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new  
evangelists  
monthly

*May*  
*2016*

# New Evangelists Monthly #41

May 2016

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# New Evangelists Monthly - May 2016

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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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## Questions and Answers [at A Spiritual Journey]

If you do not believe in God (the God of Christ), you will never know the answers to many of the important questions of life. If you do believe in God, you have no more questions to ask, for Christ is the key to all the answers you need to know.

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This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2016/04/questions-and-answers.html>  
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# How Theology of the Body Impacted My Life [at joy of nine9]

**The question we had struggled with for years was, “How could we remain faithful to Church teaching when Natural Family Planning did not seem to work for us?”**

My husband and I read this life changing article thirty-two years ago when we were on a rare date night for our sixth wedding anniversary. Parents of four, we really wanted to remain faithful to Church teaching by refusing to use artificial birth control but we already felt stretched to our limits financially, emotionally and physically. I am tiny and had never even held a baby before my first. Growing up in a Protestant home with only one sister, it had never even occurred to me that I would one day mother a large family.

After my conversion to Catholicism at nineteen, I earned a degree in English Literature at a Catholic College. Everyone thought I was called to the religious life, especially the Jesuit priest I worked with as a student chaplain. Everyone was shocked with my sudden vocation change, especially me.



I had moved east with Michael after our first baby was born which cut me off from daily contact with friends and family. Although I enjoyed living in the country, raising our own vegetables and later even all our own meat, it was an isolated existence. I felt like Ruth in a foreign land but without family support because Michael’s mother was busy with a huge extended family. In addition, my husband struggled with depression. Worldly opinion screamed that we should not have any more children.

## Natural Family Planning

The question we had struggled with for years was, “How could we remain faithful to Church teaching when Natural Family Planning did not seem to work for us?” Intuitively, I already knew a call to trust in God could not just be an intellectual assent but included entrusting my fertility to God. Catholic teaching stated couples should space their children with abstinence but we slowly discovered I was one of those rare people who could conceive long before ovulation.

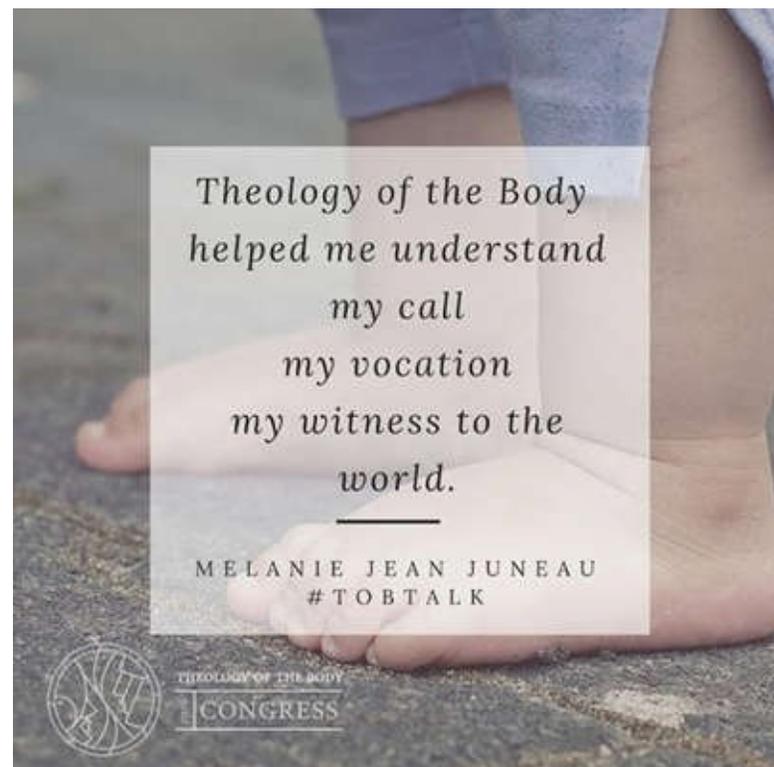
Of course, we did our best to remain faithful to NFP. However, each successive child after our third was conceived on the second, third, fourth and fifth day before ovulation. A couple of babies were created before I even had a first cycle when we thought I was still infertile. As my doctor said once, “Ah, I remember reading about a woman in New Zealand, two years ago, who conceived five days before ovulation.” I raised my hand and chirped, “Well, you can add me to that list!”



## Theology of the Body

Then on our 6th wedding anniversary, sitting in a busy pizza place, I was flipping through our local diocesan paper when an article jumped out at me. I was excited as I read a statement by Pope John Paul II which stated that using contraceptives not only damaged a couple's intimacy but also harmed their spirituality. We were both struck dumb, sensing a powerful Presence of God as this truth pierced our hearts.

Michael and I try to never let anything hinder our journey into God's heart, so this truth now meant artificial contraception was definitely not an option. Of course, I cannot find the exact quotes we read that day but the following is close enough:



In the conjugal act it is not licit to separate the unitive aspect from the procreative aspect, because both the one and the other pertain to the intimate truth of the conjugal act...Therefore, in such a case, the conjugal act, deprived of its interior truth because it is artificially deprived of its procreative capacity, ceases also to be an act of love.

It can be said that in the case of an artificial separation of these two aspects, as real bodily union is

carried out in the conjugal act, but it does not correspond to the interior truth and to the dignity of personal communion – communion of person. This communion demands that the language of the body be expressed reciprocally in the integral truth of its meaning. If this truth be lacking, one cannot speak either of the truth of self-mastery, or of the truth of the reciprocal gift and of the reciprocal acceptance of self on the part of the person. Such a violation of the interior order of conjugal union, which is rooted in the very order of the person, constitutes the essential evil of the contraceptive act. (TOB Aug. 22, 1984) p. 398

“Love...is therefore the power given to man in order to participate in that love with which God himself loves in the mystery of creation and redemption. It is that love which ‘rejoices with the truth.’” (1 Cor. 13:6) (TOB Oct. 10, 1984) p. 406



Although we could not imagine how large our family would become, the words of John Paul II, quoted in that newspaper article, resonated within both my husband and me. Guilt lifted off us and a surge of excitement, a sense of purpose welled up from within. It took time to really believe that none of our children were simply a failure of the NFP method. Many small experiences kept reinforcing the truth for us that God called each of our children into being with our co-operation. We’d stumbled blindly at times and then a burst of clarity would shine light on our purpose.

Thanks to  
Theology of the Body,  
I can proclaim with  
confidence that mothering a  
large family is my call, my  
vocation, and my witness to  
the world.

Melanie Jean Juneau

#TOBTALK



THEOLOGY OF THE BODY  
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This Is Your Call

For example, twenty-five years ago, I once again slipped into panic mode, worrying if I was pregnant with my fifth child. Suddenly my whole body relaxed and I heard these words within me:

This is your call. This is your vocation. This is your witness to the world.

All sorts of objections rushed into my head, “What on earth do you mean a witness, a witness to what?—stupidity? People don’t understand. They just think we are irresponsible or idiots.” Then unexpected joy bubbled within me and I sensed these words in my spirit, “I am with you.”

Once again peace wrapped like a blanket around me. It was an actual physical sensation. My mind was calm and my spirit felt strong. That was it for me; I understood and I said, “Yes.” Though I still cringed under disapproval from society, I always understood my children were saving me by compelling me to dive deeper into my spirit, discovering the power of eternal Love at my core, a love that can stand strong against all opposition.

We have lived through years of suffering, surviving and even thriving thanks to the gifts of humour and faith. I can honestly say we are joyful because we answered a particular call to parent a large family. Thanks to Theology of the Body, I can proclaim with confidence that mothering a large family is my call, my vocation and my witness to the world.

first published on [Catholic Stand](#)



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This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanuneau.wordpress.com/2016/04/24/how-theology-of-the-body-impacted-my-life/>  
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# Henry Hyde born 1924 [at Leaven for the Loaf]

The year after *Roe v. Wade*, Congressman Henry Hyde of Illinois fought for and got a limitation (not a ban) on abortion funding in federal Health and Human Services appropriations bills. The Hyde Amendment has been renewed ever since, despite ongoing efforts by abortion advocates to kill it.

I'm indebted to [Priests for Life](#) for reminding me of this statement by the late Congressman, who always sought to encourage resistance to *Roe v. Wade*.

***“When the time comes, as it surely will, when we face that awesome moment, the final judgment, I’ve often thought, as Fulton Sheen wrote, that it is a terrible moment of loneliness. You have no advocates, you are there alone standing before God — and a terror will rip your soul like nothing you can imagine. But I really think that those in the pro-life movement will not be alone. I think there’ll be a chorus of voices that have never been heard in this world but are heard beautifully and clearly in the next world — and they will plead for everyone who has been in this movement. They will say to God, ‘Spare him, because he loved us!’”***

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This contribution is available at <http://leavenforthe loaf.com/2016/04/10/this-week-in-history-henry-hyde-born-1924/>  
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*...the fruit of the Spirit is  
love, joy, peace, patience,  
kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness,  
self-control*

*(Gal. 5:22-23)*

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*“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23)*

Do you notice something in common with all of these fruits of the Spirit? Each one of them is also a virtue! As I was studying for my Master of Arts Degree in Pastoral Theology, I came across this passage from Galatians, and it hit me: Virtue must be very important to the Holy Spirit, when six of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, received at Confirmation are virtues, and all nine of the fruits of the Spirit are virtues.

Bearing fruits of the Spirit is the outcome that results from our living a Christ-like life. When we imitate Christ, we become more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, generous, faithful, and gentle. We also tend to exhibit more self-control. This outcome occurs because we welcomed the Holy Spirit into our lives and we allowed Him to work within us; to change us to be virtuous.

Being virtuous is a good thing! Many people doubt that they could ever be considered “virtuous.” Others think that if they were to be virtuous, then their life would be miserable, boring, and unfulfilling. *Au Contraré!*

## **Do you want the Fruits of the Spirit?**

- Tell me that you don’t want to be loved, or experience joy, to live in peace, to be patient, and to have others be patient with you.
- Tell me that you don’t want anyone to be kind to you.
- Tell me that you have nothing to share with others; not even your time. Therefore being generous is a waste of time.
- Tell me that being faithful to your loved ones means nothing to you; that they are merely useful objects, rather than people worthy of your faithfulness; that God means nothing to you.
- Tell me that you would rather be treated with mean-spiritedness rather than with gentleness.

- Tell me that self-control serves no purpose in your life.

Tell me these things, and I will say that your soul is deadened! In truth, we all want these fruits. We all want these virtues. Stop deluding yourself, NOW, and come to realize that what you really want in life is virtue. You want to be loved, filled with joy, live in peace, and known for your patience and kindness towards others. You know in your heart that it is better to give than to receive. You know deep down that God is always faithful to you, so make an effort to be faithful to Him. Exert self-control and find your freedom to be who God made you to be. Be virtuous! Trust me: You will not be bored, miserable, or unfulfilled. On the contrary, you will be engaged, happy and fulfilled! Embrace the virtues to live a happier life!

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This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/fruits-of-the-spirit-virtues-cherish/>  
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## A Letter to People of Life [at Christ's Faithful Witness]



It was good to read in your artistically designed letters, the manner in which God is working in your marriage and bringing the "Gospel of Life" to other couples in the Tucson and Phoenix Dioceses.

The contraceptive culture has such a strong grip on people both inside and outside the Catholic Church; functioning almost like an "anti-Eucharist" among catechized non-Catholics and non-catechized Catholics. I read so many articles by people of faith idolizing artificial contraception as "manna" from heaven. Jesus said, "*Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and died.*" (John 6:49) What a poignant message to modern society.



By your choice to support a "Culture of Life," there will be persecution. I would say the car accident you suffered through is one such persecution. Be not afraid, "*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*" (1 John 4:4)

The secular culture pervades our way of thinking and acting in many unrecognizable ways. It is only when a person collects the mind of Christ revealed in His Sacred Words, the lives of His Saints, the Doctrines of His Catholic Church, and abides in Him sacramentally that a person's conscience is established. What an abused word "conscience" has become.

Every shepherd unwilling to take a stand for Christ floats the phrase "we must respect personal conscience." A choice between two objective goods is a work of conscience. A choice emphatically rendered by the Church



Identifying what is good and what is evil is an objective expression of Christ's conscience. A person who argues, "my conscience supersedes the conscience of Christ as revealed in His Church" is simply rationalizing the power of sin, which stems from ignorance, weakness, fear and indifference.

Susan and I have a friend in Albuquerque, who gave up all forms of media. She said, "Watching and listening to the passions of the world drains my soul, leaving little passion for Christ." I think it is in Mark's Gospel, that Jesus tells His disciples to "listen and watch" while they were on their way to Jerusalem. It is interesting that the entertainment genre "Walking Dead" has become so popular today. The Walking Dead are people with no direction. What a terrible condition.

Another fruitful way of collecting the mind of Christ is by observing God's creation through the gifts of reason and faith. Pope Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have both written so much on the necessity of humanity to rediscover the complimentary natures of reason and faith and integrate both within all aspects of human life. The secular world values "reason alone" and so many non-Catholics value "faith alone," both giving birth to "personal conscience alone."

It sounds -- based upon Susan's recent visit -- that the Lord is asking you both to support another project, dealing with, "discovering the image of the Most Holy Trinity within the created human body." I guess it could be called, "God's Image Project."

Susan purchased a lily plant for Easter. It is in our kitchen and every so often aromatically speaks to us, asking for water. I thought about Jesus' words, "*Do you not see the lilies of the field? I tell you not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these.*" (Matt. 6:29)



One day for a brief moment I could see within the delicacy of the lily the literal reality of Jesus' words. It was as if Jesus (the master designer) was saying, "You have no idea how much care went into the design

and development of that plant. If you could only see the joy that the beauty from that one lily plant brings creation, you would learn the meaning of the purpose of life, God's plan for each person, and how to trust in His Mercy."

Tragically, a materialist dissecting, measuring, and quantifying lily stem cells would only discover defects and evidence that the



universe is not the result of intelligent design. Your ministry of teaching couples about the gift of fertility is a formidable response to materialists like Alice Roberts, physician and anatomist, who argues in her book, The Incredible Unlikelihood of Being: Evolution and the Making of Us, that aesthetics demonstrates inefficiency and lack of intelligent design.

For people like Alice Roberts -- who are now dominating so many medical professions -- beauty is amoral with no ethical reality but efficiency is the only ethic that matters and the only reality that demonstrates intelligence. *"If you are the son of God, command these stones to turn into bread."* (Matt. 4:3) (Satan's words to Christ.) Such is the thinking behind euthanasia, abortion and contraception, and the increasing practice of hospitals to issue "Do Not Resuscitate" (DNR) orders even for children choking on meat.

It is our prayer that God continues to protect you both as He shepherds your family, parishioners, co-workers, and students through your ministry.

Yours in Christ Jesus and Mary,

Lorenzo Fox



This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2016/04/a-letter-to-people-of-life.html>  
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## The Redemptive Solution [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

He created the angels, who are far above us in nature and in the order of Creation. Alas! The most brilliant of them was blinded by his own light, rebelled, fell from heaven and took with him one third of the stars in the night.

They were defeated, but clung to their deceitfulness and vainglory!! He who could not tolerate the Creator's glory and majesty couldn't digest the fact that the Second Person of The Blessed Trinity would take upon Himself a human nature. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

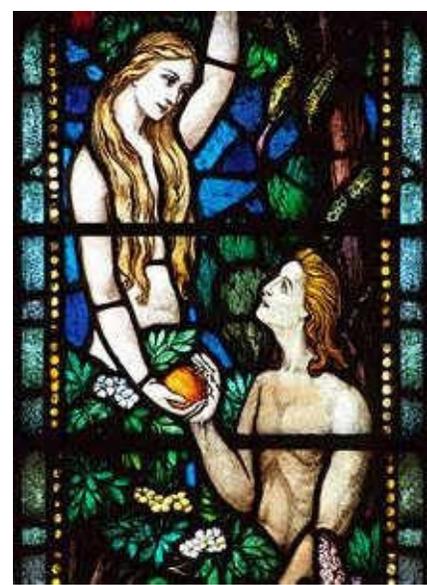
So when Adam breathed the Breath of God's Life, Satan choked. He began using his evil genius to trip Adam, who had Eve by his side. She was the greatest masterpiece of creation.

Satan had his companions. But among them there never was any love or true unity and that increased his misery.

Divine Life -- when shared among the Persons of The Trinity and with Adam and Eve -- is creative and productive. Love and sharing are inherent in them.

Satan -- on the other hand lives (if that form of existence can be called living) -- but he is divisive and destructive. Hate, pride and selfishness consume him.

But God's grace in Adam and Eve was too much for Satan to overlook. He mounted another assault. Deceit!!! Diabolical hatred made him take advantage of Adam and Eve's pristine, finite awareness.

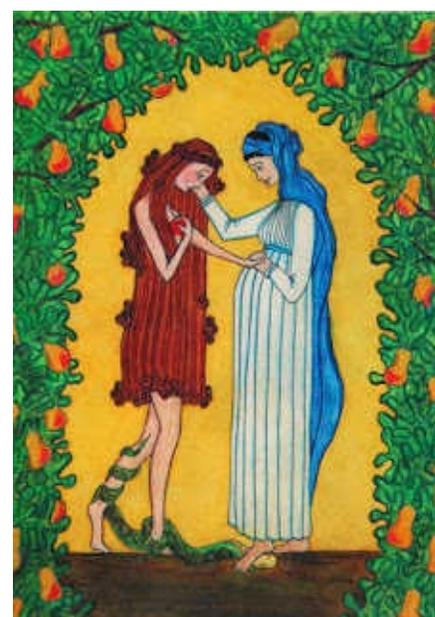


The father of lies planted the seed of pride. Alas! Our first parents succumbed.

But Jesus saw how infinitely saddened and offended His Eternal Father was. Jesus knew the consequences of Adam and Eve's willful disobedience. He told His Father that He Himself would undo the infinite magnitude of man's offense. The Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father and The Son, also consoled The Father. He accompanied Jesus on His mission to save the human race. While Jesus hung on the cross, the Spirit turned the blood of human suffering into the wine of divine love.

When Jesus took on human flesh, He humbled Himself and -- with His Father's nod -- agreed to become one like us. But how could He become one like us in all things except sin?

Precisely because He's God, He came with a redemptive solution; for nothing is impossible with God. From outside the constraints of time and space, He knew a way...for He is The Way!



That Way required a new Eve, namely Mary. For when the old Eve was cast out of Paradise by the Angel, the first annunciation was made.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

But many generations would live their lives before the Immaculate Conception would enter history so that all generations would call her blessed.

Hush. Imagine, the Creator relinquishing the splendor of Heaven; and entering the created House of God, the first living tabernacle -- Mary, most pure and humble.

She never refused God anything. And yet God is a Perfect Gentleman. He did not take for granted her choice. He sought her permission to become the Seed in her womb. Such Seed would bear Fruit that would undo the effects of original sin and thus crush the head of Satan. The forbidden fruit would no longer poison and harry the lives of mankind.

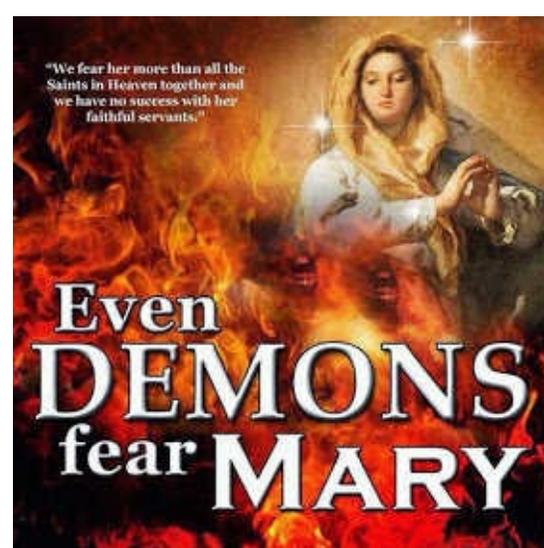
She is Our Lady of The Victory! Victory achieved through obedience: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord!*"

Adam and Eve fell prey to the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Mankind's exile began. But God so loved the world that Jesus took it upon Himself to redeem the first exile from the Garden of Eden with His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It was Eve who consented to the devil's wicked proposal and consumed the forbidden fruit. But the humble Mary -- the New Eve -- allowed the Fruit of Life to develop in the Eden of her sinless womb. "*I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to Your Word,*" Mary's human will echoed exactly the "Yes!" of the Divine Will.

Pride went before the Fall but Mary's humility paved the way to Christ's Rising in the Resurrection!! How sweet is the humility and obedience of Mary!!

O Mary, conceived without sin, obtain for us the grace to imitate you and your Divine Son, Who is meek and humble of heart. Amen!



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This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2016/04/the-redemptive-solution.html>  
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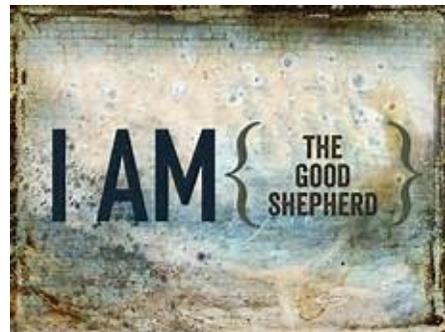
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# I Am the Good Shepherd [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

Sermon by Rev. John Paul Shea

4th Sunday of Easter, April 17, 2016

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Tucson, AZ



Today, we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday where we are reminded we need Our Lord Jesus Christ to protect us and guide us on our Christian journey so that we can attain eternal life. In the beginning of today's short Gospel (John 10: 27-30), Our Lord Jesus says, *"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. No one can take them out of my hand. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."*



As we hear these words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we are reminded that the goal of our Christian life is to become one with Our Heavenly Father. Our Lord Jesus, who is the second Person of the Trinity, is one with His Father, and He has come into our world so that we can live forever as one with His Father in Him.

In other words, God wants us to share in His Life for all eternity. Yet, if we want to share forever in God's munificent plan then we must listen to the voice of Jesus Christ in the scriptures and the teachings of our Church, and we must live our lives accordingly.

In today's first reading (Acts 13:14, 43-52), Paul and Barnabas are preaching, but the Jews rejected the words of Christ.

In the midst of this rejection, what does Paul say? *"It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life we now turn to the Gentiles."*

As Paul reminds the Jews of their condemnation for rejecting the preaching of Christ, let us be reminded that we too can condemn ourselves as unworthy of eternal life by rejecting the truths that God has given to

us.

It is easy for us to think we can enter into heaven even while living a life that contradicts the teachings of Christ and His Church. But this is not so!

No, heaven is not easy to attain. In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, Our Lord



says, “Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate that leads to destruction is wide and the broad, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that lead to life. And those who find are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

My brothers and sisters, following our Church and its teachings is to enter by the narrow gate. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Our Shepherd who wants to lead souls through this gate. He wants to protect us from the influences of the world in which we live today that separate us from God and His plan for us! God wants us to be one with Him in His Son Jesus Christ. Yet, if we want to live as one with God for all eternity, we must first be purified of whatever is not of God’s kingdom.

In our world today we hear much about tolerating sin. For example, now that so called same sex “marriage” is legal in our country, the spirit of the world tells us that our Church needs to be more tolerant toward or even embrace immoral relationships.

Yet, let us be reminded that acceptance does not bring souls to Heaven. Only the Truth will lead souls to heaven, and those who knowingly reject the truths of our faith by not striving to change their lives in accord the word of God “condemn [themselves] as unworthy of eternal life” (Acts 13:46).



My brothers and sisters, Our Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He wants to save us from our sins. God sent His Son into our world so that all who believe in Him may have eternal life. Yet, our belief must be real. Our belief means conversion and a change of life!

Our Lord calls us to deny the ways of the world. These ways lead us away from the necessary sanctify

that will allow us to live with Our Heavenly Father for all eternity.

Let us ask Our Good Shepherd to protect us and keep us safe from everything that leads us away from eternal salvation. Let us strive to become one with Our Lord Jesus for all eternity by living lives worthy of this great gift of eternal life that God wants for each of us. Amen!



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This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2016/04/i-am-good-shepherd.html>  
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# A Heartfelt Prayer

By Christopher Ziegler

Please, Lord Jesus, have pity on me,

For I am weak.

My will is broken and weary.

I cannot love you as you love me.

Your love for me is mighty and binding.

My love for you is real but frail.

Yet I know that by your mercy and by your grace,

I can become what you want me to become.

I believe it and know it to be true.

You are powerful.

You made me.

You can heal me.

Please, Lord, I want to be healed!

Cure me and make me holy,

For the glory of your name.

Amen.

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## Please, Don't Believe the Abortion Hype [at Designs by Birgit]



Catholic (?) University of Notre Dame recently hosted pro-abortion Wendy Davis, famous for her urinary [catheter-wearing](#)

filibuster of a Texas prolife law. Her address relied “on the well-worn argument of pro-abortion activists” - contraception and abortion are necessary for women to succeed. Davis'

[speech](#)

“Rising Up: From Single Mother to Harvard Law, How Every Woman Stands to Make a Difference”, revolved around the talking points of the Culture of Death.

My own experience, however, offers a completely different perspective:

## **Living the Prolife Except Experience**

As a young teen of fourteen, my life was forever changed in a brutally eye-opening experience. The cute boy down the street had a

[violent side](#)

and I was his naïve young victim. A few weeks later it dawned on my mother that a persistent stomach bug was not the real diagnosis. When thoroughly questioned I acquiesced and shared what had happened. This incident would, indeed, change our lives forever.

As my adolescent, willow-like body blossomed with this unexpected new life, our family attended Mass elsewhere – away from prying eyes. The 1970's were not like current times, with relaxed moral views and blasé reactions. Unwed motherhood was taboo and our family, Catholic and prolife, hunkered down to await the new arrival. It was decided that the child would be adopted by my parents and become a special sibling to us.

## **Life Moves On**

After our new addition arrived we continued our small town American life. Returning to school was unnerving but college was in my future, so the prerequisite grades were maintained. Aside from a few hushed whispers, our tiny community continued on without much ado. At my parents' stipulated timeframe, my dating life began promptly at sixteen.

Remarkably I met a young man who won approval from my parents almost immediately. We dated throughout high school and married during my senior year. My husband and I tried unsuccessfully to persuade my parents to allow us to adopt my brother (son) but the mother-child connection was too strong. My mother simply couldn't give up the three-year-old son she now called her own.

College-bound after completion of high school, four years later found me as a married college graduate with a one-year-old son. Life had successfully and beautifully moved on. The scholarship I had been denied (because I was married), the teen birth, and youthful marriage had not marred my future. If

anything, these life circumstances had enhanced my ability to cope with responsibility and the unexpected. The graces flowing from our sacramental

[marriage](#)

allowed us to weather any storm and remain committed in love.

## **Jobs, Jobs, Jobs**

As unhindered as my education was, my career was equally flourishing. The prolife experience of my youth strengthened the drive to become a prolife advocate. The BA acquired enhanced creative endeavors toward that goal. Tempered by the fire of punitive experience, my organizational skills were finely honed as well. Life lessons had prepared me for numerous employment experiences including: Executive Director of prolife groups, art teacher, and Field Representative for a prolife U.S. Congressman.

## **Career Choice**

In the end, my strong affinity for a traditional family won out. My preeminent career move was achieved. Stay at home mother became the most rewarding career choice for me. First, as the mother of three children attending Catholic schools and then as a home educator. Now that my own children are grown and parents in their own right, I continue to relish home life by having grandchildren around me as much as possible. The life I have lived, the life I am living was not hindered in any way. In some ways the experiences I endured prepared me for who I want to be today.

There were myriad options along the way – but the choices were mine to make. In the end, an early pregnancy did not prevent the achievement of becoming who I chose to be. I became exactly who I was meant to be: A woman with many choices, armed with strength and faith and endless possibilities.

## **Don't Believe the Abortion Hype**

The telling of my experiences is in no way intended as a long list of self-congratulatory achievements. On the contrary, my hope is to inspire those who are thrust into similar circumstances. Never forget that Planned Parenthood and their ilk exist as money making businesses whose success depends on taking the lives of helpless unborn babies by seducing their mothers by abortion promoting hype. Wendy Davis may be a successful woman by some measure, but her success was not dependent on aborting her unborn child.

As with people who grow up in poverty, broken homes, and abuse, success is dependent on a strong will and faith in the human person who was created by an almighty God. He has endowed all people, from conception, with a right to life and an undeniable ability to achieve. To use an unexpected pregnancy as an excuse not to achieve is a morally bankrupt denial of the human will.

## **Abortion Hurts Women**

In my prolife work, I have been privileged to know

[many women](#)

who pulled themselves up out of their post-abortion desolation. Without fail, their regret is profound but their conviction for life is greater. Many of these women

### [unselfishly relive](#)

the most painful experience in their lives in an effort to help others. They speak and write and volunteer in their vocation as pro-life advocates. Their pain is unspeakable and lingering guilt drives them to a profoundly selfless love of others. Although forgiven, a passionate resolve to bring something positive out of past flawed choices makes them insightful ambassadors for life.

Let us all do as much as we can to promote a Culture of Life. We no longer live in a time of scientific ignorance – even

### [secular science](#)

confirms life begins at fertilization. Likewise, our faith in God confirms that all people are conceived as equals – each life is important, no matter its origin. Educate yourself, speak out, and pray to end abortion.



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This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2016/04/please-dont-believe-abortion-hype.html>  
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## Dandelions [at With Us Still]

They're starting to get out of hand – the dandelions, that is.

I noticed it late yesterday afternoon, when I returned home from an all-day commitment that more or less torpedoed the opportunity I might otherwise have had to spend some time tidying up the turf.



The forecast today calls for rain, so there goes another chance to weed out the vigorous invaders.

Truth be told, I don't mind dandelions all that much. In fact, I rather treasure the bright splash of color a singleton can add to an otherwise bland and boring stretch of fescue.



Of course, dandelions tend not to be as gracious as I'd like in accepting my hospitality. One pretty flower turns quickly into ten or twenty. And then, the battle is on.

Not this weekend though. Events are conspiring to give the weeds a stay of execution. All I can do is watch and wait.



And perhaps, during my rain-soaked Sabbath pause, take a moment to reflect on [the wisdom that the Risen Lord offers](#) his friend Peter as they chatted after breakfast on the seashore:

Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger,  
you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted;  
but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands,  
and someone else will dress you  
and lead you where you do not want to go.”

Indeed: The dandelions have disrupted my plans for a perfect expanse of green. But they’ve caught my attention, too.

I wonder: Am I leaving room...for unplanned beauty to bloom in my life?

And: Where is it that I’m being led...that I may not want to go?



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

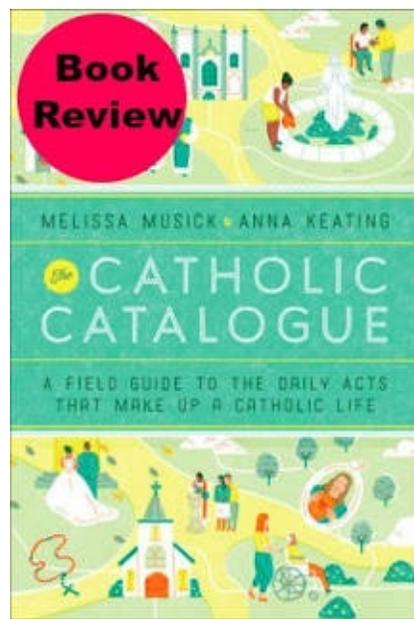
*IHS*

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This contribution is available at <http://withusstill.wordpress.com/2016/04/10/todays-find-dandelions/>  
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# The Catholic Catalogue [at Books, Bargains, Blessings]



I went through RCIA two years ago. When I had an opportunity to receive

## [The Catholic Catalogue](#)

by Melissa Musick and Anna Keating from the publisher in exchange for a review, I was excited about this new book.

At over 400 pages, this book looks intimidating, but it is anything but. Like many reference books, this is not meant to be read straight through (although you COULD do that if you wanted). This is a book to help guide you on the things that make you Catholic, and often that is creating family traditions.

Think to the month of December and the traditions that are there. Christmas cards. Often a family has a certain ritual for the Christmas tree. TV shows that are on every year. All these things weave together to create a cozy feeling. But why should Christmas be the only holiday we have traditions? And do you do things like celebrate St. Lucia's Day in December? It takes little preparation but is something that can be enjoyed by everyone, because after all, who doesn't love a pastry for breakfast, especially when it's served in bed?

Just like many of us have things we do each year for the Christmas holiday, there are plenty of ways the Catholic faith can be celebrated with traditions the entire year through. This book gives ideas as well as explanations as to why things are done the way they are. Broken up into three sections, this book presents 82 short chapters about living a Catholic life.

There will be things you know in this book, but will give you a fresh perspective and ideas on them. There will be things that you have never heard of and will want to incorporate into your life. This is an excellent book for gift giving at a wedding or confirmation. I think all RCIA students should be given this because it's how the Catholic Faith is lived out, not just what is believed. Both are very important.

Thank you to Image books for providing a free copy for review. All opinions are my own.

This contribution is available at <http://www.booksbargainsblessings.com/2016/04/book-review-catholic-catalogue.html>  
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# First Communion stories, tips and gift ideas [at The Koala Mom]

**Sunshine is receiving her first communion later this month.** She's spent the last two years in Catechism classes at our local parish, preparing for this day. As a convert, I also remember my own years of preparation before receiving. It's been neat to watch her journey toward this. Over the last two years, I've noticed that she's definitely grown in her faith, becoming more attentive at Mass and more interested in prayer and confession.

If you also have a child celebrating First Communion this year, here are some tips and stories from other Catholic moms. I've also compiled a list of gift ideas for your little communicant.



## Tips & Advice

[Preparing Your Child's Soul](#)—seven great tips for helping your child get ready for their First Communion.

[Preparing Your Child At Home](#)—one mom shares what she does to prepare her children at home for their First Communion (includes links to resources and a semester outline).

[When Religious Education Programs Thrive, We All Win](#)—why a great parish catechism program is so important for our children's faith.

## First Communion Stories

[Henry's Second Communion](#)—Rabia shares her son's joy about receiving the Eucharist for the second time.

[Letting Your Child Go With God](#)—a beautiful post about receiving the Eucharist on the tongue.

[Nostalgia, and How Time Really Does Fly](#)—a Catholic mom shares photos and memories of her kids' First Communions as her last prepares to receive.

[Fourth Time Lucky](#)—several pre-Mass disasters help this family focus on what's important during their daughter's First Communion.

## First Communion Gifts

[Bracelets](#)—a great way to help your child remember this special sacrament.

[Happy Saints eBooks](#)—these adorable books include buttons, posters, cards, prayer cards, and colouring pages; your child can print, colour and display her favourite saints or do craft activities.

[Saints and Heroes animated DVDs](#)—get a DVD about your child's favourite saint or Catholic hero from CCC of America.

[DIY Rosary](#)—order a customized rosary for your child to make (everything is included in the kit).

[Holy Heroes Spiritual Diary Set](#)—this diary includes quotes, prayers, guide to confession, space to write, and more. Holy Heroes also has lots of other great Catholic gifts for children.

[Blessed Immelda's Eucharistic Miracle](#)—share the story of Blessed Immelda, patron saint of First Communicants, with your children.

*What tips or advice would you share for a child's First Communion? What gifts would you recommend?*



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This contribution is available at <http://thekoalamom.com/2016/05/first-communion/>  
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## The Great Decision [at Third Place Project]



*(The same could be said for prayer...)*

When I was 17 years old, I caused a car accident. It wasn't a particularly spectacular crash – but it was memorable for three reasons. First, I collided with some friends of mine; second, because I totaled my father's Buick (the only new car he ever owned); and third, because my back has never been the same. I've spent time over the past twenty years with physiotherapists, massage therapists, and chiropractors making sure that everything stays moving properly.

A few years ago, during a checkup with my family doctor, the nurse who was working with him strongly suggested there was a simple solution to this and a few other health problems I had: to lose some weight. And for a time I did (and my back was better) – but once again, I find myself in the same position; I need to lighten the load. And you'd think, with the evidence so blatantly obvious (lighter Mike=healthier Mike), this would be easy. But I like yummy food and would rather watch sports on TV than workout myself.

Matthew 19:16-22 introduces us to a man whose name we will never know – we only know that he's a rich, young man. But he runs to Jesus looking for answers – namely, what does he need to do to gain eternal life (cf Mt 19:16)? The story ends with him going away sad, because what was asked of him was more than he was willing to do. And sadly, he and I have more in common than I'd like to admit (and unfortunately, it's not the “wealthy” part...)

Though I'm no professional athlete, I've been decently healthy for most of my life. I don't smoke and I don't drink, I try to eat well, and I've been known to work out from time to time. But it's in those moments – confronted by the nurse or feeling the ache in my back again – that I realize I need to renew my commitment to doing what's hard because I know the payoff in the end is worth it for myself and for mini stick hockey games with my kids.

In May of 2007, Pope Benedict XVI explained the above passage to young people in Brazil. There, he pointed out that the young man's question wasn't so much about the future – eternal life – but rather, the present moment:

***In short, the young man's question raises the issue of life's meaning. It can therefore be formulated in this way: what must I do so that my life has meaning? How must I live so as to reap the full fruits of life? Or again: what must I do so that my life is not wasted?***

It makes sense to bring this question to Jesus. Jesus promises us a life full of meaning (cf. John 10:10), and although this man seems to epitomize the “good person” – he didn't lie, steal, kill, cheat, and he had a

solid relationship with his parents – something was still missing. He felt the ache in his heart to do and be more than a good person. So Jesus confronted him about his “wealth” – that thing which he valued more than his relationship with God. In much the same way as I resist giving up slurpees, jelly beans, the comfort that came from this man’s wealth was too much to just leave behind.

In the same reflection on this passage, Pope Benedict suggested that “wealth” was, for this young man, his youth itself:

***...youth appears as a form of wealth because it leads to the discovery of life as a gift and a task. The young man in the Gospel understood that his youth was itself a treasure. He went to Jesus, the good Teacher, in order to seek some direction. At the moment of the great decision, however, he lacked the courage to wager everything on Jesus Christ.***

How often do we all lack the courage to make the “great decision?”

There are no shortage of books, websites, apps, and wearable fitness gadgets which promise the solution to my (our) health woes. But every plan and scheme to get in shape centers on two things: eating better and exercising more; and even these assume the willingness to do what’s hard for the sake of being (and feeling) healthier. That great decision (to be healthy) is what motivates you to get out of bed a little earlier for a workout and to say no to dessert.

Likewise, there are no shortage of books, websites, apps, and gadgets that promise the secret towards finding fulfillment in life. But here, the solution has always been centered on one thing (cf. Luke 10:42), the “great decision” to place one’s relationship with God above any other treasure (wealth, pleasure, youth, popularity, or otherwise). Learning to place God first and foremost in one’s life – and to trust His promise for a fulfillment that lasts – help us to get over the hump and make forward progress in our spiritual lives.

What’s keeping you from making that great decision?

***You have made us for yourself, oh Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*** -St. Augustine

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This contribution is available at <http://www.thirdplaceproject.com/the-great-decision/>  
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# Relationship, conscience, and discernment: first reactions to *Amoris Laetitia*

[I am a Catholic woman.](#)

Despite this, I've never quite been comfortable with the Catholic Woman™ movement. As a single woman into my thirties I felt out of place. Now that I'm married the paradigmatic Catholic Woman™ still alienates me: I kept my birth name. I kept my professional ambition. I'm not sacrificially tending to a brood of young'uns or to aging parents. Not to say I wouldn't do those last two things, but I'm not, and certain strains of Catholicism make me feel as if I am doing family wrong.

Reading [Amoris Laetitia](#) today, I finally felt that I'm actually "doing family" just fine.

Before getting into the nitty-gritty of marriage, Francis writes an extended treatment of relationship, beginning with the relational nature of the Trinity. Families are important because they are fundamental relationships, and relationships are our calling.

At times it seems like the focus on the family is a fetish, idolizing fresh-faced young Catholic parents who live a picture-perfect conventional life. But the extended context-setting of the first two sections of the document challenge this fixation by getting to the root of the blessedness of family. **Family, for many of us, is the most intense experience of relationship in our lives, and feeds all our other relationships.**

Because of this primacy, family should be supported. Such support means more than insisting families fit a mold. This support means ensuring housing, opportunity, education, access to culture, a safety net, and a larger community. *Amoris Laetitia* always comes back to the communal responsibility to encourage relationship and family.

Sometimes supporting families means encouraging people whose actions you find distasteful, being gratuitous with support and not worrying who deserves it, and certainly not keeping tabs on who is following the rules.

Sometimes, rules are a blessing, guiding us toward right action and letting us know that there may be consequences if we overstep. Rules are simple. Rules are clear.

But life is neither simple nor clear, and the muddier parts of human existence call for nuanced decisions about what is right and wrong. This is when we need to rely on our conscience.

One, of course, is the importance of conscience. "...not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium." (AL 3). This is not new, but it flies in the face of strain of Catholicism that some mistake for the only true expression of the faith: one which imagines that our thorniest relationships can be defined by strict, universal rules, and that only those who fall on the right side of those rules can be considered worthy.



We are called to form  
consciences, not  
to replace them.

*Amoris Laetitia*

“We are called to form consciences, not to replace them.”

Admitting that on many issues, decisions will be up to individual consciences is terrifying. Suddenly it becomes much harder to know what to do – or to judge others choices – than it was when we thought strict rules applied to all situations.

Yet **formation of conscience is paramount**. Individualism that is not rooted in truth is not the same as a fully formed Christian conscience. This puts another burden on the believer: to pray, think, read, research, and do all the other work necessary to form one’s conscience. When done intentionally this discernment is a joyful burden.

Judging by this document (and of course, many others), the guide of such discernment should be love. Francis makes it clear that **anything that is not love is not of God** – domestic violence, discrimination toward migrants, subjugation of women, exploitation of children and the elderly.

I joked to a friend tonight that a key idea of *Amoris Laetitia* was “don’t be a [ ]”. In many ways, Francis makes this point. He urges Catholics not to blame this, that, or the other thing for the changes we see in society – indeed he remarks on the Church’s responsibility in destabilizing changes. He urges pastors to be sensitive and pastoral to those in “irregular” situations. He reiterates that all people, regardless of sexual orientation or relationship status or anything else, must be treated with dignity as children of God.

There were moments that this document gave me goosebumps. It beautifully shares the hard truth: that there are no easy answers. At the same time it is inspirational, setting before us lovely, Godly aspirations and inviting us to move ever closer to those goals.

I have only read about half of the document ([highlights here!](#)), and look forward to reviewing it further. What have been your takeaways from *Amoris Laetitia*?

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This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2016/04/08/relationship-conscience-and-discernment-first-reactions-to-amoris-laetitia/>  
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# Who is a True or False Pope? [at The Shield of Faith]

[\*True or False Pope? Refuting Sedevacantism and other Modern Errors.\*](#)

by John Salza and Robert Siscoe, is a book regarded by many as the

*Summa*

and final word against Sedevacantism.

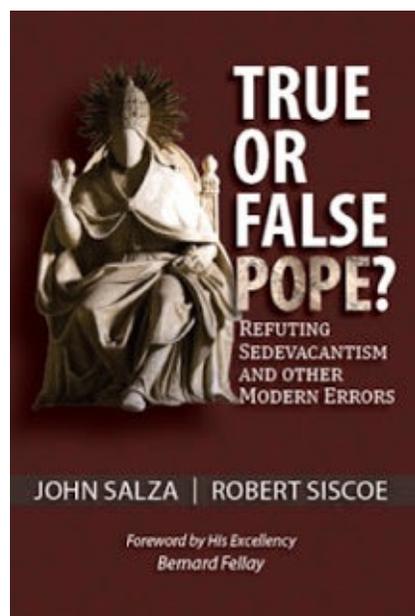
I have heard a lot about this book and here is why I am

*not*

going to read it.

Although I still have not definitively crossed that Rubicon, I maintain that there is a strong incentive to believe that Francis may have lost the Faith, and if so he would not be a pope.

How can the authors claim to refute the possibility of Sedevacantism when it is clear to me that I can make a personal decision that I no longer believe that someone professes the Catholic Faith? Why should I read 700 page book designed to show that there is no point in using my own mind to come to such a conclusion, or that my personal beliefs don't matter.



God has endowed us with memory, intellect and will. Don't I have a right to form my own personal beliefs using these means, otherwise why has He endowed us with these faculties?

I can make use of our God-given faculties of thought, reason and logic. [Intellect.]

I can make use of a study of what constitutes the Catholic Faith. [Memory.]

I can make use of my free will, in union with the Will of God. [Will.]

I can make use of prayer, especially Mary's Rosary.

I can make use of a properly formed Catholic conscience.

I can make use of my

*Sensus Catholicus*

I can make use of basic common sense: if it walks like a duck...

If the use of the above means causes me to no longer believe that Francis professes the Roman Catholic Faith, then I must conclude that he cannot be a true pope, since Our Lord promised Peter that his Faith would not fail him. It's really that simple.

But no - some will say that we must have a visible Church with jurisdiction. But I ask, is the Church since the Vatican II Council undergoing the Passion of Christ as many are now saying? Is not Holy Saturday a part of that event? On that day, there was no longer a visible Christ, there was no jurisdiction, all we had for certain was the perfect Faith of His Mother, Mary.

Is it not possible that the election of Pope John XXIII was invalid (theories abound), thus leading to a line of false popes? Is it not possible that Modernists hijacked the Council documents such that a counterfeit Church was created? The true Church was designed and created by Jesus Christ, and the nature of the Church is to "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). But Karol Wojtyła admitted in

*Sign of Contradiction,*

"... the Church succeeded, during the Second Vatican Council, in re-defining her own nature." What a telling confession! Vatican II redefined what Christ established, creating a Church which replaces proselytism with dialog, conversion with shared prayer, and exempts today's Jews from having to except Jesus as savior.

Ironically the book

*True or False Pope*

? which is designed to refute Sedevacantism, might end up convincing Catholics to remain loyal to a false Sedevacantist Church and pope.

(In addition to what is mentioned in the above post, on their website for the book the authors resort to

*ad hominem*

personal attacks and mockery towards those who disagree with them, which indicates that the authors are not completely objective scholars.)

Frank Rega

[www.frankrega.com](http://www.frankrega.com)

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This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2016/04/who-is-true-or-false-pope-2.html>  
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# The Importance of Theology of the Body in the Year of Mercy [at Plot Line and Sinkers]



Photo Copyright James Hrkach

To celebrate the Year of Mercy and to participate in #TOBtalk for the upcoming [Theology of the Body Congress](#), I'm reposting this article from last year on practicing the spiritual works of mercy with a **theology of the body** focus. First, the question: **Why is Theology of the Body important to you?** I try to live my entire life according to Theology of the Body principles. As well, I reverted back to my Catholic faith through the teachings of the Theology of the Body even before I knew the term "Theology of the Body." My then boyfriend (now husband, James) wanted us to wait until marriage to have sex and he also did not want us to use contraception. The contraception issue became our first major disagreement, with me arguing for contraception and James arguing against. He said things like "I don't want there to be anything separating us when we consummate," or "If we used contraception, there would be something separating us and I want sex to be between you, me and God. That's all." Incredibly, I decided to trust him and went along with his desire to not use contraception. Seeing the impact of following the Church's teaching in this matter, I eventually became one of the biggest proponents of Natural Family Planning and Theology of the Body.

Living the teachings of the Theology of the Body has not only helped me to be closer to my husband and to God, living these beautiful teachings has also allowed me to be merciful and, in this way, follow the spiritual works of mercy more closely.

According to the Catholic encyclopedia, **mercy** is "*a virtue influencing one's will to have compassion for, and, if possible, to alleviate another's misfortune.*" The spiritual works of mercy are one way Catholics can show charity and compassion to others. Since my husband and I teach Natural Family Planning, we have always tried to practice the spiritual works of mercy through our NFP ministry. Many Catholics do not understand the Church's teachings on sexuality. Mother Teresa once said, "*If you judge someone, you have no time to love them,*" Sharing the truth with charity and without judgment is extremely important.

### **Admonish the Sinner and Instruct the Ignorant**

I often find myself in conversations about these intimate topics with acquaintances and relatives. For example, while I was attending a First Penance meeting with one of my sons, the instructor handed out a “Examination of Conscience” pamphlet. On page three, under “Thou Shall Not Kill,” sterilization was listed correctly as a mortal sin. The woman next to me gasped and whispered, “I thought the Church changed her teaching on this. I had my tubes tied and didn’t know it was wrong.” I then gently said, “The Church has never changed this teaching. Birth control and sterilization have always been considered mortal sins.” The woman glanced away, then turned back to me, tears in her eyes. I patted her shoulder, then said, “You know, if you didn’t realize it was wrong, then it’s not a mortal sin.” I pointed out the section in the “Examination of Conscience” pamphlet which stated that all three of these conditions need to be in place for mortal sin: it must be 1) serious matter, 2) the person must know it is serious and then 3) freely commit it. I strongly encouraged her to seek spiritual direction from a faithful priest. When she left the meeting, she thanked me.

### **Counsel the Doubtful and Comfort the Sorrowful**

A few years ago, when we were speaking at the local marriage prep course on “Sexual Honesty Within Marriage,” we talked about the importance of keeping the marital embrace free, total, faithful and “fruitful.” During the last part of the talk, we explained that contraception removes the fruitful aspect from the marital act. All of a sudden, a young woman rushed out of the meeting room, in tears. James and I continued our talk while one of the other host couples followed her, but we were concerned. After the talk, I immediately went to speak to the woman. I learned that she was the mother of a 13-year-old daughter from a teenage relationship. The young woman shared that she was currently in remission from terminal cancer. Because of the aggressive treatment, her doctors told that she would not have any more children. She told me that it upset her to hear the suggestion that her marriage might not be “fruitful” since she and her fiancé would never have children. (Of course, we didn’t say that in our talk, but this is how she interpreted it). She admitted that she had mistakenly thought she had already dealt with the fact that she and her future husband would not be having children together. But our talk seemed to bring her sadness and regret to the surface. She then sobbed and I embraced her as she released emotions that had obviously been pent up for a while. When she stopped crying, I explained that fruitfulness was much more than giving birth to children. We discussed adoption. We talked about the fruitfulness of being a good example as well as other ways she and her husband could be ‘fruitful’ in their marriage. After the course finished that evening, she came up to me, hugged me and thanked me for being so “kind.”

### **Bear Wrongs Patiently, Forgive all Injuries**

Bearing wrongs patiently has never been something I have done well. And the following example shows that not everyone I “admonish” or “instruct” has been open to the information.

Ten years ago, a woman called for NFP counseling. She and her husband had taken an NFP class years earlier. Her husband, she said, had made an appointment for a vasectomy and he had indicated the decision was not up for debate. After using NFP for many years, he no longer had any patience for the abstinence it entailed. The wife sounded like she was crying. “What can I do to stop him?” she asked. I spoke with her, then sent her information on the moral, spiritual and physical implications of sterilization. I encouraged her to seek spiritual direction from a faithful priest I knew in the area. Four different times we spoke on the phone, her tone frantic and desperate. Finally, she stopped calling. I continued to pray for this couple. Some months later, she called to inform me that her husband had indeed gone through with the vasectomy and they were now ‘very happy.’ She wanted me to know that, although she knew I didn’t agree with ‘their’ decision, she had come to accept it and that it had been the ‘right’ thing for them.

Admittedly, I have no idea what happened in between her frantic calls and the vasectomy. I suspect she never called the faithful priest I recommended. However, I calmly responded, “But sterilization is against the fifth commandment as well as the sixth, it separates a couple...it causes an increase in prostate cancer, it – ” She cut me off by angrily telling me that she only called to inform me, not to hear what the Church teaches, that she already knew that. Her husband then got on the phone and yelled at me, his tone sharp, accusing me of trying to “sabotage” his marriage. I listened, heart pounding, as he screamed at me over the phone. It took a lot of self-control not to hang up nor respond to his verbal abuse. I prayed and waited until he stopped yelling, although by that point, I was nearly in tears and my hands were trembling. Then I said, my voice breaking, “I will pray for you and I wish you both well...goodbye.” My hands shaking, I hung up the phone and cried. I forgave them long ago for their verbal abuse, and I have prayed for them from time to time, but I’ve always wondered how they are doing.

### **Pray for the Living and the Dead**

Prayer is so powerful, more powerful than any of us can ever imagine. Even if you’re not comfortable speaking up, you can always pray for anyone at anytime. Praying for others is an important part of the spiritual works of mercy. I pray daily that more couples can discover the joy of following the Church’s teachings on sexuality by learning NFP: to be chaste before marriage, to be generous and open to life within marriage. I pray for all the student couples to whom we have taught NFP over the years. I pray for the engaged couples who have listened to our testimony and talks at marriage prep courses. I offer up many prayers for relatives and friends who have chosen to lead alternate lifestyles, and those deceased ancestors and relatives who were not faithful to the Catholic Church’s beautiful teachings of sexuality.

Practicing the spiritual works of mercy through the Theology of the Body is **an ideal way to show charity and compassion** to others. And it’s an ideal way to celebrate more fully this beautiful Year of Mercy. It’s not always easy to do. However, I know that, for me, it is the right thing to do, even if the person or persons are not open to the message. The truth is, we never know when a seed of truth will be planted and someone will experience a change of heart.

#TOBtalk

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## That's Just Crazy Talk! [at Serviam Ministries]

Written By: Gregory Watson

“Theology is like a map.... Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But that map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God—experiences compared with which many thrills of pious feelings you and I are likely to get on our own are very elementary and very confused. And secondly, if you want to get any further you must use the map” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

More and more these days, I end up finding myself in a discussion about faith and religion which fizzles out fairly quickly, because my interlocutor will suddenly prate on at length about his very firmly held opinion about what is wrong with religion in general (and often conflating that with my religion in particular) and then summing up with some cliché about how we shouldn't argue about such things because we can't really know for sure and all religions are basically the same anyway. I say the conversation usually fizzles out at this point, because I am perennially at a loss about how to proceed at this point (this bafflement is usually compounded by the fact that these conversations usually occur at work and I simply don't have the time available to pursue the question at any great length before break or lunch happens to end, and when next we are able, the conversation is difficult to organically revive). More confounding to me than coworkers expressing this viewpoint (I can expect it from non-religious and nominally religious people who tend not to think too deeply about the subject), is when I hear it from religious people—devout, practicing religious people! It was a cause of great consternation from me when I heard it from one of my Pentecostal friends, a member of an evangelical denomination that bordered on fundamentalism when I was still a member.

To hear the opinion expressed that “theology isn't important” when it comes to living the Christian faith just seems nonsensical. I wish I could say that it was a Protestant problem, but that we Catholics are somehow better than that, but we all know that's certainly not the case. The notion that religions are all basically the same, and that theological teachings are somehow unimportant, is an almost faddish attitude in our culture today. One almost could expect a Grand Inquisition set up to indict as heretics those who refuse to dogmatically hold that there are or should be no dogmas!

Suggesting that all religions are the same, and equally valid paths to God, is like saying that Hockey and Soccer are basically the same because both involve two teams trying to get a roundish object into a net in order to get points and win the game. Just as the particular settings and rules are what differentiate Hockey from Soccer, and them from Football and Baseball, and every other sport, so Theology is what distinguishes Christianity from Judaism and both of them from Islam, and they from Hinduism and Buddhism and Shintoism and on and on. Yes, there are common elements in their teachings, and some religions have more common to them than others. But to say that some commonalities mean that they all “basically teach the same thing” is to completely disregard the differences, and put on a pair of ice skates in order to go play Soccer!

The differences, when we seriously investigate them, are deeply different. They cannot be dismissed simply as matters of “perspective”. Whether there is only One God or millions is rather significant when the religions that hold the one perspective have made it one of the non-negotiable principles of their belief

system. Whether Jesus Christ is that One God made flesh, or if He was only a good teacher or something else is also something that goes beyond matters of opinion. Each faith's theological system is what defines that faith, and differentiates it from the others. They are not the same. They don't claim to be the same. And they don't even claim to all "end up in the same place".

When it comes right down to it, the reason I have difficulty continuing a conversation with someone who says that it doesn't really matter what you believe, is that they're essentially saying that they just don't care about the answer. For some reason, they don't think that the most fundamental questions of life are important: Where did I come from? Why am I here? What happens when I die? Is this all there is, or is there something more? Why is there suffering? How can I be truly happy?

Deep down, we all ask these questions. The religions of the world seek to provide the answers. Most of them claim in some way that God (or a god) has revealed those answers, and even that the wrong answer will lead to prolonged (or even eternal) misery, whereas the right answer will lead to eternal bliss (in some form or other). Not all of these religions can have the right answer, as said above. Concluding either that none of them does, or that we can't know if they do, because thinking through the answers is too difficult, is just lazy.

Ignoring the very questions themselves is crazy.

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## An Intimate Union [at A Faith-Full Life]

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*<sup>1</sup>

### The Profound Mystery of Christ’s Union with His Church

Of all that Saint Paul ever wrote, this passage has to be one of his most perplexing. In his teaching on Christian marriage, St. Paul reaches clear back to the first book of the bible, quoting from the relevant passage in Genesis,<sup>2</sup> and notes, *“This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”*

Wait... what?!

I have to admit, when I read the account of Adam and Eve’s creation (and subsequent one flesh union) in the Genesis account my first thought is not, *“Ahhh, it’s obviously a reflection of Christ’s relationship with His Church!”*

It has been said that the Old Testament conceals what the New Testament reveals, and that the New Testament reveals what the Old Testament conceals. Thank God for inspired authors who can reveal to us that which was concealed in the Old Testament!

Even St. Paul’s denotation of *“mystery”* should give us pause, as this word in the original Greek (*mysterion*) became the root for what we now refer to as a *“sacrament.”*<sup>3</sup> We will return to the sacramental nature of the mystery shortly, but first let’s examine the metaphor which St. Paul presents us with.

### Primary Image or Reflection?

All too often we tend to turn the metaphor on it’s head. We think that somehow it is *Christ and His Church* who are supposed to reflect, or mirror, the intimate union of the marriage relationship. In reality, St. Paul tells us that exactly the opposite is true. Namely that human marriage – even from the very beginning – is but a dim mirror that is to reflect the reality of Christ’s relationship with His Church. Human marriage, *when at it’s best*, images the intimacy which Christ shares with His Church.

With this in mind, it is Christ and His Church who provide the example of one flesh union for husbands and wives to follow – not the other way around. John Piper, a Calvinist/Baptist preacher and author, puts it this way, *“The mystery is this: God did not create the union of Christ and the church after the pattern of human marriage; just the reverse! He created human marriage on the pattern of Christ’s relation to the church.”*<sup>4</sup>

So if the union of one flesh refers primarily to Christ and His Church, and only secondarily applies to human relationships, then how are we to understand this divine union? Perhaps if we read the verses immediately preceding the Ephesians passage above we can begin to understand.

## Christ's Consummation with His Church

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body.”<sup>5</sup>*

St. Augustine once preached that, *“Like a bridegroom Christ went forth from his chamber.... He came to the marriage-bed of the Cross, and there in mounting it, he consummated his marriage. And when he perceived the sighs of the creature, he lovingly gave himself up to the torment in place of his bride, and joined himself to her forever.”<sup>6</sup>* He also notes that the marriage bed of the cross was, *“...a bed not of pleasure, but of pain,”* where He, *united himself with the woman [his Bride, the Church], and consummated the union forever.”*

## Sexual Complementarity

In the larger context of the Ephesians passage we also read, *“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”<sup>7</sup>* In a human marriage the wife submits to the husband who is the head. The wife is receptive to the husband who initiates. Even our bodily forms reflect these differences of initiation and reception. The man's very body is disposed towards an act of extending beyond himself to give of himself to his bride. The woman's very body is disposed towards the reception of the man into herself. The two fit together as one.

Christopher West writes, *“However, in the very process of receiving her bridegroom, she also gives herself to him, and he, in turn, receives her. As [Saint] John Paul II puts it: ‘the giving and the accepting of the gift interpenetrate, so that the giving itself becomes accepting, and the acceptance is transformed into giving.’<sup>8</sup>* ... According to this ‘great analogy’ God is symbolically ‘masculine’ in relation to Man, while Man is symbolically ‘feminine’ in relation to God. *As the Bridegroom, God freely and gratuitously initiates ‘the gift’ of his Life to Man, who, as the Bride, receives ‘the gift’ from his Creator. Having received such a great gift, Man is called in his freedom to make a gift of himself back to God in thanksgiving, a gift, which God, in turn, receives. This is the Life-giving Communion of Love that Man knew with his Creator ‘in the beginning’ in and through the life-giving communion of love he knew as male and female.”<sup>9</sup>*

## One Flesh Union

And here at last we may begin to understand the profound *mysterion* of which St. Paul writes – and the sacrament which is implied. Recognizing that we are symbolically “feminine” in relation to God, and that He is symbolically “masculine” in relation to us, we might ask ourselves how this one-flesh union is to play out? If it is on the cross that Christ gives of Himself to His bride, when do we (as His bride) receive Him into ourselves? The answer of course is in Holy Communion.

Reception of the Eucharist is an act of marital intimacy. In receiving the Eucharist, we receive

Christ's body (as the bridegroom) into our body (as His bride).

Part of the reason that communion is forbidden for non-Catholics is the recognition that the marital act is to be reserved for *after* the vows have been made. In the marriage vows spouses promise to give of themselves *fully* to each other, and then in the nuptial union they make good on their vows. It would be improper for those outside of full communion with the Church, those who have not stood at the altar and taken their vows as it were, to demand to participate in the nuptial act. When we partake of the Eucharist, we don't just receive Christ into our hearts in some sort of mystical fashion – rather we receive Him body, blood, soul, and divinity *into our very bodies* – present *within us* in a mysterious and intimate way.

### **A Bride Pure and Without Blemish**

Some will object to this idea of nuptial union between Christ and His Church, noting that the Church has done things both amazing and horrific in the name of God, but, ...she is Christ's bride, made holy and without blemish by Christ Himself (as referenced in the Ephesians passage above) *and* by the righteous deeds of His saints.

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,*

*“Hallelujah!*

*For the Lord our God  
the Almighty reigns.*

*Let us rejoice and exult  
and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready;  
to her it has been granted to be clothed  
with fine linen, bright and pure”*

*— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*<sup>[10](#)</sup>

And like all brides, she has been joined to Him that the two may become one flesh! And it is through this incarnation and nuptial mystery that we, the bride of Christ, become in that marital union of one flesh, *the very body of Christ*, with He Himself as our head.

Hallelujah! For the marriage of the Lamb has come!

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1. Ephesians 5:31-32 [↔](#)

2. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24 [↔](#)

3. sacrament (n.) “outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace,” also “the eucharist,” c. 1200, from Old French sacrament “consecration; mystery” (12c., Modern French sacrament) and

directly from Latin sacramentum “a consecrating” (also source of Spanish sacramento, German Sakrament, etc.), from sacrare “to consecrate” (see sacred); a Church Latin loan-translation of Greek mysterion (see mystery). <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=sacrament> ↵

4. Desiring God, Meditations of a Christian Hedonist ↵
5. Ephesians 5:25-30 ↵
6. Sermo Suppositus 120 ↵
7. Ephesians 5:22-24 ↵
8. General Audience of February 6, 1980 ↵
9. A Great “Nuptial Mystery” <https://www.catholicculture.org> ↵
10. Revelation 19:6-8 ↵

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## So help me, I dropped it [at Ordinary Time]



Offer it up. Suffering can draw you closer to God. Just trust he has a plan in this. Words that I myself have thrown out when someone else was suffering. How can suffering draw you closer to God? I had an inkling before these past few pain ridden days, but the clarity that I see with now is different. I can't tell you how your suffering will draw you closer, but I feel the need to share with you how mine did.

Until the other night I would have told you that the one time I experienced true pain was about seven years ago. It's a day which I will never forget. I had just had my spine ripped open by a doctor. Rods, screws, and various twisty pieces of metal lanced into my frame like a sadistic pin cushion. A living voodoo doll for someone very unpopular. The pain was unbearable. Then I experienced true pain. Sure, I would have told you then that I had been in pain all day. After that day though, pain had a different meaning for me.

Just after my surgery they needed an xray of my spine with 'weight' on it in order to make sure everything was bolted together properly. So they wheeled me, mostly sedated, down a hallway to a room designed to torture and haunt my dreams for years to come. Over by the wall were two bars... they told me to hang on them. That's right... put your hands on the bar, we need you to hang all your weight on your arms while we take an X-ray of your spine. They were not kidding. So I did as asked.. they lifted me up, I couldn't even put weight on my legs yet... placed my hand on this rod and said ok hang on.. and then they lowered me till all my weight was hanging there.. hanging on those freshly spiked screw holes... twisting through those muscles which had been sliced through just days before.

Everything went white. I couldn't think. I couldn't breath. I didn't know who I was.. or what I was doing.. all I knew was, "I have to hold on to this bar." So I did. I don't remember what decade it was that they came back to get me... or how we time traveled back to the present day, but eventually, centuries after the command to hold on.. they pried me off the bar and into my seat.. and I lost consciousness. Everytime I see that scene in the passion of the Christ where they give him the cross and he embraces it, holding it.. almost reveling in the pleasure of that knowledge that he is holding on... I am reminded of what that feels like.

This time in the ER I experienced a glimpse at the living stations of the cross. Up until this point it had hurt.. it had hurt bad.. enough that this man asked to be taken to a hospital... asked to be moved into a room with needles.. like a vampire asking for daybreak. I shuffled in towards the room, a familiar one.. it's our date room.. some how they always put us in there... as we drew closer the pain hit. I gasped a

few times, moaning out loud. Then I couldn't see. My eyes had become overwhelmed. I felt the tears going down my face. I felt the shame of crying out loud like a child, weeping in front of all these people... I gasped out something to the effect of, "I can't do it." So help me God.. I dropped my cross. Everything was white again with pain. I couldn't think. I couldn't move. I couldn't speak or breath. All I could do was stand there and exist.

Then my wife, the living Simon of Cyrene, put her arm around me and said just walk with me. She moved me into the room and onto the bed. For eternity I lay there waiting for a diagnosis, waiting for pain pills, waiting for something.. Then the nurse informed me she couldn't give me the medicine they had prescribed because I was allergic to it. I was going to have to hold this cross again.. guess what? I dropped it again. I begged her for it. Please just make it go away! Do something! She told me she couldn't give it to me because I could stop breathing.. I didn't care, I said.. that'd be better than this..

Sunday my wife brought me the Eucharist and I felt unworthy. I received Jesus asking him to forgive me for carrying the cross so poorly. For giving up. You see, I now know the answer to what I would do if I were on the cross... would I go to my death? I've always said I hope so.. but Jesus took more pain than me.. and begged for forgiveness... he suffered willingly for others, refusing the wine to numb his pain. Me? I cried out for anything.. sure I tried to offer it up.. I tried to pray a rosary.. but the words wouldn't come.. an our father? and nothing but moaning escaped my lips. I sat musing over this while praying my morning office.

Then he showed up. At the door. Offering me communion. His name was Deacon Mike, but I knew him the moment I saw him... Jesus was there before me. I felt shame. Misery... I told him that I had already received and he said, "Can I bless you then?" I acquiesced and he placed his hand on my forehead. He said in a gentle voice something that I will not forget any time soon. God has created you unique.. so go forth in comfort living your life with joy as the person he created you to be. No one else can do it the way you do. Then he blessed my wife in a similar fashion. Warmth flooded through me.

Yes, I dropped my cross. I'm not Jesus.... but you know what? I've picked it back up.. because he's making me more like him. I am going to try to carry it with joy.. knowing that through this pain and this suffering I learned first and foremost.. who I am not... but secondly, I am more aware of who He is... and even if I have to drop it 100 times more... I will do so.. if only to glimpse Him for a moment saying how much he loves me.. as he helps carry the load I am unable to.

His servant and yours,

Brian

"

***He must increase, I must decrease.***

"

## Col 2:16 - A weekly sabbath reference or not? [at Catholicism and Adventism]

[In part 1, we saw](#) that the Greek word used by Paul for the holy days in Col 2:16 (εορτη, *heorte*) was used in the Greek Old Testament, with which he was well acquainted, in a way that included all five (or six) annual feasts decreed by God. Given that it was unlikely that he would use the word “sabbath” in his writings to mean something it didn’t mean in contemporary use, and given that it was entirely plausible, given biblical evidence, that he used the term “*heorte*” to cover all of the annual feasts, Col 2:16 is best interpreted as a sequence of festivals listed by frequency – annual, then monthly, then weekly.

Now we’ll look at several other similar frequency-based sequences in the Bible, and take a look at whether Col 2:17 allows the weekly sabbath to be included as something that was a shadow of what we have now.

Several times in the Old Testament, and twice in the New Testament, we see Israel’s holy days listed in various time-based sequences, usually from frequent to infrequent (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, multi-annual). Not every list covers all 5 frequencies, but you see that they are listed in a logical order.

### Sacrifices in Numbers

This sequence is derived from the original lists in the books of Moses, and especially Numbers 28-29, where the sacrifices are explained.



Full moon, NASA

- Daily sacrifices – Numbers 28:3-8
- Weekly sabbath sacrifices – v9-10
- New moon sacrifices – v11-15
- Passover and Unleavened Bread sacrifices – v16-25
- Pentecost – v26-30

- Trumpets – Numbers 29:1-6
- Day of Atonement – v6-11
- Tabernacles – v12-34
- Shemini Atzeret – v35-38

Note again ([see Part 1 for details](#)) that the Greek word *heorte* (εορτη) is used in the Septuagint to encapsulate all these days.

## Time-based sequences

Other passages where we see this time-based sequence are:

1 Chr 23:31 (KJV throughout) – And to offer all burnt sacrifices unto the LORD in the sabbaths, in the new moons, and on the set feasts, by number, according to the order commanded unto them, continually before the LORD

2 Chr 2:4 – Behold, I build an house to the name of the LORD my God, to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shewbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts of the LORD our God. This is an ordinance for ever to Israel.

2 Chr 8:13 – Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.



King Solomon, Russian icon

Here we have something slightly different – three of the feasts (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) are named, and two (Trumpets and Atonement) are omitted. Here Adventists like to claim that the sabbaths are Trumpets and Atonement, and the solemn feasts are Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. But notice the difference – the previous verse lists these as being sacrifices personally offered by Solomon during a certain time.

2 Chr 31:3 – He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings, to wit, for the

morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the LORD.

Ezek 45:17 – And it shall be the prince’s part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel.

Here we see them listed in frequency of infrequent to frequent, and then summed up as “*all solemnities*”.

Hosea 2:11 – I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

This is an interesting verse. Four events are listed, and not in order of frequency. There are several ways to read this:

1. her annual feast days (Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), her monthly feast days (new moon), her weekly sabbath, and her solemn feasts (Trumpets and Atonement).
2. her feasts – i.e. monthly new moons, weekly sabbath, annual holy days.
3. her annual feast days (all of them, *heorte*), her monthly new moons, her weekly sabbaths, and everything else.

Adventists who insist (contrary to the evidence) that *heorte* never includes Trumpets and Atonement would choose the first one. (And, interestingly, some Adventists who cite the list cite it as annual “*feast days*”, followed by the “*new moons*”, followed by the other “*solemn feasts*” – omitting the weekly sabbath.)

Only the third has maintained the usual frequency-based list – annual, monthly, weekly. That itself indicates that the third is the most likely, as all others list them in either ascending or descending order of frequency.

It doesn’t really matter either way – it’s not conclusive evidence for the Adventist position, and, in fact, does their position a lot of harm – there is no way at all to avoid the inclusion of the weekly sabbath in this list – and this verse has been seen by Christians throughout the history of Christianity as prophesying the abolition of all of these days.

Lastly, Gal 4:10 lists the following:

Gal 4:10 – Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

We again see a frequency-based list, indicating specific days (the only days, outside of the sacrifice timetable that included daily sacrifices, not covered already, were the weekly sabbaths), months (new moons), times (times of the year), and years (most likely the multi-annual cycles incorporated into Israel’s calendar).

**The weekly sabbath as a shadow**



Eve and Mary

Lastly, we should briefly look at whether or not the sabbath was a shadow of something greater.

### **Sabbath:**

1. Memorial of the original creation. Sin marred this creation.
2. Memorial of the exodus from Egypt. This freed Israel from slavery to the Egyptians.
3. Finding physical rest from work.

### **What the sabbath was a shadow of:**

1. The new creation in Christ after being brought to life in his resurrection (2 Cor 5:17, Eph 4:24, Col 3:9)
2. The freedom from slavery to sin, brought by Jesus (Rom 6:18, Gal 5:1)
3. Rest in Christ from our spiritual labours (Matt 11:28, Heb 4)

Ironically for Adventists, immediately after saying what he did in Matt 11:28, Jesus and the disciples go on to pick corn on the sabbath, and Jesus has to tell the Pharisees that [he is superior to the sabbath](#), and then goes on to rub it in by healing someone on the same day.

Col 2:16-17, in summary, lists Old Testament holy days in order of frequency, using contemporary Greek to refer to all annual feasts collectively (*heorte*), the new moon celebration, and the weekly sabbath (*sabbaton*).

### **Further reading:**

[Col 2:16 – a weekly sabbath reference or not? Part 1](#)

[Col 2:14-17 – does this refer to the 7th day Sabbath?](#)

[The Sabbath vs Sunday debate](#)

[Gal 4:10-11 – do we need to keep the Sabbath?](#)

[Mark 2/Matt 12/Luke 6 – was the Sabbath made for all mankind to keep?](#)

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Featured on [NewEvangelizers.com](http://NewEvangelizers.com)

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis encourages us to show God’s mercy through our witness. The Holy Father called this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy to direct our attention and actions “on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s actions in our lives . . . a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”

Our faith story is our account of God’s mercy in our lives. We all have a unique faith story to tell. Sharing God’s actions in our lives is the best way to become an effective witness.

Our baptism began our faith story. We were commissioned to evangelize. We can fulfill our call to mercy and evangelization in part by sharing our faith story at every opportunity given us by God.

Throughout our faith story we tell of God’s mercy, his salvation, redemption and transformation of our lives. God expresses his love through our story. He created each of us as an unrepeatable expression of his presence. He builds our faith each time we encounter him. Each time we tell our story, we reveal a unique expression of God’s presence. We share his love and mercy.

Here are five tips for making our witness better in 2016, based on my favorite evangelization verse, 1 Peter 3:15:

*“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence.”*

1. **Always be ready** – and willing — to share what God is doing in your life. Know your faith story. Be attentive to the nudge of the Holy Spirit to share with an old friend or someone new in your life.
2. **Always be curious** about the faith story of those around you and gently encourage them to share their story with you. Approach with admiration that friend you have known for years but whose story you have never heard.
3. **Always be authentic.** Keep in mind that your witness is not just what you say, but how you live out your faith and demonstrate the reason for your hope. Be approachable.

4. **Always be open** to receive the grace of the moment, the gift of God's presence. Then be open to giving away that gift of God's presence in you to others. Let a little of your faith story leak out to those around you and see what happens next.
5. **Always be humble and seek continuous conversion.** Look for ways to renew your faith. Be the one who invites those on the fringes of the church to go with you to a retreat, day of renewal, Bible Study or evangelization seminar.

### **How do I start evangelizing by sharing my faith story? How do I know what to say?**

Begin journaling. Keep a spiritual journal with all the blessings the Lord has given you. Ponder the high and low points of your life, praying and listening to the Holy Spirit.

Knowing and pondering our faith story helps clarify our thoughts. We see how God intervened and steered us to the path he planned for our greatest happiness. We see his mercy.

You can get a good idea of the variety of ways to tell a story of conversion, return to the church, a healing or an answered prayers from more than 30 stories on [JOYAlive.net](http://joyalive.net). Check out the [Joy Stories](#) tab.

Start now with your spiritual journal. Let the Holy Spirit remind you of the marvelous blessings God has brought in your life. Let me know how I can help you to:

*“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence.”*

***Ask yourself: Where can I go to pray, write and ponder my faith story?***

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## The Bishop, a Chef Priest, and a Bunch of Women [at The Not]

I had the opportunity to hang out with about 100 Catholic women over the weekend. Can I just say how refreshing it is to hang out with women who share your belief and your values? Being from the South, it doesn't happen very often. This was my first time in attendance at the Council of Catholic Women (CCW) Convention for the Diocese.

Things you may not be aware of:

If you are a woman, you are a member of CCW.

Dues are voluntary, but are encouraged. ;-)

The Convention kicked off Thursday night with a Memorial Mass for the deceased members. The main celebrant was our Bishop with priests from the different deaneries as con-celebrants. The Mass was beautiful (as always); the deceased women from the different parishes within the diocese were remembered. After Mass, we had an banquet with the Bishop in attendance. This was the first time I have had the opportunity to meet our Bishop. He came around and put his zucchetto (I had to look up the appropriate name for the “beanie”!) on various women. I was one of the women who had the honor to have it on my head for a few brief seconds. A picture was taken, but I don't know how to get it from the photographer who was taking pictures.



*Beth & Bishop Stika. I need to mention that this was at a time when no one was speaking.*

During the banquet, Beth Mahoney, who is the [Spirituality Commission](#) Chair for NCCW, gave the keynote address. She spoke of events in Mary's life and how they relate to each of us today.

Friday, I had the honor of listening to Father Leo Patalinghug. I knew of Father Leo through the [Catholic Channel on Sirius Radio](#). He is the founder of the [Grace Before Meals](#) Movement. Even during periods

when I wasn't a regular mass attendee, we always said grace before our suppers as a family. In this fast-paced world, many families don't even have supper together, much less say grace.



While Father Leo was cooking, he was doing what he does: preaching. Some “words of wisdom” from Father Leo:

About confession: It's easy to abuse confession. You should go because you're sorry, not because it's the first Friday of the month. Everything we do should be manifested from the heart.

The Church isn't a hotel for saints, but a hospital for sinners.

Not enough people are saying “yes” to God's will.

The belly button shows that from the time of our conception, God has 1 plan: to feed you.

Mary is not important to Catholics...she's NECESSARY.

Priests are called to feed people in a *supernatural* way. Women have the ability to feed *naturally*.

At the end, he talked about being beautiful. He spoke of what it meant to be beautiful; not on the outside, but the kind of beautiful that comes from the inside and radiates. To summarize, he made these points:

Remember that the U.S.A. is *One Nation Under God*, and will always be, no matter what. So, don't get all stressed about the upcoming election; we're going to be okay.

Teach the gift of modesty & allow your body to be beautiful.

God is trying to fix our brokenness if we let him.

If you're having a bad day, do something for someone else. You'll be surprised at how your day will turn around.

The last day, Cathy Bonner gave a powerful presentation on domestic violence. [Women Healing the Wounds](#) is a domestic violence prevention resource guide. The guide is free, and includes a page with tear-off tabs for each parish to put information for their local shelter. It is also available in Spanish. They also have partnered with Verizon to donate used cell phones. If you donate a phone, don't forget the charger!

Check to see if your parish has an active CCW. If not, find out why & get things going.

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## Love and Strength [at Bible Meditations]



*May the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow more and more and become as great as our love for you. In this way he will strengthen you...* 1 Thessalonians 3: 12-13a

How can growing in love make us stronger? When we care deeply about others, we become willing to move out of our comfort zones. From the Civil Rights movement to Mother Teresa's work with the poor, compassion motivates people to risk taking action on behalf of others. We can find plenty of examples closer to home.

When a loved one's welfare is on the line, even those of us who don't like confrontation find the strength to rise to the occasion. We might question a doctor or hospital staff on behalf of a family member. We might risk our teenager's displeasure when an unpopular decision has their best interest at heart. During an argument, we might even have the strength to remain silent until cooler heads prevail instead of lashing out in the heat of the moment.

If we consistently give in to others' wants or demands we're probably acting out of fear of rejection rather than love. Love shifts our focus and empowers us to act in the best interests of those we care about. Genuine love calls us to act for our loved ones' good—whether they like it or not, whether we like it or not. That takes the strength of perfect love that casts out fear.

Prayer: Lord, expand my heart to love others more and more.

Reflection: How are you being called to grow in love today? How can God's love strengthen you?



HTTP/1.1 200 OK Server: nginx Date: Sat, 14 May 2016 16:08:33 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Transfer-Encoding: chunked Connection: keep-alive Vary: Accept-Encoding Vary: Cookie X-hacker: If you're reading this, you should visit [automattic.com/jobs](http://automattic.com/jobs) and apply to join the fun, mention this header. X-Pingback: <https://onethousandwordsaaweek.wordpress.com/xmlrpc.php> Link: ; rel=shortlink X-ac: 1.atl \_dfw Strict-Transport-Security: max-age=15552000

# San Francisco's Parental Leave Policy: A Pro-Life Dissent [at One Thousand Words a Week]



We're stuck in a position. If we don't support it, you're the bad guys.

~ [Henry Karnilowicz](#)

**I think I have pretty decent pro-life credentials.** My family and I have prayed for an end to abortion in church, at home, and outside our local abortion clinic ([now closed](#), thank God). We've long supported, financially and otherwise, our local Right to Life [affiliate](#), as well as the [Women's Care Center](#), an organization assisting pregnant women in need. I've written about pro-life matters in print and [online](#), and I've spoken up in defense of preborn and *all* human life whenever given the chance.

That's why I felt so conflicted when I saw my pro-life friends give their social media thumbs-up to San Francisco's new parental leave mandate. The city's Board of Supervisors unanimously passed the [law](#) on April 6, and it provides for six weeks of full pay to new parents of babies and adopted children. It applies to most employers, who'd have to make up the 45% of income that isn't covered by the state's already generous parental leave policy.

On the surface, I get that this appears eminently pro-family and pro-life: extended benefits + no loss of income (or job) = more babies/less abortion. Many celebrating the new law pointed out that it is a tiny step in the direction of catching up to other developed countries that adopted such seemingly family-friendly policies long ago.

**Yet, I'm uneasy with SF's new mandate for at least two reasons** – one economic, one theological. Feel

free to set me straight on either one.

With regards to economics, I confess up front to a total lack of credentials – “dilettante” would be too generous in my case; “dabbler” would be closer to the mark. Yet, how much economic theory do you need to know to foresee that *forcing* businesses to provide workers something (parental leave, minimum wage, whatever) will mean *less work*. “By the simplest and most basic economics,” Thomas Sowell [laid out](#), “a price artificially raised tends to cause more to be supplied and less to be demanded than when prices are left to be determined by supply and demand in a free market.”

Many large U.S. organizations already provide generous parental leave options voluntarily, without governmental coercion, and potential employees who are family oriented aggressively compete to work for them. By *compelling* other businesses with tighter margins to follow suit will inevitably result in job cuts to balance the books. As SF Small Business Commissioner Stephen Adams [put it](#), “Can we make the Board of Supervisors run a business, meet payroll, so they understand how these things work? Enough is enough is enough. This is bad for small business.” Wouldn’t this have the unintended consequence of putting *new* stress on families?

**So much for economics; on to Catholic social teaching** – to wit, human freedom, distributism, and subsidiarity.

Certainly it’s true that our social institutions have a role to play in defending and strengthening family life, which naturally includes promoting material well-being. “The political community has a duty to honor the family,” the [Catechism](#) reads, including safeguarding adequate family benefits (2211). The question remains, however, as to the best way of making that happen “in keeping with the country’s institutions,” as the Catechism puts it, especially with a view toward respecting human freedom. It’s clear that there’s no virtue in being compelled to do the right thing. In fact, if anything, coerced actions in the name of charity usually produce the exact opposite: resentment, friction, and division.

So what to do? That’s where [distributism](#) comes in – an economic *via media* between socialism and unbridled capitalism. In a recent reflection on Acts 4 and the early church’s attempt to care for the poor, Relevant Radio’s [Fr. Rich Simon](#) flatly asserted that, as Catholics, “we are distributists – that is, we want to get as much property as possible in the hands of as many people as possible, each under his own fig tree and his own vine, as the Scriptures has it.” Simon went on to contrast state-controlled economies and capitalism, concluding that, in practice, they both lead to a concentration of wealth in the hands of a few – although capitalism is at least honest about human nature and our greedy tendencies.

**“Distributism is the way to go for a Catholic,”** Fr. Simon concluded, for it takes into account a realistic human anthropology and respects human freedom. For Simon and others of like mind, distributism in practice means that “if you can buy something for three cents more at a mom and pop store, buy it there instead of the big box store – it’s that simple.”

It may sound terribly naïve, but the distributism ideal seems to be the only way that we can respect the Catholic principle of subsidiarity – the idea that “a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order,” in the words of Pope St. John Paul II (*Centesimus Annus* 48; [CCC 1883](#)). In the matter at hand, subsidiarity would seem to require that disagreements over what benefits an employer owes his employees ought to be negotiated without recourse to state interference.

This is vitally important because political solutions to social inequities are notoriously fickle –

governments and philosophies of governing come and go, and if the state is the only one guaranteeing our rights, then our rights are never really guaranteed. Moral persuasion as well as appeals to mutually beneficial consequences should be exhausted before imposing legislated mandates (cf. CCC 1940). “Right relations between employers and employees, between those who govern and citizens,” the Catechism teaches us, “presuppose a natural good will in keeping with the dignity of human persons concerned for justice and fraternity” (2213).

**Requiring employers to provide parental leave benefits** is not only counterproductive economically; it’s also bankrupt morally because it avoids the underlying conflict: a fundamental disagreement regarding a vision for human flourishing. Instead, the only real hope for a pro-family and pro-life social order is through personal conversion – a “cultural transformation” according to St. John Paul, who goes on to describe how it comes about in his encyclical [\*Evangelium Vitae\*](#):

[T]he cultural change which we are calling for demands from everyone the courage to adopt a new life-style, consisting in making practical choices – at the personal, family, social and international level – on the basis of a correct scale of values: the primacy of being over having, of the person over things (98).

In other words, it’s grievously short-sighted to rely on legislation and the state to address our society’s problems. “Socio-economic problems can be resolved only with the help of all the forms of solidarity,” the Catechism insists, “solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves, between employers and employees in a business...” (1941).

What’s called for is nothing less than a full-scale, no-holds-barred, up-to-date witness to the Gospel – a “[New Evangelization](#),” you might say. Stop-gap measures like San Francisco’s new law simply don’t go far enough.

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*Posted by Rick Becker on April 10, 2016*

<https://onethousandwordsaweek.wordpress.com/2016/04/10/san-franciscos-parental-leave-policy-a-pro-life-dissent/>

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## More on sex by a believing deacon [at Catholic Deacon]

There are few subjects that draw more interest than sex. In light of a comment made on my [previous post about sex](#)

I offer a few more thoughts.

Over the years here on Καθολικός διάκονος I have written a lot about various aspects of sex as it pertains to Church teaching and Christian living. In particular, I have written a great deal about

[\*Humanae Vitae\*](#)

. Again, before anyone uncorks and begins to offer me remediation on Church teaching regarding human sexuality, let me assure both of my readers that I personally try to adhere to the Church's teaching and encourage others to do so because I believe it is the way for human beings to flourish.

My friend with whom I've been corresponding and who I mentioned in my last post on sex heard the homily, in which a robust denunciation of homosexuality and quite possibly people who are homosexual was offered, at a vulnerable point in his journey back to the Church, which journey began last summer.

While sex and procreation, according to nature and revelation, go together – though this link grows ever more tenuous, even among Catholics, including clergy -

[\*Humanae Vitae\*](#)

posits a “unitive” purpose for sex. This unitive aspect of sex is a progressive, one might even argue a revolutionary, element of

[\*Humanae Vitae\*](#)

, causing even some of a traditionalist bent to reject it. According to the unitive purpose, sex unifies a couple through physical intimacy. In this context, “physical intimacy” is something of a euphemism for sexual pleasure. I like that one of the most popular Christian books on marital sex bears the title

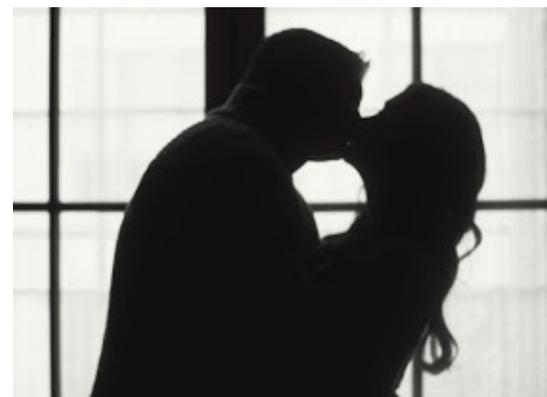
[\*Intended for Pleasure\*](#)

.  
I am firmly convinced that it is no accident that sex feels so good. For my money sexual pleasure is the best pleasure to be had. Shocking, I know. I'll take C.S. Lewis' word for it that the pleasures of heaven are better than those of sex. Keep in mind, however, that Lewis wrote about the pleasures of marital sex in

[\*A Grief Observed\*](#)

in a very frank manner. It strikes me as silly to argue against extra-marital sex, no matter the variety, by

insisting sex was not intended for pleasure. It's an argument with zero credibility that can easily be refuted by experience.



With the widespread acceptance of contraception as morally legitimate, again, even among Catholics, the matter becomes very confusing for many people because it renders Church teaching incoherent. Since I am a deacon who blogs as a deacon, it's interesting for me consider the witness of married permanent deacons when it comes to living according to Church teaching on matters of sex in marriage.

In his essay,

[“The Body’s Grace,”](#)

written years ago, Rowan Williams observed: “in a church which accepts the legitimacy of contraception, the absolute condemnation of same-sex relations of intimacy must rely either on an abstract fundamentalist deployment of a number of very ambiguous texts, or on a problematic and non-scriptural theory about natural complementarity, applied narrowly and cruelly to physical differentiation without regard to psychological structures.”

While I would disagree with Williams about the ambiguity of all the biblical texts to which he alludes, while accepting the ambiguity of some, I certainly agree with his assertion about them being abstractly deployed by Christians who accept the moral legitimacy of contraception. I also agree with what he asserts about complementarity once procreation is severed from sexual intercourse.

So, the confusion experienced by so many concerning Church teaching on homosexuality not only arises from “the world” but also arises from within the Church. Here's my view- until we're ready to adequately prepare couples to live the sacrament of matrimony and to insist with the same intensity we bring to bear in railing against homosexuality (though I would hope for a more compassionate and pastoral approach than we often muster when addressing homosexuality) that married couples live the true meaning of marriage as taught by the Church, we ought to stop fearfully reacting to last summer's SCOTUS ruling in Obergerfell and lay-off an incoherent approach that serves primarily to alienate people.

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# Meet the "Doorkeeper": The Man Who Shed his Ego [at It Makes Sense to Me]

*IT MAKES SENSE TO ME*

By Larry Peterson

\* An edited version of this appeared in

[Aleteia](#)

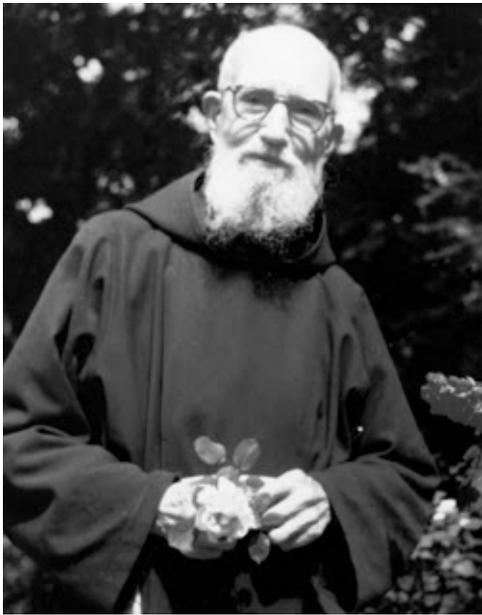
on May 3, 2016

Worn down by the egotistical blustering of all the presidential candidates I decided to begin a search for someone sans *EGO*. I was sure it would be almost next to impossible. Then a bulb went off in my frazzled brain.

I began a search of the [Official Catholic Directory of Saints](#). The search was easy. It is chock full of the "Egoless". (N.B. Being egoless is not a birth defect). The saints managed to discover the secret to attaining a diminished to non-ego persona. They learned how to love God with all their minds, hearts and souls (something most of us fail miserably at doing). They mastered the technique of diminished ego and advanced in their spirituality to the point where it led them to love others more than themselves. They reached a point where their own self was no longer a concern to them. Others came first.

These are the people gone before us who loved God unconditionally. Many times, like most of us, they failed miserably before they got it right. They just never quit trying to love God MORE every day. These folks ultimately emptied themselves for others before they died, many times giving their lives in doing so. This Directory of Saints is a treasure trove of Christian example for all of us, especially the young.

The "Doorkeeper" is an example of this. He was an uncomplicated man who never aspired to be anything more than a simple priest. His name was Bernard Francis Casey and his family and friends called him Barney. Barney, like so many other Catholic saints, shed his ego.



Barney was born in Oak Grove, Wisconsin back in 1870. He was the sixth of 16 kids of Irish immigrants. When Barney was a boy he contracted [Diphtheria](#) and it left him with a permanently raspy sounding voice. (This would inhibit his speaking ability for the rest of his life). Young Barney felt the call to the priesthood but, at the age of 16, he hit a detour. He had to go to work to help the family.

Barney Casey always did whatever job he had (he worked as a lumberjack, a prison guard , a streetcar operator and even a hospital orderly) to the best of his ability wanting to serve his God in all things. When he was 21 he was finally able to enter St. Francis High School seminary in Milwaukee. He spent five years there before being able to move on and join the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. Upon his acceptance he took the name of Solanus after St. Francis Solanus, a 17th century missionary.

[Solanus Casey](#) was finally ordained a priest at the age of 33. He had to study extremely hard to reach that goal and when he was finally ordained he was given the title "Sacerdos Simplex" which means "simple priest". This meant he was not permitted to preach or to hear confessions. He never complained and took joy in having the honor and privilege of being able to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Father Casey lived in Detroit and his main job at the monastery was that of the doorkeeper. Father Casey, wanting to do the absolute best at whatever God chose for him, became the finest doorkeeper that ever lived. He did this for well over 20 years. Unexpectedly, he also became known for his service to the sick and for the advice and consultations he would have with visitors. People began attributing cures and other blessings to his interaction with them or others. He quickly became known as "The Doorekeeper".

Father Casey was a man who opened and closed doors for people. He was a man who disregarded ego and was happy to serve God in the simplest of ways. He was a man who, because miracles have been attributed to his intercession, was declared [Venerable](#) by Pope John Paul II in 1995. This is the first step toward canonization as a saint. Father Solanus Casey died in 1957.

Father Solanus Casey is on the road to full sainthood. And all he did to begin his journey down that road was to humbly and happily open doors for people and talk to them if they wanted. A shining example of the beauty of humility and how powerful that quiet virtue can prove to be.

Solanus (Barney) Casey has re-charged me. It might be nice if all of today's bloviating pundits could hear or read his story. It would also be a fine thing if all the young people across the entire country were also introduced to this God loving, humble man who managed to become famous by simply opening doors better than anyone else.

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## Mercy Keeps Our World Existing [at A Moment From De Sales]



Once an elderly woman approached the then Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires, now Pope Francis.

Seeing her, Pope Francis called out *Abuela*, (Grandmother), as they do in Argentina. “*Abuela, do you want to confess?*” “*Yes,*” she replied. And since he was ready to leave for a Confirmation, said: “*But if you have no sins...*” he said admiringly!

Her answer was swift and immediate: “*we all have sins.*” “*But maybe the Lord can’t forgive them,*” Bishop Bergoglio responded. “*The Lord forgives everything!*” she replied. To which the Bishop commented, “*How do you know?*” Then came a most insightful response, which astonished the Bishop even to this very day.

She softly said: “*Well If the Lord didn’t forgive everything, our world would not exist.*” Now those words spoken by a wise grandmother years ago remain within the heart of Pope Francis.

Her words echo to this day in our “mercy” church—“***If the Lord didn’t forgive everything, our world would not exist.***” Like Pope Francis, we need to hear these wonderful heartfelt words with every step we walk upon this earth. We are sinners and can’t do life alone. But, as we should know the Lord loves us and with His love comes mercy—the mercy that helps us begin again.

This is why the Lord calls those who are weak: Peter, Matthew, Zaccheus, Thomas, you and me. He calls us and makes us strong by His mercy. It’s the same with Mary Magdalene, and the woman caught in adultery. Listen again: “*Has no one condemned you, then neither do I, go and sin no more*” said Jesus to the embarrassed woman.

Now we don’t know if this woman ever sinned again. What we do know is she never forgot these words the Lord spoke “*then neither do I.*”

And when she remembers—as we all do—we come running back to Jesus to try again. Pope Francis wrote: “*As long as we are alive, we have the Lord’s mercy as a gift.*” This means everyone has this same gift of abundant mercy.

And, again, as that wise “Abuela,” grandmother said: “***If the Lord didn’t forgive everything, our world would not exist.***” But we know our world does exist. The Lord has risen from the dead and we are alive yet another day—and so is God’s mercy.

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# How to support loved ones who are struggling with infertility [at Catholic Review]

Maybe it seems like a strange thing to think about at a wedding. But every time we watch couples exchanging their vows, I worry that the smiling newlyweds will have trouble creating their family.

Infertility is a heavy cross to carry in a marriage.

It's lonely and painful. It forces couples to navigate challenges together, often early on. It doesn't always have a solution—or even an explanation. And the medical solutions that are presented as easy fixes by society can raise moral questions and pull couples away from the Catholic faith and from God.

This week it is

[National Infertility Awareness Week](#)

. If you have loved ones who are experiencing infertility—even if you suspect they are, but don't know for sure—here are a few thoughts on how to support them.

**1. Don't ask when they will have children.** They may not feel ready to share their infertility journey with you. They may never be. When my husband and I were realizing we were not likely to have a child by birth, we kept that close, not telling family or friends until we had decided to adopt—and were practically waiting to be matched. Other couples want to talk about their experience. But I would let them initiate the conversation.

**2. Pray—and don't just pray for them to give birth to a child. Pray for them to be open to God's will.** Pray for them to become parents, but pray that if they don't, or if it takes longer than expected, they will have the strength and the patience and the courage to stay strong and together. Pray for their marriage. Pray for wisdom for them on their journey together.

**3. Be gentle sharing your own baby news.** If you're expecting, you might want to consider whether it would be best to tell them before you broadcast on social media, or whether to tell them by phone or email rather than in person, where they may struggle emotionally.

**4. Don't offer advice unless it's requested.** This is one of the great rules of life, right? And don't assume that just because they are experiencing infertility, they will decide to adopt. It's not that simple, and adopting is not an option for every couple.

**5. Keep in mind that infertility is a very personal, individual experience.** Even in the same marriage, a husband and a wife may experience grief in different ways. Couples who have given birth already can experience secondary infertility. Some couples know they will never be able to give birth, others have conceived and lost children, and others have no explanation for their infertility. There is no one answer or solution.

It can feel particularly difficult for Catholics to face infertility. The Catholic Church often seems better prepared to celebrate the large, growing families carrying the gifts up to the altar during Mass than to notice the childless couple sitting quietly in a back pew. But being open to life, of course, doesn't always mean holding a child in your arms.

I hope this week you will join me in prayer for all those couples who are facing infertility. And, if you are reading this and currently on this journey, please know that I am praying with you.

***You might also be interested in:***

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This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2016/04/25/how-to-support-loved-ones-who-are-struggling-with-infertility>  
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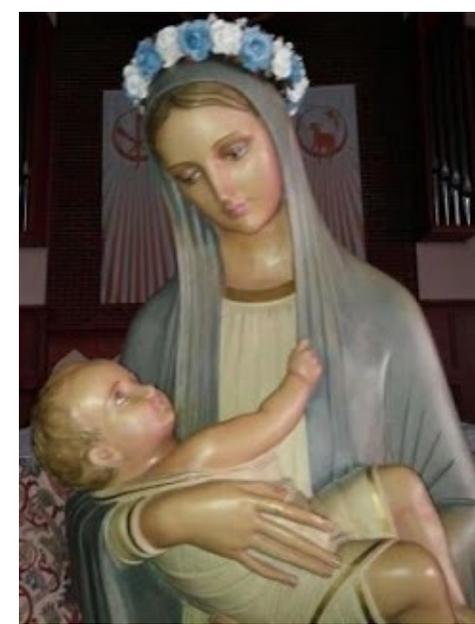
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# Mary My Mother - Be at My Side [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

I am sharing the following post:

## Monday Musings – Mary My Mother – Be at My Side

(Originally published January 4, 2016)



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*“Blessed Mary, my Mother, help me to go to Communion everyday with better dispositions.”*

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

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

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

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

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

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This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2016/04/revisiting-wednesday-monday-musings.html>  
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## Enfleshing God's love for the poor [at walk the way]

Today is a strange confluence of events and feasts which, for me, show God's ongoing love for the poor.

Since March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, fell on Good Friday this year, it is celebrated today.

Yes, the Word became Flesh on a specific day; but He continues being made flesh every day – in those who are marginalized, rejected, denied love and life.



Mosaic in the Filipino style in Nazareth

Today is also the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. I clearly remember the night, staying with my parents. I especially remember the phone call from a former classmate who knew of my concern for civil rights.



Benedict the Black

Today Franciscans celebrate the death in 1589 of a saint I have revered since grade school – St. Benedict

the Moor (*il moro*), as he was known then.

The son of African parents who had been slaves, St. Benedict was raised in Sicily. After being freed from slavery, he joined a group of hermits and was eventually chosen their superior.

When the pope disbanded all the small groups of hermits, Benedict joined the Franciscans, where he served as cook. He was chosen superior, even though he was illiterate. He was later chosen novice master but he asked to be allowed to return to the kitchen.

His simplicity, his willingness to do whatever for the glory of God, reminds me of this quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.:

“Whatever is your life’s work, do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better. If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music; sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, “Here lived a great street sweeper, who swept his job well.”

Today is also the feast of St. Isidore of Seville, an encyclopedic bishop and teacher, who died in 636. He once wrote these words that reflect God’s love for the poor and mistrust of riches:

“The greater our love for the things we possess, the greater our pain when we lose them.

“Greed is insatiable. The person who is afflicted with it always needs something else; the more he has, the more he wants.

“The powerful are nearly all so inflamed with a mad lust for possessions that they stay well clear of the poor. Small wonder that when they come to die that are condemned to the flames of hell, since they did nothing to put out the flames of greed during their lifetime.”

Strong words that challenge all of us.

The challenge is how to be poor like Jesus, giving ourselves for others; how to be drum majors for justice like Martin Luther King; how to be humble servants like St. Benedict the Black; and how to use our gifts for the poor.



# Image at St. Francis of Assisi Church, 31st Street, NYC

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This contribution is available at <http://walktheway.wordpress.com/2016/04/04/enfleshing-gods-love-for-the-poor/>  
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# The Foolishness of "That's Just YOUR Opinion" [at If I Might Interject]

I find myself shaking my head in disbelief when I come across people who write off Catholic teaching with some variant of “that’s just your opinion.” I shake my head because rationally that means we can write off their views of right and wrong on the same grounds. If one rejects a Christian’s arguments on these grounds, one can reject the arguments of an atheist on the same grounds. Under those assumptions, we can’t find truth about anything and we can only use legal or physical force to compel anyone to accept something. It’s ironic that people who claim to champion reason and enlightenment should promote a throwback to “Do what I say or I will bash you with my club!”

It’s not surprising that people believe this tripe. I recall a teacher in High School once give us a couplet: “*Opinions are never right or wrong. Opinions are only weak or strong.*” The couplet confuses “opinion” with “preference” or “feeling,” leading to people thinking that a religious view on abortion is no different than a preference for a flavor of ice cream. Many dictionaries give that interpretation to opinion as well. But that is only one of the meanings.

An opinion on matters of right and wrong, as Merriam-Webster describes it, “*implies a conclusion thought out yet open to dispute.*” This means that the value of the opinion depends on how it matches reality. A person may dispute what another says about right and wrong, but the value of the dispute *also* depends on how it fits reality. This means when people disagree on moral obligation, we have an obligation to investigate what is right, not simply dismissing what we dislike.

The problem is, the modern rejection of Christian morality is not based on truth or facts. Opponents distort Christian teaching and opponents accuse us of bad will (bigotry, etc.). Since opponents misrepresent our teachings and motives, they do not refute us. Nor do they prove we hate people belonging to certain groups popular with political and cultural elites. What they do is *slander* us, whether they do so out of ignorance or out of hostility.

To avoid slander or misrepresentation, people must investigate claims to see if a claim is true. If it is not true, we must stop repeating it. If it is true, we must act in accord with it. For example, when a culture learns that human beings are equal regardless of ethnicity, it can no longer treat some ethnicities as less than human. That means we must abandon slavery, segregation and racial hatred.

Those are obvious examples. Few people support those evils any longer. But people forget that today’s elites defend today’s evils in the same way that elites in past centuries defended slavery and segregation. For example, abortion denies the humanity of a fetus in the same way that slavery denied the humanity of a certain ethnicity. On the other hand, people assume moral objections against behaviors are the same thing as racism in the past. For example, some people see the Church opposing “same sex marriage” as the modern version of racism and segregation. But the Church does not see people with same sex attraction as less than human, nor [justify mistreatment](#) (legal, physical or in other ways) against them.

What the Church *does* do is deny that *de facto* unions are the same thing as marriage, so we should not treat them like marriage. In making this denial, the Church offers definitions about the purpose of marriage and family. A person might disagree with how the Church defines these things, but one has to show that the

Church speaks falsely in order to refute her. But proving that is not done by shouting words like “homophobe” or “bigot” (the common response).

Reason demands we examine the truth of claims and not shout down things we dislike hearing. If Catholics oppose abortion on the grounds that the unborn child is a human person, then accusing Catholics of being “anti-woman” is speaking falsely. If Catholics oppose “same sex marriage” on the grounds that marriage between one man and one woman open to the possibility of raising children is the basis of the family, it is wrong to use epithets like “homophobe” and “hateful.”

Before anyone asks, yes, this means Christians must also use reason and examine truth, not shouting down opponents. Yes, some Christians do make the rest look bad by rashly judging motives and misrepresenting arguments. That is not how God calls us to behave. We must refute falsehood with truth, not with the tactics of those who hate us. An educated Catholic, faithful to the teachings of his Church will deplore the tactics of the Westboro Baptist Church [as being unjust](#). If a Catholic should embrace those tactics, he does wrong.

But because the Church does oblige us to behave rightly, blaming the Church for those who behave wrongly is unjust. There is a difference between Catholics behaving hypocritically by ignoring Church teaching and Catholics behaving badly *because* they follow Church teaching. Assessing where blame lies calls for us to discover the truth in a situation, not merely assuming an unpopular opinion *caused* bad behavior.

But, doing that will force people to recognize that their accusations against the Church are false. That’s why people will continue to treat Catholic teaching as odious opinions instead of seeking the truth about us.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2016/04/seeking-truth-foolishness-of-just-your.html>  
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# A Spiritual Retreat



I went to my first religious retreat. Silent. Even our meals were taken in silence. There was a lot of praying. I didn't think I could hear Mass, pray the rosary, the stations, adore the Lord and meditate for this many hours every day for three days but the time flew. I was grateful for the 5-hr drive so that we could transition to our normal lives.

The Carmelite retreat center was beautiful. There were paintings to lift our minds to God, even in the bathrooms. I copied a couple of sayings:



Count your blessings. (I have a pillow that says this too and Salina Yoon wrote a [beautiful PB](#) J). This little saying should be tattooed upon our hearts.

Seven days without prayer makes one weak.

What you are is God's gift to you. What you become is your gift to God. ~ *Hans Urs van Balthasar*.

I loved this opening prayer before each meditation.

*My Lord and my God, I firmly believe You are here, that You see me, You hear me. I adore You with profound reverence. I beg pardon for my sins and the grace to spend the time in prayer fruitfully. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father, my Lord, and my Guardian Angel, intercede for me. Amen.*

**Meditation on the [Samaritan woman](#) in John's Gospel:**

We are like her. What is our encounter with Jesus like? He longs for a deeper relationship. And when we allow this, we are transformed. The Samaritan woman drops her water pot and announces to everybody that Jesus is the Messiah. It's important to note that Jesus chooses imperfect people to spread His Word. Think about Mary of Magdala.

Another point is that God puts specific people in our lives, not just random people. We will have the greatest influence on the people in our immediate circle – our children, friends, parents. They are all here in this time and place by design. So be salt and light to them!

### **On Examination of Conscience and Mercy:**

We belong to God. He made us. He knows us. So have no fear and anxiety when we go to make our confession.

On the cross, Jesus is not focused on His humiliation but how we are hurting the Father. “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!*” He cries.

And so, we too need to forgive those who’ve wronged us. And be quick to ask for pardon as soon as we realize we’ve done a wrong. “Don’t say, ‘he made me do it!’”

Funny story: A nun hauls in a boy because he bit another’s finger. “Did you bite his finger?” she asks. “Yes, sister,” says the boy. The nun is pleased with the boy’s forthrightness. “Why did you bite the finger?” The boy replies, “He put it in my mouth.”

### **Fri Mass – Homily**

Feeding of the five thousand. It’s an impossible problem, but Jesus tells us what to do (sit down and distribute the food) and He provides the rest. He far exceeds our expectations. We must trust in Jesus.

And who is this Jesus? He is Son of the Living God! In Acts 5:34-42 a Pharisee observes what has happened to previous so-called prophets. He then advises the Sanhedrin, "have nothing to do with these men (the Apostles), and let them go. For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God."

Wow!

That's enough to chew on for now :) More meditations to come later.

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This contribution is available at <http://vijayabodach.blogspot.com/2016/04/a-spiritual-retreat.html>  
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## Amoris Laetitia conclusions [at Convert Journal]



It has now been 11 days since Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* ("The Joy of Love") was released to the public. It is the Holy Father's reflections and conclusions on the Synod of Bishops meetings on the family. Apostolic Exhortations in the hierarchy of document authority are below Papal Bulls, Apostolic Constitutions, Motu Proprios, and Encyclicals. They are not legislative documents nor do they contain dogmatic definitions or changes to discipline. *Amoris Laetitia* is unusually large, weighing in at over 250 pages.

Pope Francis has long been rightly concerned with Catholics who feel estranged from the Church. He knows, due to secular propaganda and poor catechesis, that fallen-away Catholics feel rejected and do not participate in the life of the Church. These include those in same sex relationships, those struggling with gender identity and – the largest group – those who are married but living in an attempted "remarriage" outside of the Church.

*Amoris Laetitia* in many ways is a beautiful presentation, and even defense, of the teaching of the Church. It is also an invitation to those who have separated themselves to return and join all of us in responding to the universal call to holiness. Additionally, it is a document for the faithful intended to strengthen marriages and families.

Much of *Amoris Laetitia* is very good. It could have been in the same league of *Humanae Vitae*, but it sadly falls short due to critically muddled messages. A small part of it (particularly in chapter 8 and footnote 351) addressing pastoral care are ambiguous and problematic to the point of overshadowing the rest of the document. The text in question leaves open, for those inclined to interpret it in a certain way (debatably including Pope Francis), "pastoral practices" which are contrary to the timeless teaching of the Church everywhere and in every place, the direct words of Christ Jesus and the explicit warnings of St. Paul on receiving ("taking" is a more appropriate word in this instance) communion unworthily.

That scandal has already begun. Scandal, BTW, means evil actions which occasion others to sin. "Liberal" minded bishops (particularly in Germany, but other places too such as Chicago) have already declared these ambiguous words to be a game changer. For their part in the scandal, the biased liberal media was quick to affirm the same. To wit:



While *Amoris Laetitia* officially changes nothing, certain priests and bishops through their own interpretations of the ambiguity, are quite likely to offer a path to receiving communion for the "divorced and remarried." To be clear, these are people who are already married to others and either have not sought a declaration of nullity or whose previous marriages were found to be valid but are unwilling to live in continence (i.e. as "brother and sister") with their new partners. This acceptance over true repentance may be devastating to their eternal souls. The scandal will be harmful not only to the partners, but their children, their parish and the entire Body of Christ.

*Amoris Laetitia*, for all of its true and beautiful text, fails to clearly identify such immoral unions as

sinful. Quotes from prior documents seem to selectively exclude that too. Instead, the immoral unions are normalized as simply “irregular.” Yes, they are indeed irregular because of their mortally sinful nature. Calling them irregular is misleading.

Likewise, the clear teaching of Christ on marriage, while strongly affirmed, is referred to as the “ideal.” It is ideal only in that any lesser sexual union is mortally sinful. Then again, Jesus’ teaching is described as “proposed” which it is, in the sense of free will to accept or reject Christ.

It is understandable for a pastor to (initially perhaps) use gentle words like irregular, ideal and proposed to open a dialog with those who have strayed. When they appear in an official teaching document and facilitate an interpretation implying acceptance of sin, which some appear determined to do, then they lead to scandal.

Lastly, *Amoris Laetitia* gives prominence to the “internal forum” and the person’s conscience. A *well-formed* conscience (i.e. in concert with God’s will) is valid and ancient Church teaching, but internal forum is somewhat technical and readily abused by misunderstanding. Without giving clear direction, the text in *Amoris Laetitia* can easily lead to the heresy of relativism. Already, America Magazine has declared simply and without qualification “the role of [sic] conscience is paramount in moral decision making” as a key takeaway from the document. With all due respect, that is absurd.

FWIW, my predictions are:

- *Amoris Laetitia* will fail in its goals, but will be seriously divisive for the Church.
- Those who are “divorced and remarried” will increasingly receive communion (and thereby, as [St. Paul warned](#), “eats and drinks judgment on himself”) — with and without pastoral guidance.
- In areas where bishops tolerate (or worse, promote) this abuse, actual applications for annulments will decline in preference to this express approach.
- Young people contemplating marriage, will have ever more reason to doubt the Church’s teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. What they see in actions will speak much louder to them than the words to the contrary.
- Likewise, struggling marriages will be weakened as a new acceptance for “remarriage” may appear to be normalized.
- A future “pope of clarity” will have to unambiguously correct this and other official ambiguities which have appeared in recent years.

*Amoris Laetitia* has much to recommend it, particularly for those who will read it with faithful eyes. Many who have been closely following the shennigans surrounding the Synod on the Family have feared it would be worse. For that at least, they are relieved.

EWTN’s highly respected news program *The World Over* with host Raymond Arroyo had excellent coverage of the issues raised by *Amoris Laetitia* last Thursday evening:

I strongly recommend further reading:

Fr. Zuhlsdorf has insightful posts on the topic too:



## Mutual submission of spouses: coherent, Pauline, true? [at LMS Chairman]



Among other issues raised by Pope Francis' Exhortation

*Amoris laetitia*

is the question of family life and the complementarity of the sexes. As I have pointed out

[on this blog](#)

, Pope Francis seems to have a relatively robust notion of the specialisation of gender roles, a subject Pope St John Paul II was less willing to broach. I have noted

[on this blog](#)

the strange position of the

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

, which brings up complementarity when discussing homosexual relationships. These lack 'genuine complementarity', the Catechism tells us, and therefore lack something essential to marriage. Something so essential, in fact, that

*its own discussion of marriage*

doesn't even mention it. D'oh.

Pope Francis nevertheless pays lip-service to feminism, and says that 'patriarchy', whatever he means by that, is wrong. More substantially, in section 154 he repeats in summary form the argument made by Pope St John Paul II in his 1988 Apostolic Letter

[Mulieres dignitatem](#)

24, that St Paul in Ephesians wants each spouse to submit to the other (Pope Francis refers in fact to a 'Catechesis' John Paul II gave in 1982, but the argument is the same). This is something, on the face of it, which is problematic in

*Amoris laetitia*,

not because it contradicts Pope St John Paul II, but because it agrees with him.

Pope St John Paul II says very little about what 'mutual submission' actually means. There may be a 'pious reading' which would allow us to say that it says nothing in tension with previous treatments, but I want to explore the theory as standardly elaborated and understood by neo-conservative Catholic writers, of whom there are a great many. The problems with their notion of 'mutual submission' can be divided into three categories. Does it make sense? Is it the teaching of St Paul? And, Is it the teaching of the Church?

Mutual submission is a theological riposte to traditional views of male headship of the family. There are good, bad, and indifferent versions of such views, but what they have in common is that according to them the husband has some form of authority over the wife, which the wife does not have over him. There is an asymmetry in the relationship, and the family has a hierarchical structure. Instead of clarifying the nature, the limits, the purpose, or the motivation of this authority, or investigating the corresponding expectations and rights of the wife

*vis a vis*

the husband, the 'mutual submission' approach to this question is to deny the asymmetry. The most natural way to do this would be simply to say that there is no submission of the wife to the husband: there is no relationship of power or authority, and no hierarchy, within marriage. This would be the view, I suppose, of most secular people. Instead, the 'mutual submission' suggestion is that there is a relationship of power or authority, but that it goes both ways. The wife submits to the husband, and the husband submits to the wife.

At any rate, this is the language which is used, on the basis of Ephesians 1:21, where St Paul writes '

And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ

', which is used by the partisans of this view as an interpretive key to understand the numerous passages in the New Testament which urge wives to submit to their husbands. Yes!, people say, wives

*should*

submit to their husbands, but look at Eph 1:21: husbands should submit to their wives too!

It may be objected, however, that the attempt to establish a position on authority within the family which is different from the secular view that there is

*no*

authority in the family, at any rate between husband and wife, fails, because it is impossible to give coherent substance to such a position. What does it mean to submit to the authority of a person who,

*in exactly the same way,*

is submitted to your own authority? I might have authority over you as the Secretary of a club you have joined, and you may have authority over me as a traffic warden over the driver of a car, but we can't have authority over each other

*of exactly the same kind.*

It just doesn't make sense. Or rather: the only sense which can be made is that the clashing authorities cancel each other out.

The proponents of this view might reply that it means that the two people locked in this Escher-like paradox of mutual subordination should always be ready to give way to the other's desires, as opposed to working out their differences by some form of bargaining. The two little love-birds, trapped forever in the closing pages of a sentimental novel, should, on this view, be constantly saying to each other 'no, dearest, we must do what

*you*

want!' Whenever they have divergent desires or opinions, which will be a lot of the time if they are rational, if they are to come to any decisions at all, they must do so in favour of whichever has best mastered the art of emotional manipulation: of conveying a desire without appearing to insist upon it. If that's not what the proponents of this view have in mind, then what it really comes down to is saying that the bargaining of the secular model should be tempered by charity and self-restraint, which may be an improvement upon secular practice but does not restore to it any kind of

*legitimate authority.*

If Scripture tells us that there is legitimate authority within marriage, then, on this view, Scripture is wrong.

So the next question is,

*does*

Scripture, and specifically St Paul in Ephesians, tell us that there is legitimate authority within marriage, of one spouse over the other? The answer of course is that this message is conveyed emphatically over and over again, not only in Ephesians, but in Colossians, 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, and the Letter to Titus: I've listed the passages

[here](#)

. Ephesians 1:21 is the only apparent qualification to the principle that husbands have authority over wives and wives should be subordinate to husbands, and not the other way round. So what does Eph 1:21 mean?

A comment on a recent post this blog suggested that it is a general remark to the effect that some Christians be subject to other Christians, not only within marriage but in the household (children to parents and slaves to masters) and in society (everyone else to the Emperor). Given the structure of the

letter, this suggestion makes sense.

An alternative view, which is somewhat closer to the exegesis of

*Mulieres dignitatem*,

and has the support of some Fathers of the Church, is that it is not

*legal*

submission which is at issue here, but the kind of submission made by Christ when he washed the disciples' feet. Christ did not give up his authority in this action, but illustrated the spirit which should animate it, a spirit of service. This service is proper to all Christians, who should seek to serve all, whether they have legal authority or not. So, far from being incompatible with authority, such service may be performed through the

*exercise*

of authority. So St Jerome tells us, of this verse:

Let bishops hear this, let priests hear, let every rank of learning get this clear: In the church, leaders are servants. Let them imitate the apostle...The difference between secular rulers and Christian leaders is that the former love to boss their subordinates whereas the latter serve them. We are that much greater if we are considered least of all." (Migne PL 26:530A, C 653-654).

(I owe this quotation to a short book on this subject by Robert Sungenis, *Does St. Paul Teach Mutual Submission of Spouses?*, which can be bought [here](#) and is online [here](#). He puts a number of handy quotations together, particularly from the Fathers.)

Both interpretations make sense, and it isn't necessary to decide between them here, since both messages are implicit and explicit in Scripture in other passages. It is clearly the teaching of St Paul that Christians should submit to legitimate authority, and it is clearly also his teaching that leaders should exercise authority in the interests of the community they are leading, and not for their own benefit alone. It is on the basis of the second reading, perhaps, that a 'pious reading' of *Mulieres dignitatem* could be constructed, to the effect that all St John Paul II really meant (when read *in light of the tradition*) is that, like all Christian rulers, husbands should use their authority in service to the community they govern. In any case, what is not the teaching of St Paul is the idea that wives in some sense have an authority over their husbands, such as rivals or cancels out the authority of the husband over the wife.

The final question is of the teaching of the Church. Naturally the Church does not have the authority to overturn Scripture, and we find the teaching of Scripture accepted very clearly, and applied to modern conditions, in the Papal Magisterium.

The *locus classicus* on this subject is Pope Pius XI's 1930 Encyclical [Casti conubii](#), but Leo XIII (in his 1890 [Encyclical Arcanum](#)) wrote in the same vein on the subject, as did the darling of the liberals, Pope John XXIII, in his 1959 Encyclical [Ad Petri Cathedram](#), which was written after Vatican II had been summoned. Bl. John XXIII wrote:

53. Within the family, the father stands in God's place. He must lead and guide the rest by his authority and the example of his good life.

54. The mother, on the other hand, should form her children firmly and graciously by the mildness of her manner and by her virtue.

55. Together the parents should carefully rear their children, God's most precious gift, to an upright and

religious life.

56. Children must honour, obey, and love their parents. They must give their parents not only solace but also concrete assistance if it is needed.

This nicely illustrates the point I have made

[on this blog before](#)

, that the doctrine of male headship does not deprive the wife of authority: her authority over the household, rather, derives from the authority of the husband, even when, as may commonly be the case in practice, it is has more frequent practical application.

**What can be said about the rejection of the authority of the husband over the wife in *Mulieres dignitatem* and *Amoris laetitia*?**

I have noted the direction a 'pious reading' might come from, but I do not want to say that the neo-conservative reading of

*Mulieres dignitatem*

is unreasonable in itself: it is, for example, consistent with what St John Paul II said in various sermons and speeches. What

is

unreasonable, for a Catholic, is the acceptance of a teaching at variance with the teaching of the whole Church. My question for the neo-cons at this point is simply this: can you explain why it is more scandalous, more disloyal to the Papacy, or in any way more theologically problematic, to question the teaching of an Apostolic Letter and an Apostolic Exhortation, one by a canonised Pope, rather than of three Encyclicals, one by a beatified Pope?

Encyclicals carry more magisterial authority, but this is far less important than the fact that Leo XIII, Pius XI and Bl. John XXIII are reiterating the constant teaching of the Church, the consensus of the Fathers, and the teaching of Scripture, this last both according to its most obvious meaning (a meaning to which feminists ferociously object), and its meaning according to the interpretation given by the tradition of the Church.

The stability of the Ordinary Magisterium on this can be illustrated from the liturgy, itself a 'theological source'. The traditional Nuptial Mass has as its Epistle

[Ephesians, 5:22-33](#)

, missing out 5:21 on 'mutual submission'. Why does it do that? Well, 5:21 has traditionally been seen as the conclusion of the previous section of the letter, a point Robert Sungenis illustrates by reference to St John Chrysostom's

*Homilies*

, so it is logical to start the lection with v.22. Accordingly, and without any qualification in terms of

'mutual submission', the lection sets out the teaching of headship as a matter of

*authority*

of husband over wife being complemented, not with more authority of the wife over the husband, but by the husband's obligation of

*love and self-sacrifice*

to his wife. It begins:

Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He is the saviour of his body.

Tomorrow I'm going to address another aspect of the neo-conservative reading of Scripture, Genesis 3:16.

I have addressed the question of whether Patriarchy, as understood in Catholic teaching, is oppressive,

[here](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2016/04/mutual-submission-of-spouses-coherent.html>  
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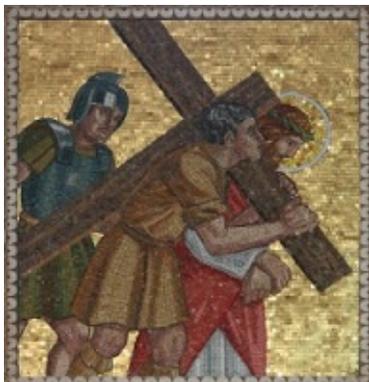
## Brother, let me be your servant [at On the Road to Damascus]

Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers.  
- Jesse Ventura



Every year droves of people leave organized religion behind. They do this because organized religion has lost its relevance in their lives. Even the great gubernator Jesse, The Body, Ventura referred to organized religion as a crutch for the weak minded. Who can blame them for feeling this way? Whose fault is it that church has lost relevance in so many lives? Can we blame the devil? How about the culture? No, the blame falls squarely on our shoulders.

Each and every one of us has been given a cross that we must carry in this life. For some of us, that cross is more than we can bear. God will always provide. Sometimes he provides exactly what is needed. Sometimes he provides more than what is needed. When he provides you with more than what you need he expects that you will provide the extra to someone else in need. He is providing you to that person. Too many of us keep the extra for ourselves or fail to recognize the abundance that we have been blessed with. We let others go without so we can have more.



Organized religion is not a crutch that weak minded people lean on for help. Jesus' own example shows us what we are to do. Jesus could not physically bear the weight of his cross on the way to his crucifixion. Simon of Cyrene was pulled from the crowd and made to help Jesus carry

his cross. That is what Jesus has done for us. He has provided us with a church to help bear the weight of the crosses in our own lives. We are to be Simon to each other.



*The thing the Church needs the most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness and proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle.*



Pope Francis has referred to the Church as a field hospital after battle. We must love the wounded and heal their wounds. As the Pope so eloquently states, “It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds.”

People are leaving the Church in droves every year because they are tired of carrying their crosses alone. They are tired of hurting or being judged by those who are only supposed to love them. Whether they know it or not they go in search of Simon. They go in search of a cross bearer. Many times what they encounter instead is Satan disguised as Simon. He convinces them to drop their cross and embrace the self. God doesn't want you to suffer under the weight of that wood. He made you this way so it is good. Embrace who you are and what you want. We all know where that road ends.

If we want to make church relevant in people's lives again we have to start by becoming cross bearers. We have to be Simon. We have to minister to the injured and wounded. We have to see the person first and treat him or her with the dignity God gave them. We have to live beauty, joy, and love. Just as a light draws in the moth so too does a joy filled church draw in the sinner.

Will you let me be your servant  
Let me be as Christ to you  
Pray that I might have the grace  
To let you be my servant too

We are pilgrims on the journey  
We are brothers on the road  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load

I will hold the Christ light for you  
In the night time of your fear

I will hold my hand out to you

Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping  
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you  
I will share your joy and sorrow

Till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven  
We shall find such harmony  
Born to all we've known together  
Of Christ's love and agony

Will you let me be your servant? Will you be my servant too?

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This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2016/04/brother-let-me-be-your-servant.html>  
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# Faith or Hell



About five years ago, God asked something dramatic of me. I had finally finished my book (*Slavery and Sin*). The final edits and the index were off to the publisher and I'd filed my notes away in deep storage. My slate was clean and I was ready to start a brand new book project. But every time I started to plan and to write, I felt an unexpected, enormous, overwhelming "NO!"

I had a spiritual director at the time, and the best way I found to describe the feeling to her was that the act of starting another academic book project felt like contemplating an act of adultery. What had once been my work suddenly felt like sin. God doesn't tend to speak to me in sentences, but if I had to put what I heard in my heart from Him at that time into sentence form it would be something like, "If you do this, you will do so purely out of your own will, without Me. I am elsewhere for you. Follow Me. Now."

So I stopped trying to write, and I asked God where I was supposed to go. I got two answers, clear as could be. One was that I would find my own deepest purpose and my salvation in raising my children. This offended me a little, but I got over it. The other was that when I did write again, and that would not be right away, I was to write in a way that served His Church.

I was an assistant professor, on the tenure track, with tenure in sight. Quitting felt like a radical thing to do, but I also felt an enormous sense of divine consolation. And then, as if I needed a nudge or a sign, the kids' babysitter up and resigned, completely out of the blue. So I quit. That summer with the kids was blissful. I knew that I was where I should be and I was grateful to be there.

I remember thinking that I finally understood what scripture means by the "pearl of great price." My worth was no longer in what I accomplished, in being "Dr. Oshatz," or in what others thought of me. I belonged to God and I was His delighted, beloved daughter. For the first time in my life, I put my entire worth in the love of Christ. I wanted and needed nothing else than to live in that love all of my days.

And then, because this is how life goes, I was tempted. Or, rather, I subjected myself to temptation. Like Lot's wife, I looked back. What would be my dream job just a few months before appeared, the job I had been waiting for and praying for years, ever since I was writing my dissertation. I reasoned that I was highly unlikely to get the job (even my dissertation advisor said I didn't have a chance), so the best way to avoid regret would be to apply. That way, the decision wouldn't be mine. Nice try, but God wasn't going to let me off that easy. I got the job.

At the very moment that I got that offer, every bit of consolation left me. I couldn't find God, couldn't feel His Presence, and couldn't understand what the heck all of that blessedness and calling had been about. This was my dream job, a prestigious position in a lovely town where my husband could work, just down

the road from my aging mother and my sisters and my family land—what kind of idiot would I have to be not to take it? Not taking it would mean letting down my mother, my sisters, and my mentors. I'd thought that my radical yes was quitting my other job, but it wasn't. I'd thought I'd already made my leap of faith and was safe in God's country, hidden away from doubt and fear, but I'd been wrong. Now I was looking at a real leap of faith. I couldn't see or feel the other side, and this jump made no sense to anyone around me. My spiritual director had just moved to Indiana.

I scoured my Bible for proof that God wouldn't abandon me after calling me to do something. I hung on every word of my kids' Veggie Tales videos about Moses, Joshua, and Gideon. I discovered that God has a record of testing faith by giving people who want to follow Him laughably ridiculous instructions. I was in good company.

I turned down the job. I made a series of agonizing phone calls, disappointing a long list of people whose respect and love I craved.

I'd like to say that at that moment, the consolation returned, God caught me in His arms, and I entered into His peace and joy, but faith doesn't work like that. (And no number of Christians claiming that they have lived in God's presence ever since that one single moment in time when they said yes to Jesus will ever convince me otherwise.)

Blessings did follow, including my fabulous, brilliant third child, but perfect peace did not. When I don't surrender to God on a daily basis, I am prone to horrid, depressing floods of regret.

Here's what I've learned: even once you sell everything you own to buy the pearl of great price, you still have to wake up every day and decide to love that pearl. You cannot take it or your own apprehension of its worth for granted. If a few days or weeks go by and you haven't wondered at its beauty and sat in its presence, your decision and resulting life stop making sense and you falter. You panic, reaching out for the false jewel of worldly glory. But if you do spend that time, nothing can possibly outshine the glory of that pearl! You are greatly beloved by God. His peace guards your heart and mind.

My floods of regret used to make me feel angry at God. I used to doubt. But now I think that the way things are for me is actually a beautiful gift. God has brought me to a place where to have joy and hope, I have to walk by faith. As long as I live in the love of Jesus, my days are a foretaste of heaven, but the moment I forget and return to living for my own glory, doubt and regret are there waiting to consume me. These days, there is no middle ground for me, no option of muddling through on my own merits. It's faith or hell. But then, of course it is! What other decision is there? That's the choice we all face, and it's not just an ultimate choice, it's a daily one. How amazing it is that we manage to forget that, and how loving God is to remind us.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.mollyoshatz.com/faith-or-hell/>  
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## Treasure [at Fr. Ben's Biblical Blog]

I have preached about stewardship—time, talent and treasure

- I like what St. Luke wrote in Acts: “The apostles and elders, in agreement with the whole church...”
- We must help our whole Church
  - o Our churches, our school, our Diocese, the poor and the sick

Next weekend I will have a bulletin article about this

Koochiching is in a difficult time

- Less families, less kids, less jobs, tough economy
- This weekend I want to speak about treasure

I want to share the treasure I try

- I do not have a wife or children
- I do not pay for my house or my groceries
- I was in college and seminary with many gifts to me (without paid)
  - o And now it is awesome to give that back to people

But I only want to share how me, as a priest, in treasure

- A priest taught us in the seminary (now a Bishop Andrew Cozzens) to have a second check for gifts to others
  - o I put about 5% to this check...could you do that?
  - o About 5% I divides my payment to the Church, School and UCA

§ How are you doing in this?

- One time, a priest was in town for a weekend and I bought dinner
  - o He said, “Why are you paying this dinner? Your Church should.”
  - o I said, “No.” Many people here cannot buy such meals, and nor should our Church

- Have I bought any alcohol from your plate?
- o No
- I must simple my own life because it is difficult up here
- o No cable for your plate (\$1,000) without cable...could you try that?
- o No garbage business...I'll bring them to our Church's garbage dump

Today I would like you to think about two other ideas

- I'm not thinking numbers, but what you can give treasure
- o UCA second collection today
- § We will begin our 2016 in a couple of weeks
- § We have about \$9,000 from 2015...can you do it?
- o Operation Rice Bowl

§ I am having fun keeping this up in my truck

§ Could you do this? Get a roll of pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters from the bank? Or more dollars? When you leave your house? Get in your car?

§ This can help the poor and the sick

Stewardship is time, talent and treasure

- The best we can be to our family is to use what you can give

I'm not talking about the numbers because we can each give some treasure

- The poor Widow at the Temple gave two pennies
- And Jesus said that she gave the most

“The apostles and elders, in agreement with the whole church...”

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This contribution is available at <http://frbensbible.blogspot.com/2016/05/treasure-6th-sunday-of-easter-season.html>  
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## Feast of the Annunciation: 2016 [at A Slice of Smith Life]

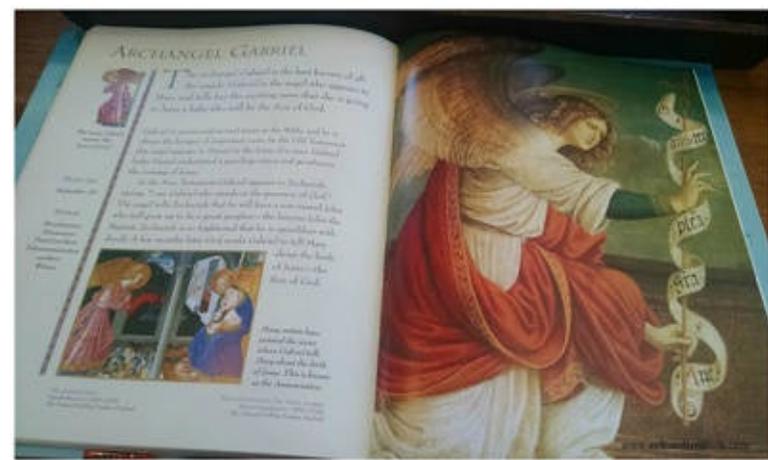
This past Monday, April 4, 2016 the

### [Feast of the Annunciation](#)

was celebrated. The Feast of the Annunciation

[commemorates the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would conceive Jesus, and the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.](#)

(Luke 1: 26-38) Normally this feast day is celebrated each year on the liturgical calendar on March 25 because March 25 is exactly 9 months before December 25 when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.



So why did the Feast of the Annunciation get moved? March 25 this year fell on

### [Good Friday.](#)

Celebrating a feast day like the Feast of the Annunciation is

### [one of the Solemnities](#)

on our liturgical Church calendar and it's a big deal and a time for celebrating and feasting. Good Friday is not a time for feasting, but rather fasting (to put it simply), so the Feast of the Annunciation got moved to the day after

### [Divine Mercy Sunday](#)

this year.

[Did you know this convergence of a big fast day \(Good Friday\) and a big feast day \(Feast of the Annunciation\) won't happen for another 141 years?!?!?](#) *"From the year 1900 until this year, the Annunciation and Good Friday have converged only five times, 1910, 1921, 1932, 2005 and will happen again this year. After this year, however, these two holy days will not converge again for another 141 years. This is the longest stretch of time where those two holy days will not converge*

*since at least as far back as the year 1700. While the stretch of time may not be of any consequence, it is interesting to think about, especially considering these two feasts will not coincide again within our lifetimes..." [Read More In 2011](#)*

, we celebrated the Feast of the Annunciation with

[coloring pages](#). [In 2014](#)

, we did this

[fun coloring activity](#)

and

[last year in 2015](#)

we made

[megaphones to "announce" the Angelus prayer](#)

and ate waffles and fruit for dinner! This is how we celebrated this year...



We had a busy evening of soccer practices, so we celebrated with a special themed lunch. I put on our plastic blue tablecloth and then a plastic "lace" tablecloth to make it "fancy". In the center of the table I lit a white candle and hid a Baby Jesus in a little space that I carved out of the candle. I displayed

[Mary: The Mother of Jesus by Tomie DePaola](#)

behind the candle that gave information on the Annunciation. The artwork on the right side of the Annunciation was painted by my oldest daughter several years ago. On the left side of the table is

[the stack of "megaphones"](#)

I created last year to "announce" the

[Angelus prayer](#)

. We prayed the Angelus with our megaphones. However, since April 4 this year was technically in the

Easter season, we should have prayed the

[Regina Caeli](#)

vs. the Angelus. We ate waffles, fruit homemade whipped cream, and bacon for lunch because

[there is an interesting connection between waffles and the Annunciation](#)

. Yum!





The Catholic faith reminds me of a bottomless treasure chest...the more I learn and love about the faith, the more I realize how much I don't know! Blogging allows me to share about our faith's rich history and traditions, family and homeschooling and I hope to inspire others through my little corner of the blogosphere.

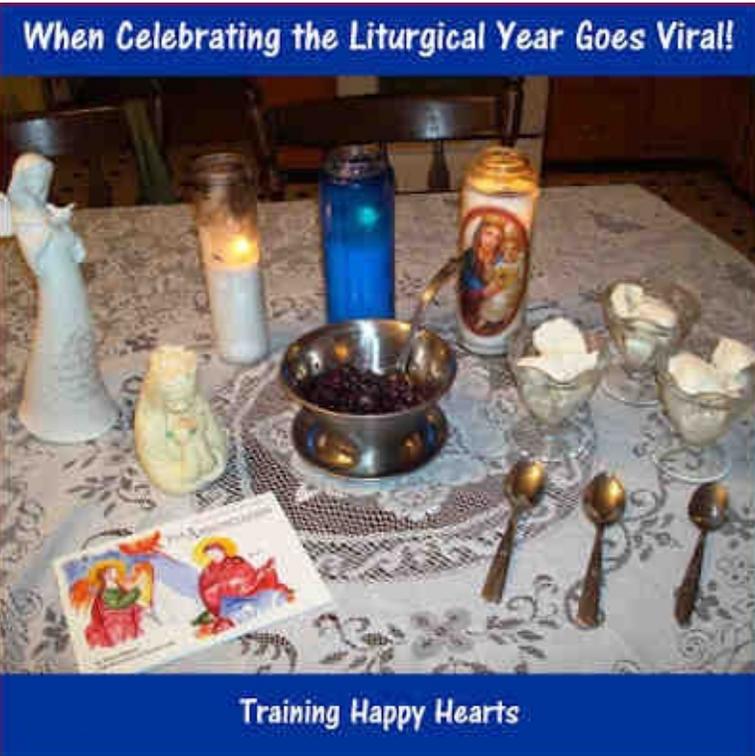


Photo Source:  
[Training Happy Hearts](#)

And I'll conclude this post all about the Annunciation with this beautiful song and images about the Angel Gabriel visiting Mary.

This post is linked at #48 at

[New Evangelists Monthly-May 2016, Issue #41](#)



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This contribution is available at <http://www.asliceofsmithlife.com/2016/04/feast-of-annunciation-2016.html>  
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# To Solve the Vocations Crisis {Serviam} [at Blossoming Joy]

## FORMATION

In the Fall, my firstborn will leave home to enter college seminary and begin the next stage of his discernment process. As many times as people say "Oh! You are going to be a priest!" he must answer...

*No... I am going to study and grow so that I may know if God is truly calling me to be a priest.*

He knows that he has a long way to go in that discernment process and it is with great joy that he has found a seminary at which he believes his mind, body, and soul will be well-formed and oriented more fully toward the heart of Jesus Christ. Whether he is ultimately called to be ordained or to enter the married or single life, his healthy formation as a man will be paramount. If it is truly successful, regardless of what his particular vocation may be, he will be prepared to raise the cry of the Christian soldier...

## SERVIAM! {I will serve}

In the Gospel of Matthew {20:26}, the apostles were disputing about their place in the Kingdom of God. Jesus replied:

"... You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. **26 It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant,** **27** and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; **28** even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

My son's journey is a new beginning in some ways. In other ways, it is only a continuation of what it means to be formed as a man. To be healthy in mind, body, and soul. To strive in love. To seek the heart of Christ. To serve.

## OBSTACLES

One of the practical realities of the next step is, of course, the question of finances. As he leaves home, his eighth sibling will only just have been born! The family continues to stretch and to grow and the bills do pile up. After the generosity of the diocese and others and digging deep at home, needs still remain. But there is grace, there is faith, there is the working hard, and there is the entrustment of the unknown to the generosity of the people of God.

My son has earned academics scholarships at other institutions but has passed them up in order to follow where he thinks God is leading. If it is God's holy will, it will be provided for. That's all we've got. And we believe it will be sufficient.



# Concerning Spiritual Gifts [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

## *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*



Opened Your Gifts Yet?

***“Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed ...”***  
(1 Cor 12: 1-3)

...  
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In order for us, as believers, to cooperate with God’s Grace it is important to be informed about the “Spiritual Gifts” because it is through His Gifts that we are conformed into His Image to be channels of His Love.

In order to be properly informed, it must be noted that the Spiritual Gifts mentioned by St. Paul in the letter to the Corinthians cited at the beginning of this post were in reference to the “gifts” that were manifested at “Pentecost” and recorded in the Book of Acts,

***Acts 2: 1 “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”***

### ***The Empowerment Gifts: The Promise of the Father***

These “gifts” which all 120 persons initially received at Pentecost are those which Jesus termed, “ the Promise of the Father”. A Promise that was made to Israel by the Prophet Joel ... (cf., Joel 2:28-31).

This is the “Promise Of the Father” that Jesus referred to just before His Ascension, when He instructed

His disciples as follows:

Acts 1: 4 ***“While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the Promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; “***

The “Promise” manifested itself as spiritual gifts that could be observed and noted by the community and the outside world in which they were embedded. It was the Lord’s purpose at the initiation of the Church to empower “all” its members to fulfill Jesus’ mission for evangelization of the world (ie.,the Great Commission) – a mission that could be accomplished only if each member received a share in the anointing that was on Jesus. That is the reason these gifts are sometimes termed “the Empowerment Gifts”.

Acts 1: ***“8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”***



Jesus Baptized in the Spirit

The Gifts were basically the same spiritual gifts manifested by Jesus during His Ministry and they were the gifts passed on to His Church by Jesus, when, at His Ascension He told the disciples to return to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit whom He will send to empower them to continue to carry out His mission to evangelize the world through them as His empowered representatives.

Here is what Peter told the crowd of 3000 regarding what had just happened at the Pentecost gathering, when they were amazed ay what was happening:

Peter Proclaims and Explains the Gifts

Beginning at Acts 2: 14 ... ***“But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:***

**17 'In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.  
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.  
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'**

This scripture then, refers to the foundational Spiritual Gifts that were manifested to 120 disciples, including the apostles and the initial 3000 converts at the Pentecost celebration described in the Book of Acts.

There are many levels of these gifts, but...  
the foundational nine gifts of the Spirit are listed by Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter Twelve...

**4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
5 and there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord;  
6 and there are varieties of manifestations,  
but it is the same God who empowers all of them in everyone.  
7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.  
8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and  
to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,  
9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the  
working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various  
kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the  
same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.**

Now, in the scripture cited in the preface to this article, Paul was exhorting the Corinthian Christians , who were recent baptized converts from paganism. to be informed about the nature of these gifts of the Spirit, in order that the community could grow and function appropriately to fulfill God's purposes for them. It is for this same reason, we also need to be properly informed of these Spiritual Gifts today. That is why in our study of Scripture we should put appropriate emphasis on St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians as well as those to the Romans, Colossians, and Ephesians.

### ***How The Sanctifying Gifts Relate to the Empowerment Gifts***

Besides these foundational "Empowering Gifts" it must be emphasized that there are also another set of Spiritual Gifts that are termed, the "Sanctifying Gifts of the Spirit". These gifts are the spiritual character and gifts of the Messiah as indicated by the verses in Isaiah 11...

- 1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.**
- 2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.**
- 3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.**
- 5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.**

The gifts mentioned in this scripture are sometimes termed, the “Sanctifying Gifts”, because they are qualities of character and virtue to which we are called to attain as the Holy Spirit sets us apart to be conformed to the Image of Christ, that is to sanctify us as we progress in our spiritual life in this world.

As you might well imagine, these also are NOT our gifts but, rather the graces and spiritual character of Christ Himself. These are the character traits that characterize our progress in being conformed to His image by the Holy Spirit. These set of graces is in accord to the statement made by John the Baptist ,, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30). That is, in order for “me” to grow spiritually into His image, the “I” in me must decrease through my “dying to self” so that His Inner Virtues and Character Traits may gradually grow and be manifested in me and through me.

Although the Sanctifying Gifts are not explicitly called out in the New Testament as “gifts”, they are alluded to indirectly as challenges we need to attain to in the growth of our inner man. St. Paul does list some the “fruit” of these gifts on our personal character in his epistles, but one citation we remember especially is the one to the Galatians...

**Gal 5:22 “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.”**

While the “Sanctifying Gifts” are clearly indicated by today’s church as being those gifts dealing with the spiritual growth of the individual person in the process of being conformed to the inner Spirit of Christ (cf., Rom 8:29) the “Empowerment Gifts” we described prior to this section are the gifts that are manifested by believers outwardly for the benefit of the community, and are those gifts which were received at Pentecost and termed, “the Promise of the Father”.

St. Thomas Aquinas, in his treatise, “Summa Theologica”, clarifies the distinction between these two categories of Grace, namely, Sanctifying Grace and Actual Grace. The Empowerment Gifts clearly pertaining to the latter. This distinction not only helps us to understand the Spiritual Gifts but also how they are to be manifested in our spiritually active Christian lives.

Another concept that helps us in our understanding is how these Gifts, which are really Christ's Gifts relate to the Image of "Christ in us, the Hope of Glory".

In being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), the first thing that must happen is that, as we proceed in the process, His self increases in us in proportion as we die to "self". This is the process of Sanctification that begins to form our inner self into His Inner Self.

Think of it this way, just as he identified Himself with us and our sins at His baptism, so also we are identified with His Spirit at our conversion and baptism and thus acquire access to His Inner Spiritual Gifts or Sanctifying Gifts to permit us to be conformed into His Image. For if we are NOT "in Christ" none of this applies and we are still in our sins.

Also note that after Jesus accepted His commission at water baptism and identified Himself with us to bear our sins, then the Holy Spirit came upon Him so that He could be anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out His calling. Here is what Jesus testified of that process when He returned to His home town of Nazareth ...



The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me...

***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free, (Luke 4:18)***

Thus in order for us who are baptized to share in His commission (ie., His Empowerment) with us, we must similarly receive our share of His anointing in order to carry out the role or purposes of the Father for us, who respond to His calling. This is why access to the Sacrament of Confirmation (ie., strengthening or empowerment) is provided us after our baptism. The only reason most of us don't receive the Empowerment Gifts allocated to us, being that we are not properly informed about our access to them



## **Related and Pertinent Links**

[\*Has Jesus Arisen In your Heart ? \(Part 2\)\*](#)

[\*Has Jesus Arisen in Your Heart? \(Part 3\)\*](#)

[\*Prayer to Receive the Holy Spirit\*](#)

[\*Cast Your Net on the Other Side!\*](#)

[\*The Promise of the Father \(Part 2\)\*](#)

[\*Jesus, The Source of Living Water and Us!\*](#)

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This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/04/15/\\$-concerning-spiritual-gifts/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/04/15/$-concerning-spiritual-gifts/)  
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## No Matter WHAT - I drink [at Quiet Consecration]

In a couple of weeks I will be, I hope, celebrating 24 years of continuous sobriety. To the person who does not have the disease of alcoholism, or tends to regard all problems that have been addressed using the 12 Steps developed by Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith (with the contributions of organized religion, evangelical movements and other drunks like them) as 'the same', that probably does not seem like that big a deal. Afterall, common sense tells you that if you discover you are not a successful social drinker of alcohol, or that you cannot imbibe in cocaine or marijuana or heroin or cheesecake or watching pornography without getting arrested, spending the rent money, beating your husband or your kids, becoming numb to sex with real people or otherwise negatively impacting society then you should stop drinking alcohol, doing cocaine, smoking marijuana or shooting/smoking/eating heroin or cheesecake and stop watching pornography. It's a no-brainer, right? if it hurts you or others, then stop doing it.

I have written in the past about the disease of alcohol being something that hits us when we are stone cold sober. I won't revisit my thoughts on that subject here. What I am reflecting on today is a phrase I have used and one I hear often around the tables of the 12 Step program I use to stay sober.

Don't drink no matter what.

I understand the sentiment. I have, as I said, used that phrase myself, but I am uneasy with it and I will tell you why.

I am an alcoholic. I

*drink*

no matter what.

Beloved aunt's funeral? I show up on time but hung over and have a drink before the Mass starts to steady my nerves.

My nephew is in ICU after almost losing his life in a car accident? I show up to be supportive of his father - but I have a bottle in my purse and I left the house and drove 80 miles to where they are under the influence.

I have a job interview in three days and it is important that I look fresh and happy and competent? I drink up until 3am of the morning of that interview and get there with dirty shoes and not-quite-combed hair, trying to pull it off as though I am stylishly ragged and too cool for my shoes.

In other words, telling me that something important or wonderful or serious or necessary is happening to me, around me or for me and so I should 'not drink, no matter what' is not the answer. I know when I am not supposed to drink. I understand I am taking my life and the lives of those around me into my unsteady hands when I get behind the wheel of a car but you don't get it - I am not a bad person.

I am an alcoholic and I drink no matter WHAT.

Okay so what should I be saying instead? What wisdom should I be imparting to a newcomer sitting around those same tables or calling me in the middle of the day sobbing that everything sucks, nothing works right and the whole world hates her/him?

I believe with all my heart that Smith and Wilson developed the 12 Steps with the guidance of a loving and merciful God. In the words of Mr. Smith, the program he wrote down was not invented - it grew and it has evolved. What I believe I need to do is to remind the people just starting out (and those who have been here awhile) that those 12 Steps help people like me re-establish (or establish for the first time) a personal and powerful relationship with a Power of the Universe, a loving and merciful God, The Creature, The Alpha and the Omega. It is THAT relationship that gives me the power I do not have to not drink alcohol one day at a time.

Here is what I have to do, no matter what:

1. I must start my day with prayer and meditation.

For me, A Catholic and a Lay Dominican, I have my morning prayer through the Liturgy of the Hours. I must be willing, each morning, to deliberately and intentionally give my life to God and ask Him to do with it what HE wants. I am willing, deliberately and intentionally, to open myself up to the Grace that gives the strength I need to fulfill my purpose.

2. I must stay in service.

No matter what, I have got to be of service to others. I have to be willing to love the unloveable, to counsel the doubtful, to instruct the ignorant. I must be willing to perform the corporal works of mercy under any conditions and no matter how tired, how stressed or how inadequate I may feel at the time the request is made of me. I have to be willing to put God, His Church, my family, my community before me. My very recovery depends upon my constant thought of others. My mantra and prayer must be, "How may I help?".

3. I must attend meetings.

No matter how I feel or how tired I am or how incredibly stupid I might decide a group of people are, I need to shut up, suit up and show up. I need them. I need to hear how it is going in their lives. I need to meet newcomers and support oldtimers. I need to wipe down tables, make coffee and pick up cigaret butts on the sidewalk outside so we are considered good neighbors. I have to be right in the middle of the herd ready to take two or three with me to go rescue a stray one that is limping along behind us. I have to be a member among members.

4. I must keep in contact with the person helping ME.

No matter what, I have got to be willing to tell at least ONE person the complete truth about myself; however I am feeling, how I am doing and WHAT I am doing.

5. I must receive the Sacraments.

As a Catholic, I know the incredible grace that is available to me through a Sacramental and Liturgical life. I MUST take advantage of that - I cannot pretend that doing the minimum is going to be enough for

someone like me. I have to remember, no matter what, that Jesus instituted the Sacraments so that I can receive the grace I need, and as an alcoholic I need more grace than the average bear.

There are many other things I have to do in order to stay sober. I know that, to many of you, this might seem to be a matter of semantics. For me, however, remembering that there is a difference between trying to exert my will on my Alcoholism and concentrating on bringing my will into line with the Will of God.

St Thomas Aquinas said for us to approach situations by looking at what we want the result to be - and I want the result in my life to be sobriety.

To that end, this Alcoholic acknowledges that she drinks no matter what - and in order NOT to do that, she stays close to God and His Church.

No Matter What.

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# Amoris Laetitia and the Progressive Pope Myth [at Catholic Stand]

In a discussion of the God-as-watchmaker metaphor with Jonathan Witt, philosopher Jay Richards remarked, “It’s amazing how a simple image can hijack a discussion for a century and a half.” (Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt, *A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature*, p. 54) Almost as soon as he was elected, before he had done anything substantive beyond greeting the people in Saint Peter’s Square, the Western chatterati had dubbed Francis a progressive pope. This hasty assessment, fraught with Western political and cultural implications, has similarly hijacked discussion of Francis’ actions by many people both inside and outside the Church.

## The Progressive Pope and the “Hermeneutic of Rupture”

The progressive pope myth, in its essence, is a smaller iteration of the larger “hermeneutic of rupture” (or, [as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI originally called it](#), the “hermeneutic of discontinuity”) that has persisted in the Church for the last fifty years. To wit, the progressive pope myth has assumed from the very beginning that Pope Francis’ differences in style mark a break not only away from the traditions of the papacy but also away from the dogmas and doctrines of the apostolic tradition.

For example, many commentators made heavy weather of Francis’ refusal to wear red shoes and live in the Apostolic Palace. Few, however, noted his decision to [visit Santa Maria Maggiore and pray at the tomb of Pope St. Pius V](#) — a Dominican, a former inquisitor, and a major figure of the Counter-Reformation — the day after his election. Surely the latter was more significant than the former! Yet any clear and unmistakable sign from Francis of orthodoxy or respect for tradition is usually greeted with profound silence ... or explained away as [“holding out an olive branch to conservatives”](#).

The progressive pope myth is an *a priori* construct, albeit one without the benefit of valid first principles. “It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence,” said Holmes to Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*. In “A Scandal in Bohemia”, he elaborates: “Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.” The myth of the progressive pope continues to validate Holmes’ dictum, most recently in the veritable blizzard of analyses that have followed the release of [Pope Francis’ recent apostolic exhortation, Amoris Laetitia](#).

## Facts Must Not Contradict Theory

Whether your monomania is [the Church’s contraception ban](#), [openly gay relationships](#), [communion for the civilly divorced and remarried](#), or [the proper emphasis on sin](#), you will likely find something in *Amoris* to delight or horrify you. In paragraph 7, Pope Francis cautions the reader, “... I do not recommend a rushed reading of the text.” Said [Scott P. Richert in Crisis Magazine](#):

A cynic might reply that the Holy Father need not have worried, since most of those who commented on the document in the first hours after its release could not be said to have engaged in a “rushed

reading of the text,” because they did not actually read the text. Rather, as has become the norm regarding important and lengthy documents in our short-attention-span “Information Age,” most of those who were first out of the gate already knew what they intended to say about *Amoris Laetitia*; all they needed to do was to skim it quickly, looking for lines that they could use as proof that their preconceived notions were correct.

Facts, [as Don McClarey reminds us John Adams said](#), may be stubborn things. Statements, however, are infinitely malleable. Straw men are mostly stuffed with out-of-context quotes and fallacies of accent. Emphasize *this* sentence with bold font; eliminate *that* clause with a timely ellipsis; pay excessive attention to footnote *p* while ignoring the modifying implications of footnote *q*; give undue weight to what is *not* said .... It is all too common now to treat statements, documents, essays, and blog posts as if they were coded messages, their dangerous “real meanings” encrypted in such a manner that they can hide in plain sight, like Poe’s purloined letter. It is common because *no matter how stubborn facts are, they must not be allowed to contradict the theory*.

Especially not the theory of the long-awaited, long-feared progressive pope.

## **Pope Not Above Criticism**

While the progressive pope myth is pervasive, it is not all-encompassing. Dave Armstrong has compiled [an impressive list of articles](#) written in defense of Pope Francis, exposing the many errors committed by both progressives and traditionalists over the last three years in pursuit of their separate agendas, as well as the many episodes of malreportage by the secular press. (Several of these articles were posted in Catholic Stand by my colleagues [Scott Eric Alt](#) and [JoAnna Wahlund](#).) Because modern polemics require that a demonizing label be coined to simultaneously smear and dismiss those whose views contradict your own, the Pope’s most vicious critics on the right have yclept his defenders “ultramontanists” — an insult only if, like the members of the schismatic Old Catholic Church, you hold [ultramontanism](#) to be a heresy.

“Ultramontanists”, however, do not hold Francis beyond all criticism. For instance, even the most fervent of Francis’ orthodox admirers were taken aback by his ill-considered decision to appoint retired Belgian Cdl. Godfried Danneels, who had been [implicated in a sex-abuse cover-up](#) and later [claimed to be part of a “mafia”](#) that had worked to dethrone Pope Benedict, to [the Synod on the Family](#). As another example, in [“Separating Opinion from Doctrine in Amoris Laetitia”](#), Fr. Maurice Ashley Agbaw-Ebai’s praise of Francis’ “love letter” ends in a lament over the “infamous footnote 351”:

To introduce a divisive footnote into an exhortation on the family does not serve a global Church challenged on so many fronts and only ends up creating the very scenario that Francis himself decries in AL: a Church wasting its energies on internal acrimonies, in this case, on a matter that is consumed largely by the church in the German-speaking world, pushed on despite the conclusions of the 1980 Synod on the Family clearly enunciated by St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*. The unity of the Church is not served by inconsistencies in official documents, even when they are on mere matters of nonauthoritative opinion. What we have now is an impassioned debate over the meaning of footnote 351.

The often wild misunderstandings of Pope Francis aren’t solely born of malice, journalistic laziness, bad translations, and ideological imperatives. Quite the contrary: they also have quite a bit to do with his shoot-from-the-hip style, his penchant for hyperbole (how else to describe his admonition that

confessionals should not be “torture chambers”?), and his prolix, undisciplined writing. (Verbosity, [as Fr. George Rutler reminds us](#), is not only “indicative of muddled thinking” but also “the rhetorical indulgence of the modern age.”) Pope Francis’ speaking and writing, in my opinion, sometimes reveal a man who is desperately trying to articulate a vision that is not very clear in his own mind. He is unable to say precisely what the vision *is*, and therefore is limited to telling us at great length what the vision is *not*.

## “A Son of the Church”

Nevertheless, those who rigidly hold to the progressive pope paradigm often take Pope Francis’ words not only out of the context in which they are presented but out of the context of the rest of his papacy. It is one thing to constantly remind others that not everything that falls out of his mouth (or pen) is part of the Church’s infallible magisterium. It is another thing entirely — in fact, it is a grave failure of charity and misuse of the prophetic office (cf. [Catechism §§ 904 – 907](#)) — to find in the pope’s every other utterance a deliberate desire or calculated intent to undermine that magisterium. And it is certainly a sin against the Eighth Commandment (cf. [Catechism §§ 2477 – 2479](#)) to distort his words in order to support such a finding.

[On the return flight from Rio de Janeiro in July 2013](#), Francis was pressured for his “position” on abortion and same-sex “marriage” by Brazilian journalist Patricia Zorzan; Francis’ final, definitive answer was, “The position of the Church. I am a son of the Church.” In [another, more recent return-flight press conference](#), on the subject of allowing communion to civilly divorced and remarried Catholics, he told NBC’s Ann Thompson: “Being integrated into the Church does not mean ‘taking communion’. I know remarried Catholics who go to Church once or twice a year: ‘I want to receive communion!’, as if communion were a commendation. It is a matter of integration ... the doors are all open. But one cannot just say: from now on ‘they can take communion’. This would also wound the spouses, the couple, because it won’t help them on the path to integration.”

“The only key to the correct interpretation of *Amoris Laetitia*,” [insists the very traditionalist Cdl. Raymond L. Burke](#), “is the constant teaching of the Church and her discipline that safeguards and fosters this teaching.” The same thing can be said of Pope Francis: his concern is not to change the doctrines or discipline of the Church but to bring their benefit to more people:

I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, “always does what good she can, even if in the process her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.” ([Amoris Laetitia](#) § 308, cit. [Evangelii Gaudium](#) § 45)

## Wait For the Fruit

Ultimately, my faith is not in Pope Francis but in the promises Christ gave to his Church: that the Holy Spirit will teach her and guide her into all truth (cf. [John 14:26](#), [16:13](#)), and that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against her (cf. [Matthew 16:18](#)). The Church has survived her fair share of crooks, fools, and cowards; being an institution full of wheat and weeds (cf. [Matthew 13:24-30](#)), she has suffered and survived internal divisions since before the Council of Jerusalem (cf. [Acts 15:1-29](#)). She will survive Pope Francis; she may even thrive because of him.

The final assessment of *Amoris Laetitia* and its effect on the Church must await the passage of time — at least two or three generations; the same is true for Pope Francis and his pontificate. “Each tree is known by its own fruit” ([Luke 6:44](#)); the sapling of *Amoris* has barely been planted. But if the non-Catholic chatterati must saddle themselves with the myth of a progressive pope, there’s no valid reason why we must do so as well. After all, we ought to know better.

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## "Come, eat" [at bukas palad]



Year C / Eastertide / 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 5.27b-32, 40b-41/ Psalm 29.2, 4, 5-6,11-12a, 13b (R/v 2a) / Revelation 5.11-14 / John 21.1-19

I remember a time when I was walking through Boston in late autumn. While a cold wind swept down the narrow downtown street, a drizzle persisted. The man outside the church door snuggled his arms deeper into his worn out raincoat to keep warm. “Spare some change, please,” he chimed as the well-heeled couple strode out of the church doors towards the nearby high-end shops. They passed him by. He looked fit but his shabby, tattered sweater and torn jeans, his scruffy stubble and his few bags of possessions told a different story. More churchgoers came out: nourished at Eucharist, they looked at him. Some nodded and moved on briskly. Others crossed the empty street, always an easier route out. He looked into his outstretched hand: not enough. Then, he felt a tug. An older homeless army veteran halved his sandwich from the nearby 7-11, and nodding, said, “Come, eat”.

I often go back to that moment and think about how a man in need was met by another equally in need. Their lives must have been painful and complicated. When I finally got to know Jim the younger homeless man and his story, I realized how wrong I was to judge him initially as one of those bums. A former fund manager, he had it all; then he lost them in the financial crisis in America around 2008. My fellow churchgoers and I did nothing that autumn day. But a homeless army veteran did: he met Jim where he was at—hungry, lonely, in need.

Now, who has come to your aid when you were in need? Come to you where you were at: in your pain and struggles, may be even in your brighter, happier moments? Who met you amidst your life’s complications?

Today we hear about the Risen Jesus coming to meet Peter and the disciples in their struggles with life's complications. The evangelist John writes of disciples who've failed. The disciples went fishing but caught no fish. Peter denied the friendship Jesus offered when Jesus needed him most. I can only imagine the emotional tussle they grapple with: words like "useless", "loser", "no hopper", "traitor", "back stabber" must have filled their minds and weighed heavily on their hearts.

But John offers us a different perspective: **failures are graced occasions for Jesus to come into our lives no matter how messy they are and to make out of that chaos abundant goodness for us.** From nothing caught to a large catch of fish tearing at the net. From betrayal and denial to Peter's fuller confession of love for Jesus that would "glorify God".

Our gospel story also teaches that faithful discipleship involves openness to obeying God in Jesus' new commands in our lives and growing up with their help. This contrasts with how many of us have been taught what discipleship is about: the absence of failure by doing everything right and by the book so that no mistakes are made.

For John, Christian discipleship must be about **letting God meet us as we really are and where we honestly are at**, often times amidst the complexities of our lives. This is how God meets us to be with us and to save us. And God comes with abundant gifts for us to become more like Jesus and so grow into new life. All we are asked to have before God is the willingness to receive God and God's gifts into our lives.

Each of us naturally feels discouraged when we fail to follow Jesus faithfully. In such moments, many of us want to give up on Jesus and on our discipleship. Jesus however never gives up on us. This truth ought to encourage us to stay the course of discipleship, no matter how many times we fail and fall.

Indeed, **staying the course of discipleship is the assurance Jesus' resurrection gifts us with at Easter.** Each Easter then must be for us the renewal God pledges to accompany us faithfully through life in Jesus, even though original sin makes all of us prone to failing God and one another.

An area where we often fail God in is our relationships with one another as family and as individuals. This is why Pope Francis' latest exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*, or *The Joy of Love* invites us to stay the course in discipleship through our relationships with others.

Francis' exhortation guides us on how we, as the Church and as church members, ought to help families—in fact, everyone—experience God's love and know that all are welcome in our church. This is a disciple's Christ-like task.

What advice does Francis offer for us to do this? Nothing less than to imitate Jesus' actions towards his disciples by the Lake of Tiberius. That we first meet families and individuals where they are at, like Jesus met Peter and the disciples. Then we can better understand their complex and complicated lives. This will enable us to really understand the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of single parent families, of divorced and remarried Catholics, of gay men and women amongst us.

Francis' exhortation aims to bring about a Christ-like conversion in the way we relate to others. He wants us to avoid simply judging people and imposing rules on them without considering their struggles. Or as he writes, “throwing stones at a person's life” and condemning them as only “living in sin”.

Instead, Francis calls us to nurture and to guide these people, no different from us. We'll do this best by taking them from where they are at presently in their faith and life—however complex or flawed this may be—to a deeper, more loving relationship with God and neighbor.

What Francis truly wants to return us to in how we interact with one another is **the joy of loving another into life**. And isn't this what the risen Jesus did for his disciples who failed that early morning? Disciples who deserted and betrayed him when he needed them most?

How did Jesus respond to them? He graciously met them where they were at, in their failure and disappointment, and he loved them into the joy of being loved again as his friends. “I call you friends”, he said to them before his death. And like only a good friend can, he came to them in his resurrection to cook and care for them, and to forgive Peter and to call him again to his mission.

Ultimately, Francis' exhortation must crack open our sometimes hard hearts to that startling realization that you and I have already experienced the risen Jesus meeting us as we are—not always holy or saintly, often times weak, flawed and sinful. Meeting us in God's loving mercy so as to give us the joy of being loved into fullness of life again.

At Easter, we have especially received this gracious goodness of God. It is to help us to stay the course of discipleship.

How can we then not be like that homeless army veteran who meets another where he is at? Yes, what Christ-like disciples we will be when we generously share God’s mercy in the risen Jesus, our daily bread, to all others in need at this altar.

*Preached at St Ignatius Church*

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# Spring Bouquet [at Grace to Paint]



This floral is the larger version of the previous post. I painted the centerpiece from a special dinner a couple of weeks ago.

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# Old Wineskins



*“Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. [And] no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’” –Luke 5:37-39*

There is a saying I have been using in business for over 40 years, “You can only coast in one direction.” So often, as I talked with new clients they would say, “if only we could keep the status quo, things would be great.” The problem with the keeping everything the same is that things are always changing.

People dislike change. It has been said that the only people that like change are wet babies! And, it’s true.

Nowhere is this resistance to change more prevalent than among some Christians. They want to keep things just the way they were when they were young. The same holds true for Catholics who want to return to Latin, turn the altar away from the people, and return to pre-Vatican II practices.

Sorry to say, you can’t put the genie back into the bottle and you can’t un-ring a bell. The digital world moves too quickly, and business that were once necessary are no longer relevant.

Did you ever think that people would be getting their daily news from Facebook and Twitter instead of the newspaper? Remember record stores or travel agencies? They have been replaced by digital downloads and on-line reservations.

As Jesus taught, you just can’t put old wine into new wineskins. Jesus had a new way that was different from the ways of the Pharisees and Scribes. Jesus is not suggesting that we change the church teachings and neither am I. But, we must take a hard look at why church attendance is on the decline and why millennials are leaving Christianity in record numbers. We aren’t going to get them back by putting old wine in new wineskins; we have to find ways to share the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ (kerygma) in ways that will reach a new generation. What got us here won’t get us there!

Pope Francis’ latest writings have pointed us in this direction. He has a unique understanding of what needs to be done to reach more people with the message of God’s mercy. But, unfortunately, good Catholics continue to reject the message, choosing as the Pharisees and scribes did, to cling to their old ways.

That is not to say the old ways are wrong or bad! In verse 39, Paul tells us that old wine tastes good and that those of us who have tasted the old wine has no desire for the new because the old is good. I can still remember the Latin mass responses from years as an altar boy, but most priests, ordained since Vatican II, have never said a mass in Latin. And, while I am old enough to remember, I have no desire to return to mass in Latin.

Should the Latin mass be available for those that want it, absolutely! But, don't mistake it as a tool for evangelization.

So, what can we do to help Pope Francis in his attempt to reach those who have left the faith and invite them to rediscover Jesus and welcome them into our beautiful Catholic faith? Here are a few thoughts:

1. **Is my faith in a rut?** Ask yourself the question, "Have I become tepid in my faith? Am I simply settling for routine?"

We just celebrated Lent and Easter. Did you notice? Did you use Lent to shed some of your old self and become a new self in Jesus? Or, was Easter Sunday just another mass and just another Sunday?

2. **Are you clinging to routine or resisting change?** In business, when someone says "It's the way we have always done it," it almost always reflects an attitude of resistance to change.

3. **Are you putting Jesus into your old wineskins?** Catholic spirituality is broad not narrow. Attend mass in different parts of the country or different countries and you will see a faith that has many expressions, some cultural, some ethnic, but all with the same message of Jesus' life death and resurrection; of salvation through our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus is asking us to open our hearts anew, to be shining examples of Jesus' love, to invite family and friends to rediscover the Catholic faith, and share our joy with the world.

Let's enjoy the vintage wine aged to perfection, but let's not let our satisfaction with the old prevent us from sampling the new. And, let's not be critical of those who are evangelizing with the wineskins of new hearts, new lives, and salvation through our savior, Jesus Christ.

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## **Pregnant With Cancer: A Miracle [at Catholic Stand]**

Rachel and I were about to be released from the hospital. I was binding my breasts since my milk had come in but it couldn't be used due to the chemicals which were still in my system. Suddenly, my heart stopped and my stomach fell to the floor; I felt a knot in the same area as the original tumor.

I'd done this crazy thing – receiving chemotherapy while pregnant – and now it hadn't even done its job. I was scared to death but I was also angry, angry with my body for continuing to produce tumors in the face of strong chemotherapy and prayers.

I told my husband, Andrew, first. Of course, having someone else feel it, recognize it, and say something out loud varified my suscipcions. Andrew tried to downplay the lump, saying it had to be innocuous but recommended I show my mom. By her expression I could tell she was trying to hide her anxiety and comfort me. The only thing was, I wasn't buying it. My heart was in my throat.

After showing one of the nurses, a friend from high school, she called another nurse in. They conferred, and recommended I make an appointment right away with my oncologist. There's nothing like showing your traitorous breasts to an old high school friend.

### **Prayers**

Of course my mom beat the Catholic prayer drums and started to surround me with prayers. She flooded FaceBook and clogged the phone lines putting in requests for Masses to be offered in my name and for people to offer their prayers and sacrifices for my health. The Passionist Monastery put my name on their bulletin board of prayers in response to one of my mom's requests. Every nun in that monastery offered their daily prayers for and sacrifices for me. Although, I was too upset to really appreciate it till afterwards.

Since my doctor was away with his family until the following week, his partner examined me. He grimly ordered an ultrasound but wouldn't commit to saying it was another tumor or not. So much for calming my fears.

Later, as I lay there with the technician pressing painfully on the sensitive knot, Andrew held my hand trying to comfort and calm me. We anxiously watched the screen for tell-tale signs that this was just a fluid-filled cyst or some other benign nodule. The technician didn't give anything away, but once I noticed measurements appearing on the screen, I knew there was something there. When I looked at the technician's notes, I noticed the knot was 1.7 cm at its widest and had some vascular activity. This indicates a growing mass or tumor, whether malignant or benign was the question at hand.

### **A PET Scan**

We had to wait for my oncologist to return for the results. However, unlike his partner, my doctor couldn't palpitate the knot. I could have started chemo without finding anything else out about the knot because this next round of chemo was meant to catch any remaining cancer anyway. Since he noted how anxious I was

about the knot, he suggested a PET scan, even though he was unable to find the knot in question.

Those machines aren't designed with comfort or anxiety in mind. They're hard and loud and it takes a long time. Considering I was less than a week postpartum, the technician was concerned for my health and my newborn's health once I was finished with the test because I'd be slightly radio-active for about 12 hours or so. My main concern was figuring out if I was going to live to see my newborn become a toddler.

Once again it was a waiting game. We had to wait for the radiologist to read the PET scan, then we had to wait for the results to be sent to my oncologist and then we had to wait for him to schedule an appointment. Finally, the call came through that my doctor had the results and could see me to go over them with me.

### **Now You See It; Now You Don't**

In his no-nonsense manner, my doctor told us there was nothing on the PET scan. Dumbstruck, Andrew and I just looked at the doctor and then one another. I unconsciously felt where the knot had been, but even after searching for it, I couldn't find it either. My doctor looked and felt for it again too, but he couldn't find it either. The radiologist that read my scan was dumbfounded about the lack of the 1.7 cm mass reported by the ultrasound. Several times he mentioned the size and location reported by the ultrasound and then repeated that if it was present, it would have shown up on the PET scan.

### **A Modern Miracle**

Once I told mom of the results and my doctor's inability to find the knot, she explained that this was a miracle, plain and simple. There is no other explanation. While 1.7 cm is not huge by any means, it is readily detectable by a PET scan and also highly unlikely to spontaneously disintegrate, especially once it has a blood supply. My mother's hard work of soliciting prayers from all around the globe on my behalf resulted in a healing miracle.

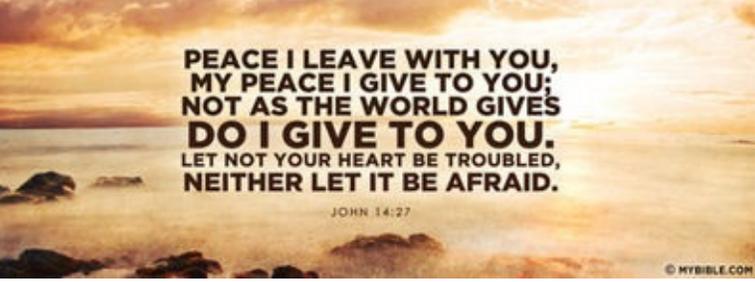
Erika is very vocal about the details of her story. Statistics tell us that [1 in 3000 – 3500 women](#) diagnosed with breast cancer will be pregnant. She believes the more she spreads the word that women and their baby can live through the cancer, the more lives will be saved.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicstand.com/pregnant-with-cancer-a-miracle/>  
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# My Peace I Leave You [at Miss Alexandrina]

[May 2, 2016](#) by [Alexandrina Brant](#) [2 Comments](#)

A photograph of a sunset over a beach with rocks in the foreground. The sky is filled with warm, golden light. Overlaid on the image is the text: "PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU, MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU; NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES DO I GIVE TO YOU. LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED, NEITHER LET IT BE AFRAID." Below the text, it says "JOHN 14:27" and "© HYBIBLE.COM".

PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU,  
MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU;  
NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES  
DO I GIVE TO YOU.  
LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED,  
NEITHER LET IT BE AFRAID.

JOHN 14:27

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Yesterday's Gospel reading was one of my favourite – it's from where we get the peace saying in the Mass. There is more to the passage, of course, but what one can essentially take from it is the power and strength of the peace that God brings, in this case, via Christ.

The point of Jesus' pronouncement is to separate the Holy Spirit's peace from the superficial and temporary peace one encounters with worldly goods. God wants us to find peace, but He also wants us to find the right kind of peace and not be so bogged down or obstructed by material wishes that we cannot make time for God or for others.

Yes, we can everything from this: the big message that without God, we are left in a level of peace that will forever be unfulfilling for us.

I wouldn't say there is a specific reason why this is one of my favourite Gospel readings. It in itself brings a sense of peace; and the fact that God is here, and we are made aware that His is the peace available forever to us is something memorable in itself.

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This contribution is available at <http://missalexandrinabrant.wordpress.com/2016/05/02/my-peace-i-leave-you/>  
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## Little Spiders and Paying a Call [at Making It In Vermont]

It is spring and our kids schedules seem to be in overdrive. I can't even think more than 7 days into our calendar without feeling anxiety, so for better or worse, I am just going day to day to day and moment to moment.

Even within all this busy Jesus has been calling me. Passing our church after dropping a couple of sons off at track practice, I feel it, a little nudge that could so easily be brushed aside. Without thinking too hard I put on the directional and park. I try the little side door of our church and expect it to be locked, but instead it eases breezily open and I go in and sit with him.

Our tabernacle is in a little room/chapel off the side of the main church. The front of the tabernacle has a design of loaves of bread in a basket with two fishes set in relief and it has a keyed lock where the door opens to place the Eucharist in. There is a wooden kneeler placed in front of the tabernacle for people to kneel at and pray, that's my spot.

I'm not sure how it got past me, but as a child and young adult I really never understood that Catholics actually and truly believed that Jesus was made present in that little wafer of flat bread (passover bread) when it is consecrated during the Mass. It wasn't till son number one was making his First Communion and I attended an information night that it smacked me in the face. The Director of Religious Education said unwaveringly that the Eucharist was Jesus, no longer just a piece of bread and certainly not just a symbol. I remember feeling taken aback and yes even thought she was a bit foolish and naive saying/believing something like that.

That was 7 years ago now... and here I am stopping by for a chat with Jesus in that little wafer...

...AND writing about it.

A couple of times a week 3 year old ~G. gets services (speech, OT, PT) at our elementary school. He's only there for about 45 minutes, so I usually just take a walk with ~P in his stroller during that time. This week though, I've been hearing the call and head down the street to our church instead. I leave the stroller by the door, put 18 month old ~P in a back pack carrier and head in. I kneel and pray/chat/thank and ~P babbles on my back. It's nice.

Light streams in across the floor in front of the tabernacle through a green window. Today I am watching the light as it brightens and darkens with the ebb and flow of the clouds. It is like a heart beat. I pour out my prayers to my God. I talk to him about the things weighing on my heart and pray for the wellness of people I know who are sick or struggling, for peace in their storms, thanksgiving for blessings, help with my mothering, and on. It's all very informal, just talking, what comes to mind.

As I stare at the rug and the beautiful light, I see a very clear dark spot. I think at first that maybe there is something on my glasses. Then I realize what it is. It is on the edge of the hand rest of the wooden kneeler. It is a very small spider.

Ha, I think, how funny.

Then Jesus in his very Jesus-ee way makes the connection for me. It's not just a very small spider, it's an "Itsy- Bitsy- Spider".

And cue the song in my head...

The spider goes up the water spout, the rain washes him out, the sun dries up all the rain, and there goes the spider climbing up again. And as I sing the song in my head, I watch this tiny spider in real life HD climb this invisible string right before my eyes, before Jesus. It climbs and climbs, it's teeny tiny legs, sure and certain. And my God speaks to me in the language of my current life with little ones.

Yes the rain is going to come, and yes it will feel like it has washed you away, but I will always be here to dry you off and give you strength to climb again.

Love to you all from the often sopping wet trenches,

~Lisa

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## Easier by the Eleventh? Possibly... [at Little Douglings]

I took my daughter in to have her ears pierced yesterday. It was a huge surprise since we had told her that she would have to wait another year. But, being the oldest girl in a larger-than-life family, she has been such an amazing help to me and I wanted to show her my gratitude for the love she pours out everyday.

The young woman helping us asked about my colossal belly and I told her it was baby number eleven (eviction notice posted for next month). I witnessed the usual jaw drop and waited for her to regain her composure. "I can't even imagine!!!" she stammered. I fully understood, because there was a time I couldn't ever have imagined. It wasn't before I had children either, because for as long as I can remember I've always wanted a dozen kids! I had the image of me gliding through the meadow followed by my short-statured posse, Von Trapp style - it may or may not have included singing and frolicking... if it did, I'm not quite ready to admit it.

And then I had my first baby. BAM! I held this tiny little guy in my hands after nine months of uncontainable enthusiasm and years of anticipation and, while I was filled with joy, I found myself several hours later crying uncontrollably in the shower. I was hit with the ENORMITY of what had just been placed in my arms. My life would never ever be the same, my life was no longer my own. I had this little being who was completely dependant on me and I was terrified, as I really started to unpack that reality! I felt so inadequate, I was sore and tired and overwhelmed by how foreign everything was: from nursing, to worrying about why he hadn't pooped yet, to tending to my own body. I kept thinking, "How could anyone have more than one!?!". I loved him with every fabric of being and yet, that fabric once woven with confidence and excitement now felt like a pathetic scrap of burlap, as this ONE tiny baby was turning my whole world upside down.

I kept thinking about this incredible woman from my church who had eleven children. She was (and is) one of the most joyful people I had ever known. Her love for children, her grace and genuine spirit of joy inspired me to be open to life. She had troubles, yes. She may have even had a couple of "black sheep" who tried and stretched her heart beyond imagining, but even the weight of her trials could not dispel the sparkle in her eyes, the genuine love for life.

Thinking about her made me cry harder. She had eleven. I couldn't even think of having to deal with more than one.

But then the next baby came, the next and the next (and I refuse to type "next" eleven times) and I now embody that same joy. I understand it. With each child, more lessons were imparted, more offerings and sacrifices helped rip my selfish tendencies from my grip (and I was holding onto them for dear life) and it meant that there was more room in my heart for all the graces God had intended for me. There are SO many things that I used to respond to by getting upset, anxious, bothered, angered and now, refined in the fire of "child-induced trials", I find myself smiling, shaking my head and saying, "Here we grow again!" The gratitude from knowing that God loves me enough to want to help make me holy, fills me with supernatural peace and joy.

I may be accused of wearing rose coloured glasses, still frolicking Von Trapp style in the meadow of my idealistic perspective, but believe me I'm not. I have to sort through my clean laundry today because one

of my kids went to sleep with a bowl (in case of the need to vomit), made use of it, fell asleep snuggling said bowl, realized in the morning that all of the contents were no longer in the bowl but all over her bedding, stripped the bed and then spread the various sheets, blankets and pillow cases into various clothing bins because she wasn't sure which bins were filled with clean or dirty clothes (run on sentence of my life)! This all happened days ago without her telling me, so I will be smelling out aged vomit for the next few hours. I promise you, the grit and grind of it all does not allude me, but I'm in love and grow more in love with each new member that joins our family. Though I have so far to go in terms of virtue, I know they've brought me further than I would have been able to come on my own.

Yesterday, I left that poor young woman at the store in a state of shock - but not before seeing exactly how much further I could make her jaw drop, as I assured her that I feel much more at ease with eleven children than I did with just one... and that no, I may not even be "done" yet.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.littledouglings.com/blog/2016/4/14/easier-by-the-eleventh-possibly>  
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It's been my experience that authors and writers are a generous bunch. The vast majority of my interactions with fellow writers over the past several years has been positive. I've discovered support and easy camaraderie in a variety of author groups – some religious, some secular; some online, some in real life. Author friends are quick to share their experiences, advice, and sympathy. They'll cheer your successes and bemoan your dejection, ready to boost your spirits and, if it's within their means, your book's success.

Sure, a few suffer from Special Snowflake Syndrome, but they are in the minority.

### [Some behave badly, in an unprofessional or unethical manner](#)

, but they are the exception, not the rule. I find that remarkable since creative types are often sensitive souls.

Or maybe they're no different from those whose creativity is expressed in the hard sciences. Maybe the difference is in the product of that creativity, their art. There is something inherently frightening about baring your soul through words, images, music, or a variety of other media. [Sharing your work](#) makes you vulnerable in many ways.

I was reminded of that vulnerability – fragility even – by watching the documentary [I Am Chris Farley](#) last week. I'd always been drawn to Chris Farley. I'm not sure whether that's because we shared the same faith, because he was “the fat guy,” or simply because that much raw talent honed into skilled performance is magnetic.

His best-know skits – the Chippendales audition with Patrick Swayze and the motivational speaker Matt Foley – remain incredibly funny. So much so that their hilarity isn't diminished with the passage of time.

The film, which I highly recommend (for adults due to language), brings to the forefront Chris's vulnerability despite his success. The self-doubt becomes as visible as the comedic talent. Chris Farley was more than a comedian – he was a son, a brother, and a friend. A man. What others thought mattered to him.

Media, social or otherwise, can either objectify or humanize celebrities, depending on how it's used. Take two recent examples. [Country signer Jake Owen spoke openly on Sirius XM The Highway](#) about how reading Tweets about his divorce affected him. [Actor Wentworth Miller opened up on Facebook](#) about an Internet meme circulated when he was suicidal. (HT: [Rebecca Florence](#). I'd never heard of Wentworth Miller until last week.)

More so for those who achieve relative success and those few who “enjoy” celebrity status. And so, for myself as much as for my author friends, I've adapted the

### [Litany of Humility](#)

**What do you think?**

## **A Litany of Humility for Authors**

**O Jesus, who taught by using parables! meek and humble of heart, Hear me.  
From the desire of being esteemed as an author,  
Deliver me, Jesus.**

**From the desire of being loved by fans and followers.  
From the desire of being extolled by 5-star reviews.  
From the desire of being honored in writing contests, awards, or competitions.  
From the desire of being praised on social media.  
From the desire of being preferred to other authors.  
From the desire of being consulted as a bestseller.  
From the desire of being approved by Bookbub and other gatekeepers.  
From the fear of being humiliated by errors and poor craft.  
From the fear of being despised by 1-star reviewers.  
From the fear of suffering rebukes from editors, agents, and publishers.  
From the fear of being calumniated by bloggers or trolls.  
From the fear of being forgotten by readers.  
From the fear of being ridiculed by harsh critiques.  
From the fear of being wronged by publishers or retailers.  
From the fear of being suspected of mediocrity or plagiarism.  
That other authors may be loved more than I,  
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.**

**That other authors may be esteemed more than I . . .  
That, in the opinion of the world,  
other authors may increase and I may decrease . . .**

**That others' works may be chosen and mine set aside . . .  
That others' works may be praised and mine unnoticed . . .  
That others' works may be preferred to mine in everything . . .  
That others' works may become wider read than mine, provided that mine may reach as many souls as they should . . .**

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## Pastoral Orthodoxy [at New Evangelizers]

A few weeks ago, Pope Francis released his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) in response to the recent Synod on the family. Some were hoping that the document would move towards normalizing and validating sexual relationships that are contrary to the Gospel. Some were hoping for a stronger denunciation of these relationships.

But besides a few misleading headlines, neither side seems to have gotten what they desired. The Holy Father reaffirmed all of the Church's doctrines of regarding marital ethics. But it also called for a renewed effort to reach out to those who are not living in accords with those ethics. Francis challenges the Church to meet people in their real-world situation and to not paint all non-ideal relationships with the same broad brushstrokes.

To many, this latter point seems antithetical to the Christian message. Are we not always to speak the truth, even when it is difficult?

I think that problem occurs because of a perceived divide between the orthodox and the pastoral.

The orthodox position appears to be that opening the doors of acceptance to those in these non-ideal relationships will lead to confusion at best and tacit approval at worst. If the divorced and remarried (without benefit of annulment) or the cohabitating couple are invited into the community, are we not also accepting their heterodox lifestyle? Those on the side of the orthodox would answer yes. They take as their model John the Baptist who spoke out boldly against Herod Antipas for his adultery. It ended up costing John his life, but he spoke to Herod as an act of mercy to try and get the king to turn from sin. If we do not speak boldly, do we allow the deadly sin to fester and destroy the souls in those heterodox relationships?

The pastoral position appears to be the opposite. The doctrines of the Church are seen as harsh and alienating. They are pharisaical rules that get in the way of Christ's embracing love. All of us are sinners and the Church welcomes all sinners. Jesus ate with the tax collectors and the prostitutes, so why should we not call those in heterodox relationships to the table of the Lord? We need to meet people where they are and love them as they are because that is what Jesus did. If they never change from these relationships, they still need to know that they are completely loved and accepted.

I admit freely that I am oversimplifying both sides a bit unfairly. But I do so to highlight the basic opposing ends from either position and the danger they see in the other.

But the choice is not whether to be orthodox or pastoral. The choice is whether you choose to be like Christ or not. For Jesus was both orthodox and pastoral.

It is so strange to me that people fail to see how the Church needs to be both orthodox and pastoral or else it will devolve into inquisitions or sentimentality.

Jesus is always on the side of truth. He said to Pilate "the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37) When He told His followers that they had to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood, Christ did not soften His teaching in order to get them

to stay. In fact rather than imploring them to remain, He simply says to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” (John 6:67)

We can only love people in truth, because people do not desire a fake, superficial emotionalism. Or rather, even if they desire this sentimentality, it will not feed the hunger in their soul. Only real love, true love, can do this. And that love will and must be tied to truth itself. Orthodoxy provides that solid touchstone of truth that can give solid ground to the starving soul.

But to many people who are not living according to the Gospel, the touchstone appears more like a treacherous smashing stone, ready to destroy their lives and happiness. I remember once a girl at a youth group who began to be involved with some friends who were dabbling in Satanism. When the leaders of the youth group began to warn her from them, she said, “If you tell me not to see them, I will never come back here to youth group.” She had such a strong emotional connection with her wayward friends that she was willing to turn her back on the truth of the Gospel.

For many people who are living in heterodox relationships, they feel the same way. They see the Church’s teaching as something that is opposed to something good and beautiful in their lives. A couple that cohabitates and bring forth children from this relationship may see the orthodox position as a condemnation of their partner and their children. This is, of course, not the case. But when it comes to matters of deep emotion, there can be a disconnect between the ear and the heart. For example, the Church has always condemned artificial means of conceiving children outside of the marital act. I know of someone who had a baby through IVF. Looking at her child running around she said, “I can’t believe someone would think God doesn’t love her.” The Church has never said that God doesn’t love children from IVF, only that the means of producing them is illicit. But the emotional connection makes the Church’s teaching feel like a personal attack.

So what is to be done?

As always, we should look to Jesus. In the Gospel of John, Jesus was sitting at a well where He spoke to a woman drawing water by herself at noon. It was very unusual for a Jewish man of that time to speak one on one with a woman like this, so much so that the disciples are shocked when they see it. Jesus speaks to her about giving her rivers of Living Water for Eternal Life. It is only after treating her like an equal and speaking to her about things that will give her real happiness. Is it only after this that He brings up that she is living in an adulterous relationship with a man. But even as He raises this point, Jesus brings the conversation back to belief in Him.

What we see here is, I believe, a model of what Pope Francis is setting out. For those who are living outside the orthodox marital model, we need to reach out to them with pastoral care. Christ did not start by speaking words of condemnation, for there is no condemnation in Christ. If someone you love is not living in the way Christ commanded, they may take a very defensive posture when speaking to them about the faith. That is why we must be like Christ and connect to them on a primarily human level. We must reach out to them as persons and have great understanding and empathy for their thoughts and feelings, even if those feelings are not in line with orthodoxy. To empathize with someone is not to condone nor condemn their choices. I can feel empathy for the ruined life a person struggling with addiction without approving of the addiction.

Pain does not have to come from a place of virtue in order to be real. And when those living heterodox lives are suffering, we can share in their suffering with our love.

But we would do them a disservice if our pastoral outreach ended with mere empathy. Christ did not come to give empathy but salvation. And Christ said that “the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:32) Jesus spoke to the woman at the well because He loved her and wanted her happiness. To live in sin is to live in darkness and death, even if the person living in that sin does not recognize it. It would have been cruel if Jesus abandoned her to her adulterous relationship. If He had never brought it up, she could never be healed of it.

Those of the extreme pastoral position are correct when they say that Jesus loves us where we are and as we are. But what is often left out is that He loves us too much to let us stay there.

The love of Jesus is not empty sentimentality. It is as hard as cold iron and furious as a raging blaze. And in that fire we are refined like silver. The goal of the pastoral must always be to bring the person back into the orthodox.

When dealing with matters of the heart, you walk into a maelstrom of conflicting and contradictory passions. Navigating them takes a flexibility and a daring. Pastoral care is like being the captain of a ship in the storm. You have to change course on a moment’s notice to avoid utter ruin. Sometimes you have to make twists and turns that lead further from home. But orthodoxy is the lighthouse that signals the way to our real home.

Pastoral care is the means.

But orthodoxy is the end.

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# Mercy, Healing, And Surrender Are Inseparably Connected... [at Brutally Honest]



Who among your circle of family, friends and loved ones might be in need of God's great mercy? Who among them might have dragons that need slaying? Who among them might need to experience the invisible but tangible presence of God?

As I write this, and as you read the words written, people all around us are facing desperate situations causing them to, silently or aloud, willingly or instinctively, cry out to God for help and compassion, kindness and forgiveness, healing and love. Indeed, for mercy.

Earlier today, I was made aware of a circumstance where I imagine this kind of crying out either has already, or soon will be, played out. The details are not yet fully known but mercy's need unquestionably revealed, a mercy that by faith can end with inner peace, an inner peace paradoxically birthed by embracing that mercy.

All of which makes [Scott Eric Alt's interview of Dawn Eden](#), author of [Remembering God's Mercy](#), most timely, most necessary:

*ALT. Your book is ostensibly about healing from painful memories, but you spend a lot of time instead writing about surrender to God. This is a very difficult trick to pull off, and you have said it was deliberate on your part. Why did you choose to write your book that way?*

*EDEN. I'm really glad you picked up on the fact that the book's invitation to find healing from painful memories is really meant as an entrée into a deeper experience of divine providence. The reason I make that shift is because, from a psychological standpoint—and this is something acknowledged by spiritual writers such as Augustine and Teresa of Avila and beyond—we can't find healing if we remain fixated on the details of our messy lives. Healing comes through seeking God's grace that we might cooperate in His plan for us.*

*So, there is a real need for those of us who have suffered spiritual wounds to stop asking “why did*

*I suffer this wound” and start asking “how can God use me in my woundedness”? When we see how God, in His mercy, wishes to bring us exactly as we are—with all we’ve done and all we’ve suffered—into His divine plan for the salvation of the world, that’s when we find healing.*

***ALT.** Your book’s title announces that it is about mercy, but in what sense do people who suffer painful memories like the loss of a child through no fault of anyone, or sexual abuse, need mercy? Isn’t mercy just for one’s personal sins?*

***EDEN.** Divine Mercy does refer, in its primary meaning, to the mercy of God that forgives our personal sins. But all wounds come from the original sin of Adam that created a crack in all of creation. Jesus, in dying on the Cross, redeemed us both from original sin and from personal sin. God’s mercy therefore saves us not only from our own sins but also from the effects of sin. When we surrender our heart to it, whatever harms us physically or mentally can no longer separate us from Him. It can only draw us closer to Him by making us more like His wounded and risen Son.*

***ALT:** So is your book about mercy, healing, or surrender? Or are these three inseparably connected somehow?*

***EDEN.** Yes, that’s exactly right—mercy, healing, and surrender are inseparably connected, and Remembering God’s Mercy is about all three. The part about surrender can be hard because, having suffered evil, we find it hard to trust in the goodness of God. So, I gently walk the reader through the journey of discovering where God is in the reader’s heart right now, even in the midst of suffering. Once you can identify that place in your heart where God’s presence is active, it becomes easier to follow Him toward the healing that He wishes to bring you. For me, as I share in Remembering God’s Mercy, I find God’s active presence in my very desire for Him.*

Read [the whole thing](#) and then pass it on. It may contain the seeds of that which could sprout into something much needed and necessary.

God's peace be yours... and especially His mercy.

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This contribution is available at [http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally\\_honest/2016/04/-mercy-healing-and-surrender-are-inseparably-connected.html](http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2016/04/-mercy-healing-and-surrender-are-inseparably-connected.html)  
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## The Poor in Spirit [at WordPress.com]



Before I venture forth, the title above might be misleading to some Catholics who are well aware of Ignatian spirituality. Its definition for spiritual poverty: that being the complete dependence upon God. Ignatian spirituality wants the complete emptying of ourselves so that God might fill us. The spiritual poverty I refer to is the lack of centrality with the holy Spirit, or God Himself.

I recently participated in a Life Teen proclamation in the Youth Ministry of my parish. This proclamation, titled *Beggar*, had a goal, and I'll let Life Teen's own words state it:

"The goal of *Beggar* is to help teenagers understand that Jesus identifies with the poor, marginalized, and outcast because He was one of them. The teens are also challenged to recognize Jesus in those on the periphery of their own lives."

Now, I can, and did, consider the statement that Jesus was poor, marginalized, and an outcast. I felt it all wanting to some degree, but I believe my difference of opinion with Life Teen is perhaps more based in the fact that Jesus is the Son of God; in want or need of nothing other than the obvious lacking of man's love for Him, His Father, and the holy Spirit. That is a powerful lacking, however it did not encourage me to consider Jesus as poor. Marginalized? Yes, by His own being. An outcast? Well that depends upon who you are talking to. As the benchmark for humanity being material wealth and human power over spiritual health and the divine, then yes, Jesus would be an outcast; His crucifixion being an obvious indicator that someone didn't like Him much.

However, it was not this dilemma that riveted my attention to this lesson. It was the fact that in amidst this lesson's some fifteen pages of teaching, there was only one sentence where there was a mention of anything "spiritual". It resided in the section on Key Words:

**"Poverty:** A condition that causes a person to be deprived of wants and needs, which can be both material and spiritual."

Putting aside the obvious tone of victimization in that definition, I could not but notice that there was no other reference to any form of spirituality or spirit, holy or otherwise, in the entire teaching. Now, I seem to recall a brief moment where Jesus says something about some guy coming after Him; a spirit of truth that will confirm the realities of Jesus' words. And I do remember something called Pentecost in the book of Acts: a minor skirmish with immigrants, wasn't it, who refused to speak good Greek.

All of this *wonder* caused me to consider the origin of material poverty; as it seemed to be the focus of this lesson.

Material poverty is all about us today; in all societies, despite our most ardent and consistent of endeavors, and in a plentitude that matches any past millennium one would care to discuss. Excuse me for saying, but despite all the prayers sent up in smoke – which claim spiritual essence – nothing has changed in regards to man’s propensity for poverty. Now man’s intellectual exercises – his material fixes – can claim great efficacy with immediate perils. It can feed literally millions who would otherwise starve. But that same societal intellect seems quite incapable of either recognizing or fending off the slow erosion of a society into the chaos that produces those immediate perils. Man’s intellect always touts its progress towards a proverbial light, yet can never quite see the darkness in that light. Man always believes his intellect has the answer, even though his intellect is but a portion – the mortal, imperfect portion – of his soul. It appears man just doesn’t understand his soul and its relationship to material poverty.

Let me offer a proposition.

Alright, so God is Spirit. I always like to start there. This assertion seems acceptable to most Christians despite the continual references to a He that’s packed full of human emotions and time/space conditions; as both the Old and New Testaments espouse.

God is eternal. Man’s intellect and body are not. Now, there lies within man something else; a thing that, in union with the intellect and body, we refer to as soul. This other thing is our spirit, and our spirit is spirit; one with God as Spirit. Our spirit knows the way because it is of the Way. Our spirit is perfect as God is perfect, and it has nothing to do with man’s inclination to distance himself from God as Spirit; that inclination being solely the purveyance by intellect and body. Yes, here’s my first arguing point or premise:

One’s spirit has nothing to do with one’s “fallen” nature.

Working on that premise, man’s perpetual inclination to assert his own authority, and thus sin, is an act of the intellect and/or the body. I’ll claim the guilt of both, however, it’s a bit of the Pinky and the Brain situation we have here; it’s mostly the intellect, for even physical sex is an act of power by the intellect.

Further, I’d like to dispense with any overt concentration on *sin* as our primary punching bag. As soon as we all get hyped on the immense lineage and library of sin, we tend to go off-road and get all rogue on redemption, salvation, etc. I want to keep this discussion tied neatly against the rock of spiritual presence and absolute duty to God so as to expose poverty for what I sense it truly is; a soulful disharmony with God.

There might be, and possibly more, two ways to envisage how man’s soul finds itself in disharmony with God’s Spirit. The first is to assume some form of separation or distancing has taken place. Coming back to my first assertion – that God is Spirit – therefore first requires a separation that must be spiritual in nature. No physical thing or force can influence, intrude, or violate God. Indeed so, He is the creator of all such things and forces. It’s a one-way street: the spirit realm is the cause of all things physical and dominant over the physical. Any separation must be a spiritual separation. Perhaps this is why the first three commandments deal with one’s alienation from God. It’s always one of the first three commandments that gets broken before any of the others can kick into gear.

This is a natural argument, and I would have taken this path of logic, and did so in first blush, but there is too much in scripture that points in a different direction. There are numerous references to the fact that one's spirit, let alone the rest of one's self, can never find separation from God. To note a more poetic reference: Psalm 137:7-12.

- <sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?  
From your presence, where can I flee?*
- <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;  
if I lie down in Sheol, there you are.*
- <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of dawn  
and dwell beyond the sea,*
- <sup>10</sup> Even there your hand guides me,  
your right hand holds me fast.*
- <sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely darkness shall hide me,  
and night shall be my light" —*
- <sup>12</sup> Darkness is not dark for you,  
and night shines as the day.  
Darkness and light are but one.*

And so this leaves me with the conclusion that there exists a second option for the disharmony that mankind obviously feels; a disharmony that causes all of us to implore the powers unseen for a more favorable relationship with this mysterious eternity.

Perhaps not a separation, but rather some form of deprivation; a weakening of the focus, of the choir of communion that all spirits share. Satan and his minions are, after all, still spirit. A horde of black flies can rile an Adirondack bear, and a smartphone can cause one to walk off a cliff. It's a matter of intrusion not upon the spirit, but upon the intellect or body parts of the soul that can weaken the bond of spirit within and God. In some way, one's spiritual being, while still in the presence of God, lacks full union with God.

Think of this.... That the sands along a sea's edge are moist with the sea's waters. That the sands lie between the land and the sea, and they hold the sea to its space and the land to its space. They, as one, are the great divide; friend to both sea and land. The sands move almost unseen to the eye; yielding to only the greater forces of earth and universe. Our spirits are grains of God, meant for communion and purpose; to hold man to God.

Lift a handful of sand from its place along the sea edge and walk it inland. Let it breathe in the air only and not the living water, and that handful of sand soon dries; first fragments and crumbles, then atomizes into separate grains that have little use in any purpose.

So to the spirit within a person. If you walk your spirit inland, yes, there is deprivation: the living water of the Deep, and yes, there is separation: one grain from another, and the further one walks one's spirit inland from God's water, the more useless they become for any purpose. An inland spirit is an impoverished spirit. Our spirits are the Great Divide, not death, for life without spirit is to be dead.

If I could use but the terms deprivation or separation, it might be easier to understand what is taking place here, but neither satisfy the reality of one's spirit trying to live out its purpose in a world whose air is not

the Spirit of God. Our spirits breathe a different *air*. In this foreign air of naturalism, one's spirit soon wanes in its potential. I have referred to this in past writings as an immurement or entombment. The spirit loses its centrality with God, and can no longer do its purpose: to guide its allies – the intellect and body – through the rigors and dimensions of a life in love with God and man alike.

In such an existence, there would be no physical suffering, no poverty of the senses or being; for in perfect union with God, mankind's communal love would be shared equally as a natural consequence. This is heaven, and Jesus assured us that heaven is here on earth.

Make no mistake. There is material poverty only because there is spiritual poverty. Material suffering and poverty is the result of spiritual poverty.

This was the focus of Jesus' ministry. He wanted man to have a deeper understanding of his material poverty, and thus Jesus talked much, in parable, of man's spiritual poverty. Take any of the stories that Jesus related to His disciples and listeners and you will find the root to be of God's Spirit; its branches that of the spirits of man. While the branches are part of the vine, then they produce and sustain life in abundance, but if one separates a branch from the vine, then it is of little use other than to be burned as fuel. This is what happens to men and women who separate themselves from their own spirits and thus from God. They become nothing more than fuel for the material world.

Jesus had a special place in His soul for the material poor. We see numerous passages attesting to this concern. The material poor are victims to spiritual poverty. But never believe that He preferred the material poor over those who's poverty was spiritual. That form of poverty is Jesus' primary concern. If you examine the full range of interactions Jesus had with different people – as written in the Gospels – you will find that He shared his ministry with the expanse of humanity. And to them all He preached of the truth in John 3:6-8:

<sup>6</sup> What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

All forms of material want are solved by spiritual wealth. Yet, we as the Church, suffer from spiritual poverty. The Church has majorly chosen pretense over substance, ritual over spiritual. By its physical practice, the Church poses its mantra of a salvific proclamation – that Jesus died for our sins – as the real essence of Jesus' purpose here on earth. Not so, Romeo. Yes, Jesus did die for our sins, and by that sacrifice we might find life. But little is said about how to actually *find* that life – how to put our right foot in front of our left – leaving its disciples to pretty much figure that out for themselves. Our insistence upon a Christ-centricity has essentially immured our spirit-centricity; causing me once more to remind us all that He asked the Father for the Advocate to come after Him; this Spirit of Truth. If Jesus thought less of the Advocate than of Himself, He might not have spoken the words in Matthew 12:31-32:

<sup>31</sup> Therefore, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

I do not want to hear less of Christ, I just want to hear more of the Spirit and the spirit within a man. The spirit within a man knows the Way as the holy Spirit knows the Way. The spirit within a man knows only of the beach along the sea and the compact communion that is shared by the sands on that beach. Our

spirits breath the holy Spirit as its air. The spirit within a man is the Great Divide that binds man to God.

If man hopes to find the Way, only the spirit is adequate and qualified to be the guide for him.

I'll finish with Luke 11:33-36:

<sup>33</sup> “No one who lights a lamp hides it away or places it under a bushel basket, but on a lamp stand so that those who enter might see the light. <sup>34</sup> The lamp of the body is your eye. When your eye is sound, then your whole body is filled with light, but when it is bad, then your body is in darkness. <sup>35</sup> Take care, then, that the light in you not become darkness. <sup>36</sup> If your whole body is full of light, and no part of it is in darkness, then it will be as full of light as a lamp illuminating you with its brightness.”

Jesus is talking about your spirit. Now, go read Romans 8:1-8.

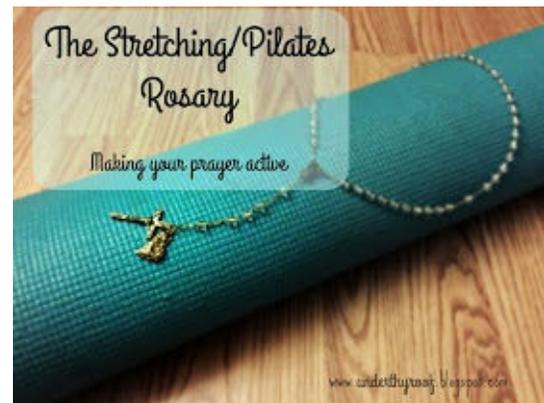
God Calls Us All Into His Service – Reese

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# Making Your Prayer Active - The Stretching/Pilates Rosary [at Under Thy Roof]



I run into problems with my prayer life due to my super active brain. My mom used to tell me I read and think faster than I could talk or write. I memorize things quickly, and am almost always thinking about five things at once -- except when I dance.

There is something about physical movement that slows my mind down and lets me focus. I developed this stretching/pilates rosary because I noticed I was saying the rosary with 3/4ths of my brain elsewhere.

I'm calling it stretching/Pilates, but these are really movements I've taken from yoga, pilates, ballet, and other movement forms. It's a mishmash of ideas. Take what works, leave what doesn't.

The important thing is to work both sides of your body equally, and I encourage you to start on your weaker side (for me it's my left - like bad.)

Note: I am not a certified instructor of anything. Do not use this if you are not medically cleared for physical exercise.

## Equipment

Yoga mat and Rosary.

Make sure you wear clothes you can easily move in. I like to do this barefoot, but you can wear socks if you prefer.

Have a water bottle handy.

## Holding the Rosary

I generally just hold my place onto the rosary beads with whatever hand is on the mat during that set. You'll need to work out what works best for you with your balance and range of movement.

## Basic Pattern

All Glory Be's = Child's Pose

All Our Fathers = While on all fours with a flat back, gently wiggle your spine from side to side - looking toward your hip as it moves to the right, and the same on the left.

## **Opening**

Creed - I like to sit cross legged on my mat and just hold the rosary while saying the Creed, I find I do better with the rest of the set if I take a minute to mentally get ready for both the prayer and the exercise.

Hail Marys - On all fours, do "Cat-Cow" for the entirety of the 3 Hail Marys. Don't bother counting, just get your movement fluid.

## **First Mystery**

First 5 Hail Marys - Stretch out the left arm and right leg. Hold for the entire set. Optional: make this more challenging by making little circles with your arm and leg.

Second 5 Hail Marys - Stretch out the right arm and left leg. Hold for the entire set.

## **Second Mystery**

First 5 Hail Marys - Still on all fours, lift the right leg, crunch in with the right leg in attitude (make sure you keep your back flat!).

- Option 1: Leg back to straight and lifted
- Option 2: Leg back to straight and lifted, tap down, lift back up
- Option 3: Leg back to straight and lifted, tap down, tap crossed over to the opposite side, lift back up

Repeat for the whole set.

Second 5 Hail Marys - Repeat on the left.

## **Third Mystery**

Lay on your right side. Place arms either behind your head (for a stronger abdominal workout) or left arm

flat on the mat, right arm supporting in front.

First 5 Hail Marys - Lift right leg pointed up as high as you can, flex back down.

Second 5 Hail Marys - Lift right leg flex up as high as you can, point back down.

## **Forth Mystery**

Lay on your left side. Place arms either behind your head (for a stronger abdominal workout) or right arm flat on the mat, left arm supporting in front.

First 5 Hail Marys - Lift left leg pointed up as high as you can, flex back down.

Second 5 Hail Marys - Lift left leg flex up as high as you can, point back down.

## **Fifth Mystery**

Option 1: Plank 4 Hail Marys, move back to downward dog for 1 Hail Mary, Plank 4 Hail Marys, downward dog one Hail Mary.

Option 2: Plank the whole decade.

## **Final Prayers**

I use this as a cool down. Spinal twists normally feel really good at this point.

While seated on the mat, take right leg, cross over left (right foot on the floor, left leg entirely on the floor and bent.) Wrap left arm around right leg, breathe, lift and turn as far as you comfortably can to the right, with right arm going behind you.

Repeat on the left side.

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Let me know if these make sense to y'all. I might have my husband help me make video or gifs to show you the movements when he gets home from Minnesota. :)

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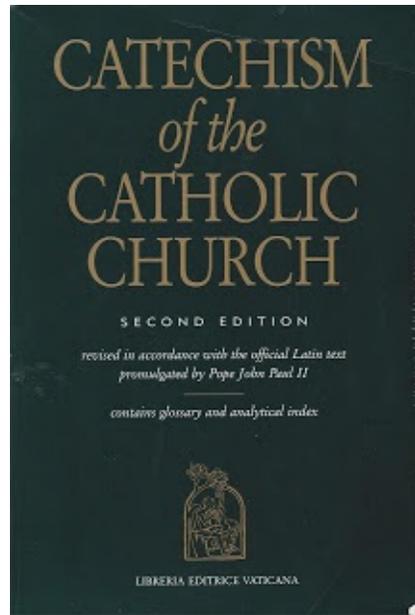
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# Man-Made Laws-Not God's Laws? [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday May 1, 2016

A Reflection on John 14:23-29, N.A.B.



By: Larry T

At a recent Scripture study class an older woman, a convert to Catholicism, frowned throughout the discussion of infant baptism, and finally snorted, “Man-made laws – not God’s laws!”

At yet another meeting my cradle-Catholic friends said they had never been accused of following *man-made* laws. But another friend in the discussion group, also a convert, said, “I went to a Lutheran college for four years and I know all about that!”

This highlights the very different way in which Catholics and Protestants view the Bible. Most Protestants believe the Bible contains all you need to know; it doesn’t need to be supplemented with doctrines. Our Catholic perspective is the Bible *plus* Tradition (as is expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church).

Father Ronald D. Witherup, S.S., Ph.D., writes in *Biblical Fundamentalism, What Every Catholic Should Know*:

*“From a Catholic perspective, as important as the Bible is, it cannot serve alone as the sole source of revelation. We should note, however, that the word ‘Tradition’, (note the capital T) does not mean ‘traditions’ we remember as we grew up. Rather it refers to the Church’s magisterial teaching through the ages as it has interpreted the Scriptures, interacted with them, and formulated doctrines that expound God’s revelation as humans can know it.”*

Catholic *Tradition* is what some Protestants disdainfully call *man-made* laws.

That is all well and good, but how do we respond to a Protestant friend who asks, “Why do you follow *man-made* laws instead of God’s laws?” Is it enough to shrug our shoulders and reply, “Because I have faith in the Church.”? Along that same line of thinking how much confidence can Catholics have in the Church’s formulated doctrines and teaching? A good starting point is in verse 26 of this Sunday’s Gospel reading:

*23 Jesus answered and said to him, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.*

*24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.*

*25 “I have told you this while I am with you.*

*26 The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name-he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you.*

*27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.*

*28 You heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I will come back to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.*

*29 And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe.*

In this Last Supper Discourse Jesus introduced the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to his disciples to assure them of God’s continued presence on earth after his return to the Father. At that time the meaning of “*he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you.*” was probably beyond the disciple’s comprehension.

Father Roch A. Kereszty O.Cist., writes in *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*:

*“God would have been a poor communicator or rather no communicator at all, had he left the interpretation of the inspired biblical witness to his Son to the ever-changing and mutually contradictory whims of human interpreters. Working in different way through the liturgy, the Magisterium, the theologians, and the Christian faithful, Christ himself has guided the Church through his spirit on the often-torturous path of understanding his own mystery.”*

What evidence is there that the Holy Spirit has piloted the Catholic Church from its very beginning? Protestants and Catholics will agree that the four Gospel authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what was necessary for the salvation of the souls of their individual church communities and ultimately the Universal Church. By 375 A.D. eighty heresies, many of which dealt with the divinity of Jesus, had arisen; it took the sure hand of the Holy Spirit to guide the Church through them. Our Protestant friends would have to agree that the Holy Spirit was present at the Synod of Hippo in 393 A.D. when the council of bishops listed and approved the books to be included in the Bible. Nor can we forget that many of the Church’s so called *man-made* laws were in direct response to a dispute or crisis of some sort. For example, it was the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. that settled the question of the nature of Jesus in his relationship to the Father and gave us the Nicene Creed. The most significant event in the modern era of our Church was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965); who will deny the influence of the Holy Spirit over it? The more we study our Church’s history the more convinced we will be that the Holy Spirit has been at the helm all along. And we can take comfort in the knowledge that He will continue to lead our Church through the challenges that are yet to come.

So then, is the Protestant way of viewing the Bible wrong? Not necessarily! After all, Protestants are Christians too, and we’re all in the same boat. There is the Protestant way and there is the Catholic way. When we’re asked why we believe in *man-made* laws the proper response is:

*Just as we accept the Holy Spirit’s role in the inspiration of the Bible, so we believe the Holy Spirit guides the Church in its teaching and prevents it from falling into errors on matters of doctrine and morality.*

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## Marriages that Can Move Mountains [at Patheos]

I just got finished watching Beyonce's visual album [Lemonade](#) and I'm blown away. First of all, let me just say that if my husband ever cheated on me, I am not going to change musical history unless it's from a prison cell, so the fact that a woman could make such a beautiful work of art, with the support of her husband, after healing from such betrayal is just simply amazing.

I have seen people say that the visual album is vulgar and doesn't pass their "purity test". These are the kinds of things that make me look up to God in Heaven and ask Him why I'm even here, because I just don't get where exactly I belong among people who have purity tests. *Life* doesn't pass a purity test.

We just observed the Passion and Death of our Lord a few weeks ago, how quickly we forget that it was not pure or vulgar free. The spit on His Face, the Flesh being torn off His back as they flogged Him, the swelling, the blood, the pain, the insults being hurled at Him along the way as well as when He hung on the Cross and the betrayal of Judas. It was ugly. Sure we look at our pretty Jesus with rock hard abs on our crucifixes but do we really think that is how He looked as He died for our sins? Our sins are vulgar and we all sin over and over and over, each time adding a blow to the Body of Christ. Yet it is through His pain that redemption comes, even if we can't stand to look at the reality of it. There are a lot of ways to avoid reality.

Birth is also full of pain, blood, tears, the tearing of a body, sometime even shit is in the mix (that isn't a very talked about fact, but it is pretty common) and yet from that comes new life.

Why then do we seem to think that art is supposed to be some sanitized version of love and life instead of a reflection of what life really looks like? Painful, vulgar and redemptive. I am highly aware of this at the moment since I just watched the strongest man that I've ever known fight death to to his last breath and it was not pretty. It was disgusting, scary and heartbreaking, yet beautiful.

What I saw as I watched *Lemonade* was the story of a woman coming into herself though the pain and love in her marriage. I saw the power of love and the redemption that comes when you look at the ugly of life and face it so that you can overcome it. So many times I see women deny what we do to impress men in order to make ourselves feel in control of what happens to us. I've done really stupid things to be the down chick to impress a man or two. I also did things to feel in control. At one point in my life I was sleeping with different men at the same time and had them all working really hard to be #1 on my call list. I'm not going to lie, it felt good to have men fighting for my attention, but when I was alone with myself at night it didn't fill the hole in my heart that could only be filled by true love.

I found that love and married the love of my life in a wonderful wedding where I was walked down the aisle by my uncle (the one that just passed away) thinking that I would never again feel the pain of being betrayed by the man that I loved. I was wrong. My marriage has suffered tremendously for various reasons. When I watched *Lemonade* I saw every single emotion and stage in healing that I've been through in the last few years. My husband has grown and healed too, but that's his story to tell, not mine. I can only speak on my own journey.

It's easy for most people to think that when you are betrayed the thing to do is to leave, to divorce your

husband and move on with your life. That the feminist thing to do is because a strong woman doesn't put up with that kind of treatment. I beg to differ. There are things that we never should tolerate, such as abuse, but betrayal comes in a lot of different forms and they don't always merit leaving. The strength of a woman is not in becoming bitter but in allowing herself to heal and forgive, which comes when she faces the pain in order to be able to forgive a man who has taken responsibility for himself and begun to change his ways. Becoming bitter is easy. Taking a man to court to get as much money as you can out of him so that his life is miserable is easy, I know, I'm also an ex-wife so I have been down that road too. What isn't easy is to face the anger, the denial, the pain and then accept the apology, then work with the man you married to rebuild the marriage that you both vowed to stay faithful to on your wedding day. Newsflash: it wasn't all about the cake. No, that isn't easy at all. But the one thing that I do know, and I think that Beyonce is trying to show in her visual album, is that the love of a man who has accepted responsibility and has been forgiven is the kind of love that creates women who can pass down the wisdom of love, life, pain and redemption in our stories to our daughters and granddaughters. Those men also become the kind of men who can sit with their sons and grandsons and tell them to stay away from the hoes, because nothing is worth hurting the woman you love and who gives you life with her smile. I know that goes against everything we hear about female/male relationships because women don't need men to do anything... well, that's all bullshit. We are created for relationships and all relationships bring pain.

As my Tio passed away, my Tia sat by his side. She told him she loved him, he smiled at her and she led us all in a Rosary for him. The life of a married couple of 53 years all came down to one of them helping the other prepare to die. All of their fights didn't matter in those moments, all that mattered was that they loved each other. It was that love that gave them the strength to say good-bye. It also helped each of us who witnessed it to let go of my Tio when it was time. That love was powerful. I am sure there was plenty of times when my Tia wanted to leave him in their 53 years together and she probably had good reason to, but she didn't, instead they both forgave each other. In that forgiveness came the kind of love that changes everything. The kind of love that is redemptive. Those are true love stories, the ones that come with a cross, just like the greatest love story ever told of God's love for us that He gave us His only begotten Son.

It is that kind of love that creates marriages that can move mountains. There is a freedom in those marriages that survive the worst of times.

*\*\*When I talk about staying in a marriage and forgiving our spouses, I never mean to stay in an abusive situation or a situation where a spouse is doing nothing to help in the marriage. If you are in danger, that isn't a time to stay, find a priest or a domestic abuse shelter and find a way out. If you are married to a lazy bum, then start working on finding your worth.*

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# For the Too Busy Blogger [at Erin McCole Cupp]

Ah, the fruits of [a Lent full of unwilling penances](#). [I didn't know you could stress your gallbladder to death](#), but it turns you can, and I did. And that's just one of three ways that stress seems to be affecting my health right now. No, not seems to be: IS.

You'll have to expect to see me less, I think. I like blogging, but I like staying alive even more.

I wish I were the person who could do more. Apparently I'm not. I've had to drop at least one commitment so far and am in the process of reducing others. So I made a list.



Care to add any of your own?

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# My New Catholic Wedding Project: Introducing Spoken Bride [at Captive the Heart: A Sprightly Wedding Blog For the Catholic Bride]



If things have been a little quiet around here lately, it's because I've been working on a project that's been in the works for almost a year. I'm thrilled to introduce you to

## [SPOKEN BRIDE](#)

, a new website that combines lifestyle articles for brides and newlyweds, visual inspiration from jaw-dropping real Catholic weddings, and community for Catholic wedding vendors.

Last summer, my friends

[Jiza](#)

,  
[Elissa](#)

(she took that gorgeous image above from Maura of

[Made In His Image](#)

's wedding!) and I started talking about what a need there is to foster connections between Catholic wedding photographers, planners, and designers in order to help them find clients who appreciate their fire for the sacrament of marriage, as well as the need for a resource that provides visually beautiful images and inspiration on par with the culture's wedding sites, yet made deeper and truer with spiritual richness. A few weeks ago, our friend

[Andi](#)

joined us, and things have been rolling, and rolling fast, since then. SPOKEN BRIDE launches May 31, the Feast of the Visitation, to close the month of Our Lady with a nod to her identity as the purest, most humble, obedient, radiant bride, in the best sense of the words.

I couldn't be happier that this dream, a long time coming, now has some real internet roots, and we have high hopes for SPOKEN becoming a distinctive, noted resource for lots of brides. Read more about us and about our mission

[here](#)

. Meantime, I'll still be posting here, at least through the end of May, and am currently discerning how SPOKEN and Captive the Heart will intersect.

Want to get involved? This community will be dependent on submissions and involvement from y'all, so we'd love to have you!

- If you're engaged or newlywed, find info about submitting your wedding or engagement shoot [here](#).
- If you're a photographer or other wedding vendor, click [here](#) for more on joining our Vendor Guide and having your work and your business featured on the site and in our forthcoming directory for brides.
- Do you have an article idea? Deets on submitting written work are [here](#).

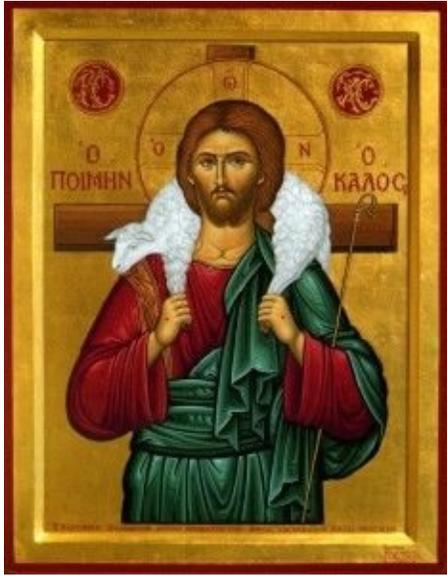
Please pray for us as we start this ministry and share it with your friends, ministry partners, and fellow vendors and creatives! I hope you'll join me!

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This contribution is available at <http://captivetheheart.blogspot.com/2016/04/my-new-catholic-wedding-project.html>  
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## Good Shepherd: Union [at The Catholic Spiritual Life]



[ACTS 13:14, 43:52; PS 100:1-2, 4, 5; REV 7:9, 14b-17; JN 10:27-30](#)

Last Sunday is now well behind us, but despite a busy week, I don't want to miss the opportunity to comment on its rich readings.

The Second Sunday of Easter taught us about God's mercy for us; the Third Sunday taught us to worship; this Fourth Sunday, Good Shepherd Sunday, taught us about union.

\*\*\*

The short Gospel reading was from the fabulous tenth chapter of John's Gospel, which is all about the Good Shepherd. Pope Francis says a good shepherd smells like his sheep. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is one with his sheep. He shares in our humanity so that we might share in his divinity.

Our reading begins, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." What is implicit is that, just as he knows them, so they know him – that's why they recognize his voice, and follow. Sheep, as we have said in the past, have an important kind of intelligence: they know their shepherd. They don't have to be driven with sticks; they follow. Faith is a gift – we recognize our shepherd because he has given his own knowledge to us.

They know him because he is among them. They trust him because he knows and cares for them. The shepherd and the sheep are one.

He gives them life, his life – and they will never be destroyed. The earthly shepherd is a dim image of the kind of care that our Good Shepherd gives us. He is the very giver of life. We live in his hands.

And then he concludes (in our little snippet from a long discourse), "The Father and I are one." He alludes to a deeper discussion about the unity of the Trinity, a unity poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given to us.

\*\*\*

In our reading from Revelation, in a more mystical key, John portrays the shepherd as a sheep – the most vulnerable sheep, the Lamb. Of course, Jesus is the Lamb in John’s Gospel, too, but here we have it put together: “the Lamb will shepherd them, and lead them to springs of life-giving water.” He can shepherd us because he has united himself to us. We can trust him because this Lamb shows his concern for us in becoming one of us. When he offers us shelter from the sun and the heat, and relief from our hunger and thirst, we know it is for real.

We look to Jesus in his humanity and know he will care for us.

The Lamb, of course, is also an image of sacrifice. In Revelation he is “the Lamb who was slain.” In this reading, we wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. There are two kinds of depth of unity in this remarkable phrase. First, he unites himself to us not only in our relief, but in our suffering. He loves us “to the end,” to the depths, to the most awful aspects of our existence, to blood and death.

And second, he washes us white, which is a sign of purifying us. He makes us good. He doesn’t merely shelter us from the outside, he transforms us from within. He is not merely a distant God who gives us earthly food, he is Jesus who transfigures us, makes our hearts like unto his Sacred Heart, washes us clean.

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This contribution is available at <http://professorjohnston.com/good-shepherd-union/>  
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# Pope Francis' Mission Of Mercy and the SSPX: Silver Lining or Pandora's Box? [at Servimus unum Deum]

Hello Everyone,

Yes it's been quiet here on S.U.D. That's mainly because of me being squeezed out between my work, and wedding preparations. Only 2 weeks to go! That doesn't leave me much time for entries. But finally, I have something for you ..... something concerning ... yet it is Latin Mass/Traditional Catholicism related.

My basis started after I read a

[post on the great, Fr. John Zuhlsdorf's WDTPRS blog](#)

. It was reported here on these Orthodox "Glad Trad" blogs (e.g.

[Southern Orders](#)

,  
[Fr. Z](#)

), and the RMT sites that I will not hyperlink to (e.g. Rorate Caeli), with confirmation on the Vatican's major news portal (see here:

<http://www.news.va/en/news/press-office-confirms-pope-francis-meeting-with-ss>

) that Pope Francis had a meeting with the current head of the Society of St. Pius X, "Reverend" Bernard Fellay. That is as far a title I will allot to him, because he and the other "priests" of the Society of St. Pius X are NOT in communion with Holy Mother Church. Also, pastors of Christian churches can be called "Reverend" so it's not just the SSPX. Turns out the SSPX leaked that their leader, "Reverend" Bernard Fellay, had a meeting with Pope Francis.

I couldn't believe this, and it got my wheels turning, so I started to draft this in response. After multiple starts and stops,

[an interesting article surfaced](#)

yesterday on Southern Orders blog run by Fr. Allan J. McDonald of the diocese of Macon in the USA. He featured an article from once-Boston Globe associated CRUX news about possible reconciliation between the SSPX and the Church. I took an alternative viewpoint in the comments box, which only further proved what I am about to say, and makes this posting more prominent in terms of its timing.

Throughout his papacy, there's been interesting news about Pope Francis and who he is choosing to extend his "Mission of Mercy" to. Now, while I take a lot of what the Radicals Misrepresenting Traditionalists (RMTs) (and Catholics everywhere,) say on their armchair thrones from their domiciles or workplaces, with a heavy grain of salt, there is something that has been going on that has me deeply concerned with

whom Francis is possibly bestowing "Mercy" to.

Allow me to remind you of the status of the society as to WHY they are not in communion with the Church, and why I will NOT call Fellay a bishop, despite technical or formal jargon and processes, or not. This is important because this post and its follow up in Part II, concerns the news that has been floating around, and it's highly concerning for the future of the Church.

*Background as to why to be deeply concerned with the SSPX's re-entry ...*

As per

[Benedict XVI's lifting of the censure of excommunication from Fellay and his fellow "bishops",](#)

De Mallerai, Williamson (who is now likely RE-EXCOMMUNICATED for consecrating bishops without the authority of Pope Francis and the Holy Catholic Church), and Alfonso de Galarreta,

***"... As long as the Society does not have a canonical status in the Church, its ministers do not exercise legitimate ministries in the Church...."***

The only absolute exception is recently, with Pope Francis' granting of temporary faculties for confession until November 20th this year for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. As for their Eucharists, those done by the SSPX ``clergy`` are ALWAYS consecrated illegally, in disobedience to Holy Mother Church, but is

*likely*

valid due to the odd canonical situation of the Society. One, however, should not play with the safety of their salvation and consume it, due to its questionable status.

The SSPX became "non-canonical" due to then Vatican II council father and founder of the SSPX, Marcel Lefebvre, and a co-consecrating bishop (who had since reconciled with Holy Mother Church,) illicitly consecrating bishops without a papal mandate from John Paul II in 1988. Regardless of whatever supposed politics between the two parties happened, the four men above, including current head Fellay, were the illegally consecrated bishops. When this happened, the SSPX (that is, its clergy) incurred the status, having NO sacramental jurisdiction in the Church, and Lefebvre, that bishop, and the four "musketeers" being excommunicated (until Benedict's intervention for the four & the co-consecrator's reconciliation.) The Sacramental jurisdiction comes from being under the authority of a bishop, even one from Rome in the Church as part of a personal prelature or missionary order (e.g. Opus Dei, Fraternal Society of St. Peter.) Sadly, Lefebvre NEVER reconciled with the Church, which is a very concerning statement for the foundation of the Society: one founded on disobedience and rebellion to Holy Mother Church.

In current day, the SSPX STILL has not reconciled with the Church. While Benedict XVI tried with negotiations in 2012, they ended in failure because once again, the SSPX refused to submit

**doctrinally**

to Holy Mother Church, and it is rumored the log in their eye, Vatican II, was to blame. The refusal was supposedly against a direct order from Benedict XVI, a condition which if not filled, would not allow them to reconcile with the Church. Currently, they operate two major "seminaries" with their major one in

the birthplace where its establishment began, Ecône, Switzerland, and have numerous chapels (I will NOT call them parishes, that's only reserved for those priests and communities in canonical validity with the Church) as well as private schools.

*More Holier than Thou ... or how the SSPX are Protestant in the Sense of Church Hating ...*

However, in existing in the world, they adhere to an education that is almost 100% how it was "pre-1962" with its strictness, teaching methods, and application of such methods in strict authority. Unfortunately, coupled with all this is the teaching to their "adherents," a twisted theology that attacks Holy Mother Church, the Novus Ordo Mass, Pope Francis, even professing incorrect teachings that are not in force in the Church. An incorrect teaching, for example, I take from a former friend now with the SSPX, who told me it was a mortal sin to eat meat on Fridays. He goes to the chapel in my archdiocese (obviously NOT under the jurisdiction of ++Collins,) and never went to their schools, so this is likely where he learnt this error.

**This is entirely incorrect**

. The current Canon Law in the Church and its Catechism, do NOT state this, nor any document in the Church's history. Furthermore,

[our current Canon Law of 1983](#)

, clearly states that this version of the law is in effect, not this AND/OR any other version of Canon Law, here in Section 5, subsection 1:

``Can. 5 §1. Universal or particular customs presently in force which are contrary to the prescripts of these canons **and are reprobated by the canons of this Code** [of Canon Law promulgated in 1983] **are absolutely suppressed and are not permitted to revive in the future.** Other contrary customs are also considered suppressed unless the Code expressly provides otherwise or unless they are centenary or immemorial customs which can be tolerated if, in the judgment of the ordinary, they cannot be removed due to the circumstances of places and persons.

``

As to hating the Novus Ordo, I turn to these YouTube videos: " Should Catholics Attend the New Mass? - Part I or II - Episode 14 - SSPX FAQ Series." and the second part in episode 15 with the similar title. I will not link to it, so you will have to do the grunt work, but if you do, watch it with caution and concern. I am merely watching these videos for the most relevant parts to this post.

First, at 2:19-2:30, the collared cleric begins to weave the web of confusion about the necessity of avoiding the Novus Ordo to be necessary. He tells the viewer that while the Church obliges all Catholics to attend Mass, it is "according to the Human Condition" and that there are occasions that might make attendance at Mass on a Sunday "impractical." This cleric's word choice is interesting. He does not say the more appropriate "unavoidable," but rather "impractical," meaning if it doesn't fit one's routine or

**personal**

needs, it is not necessary.

While continuing on in part I, the cleric correctly addresses common reasons for dispensation from the obligation, and the parish priest's ability to dispense the obligation when the situation falls outside common reasons or scenarios.

Part II is where the conspiracy theories and the hate train begins. They set you up in part I with the "basics" which are mostly correct. However, like how the Devil twists truths or things good to bring out malicious intention and sin, likewise the SSPX does so to go into part II to say why you should reject and hate the Novus ordo.

Immediately, as RMTs are wont to do, it goes for the conspiracy theory angle, implying that Pope Paul VI was directly responsible with Annibale Bugnini, to create a Protestant, heretical product: "..

under the influence of Fr. Annibale Bugnini and Pope Paul VI, both of whom wanted a liturgy that was ecumenical and would not be a "stumbling block" to Protestants. This goal was accomplished with the new liturgy by obscuring or even removing from its prayers the Catholic doctrines concerning the propitiatory nature of the Mass, the sacrificial and mediatory character of the priesthood, and the dogma of the Real Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

"

Further, the cleric goes on to say about the Novus Ordo:

"... the New Mass departs from the Catholic Faith "as a whole and in its details .... this new liturgy has confused or destroyed the Faith of millions of Catholics since the 1970's to the point that most churchgoers today have an erroneous understanding of the Catholic doctrine of the Mass and sometimes do not even believe in the real presence .... The Church cannot ask her members to endanger their Faith. This is the reason why Catholics are not obliged to attend the New Mass to fulfill the Sunday Precept. In fact, for those who have knowledge of its inherent problems, the New Mass is to be completely avoided, as they understand that it is also an offense to God ...."

So let's see, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the most POWERFUL form of prayer in the world, that which Christ has asked his Holy Priests to perform for all time, is a product hellbent on destroying the faithful of Millions?

There is so much fault at this explanation I'll only briefly wax over it.

First of all, I quote from Scripture from the NRSV-CE the Gospel of Luke 11:9-13:

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

I may be no JCD or P.hD, but I'm pretty certain that tied into the OH SO FAMOUS Matthew 16:18-19, that Christ would NEVER let the Church be destroyed by Satan, and above, would never seek to purposely

## **poison**

his sheep. Think about it, if the Church, were to do so, then clearly Christ lied in establishing His One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, it would NOT be guided by the Holy Spirit, it would not bear the mark of HOLY, and at best Jesus as God made Flesh, reflecting God, would be nothing more than like the Greek Gods of old, who sometimes looked after humanity, but also sometimes had fun playing around with them, like in Oedipus Rex and other Greek tragedies.

Also fine you might go on about the whole Bugini thing and such. First, the general Church did NOT have the Internet to propagate information as quick as a button, so the majority of priests, lay leaders, etc., had to rely on whatever was taught/handed down to them. Liberal influences and people clearly got a hold of that to curb things in their favour. Secondly, the translators used dynamic equivalence, more meaning vs. literal translation in other words. That definitely screwed up the translation. Final point on the propagation of such a "malformed" product: If it was that bad, wouldn't the Church have more quickly closed up shop in multiple (arch)dioceses already, with barely a physical presence in the world today, with only Latin Mass parishes, Byzantine parishes, etc. surviving? If it was truly a product of the Devil, and we can trust our Lord to only give us truly GOOD gifts, as per His Holy Words above, wouldn't he have allowed rapid and quick destruction of those institutional parts of the Church with this new Mass to die immediately? Did he not also tell His Disciples that He would separate the wheat from the chaff, and cursed a fig tree producing no spiritual fruit to show that that which is not of God will wither and die?

Further to add, despite the calumnies of the SSPX against Holy Mother Church and the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite, it STILL brings in converts and new faithful every year, around the world, at the Holy Triduum's Saturday Easter Vigil. If this Mass was clearly poison to the lay faithful, then why does the bosom of Holy Mother Church, continue to entice people to join her? Why then, would other noted apologists and lay leaders, such as Scott Hahn, Dave Armstrong, Fr. Dwight Longenecker, Jimmy Akin, Marcus Grodi, etc. who are CONVERTS, attend such a "bastardized" form of the Mass, only to spread the faith and do their absolute best to bring other people into the Church, with their apologetics and Internet websites?

Now, listen, it's one thing to analyze the Masses properly, and state what has been gained/lost from prior forms/updates. It's also one thing to state that "Form X has a

*temptation*

to allow priests to become entertainers due to

*versus populum*

and factors a, b, c, in the Church." However to imply that the form itself is defective, as this "priest" has said, even if the statement does or does not literally say so, contains in itself heresy and hate for the Church.

On a final note, as for the Pope Hate? Once Pope Francis ascended to the Seat of Peter,

[Fellay had calumnious words for Pope Francis that he was practicing heresy by being a modernist](#)

from a sermon he did, and put it publicly for distribution on the SSPX regional websites, also committing

the grievous sin of detraction, as well as what Pope Francis has called the Devil's work:

*gossip.*

*Conclusion Part I*

With this history, and a gander of what these "fine" folks will bring into the Church with regards to their vicious stances against the Novus Ordo and Pope Francis, contravening Scripture and other important facets of the Church in the process, these are the "gifts" they will bring into the Church when they come in.

So then, with these gifts in mind and their current stance on our modern Church,

*why should the SSPX not be receiving the gift of mercy, unchecked, in having their canonical validity and status restored in Holy Mother Church?*

That, my dear friends, and enemies and their fanboys/fan-maidens (I know you are watching me,) will be for Part II, which shall be scheduled for release this evening. But before I bid you adieu,

**Due**

**to the nature of this post, judging by the reaction I received [here](#), in prudence, comments will be closed for this posting.**

Ta Ta, and Pax.

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This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.ca/2016/04/dangerous-tides-swimming-pope-francis.html>

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## **Back to the Land, Back to God [at Wild things farm]**

There is a disconnect today between eaters and food sources. I think this is becoming a fundamental problem with society. When we lose sight of our food sources, of what else do we lose sight? Because, ultimately, what (or Who) is the source of the food which sustains us?

We had a young visitor to our homestead one day and, on seeing our chickens, she asked “Do they lay eggs? Can you eat them?!?” Her questions aren’t the exception. Most people today give little to no thought to the source of the food they eat. Here in the United States, food is, for the most part, plentiful and easily accessible.

When we become so far removed from the source of our food supply, we cease thinking about the steps that brought that food to our table. We eat for nothing more than the base instinct of survival. When we turn back to the land, be it through homesteading, supporting the local farmers market, or growing a small backyard garden, we reconnect to the Source of our food. We eat for community, pleasure, and personal connection.

When we raise just the smallest bit of our own food, even a pot of tomatoes on the back porch, or converse with our farmer at Saturday’s market, we remember all that goes into the process of putting food on the table. We also are reminded of Who is in charge of the success of that tomato plant or the laying of the eggs that fill your carton. The farmer works hard to bring you healthy food, but at the end of the day, Mother Nature is truly calling the shots. It doesn’t matter how well I tend my flock, when God makes the days short and dark, there’s nothing I can do to make those ladies lay!

This brings me to contemplate; is our disconnect from the land causing a disconnect from God? When we, as a society, lose sight of the source from which our food comes, we lose sight of He who gave it to us. Perhaps the greatest gift of the current “back to the land” movement that we are seeing will be a turning back to God.

A person working his own piece of land relies on the whims of Mother Nature. He watches the temperature shift in early spring, signalling him to tap the maple trees, he watches the flowers open and knows that the honey will soon be flowing in the hive, he sees the night time lows consistently staying above freezing, letting him know it’s time to plant. All of these things are out of his control. It is in working with Mother Nature that homesteader will find success. In turning back to the land, we really do turn back to God. Perhaps some won’t be as distinctly aware of this as others, but it is inevitable. We can’t work this land without working with He who made it.

# Fatima, the Church, and the World - Standing Together Before God [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

*A reflection in response to the fear of trusting Pope Francis to lead us in faithfully following Jesus*

There is considerable material on the Internet by Catholics who consider themselves "traditional" on the state of our Roman Catholic Church and her relationship with Our Lady and her message to the Church and world at Fatima in 1917. Some regret the hierarchy no longer declares fit for hell all those who are in mortal sin or are not Catholic. They repudiate the pastoral or maternal approach of popes since 1960 as perverse and erroneous and condemn all efforts at ecumenism and evangelization through dialogue as sacrilegious and heretical.

They criticize so severely as to judge Pope Francis wrong in his friendliness to other Christians, Jews, Muslims, people of other religions, atheists, or people whom they could label in any way as engaging in sin or a sinful way of life or of thinking or speaking. In short, only strictly faithful Roman Catholics employing the Tridentine Mass who adhere to and continue to express the hierarchical condemnations of all errors as in the previous two millennia are among the "pure" or are truly faithful.

This is precisely how the religious leaders of his day treated Jesus and He warned that this is how they would treat his faithful disciples in every generation until his return. In his day the religious leaders accused Jesus of being impure and associating with sinners. Those who criticize and judge Pope Francis would do well to heed Jesus' word to the Apostles reported by Luke in 9:54 and unite not divide the Church. Those who preach the Good News in Jesus' Name are "with us not against us."

He also commissioned us to follow his example, work together, and bring his light to the world. Our safety is to walk humbly with the Lord and strive to obey the Father's will as Jesus did. This is why He gave the keys to Peter and for us in our day Peter is Pope Francis; so that we might have in Peter, in Pope Francis, an opportunity to practice our obedience to God. This has always been one of the attractions for men and women to join a religious order; so that in the person of their religious superior they would have a daily opportunity to put their own will second in order to make room for the will of God.

Some conditions in the Roman Catholic Church and the world are indeed troubling. Since the time of Jesus in every time and place the darkness tried and continues to try to divide the Church and to extinguish the light of the Gospel lit by Jesus the Son of God, which He himself cautioned his disciples about while reassuring them He would remain with them and us till the end of time. In particular more recently Pope Leo XIII was shown by God that an intense and brutal trial of the Church and the world would be caused by the devil in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in response to which he composed a prayer to St Michael the Archangel and added it as part of the concluding rites of the Holy Mass. Although the Prayer to St Michael is no longer a part of the concluding rites of the Holy Mass, we can all continue to pray this prayer frequently

and call upon this powerful messenger of the Lord to protect us from the threats and traps of the evil one.

The chaos, perverse liturgies, sacrileges, destruction of sanctuaries and other abuses that took place since the Second Vatican Council are not simply due to or explainable by the liturgical reform. Such evil comes from hell as it always has, and highlights the value of Our Lady's message at Fatima. Only God can dissolve atheistic regimes and the secular influence of Masonic and other humanistic principles. The gates of hell will not prevail against his Church, as Jesus proclaimed to his Apostles when He entrusted his authority to them in the person of Peter.

Jesus' words do not suggest a passive stance on our part as his disciples. He did not say that the gates of the Church would withstand the assaults of hell, but rather that the gates of hell would not prevail against the assaults of his disciples, his Church. Jesus commissions us in his Church to employ the weapons provided by Jesus Himself and through his Mother Mary in taking an offensive stance against the ruses and attacks that are inspired from hell, both in our personal lives and around us, in the Church and in society. Portugal was in the grip of an atheistic regime that followed Masonic principles and Our Lady brought God's solution to all such errors in her message to the world. The faith response of the faithful in Portugal allowed God to eclipse the Masonic government. It remained for the Church to consecrate Russia and for all of the faithful of the Church worldwide to put into practice the full message of Fatima so God could eclipse its influence in the world as well. Pope John Paul II did so March 25, 1984.

Liturgical abuses have been particularly grotesque in the English world aided and abetted by the poor translation of the Roman Missal of the Novus Ordo Mass in 1974, being as it was not a traditional translation but one that was made in a process of "dynamic equivalence", significantly impoverishing the Holy Mass texts as a result. The new complete Roman Missal is a worthy and reverent translation with a richer "diet" of the Word of God spread over a three year Sunday cycle and two year weekday cycle and additional readings for sacraments and other liturgies. On July 7, 2007 Pope Benedict published "Summorum Pontificum" in motu proprio restoring to our altars the Roman Missal from prior to the 1970 reform. Both traditions now belong to all Catholics. Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI after the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 called on the whole Church to reverse the liturgical abuses committed in the previous decades. We are all called to continue doing this by studying and being faithful to the Liturgy and by dropping unnecessary additions or modifications.

Abuse of holy things, disintegration of marriage and family, loss of vocations, moral collapse and rejection of God in society all still affect people in our time. As it was in Portugal in 1917 now some American RC's sense their nation has been ruled since the American Revolution of 1775 by people who follow secular Masonic principles and that these principles have also affected all of the western societies and churches. In light of the enemy's attacks on humanity we must beware as Jesus warned lest we sacrifice mercy to the letter of the law like the Pharisees did. Fear and the refusal to trust in God are consequences of the original sin and it is out of fear that we are all tempted to employ force to defend ourselves and what we value, to employ the letter of the law as a weapon, a power; rather than entrust ourselves and others to the power of God's love and mercy, justice and goodness. The Evangelist John in his first letter taught that love of God and neighbour casts out all fear.

Having reviewed testimony on various points of view I find it compelling to accept Sr Lucia's reply that Pope John Paul II's Act of Entrustment of March 25, 1984 satisfied Our Lady's request. Heaven is doing its part and so must we do ours. Much remains to be done. Our Lady calls us to live and to bring the

message of Fatima to the world: to repent from sin, turn to the Lord, devoutly live the faith and the sacraments, pray and meditate on the Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary, observe the Five First Saturdays, fast and do penance, wear the brown Scapular, and spread her message along with the Good News. Let us stand united in faith, hope, and fraternal mutual love before the world in faithful response to Jesus' prayer in John 17; that the world may believe because of the love we have for one another.

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This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2016/04/fatima-church-and-world-standing.html>  
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## Abby Johnson's 'The Walls Are Talking' [at Peace Garden Passage]

“I was wholeheartedly devoted to an industry that thrives on the premise that life is cheap.” – Abby Johnson, author of [The Walls Are Talking: Former Abortion Workers Tell Their Stories](#)

I first met Abby Johnson, former Planned Parenthood manager, when she came to Fargo, N.D., the summer of 2011, not long after her first book, *Unplanned*, came out.



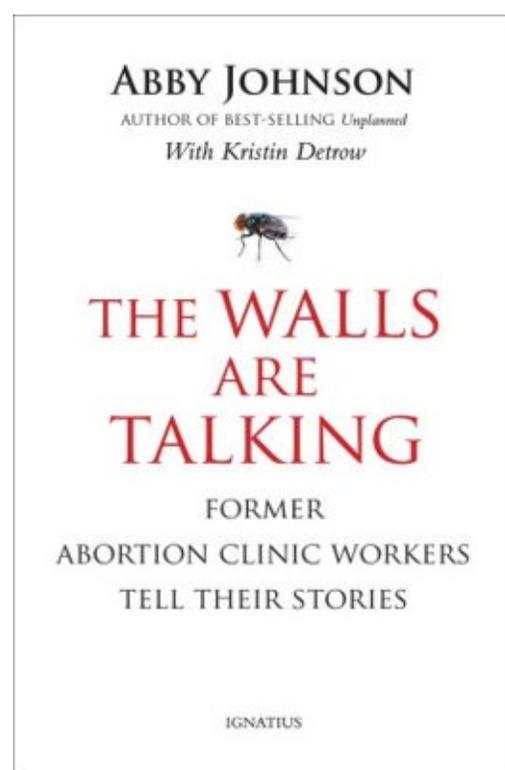
She was in town for a conference, and after she spoke, she invited us to pray with her at our state’s only abortion facility Downtown Fargo the next day. It was a powerful experience to hear her address God as well as the escorts and workers of that facility, knowing she had been in their place just a few years before.



No one can shed light on a crisis quite like one who has experienced it themselves. God knew we needed to see deeper into this issue, and through Abby’s story, we were duly enlightened, and changed.

At the time of that first crossing, I'd just started praying downtown on occasion, and Abby's story further convicted me. It was no longer just about the babies to me, though they remain an integral concern, but also about the souls of their mothers, the receptionists, nurses and even the abortion doctors who do the dirty deeds, and then, like Pontius Pilate, attempt to wash their hands clean of the atrocity.

A few years later, I accepted an opportunity to write the story of another former abortion-industry worker, Ramona Trevino, bringing me even further insight into the deceptive web of the abortion industry, and now, through Abby's latest book, ["The Walls Are Talking: Former Abortion Clinic Workers Tell Their Stories"](#) (Ignatius Press), I have been ushered into yet another layer of this modern-day holocaust.



The book reveals the heart-wrenching reality of what those who work on the inside have seen, as shared by the workers (all former now) themselves — Abby as well as others. Each has been written in first person to protect the authors' identities.

Why would their identities need protecting? Because what they've witnessed is horrific, and not something one shares lightly. Their journeys gave them a peek into hell, and their souls now cry out to share the troubling truth with the rest of us.

In these accounts, for example, we learn how abortion necessitates the reassembling of the fragile body parts to ensure none of the tiny human fragments have been left behind. "... (In) hundreds of abortion clinics across the United States, each one of them with their own POC (Products of Conception) lab... workers casually converse as they piece together the torn limbs of dead babies like macabre puzzles," Abby shares.

We see how many of the workers are lured in slowly, often not aware of the death trap they're in until it's too late: "Before they could say *Vagina Monologues*, fresh young abortion idealists found themselves standing over a dish full of death."

I will never get out of my mind the story of the woman who had returned for her ninth abortion, and

casually asked to see “it.” Her reaction to the “blob of tissues” before her brought on a sudden and horrified change in her face, sending her spinning into an emotional frenzy at the realization, finally, of what she had done.

“Upon viewing her baby, Angie changed from a woman who had abortions like some women get manicures, to a sorrowful and broken person, desperate to cling to what remained of her tiny child.”

Because of this book, we can no longer say we didn’t know. My own convictions have only increased, knowing more clearly the reality of what takes place in that dark corner of our city every week. I find myself thinking even more of the women and how they’ve been lied to, and what an injustice it is. I want to be a face of hope for them however I can.

No matter how difficult it might be to walk with Abby and her friends through their stories — and it is certainly not easy — their accounts are ultimately stories of hope and redemption. As we read in Scripture, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5)

*The Walls Are Talking* reminds us that God is with us, and we will not be overcome by darkness. Through our own work overcoming this evil through merciful actions, the light will permeate every corner of our world, bringing freedom to the babies, the mothers to whom they’ve been given, and the physicians trained to bring life who have, through their greed and misguided compassion, betrayed their profession.

One cannot read *The Walls are Talking* without being changed, and feeling indebted to the brave workers who have dared to speak in order to enlighten the world. Read this book, for the babies, for the deceived mothers, and for all those on whose hands the blood of the innocent remains.

Through reading and remembering, we can, together, shine a little light in the dark until the whole world is illumined with love.

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2016/04/roxis-reviews-abby-johnsons-the-walls-are-talking/>  
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I'm a bit of an affirmation junkie. I like making cool things and I like it even more when I like how they look when I'm finished...**and** when others tell me they like them too. It's not a big leap to realize that *I like when people like me and when they like the things that I do.*

I struggled to keep good (really good!) grades and made it through a tough program. I married a great guy and strive to be a good wife and mom to all the kids God has given us. I've always taken pride in making things...including special gifts by hand, the best I could do to show my love for others.



It actually seems pretty straight forward that I'm still trying to earn the Father's Love, even though I'm supposed to know I already have It. My strategy is to earn His Love by good behavior, checking off my to do list, making Catholic Faith filled stuff to try to win others over, raising good kids and hoping they're some sort of credit to my husband and me. I'm quietly nervous that there will be some loop hole, something I've overlooked; not quite passing the test, hoping to scrape into purgatory on my scrambling efforts.

Plagued by comparisons all my life, I continue to pursue some impossible expectations based on my skewed perception of values and abilities of others: other Catholic bloggers, other moms, other women. You see, I give others plenty benefit of doubt. I often set them up on the most favorable pedestal and park myself somewhere in the shadows they cast.



There is little mercy or wiggle room in the expectations I have for myself. My little victories sometimes have limited life while my stumbles or face palms taunt me forever. Assuming the disadvantage, I'm just not ever going to be more like those I compare myself to.

**I need to make peace with the person God created me to be.**

Discouragement comes easily when expectations seem unattainable.

Just like on [that bus in Rome](#), the Lord answered a question rolling around forever in my heart. I didn't even realize I was asking the question or how much I needed to hear the answer, but more articulately put than I could express...the words formed the realization while I prayed before Mass. I almost said it out loud...**in surprise:**

***'like hey!.... "You don't have impossible expectations for me!" '***

It wasn't a booming voice or even a directive in the first person. Maybe it's not profound to you...but it kind of is...to me. It was like the answer was formed in my head (and my heart) to answer the question I hadn't really asked. The realization that His expectations for me are **not unattainable**, but actually within my reach...is profound for me in the face of my life-ful of comparisons and expectations I burden myself with. But they are *my* expectations, burned out of pride and they don't take into account His Mercy.



It's not lowered expectations or compromised standards. They're still ambitious expectations for a *Child of God*.

- They're **realistic**...because they're **real**. He sees the real me better than I can and He loves me completely.
- They're **informed** expectations because **He knows me**...better than I do.
- They're **affirming** expectations because they give me **hope**.

The Lord knows me and all my quirks and fragments; faults, weaknesses and failings. He doesn't put unrealistic aspirations in my head to frustrate me.

*He isn't even frustrated by my state in the spiritual life.*

- **I haven't disappointed him**, progressing too slowly.
- **I haven't scandalized Him** with my repeated struggles and sins.
- He knows the good that I'm capable of and while the choices I make surely impact my path, He refuses to jeopardize my free will.
- **He knows where I fit** and *He has the time to let me figure it out.*

All I need to do is to remember to call out to Him, rely on Him...and **my perseverance in that struggle is what endears me to Him.**



He wants me to succeed...in holiness. Most importantly, He wants me *up there* someday in Heaven *with* Him and He knows just what it takes....and more specifically....what I need to do, to be, to get there. He knows my disposition, my heart's intentions and even my doubts and **He *still* has confidence in me.**

Heaven isn't this unattainable carrot designed to keep me busy, or frustrate me as I narrowly miss the gate on some technicality.



**His Mercy...and His Love for me...  
are unconditional and inexhaustible,  
as He perpetually holds out His Hand  
to lift me up.**

These more reflective posts are *a bit of a leap* for me, given the *crafts and family fun* type of posts I usually write on this site.

Your affirming comments go a long way...I'd love to hear from you in the comments!

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This contribution is available at <http://www.equippingcatholicfamilies.com/2016/04/attainable-expectations.html>  
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## Mother Angelica and Brother Joe [at Nisi Dominus]

A couple weeks ago this world lost two prominent Catholics, both Italian-Americans well-known for their involvement in broadcasting, and both with Franciscan connections. The first, of course, is EWTN founder and Franciscan nun Mother Angelica. Few Catholics below the rank of Pope have had quite so profound an impact in the Catholic world over the past century. Her influence has spread in ever-expanding ripples since the founding of her Catholic television station in 1981. Thanks to Mother Angelica there are people who have been brought into the Church or back to the practice of the Faith through EWTN; there are Catholics formed by watching, listening to, or working for EWTN who have gone on to people the amazing evangelization and apologetics industry that has sprouted up over the past four decades, and has become something of a movement; there are all the people, Catholic or not, affected by the witness of those whose faith has been nourished by that movement, and . . . well, it goes on and on.



Mother's life story is an inspiration all its own. One can't help but admire her determination to rise above a troubled childhood, and after that a debilitating injury as a young religious sister, to establish a convent in the deep south, and to create a vibrant Catholic media empire, sustained throughout by an unflinching love for Jesus Christ. In her last years she offered another, deeper, kind of witness when, like St. John Paul II, she was a living reflection of Christ's Paschal suffering (interesting that Mother died on Easter Sunday, and John Paul the Great on the Second Sunday of the Octave of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday). She suffered intensely after a pair of strokes fifteen years ago, with very limited powers of speech and a host of other related ailments. She did not, however, let her increasing pain and discomfort discourage her. Instead, according to EWTN chaplain Joseph Wolfe:

Mother Angelica had instructed her nuns to do everything to keep her alive, no matter how much she suffered, because every day she suffered, she suffered for God. [full article [here](#)]

I expect that there will be a cause for her canonization opened soon, and it will not be surprising if Saint

Angelica of Irondale finds her way onto the Liturgical Calendar in due time.



We will probably never see a cause for the canonization of long-time sports announcer Joe Garagiola, however, who died four days before Mother Angelica, on the Wednesday of Holy Week. Joe was not a Catholic broadcaster, like Mother Angelica, but a broadcaster who happened to be Catholic. In fact, although he was a lifelong, faithful Catholic, he would probably be intensely embarrassed by any discussion of his personal sanctity. Despite his celebrity he was a humble man, always speaking very dismissively, for instance, about his tenure as a catcher in major league baseball. The truth is that, although he wasn't a Hall of Fame player, his career wasn't without its highlights: he batted .257 in 676 games over eight seasons, which is quite respectable for a catcher, and in 1946, his rookie season, outthit the great Ted Williams in the World Series (the only Series for both of them).

It wasn't until his playing days were over that Joe Garagiola really made a name for himself, as a talker (which *did* get him into the Hall of Fame). He was a five-tool player in the broadcast booth: he started with an extensive knowledge of the game, experience playing at the highest level, and a knack for telling a story; in addition to those, his personal warmth and generous spirit kept him on the air for more than half a century, mostly in sports, but also for stints on various talk programs and game shows.

As it turns out, that warmth and generosity welled up from a deep source: Garagiola was a man of deep faith, as detailed [[here](#)] in a recent story at CatholicPhilly.com. He always carried a rosary in his pocket, had a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother and, for the last quarter century of his life, poured a veritable flood of time, money, and love into the St. Peter Mission School in the Gila River Indian Community near Phoenix, Arizona. The Franciscan nuns who run the school are among his most fervent fans:

“He was one of the best people I have ever met. There was no limit to his generosity,” said its principal, Sister Martha Mary Carpenter, who estimates that Garagiola was responsible for bringing hundreds of thousands of dollars into the school.

Indeed, Garagiola was a tireless fundraiser for St. Peter's, and was instrumental in financing and promoting a long list of improvements and additions to the school's facilities. He did more for St. Peter's than just give money, however: he gave himself. The former Major League catcher and broadcaster was constantly promoting the school. According to Sister Martha Mary, "Joe couldn't talk to people for more than five minutes without talking about the mission. ... He will be with us in spirit for a very long time." A frequent visitor to St. Peter's, he had often been with them in more than spirit, taking an intense interest not just in the institution, but in the children it serves. Sr. Martha Mary is proud to point out that

St. Peter's schoolchildren still recite "Joe's Prayer" twice each day. Garagiola himself taught them the short invocation: "Teach us O Lord, that every day, down every street, come chances to be God's hands and feet."



Before I go any further, let me make it clear that I am not advocating a cause for the canonization of Joe Garagiola, nor putting his personal sanctity on a par with Mother Angelica's, or anyone else's. The spiritual superstars who join the official canon will always be a very small and select group. At the same time, *all* believing Christians hope to spend their eternity in Heaven, in the Presence of God, which is precisely to become a saint. I suspect that, celebrity notwithstanding, most of us are more like Joe Garagiola than we are like Mother Angelica. Like most of us, Garagiola spent most of his time and effort on things that had little explicit connection to the Catholic Faith. As he was living out in The World, however, he was always open, "every day, down every street", to the possibility of living out Christ's love. The Great Saints show us how far we fallible creatures can rise, the little saints (a loving grandmother, a supportive coach or teacher, or a kind and generous old sportscaster) can teach us some of the first steps on the way. I'm adding "Joe's Prayer" to my store of devotions.

It's fitting that we pray for the souls of these two Catholics who have come into our homes so often through television, along with the souls of others who have died. Who knows? Some day, maybe soon, Mother Angelica and Brother may be praying *for us* before the Throne of God. (See also "[Feed My Sheep](#)" at **Principium Et Finis**)

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This contribution is available at <http://nisiidominus1.blogspot.com/2016/04/mother-angelica-and-brother-joe.html>  
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## Busy About Many Things



My mother's death happened so quickly and was so unexpected that I had difficulty coming to terms with it at the time. Everything seemed so unreal. I just didn't feel anything. Jobs had to be done and I had to do them. Someone had died and I had to make all the practical arrangements. My relatives and friends were there but they didn't support me, I organised them. I heard them say all the things you expect them to say, and I said all the things I was expected to say. It was as if I was acting a part, and I was conscious of it – but what else could I do?

When I got back home and returned to work I carried on as if nothing had happened. The workload had built up during my absence and it took me months to catch up. The sudden cancellation of a major conference gave me two weeks off. Although I didn't realize it at the time, it gave me the space and time I needed to come to terms with my mother's death. It took me a week to slow down. In the second week I read and re-read a pile of letters that my mother had sent me over the preceding years. The past came flooding back – all she'd done for me, been to me, all the sacrifices she made for me. Suddenly something that had been hard within me softened and the feelings and emotions that had been securely locked away welled up and overwhelmed me. Tears began to roll down my cheeks. I not only came to terms with her death but I celebrated her life, and her continuing life and love that I knew would always be with me.

On the following Good Friday when I was dutifully listening to the reading of the passion, something inside me said: “you've come to terms with your mother's death, but have you come to terms with Christ's death?” In a flash I saw how cerebral my faith had become. Here I was, reacting to Christ's death as coldly as I had reacted to my mother's death the year before. Once again there was the same feeling of unreality, as if I was play-acting, as if I was detached from something or from Someone with whom I should be deeply involved.

Some truths are just too big, too awful or too awesome for the mind and the emotions to cope with; they just don't react to them. That's one of the reasons why so many people never get beyond first beginnings with their prayer life. They can manage with the prayers they were taught as children, they can even make up their own, especially when they want something from God, but they can't get any further. They might believe every article in the creed, but it doesn't really touch them deeply. God is far away in his heaven and the gospel two thousand years away.

Two things are necessary for prayer to grow beyond the stage of set formulas and petitions, to the stage when it becomes a personal encounter with the most lovable man ever to walk on this earth. The first thing is to find some space and time in which to stop being '*busy about many things*' so that there can be time to come to terms with Christ's death, and to celebrate his life and love, and his continuing life and love.

The second thing needed is to read and re-read every word that has been written about him in the Gospel's and to read everything that he said, because what he said is addressed to us personally, just as every word in my mother's letters was addressed to me personally. These sacred words are precious, so they should be read slowly and carefully, as you would pore over poetry to penetrate its meaning and experience its impact. Gradually in time and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the faith that once seemed solely cerebral will deepen, as hearts and minds that were like stone before, soften and become porous to receive and experience the love of Christ ever more deeply.

When this happens, the feelings and the emotions react as the whole personality begins to respond in a perfectly human way to the most perfect human being of all. Prayer begins to grow, to develop and deepen, as in any other loving relationship. It expresses itself in the language of love as it responds to the One who now seems to rise out of the sacred texts, out of history, and to enter into the heart and mind of the person who has persevered in prayer beyond first beginnings. As love grows and deepens into union, words finally fade away as they give way to a profound and pregnant silence. Meditation gives way to contemplation – the still, silent and loving gaze upon the one whose life we now experience within us, because we have finally come to terms not only with his death, but with his Resurrection.

If those who love us remain with us through their enduring love, even after their death, how much more does Christ's love remain with us? He not only lived and died for us but rose from the dead precisely to be with us and enter into us with a love more potent and more powerful than the combined love of all humanity concentrated into a single act. In this supreme act, human and divine love is as one. Only we can keep resisting this sublime love. For although all other forms of energy can prove irresistible, love no matter how powerful can always be resisted, by a human heart that refuses to receive it.

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## Poverty of the Truth... A Little Tribute to Mother Angelica [at Our Home, Mary's Mantle]



May I begin by telling you the truth? I have not written this week. To be honest, every time I sat down, I was interrupted. By a phone call. By a task that had to be done. By life. I am the most unorganized person who lived their life ORGANIZED and it's driving me bonkers. <3 Sigh.

Anywhooooo....

One of the most remarkable and sad moments this past week, was Easter Sunday, when the world learned that our Blessed and so deeply loved Mother Angelica was in heaven with Our Lord. My heart was crushed and elated at the same time.

I have watched Mother Angelica for years. When I thought I was Catholic. When I realized I wasn't. When I came fully into the church. She was my GO TO. I fancy myself as being like her. I'm matter of fact. I'm fairly black and white (in terms of right/wrong) and I'm sassy. But I'm also loving and quiet and funny and so many other things. I envisioned myself as a friend of hers, kindred spirits. And here's the thing....

We all did that. Didn't we? Though a lot of us hadn't met her, we all knew and loved her. We all felt like she was family. We sent notes and things and we watched her. We laughed and we called our friends about this quip or that. She was as related to us as we are to God. And you know what - we are all RIGHT to have felt this way. It's who she was. It's what she wanted.

In the end, I know, that I can only aspire to be like her. And I do. Surely she is in heaven, enjoying all of the accolades people have given her over this past week.... thinking to herself - "stop talking about me and get to work saving souls, silly people." LOL

One of my favorite quotes from her is the above,

*"It's your Obligation to speak the truth, and everyone can either take it or leave it. But truth MUST be in us. We live in such poverty of the truth today!"*

Can't you just hear her saying it and pausing for emphasis? Oh me. She's so wonderful. And isn't that the truth.

I can not, for the life of me, figure out when we stopped telling the truth and WHY! I have been so unpopular for speaking the truth, about family, about neighborhood children, about myself. People just

sincerely dislike the truth. But without truth, honesty, integrity - what on earth do we have?

Let me start with the definition of honesty:

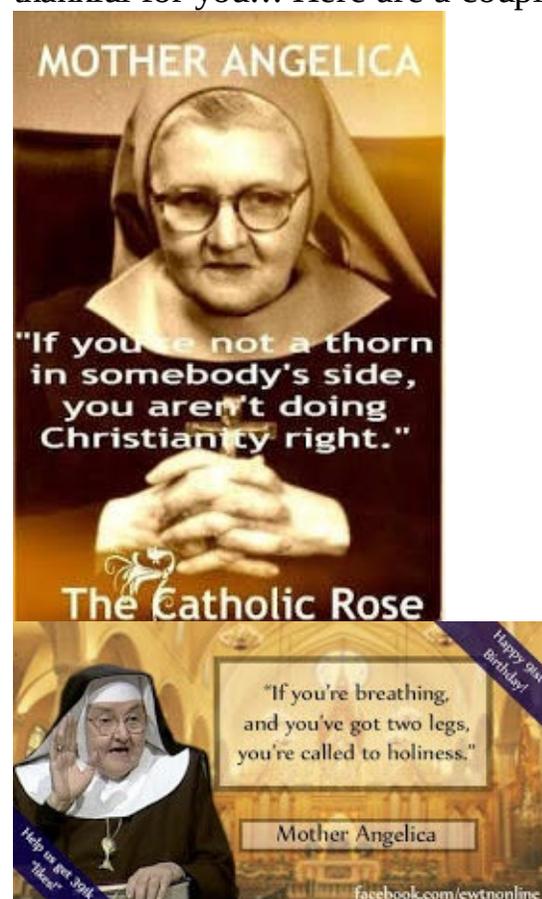
Honesty refers to a facet of moral character and connotes positive and virtuous attributes such as **integrity**, **truthfulness**, straightforwardness, including straightforwardness of conduct, along with the absence of lying, cheating, theft, etc. Furthermore, honesty means being trustworthy, loyal, fair, and sincere.

Now compare that definition to yourself, your friends, your family, what you see in the news, our country, our politicians, etc. The comparison process literally hurts my heart. It is enough to make me want to crawl into a hole and never come out. But I can't afford to do that.

We could all list what we are doing for Mother Church and for God... we are moms, Religious Ed teachers, comforters, friends, wives, sisters... the list goes on... and we are busy. But there is much more work to be done. When we are tired.... we must push through it.... whatever the IT is we have been through or are going through... there is much more to us. We can not let life stop us from doing God's work. While it is true, "we are weak and He is strong," we must strengthen our resolve; we must strengthen our Faith and stay in the word. We must pray more.

Perhaps the best part of being Christian, and living in Modern Times is that people like Mother Angelica will really never go away for us. We have them - in our hearts and minds, on YouTube and EWTN! We are blessed.

Thank you Mother, for your wit and your truth, and your teaching. I love you and miss you and I am so thankful for you!!! Here are a couple of my favorites!





I leave you with this, an Excerpt from [Two Wills, HIS & Mine](#). I would love to find the whole book (I think it's a book). Here is a quote from the link:

*"The secret then in finding God's Will is to see Him in the present moment and react to that Presence in as loving a way as we can. It takes a little effort to see God in everything, but Jesus did just that and His complete obedience won our salvation." ~ Mother Angelica*

Let us all be truth and Light!  
Happy Sunday! Hugs & Blessings, Em

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This contribution is available at <http://davishomemarysmantle.blogspot.com/2016/04/poverty-of-truth-little-tribute-to.html>  
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## Doors [at Blog of the Dormition]

On Acts 5:12-20 and John 20:19-31

Thomas Sunday



All of Bright Week, the doors of the icon screen stood open. The way to heaven, to resurrected everlasting life is opened by Christ's glorious triumph over death. There, in the icon of the resurrection – his harrowing of hades – he stands on the broken gates of death, now in the form of a cross. The tomb had been sealed, but our Lord, the Life of all, breaks open this seal and he rises from the grave. And so the doors are opened.

But today we *close* the doors of the icon screen. Beginning at Ninth Hour yesterday, the doors were closed, having stood open all week. And after this homily, I will close the royal doors again. Bright Week is ended. And we return to some of our more ordinary customs.

There is a kind of sadness to this moment of closing the doors. The gates of heaven have been open all week and now it strangely seems as though they are no longer.

Fr. Alexander Elchaninov writes,

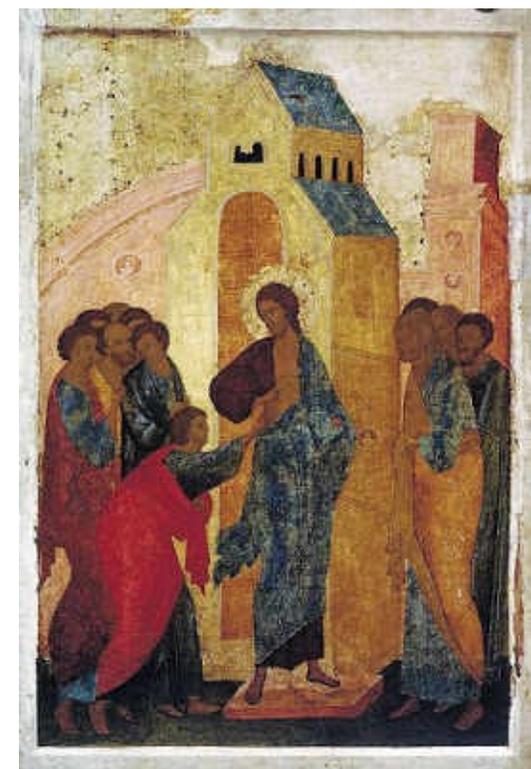
"I am always grieved by the closing of the sanctuary gates on the Saturday of St. Thomas and in general by the ending of bright week. They still sing 'Christ is Risen' but everything becomes more difficult, as if the

gates of the kingdom of heaven had really closed, those gates which have only just been opened in answer to our prayer and fasting. People plunge themselves once more with a sort of ravenousness into futile, worldly pursuits, and the churches become empty."

And yet, closed doors do not stop our Lord from entering. And hearts closed by faithlessness do *not* stop the Lord from entering.

Soon after we closed the doors yesterday, we sang Vespers. The first sticheron at Vespers begins, "When the doors were closed and the disciples were gathered together, you suddenly appeared in their midst, O Jesus our Almighty God." Again and again, throughout this day's services, the hymns are filled with this image of closed doors. Again and again, we are reminded that Christ enters regardless.

It's almost as if we close the doors just to demonstrate that this closing has no power to keep out the Lord. Shut the door and lock it, as the disciples did in the Upper Room. Soon the Lord will stand among us regardless, saying "Peace be with you." Thomas tries to lock him out of his heart and mind, saying, "I will not believe." Soon the Lord stands before him regardless, saying "Peace be with you," showing Thomas his living body marked by the nails and the spear, and saying "do not be faithless, but believing." And Thomas does believe. The doors were closed, but not to the Lord.



Where ever the apostles go, the Lord opens doors for them. Today, from Acts, we hear that the Sadducees, filled with jealousy, rise up and arrest “the apostles and put them in a common prison.” The apostles are again behind locked doors, but this time the doors are locked from the outside – a different kind of lock for the Lord to pick. So, “at night an angel of the Lord open[s] the prison doors and [brings] them out.” The next day, the officers report, “We found the prison securely locked and the sentries standing at the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside” (Acts 5:23). There is no lock of metal or of mind that can keep out the Lord from where he wills to go.

And it is greatly encouraging to know that, as he repeatedly demonstrates, he wills to be with us – and for us to be with him – even after we have been faithless. Jesus loves Thomas and wants to be with him even though Thomas has been faithless. Jesus, our Christ and our God, stoops to prove himself to Thomas! He lowers himself to satisfy the doubting mind of a mere human, as if this human’s opinion of things counts for something. Thomas matters to Jesus this much.

To understand how Jesus regards Thomas and all of us who doubt or fall away or make mistakes or sin in countless ways, I think it may be helpful to consider the relationship of adults to children. After he washes their feet, Jesus says to his disciples, “You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am” (John 13:13). He is our teacher and our Lord. If we love him at all, we are his pupils, his students, his disciples. To our Lord, we are like children. We are like the little ones about whom he says, “Let the little children come to me” (Matt 19:14).

If you think about it, it is easy to see that, next to the eternal God, we really are like little children – no different at all than children. Just consider the age ratio. If someone 25 years younger than me – or 70 years younger than some – seems like child to us, imagine how we must seem to God, who is Ancient of Days (Daniel 7). We surely are merely children.

Many of us – perhaps like Thomas – often take ourselves too seriously, as if it really mattered above all else how we see things – as if *our* perceptions were really what it was all about. As if our opinions were great and weighty and really counted for something. We might do well to occasionally ask ourselves – where we were when God laid the foundations of the earth (Job 38:4). We are new to this world, even compared to our ancestors, let alone to God. We are all like children.

It might help, then, to think about how we adults regard children, with all their struggles and their questions, because this will be similar, I think, to how Jesus regards Thomas, to how God regards us.

Well, first of all, many of the problems of childhood seem small to us. Tying my shoes is not really a

problem for me anymore (except during liturgies, it seems). Nor am I preoccupied with endless questions about dinosaurs. But I also understand where they're coming from. I've been there too. And I try to look upon them not with contempt, but with compassion. I try to treat them with patience and kindness and love. I have seen enormous patience with children from the teachers and parents among us. In this, they are icons of the Lord, our Teacher.

So how does Jesus regard Thomas? How does he regard this man who doubts him? With contempt? Does he say to Thomas, as is his perfect right, "who are you to doubt me?" No. Not with contempt, but with compassion. Yes, he does rightfully reproach Thomas to a degree, but not to the point of rejection.

I believe that Jesus loves us all as he loves Thomas and that he will give every sinner and every doubter an opportunity to stand before him and say, as Thomas does, "My Lord and my God." Even now we have this opportunity.

Those who believe without seeing are blessed. But those who doubt are not abandoned outright. Nor are those of us who turn away from God in countless other ways. Nor are those who worshiped with us on Pascha and are not here on Thomas Sunday. The Lord does not extinguish a dying ember. Rather, he does much to enkindle in us again the flame of faithfulness. Though the doors of Thomas' heart were shut by his faithlessness, Jesus comes and stands with him anyway.

This is how it works now: The doors close now, but they also open again. We may be paused now a little in our dance in and out of the holy place, but we are not halted. The doors open and they close again. They close and they open again.

Sin and doubt threaten to lock us in a prison of despair. But the Lord opens these prison doors, as his angel opened the prison doors for the apostles (Acts 5:19). No doors – not even those of death – can keep out the Lord from where he wills to go.

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## The Lake... a Horse... and the Meaning of Life [at String of Pearls]

If you've been stopping by this blog much lately, you know that my husband and I have been spending the past week or so at our house on Lake Champlain (the soon-to-be VRBO rental house we purchased last fall and hope to one day, God willing, use as a retirement home/vacation spot for our family). We've been able to get a lot of projects checked off the list, but there is still much to do to get this place ready for its public unveiling.

Yesterday, we had a crew here all day long, removing all the old insulation from the attic and replacing it with newer, better, bug-resistant stuff. We won't be satisfied until Oyster Haven is in tip-top shape--from the basement, right through its two stories, and on up into the attic. We're getting there. Bit by bit, we're getting there.

Today, I have lots of touch-up painting to do. Moldings and trims and doors and such. But here's the problem, as far as me and getting a move-on goes: this is what I'm seeing as I sit at my computer this morning, in my make-shift office at the kitchen table.



As one of the insulation installers who was here yesterday commented, "It would be hard to get much work done with that view out the window." So very true.

So yes, my husband and I are very blessed--very, very blessed indeed--to have been able to figure out a way to make this beautiful lake house, and the fabulous piece of property on which it sits, our own (thanks to the future VRBO renters whom we are counting on to help us pay for it, before we end up in the poor house!).

But with every life, no matter how blessed and happy, there are challenges and difficulties. Crosses are a given. (Jesus told us how we would be sanctified by these crosses when He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily.") So sometimes my husband and I have wondered if we've suffered enough. We have been exceedingly fortunate, almost ridiculously so; for in our 35 years of marriage, we have carried fewer crosses than most, and those crosses have seemed to be lighter than the ones others are often asked to carry. We have remarked on this over and over in the course of our life together; if it's true that God sends the toughest trials to those He loves most

(remember that St. Teresa of Avila once jokingly complained, "Dear Lord, if this is how you treat your friends, it is no wonder you have so few!"), then should we surmise that we are not among His favorites, His chosen friends? Does He know how weak we are, and how incapable of handling anything too difficult? Do we have the "right stuff" to become saints?

Here's the thing I'm beginning to understand about crosses, though: just as each and every human soul is unique and different, so will be his or her crosses. And just because right at this very moment, your life seems charmed and easy, you can never know what might be waiting for you down the road. So to try to manufacture ways to suffer "enough" is pointless, and even wrong. We are made for joy, and should rejoice about each and every blessing we receive, each gift from God that makes our lives so profoundly happy (our spouses, our children, and our grandchildren, to name the most important of these). But we should also be ever-ready to handle whatever curve ball God throws into our lives, trusting that His game plan is so much better than any we could come up with on our own--even when it seems like the worst thing that could possibly happen is happening to us.

God knows each and every one of us, better than any other human being can (even a beloved spouse who's been my best friend and confidant, the other half that makes me whole, for 43 years so far): "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you" (Jeremiah 1:5). So if anyone knows what we can and cannot handle, and what unique crosses we must carry in our lives here on earth in order to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, it's God, our Father and Creator.

So...is it possible that He has given me heavy enough burdens to carry, at least for now--because maybe carrying them will make me stronger? And then when I'm further down the road of my life, and I'm faced with a cross that seems much, much too heavy for me, perhaps--because of the muscles I've developed from carrying just as much weight as God thought I could handle at the time--I'll be able to lift it onto my shoulders after all?

Last night, my husband and I got together with my parents, one of my brothers, and one of my sisters for dinner. This brother and sister both became grandparents for the first time this past year, and they both live close enough to their grandchildren to see them on a daily or almost daily basis. My sister commented that she hadn't gone more than two weeks without seeing her granddaughter since she'd been born, and that she couldn't bear it if she wasn't close by.

And it hit me: people like my sister might look at me, a grandmother whose darling grandchildren all live a plane trip (or an all-day car ride) away and think, "Well, obviously

*she*

can bear it; but I couldn't." But here's the thing, though: I can't bear it. It is a situation that is unbearable to me. Having to go even months sometimes without seeing my sons--those five wonderful boys-turned-men who are absolutely my heart's delight--or their children--whom I adore fiercely and completely--is torture to me. But somehow I bear it. That is the cross, the uniquely painful, tailor-made burden, that God has asked me to carry--for now, anyway.

It might not seem like much, this burden, when you consider all the alternatives. There is so much suffering in the world that would have to be considered far more devastating than missing your kids and grandkids. But knowing how hard this particular cross is for this particular mom/Grammy to carry must be the reason God has chosen it for me. If I can carry this cross with courage and strength, with

acceptance and grace--and allow it to develop my spiritual muscles for whatever might lie ahead--then it could be the best thing that ever happened to me.

But of course it's the best thing! God only wants what's best for His children, and we just have to trust that He knows what that is better than we do.

Wow...I did not expect to get so philosophical today. I blame it on the extremely distracting, truly heavenly lake view from the kitchen window, because it got me thinking about Paradise and what that must be like. And I also blame it on an early morning visit with Buddy, our across-the-street "horse neighbor" (as my horse-crazy three oldest granddaughters call him), because it got me thinking of and missing my grandkids.



And now that I've figured out the meaning of life, I guess it's time to get to that painting chore I've been putting off. So until next time, dear readers...

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This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2016/04/the-lakea-horseand-meaning-of-life.html>  
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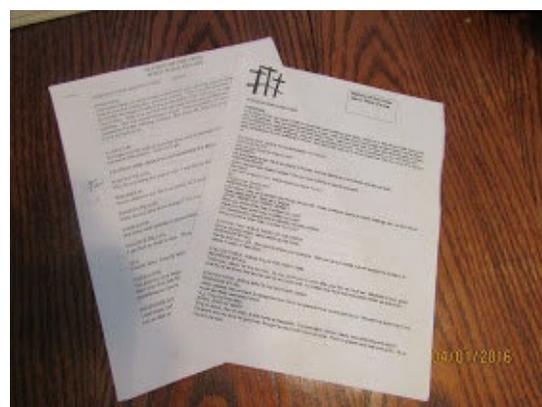
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# Children's Stations of the Cross: A How-To [at Veils and Vocations]



*hosted at This Ain't the Igzeem*

1



The first, and most important part is to have a script. We use a wonderful one that has been passed down over the years in our parish. If you would like a copy, please email me and we will work out a way for you to get one. The script includes a Narrator part for each station that explains what happened, any lines that the actors say, a congregational response for each station, and questions delivered by the priest to get the children thinking about how each station pertains to their lives today. Here is a sample:

## Station Four: Jesus meets His mother, Mary

**NARRATOR:** Here is Jesus, looking into the eyes of his mother, Mary. She must also walk this journey of love. The love of our parents for us is so very great. Do we take the love without giving in return? Do we demand to have things our way? Just as Mary and Jesus could strengthen each other in such a sad time, we can support our parents with our love. We should give it gladly.

RESPONSE BY ALL: Jesus, please help us to learn to recognize how much our parents love us and give to us. We want to show them how much we really care about them.

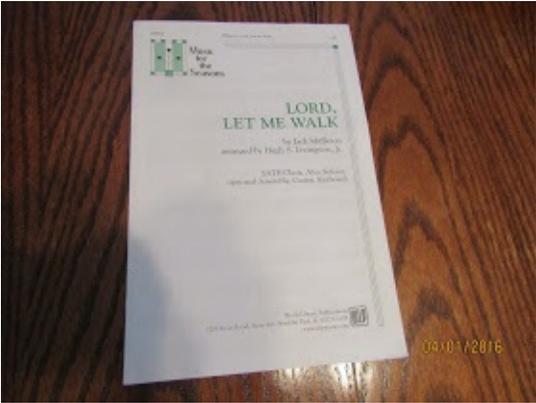
PRIEST: How do you show love for your parents?

ALL: Pray Hail Mary

SONG: Sing of Mary

Sing of Jesus, son of Mary, in their home at Nazareth. Toil and labor cannot weary love enduring unto death. Constant was the love he gave her, though He went forth from her side. Forth to preach and heal and suffer, till on Calvary He died.

2



Once you have a script, you need to gather music. There is not a lot of music included because it is Good Friday, but it is still an integral part. The songs that we have in our script include [Were You There](#), [Sing of Mary](#), [Lord, Let Me Walk](#), and [Jesus, Come to Us](#). After the stations, we have a Veneration of the Cross and Communion Service. Both of these need music. We have replayed some of the above pieces, or covered with just instrumental music. I am looking for a good piece for each of these parts, though, for next year. Now, that I have a better grip on the organization of it all, it is easier to expand ideas.

3



Next, gather costumes for the children. Most of our "costumes" are just pieces of fabric with head holes cut into them. They only get used for about a half hour each year, so it works. Make sure to have something specific for Mary, Jesus, Pilate, and the Roman guards. These costumes, again, can be something simple like a couple yards of fabric with a head hole, just make sure they are obviously costumes for each part. So, Mary is in blue, Jesus is in white, Pilate wears purple, etc. In addition to robes, we have head scarves and belts (i.e rectangular scraps of fabric and twine or ribbon for belts).

4





Now, you need to find props. Props are very important, but remember they do not need to be elaborate. Here a list of what you need:

1. crown of thorns/grapevine wreath
2. parchment colored scroll for Pilate (we put his lines on the scroll)
3. a royal looking large piece of fabric to be draped over Jesus and then "stripped"
4. swords and chest plates for guards
5. Veronica's veil (a large piece of white fabric with an image of Jesus' face on the underside.)
6. a cross for Jesus to carry (ours is 6 feet long)
7. hammers
8. boards with nails partially hammered in
9. various dice
10. a cross for crucifixion scene (shorter to accommodate the height of the children)
11. two four foot 1 x 3" boards with ropes tied around each end. (These are used for the two criminals, they slip their hands through the ropes so it looks like they are also on crosses)
12. two cinder blocks (to prop up cross)
13. a white sheet to use as the shroud

5



Publicize the rehearsal and start gathering participants. It is very important to find an older boy to play Jesus who would be able to carry the cross throughout the church. Use email, announcements, the bulletin, and catechists to get children excited and eager to join. Have the Stations put on the parish calendar. (If you are planning on having Veneration and Communion, be sure to discuss this with your pastor before recruiting people.)

You need the following parts filled:

1. Narrator\*
2. Jesus\*
3. Pilate\*
4. Roman Guards (Including one that is converted at the Cross\*)
5. Voice in the Crowd\*
6. Mary
7. The Other Mary
8. Simon of Cyrene
9. Veronica
10. Women and children of Jerusalem (usually whoever doesn't get a specific part)
11. The Good Thief\*
12. The Second Criminal\*
13. Joseph of Arimathea
14. A couple of dads to supervise "sound effects" of hammering nails and rolling dice

\*denotes speaking part

(Our practice is always Tuesday of Holy Week at 6:30 PM. It is the one night that nothing else is going on at the parish. The practice usually lasts about one and a half hours. At the rehearsal, you will decide who will play each part (we cast lots if multiple children are interested in a part). Distribute scripts and read through them with the children. Then have a run through of the children's parts without music.)

In our Stations, we have specific spots within the church for each station. So Jesus travels around the entire church reminiscent of His walk to Calvary. Before the rehearsal, pick a spot for each station to occur. For instance, the women and children of Jerusalem are always waiting at the baptismal font. Jesus falls for the third time in front of the confessional. He is stripped of his garments at the organ. You get the idea.

6



Organize musicians. We try our hardest to have children do this part as well. I recruit the musicians about a month ahead of time, the more time the better. Some years we had one girl play piano for all of the pieces. This year we had a pianist, a flutist, and a violinist, playing various pieces. It is nice to have a cantor, but not necessary. This year we had five girls volunteer at the last minute. Sometimes we have one, sometimes none. In the end it all works out.

7



The day of the event, show up at least two hours before the Stations are set to begin. Lay out costumes for each participant. [I have learned that having one or two people assign costumes is much easier than having the children find their own costume in the bins.] Next, place each prop where it will be needed. Have the children arrive one and a quarter hours before it is set to begin. Have everyone get dresses. Makes sure to have safety pins on and to "alter" costumes as need be.

Have a full run through with musicians, props, your priest, and altar boys, if they are helping. We have one altar boy carry a candle in front of Jesus as we process. In years when we had many children

involved, we have had an additional altar boy or Roman guard walking behind the procession to keep it moving forward. At each station, the participant (Mary, Veronica, etc) follow behind the cross until the end.

Find some older siblings to hand out programs and then collect them again at the end. This is important, the programs have all of the responses and lyrics for the songs. Collecting them and reusing them not only saves money but time.

Remember to breathe and most importantly to pray. God is in control and whatever happens will be great. The most important part is for the children to experience what happened on Good Friday.

Do you have any special services for children at your parish? Interested receiving a copy of the script and program? Comment below or email me. Thanks.

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This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2016/04/childrens-stations-of-cross-how-to-in-7.html>  
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