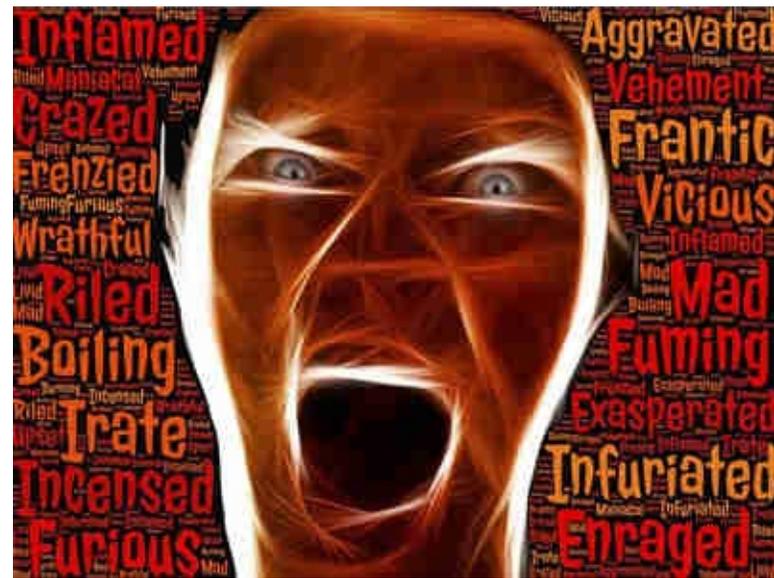
Following the Spirit

With all this being said, we must follow our conscience and ask God to guide our interactions with others. It is healthy and good to have confidants, people with whom we can share our deeply personal struggles, who will build us up when we need it and support us through the dark valleys. There is a time and a place for everyone to share their struggles, and if you are on the receiving end, consider yourself blessed that someone trusted you enough to invite you to help them bear the cross that they have been

given.

Over the past several weeks, I have read some great articles speaking about very personal struggles. These authors felt called to write some very personal articles and share them with the world. Some of these authors are anonymous, others not, and that really doesn't matter, the struggle and pain they write about is real. By sharing these stories with others, they may help someone who is also hurting be comforted and consoled knowing that they are not alone and that there is hope.

Empathy



You never really know what someone is going through, so when someone is rude to you, cuts you off in traffic, treats you like dirt or doesn't call you back, pray for them. Ask God to bless them and provide whatever they need at this time in their lives. While our human gut reaction may compel us to be mad and get back at someone, the better response is to love the one who has been less than kind to us. They may be one of the authors above who is suffering with a great cross in their lives and the weight of the burden just got too heavy and God put you in their path to receive an outward sign of their suffering. You never know, if you respond to their unkind words with kindness you may help them to get past their current difficulty.

Empathy is simply amazing, it takes the focus off of you and puts it onto another person and their needs. It is so easy to do, yet so difficult to desire to do. Consider making this your Lenten resolution, show empathy to others, especially the ones who make life the most difficult for you. Be the face of Jesus for them, love them like Jesus loves them and make the world a better place.

This contribution is available at <http://www.yourholyfamily.com/you-just-never-know/>
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How To Be Successful At Lent [at Saints 365]

If I had to list my most "successful" Lents

I would probably say the following ranked as the top three:

1. The year I gave up shopping and did really well *except* for the pair of shoes that I bought and hid in my desk at work until Easter so my husband wouldn't notice them. I sure did save a lot of money that year!
2. The year that I gave up coffee and no one at work wanted to speak to me before Noon. Boy did that one require perseverance-especially on the part of my co-workers. I did kick that nasty caffeine habit, though!
3. Finally, there was the year I gave up grated parmesan cheese - what a major sacrifice for this Italian girl. I practically top brownies with that stuff. Talk about HOLY!!! Plus, I lost a few pounds that year as well!

Epic successes, all of them. Well done, Debbie.

The problem is, Lent isn't about being successful. Or about saving money. Or about losing weight. Lent is a matter of the heart. The celebration of Ash Wednesday begins with a reading from the book of Joel in which the Lord, speaking through the prophet Joel exhorts us to:

"Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting weeping and mourning.

In the Psalm for Ash Wednesday, we read David's cries to the Lord, begging Him for his mercy after he has been caught in the grievous sin of arranging to have his lover's husband killed.

Within the Daytime Prayer of the Liturgy of the House we read from Ezekiel:

"Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed,

LENT...

it's a matter of the heart

saints365.blogspot.com

Are you beginning to see a pattern here? In all of these readings, we are being urged to seek the Lord with our heart first. Furthermore, the condition our heart is in is also important: our hearts must be clean, pure, new, and whole. God doesn't want half of our heart. He doesn't want a heart intent on performing religious actions with an ulterior, self-serving motive. The Lord wants all of our heart and he wants us to surrender it to Him freely and for the right reasons - out of love, thanksgiving and adoration. The common failure of all my Lenten "successes" was that I had not given the Lord my heart. My resolutions focused on what the fasting would do for me. I was successful because I achieved *my* goals, but success was not what God was asking of me.

Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that fasting during Lent isn't important. Fasting is a key element of the three-fold practice of Lent which also includes prayer and almsgiving. In the Gospel for Ash Wednesday Jesus warns of having the right motives when you fast, when you pray and when you give alms. (Matthew 6:2-16). The implication in his use of the word *when* is that all three of these practices will be observed. Jesus' warning is about the motive behind these practices. He is looking at the heart.

My prayer in the trenches of everyday life during this Lenten season is not that I am successful at fasting, prayer or almsgiving, but rather that, through the Lord's grace, Lent truly becomes a matter of the heart.

I'm participating in #WorthRevisit Wednesdays, hosted by Elizabeth at [Theology is a Verb](#) and Allison at [Reconciled to You](#). Head on over there for some more inspiring Catholic reading.

God is always fair [at A Moment From De Sales]



A Mother of ten children received the *Mother of the Year* award from her Parish community. Later during an interview, a reporter from the local Catholic newspaper asked this question. *Do you love all ten children equally and alike?* Without a moments hesitation she answered. *“It totally depends on where they are, and what they need at any given moment.”* What a great answer!”

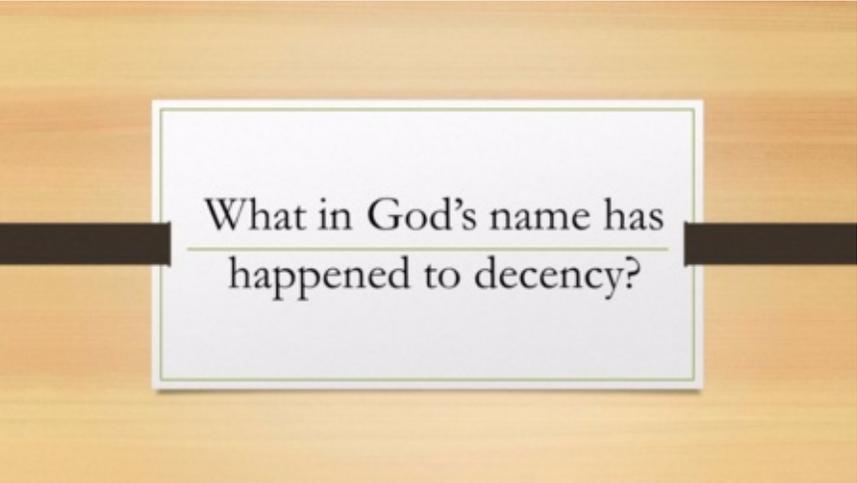
God often responds to us, His children, in much the same way. Certainly God gives each of us His love and blessings equally, but God also knows and sees things others don’t. Like any loving parent, God then acts accordingly, giving each what he or she needs to weather any storm or crisis.

When some see this, they say: *“God is not acting fairly. Look some get more and others less!”* Indeed, God as God can do whatever God wishes. However, what may look unfair to us humans—is God choosing to give His free and limitless mercy to a vulnerable family member.

God wants each of us to gain eternal life, and helps anyway God can to make this happen. And since our God likes to surprise and astonish us whenever He can, God does exactly that! And don’t forget, besides being always fair, **God is also our Loving Father!**

This contribution is available at <http://livetodaywell.org/>
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The indecency of Catholic support for Donald Trump [at Brutally Honest]



What in God's name has
happened to decency?

I bring you two recent pieces I find troubling.

The first is from [The Daily News referencing a series of polls conducted by Monmouth University](#):

To date, Trump has actually enjoyed more support from Catholic voters than Protestants. Recent polls conducted by Monmouth University showed him with higher vote shares among followers of the Roman Catholic Church than with other Christians. In Iowa, he pulled 44% support from Catholic caucus-goers compared to 24% from Protestants. In New Hampshire polling, he took 30% of the Catholic vote, which was slightly higher than his 26% share among Protestants. In South Carolina, he currently holds 42% of the Catholic vote compared with 32% of the Protestant vote.

I find support for Trump in general to be baffling, particularly amongst Christians but disappointingly so amongst Catholics.

[Max Lucado, the best-selling Christian author and writer and preacher, is asking the question every confessing Christian should be asking...](#) what has happened to decency?

As the father of three daughters, I reserved the right to interview their dates. Seemed only fair to me. After all, my wife and I'd spent 16 or 17 years feeding them, dressing them, funding braces, and driving them to volleyball tournaments and piano recitals. A five-minute face-to-face with the guy was a fair expectation. I was entrusting the love of my life to him. For the next few hours, she would be dependent upon his ability to drive a car, avoid the bad crowds, and stay sober. I wanted to know if he could do it. I wanted to know if he was decent.

This was my word: "decent." Did he behave in a decent manner? Would he treat my daughter with kindness and respect? Could he be trusted to bring her home on time? In his language, actions, and decisions, would he be a decent guy?

Decency mattered to me as a dad.

Decency matters to you. We take note of the person who pays their debts. We appreciate the physician who takes time to listen. When the husband honors his wedding vows, when the teacher makes time for the struggling student, when the employee refuses to gossip about her co-worker, when the losing team congratulates the winning team, we can characterize their behavior with the word decent.

We appreciate decency. We applaud decency. We teach decency. We seek to develop decency. Decency matters, right?

Then why isn't decency doing better in the presidential race?

The leading candidate to be the next leader of the free world would not pass my decency interview. I'd send him away. I'd tell my daughter to stay home. I wouldn't entrust her to his care.

I don't know Mr. Trump. But I've been chagrined at his antics. He ridiculed a war hero. He made mockery of a reporter's menstrual cycle. He made fun of a disabled reporter. He referred to the former first lady, Barbara Bush as "mommy," and belittled Jeb Bush for bringing her on the campaign trail. He routinely calls people "stupid," "loser," and "dummy." These were not off-line, backstage, overheard, not-to-be-repeated comments. They were publicly and intentionally tweeted, recorded, and presented.

Such insensitivities wouldn't even be acceptable even for a middle school student body election. But for the Oval Office? And to do so while brandishing a Bible and boasting of his Christian faith? I'm bewildered, both by his behavior and the public's support of it.

The stock explanation for his success is this: he has tapped into the anger of the American people. As one man said, "We are voting with our middle finger." Sounds more like a comment for a gang-fight than a presidential election. Anger-fueled reactions have caused trouble ever since Cain was angry at Abel.

He's got [more](#).

The tragedy is that decency no longer matters to far too many Christ followers... that they seemingly would rather be known as Trump followers.

There will be hell to pay for this. There will.

The question becomes, how many innocents will be paying that hell?

H/T to [Deacon Greg](#) for the Monmouth University poll.

Crossposted at [Wizbang](#).

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2016/02/the-indecency-of-catholic-support-for-donald-trump.html

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The natural unity of our bodies and our souls [at Blog of the Dormition]

On Mark 2:1-12

Second Sunday of the Great Fast

Our Holy Father Gregory Palamas

When we look at each other – especially when we look at strangers or people on the street – we often don't really see the person before us. We might see someone in our way, someone we have to wait behind in line at the grocery store, or we might see the apparent poverty of a beggar, or the struggles of a blind person preparing to cross at a busy intersection.

We may tend to see the condition of human bodies, while having little regard for human spirits. We may be attracted to some and repelled by others. We may automatically judge one other on the basis of appearance.

We may keep our heads down in a crowd, afraid of making eye contact, because sometimes that's the moment when we see a bit more than the body, which can be unnerving or make demands upon us. Jesus even says that "the eye is the lamp of the body," which, if sound, fills the whole body with light. So when we look another in the eye, sometimes we see not only a body, but also catch a glimpse of the light (or the darkness) that fills a body.

But when Jesus looks at us, he always sees us entirely as we are. When four men lay down their paralyzed friend before him on a pallet, Jesus *sees* the man. If it had been one of us, most would first have seen the man's paralysis. But that is not what Jesus first sees. Rather, he sees their faith, and he says to the man immediately, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

When Jesus looks at the scribes sitting there, he doesn't only see their silent lips, but sees in his spirit that they question him in their hearts. Again, he sees the whole person before him, whether they are filled with light or with or darkness. He knows us inside and outside. He knows us in spirit and in body.

Jesus then demonstrates that he does also see the paralytic's need for healing and he tells the man to rise,

take up his pallet, and go home. So Jesus is able to see the whole man and he can see that he needs two kinds of healing. He needs healing of both body and soul. He needs to rise and walk, but he first needs forgiveness of his sins.

These things do not exist in isolation from one another. As long as we are living this life, we need continual healing of both body and soul. We need repentance, which is therapy for our soul, as much as we need any kind of physical therapy for our bodies. Our need for forgiveness and our need for healing are really the same need, because our bodies and our souls are not two separate things but one thing, mysteriously interconnected.

Our holy father Gregory Palamas, who we always remember and celebrate on this second Sunday of the Great Fast, recognizes the gift of healing as one of those charisms of the Spirit that “operate through the body.” He writes,

“Healings and miracles never take place unless the soul of the one exercising either gift be in a state of intense mental prayer and his body in perfect tune with his soul.... The communication [of the Spirit] takes place... not only during the mental prayer of the soul, but also at moments when the body is operating.”[\[i\]](#)

Our bodies and souls work in conjunction to bring God’s healing into our lives.

Palamas writes about this in his work on “the Hesychast method of prayer and the transformation of our bodies.” The Hesychasts’ prayer does not disregard the body, but incorporates both breath and posture into prayer. We pray in spirit and in body. And we experience God in spirit and in body. Because we are spirit and body. And because God, who is spirit, has become man, who is body and spirit.

We are body and spirit at the same time. Our bodies and souls are meant for each other. We are a psychosomatic unity. We are not only bodies animated by electrical impulses and controlled by our brains, as the materialists would have it. Nor are we only immaterial spirits inhabiting or trapped in bodies that confine us until our release from them at death, when they will pass away, as the Platonists and Gnostics would have it.

A soul is the life of a body and the human soul is also an immortal and everlasting spirit, which means that the body – though it dies, and thus experiences an entirely unnatural separation from its soul – will naturally rise again and live forever. There will be resurrection. It’s not the resurrection that is unnatural; it is death that is unnatural. Resurrection is a natural response to the unnatural reality of death.

Our veneration of relics – of the dead bodies of the saints – of the relics of St. Gregory Palamas – is not merely a remembrance of what they were but also an expectation of what they will be again. Our bodies will rise again. Our bodies have a place in everlasting union with our immortal souls.

I emphasize this because both materialism and disregard for the body have strong footholds in our culture and even among some people in the church. These ideas deny or ignore the resurrection and the natural unity of our bodies and our souls. And it is essential to our faith to get right this this understanding of our human nature – this Christian anthropology.

If you gloss over the importance of our bodies as well as our souls, you miss the whole purpose of Christ’s resurrection. You miss what he has accomplished for us by rising from the dead in his body – which is our salvation - *our* salvation - the salvation of us who are bodies and are souls and are spirits.

Let me give some examples of the disregard for our bodies found all around us. First, one from our culture: a few times I’ve seen this new-agey bumper sticker (maybe you have too), which states, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

Second, one from among Christians: C.S. Lewis is often misquoted as saying: ““You don’t have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body.” When you see this quote floating around the internet, be aware that he never said this.

[\[ii\]](#)

These quotes are both half-truths. It is true that we are spirits. It is true that we are souls. I don’t merely *have* a soul, I *am* a soul: that much is true. But I am also a body. It is the way that God has made us from the beginning. And it is part of the human nature that God takes on in his incarnation.

Finally, an example regarding attitudes toward fasting. The great fast is a great time for reflecting on the importance of both body and spirit in human nature. A coworker of mine and I were discussing the great fast and she told me about how, at a local community she used to belong to, they would emphasize that we are to fast from fear. They’re not wrong that we are to fast from fear. Paul told us to have no anxiety about anything. And John teaches us that perfect love casts out fear. This kind of fear, as opposed the holy fear of the Lord, is born from a failure to trust in God. To that I would add that we are to fast also from all the other sins and vices of the spirit: malice, envy, rage, despair and so on.

But we must not emphasize these things over and against the fast of the body, I don't think. Whatever good we do in spirit, we must echo with our bodies. Because we're not spirits trapped in flesh, we're flesh with spirit breathed in by God. Physical matter isn't a problem and it isn't an illusion. Rather, it is a means by which God unites us to himself.

[i] "The Hesychast method of prayer and the transformation of our bodies," 13. The Triads, 53.

[ii] <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2014/01/the-spiritualist-origins-of-you-dont-have-a-soul-you-are-a-soul>

This contribution is available at <http://holydormition.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-natural-unity-of-our-bodies-and-our.html>
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Lent, Faith, and Ashes [at A Catholic Citizen in America]



(From U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brian May, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

(Ash Wednesday celebration aboard the amphibious assault ship

[USS Wasp](#)

.)

Ash Wednesday comes this week, so I'll get ashes on my forehead and start doing my Lenten routines — along with folks around the world.

That won't include the usual fasting: I'm past the 18-to-59 age requirement for Catholics in my region, and diabetic

[to boot](#)

. We're called to holiness, not stupidity; common sense applies, or should; and I'm putting a 'resources' link list at the end of this post.

[1](#)

Fasting, Prayer, and Almsgiving

Lent is a time for penance; which involves fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Actually, any sort of penance involves those three items. (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[1434](#)

-

[1439](#)

)



That doesn't sound like much fun, so why do it? I'm a Christian, I've been baptized, so my sins are washed away and I'm good to go, right?

Not quite. It's a bit more complicated.

First of all, I do

not

think sin a handful of activities I either don't enjoy, can't participate in, or actively dislike.

Sin: Original and Otherwise



(From NASA, via astrobio.net, used w/o permission.)

Sin is what happens when I decide not to do something I should; or decide to do something I know is bad for myself or others, and do it anyway. It's an offense against reason and truth: and God. (Catechism,

[1849](#)

-

[1864](#)

)

*"**SIN:** An offense against God as well as a fault against reason, truth, and right conscience. Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to the eternal law of God. In judging the gravity of sin, it is customary to distinguish between mortal and venial sins ([1849](#), [1853](#), [1854](#))."*
(Catechism, Glossary, [S](#))

What I should do is Love God and love my neighbor, and see everyone as my neighbor. (

[Matthew 5:43](#)

-

[44](#)

;

[22:36](#)

-

[40](#)

,

[Mark 12:28](#)

-

[31](#)

;

[Luke 10:25](#)

-

[27](#)

,

[29](#)

-

[37](#)

; Catechism,

[1825](#)

)

It's simple, anything but easy, and I've said that before. Often (

[September 27, 2015](#)

;

[April 12, 2015](#)

;

[October 12, 2014](#)

)

I think I'm a sinner and live in a fallen world — again, that doesn't mean what some folks assume it does.

The universe is basically good, and so are we — basically. (

[Genesis 1:26](#)

-

[27](#)

,

[31](#)

; Catechism,

[31](#)

,

[299](#)

.)

What went wrong is that the first of us listened to Satan, ignoring what God had said. Then Adam tried blaming his wife, and God, which did not end well. (

[Genesis 3:5](#)

-

[13](#)

)

That was a very, very long time ago — and we've been living with the disastrous consequences of their wrong choice ever since. (Catechism,

[396](#)

-

[412](#)

)

Humanity is still made "in the divine image," but the harmony we had with ourselves and with the



universe is broken: so loving ourselves, others, and God is a struggle. (

[Genesis 1:27](#)

; Catechism,

[355](#)

-

[361](#)

,

[374](#)

-

[379](#)

,

[398](#)

,

[400](#)

,

[1701](#)

-

[1707](#)

)

"ORIGINAL SIN: *The sin by which the first human beings disobeyed the commandment of God, choosing to follow their own will rather than God's will. As a consequence they lost the grace of original holiness, and became subject to the law of death; sin became universally present in the world. Besides the personal sin of Adam and Eve, original sin describes the fallen state of human nature which affects every person born into the world, and from which Christ, the 'new Adam,' came to redeem us ([396-412](#)).*"

(Catechism, Glossary, [O](#))

Baptism



(From Thomas Cole, via the National Gallery of Art and Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

I received the Holy Spirit at baptism, entering the life of the Church, and starting my trek to God's kingdom. (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[782](#)

,

[1213](#)

-

[1284](#)

)

Baptism cleaned the slate, removing original sin and whatever personal sins I'd accumulated to date; making me "a new creature." It didn't, however, shield me from consequences of living in a world that's seriously out of harmony. (Catechism,

[1262](#)

-

[1266](#)

)

It certainly won't keep me from dying, at which point I get a very serious interview with our Lord: my particular judgment, a final performance review. (Catechism,

[1021](#)

-



[1022](#)

,

[1051](#)

,

[1814](#)

-

[1816](#)

)

After that — I have no idea how long, which is fine by me — there's the closing ceremony we call the Final Judgment, we see what Creation 2.0 is like, and I've been over that before. (

[November 29, 2015](#)

;

[November 23, 2014](#)

;

[April 19, 2015](#)

)

Working Out My Salvation

"[10](#) [11](#) So then, my beloved, obedient as you have always been, not only when I am present but all the more now when I am absent, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. [12](#)

*"For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work."
([Philippians 2:12-13](#))*

If I'd never faltered in loving others, always loved God with all my heart and mind, and unfailingly walked the path of righteousness: I'd be a character on some none-too-believable story.

We've had two people like that so far, I worship one of them, and the other is the woman who volunteered for a high-risk mission, two millennia back. (

[December 21, 2014](#)

;

[April 3, 2011](#)

)

Some Saints were mostly 'saintly' throughout their lives, and some weren't. They're Saints because they exhibited "heroic virtue" to the end. (Catechism,

[828](#)

)

On their way to Sainthood, some of them were — well, a lot were like me, sort of.

[St. Augustine of Hippo](#)

comes to mind. Not that I'm in his league, and that's another topic.

I can't 'work my way into Heaven.' I rely on our Lord for salvation. I can't 'believe my way into Heaven' either. I must act as if God matters. (Catechism,

[430](#)

-

[451](#)

,

[1814](#)

-

[1816](#)

)

"Indeed someone might say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

"You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble."

"For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."
([James 2:18-19, 26](#))

About that Philippians quote, like I've said before:



2

fear of the Lord is not being scared silly of God. It's more like respect. (Catechism,

[2144](#)

)

Ashes and Adoration

The ashes on my forehead are a good reminder that it's the start of Lent, and an outward sign of repentance.

But the real work happens inside: a "conversion of the heart, interior conversion." (Catechism,

[1430](#)

-

[1431](#)

)

That's where fasting, prayer, and almsgiving come in. They're ways to fix my relationship with myself, God, and others. (Catechism,

[1434](#)

-

[1439](#)

)

Like I said, conventional fasting isn't an option for me: apart from the micro-fast, which isn't an official term, before receiving the Eucharist. (Catechism,

[1387](#)

)

For the last several years I've added something to my daily routines during Lent. It's not quite 'fasting,' but the change in schedule does mean I give up time that I'd use for activities I enjoy more. It's a sort of "voluntary self-denial." (Catechism,

[1438](#)

)



This time around, I'm adding three hours a week to exercising and another two at the Adoration chapel down the street. It's hardly the sort of "sackcloth and ashes" thing

[Daniel 9:3](#)

talks about, but it's a start.

More of my take on:

1

Lenten resources:

- Vatican
 - "['I desire mercy, and not sacrifice'](#) "
(Mt 9:13). The works of mercy on the road of the Jubilee
Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2016
Pope Francis (October 14, 2015)
 - Code of Canon Law/Book IV Function of the Church/Part III: Sacred Places and Times/Chapter II. [Days of Penance](#)
- USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

2

Fear of God, Catholic style:

This contribution is available at <http://catholiccitizenamerica.blogspot.com/2016/02/lent-faith-and-ashes.html>
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Our Father: Baptism [at The Catholic Spiritual Life]



Today we begin a new series, exploring the sacraments through the Our Father.

I laid out the general theme [in a post several months ago](#). Now I want to take some time to consider how each line of the Our Father helps us think about a sacrament.

The purpose here points in both directions. On the one hand, we want to be able to pray the Our Father well. The sacraments can give some substance to the words, a way to focus on what we're saying. On the other hand, we want to appreciate the sacraments. The Our Father can give us a way to appreciate each of the seven sacraments – and, indeed, a daily way to rediscover them all, for they are all important to our lives. At the heart of the Our Father is the most powerful prayer for making a spiritual communion. But while we're at it, we can spiritually unite ourselves to all the other sacraments that surround communion.

We begin, then, with Baptism: Our Father, who art in heaven.

Baptism is the sacrament of rebirth. The word means “plunging.” The original rite involved going down into the water and coming up again. (We have radically simplified that rite; the Latin Church sometimes likes to minimize the experiential aspect of the sacraments in order to emphasize the divine power, which does not rely on us.) So the symbolism is of dying, as we go under the water, and rising again as we come up. There is freshness, a cleanness, a refreshment in this new life – just as there is some fear and trepidation as we approach the water. Baptism is death and rebirth.

But behind this rebirth is another element of rebirth, regeneration. It is not just that we are born again from the womb of the Church our Mother. It is even more that we are conceived again by God our Father.

Jesus is the only-begotten Son, the only one who is Son by nature. But in Baptism we are joined to him, so that we become sons and daughters – “sons in the Son,” says a traditional formula. We enter sacramentally into his human death, and so are reborn united to his divine sonship. We receive the power he put into the waters – and it is the “power to become children of God” (John 1:13).

We are born again “not of blood” – that is, this Sonship is not baked into our human nature. “Nor of the

will of the flesh”: our sinfulness turns away from this Sonship. “Nor of the will of man” (John 1:13), because we simply do not have the power to make ourselves sons of God. We are born again “of God,” with the sonship only he can give us.

Every time we pray “Our Father, who art in heaven,” we can remember that by Baptism we have been given a rebirth to heavenly life. We have been called – and truly are – sons and daughters of God. This dignity is heavenly, impossible to obtain apart from the infinite divine power of Jesus, through his sacraments. And it is heavenly, too, because our citizenship, our home, our inheritance, is in heaven, with the Father who has made us his own.

Every time we pray “Our Father, who art in heaven,” we ought to remember how awesome our Baptism is. We carry that Baptism with us. It is our spiritual garment, the constant source of our spiritual dignity. And everytime we think of Baptism, we should realize that it has made us able to call the God of heaven our Father.

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God Loves a Cheerful Giver [at New Evangelizers]

We are now in the season of Lent. As we all know it is a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. If you are anything like me, Lent does not fill you with the same child-like joy that Advent does. And yet both are times of preparation. And they must both be times of joy.

Obviously, Lent is a time of sacrifice and this means that we might be tempted towards the grumpy side. If we do Lent properly we will have less free time, less in our bellies, and less money in our pockets. These things are not usually a cause for celebration. In fact being busy, hungry, and poor are some of the largest stressors we can encounter.

But we are reminded by Our Lord to be cheerful even in these times.

Let us be clear: this is not a “fake it till you make it” philosophy. We have to be honest about how we feel in our current spiritual life. But we must remember that our disposition depends greatly (though not totally) on our will. While my emotions may shift, I can choose to focus on the good instead of the evil in my life. This will not always magically change my mood to the positive, but habitually drawing my mind to what is good and holy will have a strong influence on my feelings.

And this is what Christ is talking about when wants us to re-orient our souls so that we can even rejoice in sacrifice.

The Scriptures say “God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7) That is because there are fewer ways to witness that are more powerful than being a happy Christian. CS Lewis points out that joy on this world is a window into the next:

“I do not think that the life of Heaven bears any analogy to play or dance in respect of frivolity. I do think that while we are in this ‘valley of tears,’ cursed with labour, hemmed round with necessities, tripped up with frustrations, doomed to perpetual plannings, puzzlings, and anxieties, certain qualities that must belong to the celestial condition have no chance to get through, can project no image of themselves, except in activities which, for us here and now, are frivolous. For surely we must suppose the life of the blessed to be an end in itself, indeed The End... Dance and game are frivolous, unimportant down here; for ‘down here’ is not their natural place. Here, they are a moment’s rest from the life we were place here to live. But in this world everything is upside down. That which, if it could be prolonged here, would be a truancy, is likest that which in a better country is the End of ends. Joy is the serious business of Heaven.” (Letters to Malcolm, pg 92-93)

And it is never more important to be cheerful than when we are at a loss of the things of this world. If we are only focused on this life, then this world will never give us enough time, food, or money. We will always want more. But if we accept the loss of all of these things for something better, that is a cause of joy, rather than sorrow. “The loss of all of these things I consider a so much rubbish that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:8)

As a married man, I am no longer free to pursue romantic attachments to other women. Many of my male students have trouble understanding how I could limit myself so much. I tell them that if (insert popular

female celebrity name here, e.g. Jessica Alba) wanted to get physical with me, I would have to decline. For many of the young men I teach, this seems unthinkable.

But I do not see married life as a limitation. My love life isn't narrowed, it is deepened. And the best way I can witness the greatness of marriage is to be joyful in it. I truly enjoy my married life. I enjoy the time I get to spend with my wife. I enjoy the times that I can take care of her when she needs me. I enjoy being there for her as she is there for me.

The same must be true of our Christian faith, even during the difficult times.

We all want to be happy. Everything we do in this life is an attempt to gain greater happiness. We Christians know that the only thing that we make us truly and eternally happy is the love of God in Jesus Christ. So the question is: do we show it?

When people encounter us, do they see our happiness and become filled with an aching desire to have it as well? If not, then we are not living as we should. Every day I encounter people who are hurting because they are hungering for happiness while this world only gives empty pleasure and diversion. They yearn for something more substantial, something that will feed their souls. And they will only believe that we have it if we live in joy.

As I said earlier, we may not have complete control over our feelings. And many of the saints encountered the dark night of the soul while many of us deal with great tragedy and depression. But what a witness we can be if we can be joyful even as we go to the cross.

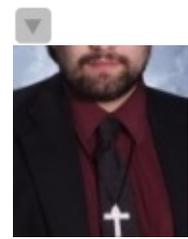
This Lent, let us try to move our hearts to joy as we sacrifice. Here are a few practical things to help with that:

1. Remember the World is Temporary. When we miss out on a particular physical pleasure or we encounter a physical discomfort, it helps to remember that this world will come to an end. The pain we encounter will cease and the pleasure we skipped, even if we received it, would be fleeting.
2. Be Goal-Minded. This is often an effective method when doing physical exercise, so this should also be the case with spiritual exercise. Imagine the type of person you wish to become. Concretely understand the virtue and holiness of the saint God is calling you to be. When you do your Lenten sacrifice, believe that each action gets you one step closer to becoming that which you desire.
3. Feel the Freedom. The sacrifices are not mere outward actions. Instead we commit ourselves to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving so that we can be transformed from within. If we do our Lenten sacrifices correctly, we will feel less of a pull towards sin and the material world. That freedom is a cause for joy. Enjoy that feeling when you encounter it.

This world is a world of joy and sorrow. There will be much this Lent that may cause great grief and heaviness on our hearts. Even our Lord felt that in Gethsemane.

But in the next world we will leave sorrow behind and only have joy. When this world is dark, the joy in our hearts acts as a kind of lighthouse to those battered about by all of the sorrow. And that joy comes from the love of God inside us.

God loves a cheerful giver because a cheerful giver loves God.



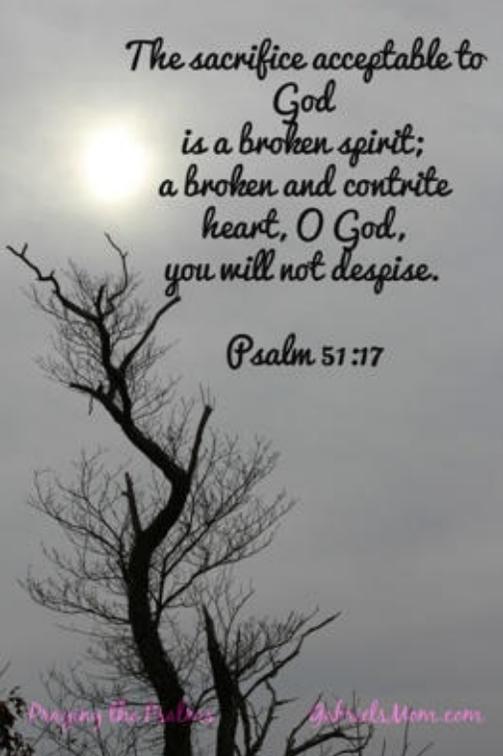
W.L. Grayson

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/2016/02/15/god-loves-cheerful-giver/>
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Preparing for Lent



*The sacrifice acceptable to
God
is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite
heart, O God,
you will not despise.*

Psalm 51:17

Praying the Rules *Arbuckle.com*

In just under a week, the Catholic Church (and others who use a liturgical calendar) will begin the beautiful season of Lent. 40 days of fasting, prayer, and alms giving, all with the purpose of growing close to Christ. I realized, I better start getting my Lenten plan together.

Of course, there will be the standard ways to mark the season in communion with others: no meat on Fridays, no “alleluias” in our prayers, and I even wear purple more often.

But what will I do for my own journey? And how can I tie my journey with those in my spiritual community? How can I make this season matter on both a personal and communal level?

Our parish usually does a video study each year for Lent & Easter. This year, we are studying a book: **Beautiful Mercy**. It is published by [Dynamic Catholic](#), and looks to be a great read. The book includes 14 sections; one for each of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Our pastor and parish council hope it will spark conversation about how we can live out mercy as a parish community.

My husband and I will make a Holy Hour each Wednesday morning. Honestly, I’m not sure why we don’t do this more often. Yes, Bruce works a lot of hours, but if we can schedule it now, we can do the same after Lent, right? I guess that’s one of my favorite aspects about Lent...the challenge to pray more, but continue that prayer long after the Easter Alleluia has been sung!

On a personal note, I hope to write more about all the stuff I enjoy reading. Pro-life news, faith, evangelization...so many thoughts in my head! I read quite a bit, but I don’t always organize my thoughts on the page. This will be my biggest challenge.

Recently, I finished preparing videos for an online retreat on prayer. My talks are rather casual, but hopefully they will touch someone’s life. If you would like to make a Lenten retreat from the comfort of your home, check out [Pray More Retreat](#). The videos will be accessible throughout the entire season of

Lent.

So basically I have lots of ideas for Lent. The key is to put at least some of these into motion...all for the sake of drawing closer to Christ. I ask for your prayers as I make this journey, and I will pray for you as well. God bless!

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