

NewEvangelists.org

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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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10 Commandments, Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit [at Catholicism and Adventism]

By various means, people have calculated that it was 50 days (inclusive) after Passover that the 10 Commandments were given by God to Moses. One can count the days in the Bible, but it's complex, and not really relevant here. There is also other extra-biblical support for this.

The significance of this is important for Adventists.



The sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles

The 10 Commandments, [as I've shown before](#), are the Old Covenant law. Their precepts remain valid as they are part of the eternal natural law, the moral law infused in us by God, and the New Law of the New Covenant given by the Holy Spirit.

The Old Covenant prepared us for the New Covenant, and the Old Law prepared us for the New Law.

Today, those Christians who celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead count 50 days from Resurrection Sunday to arrive at Pentecost, where we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church (Acts 2).

Psalm 140:30 (KJV) – Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.

So it's not really a surprise to see that, on the anniversary of the giving of the Old Law, the Holy Spirit descends on the Church. Just another sign that we, as Christians, are under a greater moral code than any given in the Old Testament.

The old law was given to Israel. The Holy Spirit was given to the world.

Adventists, who typically do not celebrate much to do with Jesus' life the way Catholics and other Christians do, will miss out on this inconvenient typology. Instead of celebrating the arrival of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus, they remain trapped in the Old Covenant, unable to see the New.

Further reading:

[Pentecost and the Ten Commandments](#) ... by Peggy Bowes

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The Day After Mother's Day: A Beautiful Mess [at Campfires and Cleats]

Is it just me or is the day after Mother's Day the most exhausting 24 hours of the year?

OK, maybe not quite *as* tiring as...welllll.....
the day you return from

a three week, nine thousand - ish mile

cross country camping "vacation," facing down

the barrel of fifteen+ loads of campfire

infused laundry and family detritus.

But definitely more strength - sapping than December 26.

I thought I might be doing something wrong.

Or that I was gradually becoming a jaded, spoiled Mommy.....

because how on Earth could I feel so darn wiped out when I should
be feeling so darn grateful?

Then I saw *this* in my FB news feed,

Mother's Day Hangover:
waking up the morning after your "day
off" and assessing the damage.



Ok, I'm not the only one, I realized.

The second *Monday* in May is, I've found, in my 16 years as a Mom,

pretty much devoted to digging out:

scraping pots lovingly ~~burnt~~ used to make a thoughtful dinner,

catching up on mountains of laundry,

stashing the "good china"

and generally maintaining order that you gave up

when everyone insisted you take a *day off*.

But what a day it was, really.....

We attended the noon mass, where my oldest lectured

(like I pro, I have to say)



(yes I'm a complete Lostie now....um, a dozen years late.....

But shhhhhh: We just finished season 4 ~ So: spoilers!

And if you are too...talk to me about your fave people!)

drank Dr Pepper, ate the hubby's ammmmmmmazing

baked ziti and garlic bread

(I don't have a picture!)

and the kids' yummy lemon meringue pie



(yes, they really made this !)

.....and because everyone insisted I relax,

And yes, the sun did come out, albeit briefly and although

it was definitely not a sit-outside-and-soak-up-the-beauty Spring day,

I sat out there under a comforter, gosh darn it, with my kids. I really want to be very careful about talking in a superficial, less than genuine way about this holiday. It's so wrought with emotion. Believe me, one of the hardest things ever, is attending mass on Mother's Day after having suffered a baby loss while the celebrant asks all "mothers,'grandmothers, godmothers and mothers to be " to stand for a blessing and applause by the congregation. It pretty much feels, at that point, as if everyone in the world is a sweet little child's unicorn and rainbow crayola drawing. Everyone except you. There's no stopping or minimizing or hiding tears. It's a nightmare and I hated it. I still hate it...for me.... it makes me terribly uncomfortable..... AND I hate it for the moms who've lost. Who've lost a child, their own mom, grandma or someone who's nurtured them like a mom. Mother's Day is torturous for sooooo many. And why priests maintain this painful charade year after year, even after being requested (nicely....really, I mean that, too) to refrain, is beyond me.

Bottom line.....? Women need to have honest, no - judge conversations about the pain the holiday brings to so many. Don't you think, too, this has to be acknowledged, while honoring our own Mothers *and* the women in our lives who've cared for us so unconditionally?

So that's pretty much why at almost 11Pm, I'm still getting myself in gear *the day after* Mother's Day, to return the house to "normal," to get my thoughts organized in this post, AND, to recognize how blessed am I..... above all else, to have this mess.



Glacier National Park, Montana

July 2012 !



So while we're talking the day after and pie... we were talkng pie, weren't we..... have you seen the

[Mother's Day ep. of The Middle](#) ~ season 1? Patricia Heaton's one of my favorites. Love the show. (We don't get cable...so it's library dvd's for us) It's an absolute hoot. And SO SO true.



And if you missed my recent post about
my very good friend Lisa and her very real
And thank you



thank you for stopping over and
spending some of your precious time
here at my home on the web!
Have you signed up to receive my posts in your email inbox?
If not, just enter your email address here
so we can be in touch regularly!

Enter your email address:

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Start Your Day With Prayer, Your Bible and a Talk With Your Mother [at TASTE and SEE]

Reminder: [8 Things Every Catholic Should Be Doing Every Day](#) is of the theme, "Back to Basics," at least in my discernment. Venturing down that pathway, we attempt to strengthen our love for God by resetting our compasses in an attempt to get closer to Him. Because we are humans, it is a meager attempt, but God will augment our efforts.

The approach embraces the gradual inclusion of new practices, so we stay enthused about our mission. It is a reminder that the "8 Things" and the "Back to Basics" theme are acts of love. Here is suggestion #1:

1. Start your day with prayer, your Bible, and a talk with your Mother, i.e., our Mother Mary.

PRAYER

Every day is a new opportunity to seek God's will - so that we may carry it out.

An effective way of doing both is this morning ritual.

I do parts of this already, but I need some tuning up. That means, if I want to grow closer to God, I need to improve my discipline. I need to follow through on my commitment to start the day with prayer. When I do follow my discipline, I usually say 1 of 2 prayers, or both. 1) St. Ignatius of Loyola's "Suscipe."

Lord Jesus Christ, please take all my freedom,

my memory, my understanding, and my will.

All that I have and cherish,

I surrender it all to be guided by Your will.

are wealth enough for me.

Give me these, Lord Jesus,

and I ask for nothing more.

Or, 2) The Third Step Prayer In 12-Step Programs

3rd Step Prayer

God, I offer myself to Thee-
-to build with me and to do
with me as Thou wilt.

Relieve me of the bondage
of self, that I may better do
Thy will. Take away my
difficulties, that victory over
them may bear witness to
those I would help of Thy
power, Thy love, and Thy
Way of life. May I do Thy
will always!

And I add, "through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen."

The Holy Spirit will guide you in developing your own routine with the prayers that draw you closest to God. As always happens in the spiritual life, you may eventually change those prayers.

THE BIBLE Last year, I decided I wanted to read the whole Bible, not necessarily the Commentary and other reading that helps bring further enlightenment, but at least the Bible itself. I was going to read it chronologically, by chapter anyhow. I started out reading it in the morning, like this suggestion suggests, then I found myself slipping and trying to read it before bed. Let's just say, I need to regroup and try again.

TALK WITH YOUR MOTHER I love having Mary as my spiritual mother. Of course, she fills in for all the deficiencies of my mother here on earth, who I also love and miss. She passed away 2-1/2 years ago. I sometimes pray/talk with Mary in the morning, but it has not been a discipline of mine. I usually connect with her later in the day, on a whim. I like the idea of regularly checking in with her first thing. I am going to give it a try - sometime soon.



Please pray that I find the fortitude to persevere and strengthen my relationship with God. I pray the same for all of you. +

Next Blog Entry - Suggestion #2. **Smile, Use Your Manners, Be Kind, Give Out Hugs**

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Knowing the Truth [at A Spiritual Journey]

It is my personal conviction that Christ is absolutely the only one you can believe in and be saved for all eternity. How can I be sure? *When you are one with him, you just know the truth in your heart. As simple as that.*

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2016/05/knowning-truth.html>
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We will not leave you again... [at Pauca Verba]



We entrust our miseries, the many streets of hate and blood, the thousands of ancient and new poverties and above all, our sins. To you we entrust ourselves, Mother of Mercy; grant us the forgiveness of God, help us to build a world according to your heart. O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain that ties us to God, chain of love that makes us brothers and sisters, we will not leave you again. You will be in our hands a weapon of peace and forgiveness, star that guides our path.

This prayer was offered by Pope Francis when he visited Pompeii last year. Notice that half way through the prayer he addresses the rosary itself: "*O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain that ties us to God...*" And then, "*We will not leave you again.*" What could Pope Francis have been thinking of when he made that promise?

Perhaps he had in mind the many who were devoted to the rosary as children but who left it as adults. Perhaps he was thinking of the 1960's and 70's when the rosary fell out of fashion. Or was he thinking of those who only wear the rosary as jewelry (or tattoo), or keep it hanging from the rear view mirror for good luck. Anyway, he then reaffirms the rosary's power as a weapon of peace and reconciliation - a guiding star along life's dark and dangerous path.

The picture at the top of this post is of my own rosary which I made the first year of my priesthood almost 37 years ago. It has gone with me everywhere. My sixth grade teacher said, "*Keep it in your left pocket, because a medieval knight wore his sword on the left side.*" I get it.

We're usually told that in praying the rosary we ought to focus our attention on the mysteries or even the words of the prayers themselves. But I'd suggest that the rosary can also serve as a tool for the expansion of our hearts, dedicating each *Hail Mary* for one particular name, problem or concern:

1. for the child waiting to be born and the newborns in NICU
2. for the children who live where the water is not potable
3. for the children sold into prostitution
4. for the children victimized by terrorists
5. for the children who are exhausted refugees
6. for the children who are out of school
7. for the children shown on the hunger commercial
8. for the children who are orphaned
9. for the children of war zones
10. for the children caught in violent homes

or again

1. for the children of my own family
2. for the child who is missing
3. for the children who are frightened
4. for the child who is bullied
5. for the children who are falling behind
6. for the child with special needs
7. for the child who is friendless
8. for the children in foster care
9. for the children of addicted parents
10. for the children failed by adults

This contribution is available at <http://paucaverba.blogspot.com/2016/05/we-will-not-leave-you-again.html>
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The Visitation [at Kitchen table chats]



Today is the Feast of the Visitation. Mary had just received the news that she had been chosen to bear the Incarnation of God, the Word Made Flesh. She must have been bewildered yet her faith was so strong she gave her Fiat: May it be done according to your word!

Yet she spent little time dwelling on what she had just gotten herself into. Her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant. With no hesitation she set aside her own circumstances and made haste to be by Elizabeth's side. Elizabeth was her kinswoman. Becoming the Mother of God was not going to keep her away.

In today's culture, it is hard enough to keep the nuclear family of Mom, Dad and children together much less extend it across generations. Yet our Domestic Church is meant to reach across the nuclear family lines to all whom God has placed in our family trees.

Recently, thanks to two college graduations (one undergraduate and one Masters degree) I was blessed to have a great many members of my family tree visiting at once. The ages spanned from 1 to 84. It was a raucous chaotic time. The house had not been so noisy in years and it was delightful. We laughed together. We played together. We ate together. We prayed together. Nothing made me happier than when we all went to Mass together.

While we adults love each other and enjoy spending time together, the spark of my three grandchildren made the visit magical. The aunt and uncles, grandparents and great-grandparents were showered with that innocent, unconditional love of childhood. The children were enveloped in an equally beautiful love from all the adults. We were all better for having shared this special occasion with so many family members across four generations.

In our mobile society it is easy to grow distant from the relatives who are not in town. Perhaps this is a good feast day to reach out to an aunt, uncle, cousin, sibling, parent or grandparent who is out of sight. Mary did not let distance weaken her bond with Elizabeth. We should not let our family bonds wane even as distance grows.

Living a Holy Sexuality Through the Theology of the Body [at Plot Line and Sinkers]

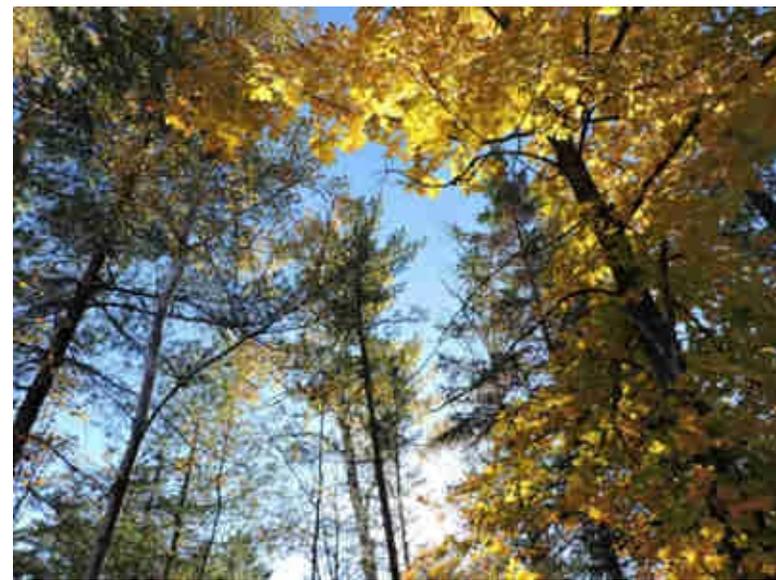


Photo courtesy KJ

[My latest post](#) for Catholic Mom is entitled “Living a Holy Sexuality Through the Theology of the Body.”

Marriage is a holy vocation that leads to the creation of life and family, an essential way of spreading the Catholic faith and of attaining holiness.

Taking the four components of God’s love for us (free, total, faithful, fruitful) and comparing them to marital love, we can discover how we can live the sacrament of matrimony as a vocation in the most free, total, faithful and fruitful way, the ultimate expression of not only God’s love for us, but in our love for our spouses. We can discover how we can best express and preserve our Marital Unity.

Free: We need to be able to give our love **freely** to our spouse. If we ask for conditions, like... I’ll love you IF, then that’s not love. If we force our spouse to do something, that’s not love. If we cannot control our passions, if we cannot say no to our sexual urges, then we are not free. If we cannot say no, our yes means nothing.

Total: The love for our spouse must be **total**. We can’t say, “Well, I’ll give you everything, honey, except for my arm or except for my leg.” Everything means everything. Total means total.

In the CCC, 1643, says: “Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all of the elements of the person enter – appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance, which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values.” Sex is holy, but the world doesn’t see it that way.

Faithful: We must be **faithful** to our spouse. Obviously, we must only have sexual intercourse with our spouse and no other. However, adultery is not the only way we can be unfaithful to our spouse. Indulging in fantasies, pornography of any kind and flirting all offend the sixth commandment. If we want to be truly faithful to our spouse, we must be faithful in word, action, and thought.

Fruitful: We must allow relations with our spouse to be **fruitful** – to be open to children – each and every time we have sex, whether or not we are planning a child. That doesn't mean we will conceive a child with every marital embrace. It also doesn't mean that we must *try* to get pregnant each and every time we have relations. It just means that we need to be open. [Natural Family Planning](#) allows a couple to avoid pregnancy and still be open to the possibility of pregnancy.

Artificial contraception, in fact, **destroys all four of the essential components** (Free, total, faithful, fruitful). Birth control violates not only God's plan (because it does not image God's fruitfulness) but it also destroys a couple's marital unity, encourages an "I can't say no" mentality to sex. When a device, medication is used or an operation has taken place to purposefully remove fertility permanently, a couple cannot give themselves totally, no matter how much they love each other. (This does not include couples who have regretted and repented, nor does this include couples who have lost their fertility through no fault of their own).

Contraception also does not allow a couple to totally give of themselves to each other. You can't say, "I give all of myself to my spouse – except my fertility." That means you're not giving your total self. Contraception destroys marital unity by separating the couple physically. Natural Family Planning preserves it.

Living a holy sexuality through the Theology of the Body is not always easy. But I can say from experience, it is most definitely worth it.

For more information on Natural Family Planning:

[The Couple to Couple League](#)

[Billings Ovulation](#)

[Creighton Model](#)

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Defying Abortion Logic: A Prolife Teen Experience [at Catholic Stand]

Relying “on the well-worn argument of pro-abortion activists that women need abortion and contraception to succeed in life” Wendy Davis [spoke](#) to students at Catholic (?) University of Notre Dame. Entitled “Rising Up: From Single Mother to Harvard Law, How Every Woman Stands to Make a Difference,” Davis’s talk promoted the well-worn argument that women need abortion to succeed. My own experience, however, offers a completely differing 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.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicstand.com/defying-abortion-logic-a-prolife-teen-experience/>
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How to Pray the "Secret Rosary" [at The Shield of Faith]

My tenth book is now available, and it is titled

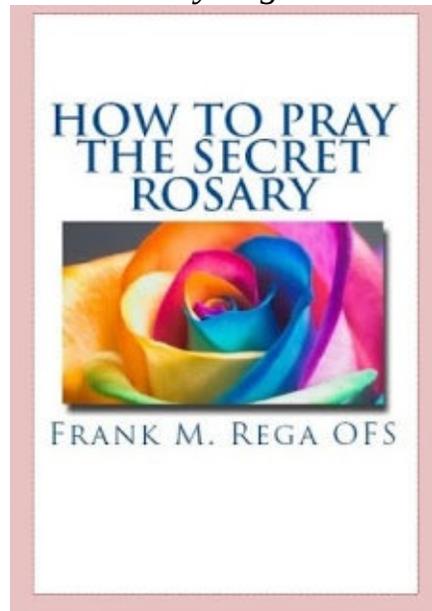
[*How to Pray the Secret Rosary.*](#)

Essentially it teaches you how to pray the Rosary in situations where it is not convenient to hold the beads, and without the need to count out the ten Hail Marys for each Rosary Mystery.

The book also contains chapters on the history of the Rosary, Fatima and the Rosary, St. Padre Pio and the Rosary. It shows the connection between the four mini-gospels and seven pillars of wisdom with the praying of the Rosary. And, for those new to the Rosary, the book describes the traditional Rosary prayers and mysteries. Complete with bibliography.

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*Praying the Rosary without the beads and without having to count the Hail Marys is not only possible, but some day might be necessary if we are forced to pray the Rosary in secret. See all books [Here.](#)*



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This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2016/05/how-to-pray-secret-rosary.html>  
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## Clericalism and Clericalisation [at LMS Chairman]



Some time ago I

[criticised](#)

the views of Russell Shaw (no relation) on the subject of clericalism and caesaropapism. He appeared to think, in his book

*To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain,*

that cases of caesaropapism, such as the Emperor Constantine regarding himself as holding ultimate authority over doctrinal matters, are actually cases of its opposite, clericalism: clericalism being the arrogation of lay authority by the clergy.

I have been thinking since then about the notion of 'clericalisation of the laity'. This term was

popularised by Pope St John Paul II; it is used in *Christifideles laici* (1988: 23), but the most explicit discussion I have found is, for some reason, an address to the Bishops of the Antilles in 2002. As he explained, it

becomes a form of clericalism when the sacramental or liturgical roles that belong to the priest are assumed by the lay faithful, or when the latter set out to accomplish tasks of pastoral governing that properly belong to the priest.

The commitment of lay persons is politicised when the laity is absorbed by the exercise of 'power' within the Church.

Curiously the Vatican website English language [record](#) of this address is partly in French, but I'm quoting from a news report [here](#).

Pope Francis underlined this analysis in response to the proposal of female cardinals:

Women in the Church must be valued not 'clericalised'. Whoever thinks of women as cardinals suffers a bit from clericalism.

Thus, clericalisation is a false response to a perceived problem of clericalism. Instead of denying the premise of clericalism, that to the clergy alone in the Church belongs dignity and authority, it attempts to redress the balance between clergy and laity in favour of latter by allowing the laity a share of specifically clerical dignity and authority. In practice only a small number of laity can be privileged in this way, and a new, clericalised elite is created.

The correct response to clericalism, underlined by Pope St John Paul II and taught by the Second Vatican Council, is to accord the appropriate dignity and space to the roles of both clergy and laity. Thus, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem* teaches:

The laity must take up the restoration of the temporal order [*ordo temporalis*] as their own special task. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church and motivated by Christian charity, they must act directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere.

This vision was reiterated strongly by Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas est*. The laity alone can fulfil this vocation of bearing witness to the Faith in the world, and of helping to conform it to Christ. As the Decree goes on to detail, this can be done in the context of family, professional, and political life.

What the laity do in the way of 'ministries' in the liturgy, and in doing things like parish catechism classes, they do by

*substitution*

for clerics. This is not always bad: it is sometimes necessary for the worthy celebration of the liturgy, given the non-infinite resources of parish churches. Where clerical acolytes and clerical scholas aren't available, which is to say everywhere outside seminaries, lay people are routinely used even in the context of the Traditional Mass. The artificial creation of reasons to use lay people where clerics

*are*

available, by contrast, is condemned by

*Christifideles laici*

:  
It is also necessary that Pastors guard against a facile yet abusive recourse to a presumed "situation of emergency" or to "supply by necessity", where objectively this does not exist or where alternative possibilities could exist through better pastoral planning.

The classic example is when the priest celebrant goes and sits down while his minions distribute Holy Communion. The principle would seem to extend to lay people reading the Epistle while the priest is present, though obviously this is a less serious issue. For in all cases of lay liturgical ministry, the purpose of the ministry is the worthy celebration of the liturgy, not the participation of the handful of lay people involved, and the motivation for getting lay people involved where this is not necessary would seem to be a clericalising clericalism. Again,

*Christifideles laici*

condemns:

the confusion and the equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, the lack of observance of ecclesiastical laws and norms, the arbitrary interpretation of the concept of "supply", the tendency towards a "clericalization" of the lay faithful and the risk of creating, in reality, an ecclesial structure of parallel service to that founded on the Sacrament of Orders.

When all is said and done, why would the laity want to do the jobs of clerics, by substitution, when they can do the jobs proper to their lay state instead, unless they are convinced of the clericalist idea that only clergy are important, that clergy are the Church's elite, with the power and prestige? It is not clericalism which wants to see clerical roles done by clerics, and lay roles done by laity, if we have a proper appreciation of the lay role.

But here is something important. When the laity act as substitute clerics, they must do so under clerical authority and direction. By making oneself a pseudo-cleric, one enters the clerical hierarchy, and one does so as the very lowest of the low. But when the laity perform their proper, lay, role, in the family, in the world of work, in politics, they do so with

*autonomy.*

This is the teaching of Vatican II (

[\*Apostolicam actuositatem\*](#):

24), and it would have been a familiar idea to Catholic fathers, merchants, and kings throughout history.

Beyond the liturgy, there are in fact a range of roles for the laity, with a range of relationships with the hierarchy. It is the role of the hierarchy to teach and judge on doctrinal and moral issues, so their 'mandate' is needed for lay people who are taking part in matters closely related to this 'apostolic' work. Again, everything done in the temporal sphere is subject to moral appraisal by the clergy. But the work of parents, the owners and managers of businesses, and statesmen, to build up the Kingdom of God is not just a matter of applying moral judgements: it is a matter of the prudential judgements which the graces of their own states of life, and their experience and training, enable them to make. Clerics without the grace of

sacramental marriage, without business or political experience or training, are generally well aware of their limitations in these fields. It is another manifestation of liberal clericalism that liberal Catholics are constantly trying to get priests, bishops, and other hierarchs to pronounce on such matters to forward their own agenda.



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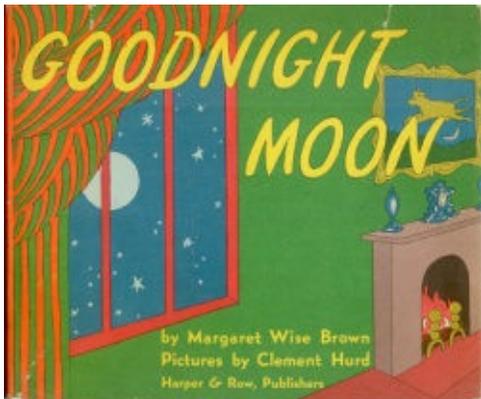
## Of Scuppers, Grace and Making Do [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



*Dear Father, hear and bless thy beasts and singing birds,  
and guard with tenderness small things that have no words.*

~ [Margaret Wise Brown](#)

**Who doesn't love [Goodnight Moon](#), right?** Has there ever been a more gentle, rhythmic narrative? Its cadence is so lovely and lilting – so soothing to both reader and child.



Our board book edition wore out many years ago because it was a ready stand-by at bedtime and went through countless readings. [Sandra Boynton](#) was another favorite, of course, but her stuff was problematic at that time of day because her comic rhymes lent themselves so well to farcical voices and gestures, which in turn led to giggles and squiggles and kids not falling asleep.

Not so *Goodnight Moon* – the literary equivalent of an Ambien. It draws you into that neat, safe bedroom, and you're fighting sleep like the tucked-in bunny, yet you know it's a losing battle – for both of you. Each goodbye, each fond farewell to moon and mittens and everything else is one more shift in the direction of the inevitable: restful, peaceful – aah...

The pictures are hard to separate from the text, and it might be that you'll recall the illustrator's name, Clement Hurd, before you'd remember the author. Hurd's bunnies and bedroom are hard to forget, but the text came from Margaret Wise Brown – know much about her? She was a highly successful editor and children's book author, and she penned about 100 books, including another you might know: *The Runaway Bunny*, also illustrated by Clement Hurd.

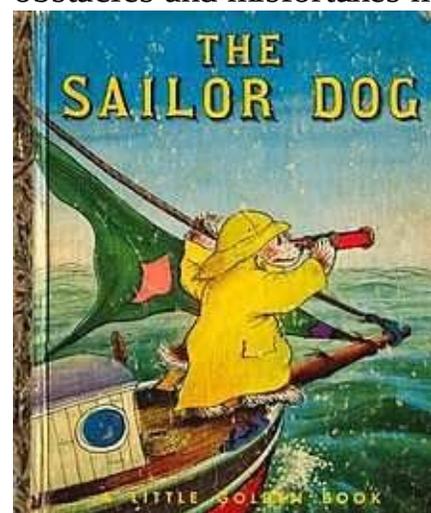
Here's one by Brown you might not know about: [The Sailor Dog](#), published posthumously in 1953. It

stars Scuppers, a dog with wanderlust who can't contain his urge to return to the sea – the place of his shipboard birth. Who knows how he ended up landlocked on a farm – who cares? Readers are thrown into the midst of a quest, and we materialize alongside our determined oceanbound hero – a car overland or a submarine undersea will not do. In terms of adventure, it's the wildness of the waves or nothing. "Scuppers was a sailor," Brown writes. "He wanted to go to sea."

And he manages to get there – taking possession of a shabby, but apparently seaworthy vessel, and launching into the deep. All goes well at first, but a nighttime storm leads to shipwreck, and Scuppers ends up on a deserted isle. He survives by his wits, and, inspired by a dream, makes the requisite repairs on his boat in order to continue his journey.

Eventually, he puts into port at an exotic locale, where he replenishes his supplies, replaces his tattered outfit with some new duds, and heads out to sea again. "I am Scuppers the Sailor Dog," he sings in the end. "I can sail in a gale right over a whale under full sail in a fog."

**Delightful – and so comforting to young readers,** and so encouraging. The hero, Scuppers, sets out on his own to follow his lights and his passions, and persists despite obstacles and misfortunes. Indeed, the obstacles and misfortunes make the tale – there *wouldn't* be any "Sailor Dog" sto



ry without the disruptions to Scupper's plans.

It's like the first reading at Mass today: "Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord," writes [St. James](#). "Indeed we call blessed those who have persevered." James tells us to motor forward, press on, keep going – like Job, enduring and making do. "You have seen the purpose of the Lord," he goes on, "because *the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*"

What James describes, and what Scuppers ably demonstrates, is the cardinal virtue of *fortitude*, "the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good," in the words of the [Catechism](#). "The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions" (#1808). And like the other cardinal virtues, fortitude can be cultivated by everyone, including those with no faith – and, in fact, they *prepare* us for faith. "The moral virtues are acquired by human effort," the Catechism teaches us. "They dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love" (#1804).

I believe that was true of Margaret Wise Brown herself. She did have a grandmother who was pious and "whose conversation was laced with quotations from Scripture," in the words of biographer [Leonard Marcus](#). Also, Grandma Naylor would see to it that Margaret and her siblings got to Sunday school

whenever she came to visit. Other than that, Brown had little exposure to religion and apparently practiced none as an adult. Plus, her parents' unhappy marriage made for a [troubled childhood](#), and she herself suffered a string of tumultuous affairs and frustrated engagements before dying suddenly at the age of 42.



Yet Brown bravely faced down adversity throughout her life, and did so with considerable aplomb. She went to college over the objections of her father and excelled. Although she never had children of her own, Brown developed a keen insight into how they navigated the world, and through her books became the confidant of countless youngsters. It seems clear that Brown's human efforts really were touchpoints for grace, and certainly grace manages to sidle through her writing – something highlighted in an especially poignant way in Margaret Edson's play, [Wit](#), particularly in its 2001 HBO iteration.

Emma Thompson stars as the ailing scholar Vivian Bearing, and Eileen Atkins plays Vivian's former mentor, Professor Evelyn Ashford. Toward the end of the play, when Vivian is bereft of all hope, racked with tumor pain and spiritual distress, Ashford comes to visit her in the hospital.

Hoping to comfort her anguished former student, Ashford decides to read from [The Runaway Bunny](#) which she'd just purchased as a birthday gift for a nephew.

'If you run after me,' said the little bunny, 'I will become a fish in a trout stream, and I will swim away from you.'

'If you become a fish in a trout stream,' said his mother, 'I will become a fisherman, and I will fish for you.'

, Vivian gains her composure and a measure of peace. "Look at that," Professor Ashford comments. "A little allegory of the soul. Wherever it hides, God will find it."

The soul of Margaret Wit Brown, the unsettled seeker behind that little allegory, would've been no exception.

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*A version of this essay appeared on [Catholic Exchange](#).*

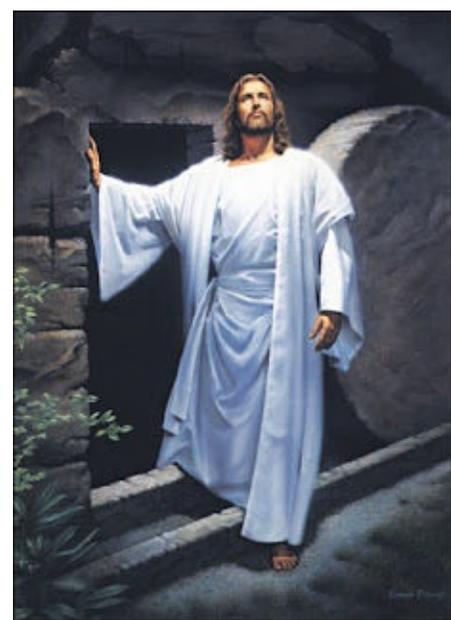
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# Evil's Defeat [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday June 5, 2016

A Reflection on Luke 7:11-17, N.A.B.



Airline pilot Chesley Sullenberger III was immediately hailed as a national hero when he successfully performed the emergency water landing of US Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River off Manhattan in New York City, after the aircraft was disabled by striking a flock of Canadian geese during its initial climb out of LaGuardia Airport on January 15, 2009. All one-hundred fifty-five passengers and crew aboard the aircraft survived. Many people were quick to declare it a miracle. Was it?

We wouldn't for a moment say that God was not involved in that whole process. But the reason the plane landed safely was that Chesley Sullenberger III had been flying planes and gliders, and teaching others to do so, for thirty years. His instincts were so well honed that all the lightning quick complex thoughts and actions necessary for a safe landing were second nature to him. The danger in using the word *miracle* to describe events such as this is in insisting that it was either/or. Either God did it *or* the pilot did it. What then, is a miracle?

In the Dictionary of the Bible, John L. McKenzie, S.J. writes:

*“Modern theology defines miracle as a phenomenon in nature which transcends the capacity of*

*natural causes to such a degree that it must be attributed to the direct intervention of God.”*

How many miracles (acts of power) did Jesus perform? There are thirty-seven recorded miracles in the Gospels; twenty-eight involved healing of the sick, casting out demons, and resuscitation of the dead; nine miracles had to do with the natural world.

Why did Jesus perform these works of power? The people of Jesus' time believed that all physical and mental disorders were caused by sin (evil). In their view, contrary to our modern perspective, whenever Jesus healed the sick, performed exorcisms, and restored life to the dead he was showing his supremacy over evil. At times the Lord insisted that their faith was essential for Him to exercise His healing powers.

Nonetheless Jesus was skeptical about the effects of his acts of power on the people, as is evidenced in Luke 16:31: *Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'* And whenever the devil, Herod, the Pharisees, or the people asked Jesus to perform a miracle he refused. Even though His acts of power caused the people to pause, admire, and wonder, they weren't the primary means by which Jesus announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God through Him – they were just one of the means. In this Gospel story we see Jesus once again exhibiting his supremacy over satanic power which, in the minds of the people of his time, showed itself through illness and death.

*<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward he journeyed to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd accompanied him.*

*<sup>12</sup> As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her.*

*<sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, "Do not weep."*

*<sup>14</sup> He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!"*

*<sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.*

*<sup>16</sup> Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, "A great prophet has arisen in our midst," and "God has visited his people."*

*<sup>17</sup> This report about him spread through the whole of Judea and in all the surrounding region.*

What are we to make of the miracle at Nain? What are we to make of the emergency water landing of US Airways Flight 1549? How many witnesses to Jesus' resuscitation of the dead man in the city of Nain were instantly converted? How many of those who believed that Jesus somehow took over the controls of US Airways Flight 1549 and guided it to a safe landing dropped to their knees in thanksgiving and praise of the Lord? Undoubtedly some of the crew and passengers did, but what about those of us who watched replay after replay of the event on the six o'clock news? Did we simply pause, wonder and go about our normal business?

What if we make the effort to view Jesus' works of power through first century A.D. eyes and try to understand that he was using miracles to display his power over evil? We might ask ourselves where His supremacy over evil was when He was tortured and crucified. In those events the raging forces of evil were given complete freedom to run amok, to create total pandemonium. Rome, represented by Pontius Pilate, and Herod were in the mix, as was Caiaphas and his corrupt Jerusalem regime, so were the close-minded Pharisees and Sadducees, as were those Israelites who declared that they had no king but Caesar. Shrieking demons danced in the streets and mocking crowds roared their approval of the proceedings. Judas's betrayal and Peter's denials were but final blows in the reign of evil and terror. It was as if all of these forces were poured into a cauldron, brought to a boil and poured on Jesus' innocent head as he was being nailed to the cross. And Jesus took it all; unchecked evil took its best shot at him, and he was victoriously resurrected in three days. On that day evil was sent packing like a cur dog with its tail between its legs.

Then why is there so much evil in our world today? We are all infected with the virus of evil. We cannot be so naïve as to believe that we are not infected, because in certain circumstances; we are all capable of committing evil acts.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-10) Jesus preached:

<sup>3</sup> *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.*

<sup>6</sup> *Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.*

<sup>7</sup> *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

<sup>8</sup> *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.*

<sup>9</sup> *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

These principles tamp down the virus of evil that resides within all of us. And Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and even atheists, whether they acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God or not, who in some form or another adhere to these principles, would find it difficult if not impossible to commit the kind of notorious evil acts that dominate today's news. Those acts of pure evil, which the news media loves to assail our senses with, are committed by a relatively small percentage of the world's population. The people who do commit those acts, like the shrieking demons that danced in the streets at Jesus' crucifixion, dance with joy at the fame bestowed on them by the obliging news media. Thankfully, the majority of the world's population prefers to live in peace.

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## Are you dancing with joy? [at Ordinary Time]



Every evening as part of the Divine Office devout women and men around the world pray for the Church as a whole. They offer up their time to God for each and every one of us. Part of that Evening Prayer involves reciting the Prayer that Mary exclaimed, inspired by the Holy Spirit, when John danced before His savior and Lord in the womb. That Prayer, which is recorded in The Gospel of Luke (

### [Chapter 1:46-55](#)

) calls us to remember the beauty of what was occurring at this Visitation between young woman and old. Here we have the promise of Zephaniah, the one from t

### [he first reading from this Feast Day.](#)

being fulfilled. God has himself come to dwell with the Children of Israel.

The LORD, your God, is in your midst,  
a mighty savior;  
He will rejoice over you with gladness,  
and renew you in his love,  
He will sing joyfully because of you,  
as one sings at festivals.

This reminds us of a simple truth. God's promises are always fulfilled, but it's up to us to keep striving for His will to be done in our lives. Mary was a very young woman, by today's standards still a child. Here this tween has found out that she is going to have the baby of God himself. If that isn't stressful enough, she is an unwed mother who is promised to be married to a man named Joseph. She could be stoned, shunned, alienated from her entire family and world. Who knows how the people will react? Even Joseph himself, who we are told is a good man, decides to discreetly divorce her so that others will not find out about it. It's enough to send anyone spiraling into depression isn't it? What happens though? Mary goes to help Elizabeth. With everything going on in her own life, she instead goes to help and rejoice over the good news of Elizabeth's pregnancy as well.

To both of their amazement the very moment she arrives John begins to dance in the womb. Elizabeth declares "How is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth realizes more is going on

here than what simply meets the eye. Like David before him, John the Baptist is dancing before the Ark of the Covenant. Here in Mary's womb is not just a normal human child.. but the very source of life itself, the Word of God. The Ark contained the Rod of Aaron, the symbol of the Priesthood. In the womb of Mary hides the very High Priest himself. The Ark contained manna from the desert, in Mary resides the living bread from Heaven, of which a man must eat or he has no life in him. The Ark Contained the tablets of stone on which were written the ten commandments. Mary's womb reveals the tablets of flesh on which are written the very Law of God, to be lived out in perfection for all of us.

Mary's response to all of this, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was to speak out spontaneously a prayer that will change all nations. The Magnificat.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.  
He has mercy on those who fear him  
in every generation.  
He has shown the strength of his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Another translation says "My soul magnifies the lord." A magnifying glass. In computer talk we speak of GIGO. Garbage in, Garbage out. Jesus himself said that what comes out of our mouths comes from what resides in our heart. (

[Mathew 15:18](#)

). That's a powerful reminder that what we put in, what we listen to, what resides in us... that's what makes us who we are, and that's what comes out of us. Are we proud of who we are? Are we proud of our choices? We can't take back the mistakes of the past, but we can change the future. It is not written yet, we have not lived it. We instead live in the now. Are you becoming who you want to be? Change it. Make haste to the country where you can serve God the way he has called you, leave behind your own worries and needs and think of the other. Mary set the bar high, she set the ultimate example of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord. Her soul can magnify the Lord because she is filled with Him in a unique way, so fully so that she became pregnant with God himself. My friend shared this reflection this morning:

"When I reflect upon Mary I think upon her friendship with God like this- she is (that is she exists) and she is beloved and loving through her relationship with the Father, she is fruitful and loving

through her relationship with the Holy Spirit, she encounters God and expresses love in this world through the Son. No human is more beloved by the Father than Mary, none are more fruitful by the Holy Spirit than is Mary and none are more intimately involved in the entirety of the human life of the Son than Mary. The Blessed Trinity is the cause, the entire life of our Lady is the effect. She stands before us as an exemplar, the model of perfection. Through her relationship she experienced the greatest of all possible human joys, to be the mother of the Son of God, and the greatest of all possible human sorrows, to be the mother of the crucified Christ, and the greatest of all possible gifts, she received her Son back from the dead. She was at the center of human history, she lived a life of deepest obscurity in a little Galilean town. She was patient, before the Annunciation, she was active, in the Visitation, she was a woman of prayer, she was a mother to the Beloved Disciple" (author: Steven Hepburn)

Too many people think of Mary as just another woman. As if God would choose just a random female out of all those available to have his own son. We humans would never even do that! Why would we think the Holy God, who created the Universe, would simply do that? He wouldn't, and he did not. He chose a woman who exemplified what it means to be pure, to be holy, to be obedient to God. She has shown us the example of what it means to give our full yes, our full assent to God's plan.. and then to make haste to do His will.

Then if we want to be true disciples of Christ, true followers, who always and in every way give ourselves over fully to God's will; then we can start by examining those words today that Mary spoke. It is up to us to make haste and go out to those in need of our help, regardless of our own worries and sorrows. To jump for joy before the Lord, and seek understanding of what is going on in our lives. To lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. To magnify the Lord in our lives.. and the only way we can do that is to have Him in them. Not just at Church, but to take that sacramental presence that we receive at Mass in the Eucharist and take Him with us everywhere and to every person! God promises joy and mercy. Are our lives examples of that? I know mine does not always show it. I have work to do, a lot of it.. but I know where to begin.. by encountering Christ in the Sacraments. Who is with me? Are you ready to dance for joy before the presence of Christ?

His servant and yours,

Brian

"

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

"

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# His Arm Around Our Shoulders [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

“Jesus wept.” That’s what St. John tells us in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of his gospel as Jesus stood beside the grave of Lazarus. Verse 35 is the shortest verse in the Bible, but I think it is among the most profound.

Live long enough and you will soon conclude life and suffering are nearly synonymous. And so for the Christian I think it fair to ask, “Where is God in all of it?”

I used to think He was in the shadows, always ready to come to us, to comfort us. But over the last decades I have slowly come to a different opinion.

Where is God in the loss, the rejection, the suffering? He is not in the shadows. He is there beside us, His arm around our shoulder, weeping as we weep. If nothing else, that is what John 11:35 demonstrates.

God beside us. As a Father. I like what St. Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome. “. . . *But you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ . . . And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. . . .* (Romans 8:15-28). Please read that last sentence again. If you have not memorized it, perhaps you should. Until we believe the omnipotent God really *does* cause all things – all things – to work together for good to those who love Him, we will never know peace and assurance in the face of the most desperate – or even the simplest – of trials.

God is right there at your side, even as you read this. Scripture gives many examples of God-With-Us in our sorrows. Leah is only one. We find her story beginning in Genesis chapter 29.

When Jacob visited her family, Rachel's beauty captured him – so much so, he agreed to work her family's farm for seven years to marry her. But on the eve of the seventh anniversary, her family pulled a classic bait and switch. When the new groom awakened the next morning he found himself lying next to Leah, Rachel’s older sister. If Jacob wanted Rachel, he'd have to work another seven years. He worked another seven years for his beloved Rachel, but it's not difficult to imagine how Leah felt – unloved, unattractive, unwanted, knowing her family had to trick Jacob into her marriage bed. The story grows even more poignant. Scripture tells us: “*When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb . . . and [she] gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, ‘It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now’*” (Genesis 29:31-32). But Jacob’s feelings toward her did not change. Ever the optimist, Leah conceived again. And then, again. "Now at last my husband will become attached to me," she said, "because I have borne him three sons." Yet even after **six** sons, Rachel remained the light in Jacob's eyes. Leah longed for her husband's embrace, his touch, and to know he

loved her. Yet, Jacob was deaf to her heartache and blind to her sorrow. But God was not. Over the years I had read these chapters in Genesis dozens of times, but several years ago my eyes froze at the list of Leah's six sons – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Levi and Judah. Although Rachel's beauty captured everyone's attention, Leah didn't know Almighty God would measure life and death through *her* offspring – not Rachel's. Levi and Judah: ancestors of Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Ezra, Ezekiel, Zechariah . . . on and on the list would grow. All of Israel's religious and political leaders would spring from her womb. Including Jesus the Messiah. Leah's story is only one of dozens revealing God-With-Us in our heartache. Let's look at just one more. There is probably not a person reading this who does not know of Job, the man who suffered nearly unimaginable loss – loss not too unlike some of you reading this have experienced in your own lives. Scripture tells us Job had seven sons and three daughters, that he was exceedingly wealthy – and God considered Job uniquely blameless.

On a certain day Satan stood before God, and God said to him, *“Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.”* Then Satan answered the Lord, *“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? . . . But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.”* Then the Lord said to Satan, *“Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.”*

Satan left the Lord's presence and in rapid fire succession – happening so fast Job didn't have time to catch his breath, disaster fell:

*“A messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants . . . and I alone have escaped to tell you.”*

*While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”*

*While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants . . . and I alone have escaped to tell you.”*

*While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and*

*I alone have escaped to tell you.”*

If all this wasn't enough, in the next chapter we learn of the terribly painful sores that suddenly broke out all over his body. What did Job do? He *“arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”* Despite and through it all, Job would not rail against God. I love what he said in the sixth chapter of that book (verse 10): *“But it is still my consolation, And I rejoice in unsparing pain, That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.”* Job's suffering and his unrelenting anguish and confusion has for nearly 4,000 years provided children of God like you and me a measure of comfort when our own lives lay around our feet like ashes after a house fire. For 4,000 years men and women of faith living through their own bewilderment and loss and terrible suffering have found in Job consolation and hope and their reason to persevere through it all to the glory of God. God tells us through Jeremiah, by the way, another of Leah's descendants, *“For I know the plans that I have for you, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope”* (Jeremiah 29:11). Hope. St. Paul tells us the things written in Scripture are for our benefit, and that through the encouragement of God's word we can have hope (Romans 15:4). That's what Leah's story and Job's story are all about – great, inexpressible hope and confidence and perseverance. It's about God beside us, about God who loves us, and who knows our deepest hurts. Back to John 11:35. When the Holy Spirit inspired St. John to include the story of how Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, God did so to ever remind His children He is very much aware of our suffering. And that His heart breaks with ours. But He also reminds us – as He did through St. Paul's letter to the Romans cited earlier – *“God causes all things to work together for good, to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.”* That is why we can trust Him.

God is **not** in the shadows waiting for us to call Him to come close. He is already close – as close as our breath. He promised to never leave us in our loneliness or confusion or grief. And God never breaks His promises.

This 18<sup>th</sup> century hymn by Catharina von Schlegel said it well.

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on thy side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change He faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul; thy best, thy heavenly, Friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end. . . .

Be still, my soul; the hour is hastening on  
When we shall be forever with the Lord,  
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,

Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.  
Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past,  
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last

Christian, be encouraged. God is beside you. He weeps with you. And His arm is around your shoulders even now as you read this.

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## Gratitude [at Bible Meditations]



*Be grateful for the good things that the Lord your God has given you and your family...* Deuteronomy 26: 11

Counting our blessings can change our attitudes and enrich our lives.

When a tractor trailer hit my car I ended up painfully bedridden for months. It was horrible. Would I want to go through it again? Never! Am I grateful that I did? Absolutely! I'm not denying the pain and challenges, but they couldn't keep God from operating in my life. When I remembered to look for the good, I felt better.

- The accident struck just after I'd gotten in shape by working out. Had my muscles not been so toned, the internal damage to my body would have been much worse.
- I got to see my husband in a new light as he stepped up to take over my household responsibilities while I was incapacitated.
- Being out of work, I had plenty of extra time to meditate and pray. I'm grateful that God didn't reject my prayers even though, in a way, I was praying because "I had nothing better to do."
- Insurance and disability benefits helped cover the loss of my paycheck.
- I was forced to stop micro-managing my teenage daughter. It was a bumpy road, but we both learned things we needed to learn. Our relationship ended up being healthier for it.
- I found out my self-worth doesn't depend on how much I accomplish. Like everyone else, I have worth simply because God loved me into existence.

God works for our best interest in life's pleasures and in its challenges. We don't have to deny our pain. We also don't have to let it stop us from being grateful.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to your blessings.

# Reflection: What good things can you thank God for today?

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## When God Says No [at Little Douglings]

I really didn't want another C-section. I asked everyone I knew (and even those I didn't know) to pray for me, that I would be able to avoid the procedure that had lengthened my recovery period so dramatically after having my twins (only 15 months ago). I enlisted all my favorite saints and assured new saint recruits that they would be listed among my favorites in gratitude for their intercession. St. Therese sent me a rose to let me know she had my back and my little ones added their powerful intercessory prayer to every family rosary. But in the end, God said no.

Every factor that needed to fall into place to allow for an attempted VBAC (vaginal birth after Caesarean section), fell through. I had been given little glimpses of hope, contractions starting the morning I needed them to, but only stopping instead of intensifying. Every spark of hope became a source of torture, like someone holding an Iced Cappuccino (my severe prego craving) in front of my face and whisking it away just as I reached out for it. I stared at the rose from St. Therese and almost wished I could send it back. I was hurt and felt so abandoned by a Heavenly Father who had so often given me more than I deserved. How could He say no to something that would clearly be better for me and my family? Why would He want to increase my suffering? I knew He loved me, so it pained me knowing that the Lord of my heart, the One who could easily move mountains and make paths in the desert, was choosing not to move this baby out in a way that would be less traumatic for my body and would end up laying a heavier burden on my family.

"I can't believe He's not answering my prayer," I told my husband. My husband's response was, "He always answers our prayers."

My eyes were burning with tears at that point.

"But His answer is no, so it doesn't really feel like an 'answered prayer'."

Then God brought me to the garden of Gethsemane - at least, mentally. Every time I prayed my mind was filled with the image of Christ begging His Father to save Him from the suffering that lay ahead - praying and weeping with such intensity that His sweat and tears became drops of blood.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22:42

And I so wanted to joyfully pick up my cross and follow Him, but I couldn't.

Because I'm weak. Because I hate pain. Because I liked my plan for how things should go MUCH more than the plan God had for me.

I was comforted to see that even Christ could cry out with the voice of humanity and be struggling with the sacrifice He was being called to make, but I realized fully being His follower would mean that I too would have to say, "Thy will be done" and to find a way to offer the trial at hand for the good of others.

Don't laugh at me, but I first needed to grieve. I had to grieve the loss of MY will. As pathetic as it may seem, I went through the five stages of grief within two days. I experienced **denial**, fantasizing about giving birth secretly at home or devising some sort of plan to avoid the inevitable. I hit up the **anger** stage. I was so mad and frustrated that I took it out on... well, puzzle pieces. Usually, when I'd find the

kids' stray puzzle pieces I'd locate the proper box and put them away, but not this time! I took those babies and whipped them into the recycling bin, "HA! Say bye bye!" (I know pretty lame, but we do have too many incomplete puzzles). I **bargained** with God (along with all my enlisted saints) and assured Him I'd write a very flattering blog about how He always comes through in the end, if He would just make a way for me.

Next, I just gave up and entered the **depression** stage where I cried hard, distanced myself from everyone and generally felt sorry for myself. And finally, I reached the coveted stage of **acceptance** and here's where I began to ask those around me if there was something that was weighing on their hearts for which I could offer my disappointment and impending recovery period. I offered my pain in hearing no from God and asked if He would in turn say yes to the other women I knew who were hoping for VBACs, as well as all those women who were praying for safe and healthy deliveries. Because in the end, God's *no* to one thing is often a huge *yes* to something else.

A friend of mine who prayed for years that God would fill her womb with a child, was met with a firm *no*, but elsewhere, another woman was bringing several children into the world (in spite of not being able to care for them) and those children are now in my friend's arms. Had God said yes to her, in her desire to mother her own biological children, she would never have considered adopting the little ones God had intended for her.

I don't fully understand why God said no to me. I know there's a *yes* somewhere. Perhaps I would have ruptured if I had attempted the VBAC, which could have caused serious harm to myself or to our newest little member, Callista Therese (I obviously got over my disappointment regarding the rose). I may never know the reason, but I do think that in surrendering my will, perhaps I was able to offer more than I could have otherwise.

Thanks be to God, Callista arrived safely on May 20th. Being the month of Mary, I am grateful to have been able to follow the example of Our Lady in her submission to God's will - that I could come to echo her fiat:

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done unto me according to thy word." Luke 1:38

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# Missing From the 2016 Presidential Campaign-any Mention of God & Religion [at It Makes Sense to Me]

## *IT MAKES SENSE TO ME*

By Larry Peterson

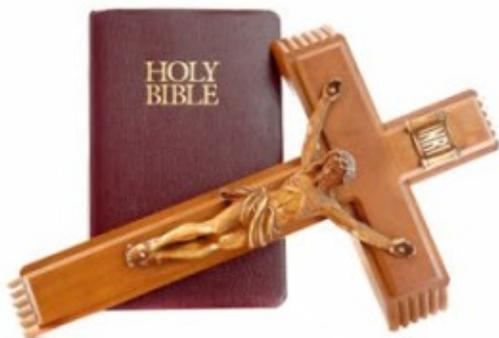
There is an old cliché which says, "One thing you should never argue or discuss is politics or religion."

One thing is for sure, when it comes to politics and politicians no one is mentioning anything about religion. They leave the 'religion' out and argue 'politics'. They not only argue with each other they debase, defame, denigrate, disparage and verbally abuse each other relentlessly and with a no-holds, reckless abandon that is disgraceful but apparently acceptable because, "that's politics". On the other hand, they will rarely, if ever, mention God or religion.

According to all of the latest polls, the items of prime importance to the American voter in 2016 are: a) the economy; b) jobs; c) immigration and d) terrorism. Unbelievably (to me) there is little mention about the incessant attacks and rulings against our religious freedom(s). How can this be?

I am fascinated by these polling results not so much for what they say and/or predict but for what they avoid. They completely seem to ignore the religious backdrop of the American story. Religious freedom is the cornerstone of our success. We must stop making believe it is insignificant.

These religious freedoms are the foundation for an ever expanding and vibrant economy. These freedoms are the fertilizer that helps grow jobs. These freedoms are so envied that people from all over the world continually want to come here. Yes, the fact is, Freedom of Religion is the very lynchpin that has held us together throughout our 240 year history.



But now I am afraid. I am afraid because the insidious, intentional eroding of the foundation of our nation is being completely ignored. We are witnessing the weight of a secular self-centeredness that is not only methodically erasing God's presence in our country but, along with God, the religious tenets (also called

## [Natural Law](#)

) used as building blocks by our Founding Fathers.

When people have the freedom to worship God unencumbered and without reservation, it frees up their spirit. They embrace this great gift and it results in personal growth and fulfillment. The United States of America proved to be the greatest nation in history because of an individual's freedom to be who they would be.

Over the course of our American history there have been numerous

## [Freedom of Religion cases](#)

that have impacted our nation. However, over the last decade, the anti-religion, anti-God rhetoric has seemingly taken a secure foothold in the battle against the "Creator who has endowed us ALL with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". And yes, in the very first paragraph of the

## [Declaration of Independence](#)

the name of GOD is actually used. He is NOT anathema to the United States of America.

It seems to me that we must stand up and fight back in defense of God and religion. Being a "none" is NOT a religion. being an atheist is NOT a religion and being a Satanist is NOT a religion. Religion is the means we use to worship God and we are free to do so. Religion does NOT define NOT worshipping God.

There is even an organization called the

## [Freedom from Religion Foundation](#)

FFRF. Can someone explain to me how, in a country that proclaims Freedom of Religion as a fundamental right, a group can be legalized and can sue folks for expressing that freedom? The Freedom From Religion Foundation is the antithesis of our primary, fundamental Constitutional right. It is even a functioning and approved non-profit 501(c)3 active in all 50 states. Does this make any sense at all? How can an entity whose primary purpose is to attack our First Amendment be legally sanctioned to do so?

Not worshipping or believing in God is our choice as Americans. Those of you who have chosen that route have been blessed with this privilege. Many have died to secure this Freedom for you. Why, if you can non-worship the way you so choose, do you want to prevent others from worshipping as they choose? Why would the name of Jesus Christ, a simple carpenter who preached love and forgiveness, be offensive to anyone? Whatever is your self-absorbed, hateful motivation to attack the very freedom(s) that protect you? What are you so afraid of?

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# Why Even Faithful Catholics Suffer From Mental Illness [at joy of nine9]

Although most respectable members of our parishes try to *look* healthy and content in public, mental illness is as common and invisible among the faithful as it is in secular circles. I would wager that mental health issues are especially prevalent among the devout who are serious about their inner life; when people tackle deep inner issues which prevent God from working in their lives, their inner equilibrium is upset by stress, anxiety and depression. This probably explains why most saints experienced profound periods of depression when they finally looked beneath their pious actions to face the reality of their own ingrained sin and subsequent need for inner purification.

If the topic of how and why Catholics experience mental illness seems completely irrelevant to you, consider this meme posted on my fridge for years:



One in four people suffer from mental illness.

Think of three friends.

If they all seem fine,

Looks like you're the one.

I often doubled over laughing after a guest to our house read this “joke” then looked uncomfortable afterwards. Mental illness is still a secret taboo to be hidden from friends and co-workers. Those who suffer are reluctant to reveal their struggles.

## Mental Illness Is Not a Sign of a Weak Character

Most make an appointment every year with their G.P. to check out their physical health and reluctantly arrange for a dental check up but why don't people also undergo a routine mental health check up? Some people might laugh off the implication there is anything wrong with how their brains function. Others

might nervously skim the rest of this article, fearing to admit they have problems. However, this question is far from ridiculous. Have you taken a good look around lately? What do you see and



It has affected  
MANY of US

hear?

Modern society is stressful; people are anxious about the economy and job security. They have problems sleeping; many self-medicate with alcohol, drugs and cigarettes to help 'take the edge off'. More and more sick days are the result of depression and other mental health issues. However, it never enters most people's minds to seek professional help until they are in a crisis because there still is a stigma attached to mental illness.

It is especially important for Catholics to understand the causes of mental illness, instead of judging those who suffer as lazy or at fault for some reason or other. It is even worse when believers deny their own need for help. When people cannot understand these unseen illnesses, they simply fall back on age-old admonishments,



Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.

Just do it.

He needs a kick in the pants.

What's wrong with you, anyway?

You seem fine to me!

No one actually believes people are to blame if they need eyeglasses to read or insulin to fight diabetes but they still heap abuse on people with depression or anxiety as if these diseases were signs of a weak

character or a lack of faith. Triggers for mental illness can be as simple as increased stress or a lack of sleep to a more serious reaction to a traumatic event such as war or abuse, anything which throws off the chemical balance in the brain. Some people just need medication to balance their serotonin levels to heal mental illness just like some people need insulin.

## The Sins of Our Ancestors Can Also Trigger Mental Illness

(Fr. Robert Stackpole, STD, director of the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy, has written an excellent explanation for how our ancestors affect us. See [The Sins of Our Ancestors](#))

Babies do not simply inherit physical characteristics from their ancestor but personalities and even blessings and curses which have been passed down through the generations. Although my children came from the heart of God, with a Divine spark in their souls, they are human beings with faults, weaknesses and even sin inherited from their ancestors.



[Numbers 14:18](#) 'The Lord . . . will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

This is not simply an Old Testament teaching. With the help of a spiritual director, I have discovered generational curses deep in my soul, hidden from me till I began the inner journey.

[Romans 5:12](#) Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

As the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) explains:

404 How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam “as one body of one man”.<sup>293</sup> By this “unity of the human race” all men are implicated in Adam’s sin, as all are implicated in Christ’s justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affected the *human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*.<sup>294</sup> It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called “sin” only in an analogical sense: it is a sin “contracted” and not “committed” – a state and not an act.

405 Although it is proper to each individual,<sup>295</sup> original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called concupiscence". Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.

When we grow closer to God and His light pierces deep into our being, generational sin is revealed in our core self. I discovered my paternal, grandmother had been pressing in on me, asking for prayer my entire life but it wasn't until the light of Christ brought the issue to light that I began to experience mental anguish. I learned my pregnant grandmother died accidentally under extreme duress as a young mother while still in her twenties. Unfortunately, her husband was at war. This incident occurred in the 1940's. She was denied a Christian burial in the Catholic Church and my father's family left the Catholic Church when the war was over.

My own process of purification would have been even more confusing and even frightening than it was if I didn't have an experienced spiritual director to show me how to confess and release each sin and oppressive spirit I had inherited from my grandmother to Christ:

[Galatians 3:13](#) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—

[James 5:16](#) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

[Romans 8:2](#) For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Even with guidance, the stress I experienced as I dealt with these inherited inner roots was barely tolerable.

## **Unresolved Grief**



grieve and release their forgotten ancestors to God, as well as miscarried and aborted souls in their family background. The change in these people, some who have been in therapy for decades, is miraculous. Unresolved grief was at the root of their mental illness.

## **Even ‘Normal’ Catholics Need therapy**

It took years before I understood the spiritual and emotional weight I carried was blocking me from receiving God’s love. Yet, this spiritual block was not the result of my own sin or failings. What I felt was my deceased grandmother’s guilt, shame and sense of unforgiven sin in my own emotions. At times I identified with her feelings, thinking incorrectly that they were part of my own identity. It sounds bizarre but, unfortunately, my experience is common.

Tragically, few Catholics discover the root of their spiritual malaise because often it means seeking psychological help. We all have psychological impairments, generational cycles, selfish habits, pride, controlling and other errant behaviors. God offers His children the means to become free from sin, bad habits and mental illness through the Church, prayer, confession but also through therapy. Let’s bring mental illness out of the shadows of shame and into the Light of Christ.

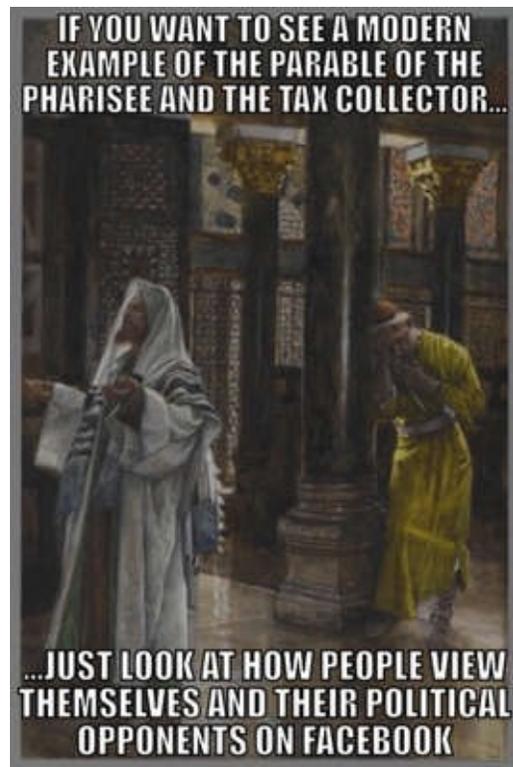
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## The Political Pharisee [at If I Might Interject]



One rather annoying thing I see on Social Media is the number of people who make political posts on Facebook praising how enlightened they are, while looking with contempt on those they disagree with. As always, this is not limited to any one party or political slant. It's not surprising in an election year, but I do wonder why so many Catholics feel that the obligation to love one's neighbor gets suspended from the beginning of the primary season in January through Election Day in November.

Political parties, politicians and voters are all sinners, and none of them can claim to be God's party. But the problem I see is many people are comparing themselves or their political affiliations with those they disagree with—always in their favor—and viewing themselves as living righteously. If they stay in a party, they see the party as angelic. If they abandon that party, they see it as demonic and they portray themselves as martyrs for the truth...even though the only suffering they normally experience is from people rolling their eyes and questioning the prudence of that choice.

In other words, what we're seeing is Catholics infected by pride. They label their opinions as the only possible Catholic option and name those who disagree as deceived fools or willing dupes. The problem is, other Catholics who reach a different opinion are looking at them in the same way. On account of political partisanship, we divide the Body of Christ.

I'm sure every person who is guilty will say, "Wait a minute! Look at what that party stands for! No good Catholic can vote that way!" Yes, that's often true. From a Catholic perspective, the Democrats routinely fail at moral obligations, the Republicans routinely fail at social justice obligations and third parties tend to either have the same failings as the major parties they emulate or have ugly positions which are only unknown because the parties are so obscure. In other words, no Catholic can claim moral superiority on the grounds of their party affiliation (or lack thereof). Every political party and every politician falls short in the eyes of God and His Church.

So, does this mean we should throw up our hands and not vote at all? No. Voting is a duty we must take seriously. As Catholics, we promote good and oppose evil in whatever way is possible. That not only means voting in such a way where either we promote the greater good or (more often) try to block the greater, but it also means we challenge the parties between elections and hold the politicians accountable to do what is right. Archbishop Chaput considers the problem of belonging to a party which is pro-abortion, but I believe his point applies to every evil that a party embraces:

My friends often ask me if Catholics in genuinely good conscience can vote for “pro-choice” candidates. The answer is: I couldn’t. Supporting a “right” to choose abortion simply masks and evades what abortion really is: the deliberate killing of innocent life. I know of nothing that can morally offset that kind of evil.

But I do know sincere Catholics who reason differently, who are deeply troubled by war and other serious injustices in our country, and they act in good conscience. I respect them. I don’t agree with their calculus. What distinguishes such voters, though, is that they put real effort into struggling with the abortion issue. They don’t reflexively vote for the candidate of “their” party. They don’t accept abortion as a closed matter. They refuse to stop pushing to change the direction of their party on the abortion issue. They won’t be quiet. They keep fighting for a more humane party platform—one that would vow to protect the unborn child. Their decision to vote for a “pro-choice” candidate is genuinely painful and never easy for them.

One of the pillars of Catholic thought is this: Don’t deliberately kill the innocent, and don’t collude in allowing it. We sin if we support candidates because they support a false “right” to abortion. We sin if we support “pro-choice” candidates without a truly proportionate reason for doing so—that is, a reason grave enough to outweigh our obligation to end the killing of the unborn.

And what would such a “proportionate” reason look like? It would be a reason we could, with an honest heart, expect the unborn victims of abortion to accept when we meet them and need to explain our actions—as we someday will.

Chaput, Charles J. (2008-08-12). *Render Unto Caesar: Serving the Nation by Living our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life* (pp. 229-230). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

When the party goes wrong on abortion, then we challenge the party on abortion. Obviously the right to life is key and we can *never* sacrifice this for other concerns. St. John Paul II warned that without the right to life, concern for other issues are false and illusory ([Christifideles Laici #38](#)). That’s common sense. No human beings, no human rights. But since we’re supposed to be the light of the world and salt of the earth, we don’t stop once we satisfy one concern. When the party goes wrong on immigration, we challenge the party on immigration. Whatever party platform goes against Church teaching, we challenge the party. We keep working on reforming that party wherever it goes wrong.

We Catholics must stop playing the political Pharisee. We’re not superior to the good faith Catholic (that is, one who obeys the Church and does not support what the Church calls evil) who reaches a different conclusion than ours. Instead, each of us need to look at our political preferences in light of our religious belief and see if we have chosen pride (“I can’t be wrong”) over recognizing our flaws. Then, after making this scrutiny, we must work on bringing the party we choose into following what God commands.

After all, in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the repentant Tax Collector was justified,

not the proud Pharisee. If we're not careful, we might find that the justified person winds up being the repentant one affiliated with the party we despise—not us.

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# Sons, Servants and Robin Hood [at Third Place Project]



Photo Credit: [FreeFoto.com](#) (Creative Commons License)

A student recently asked me why the most recent translation of the Mass prefaces the Our Father with these words:

*...at the Savior's command, and formed by divine teaching, we dare to pray...'*

It was particularly the word 'dare' that stuck out to him, as it seemed odd to suggest that something we've been doing most of our lives (praying the Lord's prayer) was a daring action. I've [written previously about the concept of divine sonship](#) – using the relationship of father/son (parent/child) to help us understand the closeness God desires to have with us. When one understands that he or she is loved unconditionally, they become capable of incredible things. This is why the image of God as a Father and we as His beloved sons and daughters is woven throughout scripture. St. John writes: ***“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are”*** (1 John 3:1).

The danger with a relationship seen only through this lens is that children don't automatically see the responsibilities that come with their relationship. A child growing up on a farm may love the farm animals and not comprehend that he or she will be required to do simple chores to help maintain that farm (and if that same child eventually inherits the farm, they'll need to learn and do all the work!) This is why St. Paul writes about the other side of this relationship: ***“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God”*** (1 Corinthians 4:1).

To consider oneself a son/daughter and a servant of God seems like a strange pairing. You don't expect someone to have the same sort of intimacy with their son the same way they would with a cook. You don't expect the same immediate obedience from a child as you do someone on the payroll. And yet, in relation to God – each one of us is both child and servant. It may be that we can look to the story of Robin Hood for some inspiration...

The basic plot of a Robin Hood story might look like this (there have been a variety of takes over the last 6 centuries):

*In the absence of his father, the King's brother runs wild over the kingdom... increasing taxes and*

*neglecting those in need, all in order to make his life more comfortable. His misbehavior causes no small amount of trouble for all those who live in the Kingdom, but he presumes his familial relationship with the King was enough to protect him from any real consequences. It's the hero of Sherwood Forest – Robin Hood, a lowly subject of the King – who makes it his life's work to set things straight until the King returns- robbing from the rich and giving to those most in need, regardless of the consequences for himself.*

For the sake of a simpler discussion, let's imagine that the main villain isn't the King's brother but instead his son. He understands what it is to be a beloved child – in fact he counts on it, forgetting that his power comes from his role as a steward of the Kingdom. On the day the king returns, he will have to give an account of his stewardship (a reckoning that will not go well for him!)

There are many servants of the King who reside in England during this time – servants who consider it their only responsibility to do their duty, without any consideration for those who suffer as a result. You can consider many from the story of Robin Hood here: particularly the soldiers and tax collectors who do the son's bidding. When the King returns, they have been obedient servants... but one might ask if they have been faithful, having blindly stood by while the will of the King was ignored and the needs of the many oppressed.

Robin Hood is also a subject to the King. But he remembers who the King is and what he would wish, and as a result is unable to stand by and let the tyrannical regime of the King's son sweep over his country uncontested. So he 'robs from the rich and gives to the poor.' As long as the son rules England, Robin Hood is an outlaw and in mortal danger, but on the day the King returns, he will be exonerated – so long as he isn't killed first. In many of these stories the King returns to set things right – and Robin's hope in the goodness of the King is rewarded. You might say that Robin understood what it meant to be 'son' better than the King's son ever did.

You can imagine that the moment of the King's return brings many things to light. A son who didn't recognize the responsibilities that come with being son. Servants who blindly obey their orders. And others who sought to do their King's bidding in every circumstance -who saw their relationship with the King alongside their duties to Him, and who sought to obey. While each one had a relationship with the King, their way of living it took a very different form.

There is an encouragement and a warning in the story of Robin Hood for all of us. If we dare to call Him Father, do we also dare to live as His sons and servants? And if our very identity comes from our understanding of life as one of God's children, we ought never forget that we are also His servants – people with duties and responsibilities. The love of God demands a response from us – moment by moment and day by day – this is our life of faith.

***Yes, dear friends, God loves us. This is the great truth of our life; it is what makes everything else meaningful. We are not the product of blind chance or absurdity; instead our life originates as part of a loving plan of God. To abide in his love, then, means living a life rooted in faith, since faith is more than the mere acceptance of certain abstract truths: it is an intimate relationship with Christ, who enables us to open our hearts to this mystery of love and to live as men and women conscious of being loved by God. -Pope Benedict XVI***



## Overcoming Disappointment [at Theologyisaverb]



“We know that all things work for good for those who love God,<sup>\*</sup> who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

I'd venture to say, that each of us has experienced disappointment numerous times in our lives. There are the daily goals that don't work out the way we had planned or expected and also those milestone moments that either shape us or rock our world. Sometimes both. Yet, how we understand and overcome disappointment is key to any way forward. For otherwise, we may find ourselves stuck in our imagined happiness rather than open to the happiness and joy that God truly desires for us. The fruits of which we might not realize until much later in life.

When my then fiance' and I were in our undergraduate years, we began to map out and plan our life together. We knew that as an ROTC officer's candidate that he would have a corresponding service commitment, one that we were happy to give. So we prayed for his choice of branch and active duty..well one out of two isn't bad. You see, active duty would have afforded a more certain path in terms of job and home security and for a newly married couple that was very attractive. Having scored in the top percentage for his flight school entrance exam he received his choice of branch, but to our surprise was not slotted for an active duty assignment. Wait, did they not know of our readiness to serve? Did they not see his potential to lead? Oh, and what of our prayers..why did they go unanswered?

Then it hit me..In the course of our prayers, we always ended every petition and prayer with THY WILL BE DONE. If in our faith lives we meant this prayerful intention then we had to take comfort that it truly was. God was looking at our potential and journey and rerouting us to where he knew we needed to be. Why? Because we had asked him to do so. We had invited God to the final say, and now we needed to get on board with the new coordinates and let go of what might have been. When we did so, I have to say God has never ceased to surprise us!

Oh, and through my husband's time in the Guard and Reserve, we were given many opportunities to lead soldiers and their families in that same discernment process of time and service. Sudden deployment activation held many concerns for these men and women who had never wanted active duty status. Now

unexpectedly thrust oversees in tenuous and dangerous situations, we prayed for each of them and their safety. And again at the end of every decade we prayed that it be God's will.

Yet, don't just listen to me..here is a bit or wit and wisdom from others..

### **~GK Chesterton**

“Do not free a camel of the burden of his hump; you may be freeing him from being a camel.

” Chesterton began his writing career not as an college English major, but unexpectedly as an art student and critic. Prior to his conversion to Catholicism, it is said that he suffered early on from depression and had also experienced a nervous breakdown. Renown for being absent minded, he relied on his wife and secretary to help him with the details in life.

### **~Thomas Merton**

“The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.” Long considered a spiritual authority on Trappist contemplation and Christian spirituality, Merton himself initially wanted to be a Franciscan. His writings advocating peace, justice and religious tolerance remain a continual call to live out our Christian faith in the world around us.

“If we really want prayer, we'll have to give it time. We must slow down to a human tempo and we'll begin to have time to listen. And as soon as we listen to what's going on, things will begin to take shape by themselves....The best way to pray is: Stop. Let prayer pray within you, whether you know it or not.”

### **~Oscar Romero**

On proper focus- “If we are worth anything, it is not because we have more money or more talent, or more human qualities. Insofar as we are worth anything, it is because we are grafted on to Christ's life, his cross and resurrection. That is a person's measure.” Soon-to-be-saint Romero's appointment as bishop of San Salvador is said to have been met with great disappointment by his fellow priests and colleagues. And still with ever growing unrest, poverty and violence in San Salvador, Oscar Romero heard and responded to his calling with holiness and unbelievable fortitude. With this passionate shepherd and martyr for the faith, we learn where our true hope lies.

### **~Dorothy Day**

“The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?”

Peace,



This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2016/05/16/wit-and-wisdom-overcoming-disappointment/>  
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## The Visitation and Saint Joseph [at Podcast]

In the Gospel of Luke we read,

*The Angel Gabriel was sent to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph ...*

Mary gives her fiat then sets off to visit her cousin Elizabeth who she is informed is also pregnant.

In art, Mary is often pictured by herself at the door of Elizabeth's home. When thoughtful minds think about this, a young, pregnant woman traveling three days over bandit-infested roads, the standard answer is she was probably accompanied by an elderly matron.

For the moment, let's be more thoughtful.

How will an elderly matron protect Mary from harm?

Mary was espoused to Joseph.

Joseph was selected by God the Father to be the Husband and Guardian of Mary.

Mary tells Joseph she intends to visit Elizabeth to help her and to celebrate God's blessing to her.

So according to the elderly matron theory, Joseph agrees to allow her to walk three days along dangerous roads escorted by an older woman while he remains home.

Another point – Joseph is also related to Elizabeth but he decides to not join in the celebration of the good news for Zachary and Elizabeth.

Really?

If this was your relative what would think of him?

**What a loser! I feel sorry for Mary being stuck with that guy!**

Let's remember that Joseph is the par excellent example of what a real man should be. He was given that grace by God Himself so he would be a suitable spouse to the Virgin and foster-father to His Son.

Joseph remaining in Nazareth while Mary travels to Hebron just doesn't sound right.

Saint Bernadine of Siena and Saint Bernard both insisted that Joseph accompanied Mary. They taught how blessed was the house of Zachary to have the entire Holy Family present for the birth of John. Saint Francis de Sales, founder of the Sisters of the Visitation of Holy Mary, also insisted that Joseph went with Mary.

As a Catholic, when we read the Bible, we must submit ourselves to the teachings of Holy Mother Church. But that does not prevent us from using our minds to seek out what the Bible does not say. We cannot change any part of the Faith, neither adding nor taking away, but we are permitted to try to fill in

the blanks.

The Bible does not say Joseph went with Mary nor does it explicitly state he remained behind. Thus, it is left to us to decide.

Would the man chosen by God to be the Head of the Holy Family allow anyone else to escort Mary on her journey to Elizabeth?

It does not seem likely in my mind. When Mary visited Elizabeth Joseph was at her side.

**Dennis P McGeehan is the author of The Diaries of Joseph and Mary, a book based on the teachings of the Early Church Fathers.**

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## Supreme Court helps the Little Sisters, though mandate stands [at Leaven for the Loaf]

For now, the Little Sisters of the Poor and the numerous other faith-based agencies fighting the HHS contraceptive mandate will NOT be subject to federal penalties for refusing to be a party (via employer-provided health insurance) to provision of goods and services that violate their faith. A unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision today made that clear, while sending thirteen challenges to the mandate back to lower courts.

“This is a game-changer,” [said Mark Rienzi of the Becket Fund](#), representing the Little Sisters. “The Court has accepted the government’s concession that it can get drugs to people without using the Little Sisters. The Court has eliminated all of the bad decisions from the lower courts. And the Court has forbidden the government from fining the Little Sisters even though they are refusing to bow to the government’s will. It is only a matter of time before the lower courts make this victory permanent.”

I admire Mr. Rienzi’s optimism. I hope he’s right.

The eight Justices declined to rule on the legality of the mandate, which is a regulation that followed the federal Obamacare fiat that contraception for women is a basic “preventive” health service. This federal policy that women are basically broken and in need of fixing is left untouched by today’s Court action.

The federal government can go ahead and provide the coverage for contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs and devices, under today’s Court action.

The bad news is that this means no majority could be mustered in the Court to reject the mandate altogether. That was the “decision” of the day: the mandate is still legal, despite numerous carve-outs and exemptions. From [SCOTUSblog](#):

“The two issues that the Court had agreed to rule on, and then left hanging at least for now, were whether the [Affordable Care Act] mandate violates the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act by requiring religious non-profits that object to contraceptives to notify the government of that position, and whether the move by the government to go ahead and arrange access to those benefits for those non-profits’ employees and students was the ‘least restrictive means’ to carry out the mandate.”

“A decision not to make a decision is still a decision.” Those words were drummed into my head by my public-policy professor more than three decades ago as I studied landmark Supreme Court cases. An important non-decision was made today: the mandate stands. So do at least thirteen challenges to it, though, and that’s good news.

[\(See earlier Leaven coverage at “Religious Liberty and the HHS/Obamacare mandate.”\)](#)



## Comment count

Yesterday afternoon, Jakey our budgie died. When we found him, his companion Louie was distraught. He chirped and bounced on top of him. Jumped along the perches. Clung to the sides of the cage. Searched in every corner for his friend. And, for the first time ever, he slept in his happy hut. Always before, the parakeets slept on a branch close together.

We wrapped Jakey in a tiny blanket and buried him in the backyard underneath a 100-year-old Elm tree. We packed the dirt and covered the grave with brush. We prayed.

*Hail Mary, Full of Grace  
The Lord Is With Thee...*

We were sad, especially my 10-year-old son, Pitcher (not his real name), who loves birds. He loves them so much he wanted to be one for Halloween.



Pitcher, like many boys, holds things inside. But last night, he was very upset. He hurt not only for Jakey, but for all the pets he's lost and for people he cares about who left without warning. He never really spoke about it until now.

**“Puzzle pieces ripped out of me,”** he said.

And he caught his breath between sobs and added, **“Never coming back.”**

## **Budgie Died of a Broken Heart**

And, still, Louie cried harder. So, Pitcher prayed the left-behind budgie would die, too. Prayed he'd be free to join his companion in heaven.

When we woke up this morning, Louie was still disoriented. He huddled in a corner of the cage grief-stricken. We read an article about how a parakeet can die of a broken heart, so we sat on the floor and talked to him and sang to him.

We wanted to save him and he rallied for a few minutes, but then he moved underneath his water feeder and just died.

My son, content that his prayer had been answered, played hide-and-go seek in the house with his little sister.

Pitcher took great care of Jakey and Louie. Every morning he made them chop and gave them crumble instead of cheap seeds. I marveled at how he gently cut up pieces of broccoli, carrot, strawberry and apple. He was a good birdkeeper — to the end.

Sometimes, I cursed the birds and all their droppings. I researched their life expectancy and grumbled beneath my breath, **“Four more years.”** Quickly, a house can become a zoo.

I gave our kids pets so they would learn responsibility and know the joy of loving a furry or feathered friend. I created these experiences only to be faced with the same decision every day. Gripe and bellyache about the bird doo and guinea pig poop or surrender to my own cause? I want to raise children who are loving and responsible. Sometimes, the person I fight the most is myself.

Last night, after Jakey died Pitcher asked me to sleep with him. **“Stay with me all night,”** he said. **“Don’t leave. I know you will always be there for me, Mom.”**

I held him as long as I could, until my arms went numb and he fell asleep. And, all night long I marveled at his faith. Maybe if he believes I will always be there for him, there’s a chance I’ll live forever.

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This contribution is available at <http://sixseeds.patheos.com/jenniferchronicles/2016/05/budgie-died-broken-heart.html>  
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## Caper [at With Us Still]

Every once in a while, you get confirmation that miracles do indeed still happen.

Such was the case late last week, when months of intricate planning—and more than a little intrigue and subterfuge—culminated in a memorable birthday event for my dear spouse.



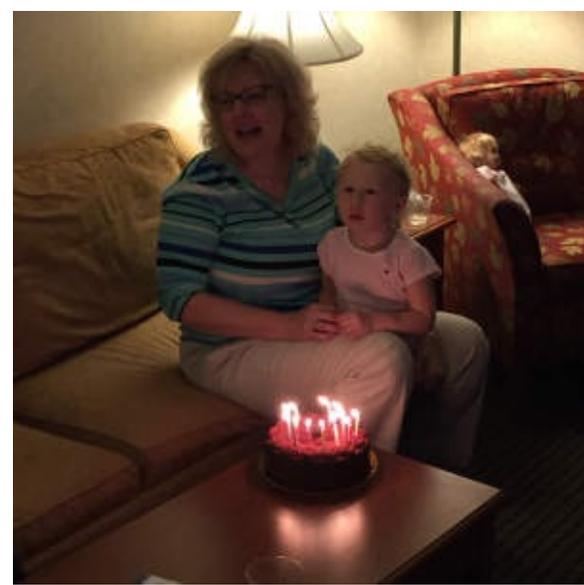
Take the rest of the weekend off, my Dear...

Gerri celebrates a ‘milestone’ birthday this month, you see...but to make it a surprise, we had to spring the trap a little early.

‘We’ ...as in my three adult children and I...and my daughter-in-law and son-in-law...and our granddaughter. Suffice it to say, that’s a LOT of schedules to coordinate and clear...in order to plan a family get-away weekend to Kansas City, where our eldest son lives.

The task was made all the more daunting because our family’s Planner-In-Chief was to be the guest-of-honor...and therefore, couldn’t be clued in about the ruse.

But miracle of miracles, we pulled it off – arriving at Gerri’s place of employment shortly after lunch last Friday...and then “kidnapping” her for our family’s rendezvous in Kansas City. (A special tip of the cap to Gerri’s boss, to my mother, and to assorted other extended family members and friends who cooperated in the Master Plan...and helped provide many elements of the intrigue.)



Yum...chocolate!!

It took a while for the enormity of the caper to sink in, once Gerri realized that we were *all together* in Kansas City. A mother's dream: what better way to celebrate? Why, there was even a birthday cake... complete with candles!

A Dad's dream, too, it turns out. As I look back on the weekend, I realize that it filled *my* heart with joy... and more than a little gratitude...for the familial love that was present to us throughout our time together.

In these late days of the Easter season, I am reminded that this is very much how Love seems to work: In the person of Christ, we have experienced companionship and self-sacrifice throughout this holy season. We have known the joy of breaking bread together...of acquiring the sustenance we need for the journey ahead. We have come to know the sweet sorrow of parting, as well.



Tapas...together...

Jesus seemed to have something like this last lesson in mind in the [gospel passage we heard at Mass today](#). He offers the disciples a sort of riddle:

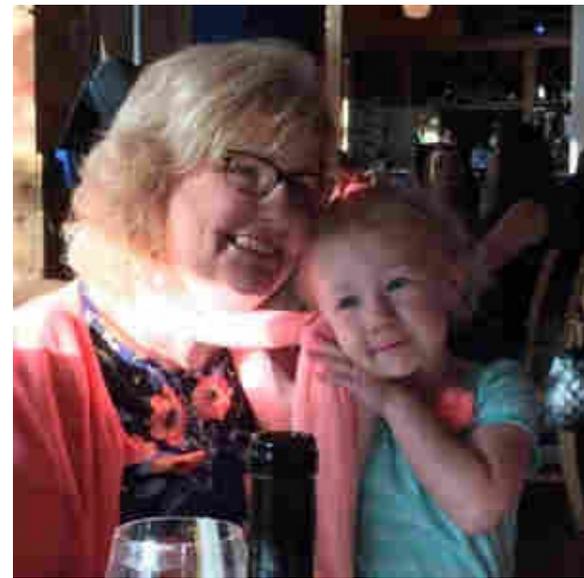
Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Are you discussing with one another what I said, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?"

Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy."

It's truly a blessed assurance, if you think about it: The Risen Lord promises to be there in every circumstance of our lives. The joyful moments that happen once in a lifetime. The times of grief and disappointment, too. And when we gather as family, we have the opportunity to make this Love come alive in a memorable way...even if only in one small corner of the world.



Love enough to share...



*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/2016/05/05/todays-find-caper/>  
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## **A Corpus Christi Lament [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]**

When we entered Church yesterday on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, was it any different than walking into a movie theater, a school auditorium or other public place?

How much consideration was given to He Who is really truly and substantially present here among us?

Or was most of our attention showered on the people around us? Did the din of idle conversation, loud voices and banter belie any authentic belief in the Real Presence of our Lord and Savior behind the tabernacle's locked doors?

How painful such conduct is to the Lord who suffered and died for us in order that we might live eternally with Him. Not even a Solemnity that He requested caused some to focus their attention on Him.

For many, Sunday is the only day they come into His Presence. Yet they act like He is not there. In far too many parishes, it is more important to be friendly and chatty with each other than to spend time in silence, prayer and preparation for the Mass.

What an opportunity some pastors lost yesterday by failing to remind us that our living and loving Lord is in the tabernacle waiting to be acknowledged, worshiped, adored, visited and loved.

How many of us were properly prepared to receive and consume His Most Precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity?

For another year, too many souls did not hear any of those truths.

We should have been encouraged to be silent before Mass, to worship and talk to our Savior, not to our neighbor. We should have been told how lonely Jesus is as a prisoner in the tabernacle. We should have taken Him from behind that locked door and proudly, joyfully, prayerfully, reverently and expectantly carried Jesus through the streets of our community as a witness to believer and non-believer alike of this magnificent Gift.

How many were afraid and ashamed to process publicly with Him?

No wonder the un-churched and those in other Christian denominations are not drawn to the Church Jesus established here on earth. He thirsts for those He loves to come, visit, adore and spend time with Him.

Instead, so many act like He is not here among us.

All the money in the world will not correct the many injustices around us or satisfy the hunger of those who lack basic necessities. Man's greatest need is to know, love, worship and adore our Lord and to become more like Him. When we do these things, we will act like Him, and out of love for Him, be Him to others.

Truth be told, we don't really believe in what Jesus teaches. We want to rely on ourselves and our earthly resources instead of Him. We forget that He and He alone is the answer to the pressing problems of our day - most especially our spiritual poverty. If we do not believe He is actually here among us and place our trust in Him, we will fail as individuals and as a Church community.

Maybe next year, on this most precious Solemnity, our actions as individuals and as a Church community will reflect a deep and abiding love and belief in His Real Presence among us.

Maybe next year when we enter His Churches, we will be struck by the silent, prayerful posture of His people and the inspiring and challenging words of His pastors.

Maybe next year our behaviors will match that which we profess to believe.

Maybe next year we will give the King of Kings and Lord of Lords the reverence and attention He deserves and to which He is entitled.

Maybe next year on Corpus Christi, we will even have enough faith to publicly process with Jesus through our community streets.

For this we pray.

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This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2016/05/monday-musings-corpus-christi-lament.html>  
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# Peony Clarity [at Grace to Paint]



11×14" oil paint on canvas panel; use 'comment' below to inquire.

How beautiful the shapes of peonies, whether as buds or as blooms. These I took from the far corner of our garden where they would have certainly been overlooked. What a joy to immortalize them in paint. Oh, and yes, I used the little maple syrup bottle again. Sweet!

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This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2016/05/31/peony-clarity/>  
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## Byzconsin: Farms, Tractors and Little Boys! [at Every Home a Monastery]

Life feels surreal some days here in Wisconsin. Having grown up in Southern California, the life we live now is very different from what we were accustomed to. Seeing my younger children growing up here and knowing this is the only way of life they know is strange to think about. Not that it's bad at all, it's just so very different from how I grew up. Different from what our older kid's younger days were like, too.

Most of spring and all of summer in the High Desert of California were spent in 100 + degree weather. We would take drives at night when the scorching sun finally went down for ice cream to try and cool off. The kids only went outside to play in the very early morning or evening once the sun started going down. I went grocery shopping after dark.

Now we live in a small village (800 people) which is surrounded by dairy farms and corn fields. The nearest "city" is 25 minutes away and has around 33,000 people. Lots of small towns, lots of countryside surround us. It's normal in the spring and summer to see tractors and trucks with hay scootin' down the roads. My boys love this!



The three younger boys (6,4,&3) love all things which move, as most boys do. They love seeing all the big farm equipment. They are fascinated by the tractors, the huge plow machines, and the numerous other gigantic farm vehicles that are used around here.



They are also fascinated with farms and farmers. They want to grow their own food, they want to visit the farm animals. They are also into all the local wild life. When we go for drives through the countryside, the boys are on the lookout for wild turkeys, deer, and birds. All of this is so different from the way we

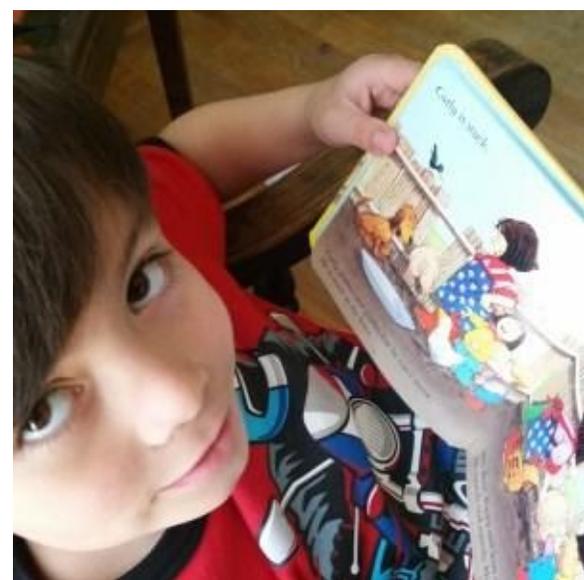
used to live! Where are the scorpions, tarantulas, and vinegaroons?!



Today the boys found a video a friend gave us about tractors. They were excited and watched it right away. I found it amusing how much they like these kind of things; this got me thinking about the different kind of childhood they are having by living in the Midwest. Back home in the large Tri-Cities area we lived in a trip to a farm area would've been a novelty and a special field trip.

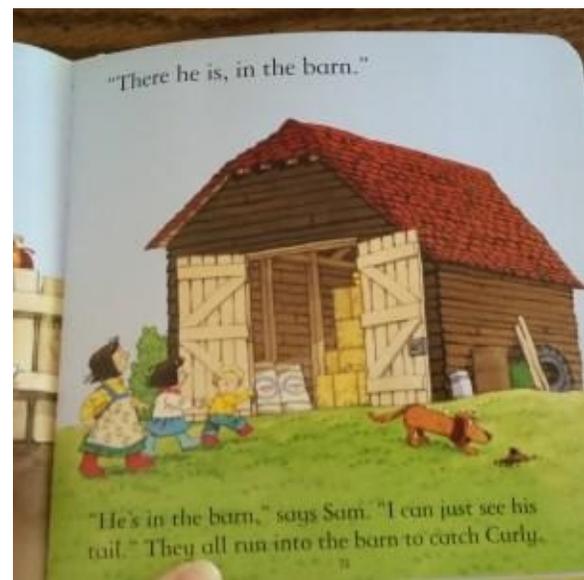
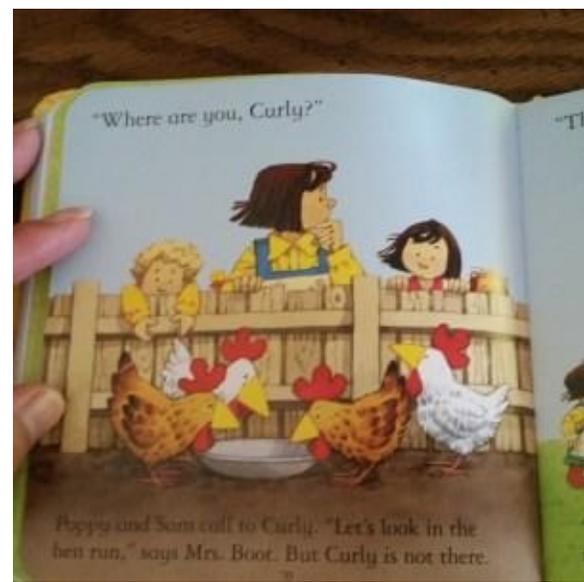
We recently have been reading through the [Farmyard Tales](#) book every night before bed. I read it to my older children when they were younger too. Lena saw me reading it to the boys and said, "I remember that book! I loved reading it and finding the duck on every page!" For my younger boys the book is even more exciting because they actually live by a bunch of farms!

Besides the fun of reading the cute little farm stories, I was really excited because Lucas actually read the book along with me! So far his reading has been words and sentences here and there, learning how to read in his workbook and online program, but not actually sitting down and reading any books to me. Just letting me read to him. When the kids are young and just learning to read I've learned it is best not to push them too much.



So the first story in [Farmyard Tales](#) was Lucas' first book! He read so well and gained some real confidence in his ability. I was extremely proud of him. What makes this book good for first readers is the

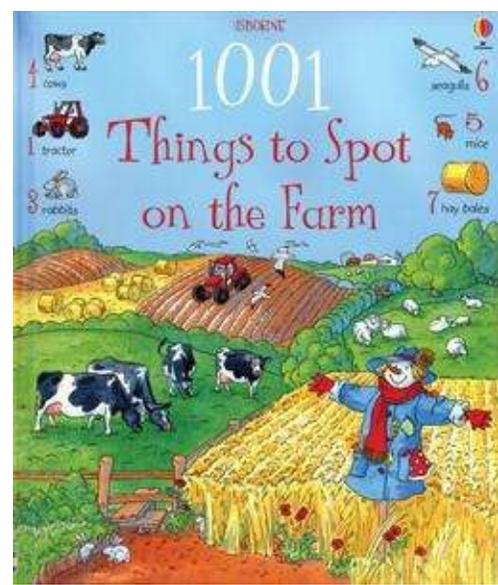
dual lines. The top of the page has a short simple sentence. The bottom of each page has more words. You could read the top sentences only and the story is perfect for a beginning reader (or when you want to get through a story quickly). I had Lucas read the top lines and I read the bottom. He really liked us reading the book together. The illustrations in the book are charming and give great clues for the text.



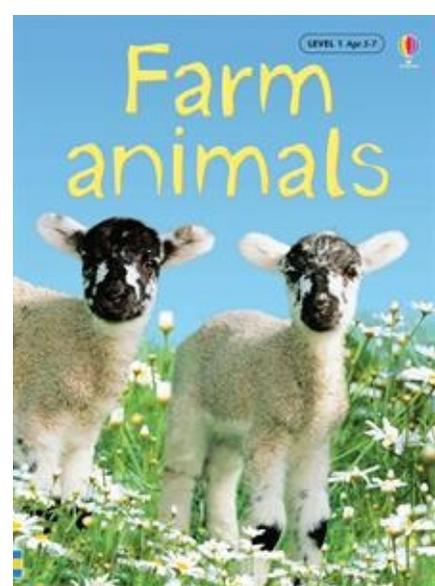
Another fun aspect is the little duck that is hidden on each page. The three boys are excited to find it as I am reading. They scan the picture and focus while they look for the hidden duck. I have to make them take turns pointing it out so they don't fight with each other in their race to find it! The Farmyard Tales book is a big hit with my kids!

It's a joy watching children grow and discover new things. A joy, privilege, and blessing to teach them things like reading. I often think of Saint Theophan who said, "Of all the holy works, the education of children is the holiest." Some days educating children doesn't feel like holy work, but then some days it sure does, with blossoming readers, curious minds, and new things to discover—those days come easier.

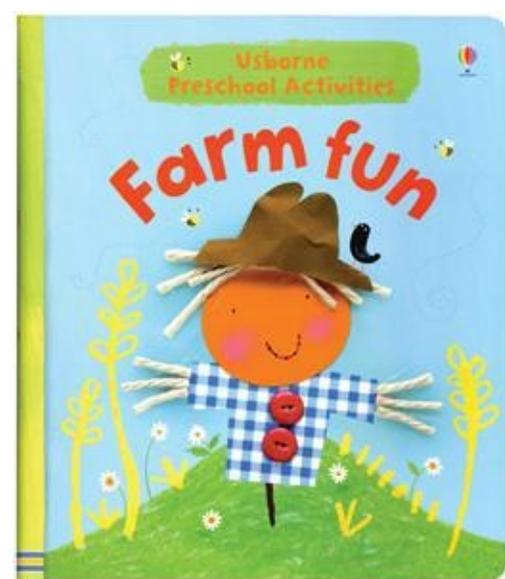
Do you have little farmers in your life? You can find many fun and educational books about farms, animals, gardening and more in my Usborne store. Here are a few of the great books I have to offer you for your kiddos:



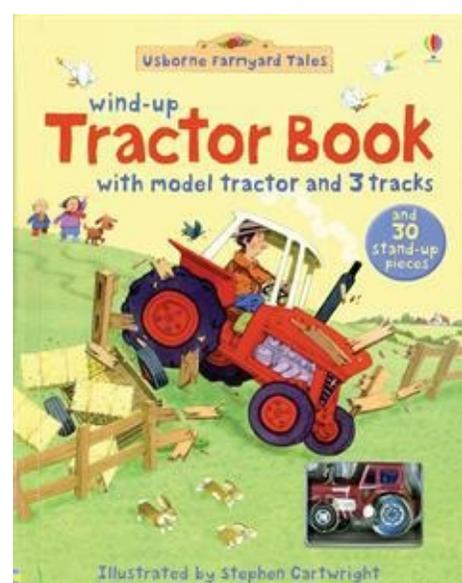
[1001 Things to Spot on the Farm](#) –Kids love looking at these fun books! This charming picture book shows scenes from farms around the world, and on every page, there are dozens of things to spot. The detailed pictures provide hours of looking and talking, and dedicated spotters will be unable to put the book down until they have found all the water buffaloes in the rice fields, the cocoa pods on the tropical farm, or eight lambs on the sheep farm. Counting sheep has never been so much fun!



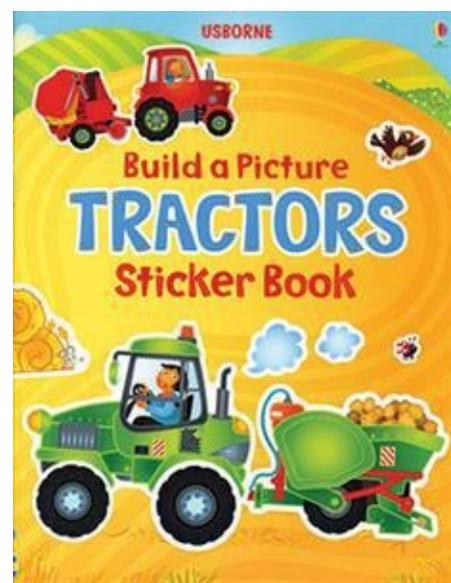
[Farm Animals](#) — A book for 5-7 year olds. How do pigs keep cool? Why do farmers shear their sheep? Which farm animals live underwater? In this book you'll find the answers and lots more facts about farm animals around the world.



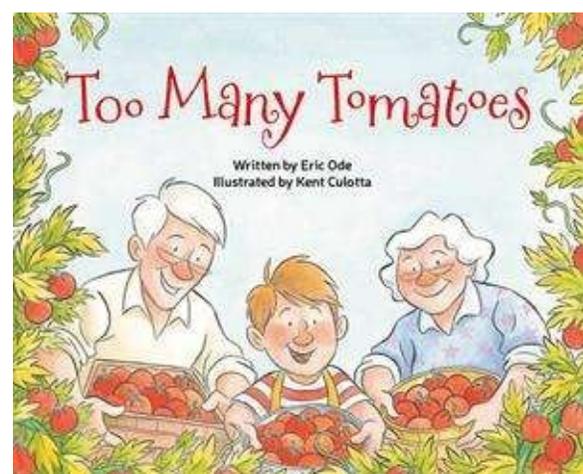
[Farm Fun](#)— An activity book! This delightful activity book is specially designed for sharing with young children. There are lots of ideas for drawing and painting, fingerpainting and cutting and sticking. As well as being fun, the activities will help to develop important skills such as hand control, coordination and concentration.



[Wind-Up Tractor Book](#)— This book is so much fun! It has a little tractor toy and tracks inside the book! You can play and tell stories with this fabulous interactive book. Wind up the tractor and watch it whizz around the tracks, and use the pieces to tell the stories.



[Build a Picture Tractors Sticker Book](#) — One of several tractor sticker books available. Add all the busy tractors, animals and drivers to the scenes to create the pictures in this delightful book. There are more than 100 fun stickers to play with.



[Too Many Tomatoes](#) — Eric Ode's rollicking, rhyming garden story combined with Kent Culotta's exuberant illustrations will have readers, tapping their toes (and digging their dirt, and sowing their seeds) as they count the too-many tomatoes overgrowing the garden, the building, the block ... and more!

*Grandfather's garden*

*is popping with peas.*

*It's buzzing with blossoms*

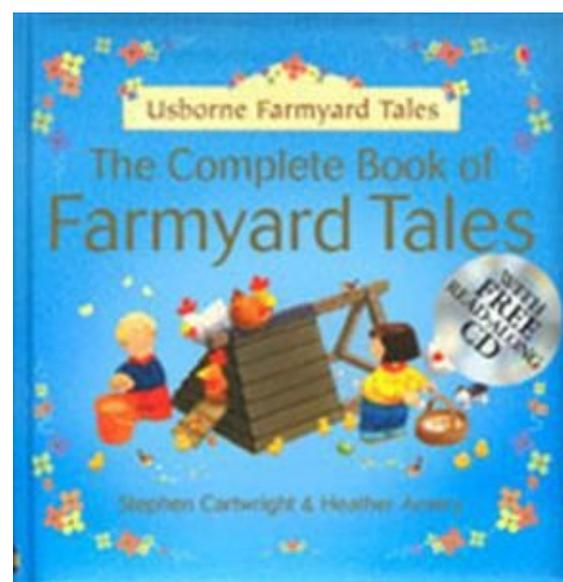
*and bumbly bees.*

*It's bursting with berries*

*and beans and potatoes*

*and tall, twining vines of*

*too many tomatoes.*



[The Complete Book of Farmyard Tales with CD](#) — The book I wrote about above. This delightful book contains all 20 of the popular Farmyard Tales stories. Young children will love Stephen Cartwright's charming illustrations of life on Apple Tree Farm, and the gently amusing stories of Mrs. Boot, the farmer, her children Poppy and Sam, and their animals, Rusty the dog, Curly the pig and Woolly the sheep.

I have many more books to offer about animals, farm life, gardening, and much much more. Visit my [Usborne bookstore](#) and share these exciting and educating books with the children in your life. Let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your support!

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## Pass the Marshmallows [at On the Road to Damascus]

A father and son were enjoying a nice fire while out camping on a warm summer's night. When it was time for bed the father called the son over and showed him how to separate the burning wood so the pieces were isolated from one another. The fire quickly died down and only glowing embers were left smoldering. In the morning the father showed the son that all but three embers had died during the night. The three that remain were also almost out but had just a bit of life left in them.

The father gathered all of the dead embers together in a pile and placed the three lit ones on top. On those he placed a handful of dry twigs. The father began to blow on the embers which turned red and got hotter with each breath. On the second breath wisps of white smoke began to rise. On the third breath the pile burst into flames and the morning fire was started.

Two-thousand years ago there were eleven embers huddled together in the upper room. They were barely lit as they feared for their lives. The Lord gathered them together and breathed the Holy Breath (From the Greek work *pneuma* meaning wind, breath, or spirit) upon them and they burst into flames with the fire of desire to serve God. This is the way church works. Those with faith come together to form an everlasting fire of love for God. As a church we burn brightly.

But like the father in the story the devil tries to extinguish that fire by separating the individual embers. The individual embers can burn for a while but none can burn as brightly or give as much warmth as what they do together. Eventually individual embers will fade away and die out. This is what the devil wants to do – extinguish the fire of God's love burning in each one of us. This is why it is so important that we assemble together in our churches. God will send the Holy Breath upon us to feed the growing fire in each of us so we can properly radiate his love and light.

For those who believe that they do not need a church, that they can be spiritual anywhere, that it is just them and Jesus – they are smoldering embers that will eventually die out. We need to show them the importance of being part of God's bonfire (*bon* is French for good). We are so much more when they are with us. Throw another log on the fire. Bring a smoldering ember to church with you.



# Bring Your Toddler to Mass



I have never written a “tips” piece on this blog before. I didn’t think I had how-to sorts of tips to give. But the other day I tossed off a comment about being an expert on taking little kids to Mass, and then thought, well, yeah, I kind of am. To be clear: I’m not an expert on getting them to behave at Mass, just an expert on taking them, week in and week out, without despair or undue frustration. So, at the risk of sounding like I know way more than I do, I am sharing ten tips on how to get through Mass (or any church service, really) with your young children.

But first, before I get to the “how” of attending Mass with young children, you might be stumped by the “why?” Why take them at all?

Because your whole family belongs at Mass. Mass isn’t a privilege intended for the well-behaved, whether age two or forty. It is a privilege intended for every single member of the church family, including and especially the messy ones (again, whether age two or forty). Your children belong with you at church, and you should never be put in position of having to find child care for them so that you can attend.

There is no good way to do this. If you hire a sitter, you’re making someone else work on the Sabbath, making Sunday morning an occasion for dividing instead of unifying your family, and buying your way out of a problem that belongs to the community, not to you as an individual. If you keep them home with dad while mom takes the older kids to Mass, you are endangering the faith of your children. (Multiple studies indicate that it’s the father’s church attendance that, more than anything else, determines whether or not children will attend church as adults.) It’s important that your kids see mom and dad worshipping together. Leaving them with extended family is a much better option, but not a perfect one, especially if your older kids figure out that grandma or auntie’s house is more fun than Mass.

So bring them, and if they disrupt things, know that that’s not all on you. The Church wants you to be open to life, and when we’re open to life, toddlers happen, and toddlers are loud, messy, and disruptive. Bring all of your children, the messy ones and the well-mannered ones, and if you don’t feel welcome, either keep going anyway, knowing that Jesus welcomes you always; help your church to develop good children’s programs that get the little ones out of the sanctuary, at least for while; or find another parish with good children’s programs. Above all, don’t not go for three years because your kids are too little. Mass is for you, no matter what stage of life you are in. Don’t let anything or anyone take the Bread of Life from you.

Enough about why, here’s how:

- 1) Go every week and, if at all possible, always to the same Mass.

When I was training my dog, I learned that puppies don't automatically generalize. Just because you've taught them to come when called at one park, they won't necessarily do the same in a different context. Toddlers are the same way. Through sheer repetition, you can train them to contain themselves reasonably well during Mass at one time in one location, but they will not transfer that training to any other time or location. For our two-year-old, a different Mass time or place is a brand-new game with rules yet to be invented. Can I dance in the aisle here? Knock over an urn of holy water? Crawl under the pew and grab the shoe of the man in front of me? Let's find out. (By the way, the answer to question number three is no, because he will reflexively kick you in the face. At least I hope it was a reflex.)

2) Come armed. Bring food and books.

Do not bring Cheerios or other little crunchy things. They get everywhere and you will spend your time at Mass picking them up. They will get ground into the floor and the pews and you'll feel bad. For guilt-free snacks, I suggest pancakes. No crumbling, no scattering. In my family, pancakes are a once-a-week treat, so they're yummy even without maple syrup. (I hope it goes without saying that you shouldn't bring syrup to Mass.)

There is no need to bring religious books—who are we kidding with those? Your toddler is not going to get religion by looking at pastel illustrations of Noah's Ark. Instead, bring lift the flap books with as many little flaps and sliding pieces as possible. Even better, make these books available only during Mass. Yes, you will have to spend some time naming things and whispering "How many? Where is the circle? Which is the red one?" and so on. That's fine. God knows you can multitask.

(Obviously your older kids, say age five and up, don't get to eat or read books other than the Bible or the missalette at Mass. They are more likely to accept this if instead of saying "you're too old for that," you explain that needing these things is a sign of immaturity and weakness.)

3) Unless your child is really loud, as in loud enough to drown out the priest, or injured, do not take them out of the sanctuary. Otherwise, they quickly learn that making any noise is a quick ticket to freedom.

It's ok if they make some noise. When they feel the need to vocalize, instead of leaving, I teach them to talk about Jesus. Everyone thinks that's cute, even if it's during the Gospel reading, the homily, or the Eucharistic Prayer. Teach them to say "I love you Jesus!" or "Hallelujah!" Even "preach it, Father!" is better than "I tooted!," which is what my two-year-old called out during the homily last week.

4) If you do have to leave Mass, be as boring and unfeeling as possible.

Leaving Mass should feel like missing out. If you have to take them out, or if they run for the exit and get past the usher, then no talking, no eye contact, no affection whatsoever. The love is in there, with Jesus. If you become a zombie the moment you hit the narthex or the church garden, your child will not want to hang out there with you.

5) Shower affection on all of your children when they are well-behaved.

Mass is a time to get loved up, by God and by your parents. Cuddle. Never brush off the affections of your children, even if you are deep in prayer or trying to focus on the homily. Hold hands with them and your spouse. Kiss them. Make Mass an experience of Love Himself for your children.

## 6) Embrace the laughter.

Being serious, dour, and prim doesn't make you more holy. We are a people of joy and Sunday Mass shouldn't feel or sound like a funeral. Laughter is the yin to piety's yang—it keeps us in balance spiritually. When we start imagining life with God as a gauzy, bloodless place of noble sentiments and easy virtue, laughter cuts through our BS and brings us back to our bodies. Wholesome family laughter is a spiritually gift. Give that gift to others. Give it to your older children by bringing their younger sibling to Mass.

## 7) When people give you the stink eye, smile back, forgive them, and pay them no mind.

Know that most everyone at Mass is delighted that you are there with your children, as they darned well should be. You and yours, rubbing snot on their hands before the passing of the peace and shoving each other, are the future of the Church, sitting in your proper place. You have brought your children to their Father's house where they belong and He is glad they are there. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." If we adults are to enter the kingdom of heaven, we have to become more like them, not the reverse.

## 8) Don't bribe them with the post-Mass donuts.

After Mass, donuts happen just for the asking, whether you deserve them or not, like grace. Otherwise my littlest would never get donuts. There is plenty of time for consequences; don't make church a place of denial and disappointment.

## 9) No matter what, never judge other parents and their kids at church.

If your kids are well-behaved at Mass, do not take it as your doing. Don't you dare start thinking you could do better than that poor lady two rows behind whose kid is acting possessed. My second child was always well behaved at Mass, even as a toddler. I took that as our doing, and then our third proved me very, very wrong. Graciously accept good behavior as a gift from God. Receive it thankfully and you might get that gift again. I realize that God is beyond human ways, but I have to think that if we go about grabbing the gifts God gives us and pretending we made them ourselves, God might just stop giving them. The moment you judge another parent, you'd better get ready for your children to humiliate and disappoint you, because it's coming.

If you see a family that is struggling, smile at them. Make funny faces to entertain their children. We are in this together. We are raising the next generation of Catholics, and we will make the Church a welcoming, loving, joyful, even (gasp!) a fun place for them.

## 10) Get *Little House on the Prairie* and all other stories of the perfectly behaved children of yore out of your head.

Rid yourself of images of the Ingalls kids and their Puritan or Catholic forebears sitting bolt upright, all prim and starched, in cold pews for hours because Pa said so and they love Pa. These and all the images you have of childhood perfection are pure fiction. (If it helps, note that Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter Rose rewrote most of her mom's work, which in its original form didn't involve much in the way of stories.) If you expect perfection, you will be disappointed and frustrated. Keep your expectations in line with reality. Expect them to be there; to dress decently; to show respect to you, the priest, and each other;

and to be children.

You've brought your family to Mass, where you are all in God's holy presence giving Him the worship He is due. Extract your toddler from under the kneeler, pick up the half-eaten pancakes, and go get yourself a donut. You've done good.

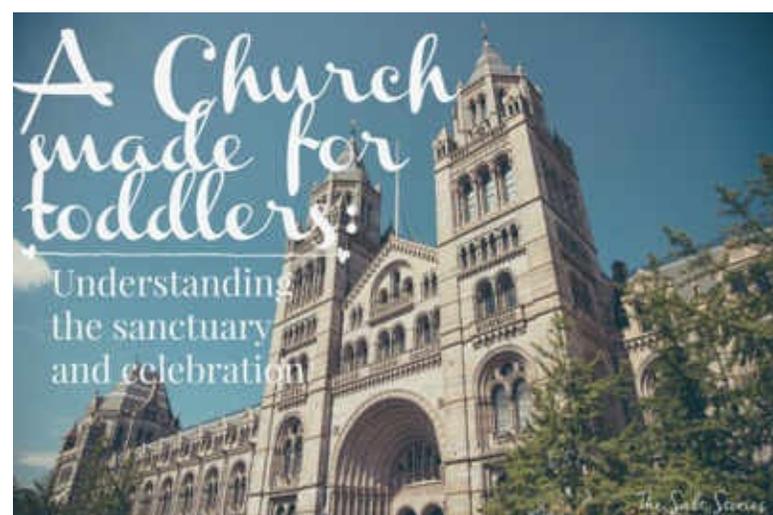
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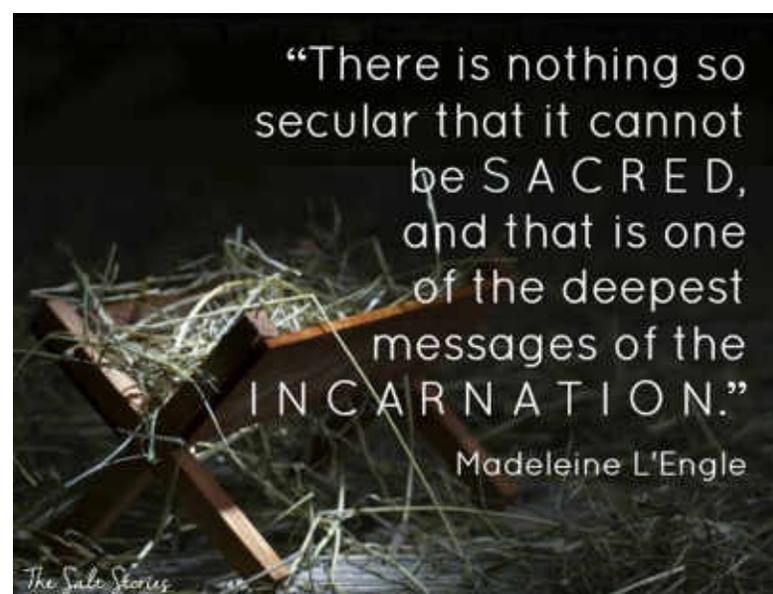
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# A Church made for toddlers: Understanding the sanctuary and celebration [at The Salt Stories]

Going to [mass with my daughter](#) is quiet the trip. But as she grows further into toddlerdom, we have found many opportunities to share the celebration with her, using tactile and visual cues to begin the discussion. We mention her place in the family of God as we dip our hands in the baptismal font, and when she gets fussy we use the stations of the cross to tell her the story of Good Friday. And as she has found ways to engage, it makes me wonder, was church made for a toddler's developmental state? The liturgy clearly utilizes our senses to activate our brains.



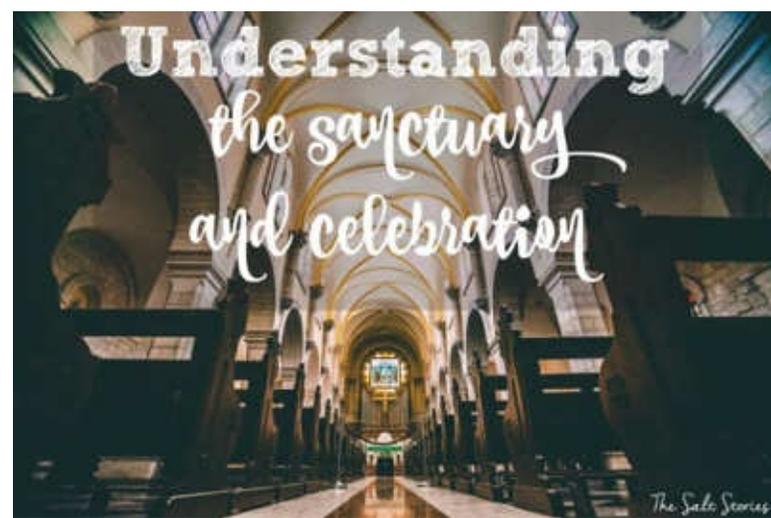
One of the most amazing things about the incarnation is that in it God made the common holy. He has a track record for turning material things into something more. Whether with a burning bush, a rod that can part a river, a land for his people, healing with mud, or the attachment of the human soul and the body. God enters the world in which he created, and speaks to us in a way we can understand.



The mass is meant to activate the senses. From the beginning to the end there is a way for my daughter to

engage in the church service. Holy water, incense, music, Eucharist, offering peace, sitting, standing, kneeling, spoken prayer, color changes, and even moments of silence.

The church treats me like a toddler, and I am okay with it. When my mind wanders to my grocery list, I can see out of the corner of my eye a beautiful picture, liturgical color, or am asked to re position my heart as I move my body. It keeps me engaged and my body fills in the gaps where my mind and heart fails.



So in this series, I will be digging deep into the fixtures and traditions that mark the Holy mass. A few posts coming to a screen near you soon.

- Standing and singing Alleluia for the Gospel
- Lighting and moving of candles
- The use of the baptismal font
- Singing the Great Amen
- Why all the kneeling?
- A Case for the Crucifix

I am pumped to learn more about [these ancient traditions](#). Please let me know if there is any other pieces of the celebration that you would like to add to the list.

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## The Chapel Rosary [at FranciscanMom]

I was running a minute or two late for my Holy Hour yesterday, and as I approached the church driveway I realized I'd left my pocket rosary behind when I changed my clothes.

Worse, I'd tossed my wallet into my "Adoration tote" along with my journal, earbuds and a spiritual book or three—so I didn't have the rosary I keep in my handbag.

I can count on my fingers in a pinch; after all, God gave me ten of them, but our Adoration chapel has a few rosaries on a hook near the entrance. I decided to use one of those to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

Using a chapel rosary (or any rosary belonging to someone else) brings to mind a unique connection that is made through prayer.

What other hands had held that rosary, fingering the beads, counting off prayer intentions, wiping away tears?

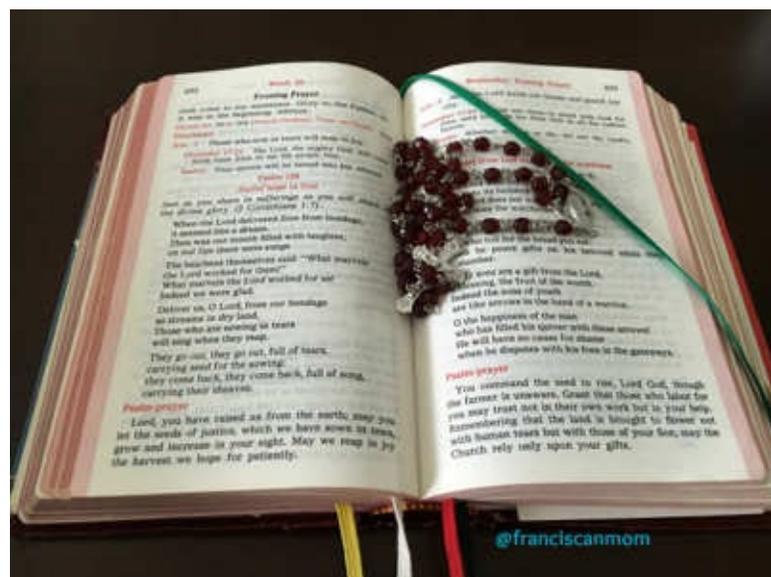
What other hearts had prayed the prayers, there in the chapel, laying bare their most secret and fervent desires of the soul?

Was the last person to lift this rosary off that hook a stranger? A friend? A neighbor? My husband?

So many prayers have been prayed on this rosary, in this chapel.

I prayed one extra Memorare for those who have prayed here before me, for those who pray here with me, and for those who will pray here after me.

We are all connected, united, brought together by our prayers on a single string of beads.



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## A Moment From De Sales [at A Moment From De Sales]



We share fully in Jesus' relationship with His Father. When trouble finds us, as it usually does, we know that we have someone we can count on, someone who cares for us. For we know that our affliction is the key to action for this loving God.

It is for Bob, a successful teacher with two small children, but who has been diagnosed with Cancer. Devastated as Bob and his family are, Bob finds hope and his hope defies his cancer; thus, giving him the will to go on! Why?

Because—Bob knows that our loving and merciful God will do anything to save us, love us, help us and cherish us. And to know this and truly believe this provides us with hope. Hope is the life line that helps us to stand when we fall.

Hope sustains us when everything else does not work. It is hope that says to us “we will make it.” We will make it because God will not let us fail. Didn't God send Jesus so that none of us would perish? Indeed God did and because of this wonderful gift, we have hope.

Winston Churchill, the great leader of Great Britain, during the Nazi bombings of London said, *Never, never, never give up!* And the Londoners didn't. Jesus says, “Hope in Me and you will survive.” And we will because, as believers, we know that when Jesus makes a promise—He keeps it.

God's love and protection produces the endurance, *i.e.* the hope, needed when affliction impedes our journey. We simply have to hold tightly to this hope and never surrender to the affliction.

Again, God wants us to endure and Jesus' words spoken when He was among us— cheer us on. They continue to remind us that our God truly wants us to come home to Him someday, because God's glory is my salvation, -and so is everyone else's salvation.

Hear then, this mantra: “Never, never, never give up” as our salvation is God's glory. Our hope with God's help is the way we can do it. Now that's something to cheer about each and every day!

## Brother John



Brother John was a man with the best of intentions but a terrible temper that made him impossible to live with. He decided to go into the desert and find a monastery where he could come to terms with his affliction. In less than a year the monks found his temper so impossible that he had to leave. They gave him a fine set of pots and plates, a large jug of goat's milk and enough food for a month. Then they helped him find a cave in which to live as a hermit. At last he thought, he could come to terms with his temper because there was no one there to try him.

It was when he was trying to light the fire that he overturned the jug and lost all his milk. Before he could control himself he picked up the jug and smashed it against the side of the cave. The pots went the next day and the plates the following day!

Brother John cursed and swore but there was no longer anywhere for him to go to hide from the affliction that would have gone with him anyway. At last he had to face in solitude what he'd never faced before. It was there that he finally learnt that the trouble with the world he had run away from was not 'other people', as Sartre said, but with himself. If he wanted to live in peace with others he must first find it within himself. St. Catherine of Siena used to say, "*The trouble with the world is me!*"

It was a truth that she had learnt for herself in blood, sweat and tears in her solitude, not in a desert, but in her own home in what she called '*the house of self-knowledge*'.

It takes a saint to see a truth so clearly that pride and prejudice prevents the rest of us from seeing. The evils of the world that we hear about daily on our radios or see on our television screens are but the outward expressions of the evil that is within us all. Yet, arrogant human beings find it offensive when they are told that the source of the world's woes can be found within them. They like to think that they have no part in them, that they are out there in a place where they can be dealt with by the expertise and endeavour of *Homo Sapiens*.

That's why *Schumacher* pointed out in his book, '*Small Is beautiful*', that '*although people go on clamouring out for solutions, they become angry when they are told that the restoration of society must come from within, not from without.*' Simplistic it may seem to the clumsy and cluttered mind of *homo arrogans*, but it is nevertheless true. There will never be peace and harmony in our world until there is first peace and harmony in our hearts. All the great mystics have discovered the hard way what Job meant when he said that man's life on earth is a continual war, a war that has to be waged within. Pope John XXIII's bedside reading was '*The Spiritual Combat*' from which he drew his inspiration. This man of peace and compassion only became so through many inner battles that he fought and lost, as he explained

in his book *Journal of a Soul*. It is only after losing battle after battle in spiritual combat that a person finally learns that the 'war to end all wars' will never be won without help and strength that is quite beyond our own resources. This was the lesson that St. Paul finally learnt. He actually thanked God for his weakness because it enabled him to realise that without God he couldn't win a single battle with himself. For St. Paul, even sinfulness can become a steppingstone to sanctity when it forces a person to turn again and again to the only One who can help him.

No politician, no diplomat, did more for peace in her day than did St. Catherine of Siena. Nor will anyone do more for peace in our day, than those who have the courage to go within as she did, and with God's help fight first within themselves for that which they wish to bring to others.

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## The diaconate is a sacramental office [at Catholic Deacon]

One of the issues the recent excitement about women and the diaconate, or women in the diaconate, brings to the fore is the sacramental nature of the diaconate. As it made its way to being restored as a permanent order of ministry in and for the Church, there was a legitimate question as to whether or not the diaconate was sacramental in nature. Believe it or not, there was a similar question pertaining to the episcopate, whether a priest became a bishop by way of ordination or institution.

The matter of the sacramental nature of the diaconate was resolved in 1947 by Bl. Pope Pius XII in his Apostolic Constitution

### [Sacramentum ordinis](#)

. In this encyclical, the Supreme Pontiff clarified that the diaconate is conferred by ordination, the form being the laying on of hands and the matter being the consecratory prayer. Hence, it is by being ordained a deacon that a man is constituted a cleric.

The sacramental nature of the diaconate is rooted in the Church's reception, understanding, and authoritative interpretation of sacred Scripture, the relevant passage being

### [Acts 6:1-7](#)

. Despite some exegetical concerns- not serious ones, in my view- at least since the time of St. Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century of the common era, this passage has been understood as the origin, the

*magna carta*

, of the diaconate. There is much more that could, and probably needs, to be said with regard to this passage in terms of understanding the diaconate as being divinely instituted. It was instituted by the apostles acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They called seven men "filled with the Holy Spirit" to assist them in the community so they could focus on their apostolic ministry. I think it is significant that we know the names of the first seven deacons. Even more significantly for the restored and renewed diaconate, in the Acts of the Apostles we see the organic evolution of the office in the subsequent ministries of Stephen and Philip.

Paragraph 29 of

### [Lumen gentium](#)

, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, also assumes the sacramental nature of the diaconate: "At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed 'not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service.' For strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and his group of priests they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God." Given this, one can see that Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Letter, issued

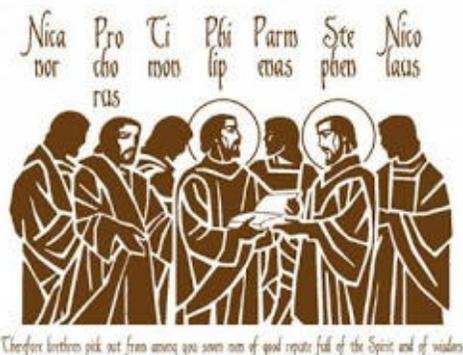
*motu proprio*

## [Omnium in mentem](#)

, which, among other things, amended the

## [Code of Canon Law](#)

, specifically Canon 1009 concerning the diaconate's relationship to the episcopate and presbyterate, was not an innovation aimed at sparking a sacramental revolution, but simply a clarification.



The need to write something about the diaconate as a sacramental office conferred by ordination, along with the necessity of the unity of the three offices that together constitute the sacrament of orders, became apparent to me after someone put a link to my post

## ["Arguing for the ordination of women by way of reduction"](#)

up on social media. In response to this I was on the receiving end of a rather pointed rebuttal that took me to task for arguing against what the commentor viewed as a given (i.e., that ordaining women deacons was utterly unproblematic in light of a rather simplistic and reductive argument made on the basis of

## [Omnium in mentem](#)

) and for not writing clearly enough. As to her second point, I'll reluctantly concede that I could've been clearer. I make no apologies for generally not posting in the form of a legal brief- the person who took exception to what I wrote is an attorney.

So, in order to clarify a bit, I offer the following as food for thought:

1- In light of the unity of the offices that comprise the sacrament of orders, ordaining women, conferring on them the sacrament of orders, is more complex than many suppose or want it to be

1b- In light of the unity of the sacrament of orders, it's difficult to see how once women are ordained, what theological or anthropological reasons could be given for not ordaining women to the other offices- this was the reason I used the example of what happened in the Church of England from 1987, when the church approved the ordination of women to the diaconate, to 1994, when the church approved the ordination of women to the presbyterate, to 2014, when the church approved the ordination of women to the episcopate- this proves that such an argument is not fallacious (i.e., not a

slippery-slope argument)

2- The fact that deacons don't act *persona Christi captis* (i.e., in the person of Christ the head) does not necessarily mean (in my view, does not likely mean) that deacons do not act *in persona Christi* when exercising our ministry- perhaps the best term for this is *persona Christi servii* (i.e., in the person of Christ the servant)

2b- If deacons in nowise, or no way, act in the person of Christ in the exercise of our ministry, then what precisely makes the diaconate a sacramental office?

3- As we see with all the confusion we are experiencing concerning marriage and who can use what restroom, theological anthropology is crucially important, lest the Church accept what Pope Francis himself has denounced as "[gender ideology](#)"

It seems to me that the Church in recent decades has done a notable job in defining what what a deacon is not, what he cannot do, that is, to define the diaconate negatively. It is worth pointing out that in the Church's history, it was tensions that arose from perceptions that the deacons had grown too powerful that contributed to its decline and, at least in the West, its reduction to a transitional order whose sacramentality was a matter of dispute. It seems to me that much work remains to be done in terms giving the restored and renewed diaconate a clearer sacramental and ecclesial identity. It seems fair to expect that deacons themselves undertake the bulk this labor. There is good news in that this project is already underway. In the United States we have as a foundation the invaluable work of Deacons Owen Cummings, Bill Ditewig, and James Keating. My mention of these notable deacons should in no way be taken as an attempt to attribute the views I have expressed in this post, or my previous posts on the diaconate, to any or all of them.

No matter what the Church does with regard to women

*vis-à-vis*

the diaconate, one thing that is clear- ordaining women, being no simple matter, is not something the pope could do

*motu proprio*

by simply amending the Code of Canon Law.

And now I think I'll give this topic a rest for awhile.

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# The Fear of God [at Serviam Ministries]

Written By: Gregory Watson

*“And fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)*

Recently, a co-worker who is struggling with his faith commented to me that it seems unreasonable and unfair to have to love and worship God, or else be sent to Hell. To my friend’s mind, the notion that God would demand our love at such a steep price for refusal, doesn’t seem right or good. Unfortunately, work being work, I didn’t have the opportunity to engage my friend’s confused line of thought at any length, but it has certainly left me pondering the question, and the fundamental theology underlying such a position. Ultimately, the notion that faith in God is simply about placating a spiteful deity who is ready to plunge us into a fiery pit is something which is much more reminiscent of pagan ideas of gods from old myths (or new myths, for that matter, as illustrated by the upcoming new X-Men film’s megalomaniacal villain’s claim to divinity attest). The Christian faith, on the other hand, is so much more than subservience to a vengeful and capricious God. Rather, the God we serve is the God Who Is Love Himself!

Now, of course, this desire to distance ourselves from the notion of a God such as my co-worker envisions has led many well-meaning folks to suppose that perhaps there is no such thing as Hell at all, or that, at the very least, it’s only temporary, but in the end, all will be saved. The claim is often heard that all that “Hell” stuff is “Old Testament” theology, whereas Christians are “New Testament” people. Chief among the many problems with that ideology, however, is the fact that Jesus Himself warns us more about Hell than anywhere else in the Bible, and He’s very clear about it lasting forever!

So how does the threat of Hell square with worshipping a loving God? In the first place, we shouldn’t think of Jesus’ and the Church’s teachings about Hell as “threats”, any more than we consider the gas gauge on our car pointing to “E” as a threat. Your car does not “threaten” to stop running unless you give it gasoline and proper maintenance. These are simply requirements necessitated by the car’s design.

So it is with our relationship with God—it’s not that He needs us. He is not so small or weak that our love for Him feeds Him, or our rejection of Him hurts Him in some way. He is not like the old Irish gods who, when no longer worshipped, diminished in both stature and power to the level of the fairies of folklore. God is the very ground and source of all being. He is pure existence, pure act. It is we who are the changeable, contingent beings, wholly dependent upon God for our very being, and all else besides. We owe our existence not to a felt need within God, but purely as an overflow of His infinite love. We were made to live in and with and through Him, just as cars are made to run on gasoline. And if we, through the exercise of our free will with which God endowed us, choose to reject Him, preferring the lesser goods of the world which He has made instead of He Who Is the Greatest Good, then we cut ourselves off from His grace, the supernatural life which He gives to us through baptism, and renews in us through the Eucharist. And if we persist in that graceless state, never returning to Him through Confession, and die in that state, we will indeed end up separated from Him in Hell.

But it is not that *He* is casting us into Hell in some vindictive act of judgemental rage. Rather, He is merely honouring our decision to not love Him, to desire to be without Him. But since God is the source

of all goodness, to be without Him can be nothing other than Hell—pain, suffering, and bitterness.

So yes, Hell is real, and Hell is forever. Does that fact necessarily lead us to a mere servile fear of God—only obeying Him to escape that horrible reality? Ideally, no. When we truly come to know and love God for Who He Is, we see in Him the end of all our longings and desires, the source of all our happiness, and the fulfilment of all our hope. And in our highest moments, the thought of Hell never crosses our minds, except insofar as prompting us to rescue others from that fate. However, while the spirit may be willing, the flesh is indeed weak. Our passions and desires change frequently according to myriad factors. As physical beings, we are especially attracted to physical goods, and forget that Greatest Good, which happens to be Spirit. Yet even in our weakness, God accommodates Himself to us—first by Himself becoming a Man, Jesus Christ, in order to redeem us to Him. Moreover, He gave us seven Sacraments, physical signs of that immaterial, spiritual grace, which is transmitted to us through those very signs and tangible realities. Even so, however, the noise and lights and distractions around us blind us to the Goodness and the Glory of God. Sometimes the positive reinforcement isn't enough, and so the reminder that there are consequences to rejecting God, ultimate among them being Hell, can be a good and saving influence, albeit of the lowest sort.

While the goal of the spiritual life is a love of God for His own sake, entering into a life of perfect happiness with Him in Heaven, the path toward that end is often turbulent. And while it may not be ideal, we often find ourselves much closer to the beginning of our journey to God. And it is at the beginning of our spiritual life that the words of the Proverb are addressed:

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is prudence.”*  
(Proverbs 9:10)

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# Saint Philip Neri -- Saint of Joy! [at A Catholic Mother's Thoughts]

May we all be saints of joy!!

From

[Magnificat](#)

this morning, quoting

[Blessed John Henry Newman](#)

:

Nothing was too high for him, nothing too low. He taught poor begging women to use mental prayers; he took out boys to play, he protected orphans....Cardinals hung about his room, and popes asked for his miraculous aid in disease....It was his mission to save people, not from, but in, the world.

Nothing was too high for him or low.

[God is no respecter of persons. \(Acts 10:34\)](#)

. What a good reminder this holy saint gives us.

How easily we slip into thinking we are better than others. Some think they are better than the poor. (They must not work hard enough. They must not be very "together.") Some look down on the rich. (After all, surely they are attached to their possessions. Surely they are guilty of materialism. Surely they are haughty.)

Does education make a person superior? Nice clothing? Status? Money? Power?

[God is no respecter of persons](#)

. May we never forget that we are all poor broken children, in need of the Redeemer.

And like Saint Philip Neri, may we never pass up an opportunity to share the joy of Christ with every person we meet.

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## When Church Strife Makes You Worry About Your Witness [at In Caritas Christiana]

In the last couple of months, we have had some significant conflict among our church-going friends and their families. I don't want to go into detail here, but these events have been a big deal. They have been a big deal in my life, in my husband's life, in the lives of all of our family... but we've been

*very*

careful about sharing them with friends.

Why is that?

In a word: scandal.

We do not want to create scandal for our friends who do not believe. They have enough of their own reasons for not going to church without adding the hurts we've gathered over the last few months to their lists.

We were conversing with my brother-in-law - Jamie - recently, and I mentioned this, inasmuch as we have avoided talking about "the drama" with a mutual friend who we all hang out with regularly.

"We were concerned about what kind of witness it gives to him," I said.

Jamie quite disagreed. "He needs to see that Christians don't have perfect lives and don't pretend to have them," he said. "He needs to see that we're real people with real problems, who have real sins to deal with, and that those sins have real consequences for our lives."

This got me thinking. There is a lot of merit to what Jamie said - the example of a Christian life lived well in the midst of troubles is important. It's important that people who don't believe see the presence and effects of grace in times of trouble. What makes a Christian undergo trials differently?

These things have to be seen - experienced in a way - to be really believed.

However there are times when sharing can be counterproductive. You don't want to tell a friend who is not a Christian (but who you hope will be one day) the regrettable details of how your fellow Christians failed to live their faith fully as it applied to you.

For many people, you and your account of the Church in your life will be the only Bible that they ever see. How will they come to know Christ through you? It's important to put our best foot forward toward that end, and it is important to let them see the extraordinary action of grace under fire.

It's a narrow line to walk. You want to show that the Christian life isn't always perfect but that it can be lived well under non-ideal conditions, but you don't want to do so in a way that will push further away someone who is already holding God at arm's length.

Before you start talking, consider a few important points:

**Ask the all-important question: Will this knowledge bring my unbelieving friend closer to Christ?**

Not every fact needs to be shared. Sometimes it just doesn't need to be shared by you. As my husband's grandmother has said, "Total honesty is a crock."

Before you pour out your heart to your friend about whatever the latest drama is at church and who's mad at who and why and what's really got you goat in the parish hall right now, ask yourself the all-important question.

*If my friend knew [whatever it is I am about to say] would they be more or less likely to come to Christ?*

It may be that the person you're considering sharing with has a right or a reason to know. That's fine. If that's the case...

**...wait until you aren't raw.**

Let them know what happened - in a way that you control. In particular so that you can control *yourself*.

Don't let the conversation go too long - it becomes easy to allow yourself to vent, and you don't want to process your grief over the failures of believers with nonbelievers. This puts them in a position to feel like they knew it the whole time: Nobody hates like church people.

As I said, these events are still somewhat raw in my life and the lives of my family, and so we are still being very judicious about sharing. In the last few months, we've watched a few people with authority in a church misuse that authority to great harm.

Therein is the crux of the matter. It's

*a few people*

who have hurt us, but those

*few*

do exist, and their regrettable actions will give

*all*

Christians a bad name, if we don't think first before we share about what happened - and with whom, and how.

We want our friends who are not believers to come to faith, and when we have strife with other believers, the things we say outside the church regarding that strife matters.

[witness.html](#)

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## Fiat Mihi Too [at Smaller Manhattans]



I first heard the Bamboo Parable when I was a kid, I imagine most of you have heard it too. No? It's the story of beautiful Bamboo, who freely allows its Master to chop it down, hack it open, and use it to bring life-giving water to parched land.

[Here's](#)

an effective retelling. Whatever its origins, the Bamboo Parable inevitably reminds me of Jesus, and the necessity of each Christian to imitate Him, that is, to die to self: "Verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it stays alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit." You know about that unpleasant side of Christianity, right?

I never cared for that story. Its implications were too inconvenient. I bet folks such as Mother Teresa liked it just fine; but then, I found Mama T to be on the inconvenient side of Christianity as well.

And this little prayer: "Lord take me and do with me as you will." A riff on the Bamboo Parable: beguiling and beautiful; but scary, too. I've heard umpteen versions of that prayer for decades. But I would never say that prayer because if I did, what dreadful thing might I be getting myself into?

In 2004 my parish published a pamphlet called *A Simple way of Life*. Only 8 pages long, but with a respectable, substantial cover, which made it too nice to throw away. Pages 6 and 7 elaborated on some hallmarks of being "a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus," who:

*Prays every day.*

*Worships at least once a week in the Most Holy Eucharist.*

*Studies Sacred Scripture every day.*

*Confesses one's sins regularly in the Sacrament of Penance.*

*Serves others in the Name of Jesus Christ.*

*Shares one's personal gifts, time, and money with the Lord and His Church.*

*Connects with other disciples in the Christian community.*

*Evangelizes the world through words and deeds.*

Isn't that a pithy list? I love it. I'd re-read pages 1-7 a few times a year, see how I was doing. Pretty good, I'd say. But page 8 was problematic- like the Bamboo Parable. This is what page 8 says:

*By the grace of my Baptism and with the help and mercy of God, I commit myself to strive to live according to this Simple Way of Life.*

---

*Name of Disciple*

---

*Date*

I would not sign and date page 8. That's asking for trouble. I'm no Father Damien. I don't invite bad stuff to happen. Careful is good, cautious is better. But badstuff happens despite care and caution; and I learned that enduring the badstuff with a Jesus worldview makes it not just bearable, but...*worthwhile*. And in 2012, more than 8 years after first reading *A Simple Way of Life*, I signed and dated page 8.

That's a few years ago now. I can't say that I'm a better Christian today, but I do ask God to use me as he will; I try to bust out of my comfort zone; and I accept that being the Bamboo would hardly be the worst thing that might happen to me.

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# There is one holiness [at Blog of the Dormition]

## For All Saints Sunday

Paul addresses most of his epistles to the saints of this or that city. And, I hope, if he were writing to us, he would say the same and would address the saints among us.

Although, when he addresses the Galatians, he does *not* call them saints. His letter is written to rebuke them because they have been turning to a different gospel, a perversion of the gospel of Christ.

So, if Paul were writing to our church, *would* he call us saints? Or, would he, as he did addressing the Galatians, leave that part out? Are we following the gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul preaches? Or are we accepting a different gospel, receiving a different spirit, or preaching another Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 11:4)?

Some in Galatia were holding up circumcision and the works of the old law over and against faith working through love in Christ, the love which in truth fulfills the whole law (cf. Gal 5:6,14). This excessive regard for externals I don't think is the typical error of our age, but we are inclined toward other errors.

Sometimes, we excessively internalize our faith. We regard it as a private matter, not something to be discussed in public. We are sometimes cowards and we sometimes fail to acknowledge Christ before others. Today, Christ tells us that if we acknowledge him before others, he will acknowledge us before his Father. That is, he will make us his saints. Likewise, if we deny him, he will deny us before his Father (Matt 10:32-33).

If we love Jesus, we will keep his commandments (John 14:15). Among other things, He commands us to acknowledge him before others (Matt 10:32). He commands us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15). And he commands us to baptize every nation in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).

If we keep these commandments, Christ will acknowledge us before his Father (Matt 10:32). He will remember us forever. And so we will live forever in him, our resurrected Lord. In Christ, we will know

the Father, which is eternal life (John 17:3). This is holiness indeed: oneness with God. This is what it is to be a saint.

This word “saint” is interesting. If we look at the Greek, ἅγιος, it’s the same as the word for holy. Sometimes Greek has many words for which we have only one, as in the case of “love,” but sometimes, it goes the other way and they have one word, for which we have many. And this is the case with the word ἅγιος, which means holy, which means saint, which means sanctuary (e.g [Heb 8:2](#)). At times, even Jesus is simply called the Holy – ὁ ἅγιος (e.g. [Mark 1:24](#)). This is worth keeping in mind when we think about the saints. Saint and Holy are utterly synonymous. There is no difference at all in the mind of the fathers, or in the mind of Paul. There are not two holinesses, but one holiness. If someone or something is holy, it can only be because they are partakers of the one holiness.

The single greatest teaching of the second Vatican council, in my opinion, is that there is a universal call to holiness. This is not a new teaching. Not by any stretch. This was already the teaching revealed by the Lord God through Moses in the wilderness of Sinai 3,310 years ago – or so. The Lord our God says in all ages, “be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44-45).

There’s a tall order. The holiness of the Lord our God cannot be overstated. Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord, the God of hosts. Three times holy is he. In Hebrew, this is a superlative. He is the holiest one and the source of all holiness, in whom is any holiness that is.

Yet, as the Lord, he is God of hosts, that is, as [Fr. Stephen Freeman](#) puts it, God of a huge crowd. He is in and with and surrounded by his saints. “Orthodox worship and prayer,” Fr. Stephen writes, “is simply *crowded*. Though we worship only the Triune God, we nevertheless do so in company with a ‘great cloud of witnesses.’” God, who alone is holy, has chosen not to be alone in his holiness, but to surround himself with those he has made holy, those he has made one with himself by his grace.

In the Divine Liturgy, after the consecration, the priest holds the holy lamb and says, “Holy gifts to holy people.” Does this mean you have to be a saint in order to come forward to receive Holy Communion? Yes, it does! There is no difference between “saint” and “holy.”

Then how do we become saints? None of us is sinless – but among the saints are sinners, every degree of sinner, and every kind of sinner – just like us. So when I say, yes, we have to be holy before we come forward, we have to be saints before we receive the holy things which are for the holy ones, I am speaking of a miracle of God’s mercy and grace with which we cooperate through prayer and humility and confession of our sins. We do not make ourselves saints, the Lord makes us saints.

Every saint he makes is unique. We honor them all. We need them all. Just as in one body, every member is different, yet every member needs the others for the whole body to thrive (cf. Rom 12:4-5). Every person that God makes, God wants and needs for his purposes. We are wanted and needed by God. We should seek God's purpose for our own lives. As Fr. Thomas Hopko points out, if we are condemned or damned it will not be because we are not the Theotokos, or we are not John the Baptist, or we are not Isaac the Syrian. It will be because we are not truly ourselves. It is for not being who God created us to be that we could be damned. The ultimate authority on who we should be and what we should do is our author and creator.

He reveals a lot of this to us through the Church, so don't think this means that we can go it alone. Because God gave us the Church to guide us into holiness, that is, into the person that God made each of us to be. Going it alone was never his vision for any human being. We are communal creatures. We are a community of persons, in the image of God, who is a community of persons. The Church is that community - that coming together as one with God and one another.

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza has a beautiful image of a wheel, in which the center – the axis – is God, and each of us are somewhere along the spokes of the wheel. You see, the closer we get to God, the closer we get to each other. Also, the further we get from God, the further we get from each other.

For this reason, it makes no sense to receive communion – to enter into communion with God – if we have animosity toward our brother or sister (Matt 5:23-24). There is no communion with God without communion with one another. First of all, we must “be reconciled with everyone and have no animosity toward anyone.” This is the first rubric in the Liturgikon.

Before we dare to approach with the fear of God and with faith, we pray that the holy mysteries be for our healing and not for our condemnation. We pray that the Lord make us worthy to receive. And we pray for mercy. This prayer – this Kyrie eleison – is our path to holiness. Holiness never comes from relying on the self, but rather on the one to whom we pray. To rely on the Lord, who alone is holy and who alone can make us holy.

So, when the priest holds the Eucharist in his hands and says, “Holy gifts to holy people” what can we say? We can only say, “One is holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father.” All holiness that is comes from the holy one.

The holy one, Jesus Christ, teaches us how to be holy in today's gospel. We must confess Christ before others, we must love him more than all others, even more than our fathers and mothers and sons and

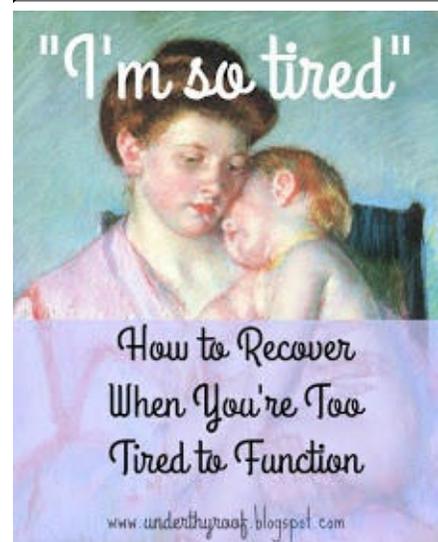
daughters. And we must take up our cross and follow him (Matt 10:37-38). These are Jesus' own words. This is his prescription for holiness.

When we are baptized into Christ, we are clothed with Christ and we begin to become one with him. We must thereafter imitate him, especially in his self-sacrificial love, to remain and grow toward ever greater union with the holy one, Jesus Christ, who is one in essence with the Father who is holy.

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Guys, I'm so tired.

And I mean that in the best way.

Last night wrapped up a long slew of dancing (hard) everyday, and often late into the night. It has been a very long time since I've pushed my body this hard, and suddenly recovery is VERY very important.

I only have a two day mini-break (of stretching only) before another dress rehearsal on Thursday. So I'm going to take this opportunity to share with all y'all the recovery things I manage to do when I'm sleep deprived, so sore it's hard to move, and still have to keep up with a toddler and a preschooler in the morning.

## Heat

When you feel sore and tired and gross, nothing really beats a hot shower. I learned a while ago to be a night shower person, but have grown to appreciate it more with babies. If you want this to be relaxing, it needs to be while little people are sleeping.

Need to get some heat on achy muscles, but only have a 20-ish minute nap window? Rice sock!

Fill an old sock with plain 'ol rice, tie or sew shut. Boom, rick sock! Throw it in the microwave for 2 minutes and you've got yourself a magical molding-to-your-body heating pad.

Add in a handful of dried lavender for an extra relaxing element.

## **Every 3rd Drink Cannot be Water**

Something I remembered the hard way early last week - you really can drink too much water.

When I'm pushing my physical limits, I aim for every 3rd liquid to be something besides water: herbal tea (iced or hot, with a spoonful of honey), Gatorade, bone broth.

It does wonders for keeping up energy and keeping the crampy legs away.

## **Enforce Nap/Turtle Time**

Sometimes I'll have gotten my achy body through the morning chores, gotten some homeschool lessons in, been to the park or errands, and gotten everyone fed lunch. But then we get to post-lunch, and suddenly I. Just. Can't. Keep. Going.

This is what I call The Wall.

The Wall is a good thing. It's the thing that lets you know you have hit a limit and it's a very good idea to take a rest now.

I normally hit it twice a day: immediately post-lunch (about noon) and again after dinner clean up (about 6pm).

The noon one is really important for me, since there is still the entire rest of the day that needs doing. Hence, my kids still nap regularly at noon.

John is almost 4 years old. He's at the borderland of maybe not needing nap.

So sometimes he naps, and sometimes he does Turtle Time.

Turtle Time is something we did at Girl Scout camp that is an amazingly brilliant parenting tool.

There is an hour in the afternoon where you just stay on your bed. You need to have everything you need for Turtle Time ready within reach of your bed before Turtle Time starts (book, journal, etc.)

You don't have to sleep at Turtle Time, but you can't get off your bed (except for true emergency purposes), you can't bother anyone else, and you can't make noise. For one hour.

If I can manage an hour after noon of noone calling me, pulling on me, or climbing on me, the rest of the day becomes magically better!

Happy mommy = happy kids (and vice versa.)

## **Do Something With People**

This might be an evening activity out of the house or a date night in with the husband, but it just can't be something physically demanding.

I add this one in here because it's true for me, but I would add the caveat that I'm on the extroverted side of the scale. If you are an introvert this might not be true for you.

I'm married to an introvert and he recharges by watching movies on Netflix. I can do that too, but it doesn't recharge or relax me.

There is something about in the flesh interaction with people that reconnects me back to the world outside of dancing and babies (there is one, I'm sure!)

Hope this gives y'all some ideas. Let me know what works for you to recharge and recover in your busy life!

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# The Heart of Jesus is ONLY a heart of LOVE [at A JESUIT'S BLOG]

## THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Ever since the seventeenth century when St. Margaret Mary Alacoque was granted visions of the Sacred Heart and asked to spread this devotion, the Jesuits represented by her confessor St. Claude de la Colombière, played a fundamental role in spreading this devotion. Colombière, spoke with Margaret Mary a number of times and after much prayer, discernment and reflection became convinced of the validity of her visions.

In recent times, one of the most loved and admired Generals of the Society of Jesus Fr. Pedro Arrupe was instrumental in reviving this devotion and placing Jesuits once again at the forefront of spreading this devotion. This devotion according to Arrupe was “the centre of the Ignatian experience”. It is an “extraordinarily effective means as much for gaining personal perfection as for apostolic success”. Arrupe was aware of the fact that the devotion had to be spread using newer symbols and made every attempt to do so.

According to one of the visions made to Margaret Mary, Jesus made twelve promises to those who would have devotion to the Sacred Heart. Of these one is of special significance. It reads “Sinners shall find in My Heart the source of an infinite ocean of mercy”. This promise is totally in keeping with the message of Jesus on every page of the New Testament. Jesus, the revelation of the Father’s love, was consistent and constant in his message of the unconditional love of God. His inaugural proclamation as he began his ministry in Galilee was that the kingdom had indeed come, that God’s love and mercy and forgiveness was being given freely to anyone who was willing to open their hearts to such love. His table fellowship with “tax collectors and sinners” (who were regarded as outcasts and so not to be associated with) was tangible proof of this promise. Jesus even went as far as to say “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mk 2:17). The parables like those of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and ‘Prodigal Father’ (Lk 15:1-32) are further confirmation of this promise. As a matter of fact a clear connection is made between the murmurings of the ‘Scribes and Pharisees’, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Lk 15:2) and Jesus’ telling the parable of the Lost Sheep (Lk 15:3-7). Thus, while “sinners shall find an infinite ocean of mercy” in the Sacred Heart is not a new teaching, it is an important reminder to us of how gracious God is, in the heart of Jesus.

What then does the Feast of the Sacred Heart mean for us today? First the heart is a symbol of the whole person and so the Sacred Heart of Jesus represents the whole Christ who is and will always be unconditional and eternal love. This love of Christ is given freely, without reservation and measure to all who open themselves to receive it. Second, the feast reminds us of the constant care and concern that God has even now for each one of us and the whole Universe. By celebrating the feast we make present the self sacrifice of Jesus for all humankind. Our God is a God ‘with us and for us’. God is Emmanuel. Third,

the feast of the Sacred Heart reminds us of the intimate connection between the Sacrament of the Eucharist and devotion to the Sacred Heart. The Eucharist was that pivotal event in the life of Jesus when he showed how much he loved the whole world. Just as the bread was broken so would his body be and just as the wine was shared so would his blood be spilled. In the Sacrament of the Eucharist we receive the real, whole and risen Christ, so in the devotion that we profess to the Sacred Heart we relive this encounter.

The feast is thus not only a privilege and grace, but also carries with it a responsibility. First, the love that we receive from the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not a private possession, but one that must be shared with all. Just as the Father makes no distinction and makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good (Mt 5:45), so must we in our sharing of the love of Christ. Second, the concern that God has for us and our Universe must be a concern which we must show to our world. The wanton destruction of nature, excessive and abusive use of scarce resources like water, indiscriminate cutting of trees for selfish gain, unlawful and criminal killing of wild animals are signs that we are working against God's concern. If God cares for us so much, must we not care for our world? Third, the intimate connection of the Sacred Heart and Eucharist reminds us that just as Christ is so easily available to us, we must also be to each other. The Eucharist and the feast of the Sacred Heart ought not to be private and passive devotions, but celebrations that make us ready to reach out in service and availability to anyone who needs us.

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This contribution is available at <http://errolsj.blogspot.in/2016/06/friday-june-3-2016-most-sacred-heart-of.html>  
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# Sexual Assault - How to Respond? [at Quiet Consecration]

## 2356 Rape

is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents (incest) or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them.

\*\*\*\*\*

The definition of Rape in the Catechism of the Catholic Church encompasses the Catholic understanding of both Justice and the inherent Dignity of the Human Person. While it is common today to dismiss Church Teaching in this area due to the horrific Sex Abuse Scandal, it is always important to point out that the failure of the people within an institution to live the Teachings of Jesus' Church does not negate those Teachings; rather, it points out our tendency to sin and underscores our need for the Sacramental Graces provided by the same Church.

I believe one of the most difficult aspects of any discussion of the horror of sexual assault is talking about prevention of, or defense against, the assault itself. One finds oneself right smack in the middle of political emotion. The idea that no one, and I mean NO ONE, has the right to commit a criminal act against anyone - man, woman, child or animal - has to be sacrosanct. The fact that us humans might have some sort of responsibility for our own safety and protection does not mean we are responsible for any criminal attack perpetrated against us. Therefore, when discussing the problems being faced on College Campuses, one must be very careful to not send the message that anyone who is a victim of such a grievous crime is responsible for that crime.

This is especially true if the person is impaired in some way. A drunk or stoned man or woman cannot give consent for sex. If you decide to have sex with a man or woman who is drunk or loaded, you have committed a crime. If you are also drunk or loaded then the situation becomes even hazier.

If you, as a man, decide that the half-conscious woman (or man) in your car should be taken to your dorm room so that you and all your buddies can assault her (or him) and take pictures of it to put on the internet I do not want to hear you tell Dr. Phil (during your sensational jail house interview) that you are really a nice guy. I don't care if you go to Church and are Born Again the Evangelical Baptist way or that you were an Altar Boy in grammar school. You are a criminal. You are disgusting in your practice of sex and you deserve to spend a long time incarcerated. I hope you do find Jesus. I hope you do find His Church and repent. I will pray for you....but I want you to spend time in prison. You deserve it.

All that being said, if I was a parent of a teenage girl today I would urge her to never, never, NEVER, go to a large party and ingest alcohol. I would caution her on what she wears, how she talks, the language she uses and to never separate herself from her friends. I would tell her to she would be better off spending Saturday nights alone than attend a street party at her college. I would share my graphic story of assault with her. And I would let every young man who interacts with her in my line of vision that, while

I am a Faithful Catholic, I would be willing to do time in prison myself to protect or avenge the honor of any child of mine who is violated.

In theory, I should be able to walk buck naked down 9th Street in Modesto and do so with impunity. I should be able to go to a bar and drink myself silly and get in a cab and go home unmolested. I should be able to use any kind of language I want when expressing myself without some yahoo deciding that I am signaling my available for a free-wheeling sexual encounter with a stranger or group of strangers.

In reality, that is not how the world works and while I applaud the arrest and prosecution of anyone who assaults someone and uses the excuse of 'but look what she/he was wearing' as their defense I am not going to take any more chances with my safety. I am not going to live my life on the edge anymore.

In my opinion, to vilify anyone for telling women on college campuses to not get drunk at parties in order to avoid being attacked is an example of how good sense is discarded for political correctness. It is also my opinion that looking at a group of boys OR girls who join in and attack someone as being anything less than animalistic in their behavior is also discarding good sense for political correctness. If your boy stands in line to have sex with a girl in a bathroom, your boy is a rapist and should be kept away from other vulnerable people. If your daughter takes pictures of, or joins in with an attack on a single person there is something horrible about her and she needs to be punished and kept separate from others she may harm.

Speaking out and asking people to watch their own behavior is really no different than encouraging people to lock their doors. I do not think criminals have a right to commit crimes. I am going to do whatever is necessary to keep myself safe. I will modify my behavior, I will learn to protect myself, I will pray and I will trust God.

I suggest we teach our children to do the same.

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This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2016/06/sexual-assault-how-to-respond.html>  
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If you hang around here long enough, you'll learn that I'm not a big fan of Calvinism.

Calvinism, to put it briefly, is a Protestant theology based broadly on the writings of John Calvin and other theologians of the Reformation. Calvinism, or 'Reformed' theology as it's also known, emphasises the sovereignty of God, particularly in how God predestines some to be saved and others not. This doctrine of predestination and free will is often summarised by the mnemonic TULIP.

## What is TULIP?

Now, I love a good mnemonic and this one is no exception. It's the content of that mnemonic that I just can't agree with.

TULIP stands for:

- **Total Depravity:** People are inherently and totally unable to please God because we're sinners. We have a total inability to cooperate with grace.
- **Unconditional Election:** God chooses some people to be saved for no other reason than that, in His mercy and for His glory, He wills it.
- **Limited Atonement:** Christ only died for those God already elected. (If He didn't, that means that the sins of the reprobate (the unelect) have been "paid for" twice, firstly by Christ and then by the individual themselves in hell.)
- **Irresistible Grace:** When God chooses you for salvation, you can't reject His grace. It's irresistible.
- **Perseverance of the Saints:** God's unconditional election by irresistible grace obviously means that those He chooses will persevere in their faith because they can't not.

Full-blown Calvinism leads us to a God who wills the salvation of some and not others, a Christ who died for some and not for others, and a Holy Spirit who unilaterally overwhelms the will of those He comes to save. It denies true freedom and, frankly, presents God as a Very Big and Very Picky Cosmic Bully.

## What does the Catholic Church Teach?

The teachings of the Catholic Church on predestination are rather different. In contrast to Calvin, Catholics affirm the importance of free will and the synergistic relationship between free will and divine sovereignty. Although we are sinners, we are still human persons with an inherent dignity and an ability to choose the right or the wrong. That's why evil exists in the first place; it's *our* choice to reject God and all that is good.

We believe that God truly wills *all* to be saved and provides everyone with what they need to know God. Although, just because God provides this grace, doesn't mean we'll take Him up on His gracious offer. Finally, we also affirm that Christ truly died for every single person whether they ultimately accept Him or not. He died as much for Judas Isacariot as He did for St John the Beloved.

This is a truly beautiful and liberating teaching. But it's missing one thing.

*A mnemonic.*

Clearly, we need a mnemonic! Well, do not despair. The antidote to TULIP, I think, is ROSES.

## What is ROSES?

ROSES is my own creation which presents the Catholic teaching on predestination. It stands for:

- **R**ebellious Children
- **O**pen Invitation
- **S**ufficient for All
- **E**ffective Grace
- **S**afe in Christ

ROSES says that we are **Rebellious children** who have received an **Open invitation** of salvation, won by the life, death and resurrection of Christ which is **Sufficient for all**. Through the **Effective grace** of God, we are enabled to believe and, by the same grace, kept **Safe in Christ**. (As an added bonus, ROSES reminds me of that quintessentially Catholic prayer, the Rosary!)

To break it down a little more:

### Rebellious Children

All human beings are children of God, wounded by sin and opposing God. By the fall, our human nature is wounded and our capacity to choose the good is impaired — but it is far from destroyed as Calvinism posits. Despite the wounds of sin, we still have free will. Scripture consistently presents us as free moral agents who can choose the good — to choose God and His righteousness. We are the prodigal sons, the rebellious children who need to be called home and freed from our sins.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; *therefore choose life*, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20a)

For he will *render to every man according to his works*: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. (Romans 2:6-8)



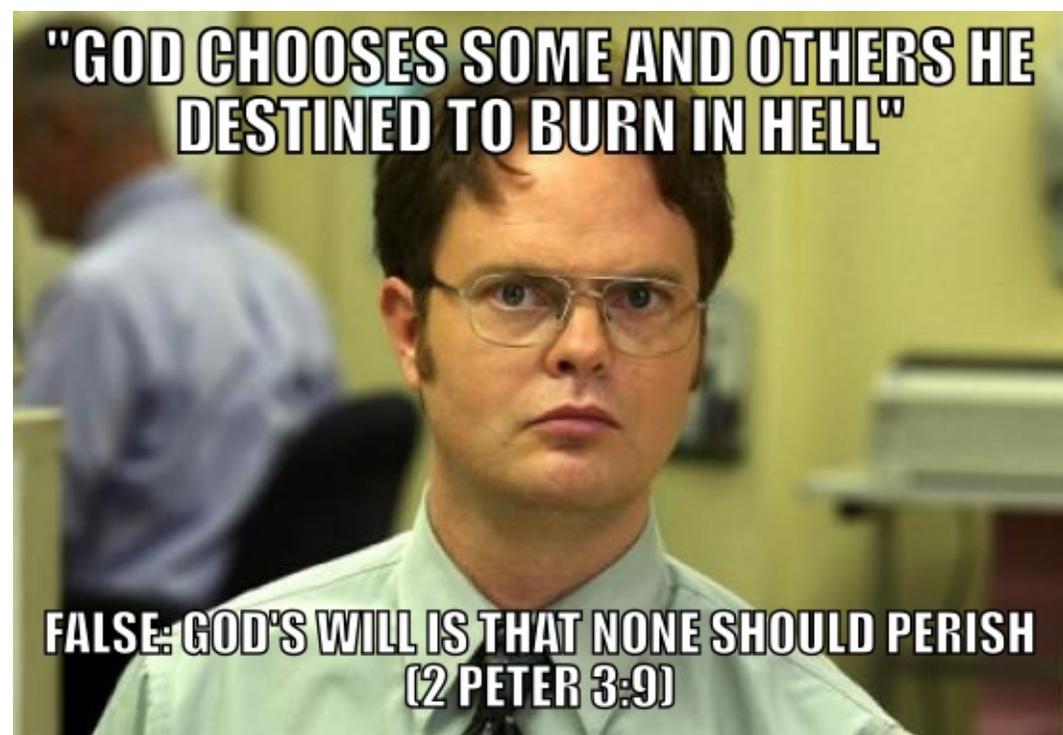
## Open Invitation

Even though we are sinners, all of us are deeply loved by God. (Rom 5:8) To love someone is to will their good and therefore, we can't say that God could love us and not will our salvation. God invites us all to receive His love freely given through Christ Jesus. (He is the king who prepared a great wedding feast and invited *everyone*.)

For God so loved *the world* that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that *the world* might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for *all men*... This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1, 3-4)

The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, *not wishing that any should perish*, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

A meme featuring a close-up of the character Moss from the TV show 'The Office'. He has a serious, somewhat skeptical expression. The text is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font with a black outline. The top text reads: "GOD CHOOSES SOME AND OTHERS HE DESTINED TO BURN IN HELL". The bottom text reads: "FALSE: GOD'S WILL IS THAT NONE SHOULD PERISH (2 PETER 3:9)".

"GOD CHOOSES SOME AND OTHERS HE  
DESTINED TO BURN IN HELL"

FALSE: GOD'S WILL IS THAT NONE SHOULD PERISH  
(2 PETER 3:9)

## Sufficient for All

The passion and death of Christ was the perfect offering of love to the Father through the Holy Spirit. He offered up His life as an atoning sacrifice and this sacrifice is more than sufficient: it's good enough and big enough to dwarf even the greatest sins. Christ died for the whole world, even if some never accept His salvation, He still died for them. He is the Saviour of all, the propitiation for all our sins and the redeemer of the world.

We have our hope set on the living God, who is *the Savior of all men*, especially of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:10)

We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for *the sins of the whole world*. (1 John 2:1b-2)

**SO YOU ARE TELLING ME THAT CALVINISM  
IS THE GOSPEL?**

**SORRY, BUT THE BIBLE TELLS ME THAT  
THE GOSPEL IS ACTUALLY GOOD NEWS!**

### Effective Grace

Because God wills that all be saved and He knows we are sinful, wounded people, He always gives us enough grace to accept His love. His grace is *effective*. Only God's grace can enable us to believe in Him and bring us to salvation. By ourselves, we can do nothing but He can do all things if we are open to receive His salvation. But, we still need to accept and cooperate with this grace. We *can* refuse it and that is the whole sorry story of sin.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, *and you would not!* (Matthew 23:37)

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, *you always resist the Holy Spirit*. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? (Acts 7:51-52a)

**IS YOUR NAME GRACE?**

**BECAUSE YOU ARE IRRESISTIBLE**

### Safe in Christ

God is always faithful. He will not go back on His word or change His mind. We, however, can turn away from Him and refuse to accept His love. We, who have tasted the heavenly gifts, can choose to reject our Lord. He will protect us from everything the world can throw at us — from death, demons, height, depth and “anything in all creation” (Romans 8:37-38) *but we can still choose to leave Him*. Yet, He is always there, loving us and helping us to return to Him.

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance *those who have once been enlightened*, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. (Hebrews 6:4-7)

If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. *There is sin which is mortal*; I do not say that one is to pray for that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal. ( 1 John 5:16-17)

If we are faithless, *he remains faithful* — for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:13)



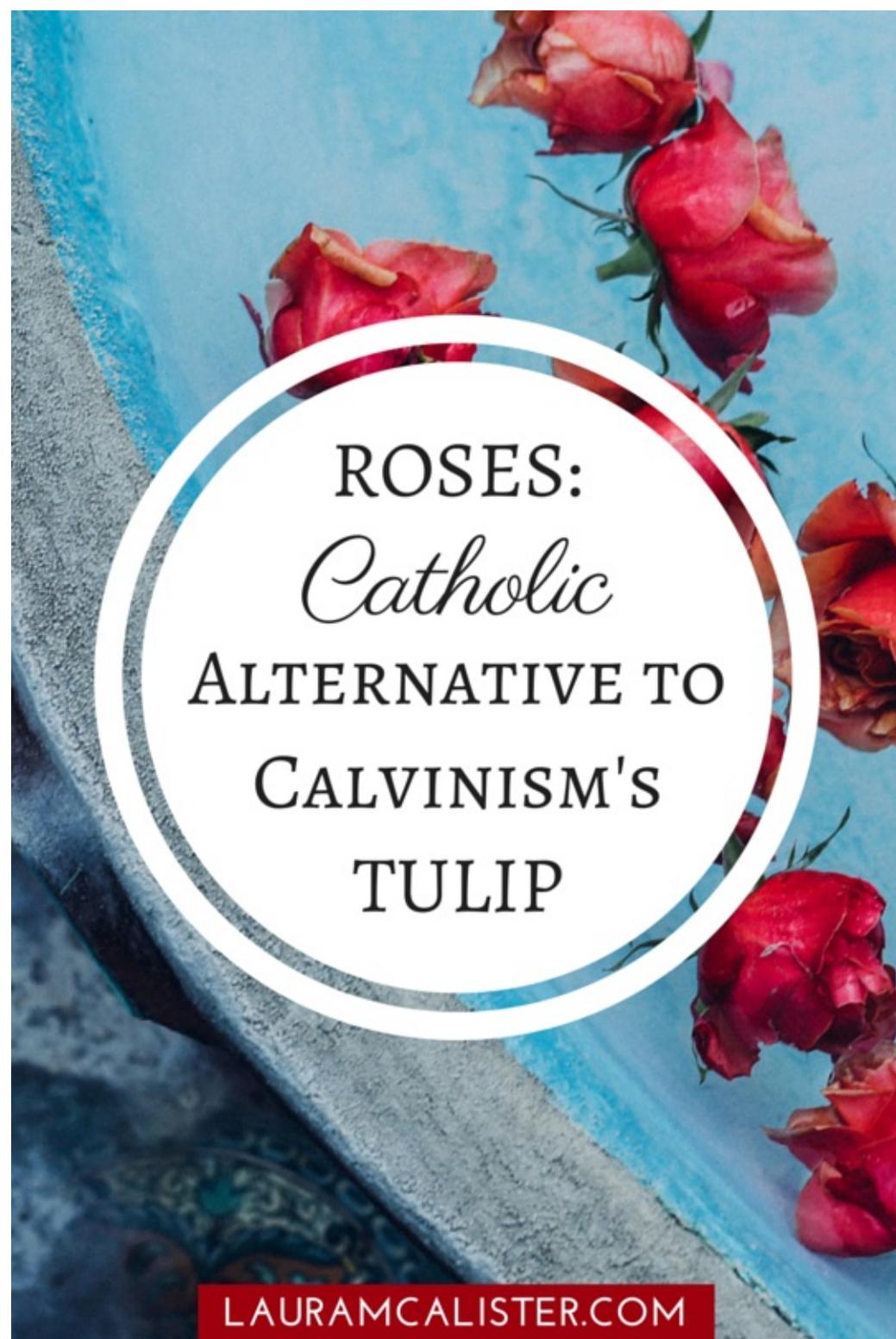
## ROSES: The Catholic Alternative

ROSES is simply my humble attempt at articulating the Catholic teaching on predestination: the goodness of God who wills salvation for all and our own free will to reject Him. The relationship between these two wills, one divine and one human, is a mystery. And even the best mnemonic in the world couldn't unravel that mystery.

We must, at all costs, uphold the goodness of God who loves each and every human creature. Calvinism pits the sovereignty of God against His goodness but we *cannot* do this. That is the not the God revealed to us in Scripture; it is a God of our mental gymnastics. Jesus Christ was lifted up on the Cross to draw all men to Himself. (cf. John 12:32-33)

This is God's Heart for us.

A Heart that loves and wills the salvation of all His creatures.



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This contribution is available at <http://www.lauramcalister.com/2016/05/02/roses-catholic-alternative-calvinisms-tulip/>  
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## In the Blink of An Eye

I had just (narrowly) survived what I described to my husband as the most infuriating grocery shopping trip of my life. My three- and four-year-olds touched at least 3,567,492 items in the supermarket. Plastic-wrapped mushrooms were poked, signage was damaged, candy bars were fondled, and bags of rice were shaken. To the other shoppers, I must've appeared as a harried harpy incessantly reeling my little monkeys in. "Get down." "Don't touch." "Get off." "Come back."

Groceries and children safely stowed in the minivan, we set off for home. The one-hit-wonders station played "Happy Days," and I bopped along to the music. (Did you know it was a full song and not just the musical accompaniment to the TV show's title sequence? Me either.)

Then there was the thud to the right front fender. I glimpsed a mottled brown creature being flung to the side of the road. Ugh. A groundhog? A rabbit? Uncertain, I found a place to turn around and doubled back. Though I'm not a hundred percent certain, I believe I hit a long-haired cat.

I may have been going a little over the speed limit on the two-lane road, but with no berm and only high grass lining the side of the road, I doubt I had any chance of avoiding the animal even below the posted speed limit.

I felt sick. A cat. I'm not a cat person, but still.

Homes along this road are sparse and set back from the road. It could have been a feral cat. Maybe a barn cat. There's not even a safe place to pull over and examine the animal to see if, however unlikely, it had a collar or tag.

After I got home and unloaded all the groceries, a glance at my driveway reminded me what had occurred immediately before we left for our grocery trip.



The little kids often head out into the fenced-in yard ahead of me while I put on shoes, gather my phone, keys, purse, etc. I knew they had stepped outside ahead of me, but when I walked out the door, I spied the gate at the end of the yard propped open with a squirt gun.

My four-year-old, who I'd known had been fiddling with the child-safe locks in recent days, had finally mastered opening the gates. My preschoolers were standing where the driveway meets the road, tucked behind the minivan. Right where cars often zip down the gentle slope descending from the development behind us.

And all afternoon, I heard the thud of that cat in my mind's ear. Over and over. Only instead of the victim being a mottled brown creature, it was my son (the younger and more impulsive of my two youngest children). I replayed the image of my precious three-year-old boy peeking around the mini-van. My sweet, greeting-card grabbing, meat-package poking little man.

I likely killed a barn cat. But my children were safe. (Blessed be their hard-working guardian angels!)

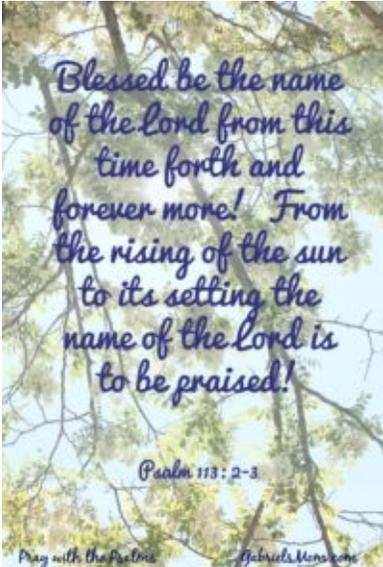
I'm grateful for the reminder to treasure each moment. Treasure each loved one. On Mother's Day and every day. And to doubly secure the gates with lock and key.

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## Third Sunday is Park Day



Blessed be the name  
of the Lord from this  
time forth and  
forever more! From  
the rising of the sun  
to its setting the  
name of the Lord is  
to be praised!

Psalm 113: 2-3

Pray with the Psalms

Gabriela Monson.com

My writing has been sporadic here, but I just wanted to share a few simple thoughts and pictures. After all, not everything has to be profound or challenging. In fact, today is a perfect day to reflect on the simple things...beauty, joy.

My husband, Bruce, and I decided recently to take advantage of the scenic parks in our county. That is, more than we have before. We have wooded areas, wetlands, lakes and rivers. I am not physically able to cover much of the terrain, but my scooter does pretty well on some of the grassy areas, and I am grateful for the paved trails. On the third Sunday of each month, we now have a plan: attend Mass, eat at the local Knights of Columbus all you can eat breakfast, then change clothes and drive out for a scenic afternoon.

Our park for today: Kickapoo State Park in rural Oakwood Illinois. Today was a gorgeous, sunny day to enjoy the green foliage and spring flowers. It was also quite breezy! The wind felt cold on my face, but as soon as it stopped, the warmth of the sun took care of me! Bruce brought his camera and took well over 100 pictures.

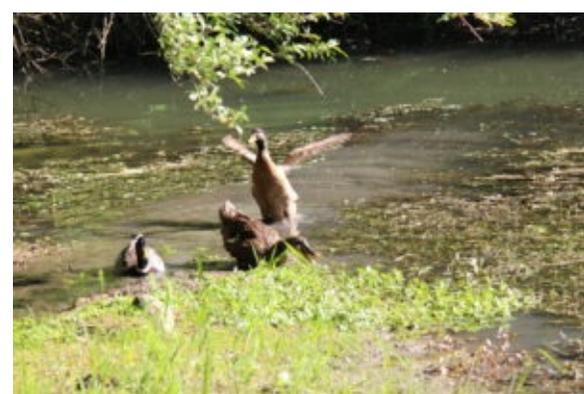
Everything looked so serene and beautiful. Even the weeds! (I could almost hear my mom sneezing!) We saw some people fishing in the river, though the fishing wasn't good that day. Or so we were told. But it didn't matter. It was a great day to enjoy being outside; a great day to start up a conversation with



someone new on the trail; a great day to rejoice in God's creation!

I'm posting just a few pictures today, but I hope to use more of them later. The land is generally flat here in central Illinois, but it is hard to deny how lush everything looks this spring! I don't know about you, but I don't need mountains to be impressed. I even got a kick out of some Mallard ducks playing in the water and diving for their lunch. Bruce and I just watched for a while. The quiet and slow pace of our afternoon was such a blessed break from computer and television screens.

I think I will try this again next month. A different park; some different photos. This could be a fun new tradition. Stay tuned! Better yet, spend time at a park in your area. Even if you live in an urban environment, search for a city park. More and more communities are working to reinvigorate those areas. I think it is because we all can benefit from some time to be unplugged. Tell me about your favorite park below in the comments.



Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created.

And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed.



Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and maidens together, old men and children!

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise the LORD!

## Psalm 148

## My John [at CF Family]



I folded a few of John's T shirts early this morning -- Joe Cool, Colonel Sanders, and Iron Man. He won't be needing them for two months because he left in the middle of the night for Lackland Air Force Base in Texas for basic training. I cried while folding of course. I'll add them to Rees' pile and hope he puts them away nicely for his brother. Both of the big boys and Ken don't really like it when I fold their clothes.

*Don't do that, Mom; we can. Don't do that, Honey; they should*

. And I know; I know. But folding clothes in the very early morning with a cup of (now) decaf is an odd pleasure of mine. It gets something tangible done while I'm able to think about whatever my mind wants. The only interruptions are from my own brain's thoughts flitting here and there and I like it.



This morning I thought about John. About how cute he was and how handsome he is. About how ready he is for this tough adventure and good plan. About how old and strong he looked last night saying goodbye to his little brothers and sisters and about how I noticed a flicker of nervousness while he explained to Ken about how the airport in San Antonio has an Air Force desk because there are so many recruits passing through and he'll just need to get to that desk and they'll put him on a bus.

When I hugged him goodbye, I told him that I wasn't worried about his "making it" ~ he's been itching to

go since February ~ but that I would miss him terribly. We gave him a replica of a WW1 Rosary, the kind handed out to Catholics by the US government back then (Imagine that!), and the Combat Prayer Book, a tiny book, easily slipped into one of the many arm pockets. But not during boot camp, he tells me. That's OK. Someday he'll want it and he'll have it.



It's bearable because he'll be back in mid-July (Until they send him away again for Tech school, but I won't think about that yet.). Ken warns me that he will be changed when he returns. Just typing that sentence makes me drip tears on my keyboard. It's good, though. I'm happy for him. He needs to do something that is Just John. He has always been with Rees, making what breaks he could. Doesn't like hiking; doesn't like country music; doesn't like to read. I imagine they will miss each other terribly, anyway.

He tells me to wait two weeks, then call a number on a paper he gave me (Good Lord, I'm awful about keeping track of papers.) and they will tell me where to send letters. He also tells me that he may not get to read them or write back if he gets in trouble. Lovely. So I will busy myself with writing to him and helping Clare pick out a Million Degrees Hot Texas wardrobe, for she and Ken will fly to San Antonio for his graduation. She's never been out of Alaska; never even been on an airplane. It's a trip of a lifetime and I will love picking out clothes with her!

So my John is gone. But he's all right. And I suppose I am.

St. Michael, the archangel, pray for him please.

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This contribution is available at <http://northernccfamily.blogspot.com/2016/05/my-john.html>  
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## Hearing and Obeying God's Voice [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]



He who has Ears ... Let Him Hear

***“He who is of God hears God’s words;” (John 8:47)***

***‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Rev.3:20)***

**From the Gospel of John Chapter 10 we also read more about hearing His Voice and why hearing His Voice is essential to true discipleship...**

**[4] *When He has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.***

**[5] *They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”***

**[14-15] *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.***

**[27] *My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.***

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Perhaps the key characteristic of one who is a disciple to Christ is obedience, the [Obedience of Love](#). This level of obedience is an obedience that is not only given willingly but out of a sincere, self-denying, love for Christ. Such and obedience may only be derived through an intimate personal relationship with the Master, a relationship where our ability to listen to His word and His teaching is essential. For without an ability to clearly discern His voice we cannot faithfully follow His specific instructions for our lives.

It is unfortunate that most of us Christians, though sincerely desiring to respond to the call of discipleship that is placed on all who believe, are seriously hampered from fulfilling our call because we lack the spiritual discernment needed to hear the Voice of God, be it the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. Instead, we blindly stumble along life's way using our human instincts and human guidance to guide us in what we hope is a walk that is pleasing to the master.

Of course we have the Word of God and Church tradition to keep us from totally going out of bounds in general, but the specific guidance for our lives requires that those general guidelines be interpreted and directed to the specifics of each person's life. This level of discernment may only be achieved through a personal revelation of the Holy Spirit that clearly tells us what the Lord is saying to us personally, regarding the conduct of our lives for His Glory.

The Lord may speak to us in any manner of ways, such as through prayer, praise and worship, prophecy, visions, dreams, spiritual direction, friends, relationships, circumstances, and of course, the Word of God. Of course, because we are humans and always susceptible to deception, we must, as St. John tells us, test every spirit to truly discern the voice of the Lord in all of these ways (see 1 Jn. 4:1).

One of the ancient traditions that helps in the discernment of God's voice speaking to us personally through the Word of God is that of "***Lectio Divina***" (click [HERE](#) to go to that section).

A more recent approach in listening to the Spirit of the Lord, is that expressed through prayer in His Word and community chanting as exemplified by the ***Taize Prayer Community*** (click [HERE](#) to go to that section).

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit, is, of course, essential if we are to activate the spiritual gifts needed to open our spiritual ears (click [HERE](#) to go to the section on Pentecost and the Promise of the Father).

It may surprise you but the Lord is eager for you to enter into intimate dialogue with Him! He, in fact told us in His word that He stands at the door to your heart asking to come in and Sup with you (Rev. 3:20)! All you have to do is open that door and ask him to Come in!

I know that making that decision is difficult because it also means surrendering to His Lordship over your life. Because once you hear His Voice, Obeying His call is essential! I urge you to read a summary of my testimony my as my witness to what happened to me.

In order to provide you, not only a link to an article about my own coming to dialogue with my Lord, but also links to other articles that will provide you further insight and instruction to assist you in your quest for "***Hearing God's Voice .. and Obeying it***"!

***Here the related articles or posts that I believe will help you :***

**[My Testimony](#)**

**[Enter in By the Narrow gate](#)**

**[The Double Portion Anointing](#)**

**[I Stand at the Door and Knock ...](#)**

## [Prayer to Receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit](#)

*May the Holy Spirit Guide you in your desire to draw closer to Him in true discipleship!*

*Your Brother in Christ .... Bartimaeus*

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This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/06/05/\\$-hearing-and-obeying-gods-voice/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2016/06/05/$-hearing-and-obeying-gods-voice/)  
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## Baptism Day [at The Heart's Overflow]

I don't know the date of my baptism. My husband doesn't know the date of his baptism either. To be honest with you, I don't remember the date of Trixie's baptism, even though it was not that long ago.

But I will never forget the date of Johnny's baptism. June 1, two days after he was born.

We were brand new parents, and to turn our world even more upside down we had just found out our son had a very serious birth defect and would be having his first of many surgeries within a day or two.

My husband and I remember the day our newborn son was transferred to the NICU as the darkest of our life. We had no idea what was going on, struggling to keep up with medical jargon we didn't understand, feeling like life had come to a complete stop, and that it would never be normal again. We were sharing the little tiny pull-out couch in Johnny's NICU room. I was hobbling around on the unsteady legs and in the weirdly shaped body of a newly postpartum women, recovering from a very private event in a very public and uncomfortable setting. We took turns holding Johnny's hand through the window of his incubator. I couldn't stop crying.

We decided that we wanted to have Johnny baptized before he went into surgery. The procedure was not incredibly risky, and his prognosis was very good, but we wanted to have him baptized all the same. We called our priest, who quickly came down to the hospital. My parents were there, as well as our good friends who we had asked to be Johnny's godparents. The nurses kindly overlooked the 4 person maximum of the NICU rooms for us. Johnny was placed on a pillow on my lap, his IV tubes and monitoring cables carefully arranged, and the rite began.



There, in that NICU room, in our darkest hour, we invited the light of faith. Hoping for what we could not see

—

forgiveness of sin, adoption into God's family, grace

—

drops of water were sprinkled on Johnny's forehead. We buried the fear and sadness that had consumed the last 24 hours with Christ in the water, and we allowed hope and joy to rise. Johnny was the one receiving new life, but we were being renewed as well.

The next day Johnny went into surgery. We still felt anxiety, and we still cried, but something was different. A sacrament had taken place, the invisible had been made visible and tangible. We were united with Christ, even there in our darkest hour. Or maybe, especially there, in our darkest hour.

Tonight at dinner we will celebrate Johnny's baptism. Trixie will lend Johnny the baptism candle she received when she was baptized in our church. We'll light it and receive the light of Christ again. Since beginning this post I have looked up the date of Trixie's baptism, November 14. So we'll be sure to light the candle again on that day as well.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.theheartsoverflow.com/2016/06/baptism-day.html>  
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## Grandma's gift from the grave: a patchwork quilt [at Peace Garden Passage]

The heading might call to mind something morbid, but this is anything but.

Yes, my grandmother died, just a few months ago on Dec. 28. She was 101, and even though we miss her, we had a lot of good, long years with her. We all feel pretty blessed in that.

As her oldest two grandchildren, my sister, Camille, and I had the most years with her, and for that, we are even more blessed. I had 47 years with Grandma and my good memories go back just as far.

Grandma was the consummate mother. She belonged to a Mother's Club. She was a Girl Scout leader for a while. She taught religion class for a time. She poured money and time into building the local Y, then swimming laps there, and making sure we all knew how to swim.

And she sewed her children's clothes — and ours when we came into the picture. I remember during visits arriving and finding her there in the living room with the sewing machine and all the material, thread and pin cushions, too. She was always happy to take breaks to read to us, though.



My mother never learned the art of it, but she appreciated her mama's skill. In our earliest years, she didn't have to buy many clothes for us. Grandma sewed them all. My sister and I were only 17 months apart, and Grandma often made us matching clothes in the earliest years. Some of our young peers accused us of being "twins." The matching clothes had them fooled.

In time, our clothing tastes changed so Grandma's machine didn't hum quite as much, but she did continue sewing a bit — clothes for our dolls, mending and the like.

When my sister graduated college — or perhaps it was when she got married just after that — my grandmother pulled together scraps from all of these sewing projects from our years as little girls and

made her a patchwork quilt. I loved it, and secretly hoped my quilt was in the works, too.

Grandma did start a quilt for me, but never finished. Later, we learned that her arthritis had kicked in around that time. So she just folded the project into a box, closed it up, tucked it away somewhere, and moved on with life.

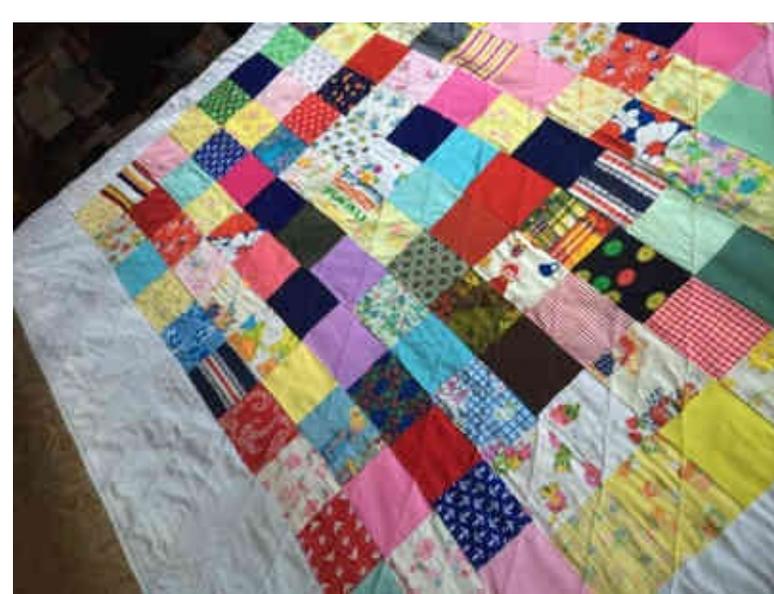
And there the quilt sat, in the dark, still and silent...waiting.

Flash forward to January of this year. Now, Grandma is gone, and my mother and sister are going through her home, sorting what to keep, what to give away. And in the midst of all that, a box appears under Grandma's bed, contents unknown. When my mother opens it, she discovers the face of the quilt Grandma had started for me all those years ago.

Sizing it up, my mother becomes determined to find a way to bring the quilt back to life. My sister mentions a friend who quilts, and a revival begins. In another time and place from whence it began, a project set in motion by my grandma's arthritic hands — with me in mind and love on her heart — experiences a resurrection.

My mother had told me it would come in time, but I forgot about it. Then one spring weekend, my daughter and I head to the city where my mother lives to do a college visit. I'm totally focused on my daughter and the task at hand. When my mom calls and leaves a message, it doesn't connect.

"I have a surprise for you!" I'm thinking it must be for my daughter. But when we stop by her place to pick her up for lunch, Mom says, "Come inside a minute, Rox. The surprise is for you!" Inside her apartment, she hands me something in a large, plastic bag: the quilt, wrapped and ready. And so many memories infused within.



Now, it's on our bed, and at night, I pull it over me, and I feel Grandma's love there, keeping me warm, sending me into another night of rest.

It is her gift from the grave, but the "better late than ever" rule applies here. I am so grateful to have it.

I'm also very grateful to my mother for finding it and having the idea; for my sister for being the bridge; for her friend Esther for being willing to find time in her life to make this happen, for me.

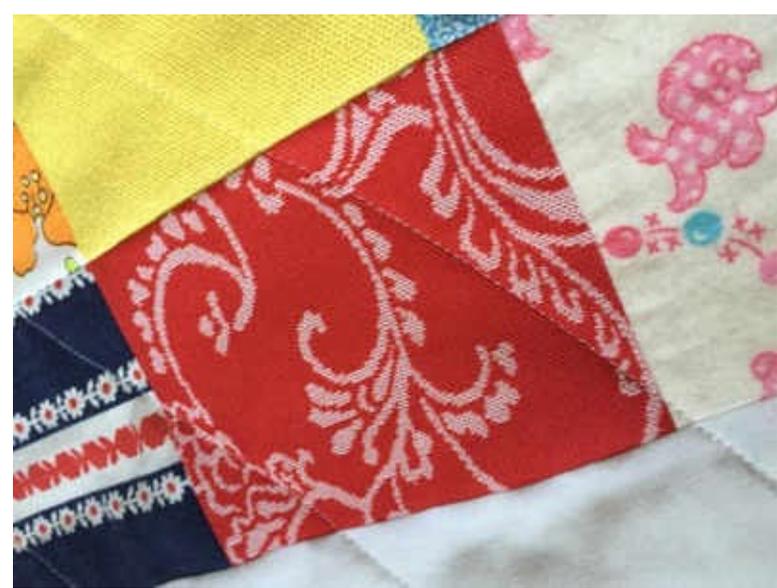
It's an early birthday present, months in advance, and I couldn't be more tickled. Grandma isn't here anymore, and yet she is, very much so.

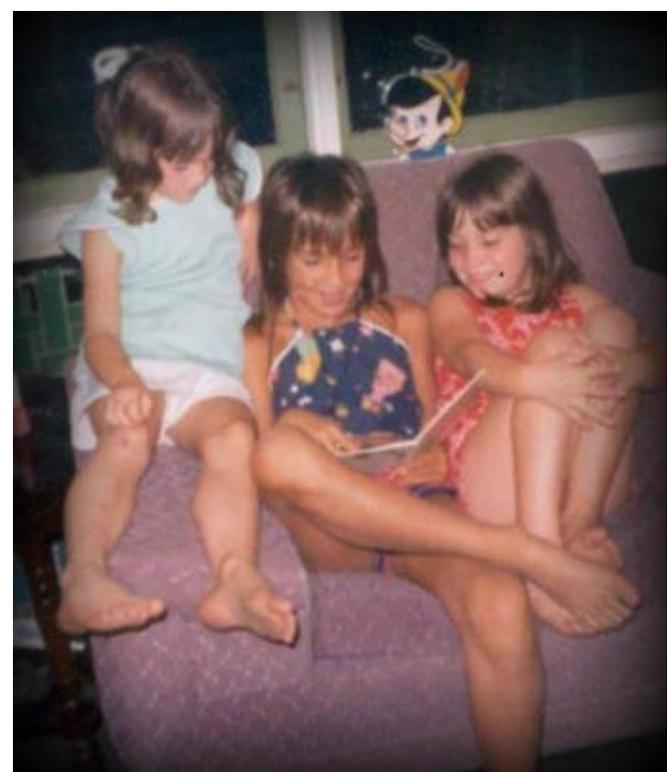
I love you, Grandma. Thank you for all the love you sewed into our clothes all those years. Each thread was a piece of you given to us. Each knot, a note of love. Each snip of the scissors, a smile for your granddaughters.

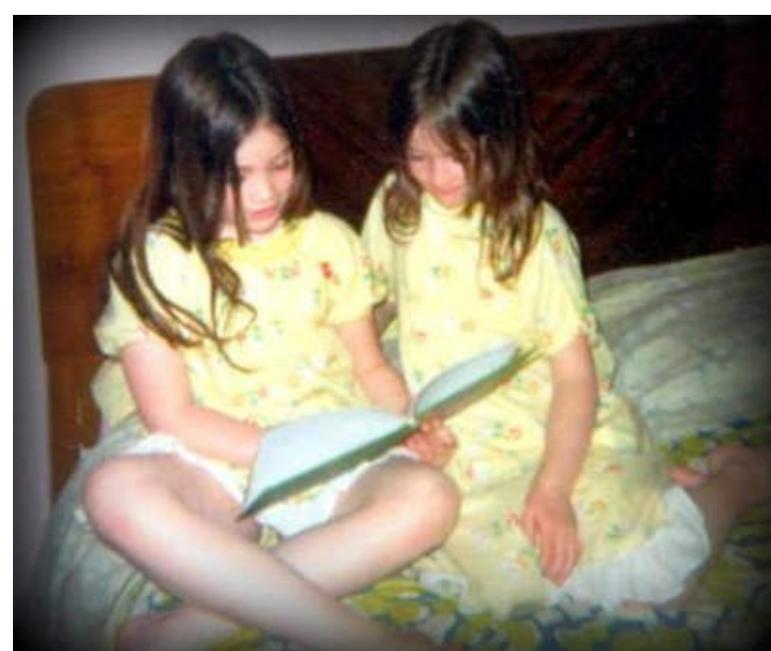
Thank you, dear Grandma, for nudging the project along from your new place. I hope you have a warm quilt to keep you toasty, too. Or just to make you happy if warmth is no longer a need. And I hope your own mama is there to pull it over you each night.

Here are some of the pieces, and the corresponding clothes...









# Q4U: What pieces of your loved ones bring them back to you?

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2016/05/grandmas-gift-from-the-grave-a-patchwork-quilt/>  
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## The Suffering of Mother Mary

We live in a world and in a culture that seems to want to live forever, and never ever talk about suffering or death. But for the Christian, these are two ideas we must embrace for Christ himself told us to pick up our cross and follow him. If you don't know already, picking up crosses, carrying crosses, is hard work, work that endures pain and suffering. However, if we suffer with Christ, then we will rise with Christ as well. Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus say – *if you follow me, life will be a bed of roses*. It's just not the case. Although there is great joy and hope in being a Christian and following Christ, we must also know that pain, suffering, and eventual death awaits us.

I often think to myself that people on social media, specifically Facebook, seem to be doing so well all the time. It seems most of the time you see people getting engaged, getting married, or having babies. However, if you look more closely and you follow your Facebook “friends” more closely, you realize that there is a lot of suffering that happens in the lives of these friends. In the past three days I have learned about some friends losing a parent, which is not easy let me tell you, as well as friends learning that their young child has cancer.

It is in these times where we must trust in our Lord Jesus Christ that all will be in according to the divine economy of God. It is in these times when we must trust, when we must hope, and when we must look to the Blessed Virgin Mary. If there is one woman, one mother, who suffered more for her child, it is Mary of Nazareth. She endured much pain and suffering being the Mother of Jesus Christ, and I am not only talking about watching him be crucified on Calvary.



Our Lady of Sorrows by Carlo Dolci

Bearing Mary's suffering, for today's "Mondays with Mary"; I draw upon the words of Mother Angelica as she explains what Mary endured as the Mother of God. If you know someone who is struggling right now to understand suffering, or you know someone that is suffering some type of pain, you might want to share this post with them, since Mother's word's bring great peace and consolation. The great Poor Clare says,

“Look at Our Lady, that magnificent woman. Is there anyone you ever heard of who suffered as much as she has? Having to run from a tyrant, having your Child born in a stable, finally presenting that Child in the temple and having the High Priest say, ‘This Child is destined for the fall and rise of many’ (Luke 2:24). Whew, what mother would love to hear that? Losing Him for three days, finding Him for so many years, and then seeing Him humiliated by those who should have known Him and accepted Him and loved Him – seeing Him ostracized by His own. Finally, seeing His apostles run in fear, betray Him, and deny Him, and then to watch Him die on a cross. What woman suffered as much as she did? Who dares call pain evil?”

Our Sweet Mother went through the darkness in the valley of the shadow of death over and over as an example for you and me. That’s the kind of faith the Lord expects of us, that kind of total abandonment.

Our Lady suffered with her Son. You’ve got to suffer with her Son too, and so do I. Jesus says, ‘Take up your cross upon yourself, and I will help you with it. Learn from Me.’ We don’t often think of God trusting us. When we have crosses and more crosses on top of them, He is trusting us. If you accept them obediently and go forward with His help, your soul is being purified bit by bit and becomes beautiful before the Lord.”

To read more about the Suffering Mother, I would suggest you check out a recent “Mondays with Mary” I wrote back in March, titled, [Jesus, Mary, and the Cross](#). In this post, it has other blog posts that speak about the suffering Our Lady endured as the Mother of Jesus Christ.

**Our Lady of Sorrows...Pray for Us.**

**Mother Angelica...Pray for Us.**

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This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2016/05/23/mondays-with-mary-the-suffering-of-mother-mary/>  
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## Clarity sought, clarity found [at Brutally Honest]



I was once, to my personal chagrin today, a pretty big fan of Sarah Palin... so much so in fact that I devoted a category to her and called it, quite lamely, [Plainly Palincredible](#).

She was, now nearly 8 years ago for me, [a breath of fresh air and was quite captivating for a number of different reasons](#). But that was then.

A careful reading of the two most recent entries in [the Plainly Palincredible category](#), each now a tad more than two years old (and accessible via the related article links below), would clearly show that the Palin schtick was beginning to get old for me then, an oldness that grew completely stale when she wholeheartedly endorsed Donald Trump in January.

No better example is there of her staleness, no better example is there of why she has fallen off the pedestal I had placed her on years ago, than [her latest foray into capturing media limelight](#):

*Former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin said in an interview that aired Sunday that House Speaker Paul Ryan could be ousted for his hesitancy to back Donald Trump, and suggested Ryan's reluctance was fueled by aspirations to run for president in 2020.*

*When asked for her thoughts about Ryan's stance on Trump, Palin invoked former Rep. Eric Cantor. The ex-Republican House majority leader, who was viewed as the likely successor to former House Speaker John Boehner, was [defeated by a Tea Party challenger](#) in a stunning upset in the 2014 Virginia primary. Ryan [ultimately took the position](#) after Boehner retired.*

*"I think Paul Ryan is soon to be 'Cantored,' as in Eric Cantor," Palin said on CNN. "His political career is over but for a miracle because he has so disrespected the will of the people, and as the leader of the GOP, the convention, certainly he is to remain neutral, and for him to already come out and say who he will not support was not a wise decision of his."*

I no longer find myself thinking that Palin is capable of addressing what is or isn't wise and her full-

throated endorsement of Trump is likely the flagship reason. Since Ryan is reluctant to support the bigoted, xenophobic and horrifically unqualified Trump, Palin has decided that he should be 'Cantored' which of course is her prerogative, as is my own to decide that she now joins the ranks of those who, thanks to Donald Trump, have been unmasked as anything but principled people.

Ryan, for what it's worth, impressed me not long ago when he did quite [the about-face](#) in how he perceives the poor:

*"But in a confident America, we aren't afraid to disagree with each other. We don't lock ourselves in an echo chamber, where we take comfort in the dogmas and opinions we already hold. We don't shut down on people — and we don't shut people down. If someone has a bad idea, we tell them why our idea is better. We don't insult them into agreeing with us. We try to persuade them. We test their assumptions. And while we're at it, we test our own assumptions too.*

*I'm certainly not going to stand here and tell you I have always met this standard. There was a time when I would talk about a difference between "makers" and "takers" in our country, referring to people who accepted government benefits. But as I spent more time listening, and really learning the root causes of poverty, I realized I was wrong. "Takers" wasn't how to refer to a single mom stuck in a poverty trap, just trying to take care of her family. Most people don't want to be dependent. And to label a whole group of Americans that way was wrong. I shouldn't castigate a large group of Americans to make a point.*

*So I stopped thinking about it that way — and talking about it that way. But I didn't come out and say all this to be politically correct. I was just wrong. And of course, there are still going to be times when I say things I wish I hadn't. There are still going to be times when I follow the wrong impulse."*

Correcting your course after following the wrong impulse suggests strongly that you've been influenced by some idea, some proposition, some mindset or philosophy that has not only shown you the error of your ways but has given you the courage to change your direction.

My hope is that this influence is Ryan's Catholic faith, the same faith that finds me abandoning both the left and the right when it comes to politics, an abandoning that has accelerated with the rise of Donald Trump and the attitudes put on display by his supporters.

The following video put out by then Father and now Bishop Robert Barron, speaks boldly to what the faith teaches as it relates to what Paul Ryan, in part, is referencing above. Give it a listen. It touches on that which has given me the clarity I've been seeking for most of my life, the clarity I was not finding in political ideology.

Carry on.

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This contribution is available at [http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally\\_honest/2016/05/clarity-sought-clarity-found.html](http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2016/05/clarity-sought-clarity-found.html)  
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## Death and Beauty [at Backs of People's Heads and Baby Faces]



My father was diagnosed with esophageal cancer about two weeks ago. The specific type is a common one, but because of its location (at the junction between the stomach and the esophagus) it is very virulent and hard to kill. People who have this type of cancer, in this location, have only about a 14% survival rate past five years. It's an awful disease that steals your ability to eat and I'm going to go out on a limb and say that it will steal his ability to sing.

My dad and mom have always sung to me. My father taught me to sing in German. He taught me to sing in harmony. He taught me to play trumpet and my very first notes on the piano. My folks sang me a lullaby every night before I went to bed. I can still hear their voices as they sang to me in my tiny, little, room in our tiny post-WWII house. In my life, where song is like breath, my parents taught me to breathe, but most especially my dad.

Having been here at this point (where singing becomes harder and then disappears,) I woke up one morning last week weeping over this impending loss. I know, perhaps more than he does at this moment, how hard this is going to be. To hear a choir and know and feel every single note all the way down to your inner core, but not be able to join in the song, is a great grief.

One of the things that I believe about the world is that beauty transforms people and when people are transformed, they transform the world around them. Creating beauty and appreciating beauty both transform you, but it is in creating beauty that we truly share in the divine. I think that's one of the things that makes us unique as human beings --our capacity to create beauty. Not just in the sense that we are beautiful, but in that we seek it out, we want to appreciate it, and we seek to create it using the gifts that we are given.

My father's gifts are not the same as mine, though they overlap (DNA is a thing). Where my talents are administrative and musical, Dad's are innovative and musical. Where I want a piece of music to recreate, Dad can improvise. Where Dad likes to create outside the box, I like to see what I can use inside the box to make things better. This is illustrative of the reason that my father is a serial entrepreneur and I work in

an office.

Creativity can express itself in many ways and musicians (really artists of any type) have to learn to embrace those other forms of creativity as life throws us curveballs and takes away our more obvious gifts. It is obvious, for example, that a person who can sing or write or draw is talented and that they are creative, but what may not be so obvious is the beauty of other things that they can create. One of the things that I learned when I lost my voice is that there are other ways that I can create beauty, but first I had to learn to see it in places other than the obvious.

Dad has used his creativity to solve engineering problems for years. Always looking outward, Dad has done much good with his life. I have no doubt that there are many families who still have fathers, husbands, mothers and wives because my dad's inventions changed the way that manufacturing is done in their industry, making it safer, while making it more reliable and accurate. And that is a beautiful thing, isn't it?

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever: its loveliness increases..." - John Keats

Maybe this is how we live on in the lives of our loved ones - by creating things that are beautiful. The fact that even one life was spared from a runaway extrusion of steel may be the reason that ten more lives exist in the world - and happily. Even the music, which disappears as soon as it's made, stays with me and has inspired many others throughout my career. It is true: we never know the impact we have in the world and the ripples we send out from one act.

It is in this moment, where death and life are converging, that I can finally see the beauty of all of my father's creative genius. It's such a paradox to know that it takes loss to make you see gain.

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This contribution is available at <http://peoplesheadsandbabyfaces.blogspot.com/2016/05/death-and-beauty.html>  
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# Our son's First Communion: A day I didn't want to miss [at Catholic Review]

Even before our kindergartener got out of bed yesterday, he said, "This is one of those days I just really don't want to miss the day."

He was so right.

Reason #1: It was the day of his first baseball game—because thanks to rain, rain, rain, and a broken thumb, he had not been able to play in a single game.

Reason #2: It was the day his big brother would receive the Eucharist for the first time.

The morning was a blur. All of a sudden we were at the church greeting family and friends who had come to celebrate the man of the hour. Our First Communicant wore a gray blazer and a tie with chalices on it, khaki pants, and a pair of Star Wars socks I didn't notice until I saw one of the pictures hours later. He was so handsome and focused and ready.

Some of the children had roles in the Mass. Our son's job was to carry the book to the altar for the priest to use for the consecration. The red book, which I believe is called a sacramentary, looked huge in his hands. He carried it carefully to the altar, bowed reverently, and walked down the steps to our pew.

*But it exists, thanks to a rebellious relative of mine, so here it is.*

Seeing him participating so fully in the experience of the Mass was amazing. As I watched him walk down from the altar after carrying the book, my eyes were full of tears. And toward the end of Mass when our pastor told the children to turn and thank their parents, my eyes filled again.

There is something so beautiful about watching your children grow. And seeing our children grow in our faith is extraordinary, easily the most rewarding aspect of parenthood. I don't know how well I'm doing

with this parenting thing, but at least we've made it this far.

As wonderful as our children's baptisms were, those days were a sign of the faith we were choosing for them. Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is a huge step on our son's own individual faith journey. It reminds me that my role is an important one, but ultimately this is his path. I feel so blessed that my husband and I are walking alongside him as he grows.

That evening I was thinking back over the day. It hadn't been the day I expected. We were surrounded by family and friends, and our children had a wonderful time. All four of their grandparents were with us, which was such a gift, one we definitely do not take for granted. So many, many blessings.

But, as with any day where you have too many expectations, I had a few disappointments, too. I didn't actually get to see our son receiving Communion because there were so many people in the church, and I was a few people back behind him in line. We weren't able to take a single family photo the whole day or even get a picture with one of the priests. Come to think of it, we didn't even drive to and from the church as a family. But the focus of the day was the Eucharist—and our son's encountering Jesus in that way for the very first time. So the day was absolutely a win.

During Communion at Sunday Mass today, I received just before our son did. As I walked away, I glanced over my shoulder and saw him receiving the host, Our Lord, into his palm, for the second time in his life. He looked so mature, so natural, so at ease. It was as beautiful and as miraculous as any moment I experienced on his First Communion day.

I thought, maybe, just maybe, seeing him make his second Communion was better than seeing him make his first. His First Communion was, after all, just a beginning.

Besides, it's not the first time I've missed a "first," and I wouldn't trade any of the times I have been there only for the seconds or thirds or sixteenths.

His little brother is so right. This is a day I really don't want to miss.

And so is tomorrow.



## The Feast of The Immaculate Heart of Mary [at Monks and Mermaids]



The feast of the Immaculate Heart, eccentric as it may appear to non-Catholics, point us to a wonderful truth acceptable to most: our religion is a religion of the heart, of grace that has its home in our deepest self. This is illustrated in the Gospel of St Luke in which the Blessed Virgin kept all that God told her, either by words or in events, in her heart. She did not allow them to become fleeting memories, here today and gone tomorrow: she allowed them to sink in to become ruminations in her very soul, part and parcel of what she was becoming, our most holy Theotokos (God Bearer).

She took into her heart the words of the angel, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow, and so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God;" and from her immaculate heart came her answer, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me." It can be said that Jesus was conceived through the heart of Mary.

The Visitation is a story of the meeting of John the Baptist with Jesus within the depths of Elizabeth and Mary, and it is from within the heart of Mary that the Magnificat flowed. The events and words that express the meaning of Christ's birth are also contemplated by Mary, deep in her heart. At the presentation of Jesus in the temple, Simeon prophesied to Mary that a sword would pierce her soul " so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." For the first time, St Luke hints that will happen in the depths of Mary will have a direct effect on others. Finally in St Luke's Gospel, we have the Holy Family visiting Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. Mary and Joseph have the experience of losing Jesus for

three days. They are reminded by his replies that, although they are the legal parents, Jesus belongs to the Father and thus has a prior loyalty. This loyalty would lead him to the cross. St John's Gospel shows Our Lady, with sword in her heart, suffering with Christ deep down in her self. When her heart had expanded by its synergy with the love of Christ crucified, she became our mother as the disciple whom Jesus loved took her into his family.

We saw in yesterday's feast that, according to Thomas Merton, "in the deepest ground of our being we remain in metaphysical contact with the whole of that creation in which we are only small parts." It is that point within us in which God breathes on the matter of this world to make each one of us a living soul. It is our point of contact with God by which we are human: it is what we call "our heart". When Mary received Jesus into her heart by her humble obedience, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord..." and continued to receive him by her life of humble obedience, right up to the foot of the cross where she stood with St John, her heart became the heart of the human race, and the situation of every other heart "metaphysically" in contact with hers, humans across time and space, now beat in a new context: the offer of grace was everywhere. For this reason we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary involves a total commitment to respond to the Gospel with the same wholehearted humble obedience that Mary displayed, not just with words but with deeds.

Mary's message is always that which she gave in the Marriage Feast of Cana, "Do whatever he tells you." It involves listening to and reading the Word of God meditatively, openly, in an attitude of humble obedience so that the Holy Spirit can speak to us as he spoke to her. Praying the rosary is another way to place yourself in humble obedience to the truths of faith in union with Mary; but this prayer, however important, holy and wonderful it is in the experience of the Catholic faithful, should never be a substitute for the meditative reading of Scripture; but rather, it should be a way of extending its influence into the rest of the day.

Another dimension of our relationship of humble obedience to the will of God is penance, something we all tend to neglect. At least, we should not put off till later what we can do today. On hearing of the plight of her cousin Elizabeth, even though this was not the main thrust of the message given her by the angel, she downed tools and, with haste, went to look after her cousin who was about to have a child. To learn to do unpleasant or difficult things immediately it is a good thing to take on fasting or 'giving up things'. This strengthens our will to do the will of God when it is really important to do so. Most of all, we should remember that what happens in our hearts is important, not just for us, but also for others, perhaps others we don't know or may never meet in this life. We, like Mary, are "metaphysically" connected with everyone else.

This brings me to [the message of Fatima](#). What I find most challenging and most exciting is the claim in

Fatima that prayer and penance can alter history, but is no different from the claim of Saint Therese of Lisieux she can practise the love that causes martyrs to be ready to shed their blood and missionaries to spread the Gospel. Both the Fatima messages and the teaching of St Therese take for granted that there is a unity of the human race that has its origin in God and of which we are only sometimes aware.

Part of the message of Our Lady in Fatima is about Russia. Unfortunately, there is an apocalyptic right wing, both in the Catholic Church and in the Orthodox, so that Youtube is choc-a-bloc with interpretations of the "secrets of Fatima" that say more about those who make them than about either Fatima or Russia. What is true is that the Blessed Virgin told the three children that Russia would become a source of great evil, of persecution of war etc, and she told us to pray and do penance for Russia.

This happened. We used to say "prayers for Russia" after every Mass; children gave up sweets for Russia, many went to Mass and said the rosary for Russia. I doubt if any part of the world prayed so earnestly and over a prolonged period in favour of Russia and its conversion. It is also true that when Communism eventually fell, with the loss of very little blood, the Orthodox faithful attributed this to the protection of Our Lady of Kazan.

I don't think the Russian Orthodox have generally appreciated the amount of prayer that was offered up in the West for them. Some are intent that only bad things come from the West and have even; so they accuse us of praying to convert them, a prayer of aggression. The same would be only too glad to convert us. However, most of us were thinking of the Communists who persecuted Catholics in other countries and were genuinely praying for their Orthodox brethren, even if they often had no idea what an Orthodox is. On the other hand, a Catholic monk friend of mine was once taken on a tour of churches, Orthodox and Eastern Catholic in Minsk, and asked to guess which were Orthodox and which were Catholic. He was certain about one church because it had inside a statue of Our Lady of Fatima. In fact, it turned out to be Orthodox - so some know of the deluge of prayer on their behalf because of the Fatima apparitions.

### **What is the difference between the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary?**

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the symbol and devotional expression of the divine and human love that the triune God has for us, for all human beings and for all creation through Jesus Christ. The immediate object of that love is ourselves.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary is the symbol and devotional expression of that human, creaturely love that is enabled by the Holy Spirit to receive Jesus Christ himself with the fullness of divine-human love that is his, in which we participate and, by so doing, share in the divine life. The immediate object of this love that comes from the Immaculate Heart is love of the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

The reception of this love has two essential characteristics: i) Once Our Blessed Lady's heart receives this love, Jesus uses it to "contaminate" as many other hearts as possible so that all these hearts become instruments of his love; ii) When, through conversion, we receive this love of Christ, we never receive it as an individual, but always in communion with others: this is because of the nature of the heart which is in "metaphysical" contact with all other hearts; and it is also the nature of the Church. As "those in communion" we are welded together in Christ as the Giver of salvation, and with Mary as the prime receiver of salvation. As Khomiakov wrote:

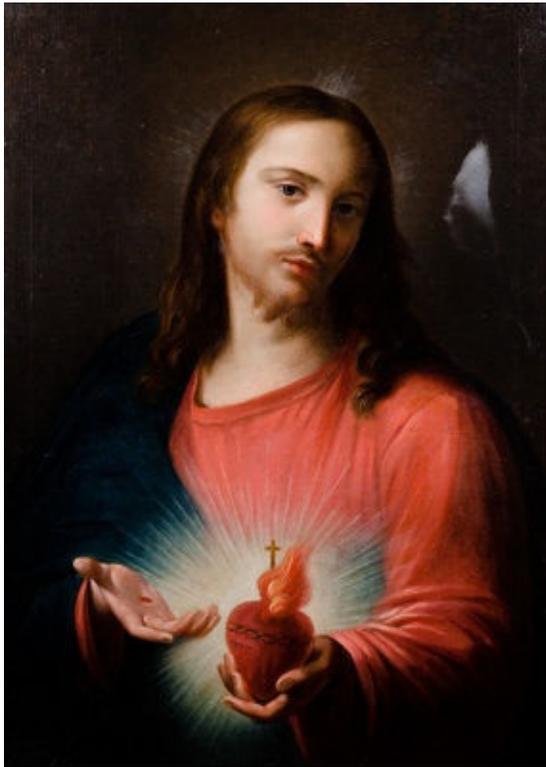
We know that when any one of us falls he falls alone; but no one is saved alone. He who is saved is saved in the Church, as a member of her, and in unity with all her other members. If any one believes, he is in the communion of faith; if he loves, he is in the communion of love; if he prays, he is in the communion of prayer. Wherefore no one can rest his hope on his own prayers, and every one who prays asks the whole Church for intercession, not as if he had doubts of the intercession of Christ, the one Advocate, but in the assurance that the whole Church ever prays for all her members. (The Church is One by Alexei Khomiakov 1804-1860)

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# Christ's Heart in Ours and Ours in Christ's Heart [at Monks and Mermaids]



Our Catholic Faith reaches up to heaven, out to our neighbour, and down into the depths of the soul. These three dimensions seem to divide our efforts into three separate tasks, liturgy, love of our neighbour and contemplation, tasks which keep on getting in each other's way. However, for those who persevere to the end, they are seen to be inseparable, all three being dimensions of any authentically strong relationship with God, all three leading to the same goal and doorways into the same place. In this essay we are going to look at the heart and discover how it connects us to heaven, to earth and to the whole cosmos. We shall then be able to see the relevance of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let us start with three quotations from Thomas Merton.

We must begin by frankly admitting that the first place in which to go looking for the world is not outside us but in ourselves. We are the world. In the deepest ground of our being we remain in metaphysical contact with the whole of that creation in which we are only small parts. Through our senses and our minds, our loves, needs, and desires, we are implicated, without possibility of evasion, in this world of matter and of men, of things and of persons, which not only affect us and change our lives but are also affected and changed by us...The question, then, is not to speculate about how we are to contact the world – as if we were somehow in outer space – but how to validate our relationship, give it a fully honest and human significance, and make it truly productive and worthwhile for our world.“ - From *Love and Living*

*In the deepest ground of our being we remain in metaphysical contact with the whole of that creation of which we are only small parts.* Thomas Merton goes further, going on to describe what, according to Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Eastern Christianity calls the "heart" or "deepest self".

“At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely ... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is every- where.” — Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

This was not Thomas Merton's philosophical theory, his abstract belief, or some monastic dogma: it was his direct experience, as well as a monastic theme in Catholic Tradition of East and West. He recounts his own experience.

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world. . . . This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. . . . I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. . . . But this cannot be seen, only believed and ‘understood’ by a peculiar gift.” — Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

The problem is that we live in a fallen world and in a fallen humanity that re-constructs the very being of things to serve ourselves, thus creating a false world and a false self, causing the "isness" of things to become opaque to the presence of God. Created Being, once it became reflectively conscious in human beings, denied its own nothingness and simply left no room for God. Thus the transformation of created being by sharing in God's life through the Incarnation, which was God's plan for creation from the beginning, could only be achieved by Christ's "obedience unto death". Christians are those who share in that obedience by dwelling in Christ and permitting Christ to dwell in us. The place where he dwells when we receive him in communion is our "heart" which is "*like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven.*" It is here that we are united to everyone and everything else. Our heart, in metaphysical contact with the whole of that creation of which we are only small parts, becomes a monstrance of Christ's presence shining in the heart of creation. It is the Church's job to shine, deep down in the depth of things, with the light of Christ.

St Peter Damian also sees the heart as the centre of Christian unity. In "*On the Dominus Vobiscum*", written to Catholic hermits to explain why they say, "Dominus vobiscum...Et cum spiritu tuo" in the solitude of their cells when they pray the Divine Office. He says:

Indeed, the Church of Christ is united in all her parts by such a bond of love that her several members form a single body and in each one the whole Church is mystically present; so that the whole Church universal may rightly be called the one bride of Christ, and on the other hand every single soul can, because of the mystical effect of the sacrament, be regarded as the whole Church.

The cohesive force of mutual charity by which the Church is united is so great that she is not merely one in her many members but also, in some mysterious way, present in her entirety in each individual....By reason of her unity of faith, she has not, in her many members, many parts, and yet through the close-knit bond of charity and the varied charismatic gifts she shows many facets in her individual members. Through the Holy Church is thus diversified in many individuals, she is none the less welded into one by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

And so the priest before he offers sacrifice and prayers to God shows by this mutual greeting that he is bound to the faithful by the bond of brotherly love; he does this so that he may make this commandment of the Lord clear by his outward actions, as well as keeping it in his heart. Because of this, he sees as present with the eyes of the spirit all those for whom he prays, whether or not they are actually there in the flesh; he knows that all who are praying with him are present in spiritual communion. And so the eye of faith directs the words of his greeting and he realizes the spiritual presence of those whom he knows to be near at hand. Therefore let no brother who lives alone in a cell be afraid to utter the words which are common to the whole Church; for although he is separated in space from the congregation of the faithful yet he is bound together with them all by love in the unity of faith; although they are absent in the flesh, they are near at hand in the mystical unity of the Church (Chapter 18, 73-74).

Because of the mystical unity of the Church which unites the many in the heart of the one and allows the hermit to be the voice of many in prayer, our vocations complement each other so that the vocation of each glows with the beauty of the vocations of all the rest. No one understood this better than Saint Therese of Lisieux who believed that her vocation "to be love at the heart of the Church" would give courage to the martyrs, zeal to priests, perseverance and patience to those suffering trials etc. She wrote:

*Her desire to live all vocations*To be your Spouse, O Jesus, to be a Carmelite, by my union with you to be the mother of souls, should content me... yet it does not... Without doubt, these three privileges are indeed my vocation: Carmelite, spouse, and mother. And yet I feel in myself other vocations—I feel myself called to be a soldier, priest, apostle, doctor of the church, martyr. Finally, I feel the need, the desire to perform all the most heroic deeds for you, Jesus... I feel in my soul the courage of a crusader, of a soldier for the Church, and I wish to die on the field of battle in defense of the Church...

I feel in me the vocation of a priest! With what love, O Jesus, would I bear you in my hands, when at the sound of my words you came down from heaven! With what love would I give you to souls! But alas, just as much as I desire to be a priest, I admire and envy the humility of St. Francis of Assisi, and feel the call to imitate him in refusing the sublime dignity of the Priesthood....

Dreaming of the tortures in which Christians are to share at the time of the Antichrist, I feel my heart thrill, and I would like these tortures to be kept for me... Jesus, Jesus, if I wanted to write all my desires, I would have to take your Book of Life, where the deeds of your saints are recorded: all these deeds I would like to accomplish for you....

*Each person has their own gift*At prayer these desires made me suffer a true martyrdom. I opened the Epistles of St. Paul to seek some relief. The 12th and 13th chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians fell before my eyes. I read, in the first, that not all can be apostles, prophets, and doctors, etc., that the Church is composed of different members, and that the eye cannot also be at the

same time the hand.

*Therese finds her vocation in charity*The answer was clear, but it did not satisfy my desires, it did not give me peace.... Without being discouraged I continued my reading, and this phrase comforted me: "Earnestly desire the more perfect gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31). And the Apostle explains how all gifts, even the most perfect, are nothing without Love... that charity is the excellent way that leads surely to God. At last I had found rest.... Considering the mystical Body of the Church, I had not recognized myself in any of the members described by St. Paul, or rather, I wanted to recognize myself in all... Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church has a body composed of different members, the noblest and most necessary of all the members would not be lacking to her. I understood that the Church has a heart, and that this heart burns with Love. I understood that Love alone makes its members act, that if this Love were to be extinguished, the Apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood... I understood that Love embraces all vocations, that Love is all things, that it embraces all times and all places... in a word, that it is eternal!

*To be love in the heart of the Church*Then in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: "O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation, my vocation is Love!... Yes, I have found my place in the Church, and it is you, O my God, who have given me this place... in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be Love!... Thus I shall be all things: thus my dream shall be realized!!!"

I am a child... It is not riches or glory (not even the glory of Heaven) that this child asks for... No, she asks for Love. She knows but one desire: to love you, Jesus. Glorious deeds are forbidden her; she cannot preach the Gospel or shed her blood... But what does that matter, her brothers work in her place, and she, a little child, stays close to the throne of the King and Queen, and loves for her brothers who are in the combat... But how shall she show her love, since love proves itself by deeds? Well! the little child will strew flowers, she will embalm the royal throne with their fragrance, she will sing with a silver voice the canticle of Love.

Yes, my Beloved, I wish to spend my life thus... I have no other means of proving my love except by strewing flowers, that is to say, letting no little sacrifice pass, no look, no word--profiting by the littlest actions, and doing them out of love. I wish to suffer out of love and to rejoice out of love; thus I shall strew flowers before your throne. I shall not find one without scattering its petals before you... and in strewing my flowers I will sing (can one weep in doing so joyous an action?) I will sing, even if my roses must be gathered from among thorns; and the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song.

The opposite is also true: if the holiness of each reflects the many-faceted holiness of all, if like Thomas Merton we are united to everyone deep in the heart where God's presence shines, and if our separateness is an illusion, we must also come to realise that we cannot separate our sin from that of others, and our sins are coloured by the many-faceted sins of the human race. As Thomas Merton points out, "*Through our senses and our minds, our loves, needs, and desires, we are implicated, without possibility of evasion, in this world of matter and of men, of things and of persons, which not only affect us and change our lives but are also affected and changed by us.*" This leads us to Dostoevsky in his *Brothers Karamazov* and the teaching of the *staretz Zosima*. If our own vocation, when properly lived, contributes to the holiness of all, our laxity and sin can, at a certain level lead to the weakness in temptation by bad example, by lack of good example, by the lack of support for others in prayer, by making Christ's presence less visible in the world. If, however, we are united to Christ in the heart where humankind is most truly one beyond the reaches of sin, then, with St Therese, our love can become, in some mysterious way, the love of all who follow Christ, and, with Father Zosima, our own repentance can become the repentance for all who sin. We can be "responsible for all to all" because we identify with all in Christ at the heart

of humankind. Father Zosima says:

"Love one another, Fathers," said Father Zosima, as far as Alyosha could remember afterwards. "Love God's people. Because we have come here and shut ourselves within these walls, we are no holier than those that are outside, but on the contrary, from the very fact of coming here, each of us has confessed to himself that he is worse than others, than all men on earth... And the longer the monk lives in his seclusion, the more keenly he must recognize that. Else he would have had no reason to come here. When he realizes that he is not only worse than others, but that he is responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual, only then the aim of our seclusion is attained. For know, dear ones, that every one of us is undoubtedly responsible for all men -- and everything on earth, not merely through the general sinfulness of creation, but each one personally for all mankind and every individual man. This knowledge is the crown of life for the monk and for every man. For monks are not a special sort of men, but only what all men ought to be.

We unite ourselves to sinners, not by judging them like the pharisee, but identifying ourselves with them in their sin and repenting, *with* them if possible, and even *for* them, not as holy people for sinners, but as fellow sinners. To be a Christian is to identify ourselves with the whole race, no matter who or in what state they are: we are brothers and sisters.

Saint Therese believed herself to be so united with others that, when in the last eighteen months of her life all taste for religious practice was taken away from her, she felt cut off from God, with the emotions of an agnostic, yet she did not diminish her prayer life; and she prayed that, when God chose to deliver her from this suffering, he would, at the same time, deliver the real agnostics whose negativity she shared. When, through living in the heart that has cosmic dimensions which are filled with divine Love through Christ's presence in the Spirit, the Christian comes to love universally:

Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. . . . for all is like an ocean, all is flowing and blending; a touch in one place sets up movement at the other end of the earth. . . . Every blade of grass, every insect, ant, and golden bee, all so marvellously know their path, though they have not intelligence, they bear witness to the mystery of God and continually accomplish it themselves. . . . All creation and all creatures, every leaf is striving to the Word, singing glory to God, weeping to Christ, unconsciously accomplishing this by the mystery of their sinless life.

There is a purple passage in *The Brothers Karamazov* in which Alyosha realises the truth of Fr Zosima's teaching and, in ecstasy, embraces in love the earth, knowing he was connected to all reality.

The vault of heaven, full of soft, shining stars, stretched vast and fathomless above him. . . . The silence of earth seemed to melt into the silence of the heavens. The mystery of earth was one with the mystery of the stars. . . . Alyosha stood, gazed, and suddenly threw himself down on the earth. He did not know why he embraced it. He could not have told why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all. But he kissed it weeping, sobbing, and watering it with his tears, and vowed passionately to love it, to love it for ever and ever. . . . What was he weeping over? Oh! in his rapture he was weeping even over those stars, which were shining to him from the abyss of space, and "he was not ashamed of that ecstasy." There seemed to be threads from all those innumerable worlds of God, linking his soul to them, and it was trembling all over . . . He longed to forgive everyone and for

everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything. . . . But with every instant he felt clearly and, as it were, tangibly, that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind—and it was for all his life and for ever and ever. He had fallen on the earth a weak boy, but he rose up a resolute champion, and he knew and felt it suddenly at the very moment of his ecstasy.

Alyosa had come to love at Christ loved, identifying himself with all, even the worst sinners and with the whole of creation, like St Benedict who saw all that exists in a veil of light.

My final quotation is from St Isaac the Syrian (7th Century), a Desert Father who saw the rigours of the desert as a school where people can learn to love as Jesus loves. Here is his description:

What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, for demons, and for all that exists. By the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person's heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in any in creation. For this reason, such a person offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm her or him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner such a person prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in a heart that is in the likeness of God.

The person who is genuinely charitable not only gives charity out of his own possessions, but gladly tolerates injustice from others and forgives them. Whoever lays down his soul for his brother acts generously, rather than the person who demonstrates his generosity by his gifts.

St Isaac teaches that God is not like us who are changeable: God can only love, and this love is without boundaries and embraces all that exists. The flames of hell are not God's punishment: they are the flames of God's love that threaten the egoism of the damned, hell thus becomes their own invention.

In this article, we have not mentioned yet the Sacred Heart of Jesus, concentraing instead on the human heart transformed by grace. If we, as humans, have such heart, Jesus, who is as human as we are and more so, must also have a human heart: and what a heart it must be!! Read once again the quotations and ask yourself how they throw light on the heart of Jesus.

Those of us who are concerned with Christian unity must remember that, before any formal negotiations and agreements, Christian unity begins and continues to exist in the heart. If it is not in the heart, no negotiations will ever succeed. The Sacred Heart actually unites East and West. It does so because all who receive Christ in their heart at communion or in any other way, all take up their abode in Christ's heart. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, all who are united in his heart are also united in the hearts of each of us. This happens whether we recognise it or no. Deep in the hearts of the monks of Athos, Roman Catholics lie hidden because they are in the heart of Christ! The heart of Jesus is much wider than our prejudices.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that moon to Christ's sun, remind us what the Eastern monastic tradition keep telling us, that our religion at its deepest level, has its existence within us. Devotion to the Sacred Heart should not just be expressed in sentimental pictures and statues. To be authentic, we must dig down deep within ourselves, break through the rock of our egoistic infidelity, and find Christ's living heart within our own, knowing that all who are in there with us are our brothers and sisters. please click on

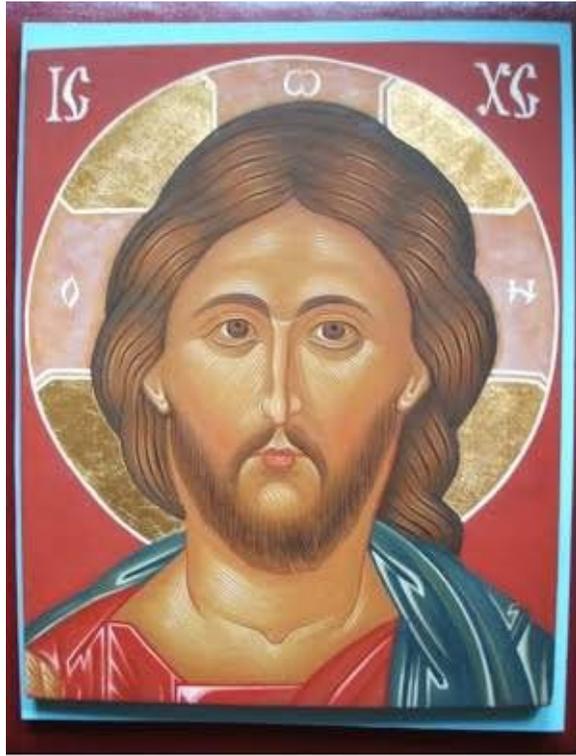
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## The Christian Mystery [at Fri, 10 Jun 2016 12:00:00 EST]



When God became man in Palestine, a new relationship was created between Heaven and earth, Eternity and time: there came into existence the ‘fullness of time’ which culminated in “kairos” of Jesus, the ‘last times’ (eschaton). The “fullness of time” was a direct result of the Incarnation and from Jesus’ true identity as God-man. Just as we identify the persons of the Blessed Trinity only by their relationships with one another, we call God the Father “Father” because of his relationship to the Son, and the Word is “Son” only because of his relationship to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is breathed forth by the Father to become the mutual union of Love between the Father and Son, so the identity of Jesus as a human being can only be thought of correctly in his relationship to his Father in the Holy Spirit, and to the human race in the same Holy Spirit, and especially to the Church. This relationship to the human race is not something that happened after the Incarnation: it is the very meaning of the Incarnation, and a dimension of his identity as the Christ. The title by which Jesus described himself, ‘Son of Man’, implies this corporate personality. Kings in the ancient Middle East were considered the personification of their people: what happened to them was considered to have happened to all their subjects. If they were praised, all felt uplifted; if they were insulted or wounded all screamed for vengeance. What was a pious fiction in the mystique of oriental royalty is literally true of Jesus because of the action of the Holy Spirit from the moment of his conception, uniting him both in the Holy Trinity as Son of God and to the whole

human race as Son of Man: this double union constitutes his identity.. Archbishop John Zizioulas writes:

*The Holy Spirit does not intervene a posteriori within the framework of Christology, as a help to overcoming the distance between an objectively existing Christ and ourselves; he is the one who gives birth to Christ and to the whole activity of salvation, by anointing him and making him Kristos (Lk 4: 13). If it is truly possible to confess Christ as the truth, this is only because of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12, 3). And as a careful study of 1 Cor. 12 shows, for St Paul, the body of Christ is literally composed of the charismata of the Spirit (charisma = membership of the body).*

*So we can say without risk of an exaggeration that Christ exists only pneumatologically , whether in his distinct personal particularity or in his capacity as the body of the Church and the recapitulation of all things.*

*Such is the great mystery of Christology, that the Christ-event is not an event defined in itself – it cannot be defined in itself for a single instant even theoretically - but it is an integral part of the economy of the Holy Trinity. To speak of Christ means speaking at the same time of the Father and the Holy Spirit. For the Incarnation as we have just seen is formed by the work of the Spirit and is nothing else than the expression and realization of the will of the Father.*

*Hence, everything that Jesus did in life was directly related to his place in the Blessed Trinity and also related to the whole human race of all times and places; and the Holy Spirit is the link at both levels. It can be said that, during his life on earth, Jesus lived about thirty three years of ordinary “horizontal” history and was crucified at the end of it, and that the empty tomb took place three days later around two thousand years ago. However, as God-made-man, there was another “vertical” dimension to his life: he had a relationship with his Father through the Holy Spirit, and it was the Holy Spirit who placed him in contact with all times and, by so doing, made Christ the meaning of all time, making him the universal focal point of all history. For this reason, Christ’s time is called the “fullness of time”.*

This “fullness of time” came into existence in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and was completed and reached perfection in Christ’s death which was his doorway into eternity. Thus his life was united to all human lives, and his sufferings were united to all human sufferings, and his fidelity was united to all men in their infidelity and sin. He bore our sufferings and sins, changing suffering into a way to God, seeking and obtaining pardon for all sin, and giving to transient human life a value and a hope it would never have had without him, the capacity to receive eternal life as sons of God, and the means to bring this about. What is impossible for men is possible for God. By means of the Christian Mystery, God was making the impossible possible, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” (Jn 1, 12).. Because Christ was directly related to all times and places by the activity of the Spirit during his time on earth, God’s revelation in and through Christ in the past became as much God’s revelation to us in the present as it was to his contemporaries. Thus, when the Church sings, “Hodie, Christus natus est”, it is celebrating our contact with the birth of Jesus, which we come to know about through the word of God and celebrate as a true theophany in the liturgy. The activity of the Holy Spirit does not take the event out of the past and put it in the present; he simply bridges the gap between past and present, because the Spirit is outside time and has the same relationship with all times. We are

“contemporaries” with Christ’s birth, life, death and resurrection in the Spirit. This fact does not merely justify the “hodie” of the liturgy, it also justifies Catholic devotion to the “Divine Child” or to the “Infant of Prague”, or to the Passion of Christ in its historical details, as the Franciscans and Passionists have favoured. Thus, although the death of Christ is an historical event, the memory of which has been passed down from one generation to the next, it is also a reflection of the presence in each generation of the Holy Spirit who makes the event the supreme revelation of God to us in the present, in spite of being an event in the past.

Nevertheless, his death is not only the climax of the ‘fullness of time’, it is also Christ’s kairos, the time that will truly last for ever, the time that is actually present in the liturgy. To discover this we must look at his death from a completely different angle, as the radical self-giving in love by Jesus himself, an offering for all eternity because it is without limits, a total submission to the will of the Father without reserve or limitation. This self-offering was Christ’s act of voluntarily dying in loving obedience to the Father; and it became a permanent dimension of the risen Christ, an essential characteristic of the eternal relationship of his glorified humanity to the Father, without losing contact with its historical context, because there is no time in heaven. Thus he is depicted in the Book of Revelation as the Lamb “slain but standing” (). Fr Jean Corbon writes of Christ’s death:

*Above and beyond its historical circumstances, which are indeed of the past, the death of Jesus was by its nature the death of death. But the event wherein death was put to death cannot belong to the past, for then death would not have been conquered. To the extent that it passes, time is the prisoner of death; once time is delivered from death, it no longer passes. The hour on which the desire of Jesus was focused “has come, and we are in it” forever; the event that is the Cross and Resurrection does not pass away. (The Wellspring of Worship by Jean Corbon, Ignatius Press, pg 56)*

Thus, by means of his ascension into the presence of his Father, this passage of Jesus through death and resurrection has become the permanent means for human beings and even for the whole universe to be transformed into sharers of the divine life. Hence, we who live in time are destined to ascend, through his death and resurrection, into the presence of the Father. By dying on the cross and entering heaven by resurrection-ascension, Christ has brought about a new way of being human. By passing through his death to share in his resurrected life, the whole creation is destined to be transformed into “the new heaven and new earth” spoken about in the Apocalypse; and this is already a living reality in Christ in heaven. It is into this reality that the Church passes every time it celebrates Mass. His pasch has become our pasch, his mystery our mystery. We are baptised into his death and resurrection and celebrate the same mystery of our participation in this process at every Mass. Once in his presence, we receive eternal life from the Father, a life that belongs by right to the human nature of the risen and ascended Christ, but which he shares with us through the Spirit who makes us one body with him. Sharing in his human nature that has been transformed by resurrection, we share in his divine life and also share in his joy

When we ‘ascend’ in the Mass to the heavenly sanctuary into the presence of the Father through the veil that is Christ’s flesh, our baptism and confirmation are renewed. In the words of St Ambrose, “By his Ascension, Christ passed into his mysteries.” Corbon, “The Wellspring of Worship, pg 98). In our communion with the risen Christ in heaven, all our sacraments, our baptism and confirmation, our ordination or marriage, are rejuvenated and become again and again, active means of grace, because we have been united by the Spirit to their Source who is Christ. The death of Christ is like a black hole through which the whole human race, and indeed, the whole of creation have to pass in order to bring into existence a ‘new heaven and a new earth’.

The Gospel of St Mark is said to be simply an account of the Passion of Christ, with a long prologue which tells of his public ministry, and an epilogue which tells of his Resurrection. It is clear that, for St Mark, his Passion is the most important revelation of all. St Matthew’s account links the death of Christ in apocalyptic fashion with the emptying of the tombs and the resurrection of the dead (Mt 27, vv 51 – 54). St John’s Gospel also attaches to Christ’s death on the cross many of the ideas that belong to the Last Day in other gospels. For instance, when Jesus is lifted up (crucified) he will draw all men to himself (); in the cross, Jesus and his Father are glorified (); and the crucifixion is the Judgement of the world (). Moreover, the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world is linked with Christ’s death on the cross( ). He tells Simon Peter before the crucifixion that he is going on a journey and that Si Peter cannot go with him now, but that one day he will be able to go (Jn 13 ). It implies that accompanying Jesus through death to resurrection is a future option for Simon Peter, and for us. It is not only a historical memory, however direct may be our contact with this event through the memory of the Church: through it Christ in the ‘fullness of time’ and we in our own time pass into the ‘eschaton’.

In his “presentation” of *Liturgia y Oracion* by Fr Jean Corbon, Prof. Felix Maria Arocena of the University of Navarre in Spain tells us that there is an altar in the church of the Convento de San Bernadino de Siena in Bergamo which illustrates the confluence of our historic memory of the Passion with our participation in Christ’s sacrifice of the Mass. Caravaggio so painted his picture of the Passion that, every time the priest elevates the host at Mass, we become aware of the two ways in which we are brought into contact with the cross, with the historical event through the memory of the Church as depicted in the painting, and with the same event as our door into eternity, our way to God through the Eucharist. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the Church takes its normal emphasis away from the Eucharist in which the death and resurrection of Christ are united together as one single mystery, and concentrates on the historical event where the resurrection was in the future, and Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!”. We do this because, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the crucifixion of Jesus is the clearest and most intimate theophany (manifestation of God) in human history, not only for Our Lady and St John on the day, but for us and for all believers until the end of time.

This passage of Jesus through death to resurrection and ascension into the presence of the Father is celebrated for all eternity by the angels and saints in heaven, as they share the joy of the Father at the arrival in heaven of his only begotten Son, and they share in the joy of Jesus as he is accompanied by

those whom he has saved – “A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” from all times and places – streaming into the heavenly Jerusalem with him. This is the heavenly liturgy.

One direct result of the ascension was the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Church at Pentecost. In this reason we can say that the ascension of Christ is the epiclesis which is the cause of every other epiclesis in Catholic liturgy. Indeed, Pentecost is the origin of the Liturgy of the Church. According to P. Jean Corbon OP, (*The Wellspring of Liturgy*), the Liturgy is brought about by the synergy (harmony or synchronization between two “energies” or activities) between the activity of the Holy Spirit and that of the Church which brings about the Church’s liturgy. In this relationship, the Church is pure need, but the Holy Spirit enables it to do what would be impossible without the Spirit.

### **The Eucharist memory of the Paschal Mystery**



"Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22,19; 1 Cor. 11,24.25). It is following this command of the Lord that the Church has always understood, from its very beginning, the great mystery it was to guard and that the Church was called upon to transmit faithfully over the centuries until the glorious return of Christ. Even when the first Christians continued to go and pray in the temple (see At 2,42; 5,12; 3,1), the first act that allowed them to identify themselves as a new community, was the celebration of the "new Easter". Using a surprising denomination, they indicated in the "breaking of the bread" the novelty of their prayers. This consisted in listening to the Word, in remembering the death and resurrection of the Lord and joyfully awaiting the day of His return; the prayers for giving thanks, the Eucharistic prayer, was established from the very beginning as the recollection of the Lord’s supper which took place before his death on the Cross (see 1 Cor 11,26).

The Eucharist therefore is understood as an act created by Jesus himself, placed within the history of Salvation, in the period of time that elapsed between his death and his return in the parousia. The eschatological conscience that accompanied this prayer, therefore constitutes one of the peculiarities that characterize its meaning and allows its integral preservation until the Lord Jesus shall accomplish the "restoration of all things" (At 3,20). The cry of Marana-tha ("Come, Our Lord!"), pronounced during the Lord’s supper, strongly attests to what extent the first community felt the Lord’s presence close to them

and to what extent they rejoiced in thanking Him (ευχαριστούντες Eph 5,20), without however forgetting that the fullness of communion had not yet been fully been donated and for this reason they invoked His return. It was this Eucharistic awareness that allowed the first community to experiment in a totally particular manner the closeness, the presence and the communion with the Lord Jesus and it was this that allowed it to confront in a heterogeneous manner the Judaic cult and any other pagan sacrificial action (see 1 Cor 10,16-22). The participation in the body and the blood of Christ went well beyond any analogy, because it involved the real presence of the Lord and real communion with Him. This dimension, which already exists in the signs and the words reveals the sacrificial sense of the Eucharistic banquet, has always allowed believers to build and to strengthen the bonds with their brothers (the "saints" of At 9,13) to the pointing of calling themselves for this reason "God's community", "the holy assembly" and "the Lord's people". Finally, it is from Eucharistic life that this community received the strength to lead a moral life that was coherent and a source of testimony. Paul's invitation to "examine oneself" so as to be worthy of sitting at the Eucharistic banquet is an indication of a conscience capable of perceiving the rules of its own existence in conformity with the mystery it celebrates. These elements allowed them to become aware that it was in the Eucharist that the believing community always found the origin of its being "only one body", "the body of Christ and members of member" (1 Cor 12,27).

This brief introduction, that creates the essential scenario for theologically approaching the subject of the Eucharist, allows us to verify the fundamental and constituent points of this mystery. First of all, there is no rift between Jesus' established act during the last supper, "the eve of his passion" or "the night on which he was betrayed" and the believing community's successive customs. This custom has simply repeated and celebrated only what Jesus himself had indicated and commanded to be repeated after his death. Any historical-critical analysis that might attempt to separate these two moments, insinuating that the "Lord's Supper" is a composition of the community, is destined to disintegrate when confronting the historical evidence which has no analogies with other cultural celebrations and the very self-awareness of the primitive community. The conformity with the entire message announced by the Lord and the events of His death and Resurrection discovers its most coherent and original synthesis in this command to pass down the actions of the Last Supper. With this command for the anamnesis, He impresses the seal of His real presence among His faithful and His Disciples beyond His death. A single act that is not characterized by a tired repetition or representation, but that on the contrary, presents itself as the apex in its unrepeatability. The very words *zikkārōn*, anamnesis, memory simply interpret the uniqueness of the act in its ever-lasting historical presentation.

The historical and theological development that took place during the first centuries, and of which the Fathers have left us a precious testimony, becomes real in the various passages that progressively lead to the verification of the public characteristics of the liturgical action. The building of the first basilicas with their circular shape, the centrality of the altar added to the solemnity of the celebration are the testimony of the progress that occurred starting with the foundations of Eucharistic life within the Church. Thomas, with the Scholastic will lead to a meditation of the sacramental characteristics of the Eucharist. It is sufficient to read once again some of the questiones (73-79) in the III Pars of the *Summa Theologiae* so as to verify the deep theological unity that is achieved in the analysis of the *signum et res* and of the *sacrificium laudis et crucis*. Regarding the meaning of the Eucharist Thomas wrote: "This sacrament has three meanings. The first concerns the past, because it commemorates the Lord's passion which was a real sacrifice... The second concerns the effect of the present representing the unity of the Church in which mankind is united through this sacrament. For this reason it is called communion or *synaxis*... The third concerns the future: because this sacrament is prefigurative of the divine beatitude which will occur in the homeland. In this sense it is called *viaticum*, because it shows us the path for achieving it and for the same reason it is also described as the Eucharist, the good grace". As one can see, the triple distinction of the sacrament as *signum rememorativum* (because it proves the uniqueness of the redeeming act),

demonstrativum (in the sense that it accomplishes the announced redemption) and prognosticum (because it is the anticipation of the Eschatological banquet), find in these words their theological importance. The antiphon to the Magnificat in the Corpus Domini feast simply evokes liturgically in a poetic synthesis the theological intuition: "Recolitur memoria passionis eius, mens impletur gratiae et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur".

The Tridentine was to mark a fundamental moment in the history of the dogma. Contrary to the Protestant interpretation according to which Christ's presence is produced by faith, the Councilior Fathers affirmed that Christ is not present in the Eucharist simply because we believe He is, but that we believe because He is already present and that He is not absent because we do not believe, but He remains with us so that we may live in communion with Him (see DS 1654). In the history of the development of this dogma, the Tridentine stage clearly underlines the deep emphasis concerning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The expiratory finality and the sacrificial character of the Eucharist mark in a decisive manner the theology of this sacrament and the terminology achieves its irreversible dogmatic depth. The Tridentine affirmations lead, as is well known, to the successive controversy that essentially concerned the sacrificial nature. A debate and a theological meditation that reached our times in an interpretative "muddle".

The Second Vatican Council certainly marks a fundamental stage in liturgical, theological and pastoral reform of the sacrament. Although it does not include as specific document concerning the sacrament, the second chapter of the Sacrosanctum concilium can be considered a decisive point on this subject. Because the Council keeps its eyes firmly fixed on the Church, the Eucharist is understood in a binding relationship with the life of the Christian community for which it is the "summit and the source" (LG 11). The terminological variety with which the sacrament is described in the more or less 100 passages of the different documents of the Council, shows on one hand a dogmatic richness and on the other the difficulty in synthesizing the teachings it contains. At least two fundamental issues certainly flow into the teachings of the Council that had determined previous theological reflections.

The first, essentially is referred to Odo Casel's studies (+1948) with his theory of "renewed-presentation". He claims that in the Eucharist the mystery re-presents itself, meaning a renewed-enacting in favor of the community that celebrates it. The Holy Mass, therefore confers a presence of a trans-temporal and trans-locational nature to the mystery of the Cross. Having removed the reference to a dependence for mystery cults, Casel's theory had various supporters who continued to favor his interpretations relying in particular on the dimension of the characteristics of the new and definite alliance of the Eucharist. The second, refers to studies by M.Thurian and Louis Bouyer that instead repropose the notion of a memorial as the sacred pledge that God offered to His people so that they would uninterruptedly represent this to Him. In this manner, they attempt to meditate even more on the essential connection that there is between the memorial, the sacrifice and the banquet.

These brief concise outlines only intend to repropose the plurality of the interpretations that concern this sacrament. The theological accentuations that we find concern in turn a number of particular subjects that can be synthesized as follows:

1. The concept of memoria (anamnesi), where the institution's central and founding event finds its basis and its original unity in Jesus' act at the Last Supper.
2. The concept of giving thanks (beraka), in which the gratefulness of the faithful for the supreme gift they have received becomes clear. Hence the sense of the divine cult, of the glorification, praise and adoration that the community addresses to the Father for the wonders He has accomplished and of which they His people are the witness.
3. The concept of sacrifice (thysia), in which the renewed-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is underlined as an act of redemption involving both His body and the Church.
4. The concept of epiclesis with which the interior action of the invocation of the Spirit, who works and

accomplishes the Eucharistic act, is stressed. This presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist is synthesized in Ippolito the Roman's anaphora, where one prays to God the Father saying: "Allow your Holy Spirit to descend upon the offering of your Holy Church, and after reuniting them, concede to all the Saints who receive it to be filled by the Holy Spirit so as to fortify them in the faith and in the truth, that we may praise you and glorify you through your Son Jesus Christ, through whom you receive the glory and the honor, Father and Son with the Holy Spirit within the holy Church now and for ever and ever" (Apostolic Tradition, 4). It is the prayer that requests the benediction of the Lord and that is celebrated by the Church as blessing the Lord Himself, according to Paul's expression: "the chalice of benediction which we bless" (1 Cor 10,16).

5. The concept of communion, with which one intends to infer the aim of the Eucharist and its accomplishment. The new alliance that Christ enacts with His blood creates the life of the Church and for the church stating the premise of redemption. None as well as Saint Augustine have been capable of understanding the connection in this relationship: "If you are to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostles who tell the faithful: Now you are the body of Christ, and members of member (1 Cor 12,27). If therefore you are the body of Christ and his limbs, your holy mystery is placed on the table of the Lord: you shall receive your holy mystery. To what you are you answer Amen and by answering you undersign it. In fact you hear: "the body of Christ" and you answer: "Amen". Really become the Body of Christ, so that the Amen (that you pronounce) shall be true!" (Sermon 272).

6. The eschatological concept, with which one insists on the final and preparatory characteristics of the Eucharist. "While awaiting His coming" repeated after the consecration clearly certifies the Eschatological intent that the Eucharistic supper contains as the affirmation and the anticipation of new heavens and earth in the Kingdom of God.

A text written by the great Catholic theologian M. J. Scheeben, allows us to synthesize the various elements we have tried to examine: "The Eucharist –he writes in The mysteries of Christianity- is the real and universal continuation and amplification of the mystery of the Incarnation. Christ's Eucharistic presence is in itself a reflection of a amplification of His Incarnation... The transformation of the bread into the Body of Christ thanks to the Holy Spirit is a renewal of the wonderful act with which He originally formed his Body from the breast of the Virgin by virtue of the Holy Spirit Himself and took this body onto His person: and of how, thanks to this act, he entered the world for the first time, hence in this transformation He multiplies His essential presence through space and time". The Eucharist, finally, remains the rule for correct theological thought; we are reminded of this by Saint Irenaeus who wrote: "Our doctrine is in agreement with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms it" (Against Heresy IV, 18, 5).

+ Rino Fisichella

## The Evil of "Inculturation" [at V for Victory!]



At the heart of modernism is the reduction of Christianity to an abstraction. To say that Christianity is an abstraction is as much as to say it can be anything to anybody, which is as much as to say that it is not real. The whole point of purging churches of statues and images, butchering the liturgical calendar, and discarding devotions was precisely to further this idea of Christianity as an abstraction divorced from reality and inaccessible to our senses.

But in the Incarnation, God entered history in the flesh and made Himself accessible to our senses. Luke's Gospel carefully spells out for us the time and place when this happened, and under which temporal rulers, and in what cultural context -- precisely so that we understand and take to heart the fact that Salvation occupied actual moments in the history of the world. True, the artists of different nations have always felt free to portray Jesus and His mother with various ethnic features and in various costumes; but it is another matter entirely to try to shape the Christian faith itself according to the molds of cultural idiosyncrasies.

And that is where "inculturation" becomes an evil, in the service of the heresy of Christianity as a mere "idea." [Fr. John Hunwicke puts it best](#) in his musings on the intimate connection between the Christian faith and the realities of life in the Mediterranean basin (emphases in original):

But more insidious still is the idea that the principle of inculturation could be applied to the elements used in the Christian sacraments. I have known suggestions that to use bread made from something other than wheat, alcohol produced not from grapes, and the oil of vegetables other than olives, would 'affirm' cultures which do not find their origins in the Mediterranean basin. This seems to be based on the notion that Christianity is an idea; and ideas can, in different cultures, be garbed in different clothes. *That* is what is the basic heresy. Because Christianity is not an idea. It is a person, a God who took flesh - a *particular* flesh - from a particular Girl in a particular country in a particular culture, and in that flesh died on a Cross made from a particular Tree after he had, on a particular evening, given himself to his friends under the outer appearances of a loaf and a cupful of wine. This *particularity* and this *materiality, this rootedness*, is Christianity. That is why the Gnostics were not Christians, and why Matthew Fox is not a Christian. And the Matter of the Sacraments is rooted in the particularity of that Incarnation and its culture.

Without the Corn, the Wine, and the Oil, *nulla salus*.

Indeed.

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## What is Adoration? [at Mere Observations]

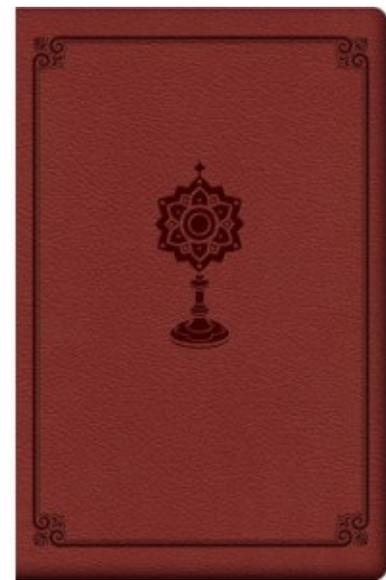
*When we go before the Blessed Sacrament, let us open our heart; our good God will open His. We shall go to Him; He will come to us; the one to ask, the Other to receive. It will be like a breath from one to the other.* – St. John Vianney

I read the following passage in a great little book I picked up recently called [Manual for Eucharistic Adoration](#), written by the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration and edited by Paul Thigpen, whose [Manual for Spiritual Warfare](#) remains a favorite. I've been using both books during my weekly visits to the adoration chapel in town. The following passage stood out for me as a great explanation about what adoration is, particularly for those who might not understand what is meant when I write about it. It also explains why I think it is a difficult contrast to grasp for many in our me-first, self-centered lifestyle.

It's from Chapter 5: Guidelines for Adoration (pages 32-33).

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### How Do I Adore?



It is important to remember that feelings of love, fervor, and devotion are not essential for adoration. Adoration is not a sentiment.

Fr. John Hardon, in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, defines adoration as “the act of religion by which God is recognized as alone worthy of supreme honor because He is infinitely perfect, has supreme dominion over humans, and the right to human total dependence on the Creator. It is at once an act of mind and will, expressing itself in appropriate prayers, postures of praise, and acts of reverence and sacrifice.”[1]

Our adoration, therefore, begins when we walk in the door of the church or adoration chapel. When we genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, kneel in the pew, and show Him our respect by giving Him our full attention, we adore Him. When we turn off our cell phone and maintain reverent silence in the chapel, we adore Him. When we make a simple act of faith in His Real Presence, we adore Him. When we place ourselves before Him as empty vessels to be filled with His love, we adore Him.

In our self-centered culture and classic American emphasis on work, we often feel we have to accomplish something during our times of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. We rate our experience by how “good” our prayer was, how heartfelt our devotion was, or how focused we could remain. Yet prayer and contemplation are fundamentally God’s work, in which we are invited to participate.

We need only to give Him the opening, and He will do the rest. By coming to adoration, we are handing Him the key to our hearts, allowing the rays of His love and grace to bathe our souls in the light of His Presence, as the rays of the sun bathe our bodies in light. If we can take the time to pull away from the busyness and distractions of life and just sit at His feet, He will lead us.

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[1]“Adoration,” in Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life Publications, 2000), 13.

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# The "new" Saint Anthony Hymn (NSFC) [at The Accidental Organist]

NSFC: Not Safe For Church. Just in case you were wondering... (there's nothing scandalous or heretical in it, it's just not Mass material!)

*To the tune of Christ be our Light*

Where are my keys? I thought I had them

Now they're not here, and I'm locked out

No-one will be home until tea-time

Help me, St. Anthony...

## **Refrain:**

**Saint Anthony, finder of keys, purses and wallets**

**Saint Anthony, help find our stuff, show us the way**

Where is my phone? Not in my handbag

Don't know the time, I can't call home

Without my phone, my life is chaos

Help me, St. Anthony...

## **Refrain**

Where is my wife? Not where I left her

Asda is huge - where can she be?

Without her here, I'll just buy ice-cream

Help me, St. Anthony...

## Refrain

*Feel free to use as you see fit (for non-commercial ends only ;-)*

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# We Are Not As Strong As We Think We Are [at New Evangelizers]

*“And lead us not into temptation...”*

This may seem like a strange request of Our Father in Heaven. After all, He is not the tempter. Satan is the one who tempts us to damnation. So why do we ask Him to not lead us into temptation.

I think a clarification is necessary here. Liturgically, we use the phrase “lead us not into temptation.” But if you go to your Bible and if it has as a good translation, like the New American Bible, it will say instead “do not subject us to the final test.” (Matt 6:13)

What is this final test?

In all likelihood, the Jewish people of the time expected a series of cataclysms that would befall humanity at the same time as the coming of the Messiah. This appears to be a prayer to be spared such catastrophes. But there is also another way to look at it in keeping with the liturgical translation.

None of us can fully escape temptation in this world. No matter what vice we harbor, there are instigations and opportunities at every turn to give in to these elements of our darker nature. We are sometimes beset on all sides.

You understand that strange phenomenon on Friday’s in Lent when it seems like everyone else is enjoying steak and ribs but you. Or perhaps you struggle with your anger and that co-worker who annoys you cleared their throat for the hundredth time, even though you asked them not to. Or maybe you struggle with chastity even when you go to Church, the summer outfits of the parishioner’s draw your eye and spark unwholesome thoughts.

If you are someone who cannot relate to the above, then this article is not for you. I am a weak, sinful man speaking to other weak and sinful people.

And when we ask God to “Lead us not into temptation” or to “not subject us to the test,” we are also asking God to spare us from temptation.

To be clear, temptation itself is not a sin. Christ Himself was tempted in the desert before He began preaching. We may have unnatural appetites to excess of good things like food and pleasure or appetites to bad things like envy and lust. But the appetite itself is not a sin. You may feel a strong urge towards something you know you should not do. Feeling the urge does not make you sinful, even though Satan whispers in your ear that you are no good because you desire these things. I believe this is the case for those who struggle with pornography. Engaging with pornography is a sin. But when the person struggles against it, even in the struggle they feel dirty and shameful as if they were engaged in the sin already.

Those appetites for sinful things are not the sins themselves. However, that does not mean that they are tolerable or good in the soul. Every effort should be made to remove those appetites. If I struggle with an appetite for gossip, I must cease the sin of gossip. But I must also through inward prayer and mental exercise work to remove the desire for gossip. For many of us, this is the spiritual work of a lifetime and may only be complete in the cleansing fires of Purgatory.

But those bad appetites in the soul can be removed. How do we do it?

Please allow me to paraphrase a story a wise person once told me: There was a young warrior who went to the head of his clan. The young warrior was in turmoil. He told his leader that tried to be virtuous but he would fall into sin. The leader told him that he was in turmoil because inside of the young warrior's spirit were two wolves fighting for control. One wolf was noble, brave, kind, and virtuous. The other wolf was base, cowardly, cruel, and vicious. The young warrior asked his leader which one would win out. The leader said to him, "Whichever one you feed."

Oscar Wilde once flippantly said that the only way to get rid of temptation is to give in to it. He was, of course wrong. His own life story is testimony to this. When we give in to our temptation, they become stronger. The words of Christ echo here when He said "he who commits sin is a slave to sin." (John 8:34) He was not talking about external slavery, but internal slavery. Look at the world and tell me I am wrong. We encourage people to give in lust. Are we less lustful? We encourage people to pursue every material possession they desire? Are we satisfied with our things? Or do these desires simply grow?

So it is clear that we must starve our temptations in order to weaken the chains on our souls. But as we said, temptation is all around. How do we fight these temptations when there is danger around every corner?

That is why we beg Our Father for help. We cannot flee the world. We are called to be part of it, not sheltered away from it. And living in this world does hold great spiritual dangers. So we ask God to help us. This, above all, is an acknowledgement that I am not ready to face temptation on my own. So many of our great stories are filled with heroes who cause great calamities because they think themselves stronger than they actually are. But even the greatest of heroes can fall.

Look at David. He was God's chosen king, a man after God's own heart. But once he gave into temptation towards his lust for Bathsheba, it set him on a path to destruction and ruin. David would have been happier if he avoided the temptation all together.

God does allow temptation to come our way because in resisting temptation we become spiritually stronger. We learn to fight and hopefully become seasoned veterans of spiritual combat. But the moment that we say to ourselves, "I can handle any temptation that comes my way," we are lost. Because we will fail. And that failure is due to the fact that we are not as strong as we think we are.

In the version of the Act of Contrition that I learned as a child, it says that we will "avoid the near occasions of sin." If we know we are going to be tempted in certain places or in certain company, we must make a strategy to change. When I started teaching, I found that I was incredibly prone to gossiping with other teachers at the lunch table. I tried to moderate my behavior, but to no avail. For me, I had to take the extreme path of not eating lunch with any of my colleagues. The fault is not their but mine. I admit, this choice isn't for everyone. But it is what I needed to avoid temptation. Perhaps for you, temptation to envy hits you when you watch *The Real Housewives of East Akron* or whatever. Perhaps you should switch your viewing habits.

Some of you might think this a bit extreme. And perhaps it is. But if I need to starve the wicked appetites of my soul, I must do what is required. Like I said, I am a weak man who is not yet strong in temptation. But Christ can make me strong. Remember Paul said, "In my weakness, I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10) If I think I am strong, then I forget how much I need God to protect me. But if I acknowledge my

weakness, then I call upon the Lord who will fight for me and see me through every temptation.

Because even though I am not as strong as I think I am, God is stronger than me.

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## Where is Home? [at String of Pearls]

Sometimes I wonder if my little String of Pearls, filled with the musings of a grandmother in her late 50's and read by only a handful of folks, has a

*raison d'etre*

on the Internet. "Do I even belong here?" I often ask myself. "Has this blog run its course, become irrelevant?" I've never really been a full-fledged member of the Catholic blogging club, which is mostly populated with young mothers whom I admire so much. The blogosphere is chock-full of way more interesting and entertaining, way younger and hipper (and wow, way

*holier*

) gals than I, most of whom seem to be in the same season of their lives, the season of child-bearing and child-rearing.

My own child-bearing era has become a glorious but hazy memory. It's been years since I last bought a home pregnancy test kit (something they didn't even have when I had my first babies) and excitedly awaited the results--because every other time I'd been so late, another son had been on the way; it's been years since I cried when the tests were negative, because I was embarrassed and disappointed and forced to come to grips with the sad reality that I would never carry another child in my womb.

I wonder if any woman is ever ready to hear that as far as

*that part*

of her life is concerned, she is "done." Even if she thinks her family is "complete," it's a tough thing to accept.

I'm in a new season now, approaching what they call the "golden years." And they are golden, very much so, in their way. My husband and I consider our life these days to be one long date, where we get to spend all of our free time together, focusing on each other, now that we're not running here and there to drop kids off and pick them up, now that we don't have a houseful of boys whose demands need to be met.

But my top "love languages" (which I only learned about after my sons got married and my daughters-in-law asked me what mine were) are

*quality time together*

and

*acts of service*

. I live for spending time with my family, my favorite people on earth. And I love to do things for them. But when you are not physically near your loved ones, it's kind of tough to speak these languages as often

as you'd like. The nest we've made here in NH over the course of more than a quarter of a century, the home where we raised our sons, is now officially empty. Our four oldest boys have started families of their own and live miles from home, and not long after our baby graduated from college last May, his new career took him even farther away from us than any of his brothers.

So our beautiful Colonial house in NH, a nest that we spent years feathering, rarely has anyone in it these days--and that includes my husband and myself. Between our time spent in NY fixing up Oyster Haven (our VRBO house on Lake Champlain) and our travels to visit with our kids and grandkids, we never seem to be there for more than a few days at a time anymore.



My husband and I are coming to a bit of a crossroad in our lives, one that I should have seen coming many years ago but somehow didn't. We are beginning to ask ourselves where we belong in the world, to ask ourselves, "Where is 'home'?" Is it here in NH, in the house we bought at Christmastime in 1989 and where we raised our five boys? Or is it at the idyllic house on the lake that we bought just last year, in the area where we met and our story began?



A few days ago when I drove from NH to our Oyster Haven house (to meet with the cleaning staff who will take care of the turnover between renters), I had plenty of time to think about things. I was in the car for about four-and-a-half hours, and I was driving solo (since my husband was off working a trip); so as I said...gobs of time to think. A lot of you probably sing at the top of your lungs in the car (I know I do--badly!); but do you also cry in the car? I find that from time to time, when I'm all by myself on the open road, a good old-fashioned therapeutic cry is in order. I'm the luckiest person in the world, with a life filled with more blessings than any flawed human being such as myself could possibly deserve. So what's there to cry about, you ask?

I guess it's just that sometimes, I feel like I have no home. Or too many homes. It's confusing, and sometimes, it makes me feel a bit

verklemt

. I know I'm not supposed to get emotionally attached to the lake house, because we're going to have to rent it out to afford it, and that means we're going to have to let other people stay there. But every time my husband and I spend a few days at Oyster Haven getting work done, it begins to feel like home. Then we drive back to NH, and I feel I'm home again. My loyalties have become divided, and that's tough for me. It's hard to know what's right for us, at this point in our lives.

This song I was listening to in the car, by an Irish band called The Script, didn't help either, as far as the crying went.

You see, I've always been a nester, and I've always been able to make even our most humble abodes feel like home. When we first got married and my husband was in Navy flight training, we lived in an apartment in Corpus Christi, TX for a short spell; then in an apartment in Beeville, TX for an even shorter spell, until we got into base housing and moved into a duplex where we stayed for a few years, and where our firstborn lived the first two months of his life; then in a brand new ranch--the first house we ever bought--in Jacksonville, FL, where sons #2, #3, and #4 joined the family; then in a rented ranch house in a Chicago suburb, when my husband began his airline career; then in a rental home--a small Cape Cod--in NH, where we spent a year. And finally, we ended up in our "forever home," our beloved Colonial, only the second house we've ever owned since we became man and wife in 1980. Over the years we lived here, I really didn't look ahead to the day when the boys would all be grown and gone, when they might not live a stone's throw from us. So I never really thought about the possibility that we wouldn't always be here.

Sometimes our NH home, so empty and quiet now, makes me feel sad, a feeling that confuses me. Because it's always been a happy house. It's the only home our youngest son has ever known, and he wrote a deeply moving "fictional" piece about it for a 9th grade English project (which I blogged about in 2011, if you'd like to read

[the full post](#)

). Here is an excerpt from that project, about a family he called the O'Callaghans but who were really the Pearls:

...

*To common passers-by, it is just an ordinary house at the end of some street. And yes, like any home, it is where I sleep, it is where I eat, and it is where I live. But to me, it is so much more than just an inn or a breakfast nook. It is a familiar face that says, "Hello there! How was your trip?" after I've traveled long distances; a life-long friend that is always there when I don't know where else to go. It is my playground, my home field advantage for all my backyard football games; where our family-famous Wiffle Ball homerun derbies are held. It is my place of study; where I have been schooled for the past five years and still get schooled. It is where I learned about life, about the One who made me, and the One who sacrificed Himself for us. This is where the seven O'Callaghans live. And although there are nicer houses on our street, our house is a hidden gem, stowed away from the rest of the world. It is everything I want out of a house. Everything I need out of a home*

That kid...

Our youngest son's senior year of college, we had to leave NH in early January to go down to VA to begin our four-and-a-half-month stint as nannies to our sweet little grandson G-Man. Knowing how much of a homebody our baby had always been, I asked him if it was okay for him to cut his time in NH--his last Christmas break time--short and join us at his older brother's house until he had to go back to Notre Dame for his final semester. I was all apologetic, but he looked at me and assured me it was no problem. He said, "Mom, wherever you guys are, that's home."

I'll say it again: that kid...

When my husband got back from his trip, I was filling him in about my tear-filled drive to NY, listening to The Script and wondering if that song had some kind of hidden meaning that God wanted me to hear. I talked about how much I loved our NH house, but wondered if we're meant to sell it and settle in NY, to fulfill a lifelong dream of living on the lake. I asked him how we were supposed to know where we belonged. His answer was, "I'm always happy when I'm with you. Whether it's here, or in NY, or at one of our kids' houses. As long as we're together, I'm happy." Hmmm....it's obvious where our baby gets his heart from.

So in spite of how happy we've been at our home in NH, I'm also beginning to realize that if we decide it doesn't make sense for us anymore, that's okay. The bottom line is that wherever we are--just the two of us together, or with our boys and our daughters-in-law and our grandchildren--

*that place*

is home. It could be MI or VA, or even Germany, but wherever we are together, that's our home.



Home is not walls and a roof; home is the people you love. Lots of things will change in the course of your life, but not that. Maybe that's the little bit 'o wisdom this old grammy blogger has to offer. So maybe I'll stick around a while here after all, if for no other reason than to assure all the young moms out there who might stop by this blog that there will still be life after your babies have flown from the nest. And it

*will*

be golden.

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# **Eroticization and the unique developmental process of human persons [at In the Breaking of the Bread]**

*(This is an edit of a previous post from January 14, 2014 which was to be continued but was interrupted. Here this series of reflections is re-framed with a focus on our unique developmental process as human beings and the role of the process of eroticization in our development and growth as persons. Fr. Gilles Surprenant)*

## **We human beings are unique in our sexuality and in many other ways**

It is safe to say that sexuality, though it is only one of many dimensions in the life of human beings, occupies much more place in the lives of human persons than with any other living creatures that we know to exist.

This is without any doubt due to our unique self-awareness, our capacity and desire for self-reflection and self-understanding, which uniquely equips us for complex forms of interaction with our fellow human beings, and add to that our capacity to make deliberate choices with regards to our relationships with others of our kind, our capacity for deep interiority and spirituality and to enter into a genuine relationship with God, and perhaps most precious of all, our freedom of will, however limited or compromised we may feel our free will to be at any given time.

We human beings are flawed creatures, but to the extent that we are aware of our flaws, then to that extent we are able to desire to improve and to make efforts to do so. However, to the extent that we are in denial of our flaws or simply ignorant of them, then to that extent do we represent a danger to ourselves as well as to others, especially those who are in any way weak, fragile, or in any way vulnerable or somehow incapable of standing their ground in the face of encounter with or intrusion from others.

## **We find a broad spectrum on the human landscape**

When we consider the broad range of persons within the spectrum of human beings we can observe at the near end persons manifesting an exquisite fine tuning of sensibilities to the reality and feelings of others combined with deep respect for the life conditions and for the free will of others. Such people have a rich diversity of relationship to offer anyone interested and willing to engage in conversation and other activities with them.

At the far end of the spectrum we sadly find human beings that seem not to resemble much that could be considered human. They seem totally absorbed by their own impulses and manifest little of anything resembling conscience, judgement, awareness of others as distinct human persons, or self-restraint.

Women of this sort employ any strategies to get from others whatever it is that they seek: sexual activity, money, status, or any number of marks of attention or affection, or simply to exercise control over others. Men of this sort rather resemble dangerous predators in the animal kingdom, in their insatiable appetite to satisfy their impulses they are ever ready to pounce on the weak and unsuspecting and suck out of them every drop of sense satisfaction that they can get.

Sociopaths are human individuals who have no sense of others as distinct human beings with their own value, feelings, dignity, and autonomy of will, such that society perceives them as hostile towards society, towards other human beings, and therefore dangerous.

Psychopaths are human individuals who are seriously mentally unstable and whose speech and behaviors are unpredictable, and hence, also dangerous. Male sexual offenders, who use others for their own sexual satisfaction, might resemble a large male organ on wheels running out of control like a vehicle careening down a mountain road without brakes. All the faculties that normally distinguish a human being from other primates and individuals in the animal kingdom are co-opted and re-wired to serve the male organ and all its impulse drives towards satisfaction, however ephemeral such satisfaction may be.

In between these two extremes on the human spectrum between personality development at one end and personality disorder at the other end we find a full range of variations in human development for any given individual: self-awareness, self-possession, self-understanding, self-restraint, self-governance, self-mastery, maturity, autonomy, responsibility, religiosity, faith, and altruism...

In this first part on "Eroticization and the unique developmental process of human persons" let us begin with a consideration of what seems most urgent, that is, all that is wrong with human sexuality such as sexual abuse and sexual violence towards others.

## **Sexual abuse is a crime against humanity**

The sexual exploitation and abuse of one human being by another is a crime against humanity, a crime against the person itself, because it is a violation of who that person is in their very identity as a human being by way of their sexual dimension . Our sexuality is an integral facet of our distinctiveness and who we are as human persons. We are living beings with a capacity to not only relate to others and to care for them but also to do so in a great variety of distinct ways, with degrees of intimacy and expression appropriate to our age, gender, the nature of the relationship, and what it is that we want to express or give; all of which is deeply tied into our freedom as individuals and our capacity for meaning and responsibility. With human beings, sexuality is not a mere function of a brute instinct genetically ordered towards the continuation of the species.

Sexual and other forms of abuse are particularly heinous when committed against children and other fragile, vulnerable, or innocent beings. They become doubly tragic when those perpetrating the abuse

were first of all victims themselves and as a result the distorted product of having in their past suffered sexual or other forms of abuse, often at an early and deeply impressionable age.

One benefit, admittedly an incalculably costly one, of the current scandal of sexual abuse of children and other innocent and vulnerable people is that the great wall of taboo and silence has begun to crumble. By virtue of the actions that have been courageously taken by victims, those who support them, and those individuals and agencies who represent them, but also by virtue of church leaders who have made manifest their willingness to receive complaints and exercise responsible action in response to them, we can finally observe that social taboos are shattering and it is becoming more possible to talk of these things openly and therefore to begin to work together towards solutions and better safeguards. Although the existence of abuse is tragic and sad, increasingly its victims are willing to courageously come forward to denounce what was done to them and bring this terrible crime to public awareness and to the attention of authorities.

Only a few decades ago our society was so deeply locked in by intense taboos that there seemed to be a "conspiracy of silence" around any hints or signs of the possibility of sexual or other forms of abuse. It was as if a whole society was trapped in a stage of denial, with the result that the full weight of responsibility for a victim's abuse fell on the shoulders of the victim himself or herself. It was not out of cruelty or ill will that people and those in authority acted this way for the most part, but rather more out of fear of the unknown, fear of supporting a false accusation, and fear of discovering that such horrible things are actually happening to people. Even mothers seemed incapable or unwilling to believe their own children when they complained of having suffered unmentionable acts damaging their innocence. Whatever the reasons, denial just was.

It was as if people individually, families, social institutions, and society as a whole could simply not bear even the remote possibility that sexual or other forms of abuse could be happening in their own intimate circle, in their society which they considered "enlightened", or in their church they believed to be "Christian". It was not yet the age of "reality therapy" or "reality TV" or talk shows. Thankfully we have passed into another season of human society, one in which we are more willing to admit to ourselves the truth and to deal justly and fairly with the reality, whatever that might be in any given situation.

## **The complex nature of the human person and sexuality**

The fundamental and horrible truth of the matter is that human nature, including our sexuality, has been weakened, damaged, tainted since the dawn of human history. The abominable practices and the pain and suffering engendered by misuse of human sexuality is primarily what has caused - almost across the board worldwide - religious leaders to condemn sexual infidelity and all forms of unusual sexual practices as evil or at least to be avoided if not condemned.

Human history, literature, and culture chronicles the many ways in which human beings cause others to suffer whenever they use their sexuality as a way of taking pleasure, often at the expense of others. While men and women differ by design in their naturally occurring genders - with males more intrusive and females more inclusive - sexual predators can and do exist among members of both genders, even if they admittedly can appear and operate very differently with different degrees of destructiveness in the

consequences and aftermath of their acts of deception, seduction, manipulation, and sexual exploitation.

Particularly in our day there is an increasingly universal acceptance that sexual expression and even experimentation are acceptable providing they take place among consenting adults. Yet, increasingly there are those bold and aggressive enough to contend that such sexual activity and experimentation is even acceptable by adults to children and youth, even without consent. These opinions and ideological positions do not take into account the human developmental process nor the subsidiary process of eroticization, nor the importance of free and informed consent and the minimal autonomy that comes with adulthood.

If we are ever to understand what is going on, how the trends in human thought, feeling, conviction, and practice are constantly evolving - and often in ways that bode ill for the common good - we need to have a closer look at the nature of the human person and of our sexual dimension in a dynamic way that makes provision for and takes into account our developmental process and the unique experience and awareness of individual persons.

If sex were not pleasurable, then there would be little need for this dialogue because few would engage in sexual activity. It is because of the pleasure associated with sex and sexual feelings that the human impulse to engage in it is so strong. Sexual pleasure is part of the design of the human person and is directly related to human beings' fertility and power of reproduction. Unlike most other creatures in the animal kingdom human beings enjoy self-awareness, free will, awareness of others as other, and so can and do engage in sexual activity with or without the intention of reproducing, with or without varying degrees of awareness of and of attention to the experience and well being of the other.

### **Sex is good, yes, but not in every instance**

Even reluctant or prudish religious authorities have traditionally granted that sex was good with the belief that it was designed and created by God, but only for the transmission of life and the survival of the species. They could not accept that sexual pleasure was good in and of itself, but rather that humanity's capacity for that pleasure had irremediably been corrupted and could never be regained. Paradise and human innocence were lost forever. Christians with a more complete understanding of human nature appreciate that human sexuality is perfectly designed for human couples when engaged in by one woman with one man for life and that the power of sex by design binds them together, activates their combined fertility, allows them to mutually give pleasure and comfort to each other, and over time can evolve and grow with them and their relationship. As they share their lives together, grow as a couple, and develop their family, their sexual union intensifies their mutual attachment, fidelity, and solicitude, that is, their disposition and motivation to look out for the other and to deliberately put the other's interests first, ahead of their own.

### [Pope John Paul II](#)

, the Bishop of Rome from October 16, 1978 to April 2, 2005 was of this view and went much further and deeper in his development of thought on what he called the "

## [theology of the body](#)

", which emerged over time from the philosophical reflection he engaged in from his youth on human meaning, freedom, love, and the powers of "the acting person". He held the view that human beings give meaning to their lives by their deliberate choices and that the highest meaning comes in the freedom to make of oneself a total gift to the other. He called this the "law of the gift".

## [His work](#)

continues to be promoted all over the world for the common good.

## **Why do people pervert sex into violence?**

Human sexuality is deeply tied into the nature of the human person, our freedom, our capacity for giving meaning to our life, and our capacity to be open to and care for the other. Sexual abuse is particularly evil because the aggressor "takes" sexual pleasure at the expense of the pain and trauma caused by the violation of the dignity and integrity of the one who is in this way victimized. Even when the sexual violation causes minimal harm, the act of force against the other's will remains a traumatic and damaging experience.

Why do people then perpetrate such violence one upon another? The answer can only be found in the toxic mixture of the beauty, goodness, attractiveness, power, high purpose, and desirability of our "sexual powers" on the one hand, and the distorted or underdeveloped humanity of the perpetrator on the other hand. By analogy we understand that a hammer in the hand of a sculptor like Michelangelo can be instrumental in creating such inspiring sculpture as the Pieta, but in the hand of a vandal can destroy a thing of beauty, or wound or kill living things and even people. In addition, each destructive act further damages the perpetrator.

## **The beauty and power of human sexuality**

So it is with our human sexuality, which can be seen as a capacity for tenderness. Human beings don't simply have sexuality, but we are sexual beings. Our sexuality informs, colors, and is informed by our whole being at every level. Comforting a child engages our human sexuality, our capacity for tenderness, but in a healthy person does not generally involve sexual arousal or pleasure. These tend not to activate without specific stimulation, unlike other functions which operate automatically. As a human being develops normally, a wide and extensive variety of meaningful experiences, sensations, and gestures enrich each person's capacity and skill in expressing tenderness in ways appropriate to each relationship and in communicating with others in exchanges that can be either mutually enriching or mutually harmful, damaging, and destructive.

Our sexuality can be considered healthy when we have effective safeguards allowing us to distinguish

different types of relationships. Clear distinctions and understanding give us freedom to express a wide range of tenderness - actively in giving and passively in receiving - without any confusion from sexual arousal. The appropriateness, meaning, and significance of sexual expression from a casual glance or tone of voice all the way to the intimacy of the marriage bed takes place in a continuum defined and circumscribed by the nature of each relationship, time, circumstance, and the meaning we wish to give it. In all its manifestations human sexuality can be considered most noble when it seeks and effectively accomplishes the good of the other.

Genital sexuality adds to the expression of tenderness a rich universe of meanings specific to the union of a man and a woman committed to each other for life and the outcome of their sexual fertility the transmission of life itself by the procreation and education of children. The intensity of the sexual union of a married couple strengthens them to face their many challenges and duties as parents and is the fire at the heart of the family. Sexual activity outside of a woman / man couple with a mutual commitment for life sets aside the procreative function, the stability of a life commitment, or other dimensions which have repercussions on those engaging in sexual expression and those affected by it, such as the offspring and other circles around them.

In our day both men and women who understand themselves to have same sex attraction have sought to normalize sexual activity between two persons of the same gender. Any sexual expression between two persons of the same gender must necessarily stretch the imagination and have recourse to means that in the end can only simulate the loving union of a man and woman. In the end such simulations remain a parody of what nature has established as the standard and can only generate fertility through artificial manipulation.

Still, there is no denying the human impulse to love and be loved, to found a family or household, and to engage in the rearing of children. The "gay lobby" has in various places obtained the right to engage in a civil same gender union and same sex couples do acquire children by artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogate pregnancy, or simply through adoption, and do their best to perform the full range of tasks needed as parenting by human children. However, the act of fertilization bringing each new human life into existence can only be an act of loving union of the parents when these are a mother and father joined together.

There is also no denying that our most deeply rooted experience and imagery of couple love remains one man and one woman who commit themselves to each other for life in order to found a family. They have between them all that they need through their own fertility to conceive and rear their own children. In addition, in this traditional model of marriage and the family, the children are not denied their right to have a parent of each gender for their optimal formation and development through their various stages of formation: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. There is apparently embedded in the human psyche a need to have a parent "of each kind". This innate felt need goes way beyond a child simply comparing itself and its home situation to that of other kids at school, which merely mirrors and accentuates an innate need.

**Human sexual development requires mentoring**

On considering human nature, it is easily observable that human beings don't just fall into a perfect experience and sexual life stance, but that this requires careful upbringing, learning, mentoring, integrating, and living. We also need to learn to seek and give forgiveness when our expressions of tenderness and sexual union are clumsy or selfish and manipulate, take, and hurt rather than serve, give, and care. When our sexuality and capacity for tenderness are poorly formed, mistakenly informed, or incompletely matured, all kinds of harm can be done on both parts in the missteps, accidents, manipulations, and misunderstandings that occur.

We can see this in every generation and just about in every life. Married couples must invest selfless effort to develop their sexuality so that it becomes a mutual venture that enhances their union and bears good fruit for others around them beginning with their family. The more selflessly parents live their sexuality as a couple, the more benefits their children receive. They develop a healthier sexual outlook from the mentoring they receive.

### **Wandering away from the original design**

Other human couple forms have the disadvantage of not having the differentiation and complementarity that are inherent in the basic man-woman couple. This natural difference seems to be a fundamental component in the permanence and stability of being committed to each other for life, and the deepening of their relationship that comes from long term fidelity and exclusivity. In embracing the design in the male / female couple model human beings discover a unique form of freedom that comes from sharing a deep personal relationship with their Creator God as the true and existential source of their love, fidelity, and fertility. When fertility is taken apart from its power to give pleasure and unite, one consequence in our times is that fertility is regarded as a curse or threat and medicated as a disease. In this scenario now playing out it is easy to understand how sexuality can become an arena of disagreement and unpleasantness if not of selfish manipulation and abuse.

When children are brought into the world in a family where at its center the parent couple do not live their sexuality with the purest of motives and the clarity and freedom of unselfish love, one can begin to understand how all kinds of misunderstandings, manipulation, hurts, selfishness, and deviations can occur. It is the tragic truth that it is most often and primarily in the family that children are violated and abused in various ways, including sexually, where parents or other adults take advantage of children precisely because they cannot assert themselves and are in their innocence most vulnerable and easy to manipulate and exploit.

Once sexuality is in this way perverted in the young, they struggle for their whole lives attempting to regain what was ripped away from them, ever desiring to recover their original innocence and come to live a more wholesome sexuality in accord with our fundamental design for happiness and togetherness. Those who are fortunate are able to find help and gradually sanitize or make healthier their sexuality, but others become inclined to reproduce in their own lives the abuse and perversions of sexual tenderness that marked them in their innocent years and inflict it upon others. It is much like the children of alcoholics who tend to gravitate towards another alcoholic when they are seeking out a spouse or life partner simply because that is the type of human personality with which they became familiar while growing up. No matter how twisted and hurtful a parent might be, the child's need for love is so dependent and total that it

even soaks up drop by drop what love may exist, however perverted, in the most depraved of parents.

## **Exquisitely sensitive spouses or dangerous rapists**

It is the very same raw material of human sexual personality that begins at conception and develops through gestation, birth, infancy, childhood, youth, and adulthood. Why, then, do some become exquisitely sensitive and loving spouses, some struggle with clumsy attempts to please, others have trouble setting aside their own desires and come across as "taking" rather than "giving", and still others become predators: manipulators, violators, rapists, pedophiles, ephebophiles, in short, dangerous offenders and monsters?

It is impossible to understand these differences outside of a "developmental model" of the human person as a sexual human being in contrast to a human being who simply happens to have sexual organs. A human being is not simply born to just exist and be the way it is, unchanging, to continue unchanged in the manner of a stone. On the contrary, a human being is a single living entity that grows until it stops growing and dies. All of a human being's experiences accumulate and interact with all the others throughout its developmental stages and then continues to do so throughout its entire life cycle. You cannot examine or understand a person's sexuality without striving to understand the entire person, at all of its levels and facets, because everything within them is interrelated. You "pull" on one aspect and the whole fabric is pulled along.

## **Human development is a long and complicated process**

Before the advent of discoveries and advancement in our understanding of the human person, it was generally thought - and many people have not caught up with the social sciences and still think - that a person is "born that way", the way they are, and that they cannot change. Advances in scientific observation, analysis, theorizing, and experimentation have revealed that the living entity called a human being is a physical and psychic organism with a wide and complex range of emotive experience as well as expression, and in addition has a more mysterious spiritual dimension that is more difficult to observe and quantify.

The human being begins its development with the genetic material it "receives" from its mother and father and from the moment of conception also absorbs untold billions of "impressions" from both the mother and the father during gestation in the womb and then continues to take in untold quantities of "impressions" from its parents, other people, other living things, and everything else that exists all around it, as well as its own inner processes, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, which in turn are also very complex.

Each individual has received from its genetic material certain "predispositions" to a variety of conditions, inclinations, sensitivities, and sensibilities. In almost every instance of identical twins, there are marked

differences in temperament, sensitivity, and so many other factors of personality that cannot be explained any other way. As time passes and it takes in quantities of sensations and experiences, the individual undergoes the ongoing cumulative effect of all that it is taking in, its ongoing growth, and a developing and constantly operating process of "updating" or "rebooting" for understanding and interpretation, judgement and orientation, choice and integration, responsibility and freedom. Sensations, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, interpretations, awareness, feelings, moral judgements, free choices, the acceptance of responsibility and responsibilities, freedom to change, deliberate commitments, ongoing learning, admission of fault, and efforts to improve are only some of the multiple facets and operations taking place more or less simultaneously that taken together are in a continuous way formative of the human person. There is more going on within each human person than the person itself can keep track of or than any computer could compute.

## **Human development - becoming a person**

In the social sciences it is now generally accepted that the human being is a dependent entity from the moment of its conception until it reaches maturity. We could say that every human being receives from conception all the necessary "raw material" to become human and, as he or she develops, must accept to participate in its own formation and development while accepting the formation and caring of others, and in turn, learn to care for others. One becomes a mature adult, with at least the essential elements and abilities of an adult, after having experienced 8 developmental stages from conception until around twenty-five: fetus, body identity, identity of the doer, individual identity, psychosexual identity, psychosocial identity, identity of the self, and early adult. The adult is the human being who has sufficiently developed to now be able to take care of itself and survive, but also to take care of others independently of whether there is much in return.

We more easily recognize these stages as gestation, infancy (0-1), toddler (1-2 1/2), budding individual (2 1/2 - 3), first parental love or Oedipus Complex i.e. nightmare stage (3-6), the "flocking" by gender stage (6-12), teen age (12-18), and "getting a life" (18-25). Along the way, each person develops "preferences" of sensation, outlook, expression, reaction, and action. During the first year of life after birth, some prefer to be more "captative" / active / grabbing, while others prefer to be more "receptive" / passive / receiving. This preference generalizes in everything and gives each personality its particular inclination. The other way remains possible but won't come naturally and will always require more effort.

During the "potty training" stage, some become more "retentive" and hold things in, hold onto things; while others become more "eliminative" and release things, let them go more easily. This generalizes to every aspect of life from personal hygiene to money to generosity of time and spirit. Again, as in the previous stage, the other way remains possible but won't come naturally and will always require more effort.

From the stage where children "fall in love" with their opposite gender parent (3-6), some males befriend their "intrusive" mode (generally experienced as wanting to be like Daddy) - which is inscribed in the very design of their body - and let it become their natural way of being manly in the world. Some - either because they have been harmed by extreme forms of male intrusiveness or simply lacked an available or admirable model - prefer the female "inclusive" mode (they prefer to be like Mommy or like a very

inclusive father). As a result being intrusive takes more effort and energy every time they need to employ that mode, particularly if the mother was intrusive in a way that felt angry or controlling or threatening. If the mother did not esteem or respect the father, he would appear less admirable in the boy's eyes, which would make it more difficult for him to identify with his father's maleness or male mode.

During that same stage when little girls "fall in love" with their Daddy, some females befriend their "inclusive" mode (generally experienced as wanting to be like Mommy) - which is inscribed in the very design of their body and let it become their natural way of being womanly in the world. Some - either because they have been harmed by extreme forms of female inclusiveness or simply lacked an available model - prefer the male "intrusive" mode (they prefer to be like Daddy or like a very intrusive mother). As a result being inclusive takes more effort and energy every time they need to employ that mode, particularly if the father was inclusive in a way that seemed weak or withdrawing, or humiliating. If the father did not esteem or respect the mother, she would appear less admirable in the girl's eyes, which would make it more difficult for her to identify with her mother's femaleness or female mode.

In their teenage years, boys and girls try out their newly discovered personal preferences and abilities and find that they are energized when they are with others and may become increasingly extroverted, or they may find that being with others is more draining than energizing, so that they may become more introverted. These dispositions may also tend to vary in accord with the size of the group and their familiarity with the others and degree of acceptance by the others; as well as their own internal dynamics as they experience what energizes or drains them emotionally. Some will be more inclined to be leaders and others followers and still others, either role depending on the circumstances and the others involved.

### **Most of us have some "wrinkles" in our development**

Social scientists, philosophers, theologians, varied other professionals, and people in other walks of life will define what is a human person from a variety of viewpoints and a wide range of parameters. What does it take to become fully human? If an individual gets stuck in the first stage of life, infancy, when it was the center of the universe and the mother was still felt to be part of its own body, then as an apparent adult, this individual turns out to behave so selfishly with such little conscience that we call them sociopath - without awareness of others as having a life of their own - or psychopaths - so intent on using others for their own ends that they are actually dangerous to life and limb. This is the case of those who in the face of the prospect of being abandoned will kill their spouse, children, and finally themselves, because they suffocate emotionally at the very thought of being abandoned. They are psychologically like the infant that whimpers, then cries, then screams, then begins to choke when its primary care giver is out of sight and no longer responds.

Those who get "stuck" at the potty training stage may appear as extremely retentive or miserly or up tight, on the one hand, or on the other hand eliminative or spendthrift or irresponsibly carefree. Such an individual may be developmentally incapable of caring for themselves or for others - unable to put out what it takes to care for themselves or for others or unable to conserve what resources or time or energy that living life fully and caring for others takes.

Those who get stuck at stage four - 2 1/2 to 3 - may never have become an "individual" in their own right,

either because they became so merged with a needy parent or parents that, discouraged from paying attention to their own feelings and needs, they became paralyzed, incapable, or incompetent as an individual human person. Such an individual, perennially deprived of individuality or personal identity, would be hard pressed to properly care for others, or for that matter valuing and caring for their own life, and as a result being ever depleted for lack of self care. If they manage to heroically care for others, it would then be at extreme cost to themselves, being unable to distinguish differences in priority among the needs and wants of others and their own needs and wants, unable to reconcile the needs of others and their own.

Those who experience difficulties in befriending their own gender come to such difficulties from any number of factors: the degree or lack of masculinity of their father, absence of a father, frightening or humiliating distortion of a father figure, overly authoritative or controlling father, or unsteady, unstable character of their father; the degree or lack of femininity of their mother, absence of a mother, frightening or humiliating distortion of a mother figure, overly controlling or suffocating mother, or volatile, unreliable character of their mother; which factors can be exacerbated by one or several occurrences of one or more forms of abuse: emotional, physical, psychological, sexual; or deprivations that are normally associated with social instability, poverty, famine, homelessness, and violence such as war, unemployment, racial or other forms of negative discrimination, religious or other forms of persecution, and so on.

Healthy, impoverished, or damaged development at any of these earlier life stages has cumulative effects when the individual enters into the subsequent more social stages of human development, which in turn can accentuate or open up delays in development of various facets of the emerging human person. Childhood and teenage bullying, social pressures to conform and even to perform anti-social or criminal acts, neglect or abandonment by significant adults, extreme social upheaval and countless other factors can enhance, hold back, or demolish an individual's human development up to that point in their young lives.

The initial result when the individual "comes of age" and is recognized as "an adult" will be a human individual that is capable of a minimum of self care, awareness of others as independent individuals with their own value and right to exist, ability to live and act in the world and society, and ability to assume the rights and duties of a citizen and member of society. For many, this initial plateau or goal is delayed until later as they struggle to survive, to help their family or basic group to survive, all the while trying to welcome the challenges and events of life as opportunities to continue to grow and to develop into fully functional human persons.

When we stop to consider all the "accidents" that impinge on the young impressionable and developing lives of children and youth, it is astounding that so many people develop as well as they do and become fairly well intentioned and functioning human beings. It appears that the human being has more innate resilience than one would at first expect, given our simultaneously high degree of fragility. In part two we will examine more closely the unique process of eroticization and its huge impact in the development of the human person.

...to be continued....



## Fighting Dragons, Inside and Out [at Nisi Dominus]

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6: 9 -11)



Many years ago the high school I attended was inviting art students to decorate ceiling tiles in the school with their work. My sister, who was not devout but knew a good image when she saw one, wanted to do a painting modelled on a medieval depiction of St. George slaying the Dragon by Carlo Crivelli. The school's principal vetoed her proposed project, however, on the grounds that the not-terribly-bloody depiction of heroic dracocide was "too violent". My sister (along with many of the rest of us) was amazed that the principal would object to what was actually a symbolic representation of Good defeating Evil.

This old incident came back to mind last Saturday, which was the feast of St. George. I actually had a blog post planned to commemorate the Saint's Day, but circumstances prevented me from actually writing it. It seems that no good thought is wasted, however, because every day since I seem to come across something that brings that image back to mind.

For one there's the Washington Post report [[HERE](#)] that Indian guru and peace advocate Sri Sri Ravi Shankar recently tried to engage the Islamist terror group ISIS in a dialogue:

"I tried to initiate peace talks with the ISIS recently but they sent me a photograph of a beheaded body of a man . . . Thus, my effort for a peace dialogue with the ISIS ended."

The advocate for meditation and harmony offered this frank conclusion: "I think the ISIS does not want any peace talks. Hence, they should be dealt with militarily."

This man who has dedicated his life to spreading “meditation and harmony” can see (unlike my old high school principal) that not all violence is alike, and that sometimes there are dragons in the world that, for the sake of peace and justice, require slaying. To destroy such a monster actually furthers the cause of peace.

I am also thinking of the case of Michael Voris. Voris is the creator and public face of [ChurchMilitant.com](http://ChurchMilitant.com), and an ardent (although at times, perhaps, a little too strident) defender of Catholic Orthodoxy. Over this past weekend he revealed that earlier in his life, during a period which he has previously described as “horribly sinful”, he was in fact engaged in a promiscuous homosexual lifestyle “over a prolonged period of time”. He chose to reveal these personal details because, he said, somebody with the Archdiocese of New York was preparing to release information about his prior misdeeds in an effort to damage his reputation.



Now, not everybody is a fan of Michael Voris. Even some who agree that he is indeed engaging Real Dragons Out In The World find his style too abrasive and his manner to be sometimes uncharitable. The past week’s revelations may provide a little humanizing context for his *modus operandi*, and , in which he discusses his past sins, but uses them as a prelude to a celebration of Christ’s love and mercy, is very moving. Voris’ story also serves as a reminder that before we can engage any dragons out there, we must first prevail over those inside of us. As the old Latin motto says, vincit qui se vincit (“he conquers who conquers himself”). We may not all contain within us the same dragons, or dragons as tenacious, as the ones that Michael Voris had to overcome, but we all need to do battle with disordered desires and sinful inclinations if we are to become the people whom God wants us to be (that is, saints). We can only find victory in that struggle, of course, with the help of God’s Grace.

This last point, I have long suspected, is the real reason why my old high school principal refused to allow a painting of St. George and the Dragon. It wasn’t that he couldn’t see the symbolism, it was that the symbolism was all too apparent. Even three-and-a-half decades ago the image of a Catholic Saint killing the embodiment of evil was too controversial for a public high school. In the interim saints have only become less fashionable, and dragons more so. Fortunately, Christ has given us the Gospel, his Church, and the Sacraments, so that we might be armed as St. George was armed to confront dragons, both outside and in.

# My Catholic Homebirth [at Blossoming Joy]

1:25 am

My water broke gently during a contraction and I knew that I would need the Chief with me. I felt the baby drop and recognized that feeling... It wouldn't be long now. A midwife asked my husband to make sure the fluid was clear. It was.

My husband didn't leave my side after that point and as I leaned into his arms and rocked, I couldn't help but think that we were dancing our son into the world.

And he prayed. He prayed Hail Mary's and he prayed for protection. He prayed when I couldn't and when I did call out to Jesus, he joined in with me and it was, in many ways, like singing in one voice to God. The meaning of our marriage vows in those moments of suffering love was illuminated... I'm not sure I can put words to that kind of intimacy and joy.

*(I don't recall the picture above being taken. It must have been close to birth since that is when others entered the room. It is blurry and dark and barely visible and that is the way I prefer it. This was not a moment for the world but a moment of intense privacy and loving focus. But my daughter loves this picture and encouraged me to share. And I think it shows well how that one blessed candle was sufficient for the moment.)*

## TRANSITION

In the meantime, the midwives waited downstairs. As the baby came closer to birth, my sounds began to change. I knew that, being good midwives, they would hear and know when to come. I laughed to myself a little at the time... thinking about my groanings as a birthy way of communicating with the women downstairs. Like bird calls or something. And they were listening and moving; first downstairs, then up to the kitchen, then to the base of the stairs leading to my room.

I felt those panicky feelings that come with transition. I wanted to squeal but instead I focused on dropping my voice low and thinking only of the baby. There was no way around this moment. It is always a rather terrible moment when control slips away and is wholly replaced by a need to surrender to pain... but it was almost over.

The difference between my earlier births and later births is that the pain took over every part of me, even my mind. Like a white hot blanket. In my more recent births, I have learned how to pay attention a bit more and to work with my body instead of raging against it. Still gotta go through it... but that shift in mindset makes all the difference.

As we moved through transition, I got on my hands and knees on the bed. The Chief stayed by my side, supporting, and I felt the baby descend. I have only ever pushed while on my back or on my side at the hospital but made a conscious decision to change that at home. Laying down was how I coped in the hospital but I didn't just want to cope... *I wanted to thrive*. The books all said that standing, squatting, or hands and knees were better and faster and less painful. And I wanted to spend as little time in transition as possible.

The books were right, I think. Everything opened quickly but gently.

"He's coming."

And suddenly, the midwives were there...

quietly, steadily, as my baby crowned.

1:52

## BIRTH

His head was delivered with one push and his body followed right after. And just like I had dreamed, he was born in the relative silence and darkness of the night, with only those there who belonged. They handed him to me immediately, and our family was changed again forever.

It had been approximately 2-3 hours since I first "knew" that it was birth day. It was the quick labor and birth that I knew I would have. It was the gentle and joyful birth that I knew I *could* have. Thank God it was over. Thank God he was here. Thank God for the peace, for the quiet, for the joy, for the birthday.

## RECOVERY

After they gave the baby to me, I held him while we waited for the cord to stop pulsing and he received all the blood that rightfully belonged to him. I held him and nursed him while we waited for the placenta. No one pulled or tugged to make it go faster. There was no excess bleeding. No tearing. And we rested.

The midwives retired downstairs to give us time to be alone and bond before they came in to check on the baby again. I was helped to the bathroom to clean up a little while the bed was quickly changed. I returned to a fresh resting place and the baby was finally weighed and admired. He was quiet and calm through it all.

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## Mary: What's in a Name [at The Not]



My parents waited to name their 6<sup>th</sup> daughter, their last daughter, Mary. That last daughter would be me. Some children go through a part of their lives wishing they had a different name. I don't remember going through that phase. I once had someone ask me why my parents waited so long to name one of their children Mary (I am #8). I had no answer, and when I asked my mother, she didn't have an answer, either. It was just meant to be.

Of course I feel a closeness to Mary, since she is my namesake. As a child, I was extremely afraid of thunderstorms; more so than any of my siblings ever were. If I had a nickel for every time I said a *Hail Mary* during a storm, I'd be financially set to retire today. Saying a *Hail Mary* gives me a sense of comfort, a sense of security, like none other. (Saying "now and at the hour of our death" kind of freaked me out as a child, though!)

I have quite an imagination. This is why I avoid watching horror movies. When the movie *Halloween* came out, I just had to hear about it to have nightmares. After discussing it with my mother, she told me to ask Mary to protect me. She said that the devil leaves Mary alone; he doesn't even think about touching her. I guess he knows better than to mess with her!

It wasn't just horror movies. During school, we discussed *Bonnie & Clyde*, and we saw pictures of their car riddled with bullets. Revisiting that picture in my mind kept me from going to sleep at night. When I talked to my mother about it, the first words were *Say some Hail Marys*. I can't even count the number of nights I fell asleep clutching my Rosary in my hands. My Rosary was (and still is) my security blanket at night.

Even now, when something is going on with my boys or my imagination runs rampant over something I saw or heard about, I go to Mary. She gives me the comfort and security I need to push thoughts out of my mind. I know that she is my biggest advocate to her son when it comes to trials in my everyday life. I know she is right there, rooting me on.

I think it's very sad that you don't hear about parents naming their daughters Mary. I know one child named Mary, and I work in a school system. It's a beautiful name; one that holds so much responsibility, so much

love with just the word. Paired with the middle name (in my case, Mary Patricia or Mary Pat), it becomes unique. Is it a "cutesie" name? Not really, but the beauty of it should override cute.

So...let's bring back the name and the honor it gives the girl who bears it. Let's give Mary the honor that she deserves. Let's strive to be more like her.

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## 2016 [at The Catholic Spiritual Life]



[GEN 14:18-20; PS 110:1,2,3,4; 1 COR 11:23-26; LK 9:11b-17](#)

This Sunday we celebrate the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. Now, the real day for Corpus Christi is the Thursday after the octave of Pentecost, that is, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Last week we were talking about octaves, and how a single feast is drawn out over a long time. The reason we celebrate Corpus Christi on this Thursday is that it is the very next Thursday (not counting the weeks-long celebration of Easter) after Holy Thursday. Holy Thursday contains so much. On this “next” Thursday, we separate out just the element of the Eucharist.

(Of course, in the United States we transfer the feast to Sunday. This is because of the challenges of coordinating Masses in far-flung dioceses. I used to get annoyed about transferring feasts. But hey, it’s the priests’ and bishops’ job to figure out these details, not mine. My job is to enjoy the liturgy. Kvetching doesn’t help.)

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In the three-year cycle of the post-Vatican II liturgy, we get different angles on this liturgy. This year, we focus on thanksgiving.

The first reading is Abraham’s mysterious encounter with the priest Melchizedek. Melchizedek, of course, gets a lot of play in Hebrews as a precursor of Christ. Psalm 110, “The Lord said to my Lord,” which we pray in this Mass, identifies the Messiah as a priest “in the order of Melchizedek.”

But a nice place to go to appreciate Melchizedek is in the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer One, where after the consecration, the priest prays:

“accept [these offerings], as once you were pleased to accept

the gifts of your servant Abel the just,

the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith,

and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek,

a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.”

Melchizedek is portrayed as one of the models of offering perfect sacrifice – and a model that helps explain the others.

Now, that’s surprising, because in our reading this Sunday, we see that his sacrifice hardly fits our definition of sacrifice. “Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram.” He invokes God as “creator of heaven and earth . . . who delivered your foes into your hand” – but he doesn’t destroy anything. Doesn’t sacrifice mean death and destruction?

The tradition’s answer is, no it doesn’t. Sacrifice is an act of thanksgiving and worship, manifested with material things. We have a fine model of sacrifice in the American holiday of Thanksgiving. The turkey (one hopes) does not get burned, it gets eaten. And yet that sacred banquet is itself an act of giving thanks to God most high, creator of heaven and earth, who provides and protects and gives us a place of rest.

Melchizedek gives thanks and praise, as we do in the Eucharist – it is right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give thanks and praise, which is why it is called Eucharist, thanksgiving.

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## Jesus Wasn't THAT Nice [at Catholic Girl Problems]

I know this might come as a surprise to you, but He wasn't. Not to say He was mean, but He was a far cry from the pushover Western civilization molded Him to be over the past century. I don't know how or when the reimagining of Jesus took place, but anyone remotely familiar with the Gospels knows He was never the Labradoodle modern society envisions Him as – a neutered pup wagging his tail, oh-so happy you finally came home, and “please oh please just pet me and love me!”

“But Tara, what would Jesus do?” I don't know, but I know He's not above flipping over some tables, getting in some faces, and shouting “YOU ARE FULL OF DEAD MEN'S BONES AND ALL CORRUPTION!” – Matthew 23:27.

“But Tara, God is love.” Yes, God is love...but God is also *perfect justice*. Should *injustice* ever occur, a reckoning of sorts must take place to restore balance. Reckonings are not fun (just ask Jesus – He underwent the ultimate reckoning for *our* injustice). God cannot stand sin, nor can He share company with sin (hence the whole “Mary thing,” Evangelicals, for God would sooner cease to exist than enter the womb of just “any woman,” so you can stop bashing her, cause she *is* superior, and I strongly advise not dissing God's mama, thankyouverymuch).

Because God is perfect justice, we must make retribution for our sins against Him. Hence, the sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus instituted Reconciliation for a reason, ya know? Which brings me to the crux of the point...Jesus was not “nice” in the popular understanding of the word. Jesus was *merciful*. Mercy, however, can only be exercised upon a repentant heart. Whenever Jesus encountered a soul truly sorry and determined to amend their ways, He absolved them of their sins and gave them new life.

In this way, Jesus was “nice.”

On the other hand, He could not exercise mercy with unrepentant souls such as the Pharisees – so high and mighty and proud in their ways. When dealing with the likes of these characters, He did not stroke their egos with flattery and kind words. He corrected their error...

And He wasn't very nice when doing so.



Why am I even talking about Jesus' indisputable not-niceness, you might ask? For starters, I'm sick and tired of the Cultural Marxists of our time stripping God of His backbone simply to suit the aims of their liberal agenda. These sissies scream "tolerance!" whenever someone merely *sneezes* the wrong way, but here's the rub folks...

Not everything should be tolerated.

The Old Testament clearly stated what pleases and displeases God, via the Ten Commandments. What's better? God Himself took the time to enter our world, via our flesh, and orate with His own breath how we are to conduct our lives. He's so good, in fact, He dumbed everything down in the form of parables (or stories) to ensure simpletons such as Yours Truly would grasp the concept. To *further* simplify His mandates, he narrowed everything down to two Commandments...

Love God, and love your neighbor.

"But Tara, intolerance is not loving your neighbor." Well, this depends. What are we being "intolerant" about? Are we talking about abortion – the unjust murder of immortal souls who never had a chance to fight? Or are we talking about same-sex marriage, propagated via the "gay agenda," which seeks to destroy (and has done a damn-good job of destroying) the traditional, nuclear family? Are we intolerant towards Islam, a religion which has targeted Christianity since inception, and today is gaining an abundance of ground?

(A side note: The Crusades were not an offensive measure from the Church to destroy Islam, but the other way around. Radical Islamists were attacking Christians in the Holy Land, and the Church rose to *defend* the flock. Don't let these morons who rewrite history tell you otherwise).

And yes, sensitive Christians...I did use the offensive term “morons.” Deal.

Which brings me to the other reason for the subject matter...Pope Francis.

Before I begin, let me assure you I have kept quiet about the pope ever since he declared Catholics are “[too concerned about abortion](#) and contraception,” or when referring to the [gay lifestyle](#) (not *gays*, mind you) he said “who am I to judge?” or when he had the nerve to suggest “[Jesus failed on the Cross.](#)” I regret not speaking sooner, for like a boiling kettle, I am now so filled with steam I am about to burst.

Most recently, His “holiness” compared Jesus sending out His disciples to the [conquering spirit which motivates ISIS](#). He declared socialism as the means to a fruitful society (you know, like Karl Marx and the Communists), and he encouraged the seamless integration between Europe and Islamists.

*“Today, I don’t think that there is a fear of Islam as such but of ISIS and its war of conquest, which is partly drawn from Islam. It is true that the idea of conquest is inherent in the soul of Islam. However, it is also possible to interpret the objective in Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus sends his disciples to all nations, in terms of the same idea of conquest.”*

Really? Did the disciples behead anyone who refused to convert? Did Matthew, Mark, Luke, John or any of Christ’s messengers rape the women and children of the towns each visited? Cause these radical Islamist waste no time sexually assaulting European females as a means to take over the population genetically (Google it). The pope insists upon receiving as many Islamic refugees as possible, not thinking twice about the crimes committed against the population from their “guests.” As though these points were not reason enough to question Francis’ motives, I simply have one question...

Why the heck doesn’t he care as much about the Christian flock?

I understand you might be fuming from the ears, dear reader. However, I implore you...look beyond Pope Francis’ Twitter feed (with all the feel-good quotes he posts daily) and actually listen to the hogwash which regularly erupts from his mouth. You would be flabbergasted upon realizing just how ANTI what CHRIST said, are his words.

I really and truly believe he is the false prophet.

*“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” – 2 Timothy 4:3*

What left me most speechless, however, was when Francis declared [atheists](#) have a “reasonable hope of going to heaven, provided they lead moral lives.” Really? Cause the Gospels (you know...the WORD OF GOD) said something drastically different. Were one to go by what Jesus said (as opposed to Francis), one would realize the *“gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”*

– Matthew 7:14

Put another way...heaven is a very exclusive club, and a lot of y'all ain't gettin' in!

Even such a humble and devout soul as Yours Truly (sarcasm) might be shit outta luck...a thought which terrifies me. But heck, at least I'm trying! Atheists don't even try, nor do they care to. And how reckless and negligent of a statement for him to make, no? I liken it to a doctor discovering his patient has cancer, and instead of telling the patient the truth, he tells the patient “you have a reasonable hope of living a long and healthy life.” The pope is the shepherd of Christ's flock, and not only is he not guiding the flock given him from God, he's misguiding souls everywhere. And for what?

Would a doctor be “nice” in not being truthful with a dying patient? Sometimes the truth hurts, which brings me back to the original point of this post...Jesus wasn't as nice as society (and the Pope, apparently) would have you believe. He cut you with the truth, not to be mean, but to heal you of your errors and put you on the right path. You don't have to listen to Him, and in fact, He acknowledged many people wouldn't.

*“For this purpose, I was born, and for this purpose, I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” – John 18:37*

I interpret this passage to mean some *wouldn't* listen to Him, and He is perfectly fine with them doing so. God gave you free will; He does not wish to be loved via force. Like any good father, however, He is tough when He sees His children going astray. He tells it like it is, and no amount of social-justice, liberal sissiness will ever change that. Pope Francis, however, is doing a fine job of beguiling the masses with his rhetoric of “love and tolerance,” no matter what the cost to the souls of his audience. He preaches a false Gospel, and Christians and Catholics everywhere must wake up to this truth.

Jesus wasn't THAT nice.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicgirlproblems.com/2016/05/jesus-wasnt-that-nice.html>  
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## Why Benedictines are liturgical and why Jesuits should be too [at *Dominus mihi adjutor*]

The title above is crude, but it is designed to remind all those in the Benedictine *familia* of one of our foundational and essential charisms; and to alert the Church universal to the fact that this Benedictine charism is in fact a **catholic** one, a charism that is shared by the whole Church. The debates on the liturgy—often illuminating and uplifting, often frustrating and disheartening—will never bear fruit without a sound understanding of the foundation and essential character of liturgy.

There will be few references or quotes. What is to come should need no citations, and should serve really as a reminder or a clarification of what we already know, even if in an unarticulated state in our hearts.

The founder of that most un-liturgical of Orders, the Jesuits, knew the priority of things when founding his Order, even if the Jesuits have subsequently often lost sight of its essential implication. St Ignatius spells out in his *Spiritual Exercises* what he calls the First Principle and Foundation:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

These three duties, presented in a deliberate order, are in fact a handy definition of the Christian life, which is essentially a life of divine worship, both in liturgy (praise and reverence) and in living (service). It is a very holistic view, but it has lent itself to a common misinterpretation of Christian holiness and liturgy.



St Ignatius, by Rubens

The danger is that effectively we see holiness and liturgy—praise, reverence and service—as largely, if not purely, human activities, duties even, that must be performed, even if perfunctorily or minimally. In

doing this we objectify them, and reduce them to parts of our life in general, interruptions to it perhaps. They become things we do at such-and-such a time and in such-and-such a place, compartmentalised within the larger whole of life, as we see it.

Yet this is not what St Ignatius envisaged. Nor St Benedict. In fact, hidden in St Benedict's *Rule* is the key to interpreting St Ignatius, and indeed the key to understanding the life of the baptised Christian.

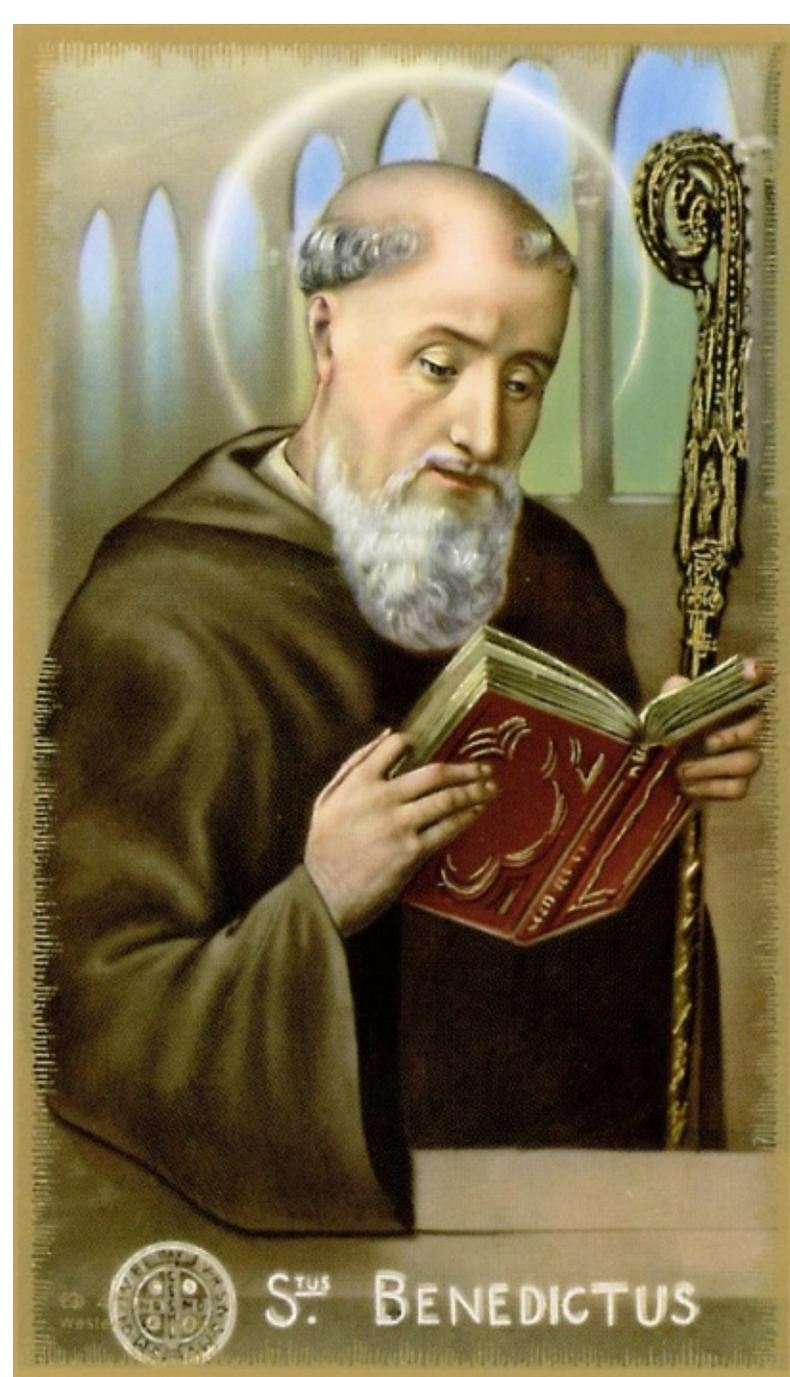
In chapter 4 of the *Rule*, St Benedict commands:

Prefer nothing to the love of Christ.

In chapter 43 of the *Rule*, St Benedict seems to contradict himself in another command:

Prefer nothing to the Work of God.

So which is the value above all values, St Benedict: loving Christ or performing the liturgy?



## St Benedict with his psalter

But of course, there is no contradiction. The love of Christ and the work of God are essentially the same thing. The trap is in seeing both these as duties that we do for God: we love him in our deeds and we praise him in the liturgy. From the human point of view these are experienced as two distinct activities, though we might allow that our praise is a manifestation of our love.

In reality, these are divine not human activities, and in God there is no such compartmentalisation. The “love of Christ” is more truly his love for us; the “work of God” is more truly Christ’s praise of the Father in and through us who form his Body, the Church. From the divine point of view, they are one and the same activity.

This might lead one to think of God as some sort of egoist: I will praise myself especially by praising myself in and through my frail creature, man. This would be to interpret God by the standards of fallen man. This is a divine activity, an activity not focused in, on himself but outward, to his redeemed creation. For by loving us and including us in the Son’s praise of the Father, God the Holy Spirit is inserting us ever more deeply into the intimate life of God the Trinity.

This is why we were created, and why we were redeemed. This is what it is to praise, reverence and serve God and so save our souls. This is why we are to prefer nothing to Christ’s love for us and his work in us. By all these divine activities God extends his intimate life of perfect love outward to his creatures, drawing them into himself to share what “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, [which] God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9).

So now we can see what is the human work, the human activity, our way to holiness: inviting and allowing Christ to work in us, to love in us, to praise in us; in short, it is to allow God to live his Triune life in us. This we do by living by the commandments of Christ and his Body the Church, living the life of the Church as the Church intends it to be lived. And when we fail, as we will, it is also to return to Christ in his Church to be reconciled and to start afresh.

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So what the billyo does this have to do with the liturgical debates? Well, hopefully that might be becoming clear by now. To put it bluntly: so long as we conceive, practically even if not theoretically, of liturgy primarily as something we do, we construct; as something that is centred on us and is an expression of us; as something we change and adapt to suit our mood, or worse, the mood and temper of the secular mind and fashion—then we will never truly understand liturgy, and our efforts to reform or change the liturgy will end in deformations that endanger our access to the saving work of Christ in us through his Body, the Church.

Liturgy is something that is first received, not made. It has been received from even before the earthly life of Christ, but most emphatically since then, given in and received by the Church over the centuries. In place to place it varies in some outward forms, according to what time and place have emphasised over the years. But in essence, the liturgies of those churches which can trace their life directly and unbroken in earthly terms to Christ and his apostles—these liturgies are always characterised by a pre-eminent focus on God, and the worship of Him accepted and experienced as something received, something into which we insert ourselves not least by trying to leave our egos with the doorkeeper. Our proper activity and participation lie our doing what the Church bids us to do, and so of opening our hearts to the love of

Christ in the work of God, to which nothing is to be preferred—by Benedictines, Jesuits, and Christians in general.

When we get liturgy right, holiness will flourish.

I've probably had too much coffee this morning.

Pax.

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This contribution is available at <http://hughosb.wordpress.com/2016/06/09/why-benedictines-are-liturgical-and-why-jesuits-should-be-too/>

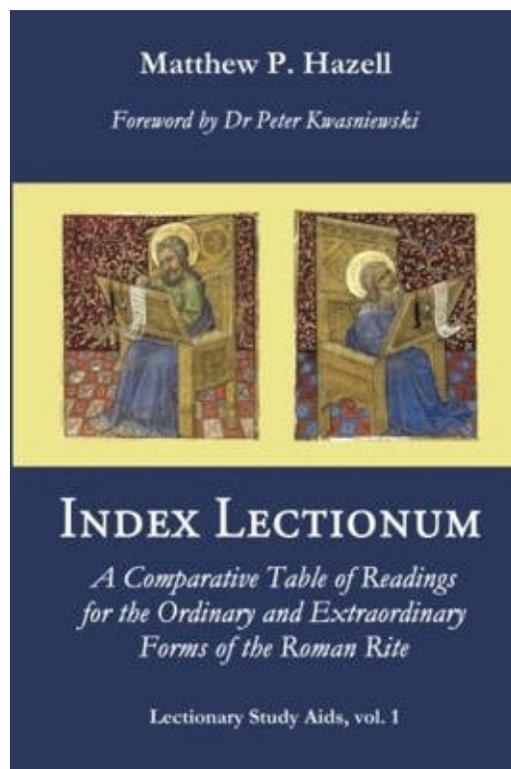
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## The Mass Lectionary: A Flawed Gem [at Dominus mihi adjutor]

Occasionally one gets to review books, and thankfully they are normally very interesting books. Usually it is in our Magazine, but it is no bad thing to review books here as well.

One book that has been sent my way is *Index Lectionum: A Comparative Table of Readings for the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms of the Roman Rite*. Written by Matthew Hazell and published under the imprint of the Lectionary Study Press this year, it is envisaged as the first volume in a series, *Lectionary Study Aids*. Matthew will be known to those interested in the liturgical reforms in the wake of Vatican II, through his website [Lectionary Study Aids](#), and his contributions to the [New Liturgical Movement](#), a collaborative website of high quality that has become the online meeting room of those with a serious liturgical interest.



Matthew is a young academic, and married to boot. It is indicative of an increasingly-clear trend in liturgical and theological circles: the debate and the scholarship are more and more being advanced by (often young) **lay** men and women. Partly this may be due to relative paucity of clerical and religious candidates for ecclesial scholarship in the modern era. Rightly or wrongly, many bishops and superiors feel they cannot indulge the luxury of committing able-bodied clerics and religious to full-time study and research. In part it may be partly due also to the enhanced role of the laity in the Church, though the modern crop of lay theologians and liturgists are not aligned with the progressive school that has been the most vocal advocate of lay participation in the life of the Church. It may also, perhaps, be in part down to the marked dissatisfaction among many of the young with the work of the previous generation of theologians and liturgists.

So it is no surprise then that the Foreword to *Index* is written by another layman: Dr Peter Kwasniewski, a well-credentialed academic who is part of the founding faculty at Wyoming Catholic College. In an essay that takes up the opportunities afforded by the *Index*, Dr Kwasniewski exposes some of the

conclusions that can be drawn from the analytical data provided by Mr Hazell.

In the post-Vatican liturgy the lectionary was expanded from the single-year cycle found in the old Missal, to a three-year cycle for Sundays and a two-year cycle for weekdays. There is, thus, now a lot more scripture proclaimed at Mass. Dr Kwasniewski highlights such gains in the new lectionary as the prophetic readings on ferial days in Advent and the enhancement of the readings on ferias in Eastertide. Often too there can be found some felicitous pairings of Old and New Testament readings.

Yet more is not always better. Over the years some have pointed out that the flood of scripture that is a feature of the new lectionary can swamp the listener's mind and comprehension. On some days, even ferias, the readings can be very long to the point of being exhausting. This may reflect a desire of the reformers to enhance that novel creature of the new Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, that it might balance the Liturgy of the Eucharist. More than once many of us have heard it asserted in various ways that the Liturgy of the Word is 50% of the reason for Mass, and is of equal importance to the Eucharistic Sacrifice itself. This is nonsense.

As Dr Kwasniewski shows from his use of Mr Hazell's analysis of the old and new lectionaries, is that while there is a lot more scripture now, the devil lies in the choice of what is included and what is omitted, and how the scripture included is edited. For often it is highly edited indeed. In fact, many passages, or even verses within passages, that are found in the lectionary of the pre-conciliar liturgy have been omitted in the new without obvious sufficient reason. It is in these especially that we can see a strong, and manipulative, editorial hand such as has never been seen in the liturgy before on such a scale and in such a short space of time. So Dr Kwasniewski is moved to point out:

It is one thing to augment a collection of readings, and quite another to delete its historic content...  
[p.xiii]

Passages that are strong in their presentation of the demands of faith, the judgment of God and the real prospect of hell for the unrepentant serious sinner, and the hostility of the world and its antagonism towards Christ, are omitted or heavily edited or sidelined by relocation to votive Masses. There can be a subtle for of conditioning at work when a reading is still to be found in the new lectionary, but moved to a place of obscurity and infrequency of use. Thus a challenging reading might have been technically retained, but effectively silenced in the hearing of the Church at worship.

The Foreword and Mr Hazell's Introduction aside, this is not a book to read at bedtime. It is a work of reference, and the food for analysis. It is a series of charts showing where readings are to be found in both the old and new lectionaries, and so revealing what has been omitted, edited, re-located and de-emphasized. It moves from Genesis to Revelation. There are appendices allowing comparison of Sundays in proper time, weekdays in Lent, saints' days and the commons of both lectionaries.

While a book of particular relevance to scholars, it will nevertheless reward some attentive reading from anyone interested in the reform of the liturgy.

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What prompted to get off my gradually-expanding backside and write this review was the occasion of my celebrating the conventual Mass in the abbey church today. For today we were exposed to just such an editorial sleight of hand as exposed in the *Index*. The first reading was from 1 Kings 18:20-39, Elijah's

showdown with the priests of Ba'al before the backsliding King Ahab and the Israelites, who want to have both God and Ba'al. It is a fascinating episode, as Elijah concedes every advantage to the idolaters in the contest to prove which god was true, Ba'al or the Most High. It ends, in the lectionary, at v.39, with the people of Israel impressed at the miraculous power of God:

And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."

It is a stirring note on which to end. But it is not actually the end of this episode in the biblical text. There is a verse 40:

And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

This not such a sweet note in which to end a reading. The thought of a prophet of God slaughtering 450 men single-handedly is enough to conjure up images of Daesh/IS.



Elia tötet die Baal-Priester.

Da hat alle Welt ihre, ist es mit den Propheten, und sprechen: der HERR ist GOTT, der HERR ist GOTT: Wie also sprach er ihnen: geht zu Baalim, Baal, und die hohen altäre, und so gehtet ihr, und wie Elia hat sie geschlagen, und abgetödtet sie heiligt.

1. Peter v. 1. 18. 19. 20.

Elijah slays the priests of Ba'al.

Yet the omission of this verse takes away all the enduring urgency, edge and ultimate spiritual meaning of this passage. Our choices matter, and they have consequences. Christ himself taught anew the ancient biblical principle, that one cannot serve both God and mammon. If we try, we limp as Israel limped between the two, making no progress and denying God the primacy that is his due. We can choose, good and evil, life and death. God of course wants us to choose life. True life is not to be found with Ba'al or its modern equivalents. Idolatry, and it can take subtle almost hidden forms in our lives, leads only to one place: death and eternal separation from God.

As Christ himself said in the gospel passage set for today, not one jot or tittle of the Law and Prophets will be irrelevant until heaven and earth pass away. But the new Lectionary's editors deftly excised a

very important jot from this salutary prophetic passage. As we read it in the new lectionary, we might be left feeling “Gee, our God is amazing, isn’t he”. But with the final verse included, we are encouraged to think instead along these lines— “To put anything but God first in my life is a path to nowhere good, for He alone is god, and only in Him is there life eternal. Without Him is eternal death. I must pay homage to Him and obey his commandments.”

It is a text that should move us to repent lest we be lost. Without the final verse, it is a passage that has no real purpose for inclusion in the liturgy.

What a difference a verse makes.

[You can purchase Matthew Hazell’s *Index Lectionum* by following links on [his website](#).]

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This contribution is available at <http://hughosb.wordpress.com/2016/06/08/the-mass-lectionary-a-flawed-gem/>  
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[Fr Hugh](#) in [Liturgy](#) Friday, 27 May, 2016Friday, 27 May, 2016 1,946 Words

# The Flam Re-Ignites: Ad Orientem [at Dominus mihi adjutor]

In the abruptly-curtailed pontificate of Benedict XVI, the issue of the priest celebrating Mass *ad orientem* became a live topic in mainstream circles. Priests began to summon up the courage to return to the ancient practice which was so needlessly effaced from the life of the Church in the wake of the Council. Then came Pope Francis, who (not least because he is a Jesuit perhaps!) is not much interested in liturgy. This means that in practice he is content not to change any legislation on it (save for the extension to women of the optional *mandatum* on Maundy Thursday). This hands-off approach is actually a very traditional papal attitude. His sacred indifference has allowed those who had begun to re-align the liturgy with tradition to continue their quiet and increasingly popular work.

So Cardinal Sarah, quite appropriately given his position as Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, has [re-ignited the debate](#), encouraging priests to celebrate Mass facing East. He makes the common sense observation that during the Liturgy of the Word the priest faces the people, given that he is addressing them, but when addressing God, as when at the altar, he should face East, an ancient symbolic gesture of a turn to God and to the direction whence Christ would return: the Risen Son returning as the rising sun.



Cardinal Sarah

**Post navigation**

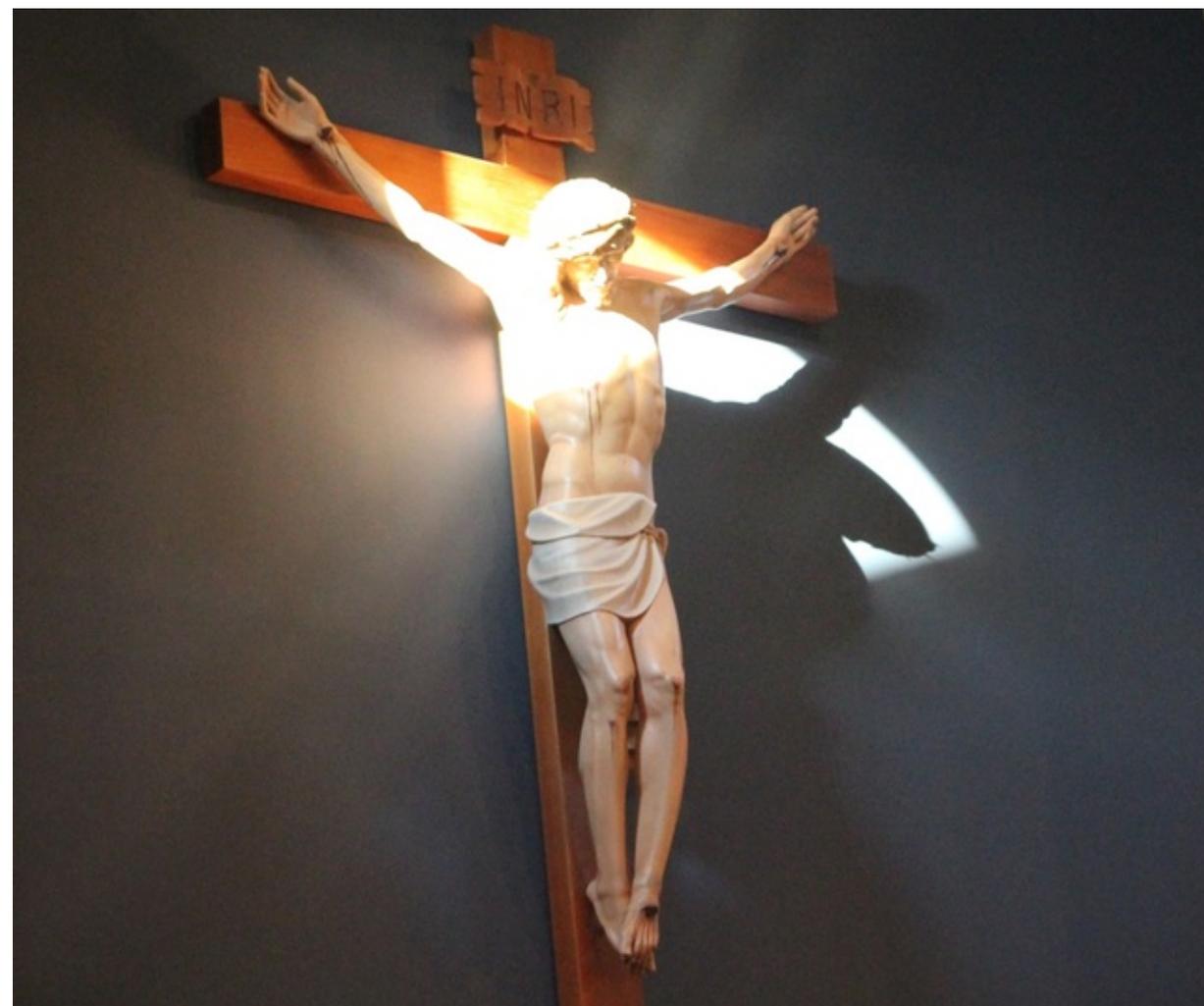
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# Five Easy Tips to Make Your Photos More Beautiful [at Erin McCole Cupp]

Photography is my achilles heel. In fact, I think I might run a marathon before I'll take a pretty picture. [Colleen Duggan](#), however, takes beautiful pictures. So I asked her to mentor me a little on the subject (note I asked her to mentor me and not any of my distance running friends). I hope you learn from it as much as I do!

## Five Easy Tips To Make Your Photos More Beautiful by Colleen Duggan



A priest friend of mine told me recently that the famous theologian Hans Urs von Baltasar once said there are three things that can save the world: truth, justice, and beauty. It was beauty that Father was encouraging me to focus on in my work as a photographer because contemplating beauty inspires the human person towards the pursuit of what's good and true.

In case you hadn't noticed, there is a lot of ugly in the world, but photography gives both the artist and the viewer the opportunity to actually *see in picture form* God's majesty in our mundane and sometimes drudgery filled lives. Lately, every time I lift my Canon and click the shutter, I think about von Baltasar's words and am reminded that by capturing a fleeting moment of beauty or joy or love, I'm participating in

God's work of saving the world.

That's a hobby worth pursuing, I think.

With the advent of the camera phone, everyone is taking pictures these days. Hop on any social media site and there is someone, somewhere who has posted a photo of her or her trip to the grocery store or coffee shop. Have you ever scrolled through someone's Instagram feed and thought to yourself, "She just seems to have a 'knack' for producing pretty images! How does she do it?"

Sure, the woman who posts a bunch of eye candy might have an artistic bent, but my guess is she actually knows a little bit about what makes an image beautiful. Just as there are rules to good grammar and writing, there are rules we can follow so that we too are able to produce consistently pretty pictures.

So, what are a few of these rules and how can we use them to up our photographic game? Below I outline a few tips below to help you start capturing those important moments so you too can contemplate God's bountiful beauty and use it to save the world.

-1-

**USE THE CAMERA YOU HAVE:** I don't care what kind of camera you own, it's possible for you to take pretty pictures. Don't believe me? Take a look at the following photos, which were all shot and edited with my iPhone camera.









You don't have to have the fanciest camera blinged out with all the bells and whistles (though if you do, could I use it sometime?) to capture a precious moment in time.

You only need to use the equipment you've got.

I never owned an iPhone until last summer and if I had known how great it operated as a point and shoot, I would have upgraded my phone much earlier than I did. (Side note: there are full time professional photographers operating only with iPhone cameras these days, that should tell you something about its capabilities.)

Learn how to use the camera you've got.

There are tons of tutorials online and websites devoted to help newbie photographers figure out how to use their camera phones. I suggest perusing sites like [iphonophotography.com](http://iphonophotography.com) and [DavidMolnar.com](http://DavidMolnar.com) for a gluttony of information and tips on the best way to use your mobile point and shoot.

On the other hand, if you do own a fancy dslr camera, I recommend you learn how to take that camera off of the auto dial and place it on the manual setting. This will be *the best and surest* way to create better images. I am limited in the scope and space of this article to explain exactly how to use the manual settings on your camera, but if you have the time and the inclination, there are many books available to teach you exactly how to get started. I recommend the following titles:

[\*DSLR Cameras and Photography For Dummies\*](#)

[\*Momarazzi: Every mom's guide to photographing kids\*](#)

[\*Beyond The Snapshot: How To Take That Fancy DSLR Camera Off Auto And Shoot Like A Pro\*](#)

**GET CLOSE:** No, closer. Still too far!

If you want to add some pizzazz to your photos, make sure you are up close and personal to your subject. (This advice is especially true when working with a point and shoot camera because you can't swap out lenses to zoom in on your subject.) Taking photos from too far away leads to boring, ho-hum images. Filling the frame helps bring subjects to the forefront and also removes a lot of pesky background clutter that detracts from the overall photo.) Below are three different examples of what it means to fill the frame with your subject.



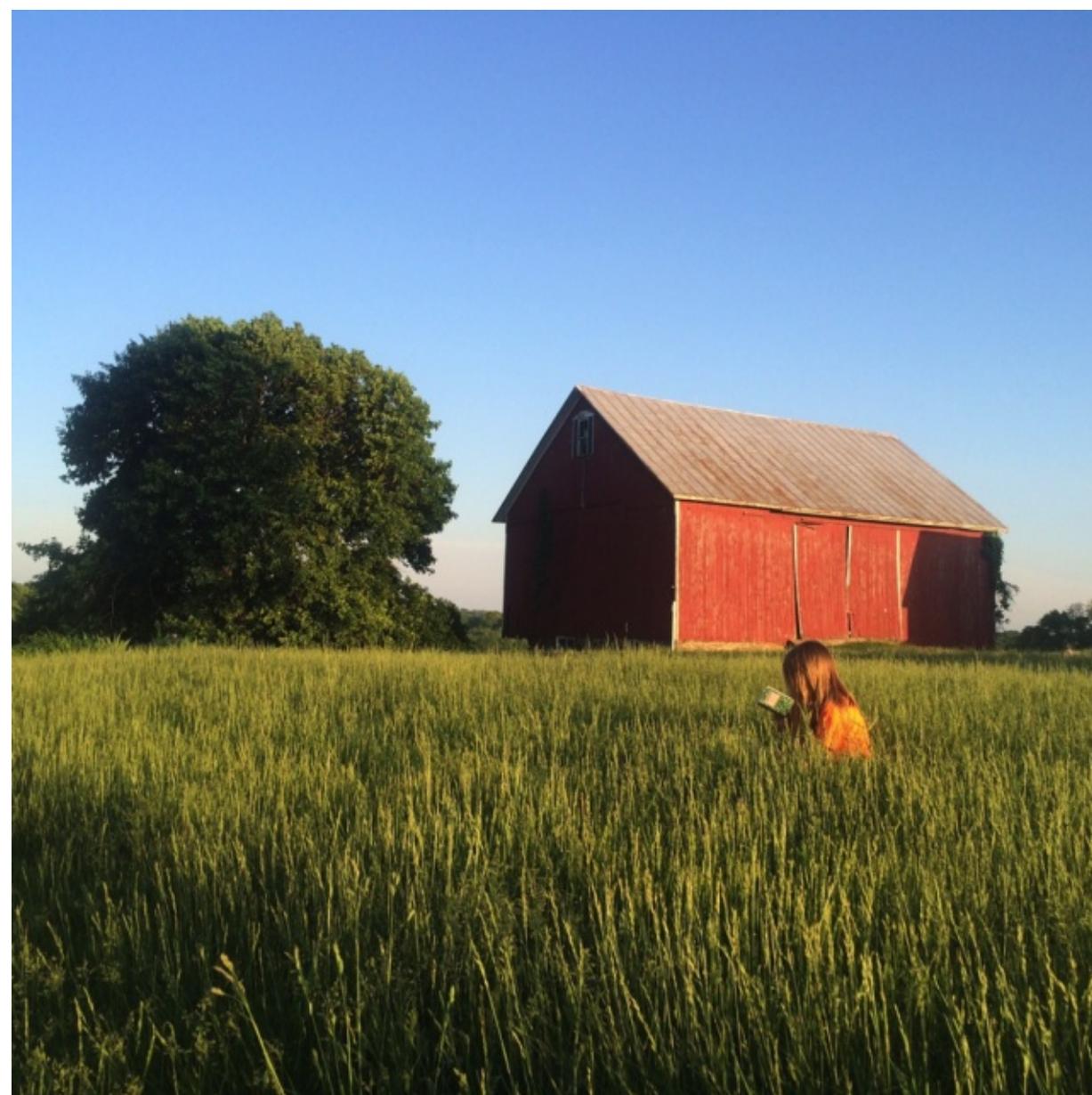




**CHOOSE YOUR BACKGROUND CAREFULLY:** I'm a bit of a freak about this particular photographic tip. Maybe it's a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder, but to me a cluttered background

can really ruin an otherwise awesome picture. Setting up an image is as much about the subject as it is what's *behind* the subject. Pay attention to the random photo bombing objects or people who wander in and out of your photos and detract from the overall look. See below for examples of photos with fresh, clean and interesting backgrounds.





-4-

**PERSPECTIVE:** If you want to take interesting photos, think of creative ways to look at a scene or subject differently than you might usually. Lie on your back and look up at your subject or climb on a table and shoot from there. I live in a rural area and I routinely take pictures out my window in order to capture images of the beautiful, country landscape.

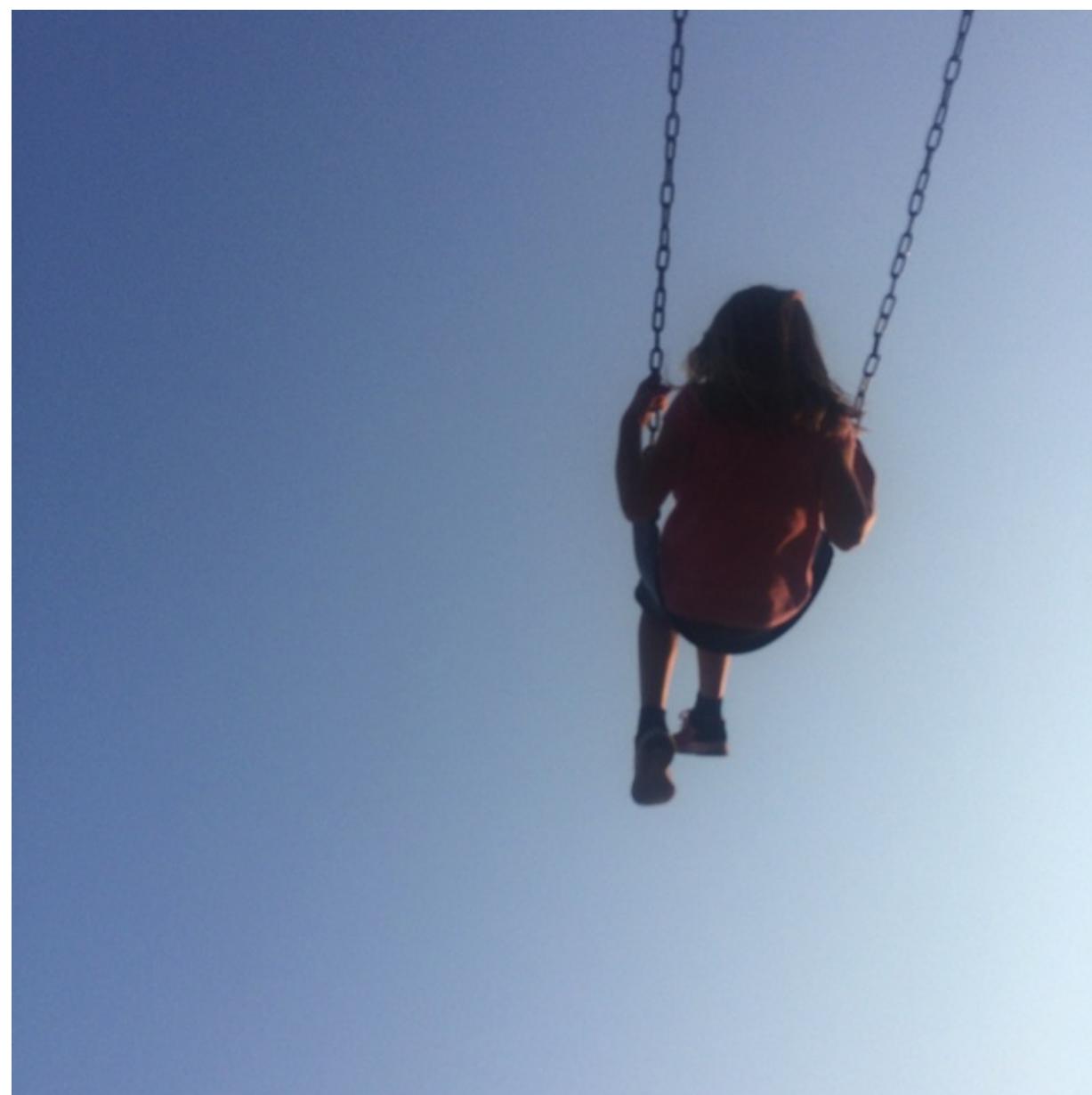
(Hey, if you are serious about photography, you do what it takes to get the picture.)

See the images below to see what I mean about varying perspective and start thinking of different ways to capture an image.

(Note: What I'm encouraging here is changing the way you look at a scene in front of you, which will most likely require you as the photographer to move your body either closer or farther away from the subject. I'm not, however, encouraging you to slant your camera at a weird angle. Nothing signals an amateur photog than a picture taken from a weird or tilted stance. It's also a personal photographic pet peeve. End rant.)



I shot the photo above on the floor of my son's bedroom while he peaked down at me from his crib perch.



I shot this with my iPhone camera lying down beneath the swing set while my daughter flew in the air. I made a conscious effort to disregard any of the stares from onlookers...and there *were* stares. I also tried not to get nailed in the head with her heavy feet.



Instead of taking a picture of my daughter smiling while holding her newly picked “flowers”, I focused on the large bouquet of dandelions she gathered. This image tells an entirely different tale than it had if I had included her face. This photographic decision illustrated how much time it took her to collect those dandelions and highlights her thoughtful attention and gesture, which is a much different story than the one I would have told if I had included her face in the photo.



The most fun perspective shots are often action ones. If you are taking pictures at sporting events, try to capture the subject as he or she is moving. Full disclosure: in this photo, my husband threw my son into the pool. However, to make the image pop more and to give a more visual “WOW” factor, I edited my husband out of the image so all you can see is my son flying through the air and into the pool.

**A note of caution:** If your subject is a child, make sure you crouch down to get on the child’s level. For a more visually appealing photo, it’s important to get eye to eye with the kid. Compare the two images below to see what I mean.

In the first image, I’m holding the camera at a downward slant, a common mistake most newbie parents and photographers make.



In the second image, I’ve changed positions and am at eye level with my child. I’ve also moved to the side of him in order to capture a prettier background.



See the difference?

## REMEMBER THE RULE OF THIRDS:

When my daughter asked me to teach her a little bit about photography, the first rule I exposed her to was the rule of thirds (see image above for a visual). If you are trying to improve your overall look of your photos, remembering this simple design trick will instantly increase the wow factor of your pics.

Newbie photographers often make the mistake of putting the subject smack dab in the middle of the grid shown above. While it's ok to break this rule sometimes, an image is more interesting if the subject is placed at one of the intersecting lines of a tic tac toe grid. (The scientific explanation has something to do with where our eyes fall when looking at a picture. I don't know much about science, but I know I do follow the rule of thirds as often as I can.)



Imagine the tic tac toe grid over this photo. See how my daughter's body is almost directly on the left line of the grid?



In this picture, I placed my little girl on the opposite side of the grid. Doing this naturally creates a more interesting picture than if her body was dead center.

A final note, with a little bit of practice and study, it is possible to improve your photo taking efforts. I wish you much luck and photographic success!

P.S. Rules are meant to be broken. Feel free to break one or all of these guidelines as you see fit. No photographer follows all the rules all the time, and you don't have to, either.

Now get out there and experiment with your camera and be sure to send me your results!

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This contribution is available at <http://erinmccolecupp.com/2016/05/16/five-easy-tips-to-make-your-photos-more-beautiful-guest-post/>  
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# When Life Isn't Ideal: "Amoris Laetitia" [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

Something I found on page 59 of "Amoris Laetitia"

[1](#)

is an example of why I love being Catholic — common sense, drawing on the Church's experience and wisdom, developed by dealing with people for two millennia.

Some folks have been having conniptions over the encyclical: some because the Pope won't redefine marriage to suit their preferences; others, I suspect, for his failure to heap abuse on couples in "irregular" situations."

Instead of denouncing them as loathsome sinners who should be cast into the outer darkness, Pope Francis actually talks about "...offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them..." ("

[Amoris Laetitia](#)

," page 227)

## "The Validity of Certain Unions"

That's 'way ahead of where I'm at in the encyclical, though. I'm still reading through the third chapter, where I found this 'shocking' statement:

*"...Canon Law also recognizes the validity of certain unions celebrated without the presence of an ordained minister.<sup>71</sup> ..."*

("Amoris Laetitia," page 59, Pope Francis)

I put a longer excerpt,

[2](#)

and links to Canon Law cited in footnotes 71 and 72,

[3](#)

at the end of this post.

Like I said, I love being Catholic: partly because the Church has been dealing with people for two millennia — and learning how to deal with less-than-ideal situations.



## Mass and Mixed Marriages



(From John Martin, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

Marriage is a sacrament "...by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life..." (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[1601](#)

-

[1617](#)

,

[1621](#)

-

[1651](#)

)

Marriage between two Roman Catholics "...normally takes place during Holy Mass...." (Catechism,

[1621](#)

)

So any couple who say they're married, but aren't both Catholics, or didn't have a 'proper' wedding during Mass, aren't really married, and will burn in eternal hellfire?

I certainly won't say that, partly because I've read

[Luke 6:37](#)

-

[38](#)

, and that's another topic. (

[March 9, 2016](#)

;

[March 15, 2015](#)

)

Also because that's not what the Church says.

My wife and I were married during Mass, but I wasn't a Catholic at the time. Not on paper, anyway: although my wife once quipped that 'in my heart I have always been Catholic.'

In countries like America, where Catholics are a minority, "a mixed marriage (marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic)" is hardly uncommon. (Catechism,

[1633](#)

)

We had to get "

***the express permission***

of ecclesiastical authority," but not "

***an express dispensation***

," since I was already a baptized Christian. (Catechism,

[1633](#)

-

[1637](#)

; Code of Canon Law Book IV Part I Title VII Chapter VI,

[1124](#)

; Book IV Part I Title VII Chapter III, )

I'd done the research before an interview with our parish priest. I'd been expecting a detailed examination of my beliefs, and was hoping there wouldn't be too many 'technical' questions.

The interview was a massive anticlimax. The priest asked me what I thought marriage was: and stopped me before I'd really hit my stride — asking if I thought marriage was a lifelong and exclusive bond. I didn't reply "well,

***DUH!***

," but that's how I felt.

I knew that some folks stumbled into and out of physical relationships with little or no mutual commitment: but I didn't understand why they'd bother calling it "marriage." Like my wife said, 'in my heart, I have always been Catholic.'

## Banns and Disasters

Ideally, a nice young Catholic couple have their

[banns](#)

read, or use "other opportune means to accomplish the investigations necessary," as Canon Law

[1067](#)

puts it; have perfect weather for their wedding Mass, and live happily ever after.

Ideally.

We do not live in an ideal world. Weather was reasonably pleasant when my wife and I got married, but lightning with near-simultaneous thunder and a torrential downpour was in progress at a relative's wedding I attended.

Couples have faced worse, including imminent death.

Disasters, accidents, and terminal illness, happen. Couples in such situations might be reasonably certain one or both of them wouldn't survive long enough for a 'proper' marriage ceremony.

The good news is that they might still get married, if only for a short time:

*"If a person competent to assist according to the norm of law cannot be present or approached without grave inconvenience, those who intend to enter into a true marriage can contract it validly and licitly before witnesses only...."*

(Code of Canon Law Book IV Part I Title VII Chapter V, [1116](#))

The conditions where this is okay are rather limited: impending death; or a reasonable chance that the couple can't find a priest for the next month. The latter isn't likely for couples living in urban areas.

For the 250 or so folks who keep

[McMurdo Station](#)

running during Antarctic winters, finding a priest before an icebreaker clears a channel might be challenging.

Having clergy present is still a good idea, though:

*"...In either case, if some other priest or deacon who can be present is available, he must be*



*called and be present at the celebration of the marriage together with the witnesses, without prejudice to the validity of the marriage before witnesses only."*

(Code of Canon Law Book IV Part I Title VII Chapter V, [1116](#))

I don't see that as being "lax." It's recognizing that a marriage is done by the two people getting married, and God:

*"The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized."*

(Code of Canon Law Book IV Part I Title VII, [1055](#))

That's pretty much what Pope Francis says:

[2](#)

*"...the couple who marry are the ministers of the sacrament...."*

("Amoris Laetitia," page 59)

It's also an example of the common sense I mentioned earlier: my opinion.

There may be awkward situations that the Church hasn't had to deal with yet. But after two millennia, my guess is that there aren't many.

## After the Wedding

Getting married is just a first step. Couples tend to become couples with children, which is a good thing: and a lot of work, which is yet another topic. (Catechism,

[2201](#)

-

[2223](#)

)

No pressure, but here's a link to the Vatican Press online copy of "Amoris Laetitia:"

- ["Amoris Laetitia"](#)  
Pope Francis, Vatican Press (March 18, 2016)(released April 8, 2016)

More of my take on life, love, and families:

- ["'Amoris Laetitia' — or — Don't Panic"](#)  
(April 10, 2016)





- Footnote 72

Code of Canon Law Book IV Part I Title VII, [1055](#)

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