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Forward

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

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

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The Ice Saints ~ Mamertus, Pancras and Gervais [at Pauca Verba]



Having a last look through the 2016 *Farmers Almanac* I came across a paragraph titled: The Chilly Saints: Mamertus, Pancras and Gervais, whose 15th century feast days fell respectively on May 11, 12 and 13. And since these days could still experience late crop-damaging frosts, the holy saints were popularly regarded as the *Chilly Saints* or the *Ice Saints*.

But I'd venture if we were to talk with the holy three they'd reveal a much greater interest in the transformation of icy or chilly hearts than protecting corn seedlings from the night frost. "*Melt the frozen; warm the chill*" we pray on the Feast of Pentecost. The Christian religion isn't about the weather, but about the transformation of hearts. *We've cultivated all kinds of ways to keep Christ at arms length.*

One self-aware and honest wife shared, "I have a husband who asks nothing of me except an ironed shirt, and I grumble under my breath about *that.*" *Oh holy Mamertus, warm us!*

At the end of Mass one Sunday, returning up the center aisle to the sacristy after having greeted the folks at the door, a man stepped out of the pews blocking my way and said angrily, "I am SO sick and tired of hearing about THEM!" "Who's *them?*" I asked. "The poor," he snapped back. I'd no recollection of having said a word about the poor in the homily and even checked my text to find what I might have said to set off such an inner ice storm. Nothing - that I could see anyway. *Oh Holy Pancras, melt us!*

Two sisters lived one floor apart in a city walk-up apartment. The sister on the third floor had taken a bad fall at work some years earlier and was on disability. Eventually she died and on the night of her funeral, the sister who lived on the second floor announced to her own gathered and grown children, "Well, at least I won't have to be running up her milk and mail anymore." *Oh Holy Gervais, thaw us!*



Okay! I've kept my mouth shut, and stayed out of the fray up to this point. I've listened to all of the commentary on television and in social media. I am aware of the deep division of ideological beliefs strangling our nation. With that, I am reminded of the slogan, *united we stand; divided we fall*. As a nation, we are deeply divided. If we don't get our act together, and begin to act like grown-ups, we will only see our nation go into further decline. We will fall. Our democracy is in jeopardy.

I've stayed on the sidelines, and not weighed in, until now, because I lived that life of negativity, speaking truth to my audit clients; telling them what was wrong and needed to be fixed, only to receive a deaf ear. I left auditing and obtained my Masters in Pastoral Theology so that I could inspire people; not tear them down. However, what I see occurring within the Halls of Congress, as well as on television via the pundits, on social media, and in person-to-person discussions regarding our political climate is nothing short of cataclysmic.

Now, for the record, I am not a fan of Donald Trump. In assessing his statements and actions, I perceive that he is both morally and ethically bankrupt. In assessing his leadership qualities, he leads via negativity (bullying/condemnation) and will find it difficult to garner support from those he leads. By taking such actions as we have seen, He is setting himself up for failure.

Also for the record, I am not a fan of Hillary Clinton. In assessing her positions on abortion and same-sex marriage, these positions go directly against God's will.

So, bottom line: We, as United States citizens, were dealt a bad hand, with poor choices for finalists, in selecting a President. Yet, one person had to come out the winner, and the other, the loser of the election.

Now, we can do one of two things:

1. Act like children and throw tantrums of disgust, spouting negative commentary about the course of

direction President Trump will take this country, or

2. We can remember that it is God who is in control, not Donald Trump, and put our faith and trust in God to protect us.

United We Stand

As I noted above, I want to inspire people, not tear them down. So, although I have my doubts about President Trump's motives and capabilities, I pray that he succeeds in taking action for the common good in accordance with God's will. I will continue praying for him, while I place all of my trust and faith in God. I will pray for our leaders in Congress that they place God first, then country, then party, in passing legislation. How novel would that be? And I pray for every citizen of the United States, that we remember that we are all members of one big family/nation, and that *united we stand*; divided we fall. Remember, with God all things are possible (Matt 19:26)! Therefore, let's unite under God!

This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/united-we-stand-divided-fall/>
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Twelve Things About Saint Thomas Aquinas That Every Catholic Should Know [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



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

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

From,

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

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

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

The pride Aquinas' mother must have felt at hearing the hermit's words was tempered by

disappointment. Her long held aspiration was for her youngest son to join the Benedictine Order. The Dominicans were mendicants – preaching beggars who evangelized and served the unwashed masses of the poor – a vocation she felt was beneath Thomas. Together with her husband and sons, Theodora would spend the next two decades trying to dictate Thomas’ calling.

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

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

Another oft quoted explanation for Aquinas’ sobriquet:

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

3. Aquinas repulsed an "indecent proposal".

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

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



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

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

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

Read G. K. Chesterton's

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

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

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

studium conventuale

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

There Thomas wrote his most famous work,

Summa Theologica

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

Summa

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

Summa Theologica

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

5. Aquinas "baptized" Aristotle.

Combining the theological principles of faith with Aristotle's empirical philosophy, Aquinas was the

most influential thinker of Medieval Scholasticism. One often hears said that Aquinas "baptized" Aristotle. It is an apt metaphor as

[James Kiefer's commentary](#)

illustrates:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Summa contra Gentiles](#)

] noting that; the blood of Christian martyrs leads to converts, whereas Islam is spread by the sword.

Moreover, Aquinas compares and contrasts Christ's selfless divinity with Mohammed's ruthless humanity. To wit, in Aquinas' own words:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. Numerous miracles attended the Angelic Doctor's death — both immediately and years afterward.

The day that Aquinas died, a comet that had shone over the monastery for three years disappeared.

As Thomas lay dying, the vicegerent at the Fosanova Abbey, entered Aquinas' room to pay his respects. When the vicegerent, whose eyes had long been ailing, looked on Aquinas' face, his vision was instantly restored. Upon Aquinas' death, his earthly remains were solemnly interred in the monastery's

Church.

Later, the Abbot of the monastery wished to secretly move Aquinas' body. Prying open the tomb, the sweet smell of roses filled the air, alerting the other friars. Gazing in at Aquinas' corpse they observed that his body was incorrupt. Fourteen years afterward, Lady Theodora desired to possess a relic from Aquinas' person. Upon breaking the tomb's seal, the fragrance of rose became immediately apparent. The remains of Thomas appeared as before, as if he were sleeping.

Various other miracles, owed to St. Thomas Aquinas' intercession would grace the faithful who prayed at his tomb or invoked his help. There can be no doubt that this great light of the Church has joined the celestial choir of the elect in heaven.

11. The Pope Who Canonized Aquinas Paid Him the Ultimate Compliment.

St. Thomas Aquinas has long been considered the Catholic Church's preeminent theologian. St. Pius V declared him a Doctor of The Church, stating he was "the most brilliant light of the Church," whose works are "the most certain rule of Christian doctrine by which he enlightened the Apostolic Church in answering conclusively numberless errors ... which illumination has often been evident in the past and recently stood forth prominently in the decrees of the Council of Trent." Pope Benedict XV observed, "This (Dominican) Order ... acquired new luster when the Church declared the teaching of Thomas to be her own and that Doctor, honored with the special praises of the Pontiffs, the master and patron of Catholic schools."

But of all the popes, Pope John XXII, the pontiff who canonized St. Thomas was most laudatory. Speaking of Aquinas John XXII said that "his life was saintly and his doctrine could only be miraculous ... because he enlightened the church more than all the other doctors. By the use of his works a man could profit more in one year than if he studies the doctrine of others for his whole life."

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

of Aquinas'

Summa Theologica

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

The greatest praise that can be bestowed upon St. Thomas is to be found in the history of the General Councils of the Church. "In the Councils of Lyons, Vienne, Florence, and in the Vatican Council," writes Leo XIII, "you might say that St. Thomas was present in the deliberations and decrees of the Fathers and, as it were, presided over them, contending against the errors of the Greeks, the heretics, the rationalists, with overpowering force and the happiest results. And it was an honor reserved to St. Thomas alone, and shared by none of the other Doctors of the Church, that

the Fathers of Trent in their hall of assembly decided to place on the altar side by side with the Holy Scriptures and the Decrees of the Roman Pontiffs the *Summa* of St. Thomas, to seek in it counsel, arguments and decisions for their purpose

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

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Pope invades another country! [at Catholicism and Adventism]



SMOM ex-Head of State, Matthew Festing

Pope Francis has demanded and obtained the resignation of the head of another sovereign state, and will appoint his own temporary supervisor until the state elects a new head of state approved by the pope.

Adventists need not be worried – this country doesn't really count as significant.

The [Sovereign Military Order of Malta](#) (SMOM) has 3 citizens, its own passports, currency (the scudo), and postage stamps, and ambassadors to many more countries than it has citizens. Since 1798, it has had no territory other than a few buildings in Italy and Malta with extraterritorial status. After World War II, it briefly had an air force.

From [The Spectator](#):

Canon lawyer Dr Edward Condon this morning tweeted out the reaction of many Catholics:

In terms of international law, the Holy See just annexed another sovereign entity.

A source close to the order puts it more bluntly:

'It's like an invasion. Nine hundred years of sovereignty wiped out overnight.'

... Festing and the leadership of the order refused to accept the authority of the inquiry, because – they argued – the Vatican had no temporal authority over a body that is independent under international law.

This is nothing that should worry Adventists. It's a symptom of a deeper struggle within the Catholic Church.

Must-reads:

[Creative Minority Report: Uh-oh. The Holy See Just Annexed Another Sovereign Entity](#)

[Damian Thompson, The Spectator: Pope seizes power from the Knights of Malta, brutally ending 900 years of their sovereignty](#)

[Fr Zuhlsdorf: Is the Vatican City State annexing the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta?](#)

Official Vatican statement: [Comunicato della Sala Stampa, 25.01.2017](#)

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Dissent is Dissent, Regardless of Faction [at If I Might Interject]

The reasoning goes that Republicans oppose the keeping abortion legal. These bishops oppose keeping abortion legal. Republicans oppose “pro-choice” politicians. These bishops oppose “pro-choice” politicians. Therefore, these bishops are partisan Republicans. (*Arnobius of Sicca* blog, from the “lost years” [Ω], 5/7/2009)

As I see it, it's not wrong to want security from attackers, but in finding the best way to get it, we can't neglect our obligation to the suffering. I think that is the reason the bishops believe they must oppose this policy. (Comment I made on my blog's [Facebook page](#), 1/30/17)

Back in the lost Xanga years of this blog, I spent time writing about Catholics who supported the Obama administration and attacked the American bishops for opposing some of his positions. The bishops defended the right to life and opposed policies incompatible with Church teaching. They were attacked as “the Republican Party at prayer.” I spent a good deal of time defending the Church from accusations of partisanship. So, moving forward eight years, I find it tragic that the same attacks on bishops exist—just the actors have changed.

In both cases, the assumption is the bishops must either support the other party or are grossly ignorant about what is *really* going on. Otherwise, they wouldn't hold *that* position. But this assumption overlooks the fact that the bishops are speaking out about our moral obligations as Christians—those obligations that bound us before the Democratic and Republican parties existed—and will continue to bind us after these parties go the way of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines and our descendants need to do research to discover what these parties even [were](#). Whether the conflict is about the right to life, or the treatment of refugees, our faith teaches us that we are bound to do certain things and oppose other things. These obligations override our political preferences because we are rendering to God what is God's (Mark 12:17).

Perhaps we should reflect when we feel tempted to accuse the bishops of “partisanship.” Are they the ones who are “partisan,” or are we the ones who are guilty? Yes, it is possible that a “Fr. Harry Tik” or a “Sr. Mary Moonbeam” can abuse their position and put political values in place of teaching the Catholic faith. But so can a “Fr. H. Ardliner” or a Sr. Mary Mantilla.” If someone says, “People from this party can't be truly Catholic,” that's an abuse. But if a bishop teaches, “Catholics must not go against our obligation to defend the unborn or the suffering refugee,” he is not abusing his position, even if he teaches against a politician that an individual Catholic might like.

Throughout history, the Church has had to oppose governments when those governments went against God's law. Sometimes these governments were dictatorial. At other times, they were democratic in nature. Either way, these governments often accused the bishops of being unpatriotic, or enemies of the state when they stood up and said, “No.” In such cases, people had to decide whether to follow the state or follow the Church.

But Church history has *never* praised those Catholics who chose to obey the state over the Church when the Church said, “This cannot be done.” Individual regions can fall into error, and the local churches with it (case in point, England in the Reformation), but the churches remaining obedient to the Church

in Rome and refusing to accept the error of the state have not done so.

The fact is, when the bishops took Obama to task over abortion, “Same-sex marriage,” and the contraception mandate, they were acting on their Catholic faith, not partisan politics. When the bishops take Trump to task over his policy on refugees, they are acting on their Catholic faith, not partisan politics. If we reject the bishops because what they say is not what we prefer politically, we are rendering unto Caesar what is God’s.

[Ω] From 2007 to late 2009, this blog, under the name *Arnobius of Sicca*, was on Xanga. While I have the HTML files from those years, these posts are no longer available online.

This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2017/01/dissent-is-dissent-regardless-of-faction.html>
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*“Blessed are you,
O God of our fathers;
praised be your name
forever and ever.
Let the heavens and
all your creation
praise you forever.
“You made Adam and
you gave him his wife Eve
to be his help and support;
and from these two
the human race descended.
You said,
“It is not good for the man to be alone;
Let us make him a partner like himself”
Now, Lord, you know that I take this
wife of mine, not because of lust,
but for a noble purpose.
Call down your mercy on me and on her,
and allow us to live together to a happy old age.”
Tobit 8:7*

This beautiful prayer was the second reading of our Nuptial Mass in 1982 when my husband and I were married. When I first read these words many years ago, they affected me deeply, especially when I learned the history of why Tobias said this prayer. After losing seven husbands before she could consummate her union with them, Sarah entered into marriage with Tobias. Tobias knew the history and understood that he could die if he married her. But he trusted God, recited the above prayer fervently and went on to a happy marriage with Sarah.

Nowadays, many Catholic couples live together or are sexually active before marriage. Same sex marriage is now legal in the United States (as it has been for ten years here in Canada). As much as cohabiting and same sex couples may desire to love one another – and most, I’m certain, really do feel love and affection towards the other – they cannot love each other in the way they are called to: freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully, **truly loving as God loves**. Sexual relations are meant to be the renewal of a couple’s marriage vows. If there is no marriage, there are no vows and there can be no renewal.

Essentially, **pre-marital sex, contracepted sex and sex between two people of the same gender are all lies.**

“God help us to love each other freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully. Help us to love and not to lust.”

For more information about the Theology of the Body:

<http://thetheologyofthebody.com>

For more information on NFP:

www.ccli.org

www.woomb.org

www.creightonmodel.com

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This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2017/01/24/marriage-one-man-one-woman-a-noble-purpose/>
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Excessive Options and Apathy

Last week I passed a billboard for a convenience store chain. (I wanted a photo of it, but since it was along a highway, and I was driving, I didn't get one.) The image consisted almost entirely of beverage bottles and read:

“Are 500+ beverage options excessive?”

“Yes.”

The implication, of course, is that excess is a good thing, and that this store has whatever you might like to satisfy your thirst. (Except alcohol. This is Pennsylvania, people.)

This isn't a screed against convenience stores. (The advertiser in this case is [Sheetz](#), which I happen to love.) I like to go into a store and find what I'm looking for. Frankly, it's sometimes tough to find my favorite. But something about that billboard stopped me in my tracks. (Mentally. I didn't brake on the highway.)

Why do we need so many options? Excessive options aren't limited to bottled drinks. It's canned soup, cereal, disposable razors, yogurt, etc. The number of choices can be paralyzing. For me, the selections either result in my irritation or my apathy.

And here we are with 500 beverages at a corner store while in other parts of the world, clean water is a luxury.

I don't have an easy solution. There's nothing inherently evil about lots of different drinks. And I'll admit to being ignorant as to why places still do not have easy access to safe drinking water. I've *heard* of initiatives like [Water for Life](#), but that's it.

But the billboard did spark an idea. One that will require (a small) sacrifice and and exercise in solidarity. For Lent this year, I'll be giving up all drinks but water and unsweetened tea. Goodbye for a while juice, milk, and alcohol. I'm still on the fence about whether to give up the unsweetened, flavored seltzer water I enjoy. (The thought of giving it up makes me wince, so I probably should.)

It won't make the drink choices at the store less overwhelming. It won't bring clean water to where it's needed. But it will make me more mindful of our abundance and of those who have so little.

This contribution is available at <http://www.carolynastfalk.com/2017/01/23/excessive-options-apathy/>
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Can I disagree with Church teaching? [at Third Place Project]



NEWS RELEASE: RESIGNATION OF BISHOP FREDERICK HENRY

In accordance with canon law § 8 of the Code of Canon Law, His Holiness Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Most Reverend Frederick B. Henry as Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary due to health concerns.

Most Rev. Luigi Bomizi, Apostolic Nuncio to Canada, ANNOUNCES THAT THE HOLY FATHER HAS NAMED BISHOP WILLIAM FERRENDE MCGRATTAN, currently the Bishop of the Diocese of Peterborough, as his successor.

The installation of the new Bishop will be on Monday, February 23, 2017 at 7:30 p.m., which will be at St. Mary's Cathedral.

Last week brought big news for the Church in Alberta – [Pope Francis accepted the retirement of Bishop Fred Henry \(for health reasons\) and appointed Bishop William McGrattan](#) (currently Bishop of Peterborough, Ontario) to take his place leading the diocese of Calgary. Since then, there have been articles [that have praised the work Bishop Henry did](#) in nearly twenty years leading Calgary Catholics, and others which [describe him as a dinosaur from a bygone era](#).

I've also seen commentary (particularly from the secular media) hoping that Bishop McGrattan might be the one to *finally* bring Church teaching in line with modern times. There've been interviews with "ordinary" Catholics regarding their take on how they didn't like how outspoken Bishop Henry has been in defending Catholic positions on controversial issues.

These interviews bring up an interesting question when considering 'ordinary' Catholics whose issue is less with a particular Bishop, and more with some aspect of Church teaching (usually a moral issue). It's really a simple question: can one be Catholic and still have disagreements with what the Church believes?

At first glance, it would seem that the answer is 'no.' When adults go through the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) to convert to Catholicism, they are asked to make a profession of faith, publicly stating:

I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.

If this is what's expected from converts, then it would stand to reason that this is what's expected of every Catholic – we should all believe and affirm what the Church believes, teaches, and professes. Personally, I have no problem affirming my belief in Church teaching. (If I didn't, I would not have spent my adult life studying about and working for the Church.) I love and trust the Catholic Church, **but I know this isn't the case for everyone.**

I know there are people who sit in the same pews as I do Sunday after Sunday for whom different

aspects of Church teaching are problematic (and others who've stopped coming at all.) This is why newspapers have no trouble finding ordinary Catholics to speak out against a variety of issues in the Church: under the umbrella of Catholicism, there are Catholics (and yes, they are absolutely Catholic) who have serious issues of disagreement with the Church. These sorts of discussions are a part of our history – and can be of tremendous good to us – provided we take the time to listen to one another.

Twenty centuries of Church history have brought with them many arguments and questions, beginning at the time of the Apostles. Thomas questioned whether Jesus really rose from the dead (John 20:24-29). Peter and Paul argued whether Gentile converts to Christianity were obligated to follow Jewish dietary laws (Galatians 2:11-21). The early centuries of the Church provided some difficult discussions about the nature of Jesus, our understanding of the Trinity, and the canon of Scripture (which books go into the Bible). The answers found by these discussions are what have given us a creed to believe and profess in the first place.

More recently, questions around liturgy, morality, and Church authority are helping us to better understand who we are and what we're about. Without the sexual revolution of the 1960's – and the questions that followed regarding Church doctrine on marriage and sexuality – we would never have discovered the theological treasure of St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*.

The Church's task is to respond to society... to be a sort of conscience for society, challenging popular opinion specifically when what is popular is no longer good for us. Bishop Fred Henry was exceptionally good at this... which is precisely that which is at the heart of the accolades at criticisms which have accompanied his retirement.

Our sphere of influence is not likely to be as wide – nor as widely reported on – as was Bishop Henry's. The key comes in what we do when we come across someone whose beliefs conflict with our own. If you're like me, and you have a strong attachment to Catholicism- and to Church teaching – it can be easy to feel like an attack on one aspect or another of Catholicism is a personal attack, and to immediately go on the defensive. We can unload apologetics books and talk about all the reasons why Catholics are right. This can come across to others as self-righteousness, and often isn't helpful, because most people who dissent from Church teaching do so for either emotionally charged personal reasons or because of reasonable, rational arguments. In either case, they deserve to be heard out. We need to be the first ones to listen charitably to others – Catholic and otherwise – who have big questions about our faith.

If, on the other hand, you're having a tough time with one aspect or another of Catholic teaching, my invitation is for you to find someone knowledgeable in their faith to talk about it further. This could be a priest, deacon, youth minister, teacher, etc. [Feel free to send me a question](#) – if I don't know the answer, I'll look it up or put you in touch with someone more equipped to help you. The answers you are looking for are there to be found – and it's my prayer that you'll be courageous and diligent enough to find them.

This contribution is available at <http://www.thirdplaceproject.com/can-i-disagree-with-church-teaching/>
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Living Rosary for Moms [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



I belong to a Living Rosary for Moms group. In this group, we gather together every day in prayer spiritually, praying for one another in our vocations as mothers. We unite our prayers and petitions.

My friend Mary started this group after reading

[this post](#)

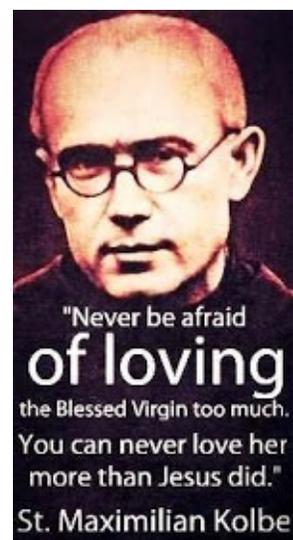
. She read this article and wanted to get together 20 of her friends to pray one full 20-decade rosary. What happened next, was a whirlwind for her. (God works like that) Within a couple months she had 9 full 20-decade rosaries! Each of the 180 women praying a decade

for

and

with

each other spiritually. Mary chose the above picture for our group to show the love Jesus had for His mother. His love, joy and respect is so evident



I have the 2nd Luminous Mystery, The Wedding Feast of Cana. Every day I pray my mystery, my Our

Father and 10 Hail Mary's, trying to contemplate on the words of Mary about her Son.

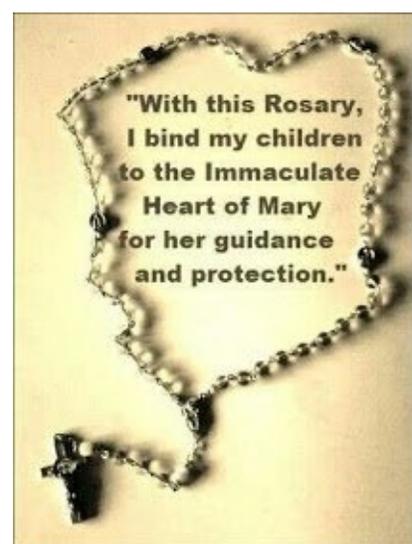
"Do whatever He tells you." -John 2:5

She always brings us to her Son.

She does not take away from Him, she adds.

I try to think about all these other women and the intentions they all carry in their hearts, just like me. I pray my decade in the shower, in my taxi-van, waiting in line or at a doctor's office, after or before Mass and sometimes in bed before drifting off to sleep.

I can't even begin to describe the bond I feel with all these beautiful prayer warriors. It's our love for our families and our faith that bind us together.



My friend Mary has put me in charge of keeping the Living Rosary for Moms going, and I currently have several open decades from women that needed to leave for various reasons.

We can also start a 10th 20-decade rosary!

The options are infinite!

If you are interested in being assigned a decade, please contact me via email if you are reading this through my blog:

(jamiejo99 at gmail.com) (no spaces and use @ for at)

I will then assign you a decade to be prayed every day for and with the other moms in the group. You will be allowed to join the Facebook group if you are on Facebook, introduce yourself if you so wish, and ask for any petitions you'd like to. We won't bother you with any postings other than petitions and Rosary related memes.

Facebook group is

[HERE](#)

if you'd like to look around.

You must message me directly.

If, after you've signed up and been assigned your decade, you find you need to quit it, you'd need to only message me and I will relieve you of your commitment. It is important you let me know though, so I can fill your spot and we have no lapse in the rosaries being prayed.

(I apologize blogger is messing with my text switching from left margin to center not letting me pick just one)

God bless you and may the Holy Spirit prompt you to join us!

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2017/01/living-rosary-for-moms.html>
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Soldier or Saint – Leave No One Behind [at Catholic Stand]

In his book, [Church Militant Field Manual](#), Father Richard Heilman relates the Soldier’s Creed of the United States Army.

“I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.”

Military discipline, that which aids these warriors in protecting their country, demands a dogged dedication to developing their strength in the service of others. Without total dedication to the mission of saving and protecting others, the mission of the soldier is destined to fail. That is why the Warrior Ethos practiced by military personnel states:

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

Soldier or Saint

In winning the battle against the Evil One, soldiers for Christ must employ a similar strategy. Whether soldier or saint, the necessary component is to go “all in”. This type of dedication and the necessary skill to pull it through are no accident. It is the result of intensive training. A soldier must pledge to advance his mission through self-restraint, commitment, and pride. Our pledge as soldiers in the Church Militant demands the same

As Catholics and members of the Church Militant, we are soldiers for Christ and our mission is clear – the advancement of His Word and the winning of souls. We are called to be our brother’s keeper in the clear sense of being members of the Body of Christ. Sinner or saint, rich or poor, strong or weak – we are all beloved children of God the Father. Our purpose, here on earth, is to bring souls – our own and those of others – to the Eternal Home with Jesus Himself. Being a child of God leaves no room for egocentric self-interest. The Word is there to be shared.

Mission One

Placing the mission first sets the tone for the importance of the goal – saving others. When we seek to participate in the [New Evangelization](#) to which Pope John Paul II called us, our focus must not be abandoned. Winning souls for Christ is the pinnacle to which we must be determined to ascend. This requires a dedication that may not come naturally for most of us. Therefore we should pray for strength

and success. We must soldier on.

“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

[John 14:13](#)

Refuse Defeat

Yet bringing souls – even our own – to Jesus is no task for the weak. This mission requires a steadfastness and determination not come by naturally. In training for our mission our weapons come from the supernatural: grace, divine inspiration, and the Word of God. Often times we seek to share what we, ourselves, have learned but lack the perseverance to allow others to fully embrace the importance of the mission in their own time. The four [Cardinal Virtues](#) of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance play a key part in defying defeat and accompanying others gently into the Light.

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” [1 Corinthians](#)

[15:57](#)

Never Quit

Discouragement can become our enemy as the Evil One places a lack of resolve onto our weary souls. In order to dig deep into our supernatural reserves we must avail ourselves to the weapons of the Church Militant. Holy Mass and the Eucharist, the Rosary and other devotions, and the examples of those warrior saints who have gone before us will help us in sustaining the fight. As in the Psalm of David we pray, “Answer me quickly, O LORD, my spirit fails; Do not hide Your face from me, Or I will become like those who go down to the pit.

Leave No One Behind

Sustained by the Word of God, fueled by His promise, and spurred by our Spirit-inspired commitment we are able to reject defeat. Imagine what would happen if all members of the Church Militant rose up, with a common purpose, and refused to leave behind any soul within their reach. What is keeping us from joining forces and completing this holy mission?

“We must learn the special operations (special ops) techniques and procedures for search and rescue missions of fallen comrades (those who have become weak in their faith). Although rarely wielded by the Catholics today, this supernatural strength and these techniques are truly authentic gifts of the Church that are field-tested and battle-hardened. We must commit ourselves to their restoration if we ever hope to stem the tide of evil and rescue our lost loved ones who may be destined for eternal damnation.” (Excerpt from [Church Militant Field Manual](#)).

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicstand.com/soldier-saint-leave-no-one-behind/>
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Turning Mother Against Child in the Name of Freedom? Not Part of His Plan [at Campfires and Cleats]

For 44 years, we have been living a nightmare.

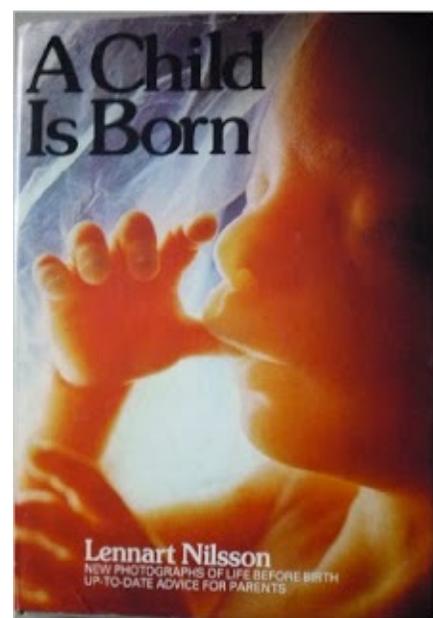
Truly, living in America today is like stepping into the

pages of a Ray [Bradbury](#) or Kurt [Vonnegut](#) piece < Brutal geniuses that they were. > where suicides and life "terminations" and more- are common and accepted.

It's a horror, a nightmare of epic proportions and

those who speak against it are, at best, considered pariahs....

at worst, downright crazy.



Contrary to what many consider a victory

a victory for women, for families, for America,

the fact is when the Supreme Court, through Roe v Wade,

legalized abortion on demand on this day in 1973,

it crushed the rights of a child *in order to preserve a mother's*

right to destroy her child's life.



It made acceptable the tearing apart of mother and child in the name of progress.

And equality.

And femininity.

And freedom.

But what freedom is there to the taking of a life?

To establish that the rights of women are predicated on exterminating the most defenseless members of society..... ?

That's no freedom at all.

Nor is it progress.

Nor, civil rights.

But many don't see it this way.

And I get that..... I really do.

I get that many women feel enslaved by their fertility.

And I get that they feel they need the "right" to choose the when, the how, the why of their reproductive-ness.

Those marches that took place in DC and in other cities

of our great nation this past weekend..?

There was a lot of snark and derision on the web around these but really,

I get why women march.....they stand with the voiceless.

They stand in solidarity for those who *cannot*,

for those who do *not*.

For those who don't have the freedoms, the privileges

and the rights that we, here in the greatest nation in the world, do have.

Isn't that essentially what The March for Life *is*?

Aren't we, who march for rights of the preborn, *also* a voice for the

voiceless?

For the defenseless?

For those whose rights have been trampled?

How are these two causes mutually exclusive?

Imagine the force we could be, if we harnessed our fervor and

perseverancethose who march *for* women

and those who march *for* the preborn....

to institute, to restore the rights of *both*,

How can we not see that The March for Life *IS* pro-women?

Just as it *IS* pro-life and pro-preborn child?

We might say.... there are there SOME women

whose attention seeking tactics in the march on DC this past weekend

were...well...less than, um, ladylike.

Well, my friends,

there *are* some pro-life advocates

who've attempted to make a point with less than

peaceful means as well.

< put down the tomatoes...this is the truth >

You know they're out there and they make us all look bad.

Hey, I'm about as devoted to the prolife cause as one can get.

And let's be honest.

There are fringe wackos in every movement, are there not?

They tear apart all the good and all the rationality.

When one hears "prolife," one tends to think of

abortion-clinic bombing psychopaths

NOT the thousands of good natured, kind hearted souls

who, in my parish alone, collected close to \$6000 in cash and

two truckloads of baby gear in only one weekend after masses for

our local chapter of Birthright.

Because that's what proliferers do.

Because we value the life of baby and mother and

we're there to applaud that woman as she exacts her RIGHT to choose life.

We're behind her, cheering her and offering her tangible

support and we're not judgmental because

Lord knows, that could be any of us or our daughters or our sisters
or our friends or our neighbors or coworkers.

We are *all* His daughters.

He has great things in store for *all* of us.

I don't presume to know His plan, but I can venture a guess that
turning against one another
and pre-born members of society is not part of it.



Thank you for spending some of your precious time today
here at my home on the web!

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

If not, just click [here](#) to
quickly and easily so we can be in touch regularly!



This post contains amazon affiliate links....

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

at no cost to you.

THANK YOU!

Until next time,

~Chris

This contribution is available at <http://campfiresandcleats.blogspot.com/2017/01/turning-mother-against-child-in-name-of.html>
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Discernment in the Second Half of Life

January 26, 2017 by [Susan Stabile](#)

Yesterday (Wednesday) I gave a retreat day for the University of St. Thomas' Selim Center for Learning in the Later Years on the theme Discerning My Place in the Second Half of Life. There were about 45-50 men and women in attendance, ranging in age from 47 to 99 years old.

The simple truth is that aging is not optional. We all age and we all will die. We can color our hair, we can use cream the promises to iron out wrinkles, we can (and should) exercise and eat well, but none of that stops the aging process.

But while aging is not optional, how we age is. As I was preparing for this program I read an account by one author of a workshop in which an attendee raised his hand and said "I'm fifty-eight and I know where I'm headed – downhill. It's all downhill from here." The authors' response was, "Well, I'm not sure I agree, but even if you are right, the real question is: Are you going to just slide, or are you going to steer?"

I think of the latter as aging optimally, a phrase I took from an 86 year old woman religious I once directed on a summer retreat; she had been nominated for an award for "aging optimally" by her local community.

Living into one's eighties, nineties, and even past one hundred is a real possibility today, one that makes fifties and sixties a time not for winding down but for gearing up. We need to look afresh at this prospect of a longer life and ask ourselves, What's the best use of this extra gift of time?

To be sure, the discernment we do in the second half of life is different from discernment at earlier stages. We are asking different questions and we are addressing those questions from a very different standpoint.

Yet, discernment at this later stage is no less important than in earlier stages. The movement away from self-absorption to a God-centered life is a continual process that doesn't end until we die. That means we continue to ask ourselves questions that help us in the process of

Identifying patterns of thought or behavior that we need to face and change.

Identifying deep and lasting wounds and learning how to seek healing and restoration.

Choosing the best out of multiple good options.

Dealing with unhealthy attachments; praying and working toward spiritual freedom.

One of the points I made yesterday was that, apart from any specific questions that arise, the second half of life is the time to ask ourselves what do I want or need to do with the rest of my life, with the time I have remaining? What do I need to do before I die? Dennis Linn suggests that the sooner we ask the question, "What do I need to do before I die?", the more meaning our remaining life will have.

As an example of the fact that some people may need to live in some new way before they can peacefully accept coming to the end of their life, I mentioned Alfred Nobel. Nobel, a Swedish chemist, made his fortune inventing dynamite and explosives. When his brother died, a newspaper accidentally printed Alfred's obituary. Most of us don't get to read our own obituary in our lifetime. For Alfred it was eye-opening to read that he was remembered for making a fortune by enabling armies to achieve new levels of mass destruction. That was not how he wanted to be remembered and so he determined to change his life. And of course today we remember Alfred Nobel because he used his fortune to found the Nobel Prize, which annually rewards the research that most benefits humanity.

So, whatever your age, I would invite you to spend some time asking yourself: what do you need to do that has been left undone.

Do you need to tell your story to someone?

Do you need to say something particular to someone?

Do you need to do some particular thing?

Is there something you need to give away?

Is there someone you need to forgive? (Or who needs to forgive you?)

This contribution is available at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com/2017/01/26/discernment-in-the-second-half-of-life/>
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HTTP/1.1 200 OK Server: nginx Date: Sat, 11 Feb 2017 16:36:23 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Transfer-Encoding: chunked Connection: keep-alive Strict-Transport-Security: max-age=86400 Vary: Accept-Encoding Vary: Cookie X-hacker: If you're reading this, you should visit automattic.com/jobs and apply to join the fun, mention this header. X-Pingback: <https://franciscanmom.com/xmlrpc.php> Link: ; rel=shortlink X-ac: 3.atl _dfw

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Of Prayer, Twitter and Red Minivans [at FranciscanMom]

Yesterday I was tagged in a [tweet with an emergency prayer request](#).



After promising to pray that Emergency Novena for Christine's friend, I messaged her to ask what color car her friend drives.

That may seem like a weird question, but I use visual prayer cues for special intentions. [When I see a car that resembles one belonging to someone I know and love, that's a reminder to me to pray for that person.](#)

Christine told me that her friend drives a red minivan.

This morning at Mass, I remembered her friend in prayer, then resolved to turn off the radio on my way home and pray that day's Emergency Novena.

After Mass, I got into my car, turned off the radio, and prepared to leave my parking space. The car in front of me moved away, revealing that the car parked in front of it was a **red minivan**.

A couple of miles later, I saw another one.

In your kindness, when you see a red minivan, say a special prayer for Christine's friend. If you commit to doing this, I'm quite sure that God will make sure you see plenty of those cars.

Intercessory Prayer

gets behind the wheel

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This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2017/01/17/of-prayer-twitter-and-red-minivans/>
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Silence: A Movie Review [at A Faith-Full Life]

Silence is a faith-based film for those (like me) who can't stand faith-based films. It is not, however, an easy movie to watch. It is a film which was made not to entertain an audience but rather, as all good art should, to provoke an emotional response. Perhaps even to, (*and dare I say it of a faith-based film?*) cause the audience to think. To reflect deeply on our own beliefs, and to question the nature of both faith and faithfulness. For me, Silence is what faith-based films should be. Based on a book by Shūsaku Endō, and directed by Martine Scorsese, Silence is not your typical hollywood fare. Another reviewer, Matt Zoller Seitz, wrote that, "*This is not the sort of film you 'like' or 'don't like.' It's a film that you experience and then live with.*" ¹

Having said that, I did like it. A lot.

I was speaking with a friend of mine who is a seminarian, and he remarked that several of his fellow seminarians had seen it, and they left the theater feeling as if they had been on a spiritual retreat. It's that sort of an experience. It sticks with you.

The film is not concerned with offering Christian platitudes or reassuring it's audience that they are good Christian people. People whom God loves more than the unsaved, and whose prayers are always promptly and faithfully answered. Perhaps we're not good Christian people. Perhaps we merely appear to be good Christians because we happen to live in a particularly good time and in a happily fortuitous place.

Kichijiro, a Japanese Christian in the film who has apostatized many times in order to save his life (having even watched his entire family suffer martyrdom in front of him), remarks that he would have been a good Christian had he been born in an earlier time; a time when Christianity wasn't persecuted. Similarly, perhaps we only appear to be faithful because our faith hasn't truly been tested. Perhaps it is easy to go to Church on Sunday, but much harder to actually die a martyr's death. Perhaps we confuse God's blessing with our own material prosperity. Perhaps if we listened carefully to Christ's words² about the rich man entering the kingdom of heaven we would begin to wonder if all our wealth is truly a result of God's blessing at all...

The Japanese Christians in this film labor under no such delusions. They suffer for their faith in abject poverty. They meet for Church in huts under darkness of night, without benefit of priests or sacraments, desperately wondering why God allows them to suffer so. The question of human suffering and God's thunderous silence in the face of it, anchors the film firmly in it's characters struggle to remain faithful.

This theme, God's silence in the face of human suffering, is one which is well documented even within the Scriptures. God allows Job to suffer in order to test his faithfulness, and when Job seeks the face of the Almighty he finds himself alone. "*If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.*"³ In the Psalms we read, "*O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!*"⁴ and even God's own Son cries from His cross in the words of the psalmist, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"⁵

This theme of silence is prolific throughout the movie. When Fr. Rodriguez gazes into a pool of water, is it his own face or that of Christ's which gazes placidly back at him? The voiceover narration in the movie is sparse, but there are a few instances when God's silence is broken and we hear His voice in Fr. Rodriguez's head – or is it only what Fr. Rodriguez imagines God to be saying? Is he only hearing what he wants to hear; receiving the only Word of God that he is willing to receive?

Is it God, who has been silent for the entire film, who finally speaks or merely his own rationalizations which clamor to make themselves heard?

This is a movie which allows us our own interpretation of the story being told. It is not a film which tries to promote a particular point of view or to clumsily persuade the audience of the moral viability of the characters decisions. Rather, it leads us to a vantage point where we can watch the events unfold, and then leaves us in silence to make of them what we will. To reflect on what our own actions would be in similar circumstances. To wonder what the voice in our own head would say.

The story follows two priests, Andrew Garfield and Adam Driver, who set out from Portugal to try and find their mentor, Liam Neeson, who has gone missing in Japan and is rumored to have apostatized. They are scandalized by the rumors and are certain that Fr. Ferriera has remained faithful and devout in spite of persecution.

They are led to Japan by a drunk and apostate Christian; a man who has betrayed all he holds dear not once, but many times over. We bear witness to his acts of betrayal and apostasy, failings which are invariably followed by desperate entreaties for confession and forgiveness. Within his ravaged faith, abject despair, and cringing hope we glimpse Peter, Judas, and ultimately ourselves.

In Japan the young priests confront for the first time the frailty of the faith and their own weaknesses and fears. Evil is shown to be both monstrous and reasonable, polite and insidious, as inevitable as the tide which throws itself tirelessly at the Christians tied to crosses in the sea. Is it an unforgivable sin to step on an image of Christ? It is only an image, it is not Christ himself. The act is a mere formality...

And yet...

Wasn't Christ Himself *imago Dei*? The very image of the unseen God? Fulfilling perfectly in His incarnation that which all of humanity is called to? In the persecution carried out by the Japanese inquisitors it is not only the Christian images which are made a sacrilege, but humans, divine image bearers, are slaughtered with almost as little regard as the images which are tread under foot (*fumi-e*).

Part of the difficulty in viewing this film is that when we are finally brought to the climax, we are left not with a neatly resolved narrative, but rather with the same questions that we have been wrestling with for the entire time.

Confident of our unfailing faithfulness, we want to proclaim with Peter, "*Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.*"⁶ But Silence unflinchingly presents us with the Christian faith as lived by men in whom the divine image has been *distorted*. Men who no longer clearly hear God themselves. Men who no longer properly follow God. Men who are unable to rightly present the proper image of God to others. Silence allows us to see ourselves in these fallen men, to realize that I too am one of the poor, undeserving, faithless sinners for whom Christ died. I too have made brash vows, filled not with faith but with false bravado. And all too predictably, I too have betrayed Him.

Steven Greydanus writes in his review of the film, *“It poses a challenge for viewers of any faith or of none, or of any culture or ethnicity, even if the challenge is not the same for everyone. A friend who is an atheist has said that Silence made him want to believe in God. For my part, Silence presses my Christian ethos to the breaking point.”*⁷

In the end, Silence reminds me that any hope I place in myself will be disappointed. I will fall. I will betray all that I hold dear. I am weak.

But... then there is this:

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”*⁸

The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he will also deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.⁹

Ultimately, this is not a film for everyone. It is long, uncomfortable, and demanding. But for those who dare, it is also richly rewarding. An absolute masterpiece and just possibly Scorsese’s finest.

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1. <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/silence-2016> ↵
 2. “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” Matthew 19:23b-24 ↵
 3. Job 23:8-9 ↵
 4. Psalm 83:1 ↵
 5. Psalm 22:1, Matthew 27:46 ↵
 6. Matthew 26:35b ↵
 7. <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/sdg-reviews-silence> ↵
 8. 2 Corinthians 12:9 ↵
 9. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 ↵

Eroticization and the unique developmental process of human persons [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

This is part 2 in a reflection on human sexuality following on part 1 which was originally posted January 14, 2014. Here were some titles in this original post of January 14, 2014 - [Sexual abuse 1 - by clergy the tip of the iceberg](#)

- Sexual abuse is a crime against humanity
- The complex nature of the human person and sexuality
- Sex is good, yes, but not in every instance
- Why do people pervert sex into violence?
- The beauty and power of human sexuality
- Human sexual development requires mentoring
- Wandering away from the original design
- Exquisitely sensitive spouses or dangerous rapists
- Human development is a long and complicated process
- Human development - becoming a person
- Most of us have some "wrinkles" in our development

May 20, 2016 I took this original post from January 14, 2014 on sexual abuse and re-framed it as a reflection with a focus on our unique developmental process as human beings with particular interest in the role of the process of eroticization in our development and growth as persons. Two additional titles were added to the original 11 to add the perspective of human development. It is helpful to realize and admit that clergy sexual abuse is in actual fact only the tip of the iceberg in human society. As it turns out the vast majority of cases of sexual and other forms of abuse take place wherever human beings are to be found and, in particular, wherever human beings are to be found in a vulnerable position with regards to others more powerful than they are. Fr. Gilles Surprenant

Human development and the role of eroticization

It would be interesting to dialogue with readers who have questions or comments on what has preceded as well as what is to follow or, for that matter, on all that is to be found in this blog.

Human beings develop into persons over a long period of time

It is

admittedly

impossible to thoroughly understand our human nature, including our sexuality, and even less in its distorted forms, unless we acquire a more fundamental and evidence-based grasp of what we are as human beings and how we become the beings we are whether at our best or at our worst. What are the many factors that enhance our free will to live lives of purpose and integrity on the one hand or on the other hand debilitate that ability and cause us to become mere shadows of what and who we might be, shameful or even dangerous counterfeit human beings?

In beginning this series of reflections on human sexuality and development we at first looked at the horror of sexual abuse as the distortion that it obviously is and then in contrast to it we opened this exploration to the broader vista of human development. Our premise is that we are not born fully developed but develop into the people we become over many years.

There seems to be broad consensus in the human sciences and in society at large that the early years in the womb and infancy are crucial for our development as persons and that our developmental process "closes the loop" as it were by the time we enter into early adulthood. As we consider human sexuality as it is experienced in the current landscape of human society we observe much confusion and pain around sexuality and sexual activity and expression. Even the casual observer can suspect the real existence of a very complex and protracted human developmental process which takes at least 25 years to run its full course.

Human development is a process generating a broad spectrum of characters

Professional anthropologists study artifacts left behind by people who lived in the past or those of people currently alive in various places on the Earth. Those now living can also be observed in the various moments, activities, social structures and practices and anthropologists formulate theories about those they observe, about how aware they are of themselves, how they see themselves, the meaning and purpose they give to their lives, and how they understand their place in the world.

In looking at our own lives and generations, at our own societies, we observe our human capacity for complex personal development, activity, and self-awareness, our profound capacity for reflection and understanding, and our unique capacity to be aware of our faults and to be willing to correct them. On the dark side we are also capable of ignoring self-awareness, of denying our own faults, and instead of imposing on or attempting to dominate others. The contrast between the saint and the sociopath or psychopath illustrates this wide spectrum of possible human characters and personalities.

The natural human family composed of a husband/father and a wife/mother with children

At one end of the spectrum of human life we find that the place given to human sexuality is merely as one of many refined dimensions of life. In the loving, faithful, fruitful, and committed relationship of a wife and her husband in marriage as a partnership of equals and a community of life and love, their human sexuality manifests a broad range of expression characterized by tenderness in a variety of

relational contexts: towards each other, with children, their own parents and siblings, and others. For such a couple genital sexuality is always about their fertility and power to give life while it is also always about expressing and strengthening their union as persons joined in a unique couple.

Rather than seeking or grasping for pleasure, the husband seeks to pleasure his wife, to whom he attaches himself out of appreciation and gratitude for the multiple ways in which she pours herself out for him and their children as one who gives and nourishes life. His selfless efforts in the bridal chamber are consistent with his efforts each day and all week to attend to his wife and children. He notices each person and attends to them in accord with the nature and needs of each one and in this he greatly values the observations and judgement of his wife and mother of their children.

The tenderness with which she cleaves to her husband expresses her appreciation for his presence, his efforts on her behalf and that of their family, and his consideration and attentiveness to her needs as she forgets herself in pouring out her life energy for those she loves. She values his role in their joint parenting of their children, and she senses the importance of his role as each child develops a sense of identity, of their gender, and that they are loved.

The friendship and manifestly loving relationship of the couple is the solid foundation of their family, in which children are mentored by both a father and a mother and are supported in their individual and collective developmental processes as infants, children, adolescents, youth, and young adults living in the communal context of their own family of origin.

While explicit genital sex does not feature overly prominently in such a universe of marriage and family life; it nevertheless is ever in the background and enjoys a valuable but discrete place as the wholesome expression of the tenderness and affection bonding their parents to each other and open to them as their children. In such a family, human sexuality is appropriately protected and safeguarded by an air of privacy, mystery, responsibility, and mutual respect.

These parents are open yet guarded on sexual issues, taking care to properly form and inform their children at appropriate teaching moments, yet taking care to protect - especially in their early more vulnerable years - their children's innocence of mind, heart, and imagination. From their point of view, our modern social climate and culture is a battleground littered with casualties, with children and youth who have been violated and robbed of innocence. All the more reason do such parents see the importance of their role in doing all they can to construct a lively and loving family environment which is at the same time communally rich and personally responsible.

Sex as the currency of human transactions tends to generate "sex wars"

If parents find themselves with an obligation to protect the innocence of their children, it is because at the opposite end of the human spectrum we find the casualties of what we could call the "sex wars": those who have suffered, often from infancy, verbal, psychological, and even sexual abuse, or who suffered deficits of loving care, of compassion, of the essentials of human respect and kindness.

Even those who have benefited from proper human care as they grew up may have suffered the lack of proper formation and mentoring that could have helped them to begin to accept and understand themselves, their sexuality in all of its dimensions, and the natural place it has in the whole realm of human relationships in all their variety and complexity. This could happen in environments where the parent or parents suffer a lack of sufficient self-awareness, autonomy, knowledge, or responsibility, and

hence engage in sexual activity as a form of currency for surviving or obtaining other goods, attention, influence, or even a position of dominance. Such deficits leave human persons isolated, or poor or raw and needy, and put them at risk to employ their sexuality to grasp as a drowning person might grab a lifesaver; rather than as a way to tenderly give of themselves to the other.

What place does human sexuality have in the emerging lives of young people?

A crucial question which acts as a "tipping point" in the human development of boys and girls into young men and women touches precisely on the place of sexuality in their consciousness. What has their experience of childhood and adolescence allowed them to understand is of greatest importance for them as human beings? Are they discovering as paramount their meaning, purpose, and dignity in life and have they begun to enjoy the freedom of will to go on giving meaning and purpose to their life by fully assuming their inherent human dignity?

In this context are they able to see, understand, accept, and responsibly assume their human sexuality as one dimension among many composing their nature as human beings? They begin to understand that human sexuality is a capacity to give of oneself to the other rather than an impulse to grab and use the other for oneself. This understanding enhances their free will to responsibly assume both their rights and duties in life and in society in view of making their personal contribution to the common good with satisfaction; while engaging in the course of living out their lives as fully as possible.

Here is the reverse side of this "tipping point". On the other hand, when people are not sufficiently formed and mentored by their parents to see, understand, accept, and appreciate their life as a good yet complex reality requiring ongoing learning and personal responsibility; they are at greater risk at a young age or later to be troubled by their human sexuality - from hormones to attractions - and by all that is to be observed in an impulsive society and culture and to be endured at the hands of others.

Even with optimum conditions in which to grow up from infancy to young adulthood, life presents us with any number of challenges to our understanding of life, the world, and society in general and to our self-understanding in particular. Whatever confusion or uncertainty assails us becomes a "hot point" or "sticking point" in our psyche and may remain with us as a problem to be solved or as a vacuum to be filled or again as a challenge to be taken up. Whatever the dynamic is in a young man's or woman's life may determine to a great extent one of the principle directions or orientations of their whole life. Our instinct of self-preservation or of survival tends to push us to resolve those issues that remain as an irritant in our psyche, in our mind or heart or spirit, or even in our physical body.

A preoccupation with illness or injury can drive a person into the medical field. Sensitivity to mental or emotional pain or confusion can drive a person into the related fields of psychiatry or psychology. An experience of emptiness or a single or series of spiritual experiences can drive a person towards related fields of religion, philanthropy, a religious vocation, pastoral ministry, or priesthood. A sense of loneliness can drive a person into some form of communal life or partnership or marriage. A good experience of family life can draw one to find a competent spouse with the complementary gifts of a mother to bear the children one would father or a father for the children one would bear as mother.

A turbulent, effervescent, and unstable culture exacerbates gender confusion

It is not difficult to find in any culture or time or place some men and women either demonstrably militant or more discretely unhappy with their traditionally assigned sexual identities or roles. We could

perhaps say that our own western society and culture may perhaps be giving more prominence to gender identity issues than any preceding generations.

Gender confusion or uncertainty - affirmed more factually according to recent research - has been considered a normal but transitory and temporary phase for some children, adolescents, and even for some adults. To be more specific, it has been widely observed that children may spontaneously play "doctor" and explore one another's bodies. Adolescents may suddenly experience arousal at the sight of a same gender friend's physical features or nakedness. While a young person's sense of identity remains incomplete and fluid it can and does happen that they experience such physical arousal and corresponding emotions of attraction and affection. However, for the most part, it has been found that such experiences turn out to be temporary and fade or simply stop as youth continue to develop.

It is not difficult to understand how fluid an adolescent's self understanding may be and how volatile the changes can be in how they are aware of themselves, what that may mean to them, what place that has in their life history to this point, and what other factors may affect and change or affirm how they see, experience, and understand their own self and their life. In negotiating a labyrinth one may find many dead ends and backtrack to seek out a path that goes forward. So too in human development any number of human experiences turn out to be dead ends, accidents along the way, temporary stops but not final destinations.

It is scandalous that certain ideological stances taken by individuals and interest groups are lobbied to governments to impose on children in schools sex ed programs that are in fact propaganda designed to exploit children and youth in order to advance their social engineering agenda. Such self-interested voices seek to replace fact based and traditional understanding of human sexuality with libertarian ideologies promoting sexual exploration and experimentation without any consideration of moral, responsible, or religious principles that have been proved to be beneficial for the individual, for the family, and for society at large. These interests would want to "freeze" children and young people into "labelled" categories of sexual preference or gender rather than respect them and allow them to find their way. Most people throughout history have found their way to some degree of identification with their own gender, either to enter into marriage and family or some form of celibate living.

Developmental stages and the levels of human identity

The "Institut de Formation Humaine Intégrale de Montréal" in its formation programs adopted and has refined classic psychological theory and practice explaining the stages of development of the human person in terms of levels of identity, of which are six.

1. The body identity - from birth to one year of age
2. The identity of the doer - from one year to two and a half years
3. The individual identity - from two and a half to three years of age
4. The psychosexual identity - from three to six years of age
5. The psychosocial identity - from six to twelve years of age
6. The identity of the self - the integration of the human identity at all five previous levels into a single autonomous identity from twelve to eighteen years of age

From eighteen years of age on, the emerging personality goes through the various stages of adult human life, and much research has been done on the stages of adult life. It is very important for all to understand however that from conception to the dawn of adulthood each human being is engaged in the

fundamental process of human development which unfolds as best it can. Children need support and understanding, and all those in a position to offer it need to understand that throughout these initial stages of human development the identity of the young person is fluid and in no way fixed.

The trend to redefine and "personalize" gender

The latest trend emerging from France is a whole theoretical or hypothetical philosophical discourse around human gender. The intention seems to be to call into question all that has been understood until now in human history around our gender identity as male or female. We have always known that there is a wide range of expression of "maleness" and "femaleness" among human beings and from one culture and ethnic population to another, from one century or millennium to another. These new ideologues would want to define such variations as entirely new "sexes" or "genders". There would even be some individuals who would want to claim to have "no gender" at all.

Human society seems to be unreasonably tolerant in entertaining such wild imaginings to the point of absurdity by allowing subjective feelings and imaginings to be taken as more real, substantive, and permanent than objectively known, observable, measurable, and definable facts. Only a fool would declare of no value the subjective human experience of life, but it is equally foolish to let subjective experience trump or nullify the cumulative value of our collective experience and knowledge.

Understandably, as children and adolescents experience confusion and uncertainty, it is tempting for them and for those concerned with their development, to want to find clarity to understand what they are experiencing and what is happening to them, including in their human sexuality. The logic at work in what is variously called the "gay lobby" or related movements seeks to define the human being primarily as a sexual being, giving priority to this dimension above all other characteristics and faculties that constitute the human being, the human person. In our time it is no longer unusual to hear adults encouraging young people who experience attraction to someone of their own gender to "lock themselves in" or label / identify themselves as homosexual: lesbian or gay or any of the increasingly numerous fractions of gender "à la carte".

What began some fifty years ago as an offshoot of the civil rights movement seeking to obtain for those who self identify as homosexual the kind of freedom and public recognition increasingly gained by racial or linguistic or ethnic minorities has become an audacious and ostensibly misguided quest to redefine human nature itself and the human person with sexuality as the keystone, the primary factor defining the whole. I don't think there can be any clarity in understanding what it means to be human without beginning with some understanding of the developmental process itself. Eroticization is one of the mechanisms involved in this developmental process and examining this mechanism will turn out to be very enlightening indeed.

We will find the process of eroticization at least a clue to why the current situation is what it is, how it has happened in our day that the trend to define oneself primarily in terms of one's sexuality has come to pass, and why our society and culture has become so obsessed with sex and sexuality.

What is "eroticization"?

Various dictionaries don't really define the term eroticization but only repeat it in a grammatical loop, such as "to eroticize is to make erotic". Our culture has become so hypersexualized, so obsessed with all

that touches on or evokes genital sexuality, that it can only go around in circles without input from other sources, such as the human sciences. Even some of these manifest signs of obsession with sex and sexual pleasure, such that other forms of pleasure have all but faded into insignificance.

For our purposes here, let us adopt the definition employed at the I.F.H.I.M. mentioned above in the course of teaching and giving practical formation in the mechanisms of the human developmental process. In this context, eroticization is the mechanism whereby a human being from one moment to the next, from conception on but especially from birth, takes "imprints" from the outside world and connects these with its own interior sensations and processes. In Introductory Psychology there is the much quoted experiment of "Pavlov's Dogs" in which the dogs at first don't salivate upon seeing and smelling unknown foods but who later on do salivate upon seeing or smelling them after having eaten and tasted them. The initial experience of seeing, smelling, and then tasting the unknown food leaves a new "imprint" in the animal's conscious and neurological processes.

Eroticization has taken place, that is, the pleasure principle has been activated and experienced and has left traces or pathways which from then on will tend to seek repetition. Eroticization connects the animal with the object of its pleasure, and in time, other circumstances may join in the association, such as the time of day, or the light in the room, or the color of the plate, or a particular sound, and so on. Almost anything can be caught up into an association with a particular pleasure, and the association may be intensified with use or eventually disassociated altogether through disuse.

The role of "eroticization" in becoming a human person

It is not difficult to understand how dangerous it would be not to enjoy eating or drinking. Should eating and drinking be unpleasant we would all be at risk of dying of hunger and thirst. From the very first moments of life newborns seek nourishment. Every one of the billions of cells in a living body crave the replenishing of nutrients, oxygen, and water, among other things, in order to continue all the biological processes that make up a living being.

In our day most people have seen graphic animations or other representations of how the human brain works with lightning like sparks running between the synapses and establishing connections and paths. Those physical and chemical processes correspond to the "associations" we make between the sight of a food, its fragrance, its taste, the pleasure we take from those sensations, the satisfaction that comes from taking in nourishment and drink, and the awareness we accumulate of all these factors. All of this experience further develops into desire, anticipation, and future planning for acquiring, preparing, and consuming food and drink.

The first experiences of various pleasures and the process of building on those pleasures with the development of memories and imagination grows into a cumulative experience we could call a process of eroticization. We all have a rich and increasingly long and deep experience of pleasures and these make innumerable "associations" with material objects, places, other people, sights, sounds, tastes, fragrances, and countless other factors.

A friend years ago explained to me how he had developed such a strong association between coffee and cigarettes that he could hardly have one without also taking the other. There is abundant literature about strange "sexual tastes or preferences or associations" such as with pain or particular garments and so on.

Such associations may initially come about by accident or coincidence, but they may also come about by conscious intent and choice.

Human beings and societies have always understood that we are not machines with no choice but to operate as built, but living organisms with free will and the ability to "shape" our behaviors, tastes, preferences, and choices. Different ethnic populations and cultures manifest different preferences to be assigned to gender as male or female. These have been, until now, widely accepted as beneficial in helping young people to find their way to clarity of identity within themselves but also socially.

The pleasure principle certainly contributes largely to the development, health, and prosperity of the human person, but through interaction with family and wider social groups, individuals also learn to curb their desires to satisfy the pleasure appetites in favor of the good of other people in particular and of the common good in general. Morality and religion have a lot of accumulated knowledge and wisdom that assure sufficient harmony between individual personal growth and happiness and the common good of others in a great variety of groupings.

Inclinations and appetites for sexual pleasure - both the diffuse pleasure of simply being male or female with all their inherent processes and sensations and meanings and the specific experience of sexual pleasure and union - are very powerful and for this reason open up great potential for coming together on such paths as marriage and family, clan or tribe, and nation as well as for division and distress, trouble and hurt, fighting, war, and death. The potential and actual consequences of sexual union are so extreme that most if not all societies develop rules of conduct and taboos to restrain excesses for the sake of peace and cooperation.

Eroticization enhancing or disturbing the congruence of one's gender identity

Families and societies that take great care to watch over, protect, raise, and form their children do so in the knowledge that from birth to adulthood children and youth go through and live in progressive states of uncertainty, confusion, curiosity, delight or fear, and desire to grow and emulate their elders. So much of human life and culture has been discovered through hard lessons that there is very great advantage to learning through the experience of others. It is not necessary to constantly re-invent the wheel nor to go through all the pain that others have gone through.

Even with excellent upbringing and mentoring, young people still go through unique experiences and face unique challenges, and they must all make their own decisions and find their own way. They can choose to ignore the collective wisdom of their elders and culture but they must then accept to endure or enjoy the consequences of their choices. Those whose upbringing has faults or deficiencies may very well experience greater challenges or pain as they learn through their own mistakes.

There is wisdom in adhering to the lessons and example of mentors we admire, but it is foolish to take the risk of following ideological speculation and theorizing about artificial constructs around speculative re-definitions of human gender and sexuality. What is even more damaging than theory and thought is trying to put such speculation into practice. With how the eroticization process works there is great risk in "experimenting" with sexual practices because each erotic experience builds on others before it. It is equally possible for a person to build up wholesome sexual development or unhealthy sexual experimentation.

Catholic Christian experience and wisdom teaches that sexual union is so powerful that it is evidently designed to unify one woman and one man for life, exclusively, faithfully, generously, and lovingly. Casual sex or sexual experimentation or union without a life commitment eventually lead to breaking up and this is so painful that there is great risk that one may not recover. Even when one does recover what is lost is the original innocence and the human person's "built in" optimism and joyful outlook.

Employing one's sexual faculty outside the parameters of a chaste, exclusive, faithful, life long union of one man and one woman builds erotic associations, habits, preferences that make it increasingly difficult to enter into the eminently human and paradigmatic union of marriage and family.

Distorted human beings - undeveloped or "petrified" persons

The more we fire those synapses, the more "beaten" the "path" in the brain, the stronger the impulse or habit becomes to repeat particular practices. Any and every use of our sexual faculty outside of marriage and family has been shown time and again to lead to excesses that lean rather to pain than to happiness, to division rather than to union, to the disintegration of family rather than its progress.

When sexual habits outside the "norm" of marriage and family proven to be the most beneficial for society become increasingly "fixed", a human being becomes hardened, distorted, or petrified. The life of marriage and family provides the ideal environment for human beings to develop more fully their sensibilities to the good and well being of others. In other words, it is in these environments that they are more likely to develop more fully as human persons. Engaging in our human appetites without restraint is dangerous for ourselves but also for others. It is true in many ways and at many levels that "it takes a village to raise a child".

The irreducible complexity of the human being

For the infinity of moments during which we were carried and thrived within the warm, comforting confines of our mother's womb we found ourselves, without awareness of course, on a long growth curve of development in our capacities, sensibilities, and development of responses. Researchers have established much evidence that in the womb we learn to recognize and distinguish our mother's from our father's voice. There develops a complex web of "conspiracy" between mother and child, and more remotely, between father and child.

While in the womb we are more "hemmed in" allowing for few if any options, once "liberated" from the womb or "expelled" from paradise - however each infant experiences it - or both, a vast universe of possibilities and options open up to each little newborn individual human being. A whole host of processes kick in at first separately and distinctly, but in time begin to "network" and interact with one another. All this is true within the individual, in addition to all the hubbub and chaos of all that goes on in the "outside" world as well, requiring the individual to make sense out of the contrast and convergence between the "inner" and the "outer" worlds.

Researchers and psychologists inform us that at birth the infant is still "one" with the mother and is not yet able to experience, much less understand, that there is any distinction between the two. When the infant "grabs" Mom it has the impression it is grabbing itself, because to this point, everything "is me". The infant is literally, though apparently mythically, at the center of its universe. Whenever it has new

experiences that contradict this comforting mega truth that "all is me", such as when it draws its first breath which burns its lungs, or when it is slapped by a doctor from the "old school", or when it first experiences the pangs of hunger or the discomfort of a wet or dirty diaper, or any discomfort, the infant goes into distress and cries out. The longer it takes for the discomfort to be resolved the more urgently it cries out to the point, eventually, of turning purple and dying.

The "school of hard knocks" has begun.

As the infant's faculties develop and sharpen, its eyes begin to focus more clearly and responds to the stimulation of color, shape, and movement. The ears begin to notice sounds and distinguishes timber, volume, and impressions of pleasant or unpleasant sounds. The same happens to the senses of taste, touch, and in time, smell. Gradually, these senses interact with one another and complex associations of sense and sensibility form and construct pathways in the brain.

According to the stages of development, in the first year of life, the largest human organ the skin has each individual develop a preference for one of two body modes: active / captative or passive / receptive. This is the very basic and fundamental "body identity". As soon as the infant begins to feel hunger, the one that prefers to be active will begin to grab at the maternal breasts, while the one that prefers to be passive will wait to the very limits of patience. In both cases, once they reach their threshold of patience they will begin to whimper, and if that doesn't work they will cry, and if that still doesn't work they will scream, and so on. Luckily, both modes remain ever possible. The active can choose to be passive at need, and the passive can choose to be active at need, but for the rest of our lives, our preferred mode comes easily while the other will always require more effort and a deliberate decision.

As time goes by, the infant's cerebral development manifests itself with new abilities to remember, to experience pleasure and displeasure, to acquiesce and to refuse, to learn and to reason, to speak and to write, to calculate and imagine, to play and to work, to conceive of goals and desires, and to take steps to realize them, to experience disappointment and jubilation, to conceptualize the difference between present and absent (when Mommy disappears from view she still exists, contrary to previous experience), and the passage of time (Mommy will still exist later when she will return).

At the second stage of human development, that of the "doer" from the ages of one to two and a half, the toddler learns to do many things and begins to take in that there are rules in this game of life. In this family or home we do certain things and we don't do certain things (pull other people's hair). It is the age of potty training, and the anal sphincter affords the individual a new pair of preferences: either to retain or to eliminate upon request, demand, or need. The whole personality will be shaped by this preference, such that the person will either find it easy to spend (eliminate) money and difficult to save (retain) it, or vice versa. One becomes a retentive or eliminative personality. Of course the other mode, the less preferred mode, remains ever possible, but it will simply require more effort and also a deliberate choice each time.

The third level of human identity, that of the "individual" identity, tends to manifest itself all of a sudden, when the toddler suddenly fells and says "I do it myself". Even if it doesn't yet have the skill to do it, the toddler will insist on doing it by themselves. Skillful parents learn how to assist the child without violating this all important sense that they can now do it for themselves.

Somewhere around these ages and stages, with considerable variation from one child to another, a

"light" begins to "turn on" within the child's consciousness. It is the "moral compass" which "knows" whether a thing is "good" or "bad". At first it simply mimics the parents but quickly makes each little rule its own. It is quite enlightening to see a child repeating to its doll or teddy bear, often in the parents' own words, precise definitions of rules or behavior, including threats of punishment. The work of a child is carried out in play time, when it repeats what it is observing and learning and in this way building up a repertoire of knowledge about the world and how it works and our place in it.

Shocking but true: each moment opens options into life or towards death

There is no telling at what point any given child may learn to distinguish the difference between a thing that is imagined and a thing that is real, a thing existing in the material and visible world from a thing truly existing in the spiritual and invisible world, a thing safe from a thing dangerous, a thing that is only a whim from a thing that is essential for survival, and so on. So many distinctions are to be learned and made, and every child is quite helpless and dependent and so in need of parenting and guidance and formation and discipline.

Parents, older siblings, aunts and uncles, clergy, teachers, coaches, neighbors, and all manner of folk in a position to accompany and guide a child on a single occasion or in a longer term relationship - all of these find themselves - whether they realize it or not in a position of fiduciary trust. The well being of each child coming into their orbit is entrusted to them, and because the relationship is lopsided in a position of great dependence, much is expected of those who are older and should know better.

Every moment of every day presents to each infant, toddler, child, adolescent, and adult a plethora of options, a veritable labyrinth of choices which, ultimately, either lead toward more abundant life or towards death. Those in formation, and at times even adults, do not immediately see the long term effects and consequences of any given experience, decision, work, act, or failure to speak or act.

How can a human being navigate towards life and away from death?

We all realize and accept that moment by moment we have access to countless points of contact with our inner and outer worlds, and the sheer number of considerations around any given experience or decision or action often drives us to distraction, if not to frustration, or on the contrary to delight. In the school of hard knocks we learn by getting hurt or failing; while in the schools of family, church, and society - both in learning institutions and in the workplace - we benefit from the experience of others. There is no shame in accepting guidance, discipline, and formation. On the contrary, it is wise to do so. At the same time there is satisfaction in making one's own discoveries.

We live in a multiplicity of universes, each with its own laws and ways of functioning, and we refuse to learn them at our own peril. Our own human body is a universe unto itself, with each of billions of cells functioning like little factories with countless intricate and complex functions operating in great harmony. We know about these things now, but from time immemorial people lived in awe of their own body and its many processes.

Our natural environment in which we live and move and have our being also has its own laws and ways of functioning, as do each of the countless living creatures who share this environment with us: micro organisms, insects, fish, crustaceans, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, birds, and those who most

resemble us, the great apes. The environment itself is a complex web of interaction and equilibrium between earth, air, and water with such complex operations as plate tectonics, weather, and water currents.

We live in the solar system and, though we cannot reach out to touch the sun, moon, or stars, still they have had a huge impact on our lives, thought, and human society. Since the dawn of time celestial bodies stimulated the human spirit to take notice of the invisible spiritual world, that of God the Creator, angels, saints and demons. While some whimsically dismiss all of these as imaginary, still there is considerable evidence in human history, culture, and religion to indicate that they are all real. That they are invisible to the eye or inaudible to the ear does not necessarily make them unreal.

How then is the human being to navigate successfully towards more abundant life and away from pain, death, and destruction? To use commonly accepted expressions, we must "listen to our body", pay attention to nature and take care of it, take notice of and give consideration to others, and open ourselves to the mysterious realm of the invisible.

In all wisdom, it makes no sense for each human being to have to reinvent the wheel. By schooling at home or in educational institutions we as a society try to inculcate as much knowledge and wisdom as we can in our children and young people. We want to help everyone understand and take care of their own body, to understand and care for nature and the environment, to learn to relate well with others in any number of social situations, to find their place at work and in the world, to discover and relate to the spiritual world, and live a rich and abundant life while contributing to the common good.

It makes no sense for each human being to have to rediscover from scratch any of this common fund of human knowledge, including about moral values and absolutes. Pretty much every human culture, ethnic group, and religion has acquired ways of transmitting to the younger generations what wisdom can derive from the experience of the older generations. In the case of Judaism and Christianity, there is ample and solid evidence to support the claim that God, the Creator of the universe, has intervened directly and revealed certain truths deemed essential for both the survival of humanity in general and the abundant and fruitful life of the individual as well as of the whole community.

Differences in ability and sensibility

Some children - perhaps because they enjoyed an unusually rich family life and loving environment - have in human history displayed remarkable ability in one or more domains from a young age.

Austrian Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, played the harpsichord at three and composed at six; Irishman and future mathematician William Rowan Hamilton by three mastered 4 languages and 13 by the age of 13; Spaniard Pablo Picasso by 15 displayed his first large oil painting; Robert James "Bobby" Fischer won the World Chess Championship at 14; South Korean Kim Ung-Yong began to speak at four months and at two could speak Korean, Japanese, German, and English; Californian Kathleen Holtz became a lawyer at 18; Connecticut environmentalist boy genius Colin Carlson enrolled as a college sophomore at 12 and founded an environmental organization; Jacob Barnett of Indiana began to attend university at 8.

Thérèse de Lisieux at 15 exceptionally was accepted to enter a Carmelite convent and took the name Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus et de la Sainte Face. She died young and was soon after canonized in the Roman Catholic Church. At two she had a mystical, spiritual experience of Mary the Mother of Jesus

and this experience marked her for life, opening her up to the spiritual realm. Once her attention was attuned to the spiritual realm she entered into a personal relationship with God, the divine Trinity of Father, Son Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit, which she related in her journal, kept at the request of her superior. Otherwise the world would never have known anything about her experiences.

These examples bring to our attention that each human being needs to pay attention to their own self, to others, to the world around us, and to God. To the degree we ignore or are hindered from opening up to any of these, then to that degree our life is limited. We can still attain great heights, but for us to experience "our full potential" - a phrase very much in favor at this time - we human beings need to open up to all the realms of which we are a part.

Our own abilities and inner disposition are as important as the quality of the care and guidance we can receive from others from a young age. It has been proven in the lab that living beings, including us humans, quickly die without loving care in infancy when we are so dependent. The more we know we are loved, the more we can thrive and embrace fully the life within and without.

Life is a constant process of observation, awareness, discernment, decision, and action

Some life lessons are easily learned because there is almost universal agreement about their truth. No one who truly cares for children would want them to burn themselves or harm themselves in any way. Physical harm is more easily recognized but some forms of harm are less so. Children abused by their own father, especially sexual abuse, suffer this harm usually in hidden ways and silence. They are in some way threatened to keep silence and when they break the silence, such as speaking to their own mother, they are often disbelieved because the mother cannot bear to accept the truth.

Some truths about life are generally accepted to be stable or always true. In our own day much that at one time was considered so is now coming under question. Male human beings were always known to be boys and females to be girls. While there might be a very wide range of expressions of male and female gender; still no one ever seriously questioned their gender until now.

In the ongoing moment by moment labyrinth of sensations, emotions, thoughts, social situations, inner spiritual movements, and overall human experiences, how can human beings from a young age make sense out of all that comes in and that they experience unless they allow themselves to be guided by trustworthy mentors and teachers, not only by word but especially by example?

For Roman Catholic Christians, the model for marriage and family life continues to be one woman to one man for life in complete fidelity and chastity, through a life of sacrificial love and self-giving. However, given all that we have reflected upon above, it is not difficult to conceive how any one child - depending on the accumulating universe of sensations, experiences, choices, pains, joys... might call in question much about themselves.

With the help of psychotherapy and spiritual direction and the strength afforded by God through the sacraments, some men and women who self identified as gay or lesbian have come either to identify as simply man or woman capable of traditional marriage and family life. Others do not achieve this outcome but do embrace a life of chastity through celibacy and discover a meaningful and fruitful life beyond their wildest dreams. Many testimonies can be found with the "Courage" movement.

The current trend to manipulate "gender identity" seems an error given the high complexity of the

human experience in general and of human sexuality in particular. Sex is so powerful a faculty by itself as well as in tandem with our fertility and procreative faculty that outside of marriage and family it is difficult to imagine who sexual experience can be "tamed" or "life giving". The sheer magnitude of the desire / pleasure / ongoing desire cycle tends to resemble addiction more than anything else when engaged in outside of the stable structure and support of faithful, life long marriage and family life. It is the family after all that best supports human development and allows human beings to fully develop and open themselves up to others while avoiding the deadly traps of self absorption and obsession that we so so rampant in the world as it is currently so distorted by the degradation and disintegration of western society.

If we human beings are to find our way amid the confusion and safely navigate in the dark towards the light and life while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls that lead to so many forms of death, we need to observe astutely, to be exquisitely aware, to discern rightly what is true from what is false or only apparent, we need to avoid or renounce what is evil and to choose and act for what is the good. We have no lack of resources, teachers, mentors, good examples, and even divine revelation to guide us on our way. It is up to each of us to choose life and renounce death.

It is good that we are not alone

One of the great values of human existence is the treasure of human community. We need not be or live alone because there are always some or many who love us and some or many whom we can love and serve to help them achieve the good. Even those who know nothing of God or the Creator can and do live extraordinary human lives in great philanthropy and public service. The family itself is the place where the most generous human acts take place, often hidden from public view. Children know best the rich ways in which they have been beneficiaries of the selfless service of others.

However, we are often dealt bad hands, find ourselves in deadly situations, get caught in nasty traps, make bad decisions and get into trouble and even hurt. That is why Jesus consistently taught what He called the truth while practicing what He called mercy. According to Jesus, God is patient with us, to allow us time to pick ourselves up with his help; while at the same time out of love for us He warns us quite sternly to avoid all that leads to death. "Choose to live and not to die" God says to everyone.

Our individual roads may not always be straight, but it is important that we look up to see our good destination and navigate by all the stars at our command. It is important that we never give up or give in to discouragement or despair, because we are not gods. We don't need to try to carry the burden of the whole world on our frail shoulders because that is God's job. As John quoted Jesus in the Book of Revelation chapter 3 verses 19-20:

"I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."

God wants to share our life, to help us reach higher and achieve farther, all the while enriching the lives of others around us and in the world. We all find it inspiring when we catch sight of someone doing something remarkable for others, with no thought of gain for themselves but only the sheer joy of enriching the lives of others. In our own day we see prepubescent children starting projects that turn into worldwide caring projects thanks to the powerful media of social networks. Churches also continue to act as powerful agents for the common good.

Happy New Year!

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The Peace of Forgiveness [at Amazing Nearness]

I am a spiritual toddler. I take a few steps in the right direction and then I stumble and fall. I scramble to my feet again and now forgetting my intended direction, I wander off before falling again. Overwhelmingly, I seem to be moving more often with gravity than with direction or progress. I am falling again and again and wondering at my painful lack of progress.

St. Catherine of Siena said that true progress in the spiritual life must include “perfect self-knowledge.” I am perfectly aware that I have so many blind spots in my self-knowledge that I am not even perfectly sure of my own name sometimes.

Recently, I have been thinking about forgiveness. What does it mean to forgive? Admittedly, I am not good at this. Actually, it would not be a stretch to say that I do not forgive – not really. Not fully.

Only *weak* people forgive. Yes, this is the lesson of my childhood.

I have fantastic parents, but one side of the family makes holding a grudge an Olympic Sport, and they win Gold Every. Single. Time. The other side of the family could sit in a room with their hair on fire and not even acknowledge the smoke in the room. The CIA can’t keep secrets as long as they do.

So between ignoring problems and holding resentment and grudges for decades, I didn’t really learn much about conflict resolution. What I did learn was to hold onto pain and never forgive. *That’s how you win, right?*

That’s the thing about not being able to forgive. It is painful. It bothers and festers and sickens the soul. It does not bring peace yet that is the one thing a hurting heart thirsts for most when it has been hurt. Peace. I just want peace.

What now St. Catherine? Here is some kernel of self-knowledge, but what do I do with it?

Now we pray she would say. So I pray and I pray, and then the silence. I talk too much when I pray. My head becomes a noisy monologue and so now I have learned to sit near the tabernacle in silence and listen.

Show me Lord how to forgive and how to heal and how to have peace when others offend and hurt me! Then silence. *This is usually when I’m reminded that peace isn’t the absence of something (conflict, anger, pain) but the presence of someONE.*

I don’t think of forgiveness in the same way I once did. It isn’t winning or losing or punishing someone or admitting defeat. It isn’t controlling someone or being under his or her control. It is about peace – restoring joy to life.

I’m still stumbling along. Forgiveness is still a struggle, but I know that when I am filled with the fire of God’s love and grace, I have peace and I am able to surrender the pain and hurt caused by others to God’s providence.

Fill me Lord with your grace and love. Remind me that your grace is at work in me. Lead me to *your heart* and conform my own heart to *your will*. When I am filled with the Holy Spirit there can be no room for anything but love. Through that love, may forgiveness and mercy materialize in me.

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Scars - We All Have Them!



“Other times, I look at my scars and see something else: a girl who was trying to cope with something horrible that she should never have had to live through at all. My scars show pain and suffering, but they also show my will to survive. They’re part of my history that’ll always be there.” — Cheryl Rainfield

As I was shaving in front of the bathroom mirror, I couldn’t help but notice the huge scar on my stomach. It reminded me that it has been 12 years since I had surgery for colon cancer. Two feet of colon removed and cancer free for over a decade and the ugly scar to prove it.

We all have scars some visible and some invisible. Some physical scars are hidden by clothing; some are visible and can’t be covered. When I see scars, I see stories. A scar means you have survived and every scar tells a story.

But, what about those scars we can’t see? Deep emotional scars are harder to heal. The loss of a loved one, physical and verbal abuse, bullying, and divorce, abandonment, losing a job or a home are scars too. These scars are scars of survival that make us stronger and are proof that God heals.

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.” — Kahlil Gibran

There is beauty in your scars. Scars build strength, cultivate courage, deepen our compassion for others and make us happy to be alive. Our scars help us in other ways as well.

1. **Our scars draw us closer to Jesus.** For me, my cancer surgery and survival was like a rebirth. The soft focus of life was replaced with a sharper, clearer vision and appreciation for life. My scars reordered my priorities to faith, family, friends, and serving others.
2. **They remind us of the healing power of God.** In my prayer, I realized that the hurt was over, the cancer was gone, the wound was healed and that God had humbled me with His amazing grace.
3. **Our Scars keep us from hurting others.** When we realize that everyone has scars, we become

more sensitive to the people we meet. Everyone has a story to tell. The suffering and courage that some people have endured is encouragement for us and increases our sensitivity to the scars we cannot see.

4. **Our scars remind us of our purpose.** We are called to help others. And, when we have suffered we become better equipped to help others. We can turn our scars into stars and give encouragement to others that we survived and they can too.

“Show me your hands. Do they have scars from giving? Show me your feet. Are they wounded in service? Show me your heart. Have you left a place for divine love?” –Fulton J. Sheen

[Be kind](#) to the people you meet. You never know what they have been through. You don't know what scars they received from what they have endured.

12 years cancer free and I wouldn't change a thing. I am so grateful for what I have learned these past 12 years.

Yes we all have scars. Scars that make us stronger, more courageous and deepen our compassion for others. If you have no scars, you haven't really lived. Scars make us beautiful because they mean that we are alive. Thank you Lord for healing me and thank you for my scars.



Scars-
We All Have Them!

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We have to act. [at Boldly Catholic]

How often have we passed opportunities by, have we allowed them to slip through our fingers? I heard the following excellent and relevant homily over the weekend from one of our deacons and he was gracious enough to allow me to post it:

Have you ever had a great opportunity set before you and despite your true desire to seize on it, you begin to weigh the risk and slowly but surely allow all the reasons you should not take that risk crowd your thinking. Eventually, you don't really say "no" but, let the opportunity slowly slip by. Over the years, I have had a lot of opportunities to act on my faith, to answer Christ's call and do something! I have, more than once, let them pass. I have regretted each lost opportunity.

Two years ago, I got a stray e-mail from one of my theology professors inviting me to walk the Camino. The El Camino de Santiago, in English "The Way of Saint James," is the pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, where legend has it that the remains of Jesus's apostle Saint James the Elder, the Son of Zebedee, lie. The Camino has existed as a Christian pilgrimage route for well over 1,000 years. Throughout the medieval period it was one of the three most important Christian pilgrimages undertaken. Even American John Adams wrote in December of 1779 that he "always regretted that he could not find time to make a Pilgrimage to Saint Iago de Compostella." The entire journey on the French route from the Pyrenees across Spain to Compestella is about 465 miles. However, one can walk the last 100 kms from the town of Sarria to Compestella and be enrolled on the 1000 year old list of Pilgrims. If any of you have seen the movie, "the Way", you have a good glimpse of what walking the Camino is all about.

Needless to say, I really wanted to go. However, thoughts of the risks began to set in. What about crime? Where would I sleep? Hadn't I vowed that when I retired from the Army that I would never sleep out in the open again! What about the time? They want to walk 100 Kms in just 5 days? That is about 12 miles a day and most of it up and down hills. I had just about talked myself out of the trip when my wife Cathy said, "let's do this and take our daughter Sarah". There was no honorable way for me to back out. We paid for the airfare, bought some good hiking shoes, and went to walk the Camino. There were lots of seemingly good and rational excuses for not going, but we prayed, felt called, and we went.

The walk was nothing short of a beautiful spiritual journey. Without map or really any clear idea of what to expect each day we got up, we went to Mass and breakfast, and often as the sun was just peaking over the edges of the mountains we started walking. As we walked, we met people from all over the world who simply desired to remove the "have to's" of daily life that drown out the voice of God and simply walk and listen. As we journeyed we began to see at each little chapel and way-point marker the prayers of humanity written on little rocks left along the path or on little slips of paper tucked into a wall here and there. Even the graffiti on the walls of some of the villages spelt out an overwhelming gratitude to God. Local people routinely placed tables of fruit, snacks, water and fruit drinks along the way. In return, they simply asked for a prayer. God is there.

Walking up to seven hours a day, we had lots of conversations about all kinds of crazy stuff but

mostly about God in our lives. We also prayed the Rosary and Chaplet with whoever would join us as they walked by. By the way, walking up hill praying the Rosary is hard work! Sometimes we just were overwhelmed with the beauty of God's creation around each corner. For my family and I, we had an opportunity to step out of the gloom of daily life and walk in the light of God's blessing, rain or shine. This was all because we simply said "yes" to what I believe was a God-given opportunity. I won't say that the walking was not challenging. It was. However, the challenges, the obstacles, seemed to be nothing compared with the joy of just walking. When you walk in light you see the obstacles vice just bumping into them and they seem so much easier to step over. We simply had to say yes and start walking!

Today, you hear Jesus' call of Peter, Andrew, John, and yes that very same St James whose remains rest at the end of the Camino. These young men lived in probably the most oppressed and depressed parts of ancient Israel. They lived near or in what was the land of Zebulun and Naphtali which were utterly devastated during the Assyrian invasions 739 years before Christ when the whole of the people were taken into captivity. They lived in Roman occupied Galilee where the Gentiles had actively settled in large parts of the land. There was a gloom that hung in the air of Galilee. However, when these four young men saw the light of Christ and heard the call, they immediately dropped their nets and followed Jesus. They walked away from livelihood and family that day to follow Christ, to be disciples. Jesus said that He is the way, the truth, and the life. The disciples saw the opportunity, disregarded the risk, and just began to follow the "way", the Camino. Jesus began his ministry with the words; "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The disciples that day entered into the light of heaven. They refused to sit in the gloom. You heard today in the first reading that "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing!" This light shone on the shores of Galilee and the same disciples who first followed Jesus later became Apostles and carried the light of Christ to the whole world. This journey began, as it did with Our Lady, with a simple yes!

You might say that this is fine for the disciples. They are extraordinary men. I would counter that, "no", they were simple fishermen. They are just like you and I but with courage! Yes, it takes courage, radical commitment, and trust to follow the Lord. Isn't that what true love demands? How can we say we love God and then let fear get in the way of responding to His call? Will there be difficulty? Yes! Will the journey be a joy? Undoubtedly!! We all prayed today in the Psalm; "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?" Do we mean what we pray? Think of Christ as He came to the end of His final talk to the disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus tells the disciples; "the world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me. Get up, let us go." (John 14:31). They then set out for the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross that followed. Note that Jesus said; get up and let "us", plural, go. He is calling us all to follow Him to the cross and a glorious resurrection. Jesus also says, "I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world." (John 16:33). To take on the name of Christian, to make the sign of the cross and pray in God's name at the beginning of every Mass, and then refuse to truly follow Christ because it makes us uncomfortable or it is risky is to, in the words of St Paul, empty the cross of Christ of its meaning. The disciples did not respond to the call of Jesus in the Gospel today with a verbal yes. They immediately dropped their nets and followed Jesus. They acted.

Listen, we cannot just behold and worship Jesus from afar. We must act. "Head knowledge is worthless, unless accompanied by submission of the will and right action." "The only way one can

ever prove love is by making an act of choice; mere words are not enough.” We cannot just tell our spouse, our children, our friends, we love them. We have to act. As you hear in the old cliché; “actions speak louder than words”. Today, tomorrow, and every day from now on, when you hear God’s call, instead of weighing the risks and talking ourselves out of spreading the Gospel, simply say yes and act. In the Words of our Lord; “Get up and let us go”! We have simply to follow the way, the Camino, Jesus.

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He was a Catholic Priest -- He was Martyred Because of it -- He was only 22 years old [at It Makes Sense to Me]

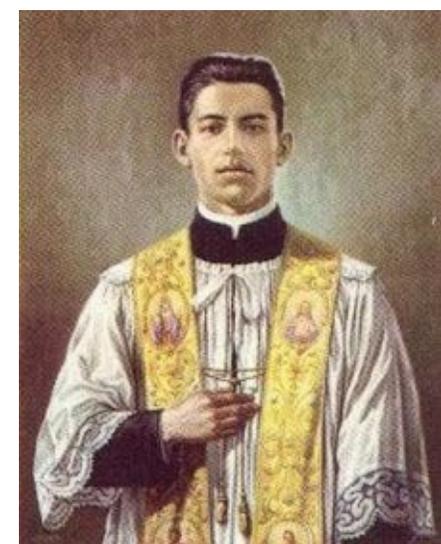
IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

The damnable and malevolent Cristero War was officially considered ended in 1929. But that did not signal the end of the torture, murder and martyrdom of Catholic religious and lay-persons in Mexico. The following happened in July of 1931 but first a bit of background.

Dario Acosta Zurita was born on December 13, 1908 in the town of Naolinco in the Mexican state of Vera Cruz. He was one of four boys and had one sister. His dad was a butcher and the family, like most other families in the area, struggled to make ends meet. Dario, like his siblings, was baptized in the local church of St. Matthew and it was his mom who was his catechist as he grew up.

Dario was well behaved, did what he was supposed to and was a relatively quiet boy. When his dad died the family fell into extreme poverty. Dario was forced to find work to help support the family. In his young heart he he had been hearing the calling to the priesthood but he thought he would never be able to answer it. However, God must have had Dario on His radar screen.



Not long after his father's passing Bishop Rafael Guizar y Valencia, (an entire story unto himself--coming soon) visited Vera Cruz. He was looking for potential seminarians and Dario expressed his desire to become a priest. The bishop (who at one time had to disguise himself as a junkman because there was an order in place for him to be shot on site) told Dario that his responsibility to his mom and siblings superseded his personal wants. In addition, Dario was too young. The bishop told him to pray to Our Lady of Guadalupe for help and guidance.

Dario's mom knew of this and traveled to Xalapa to see the bishop. She pleaded with Bishop Guizar y Valencia to reconsider. Our Lady must have been in the room that day because the bishop relented and gave permission for Dario to enter the seminary. The young man won his superiors and class mates over with his kindness, charitable persona and his devotion to his faith. In addition, Dario was an excellent

athlete and became captain of the seminary football team.

Dario Acosta Zurita became Father Angel Dario Acosta Zurita on April 25, 1931. The new priest was only 22 years old. He celebrated his first Mass in Vera Cruz on May 24 and began serving as a parochial vicar at the Parish of the Assumption in Vera Cruz. Father Dario was very dedicated to teaching the children catechism (adults too) and he loved being able to hear confessions.

At the same time, the Governor of Vera Cruz, Adalberto Tejeda, decided that he was "sick of the religious fanaticism of the people". He issued a decree called the "Tejeda Law" which basically banned all priests from administering to their parishioners. Mass was banned, catechism classes were halted and confessions were forbidden. All priests in the diocese were notified by numbered letter advising them they MUST obey the "Tejeda Law".

However, the priests in the area had gotten together on July 21st and agreed that their responsibility was not to the government but to their priesthood and their faith. They decided that they would not obey the satanic inspired "Tejeda Law".

The law took effect on Saturday, July 25, 1931. It was sometime after 5 p.m. that afternoon the children began arriving for catechism classes at Assumption Parish while people began getting in line for confession. Three priests were in the church. Father Landa, Father Rosas and Father Dario who was in the baptistry. Suddenly, a little after 6 p.m., the three church doors to the church burst open and soldiers charged into the church.

These men opened fire on the priests. Father Landa was gravely wounded. Father Rosas survived by hiding behind the pulpit. Father Dario, upon hearing the gunfire, rushed from the baptistry. His body was riddled with bullets. He fell into the sanctuary as all the children and adults watched in horror. Father's last word before he died was , "JESUS!"

Father Dario Acosta Zurita was only 22 years old when he was martyred. He had been a priest for exactly three months.

Father Zurita was beatified and declared "Blessed" on November 20, 2005. The ceremony took place in front of thousands of the faithful at Jalisco Stadium in Guadalajara, Mexico. Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins presided under the authority of Pope Benedict XVI.

Blessed Angel Dario Acosta Zurita--Please pray for us all

See edited version in

[Aleteia](#)

Jan 25, 2017

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A Prayer for My Son, A Prayer for Our World [at Making It In Vermont]

We have this little box with a sliding lid that we keep prayers for dinner in. I made it years ago when the older kids were younger and we were just starting a tradition of saying a blessing before dinner. Some of the prayers the kids made up over the years and others I collected from books. We have an old standby that we use at most meal times now, but years ago each child was given a night where it was their turn to choose and recite the blessing before dinner. Lately we have mostly used the blessing box when we have visitors and want to give them the honor of choosing the blessing.

So it sits tucked away on the counter. Two year old Paul has found it a few times lately. He has set it on the table, slid back the top and proceeded to empty and spread out the 4"x4" white card stock blessings. He's been pretty good with putting them back in, so I haven't said too much. Today he did it again and his brother Gus, who is almost 4 years old, got in on the action. Eventually the cards fell to the floor in a messy pile. I cleaned them up and put away all but one. Gus had it and when I asked him to hand it to me he tightened his grip on it instead and shook his head no. I tried sweet talking him a little, but he just did not want to give it up, so I let him wander around the house with the blessing while he made his own particular type of toddler mahem. Later in the day, I found it laying on the table. Curious I went to find out which blessing he had chosen...

It couldn't have been more relevant.

Our world today is very nearly screaming to give voice to the voiceless. For the tween/ teen trying to figure out how to fit into the world and feel safe using the thoroughly vulnerable space of a public bathroom, for women and the inherent inconvenience of fertile bodies that can derail plans and opportunities, or worse. For the very littlest of us just beginning the journey of this world deep inside our mothers. For the people who come to our country for opportunity, to escape poverty and war, who take risks we can hardly fathom for a chance at life and end up vulnerable without the rights the rest of us are born with.

For all the people our hearts bleed for, for the lives our eyes see, the people whose plights we relate to, for the circumstances that touch our families, the people that touch our hearts...

For my almost 4 year old son Gus, who has Down syndrome, a funny, sweet, great little problem solver, whose words, while they are surely making progress are far far behind most his age.

Reading that blessing he clutched in his hands all afternoon nearly took my breath away today...

“Dear Father, hear and bless

Thy beasts and singing birds,

And guard with tenderness

Small things that have no words.”

~Amen.

I read it and I prayed it. And I know it is a prayer you pray in some way too...

With love from the silent mountains of Vermont,

~Lisa

This contribution is available at <http://www.makingitinvermont.com/2017/01/a-prayer-for-my-son-a-prayer-for-our-world/>
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Of Godchildren, Detox, and RCIA [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



“Three times a week Sister Aloysia came to give me a catechism lesson....”

~ [Dorothy Day](#)

My students were finding their seats, pulling notebooks out of bags, silencing their phones (praise God!). One of them, Michaela, had recently started a regular babysitting gig for a former student of mine and her young family – a young family that happens to include my godson, [Dominic](#).

“How’s my godson doing?” I asked Mic. “Didn’t you sit for him last night?”

“Yes,” she replied. “He’s doing fine – he’s so cute!” I smiled – no argument there.

Next to Michaela sat Kat, another of my med-surg students, who piped up, “How many godchildren do you have anyway?”

I teach at an [Evangelical college](#), so few of my students are practicing Catholics, and I’ll generally jump on opportunities like this one to do some simple catechesis. Besides, my students are accustomed to my answering straightforward questions with anecdotes and long digressions, and I didn’t want to disappoint.

“Let me tell you a story,” I said. “A friend of mine in Chicago, the man I call my godfather, used to tell me that he couldn’t remember all the godchildren he had.” It’s true. Jim, longtime resident of Chicago’s [Uptown](#) neighborhood and a [legendary pillar](#) of the do-gooder community there, has served as godfather for countless babies over the decades – including one of my own. “I always thought it was scandalous,” I told Kat and Mic, “because baptism and godparenting duties are so sacred and important. I used to think that I’d never forget my spiritual children should I ever have the privilege of becoming a godfather.” They nodded their understanding, and I continued.

“After I became a Catholic myself, I got my chance,” I said, “and I’ve gotten my chance again and again. Now *I* can’t remember the exact number any more, although I do pray for my godchildren

collectively every day – sometimes by name if God brings them to mind.” I added that I’m certain my godfather does the same, and, by way of catechetical clarification, I added, “Jim’s not really my godfather by the way – I was already baptized when I became a Catholic. Really he was my sponsor when I joined the Church, but I just call him my godfather.”

“Sponsor?” Kat asked, raising an eyebrow. “You mean like AA?”

There was a weighty pause as I considered her comparison – one I’d never considered before. “Well, yes,” I finally agreed, “yes, a lot like Alcoholics Anonymous!”

I think Kat’s onto something there.

Consider: Without grace, we’re addicted to sin, aren’t we? We develop dependencies on our self-destructive behaviors, and we come to crave the evils that keep us separated from God. In fact, we routinely refer to “habits” of vice, just as we refer to “habits” of virtue – perfidy and purification as moral extensions, in opposite directions, of our human reliance on rote action.

Baptism is the drunk tank of our withdrawal from sin. It’s an ecclesial intervention to disrupt the downward slope of our unregenerate routines – a sacramental wake-up call, a liturgical splash of cold water in the face. When we receive baptism as adults (or seek full communion with the Church via the [Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults](#)), we’re in effect embracing the first step of AA’s famous [12-step program](#) of recovery: “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (read: sin) – that our lives had become unmanageable.” Simultaneously, we’re also ticking off our acquiescence to the next two steps as well – namely, that we believe that a “Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity” and that we’re turning “our will and our lives over to the care of God.”

The overlap between Catholic conversion and Alcoholics Anonymous is all the more illuminating if you take the full communion route, for while non-Christians will require baptism when they join the Church, those who were baptized previously need only make a profession of faith and make a good [first confession](#). With that in mind, get a load of the next four AA steps:

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Sound familiar? Whether you stumbled through it as a second-grader, or sweated through it as a grown-up, you’ll remember all those elements in your own first confession.

Then there’s the last two AA steps which constitute the essence of Christian *praxis* – communion and witness – regardless of when we’re initiated. Step #11 starts off, “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God,” and step #12 follows with a restatement of the [Great Commission](#): “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics (read: other sin-addicts) and to practice these principles in all our affairs” – that is, get out there and preach, but be sure to practice what you preach.

I know a little about this stuff because [my dad was an alcoholic](#) and he was an AA meeting regular – at least when he was sober. In fact, I seem to recall going to a meeting with him once as a teenager, but

that might be wishful thinking on my part. In any case, I definitely grew up yearning for his sobriety constantly, and I came to associate his teetotaling lulls with his participation in AA programs.

And I remember he always had a sponsor.

“How does sponsorship help the newcomer?” reads an [AA pamphlet](#). “It assures the newcomer that there is at least one person who understands the situation fully and cares – one person to turn to without embarrassment when doubts, questions, or problems linked to alcoholism arise.” For one thing, the AA sponsor is a recovering alcoholic himself – he’s *been* there; indeed, he *is* there. The sober sponsor can truly empathize with the fellow addict at the very cusp of recovery. But, even more important, the sponsor will be there long after sobriety is reached, because it’s a “*continuing responsibility* for helping a newcomer adjust to a way of life....”

Precisely. The same goes for the RCIA sponsor – at least, the same goes for Jim.

“**The candidate should be accompanied by a sponsor,**” reads the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. “If someone has had the principal part in guiding or preparing the candidate, he or she should be the sponsor” (#396). And what’s the sponsor supposed to do? The RCIA gives us a clue in paragraph #75.2: Prospective Catholics “become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors....”

Jim was there for me when I had doubts, questions, and problems as I considered the outrageous claims of the Church. He was that one person I could rely on to shepherd me through controversy and qualm, and to assure me that my stumbles and scruples were not exceptional – he’d been through it all himself.

He’s continued to be there for me after 30 years. Thanks, Jim. I can only hope and pray I’ll be the same kind of sponsor/godfather for Dominic – your spiritual God-grandson.

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

This contribution is available at <http://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/2017/01/22/of-godchildren-detox-and-rcia/>
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Dementia - Seeing God's Plan in a Surprising Way [at Catholic Conundrum]



Aging is beginning to really have an affect on me. And, perhaps oddly, I am not referring to myself. I am referring to others in my life and those for whom I care about deeply.

The inevitable process of aging brings change, and since I struggle with this, it tends to be a challenge for me. I have a hard time admitting how our roles often change from the child - parent relationship to the opposite, and my heart breaks with the knowledge that this is now a fact that I must embrace.

The reason for this? It's a new encounter with a disease that many know more about than they would prefer: Dementia. For me, it is a word that up until recently conjured up thoughts about memory loss and forgetfulness, but now brings the realization of so much more.

My grandmother had Alzheimer's and passed away when my teens were young, so I have had some experience with neurodegenerative diseases. However, due to the extreme nature of my grandmother's experience, I had always mistakenly put the "two" afflictions into basically two categories: Dementia - not so bad, and Alzheimer's - the worst. I'm not sure why my brain automatically assigned them this way, but it did.

Recently, however, my view has begun to shift to a more realistic take on them. My father-in-law has been diagnosed with Dementia, and, although I was resistant to the fact at first, God has been gradually bringing this reality to light.

It's not like this news comes as a shock. As his family, we have all been aware that there have been times when his memory comes and goes. However, having just celebrated his 85th birthday, this just seemed natural. He also is 85% blind due to macular degeneration, so many of the visual cues that normally serve as reminders to aging people are not there for him. Forgetfulness and memory issues seem certainly par for the course!

However, despite his limitations, he continues to live by himself in an in-law suite attached to our house. Over the years many things have gone: his car, his sight, and some of his hearing. Even the stove dials have been removed for safety. And, as things have departed, new additions have made their appearance: walkers, wheelchair, talking books, daily aid visits, etc. One would think that adding one more change to our lives wouldn't be that big of a deal. Well, just try telling that to my heart!

Over the last three weeks, we've witnessed changes in behavior, mood swings, extreme irritability including irrational anger over the phone, obsessions, etc. It sounds crazy, but it almost seems like symptoms of the disease began to arrive on cue as soon as the doctor called to inform me of her Dementia diagnosis!

However, what a blessing to have received that call! In handling some of my father-in-law's outbursts that have occurred over the last week or so, I have found great relief in knowing that there is a reason. My brain was able to convert some of the irrationality and make sense of it in the light of dementia, and patience was so much more easily attained. In fact, I am already finding myself growing in more virtues than just patience.

God is absolutely using this time as a period of refinement, and His loving care for my father-in-law is becoming more evident by the day. Most days appear normal, and, unless one was with him daily, the dementia would hardly be noticeable. As is the way, though, those closest do experience the confusion, frustration and obsessive tendencies that accompany dementia and wish we could take them away. Although I imagine that we are really just in the early stages of this progressive disease, there has already been a bonus: our relationship with both God and Rod's dad is actually improving - what a gift!

During the first two weeks of sudden symptom changes, I struggled immensely with accepting what was to come. The spirit of fear was lurking at the door. However, after talking with Rod, and my own mother who took such impeccable care of my grandmother during her dealings with Alzheimer's, and through spending time in prayer, much of the spirit of fear has disappeared. I am reminded again how much love that God has for us as He prepares us for trials, supplying all of the grace that we will ever need.

Seeing God's new plan being revealed has been, in a way, like watching flower petals slowly open. I can only imagine what spiritual fruits are waiting for all of us at the end!

As this next chapter of life opens, I look forward to seeing all that God is waiting to show me. I pray that I will grow in desiring to serve at all times, meeting all of those in my care at every stage of life. And, may I never give into the spirit of fear and always embrace the refinement He has especially designed for my soul.

How great is our God!

Photo attribution: Unsplash; <https://pixabay.com/en/man-guy-walking-backpack-knapsack-690642/>

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicconundrum.com/blog/dementia-seeing-gods-plan-in-a-surprising-way>
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Making God Your Confidant [at A Spiritual Journey]

Here's a way to get to know the Lord God intimately fast. Pour out everything in your heart before him. Share your deepest secrets and concerns, those you wouldn't even share with any other human or look into yourself, with him. Do not hold back your emotions either. Weep or laugh if you feel like it. Showing this kind of trust greatly pleases the Father, for it shows that you know that he knows everything about you. This will bring you great freedom and consolation, now that you have become one of his favored children.

This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2017/01/making-god-your-confidant.html>
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Do-over [at With Us Still]

We haven't had much to cheer about this season...we fans of the SLU Men's Basketball Billikens. Just three seasons removed from [a conference championship](#), our guys have become the bottom-feeders in the Atlantic 10.

Adding insult to injury, the university's athletic department 're-designed' the team's mascot this season—turning our beloved Billiken into something that was borderline demonic.

Last night though there was redemption of sorts.



The new 'new Billiken'

The plucky but undermanned Billikens managed [a win against U-Mass](#). Better yet, the school unveiled a new 'new' Billiken mascot – still a little harsh and angular for my tastes, but a significant improvement over the one trotted out a few months ago. (It reportedly had driven some toddlers to tears.)

I'm delighted by the reversal of fortune, on both counts. I discovered that it's as much fun to witness a Billiken win as it's ever been—even though there's almost no chance we'll come out on top at the season's end. And as for the new 'new Billiken,' I guess it's just in my nature to forgive well-intentioned mistakes.



Schroeder brothers, in the house for the SLU win...

Admittedly, though, the stakes are very low when it comes to mascots and sports marketing.

The same can't be said for some of the political choices we make. That's what occurred to me when I heard yesterday about the initial steps taken to build 'The Wall.'

Frankly, it caught me a bit by surprise – that any politician would actually attempt to follow through on such a preposterous campaign promise.

After working my way through the surprise, I realized that a profound sense of sadness had taken its place.

‘We are a better, more generous nation than this,’ I thought. ‘We are a better people than this.’

‘The Wall’ is nothing like an acceptable answer. And we definitely need a do-over...if we’re inclined to think ‘The Wall’ will make our country a better place to live.

Not convinced? Then I encourage you to spend a little time with this video, and see if you don’t find Father James Martin’s message persuasive.

<https://www.facebook.com/plugins/video.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FFrJamesMartin%2Fvideos%2F10154132008256496%2F>

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

IHS

This contribution is available at <http://withusstill.wordpress.com/2017/01/26/todays-find-do-over/>
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Modern-day magi [at Peace Garden Passage]

Epiphany 2017 has come and gone, but I'm still holding some of the insights from this year's celebration in my heart.

The "epiphanies" were delivered in a homily by our assistant pastor, the Reverend Kyle Metzger, on Jan. 7 at Saints Anne & Joachim Church in Fargo, ND.

Father prefaced his homily noting that, it being the Saturday concluding the Christmas season, all the pretty decorations soon would be stowed away for another year. He suggested we take one last long look. I did, and even sneaked up to the front after Mass to snap some photos, and into the choir loft following reception of the Eucharist to capture the whole thing.



Our parish is blessed by a beautiful and young church, only seven years old; we'll celebrate seven years next month. Much thought went into its design, and as a result, it is filled with color and symbols. And especially at Christmas time, it is a lovely place to sit and behold God's creative genius, which flows through his children.

The sparkling lights from the trees had me in a post-Christmas daydream of sorts, and as Fr. Metzger talked, I was pulled in more and more.

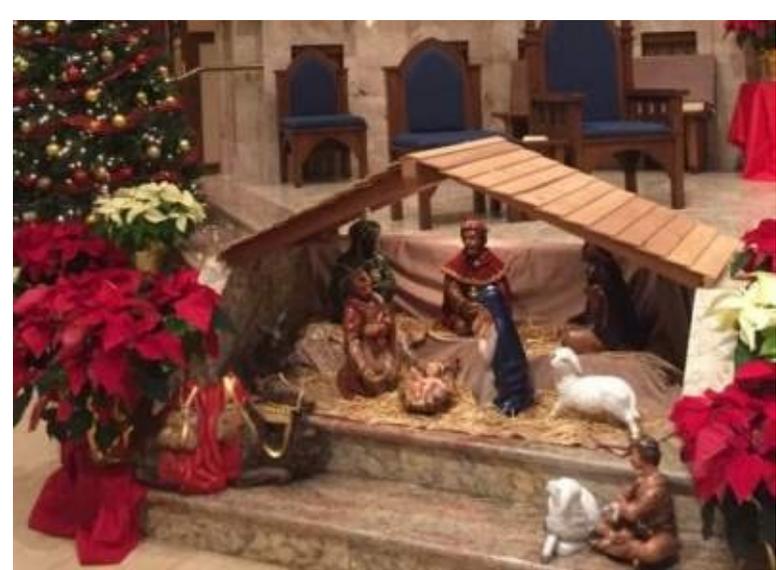


He spoke about the magi being “the Harvard professors of our day,” the ones who “wanted to make sense of the world.” He said, “In these men, science and religion came together.”

All of the knowledge they’d acquired, he added, didn’t conflict in the slightest with what they’d found in Bethlehem; rather, “It completed it.”

As Father talked, this feeling of continuity through the ages began to seep into my soul. I started to understand the magi in a new way, a way that relates more to our modern world rather than the far-off vision I once held.

And then he began to describe what it must have been like for the magi as they approached the crib of our Lord: “When they entered the stable, they fell to their knees and surrendered every valuable thing that they had.”



Fr. Metzger, a former English teacher, had me mesmerized with his version of the story as I began to envision what it would have taken for them, after a long journey, and everything they’d done to keep the treasures in their bags protected, to then empty them all out in the manger, as if they were nothing at all next to the king on which they now gazed.

Now that’s faith, I thought. It’s simply beautiful to think that these learned men would realize all their

knowledge was useless without connecting it to the One who'd come to offer himself to us.

Father then continued to fill out the image. "Imagine them in their splendid robes and diamonds kneeling on the dirty floor of the stable," he said, and I could just see it, almost as if it were happening right then. I was in awe at the thought of it — high society meeting royalty on the floor of a cold room that smelled of animal dung.



And then, the zinger I wasn't expecting; that thing that connected everything together, and to my life, right here and now.

"It was the first Adoration chapel on earth," he said. "Today's Adorer's are modern-day magi."

Though I'm sure I looked somewhat composed on the outside, at the words, interiorly, something was happening. As a regular Adorer of Jesus in the Exposition of the Eucharist, I knew in an instant just what he meant. For several years now, I've been journeying, in the dark of night, weekly to see the Lord in our small Adoration chapel — our parish's version of a manger — and it has changed me.

When I journey out of my home each week and make my way to the "stable," inside, I find my Lord. My weekly, nightly journey, though not nearly as treacherous, is very analogous to the magi's trek. This intentional mission to seek him regularly has left me enlightened. And just like the magi, having experienced God here, I find that he woos me continually back.

It is truly a gift, and I each time I arrive, like my fellow "magi," I kneel down in his presence, surrendering everything I have in that moment. I acknowledge by my actions that I am in the presence of the king. It is humbling, nearly impossible to take it in, but there, I find peace. Even if not perfect understanding always, I know that someday it will come.

I have shed many tears there, too, because I feel so close to the Lord's heart in the place where he dwells in a particularly real way, and this feeling of warmth and love overtakes me at times. There are

other times the tears flow simply because I bring my burdens, and there, I sense him holding me.

It's hard to describe, but it's worth that little journey from my home to the chapel. More recently, I have even taken to bringing the cares of my friends along with me. The night of Adoration, I put a call out on Facebook to ask anyone if I can bring their prayers before the Lord, and the response has amazed me. I am honored to bring these petitions to God; indeed, it has become the most important part of my hour, bringing these "treasures" borne of our hearts and heartaches to our merciful Lord.

These are the offerings of our life, in all of its brokenness. And when I lay them down there in the chapel, I feel his quiet response, and know that he is listening and cares for each soul who has entrusted me to bring and entrust them to him.

Until Epiphany 2017, I had never considered myself a modern-day magi, but thinking of it this way has increased my desire to be there; to travel each week to see our precious Lord.

The week after Epiphany, Father talked about the Eucharist, and what a treasure we have in it, not only at Adoration, but each week, or day even, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

He reminded us that when we come to Mass, "We come not to receive but to give," explaining the sublimity of the non-bloody sacrifice and how blessed we are in it. He suggested that coming to Mass should not be about whether the choir is on pitch, or the homily the length of our liking. We do not show up at Mass to be entertained or edified, he said, but because we are worshiping the living God, and in gratitude for all he has done for us, we offer ourselves, our time, for him.

As new and old Adorers later met with our senior pastor, Fr. Paul, the message was added to when he said, "One of the most precious things we can give our Lord in 2017 is our time and our presence...The reason we're going to Adoration is because he is alive!...He's there, the Risen Christ."

The words of our priests these past weeks have inspired me greatly, and reminded me that this journey we are on together is a privileged one, and that the Lord we are journeying toward is well worth what we will find when we finally reach him.



Q4U: Our Lord gave all for us. What can we offer him in return?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2017/01/modern-day-magi/>
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I Grow Weary of Those Who Ask Us to Slow Down [at Leaven for the Loaf]

What follows is adapted from a 2015 *Leaven for the Loaf* post. I'm tempted to say *this is not a drill*. Peaceful pro-life witness is not Activism Lite, and I have an uneasy feeling that 2017 is going to underscore that with an angry red slash.

I hope I'm wrong about the angry red thing. I know I'm right about the Activism Lite part.

Recall what peaceful witness called for in 1963, in the face of angry and sometimes violent resistance that had deep political and social roots. Recall Dr. King's words from those days: *I grow weary of those who ask us to slow down*.



Photo of Martin Luther King, Jr. By Nobel Foundation (<http://nobelprize.org/>) via Wikimedia Commons [PD-1996]

In 1963, a few months before Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the [March on Washington](#), he and many other civil rights activists converged on Birmingham, Alabama to challenge racial segregation. Their campaign was marked by intensive planning and discipline, because the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was intent not only on its message but on delivering it the right way. Volunteers for the Birmingham campaign were screened and trained, as King recounted in [Why We Can't Wait](#). He noted, "Every volunteer was required to sign a Commitment Card."

To what did the Birmingham activists commit?

I hereby pledge myself – my person and body – to the nonviolent movement. Therefore I will keep the following ten commandments:

- 1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.**
- 2. Remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation – not victory.**
- 3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.**

4. **Pray daily to be used by God in order that all men might be free.**
5. **Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free.**
6. **Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.**
7. **Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world.**
8. **Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.**
9. **Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.**
10. **Follow the directions of the movement and of the captain of the demonstration.**

King added, “We made it clear that we would not send anyone out to demonstrate who had not convinced himself and us that he could accept and endure violence without retaliating” during the campaign. That took guts. It meant putting aside the natural right of self-defense during the demonstration, even as they faced people who had no qualms about using violence, including bombs.

I want to take the Birmingham commitment to heart.

Anyone can sign a piece of paper (or in this age, click on “I agree”) signifying a commitment. So why bother? Because nonviolence during a public demonstration isn’t something to take for granted. Public affirmation reinforces personal commitment. Public affirmation is part of accountability to the larger community. It draws a clear line between those peaceful demonstrators and any people willing to resort to violence to impede them.

I have neighbors who take umbrage at the assertion that today’s pro-life movement is part of the civil rights movement that came to flower at that March on Washington in ’63. In reply, I can only avow that life is the fundamental civil and human right. Abortion takes lives, and there are businesses that profit from it. Let peaceful public witness to that continue.

I haven’t endured the physical abuse to which the Birmingham demonstrators were subjected. Their example is awesome even today. They faced police dogs and fire hoses, and still made a commitment to nonviolent public witness and action. The best way for me to honor their memory is to emulate them, even though I’ve faced nothing worse so far than name-calling.

Recall that the nonviolent demonstrators in Birmingham were far from passive. There was urgency in their goal of justice and reconciliation. From a [1963 UPI report](#) on the Birmingham demonstrations: “King reacted strongly, however, to a statement by Attorney General Robert Kennedy suggesting that the all-out integration drive here was ill-timed. ‘I grow weary of those who ask us to slow down,’ King told a reporter. ‘I begin to feel that the moderates in America are our worst enemy.’”

The events and words of 1963 aren’t frozen in place, devoid of application to our own times. View them not as an archaeologist views a dig, but as a traveler views a map: *take this path, not that one*. I could do worse than follow the people who signed those cards in Birmingham.

The longest journey is not one of a million steps but one of twelve inches [at On the Road to Damascus]

During the ordination of a permanent deacon in the Roman Catholic Church the Bishop passes along the Book of the Gospels to the newly ordained with the following words:

“Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose Herald you have become.

Believe what you read.

Teach what you believe.

And practice what you teach.”

It is a reminder to all of us that we are also called to believe, live, and pass on our faith in Christ. There are two types of belief. There is intellectual belief where you know something in your mind. Then there is an intimate belief where you know something in your heart. For example; when I had my heart surgery I knew that there was a chance that I would not live through it. I also knew that if I didn't I would be with God and that he would care for my family. I truly believed this and trusted in God. If surviving the surgery was the worst outcome how could I be afraid? This gave me a great deal of peace going into the surgery. If I only believed this in my head I would have been filled with anxiety and worry.

This is known as making the twelve inch drop – dropping belief from your head to your heart.

Every day people leave the Catholic faith for another denomination church, or they walk away from God altogether. The “nones” is one of the largest growing demographics in the world. The reasons given for this are vast and varied and usually revolve around a selfish reason.

“I don't like the music.” “I am not a fan of the priest.” “The sermons are boring.” “I didn't feel welcomed.”

The ones that bother me most are, *“I don't get anything out of it.”* Or, *“I wasn't being spiritually fed.”*

As part of our Sunday Mass we stand together and make a profession of our faith by reciting the Nicene Creed which begins:

“I believe in one God,

the Father almighty,

maker of heaven and earth,

of all things visible and invisible.”

The Catholic Mass is much more than a simple worship service. It is more than the music, more than the scripture reading. It is more than the Gospel, the homily, the fellowship, or even the reception of the holy Eucharist. These are all visible parts of the Mass. But the Mass is so much more than just the visible.

Some Protestants criticize the Catholic Church because they have the false belief that we “re-sacrifice” Christ and that Jesus was sacrificed once for all. The Catholic Church uses the verbiage that she “represents” the sacrifice on Calvary. I find it more accurate to say that the Church “makes present” the one sacrifice to the people today. We are creatures that live in the visible world. Most of us have neither the thought nor care for the invisible reality happening around us. Our intellectual belief knows that we are surrounded by the spiritual, angels, demons, and God but rarely do we embrace this with intimate belief.

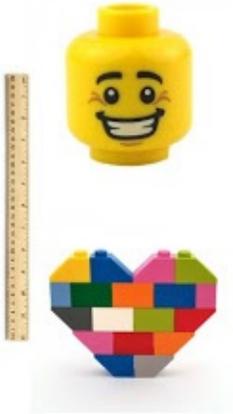
What the Catholic Mass does is act as a conduit between space and time. Our time, our reality is joined with all times at the one and only sacrifice Jesus made for all. In our visible reality we see the priest elevating the host at consecration. In the invisible reality, in that very spot stands the cross and our Lord hanging upon it. As we look upon the visible priest we are actually looking upon the invisible Jesus made present to us.

In our visible reality we are surrounded by our fellow parishioners. In the invisible reality we stand before the cross with all of the angels and heavenly host, all of the Saints in heaven, and every believer who lives, has ever lived, and will ever live throughout time. We stand with billions upon billions of God’s creation all worshipping at the one sacrifice of our Lord. Do you miss a person who has passed? When you attend a Catholic Mass you stand with that person at the foot of the cross.

In our visible reality we respond to the consecration with an often groggy or half-hearted “Amen.” In the invisible reality we are joined to the resounding “Amen” offered up by billions upon billions of voices at the same time. To open your heart to this reality will shake you to your core and you will never see Mass in the same light ever again. The greatest event that will ever happen to creation is made present to us each and every time we attend a Catholic Mass anywhere in the world.

In ministry we are often trying to get people to make that twelve inch drop from the intellectual knowledge in the head to the intimate knowledge in the heart. With regards to the reality of the Mass this needs to be a rise of twelve inches. We must believe in our hearts what is happening around us even though we cannot see it and allow that to rise to our heads and become intellectual knowledge. I see because I believe.

I am Catholic today largely in part to the complete reality the Mass offers. No other church can offer this reality. When a Catholic walks away from the faith because they do not feel that they are getting anything out of Mass they never really believed, intellectually or intimately, anything the professed to begin with.



This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2017/02/the-longest-journey-is-not-one-of.html>
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On Saturday, January 28, Joe Heschmeyer published an essay, “

[Seven Answers to the ‘Pro-Lifers are just Pro-Birth’ Argument](#)

,” in his blog Shameless Popery. The essay offers rebuttals to a meme featuring the quote from Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, that

[I wrote of a couple of years ago](#)

. I have a lot of respect and admiration for Joe, who is a student at the Pontifical American College in Vatican City (and, I believe, should be coming up on his transitional diaconate this year). I earnestly commend the essay to your attention; it’s very well balanced in its treatment of the argument.

Supply and Demand

However, Joe’s essay did prompt me to do a little more drilling on the subject, to embrace a little more of the political context in which the argument arises. The recent elections brought to the surface a long-standing tension between two different camps within the pro-life movement, camps which I will for brevity’s sake call the *supply-side* and *demand-side* branches. While the meme Joe dissects arose in a pro-abortion context, the quote has also had currency among demand-side pro-lifers.

The *supply-side* pro-life camp, which we could also call the *first-wave movement*, is mostly concerned with the legality of abortion and euthanasia, along with some related issues such as assisted suicide, cloning, IVF, and contraception. Politically, they tend to be older and more conservative or right-wing libertarian. As Joe rightly points out, conservatives are more likely to donate time and money to support charitable causes than are liberals, so it’s not like they’re stingy. However, precisely because their politics are more conservative, their view of the scope of “pro-life” is, for want of a more charitable word, narrower. They highly resist the importation of other issues, such as Syrian refugees or undocumented immigrants, into the pro-life purview and refuse the creation of government intervention programs. Because their concern is mostly with the legal and political mechanisms permitting the

“death industry” to exist, one can say they seek to shut off the supply.

By contrast, the

demand-side

camp or

second-wave movement

tends to be younger, as well as more moderate to liberal in their politics though less willing to affiliate with either party or identify with either ideology. The demand-siders recognize that economic and social issues often drive the choice for death; by addressing those issues, they seek to reduce the demand. For this reason, they’re more likely to support government intervention and more willing to pay the taxes required to support the efforts. The pro-life movement as a whole is concerned with

[what Vice-President Mike Pence called](#)

“[society’s] most vulnerable, the aged, the infirm, the disabled, and the unborn.” The second-wave movement, influenced by the consistent life ethic

[articulated most notably by Cdl. Joseph Bernardin](#)

and in St. John Paul II’s

[*Evangelium Vitae*](#)

, extends its recognition of vulnerability to immigrants, refugees, the homeless, and other socially marginalized people.

[*]

Baby-Feet Pins and Kitchen Sinks

Now, it should be obvious that, while demand is arguably the more important factor in economics, the presence of supply activates hidden (or *potential*) demand; as a consequence, both supply and demand must be treated to end the legal and cultural shelters of the “death industry”. And I’m afraid I may have given the false impression that the first wave doesn’t care about the demand while the second wave isn’t fussed about the supply.

However, the second wave’s extension of the pro-life scope to other vulnerabilities has led first-wavers to accuse them of being covert pro-choicers out to “kitchen sink” the movement to death by overloading

it with “extraneous” issues. In response, the first-wavers’ refusal to acknowledge other vulnerabilities as legitimate pro-life issues has led second-wavers to accuse them of giving Republican politicians a pass on other legitimate concerns so long as said politicians wear the baby-feet pin on their lapels — they are “pro-birth but not pro-life”.

Which accusation came first, the kitchen sink or the pass? The answer to that chicken-and-egg question is irrelevant and unproductive. What *is* relevant is that the last election cycle intensified the disagreement between the supply- and demand-siders, particularly after the formal movement endorsed Donald Trump as its champion. And if there’s anything I disagree with in Joe’s analysis, it’s his contention that “the real debate is about the means, not the ends.” All too often, debates about the means reveal divergent views of the ends.

Differing on Means and Ends

For instance, let’s take education: Both liberal and conservative agree in principle that children *should* be educated. However:

- The conservative tends to consider education the responsibility of the parents as their personal investment in the child’s future, and therefore not a legitimate government interest. By contrast, the liberal considers education the responsibility of society as an investment in the society’s future and regards the government as society’s proxy.
- Moreover, the conservative tends to consider education a *good*, but not a *right* or an *entitlement*, and doesn’t consider equality of education outcomes a practical goal. The liberal holds children equally entitled to the same quality education and will support policies that boost the outcomes of the economically disadvantaged.
- In addition, despite their personal generosity in donating time and money to charities, conservatives tend to regard the right to own property as absolute and any tax increase as an encroachment of that right — even as a kind of theft. Liberals, on the other hand, don’t regard the right of property as absolute and tend to use the government to socialize the costs of their altruism; they tend to regard their willingness to pay higher taxes as a kind of self-sacrifice.
- Above all, both sides recognize that formal education reinforces desired community values. Liberals, therefore, push for programs that benefit public education, where they control the values agenda, while conservatives push for programs that benefit private education and homeschooling, where their values hold sway.

This is just a sample of how conservatives and liberals disagree not only about means but also about ends, particularly the *telos*, or final cause, of government. While demand-siders tend to avoid the “liberal” label, in many respects they’re alienated from the conservative viewpoint. Complicating the matter: while the second-wavers fully adopt the consistent life ethic and talk about building a “culture of life”, a handful of policy preferences and a handy catchphrase do not a coherent philosophy make.

Moreover, while the second wave is leaving old political alignments behind, it isn't clear that they've shaken off the assumptions of classical liberalism — i.e., the autonomous individual making temporary “social contracts” based on self-interest and requiring laws enforced by a strong State to check his more destructive impulses. If not, then the consistent life ethic — indeed, the pro-life movement as a whole — is a healthy branch trying to graft itself onto a sick and dying tree. (See Patrick J. Deneen's “

[Unsustainable Liberalism](#)

” for the full argument behind this.)

Sr. Joan's Challenge

In summary: Most of Joe Heschmeyer's rebuttal to the “‘pro-life’ is just ‘pro-birth’” argument is sane, logical, and charitable, and is as well directed at demand-side pro-lifers as it is against pro-aborts. However, his final argument — that the differences are over means rather than ends — is erroneous. Conservatives and liberals may hold a couple of premisses in common from classical liberalism; however, in many if not most respects, their world-views and value systems are as radically different as are

[charity and altruism](#)

. More importantly, because the liberal premisses they hold in common lead to a fatal contradiction and conflict — in Deneen's words, “a future in which extreme license invites extreme oppression” — it is beyond the ability of either ideology to produce a “culture of life”.

At the root of it, while Sr. Joan's words are unfair, uncharitable, fallacious, and inflammatory, the challenge they pose to the pro-life movement is undeniable: to be “pro-life” has to mean something more than that we want to prevent (some of) the vulnerable from being killed. For the “culture of life” to be more than a catchphrase, we must think through all the implications of what it means, how it would affect our social and economic lives, how it would be promoted, enacted, and sustained as a reality. In other words, the “culture of life” needs more than a few preferred policies dictated by one or the other of our ideologies — it must become an ideology in itself, with an articulated philosophical blueprint by which we can make it real.

And we need it quickly, before the internal logic of classical liberalism drives us through the gates of Dystopia.

[*]

In a sense, to call demand-siders a “second wave” is a little misleading, as the consistent life ethic has had its advocates since

Roe v. Wade.

However, it’s the most significant difference between younger and older members of the pro-life movement.

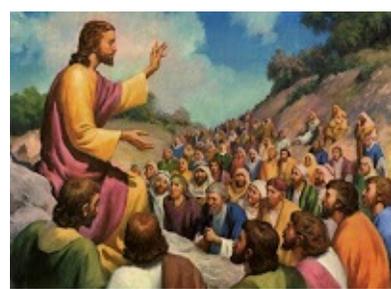
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Negotiating the Swirling Sea of Chaos [at Journey to Wisdom]

Sunday February 5th, 2017

A Reflection on Matthew 5:13-16 N.A.B.



In verse 16 of the Gospel reading for this Sunday Jesus told his disciples, “Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

Jesus said to his disciples:

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth.

But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?

It is no longer good for anything

but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ You are the light of the world.

A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket;

it is set on a lampstand,

where it gives light to all in the house.

¹⁶ Just so, your light must shine before others,

that they may see your good deeds

and glorify your heavenly Father."

What does “*glorify your heavenly Father*” mean? And how should we go about it? Are we to stand, gaze skyward with arms raised, and recite the Lord’s Prayer fifty times a day? Or should we kneel eight hours a day and piously pray one rosary after another? Perhaps we could sit motionless hour after hour lost in the peaceful abyss of deep contemplative prayer. These venerable activities would certainly glorify God, but is this kind of endless adoration all that He wants from us, the subjects of His Kingdom, the Kingdom inaugurated on earth by His Son? No doubt, there are those among us, who

would declare, rather disdainfully, that a God who simply wants people to adore him all the time is not a figure they can respect, much less worship.

Since the reading for this Sunday is at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-10), the meaning of *glorify your heavenly Father* has to be understood in the Beatitude context, the code of conduct for the subjects of God's kingdom on earth.

³ *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

⁵ *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.*

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

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

⁸ *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.*

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

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

How does God see me? When He looks at me who does He see? In a manner of speaking we present three images to the world: there is the image we have of ourselves, the way others see us, and the way God sees us.

Every morning I see a reflection of myself in the bathroom mirror; that's how I see myself. I like that reflected image because the light fixture over the mirror uses old fashioned incandescent light bulbs and under that kind of light I look as though I have a nice tan. What's more, if I turn and tilt my head just so - my grey hair looks darker and a little thicker; it makes me look a few years younger and I really like that! Who wouldn't?

On the other hand, one day last week, while accompanying my wife on a shopping trip in a department store, I caught a glimpse of myself reflected from a full-length mirror. Whoa! I looked at least ten pounds heavier! And my hair was almost white and a lot thinner; I was much older looking than the man I had seen in the bathroom mirror that very morning. Hmmm, I guess that's how other people see

me, older and heavier - looking my age.

But then, how does God see me? In his book, True Self, Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk, writes:

"What we are-our identity-is only truly known to God-not to ourselves, not to other men. The greatest terror of the particular judgement is that, the moment after our death we instantly appear before the face of God and learn our identity-truly; we finally see ourselves as we really are! The measure of our identity, of our being (the two are the same) is the amount of our love for God"

We are all called to be holy and being holy means trying to be like Jesus; since the Beatitudes are a self-portrait of Jesus, they are our instructions on how to be like Him, and they are rules on how to conduct ourselves in God's earthly kingdom, rules that when followed evaporate the swirling sea of chaos, which if unchecked could once again cover the earth.

At the final judgement, the amount of love which we have for God will be measured against how well we followed His commandments and lived the Beatitudes; it is how the obedient and willing subjects of His kingdom bring glory to Him.

This contribution is available at <http://journeytowisdom-ocbs.blogspot.com/2017/02/negotiating-swirling-sea-of-chaos.html>
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Conservative? Liberal? No: Catholic [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

My father-in-law has been asked if he's conservative — or liberal.

His answer: "I'm Catholic."

I'd give the same answer.

Catholic teachings are quite definite, so it's possible to peg them on the American political spectrum — as long as you don't look at the big picture.

Taking bits and pieces of Catholic beliefs, and the history of Catholics in America, I could claim that the Catholic Church is conservative **or** liberal. That would be as big a mistake as seeing all conservatives as hate-fueled foes of diversity, or all liberals as irresponsible lunatics.



Sex, Death, and Immigrants



The Church might seem liberal because we're told that sex is a good thing, social justice is important, and the death penalty should be a last resort. ([Genesis 1:27, 31](#); Catechism of the Catholic Church, [1928–1942, 2267, 2331–2391](#))

We're also told that extra- and non-marital sex is a bad idea, private property is a good idea, and both abortion and euthanasia are wrong. That isn't far from many conservative viewpoints. (Catechism, [2270–2279, 2348–2356, 2380–2381, 2401–2406](#))

I see immigrants as neighbors I haven't met yet; folks who are doing pretty much the same thing my ancestors did, not long ago. That makes me a Catholic who takes our faith seriously: not a liberal.

(Catechism, [2241](#))

The Catholic view of immigrants isn't new, which doesn't make it "conservative:"

"You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt."

([Exodus 23:9](#))

"When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him.

"You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God."

([Leviticus 19:33–34](#))

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me,"

([Matthew 25:35](#))

As a Catholic, my knee-jerk reaction is — irrelevant, except maybe to me. Let's see what the Church says about defending my life, and the lives of others.

Hawk? Dove?

Defending myself from a lethal attack is okay; even if my action results in my attacker's death. But I must use the least possible force. (Catechism, [2263–2267](#))

That's because my life is precious, and so is my attacker's. My intent should be saving my own life, not killing another person: even if that is the unintended effect of my action.

(Catechism, [2258](#), [2263–2269](#); "Summa Theologica," Thomas Aquinas, [II-II,64,7](#))



The same principle applies to decisions national leaders face. War kills people and breaks things, so avoiding war is a good idea.

But sometimes being nice and reasonable won't keep innocent folks alive. That's why leaders are allowed to use force when defending the lives they're supposed to protect. (Catechism, [2307–2317](#))

"...As long as the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level, governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted...."

(["Gaudium et Spes](#)," Pope Bl. Paul VI (December 7, 1965))

I could edit Catholic teaching to make my beliefs fit — or shun — pigeonholes like 'hawk,' 'dove,' 'bleeding heart liberal' or 'heartless conservative.' But that doesn't seem prudent.

Fear and Politics

I can see why ‘real Americans’ might fear ‘those Catholics.’ Many of us don’t have English ancestors, for starters.

That doesn’t mean I agree with [Alma Birdwell White](#) or her [Pillar of Fire Church](#). The outfit’s called Pillar of Fire International these days.

Catholics lived in the thirteen colonies and other parts of today’s United States long before 1776, but we didn’t start arriving in disturbing numbers until the 19th century.

Catholic immigrants from Germany, Ireland, Italy, and other foreign parts were mostly working-class folks. Not surprisingly, most Catholics voted Democrat: 70% overall, 80% of the Irish Catholics.

That changed, of course. Children or descendants of the immigrants became white-collar workers, developing voting and other habits that were closer to the American norm.¹

Blending in with the crowd isn’t necessarily a good thing. I’ve talked about ‘going native’ before. ([August 14, 2016](#))

It’s like Fulton Sheen said:

“Right is right if nobody is right, and wrong is wrong if everybody is wrong.”
 (“Life Is Worth Living” (1951-1957), Program 19, The Venerable [Fulton J. Sheen](#), via [Wikiquotes](#))

Why Bother?



Taking an active part in public life is part of being a Catholic. That starts with my personal responsibilities: in my family, at work, in my community. (Catechism, [1913–1917](#))

The “at work” part of my life is over now, so I’ve got more time for family and other activity: like researching and writing these posts.

I enjoy learning and sharing what I find, but that’s not why I keep doing all this.



I'm passing along, in my own way, the best news humanity's ever had.²

God loves us, and wants to adopt us. **All of us.** ([Matthew 5:45](#); [John 1:12–14](#), [3:17](#); [Romans 8:14–17](#); [Peter 1:3–4](#); Catechism, [1](#), [27–30](#), [52](#), [1825](#), [1996](#))

Our Lord said loving my neighbor, and seeing everyone as my neighbor, is the source for “the whole law and the prophets.” ([Matthew 5:43–44](#), [22:36–40](#); [Mark 12:28–31](#); [Luke 6:31](#), [10:25–27](#), [29–37](#); Catechism, [2196](#))

Over the last two millennia, folks like Saints [Austine of Hippo](#), [Teresa of Ávila](#), [Thomas Aquinas](#), [Hildegard of Bingen](#), [Catherine of Siena](#), and [Thérèse of Lisieux](#), have thought about what Jesus meant.

It still boils down to love and hope.

I think that makes sense. What you decide is up to you.

More about acting as if God and love matter:

¹ Catholics living in America, politics and attitude:

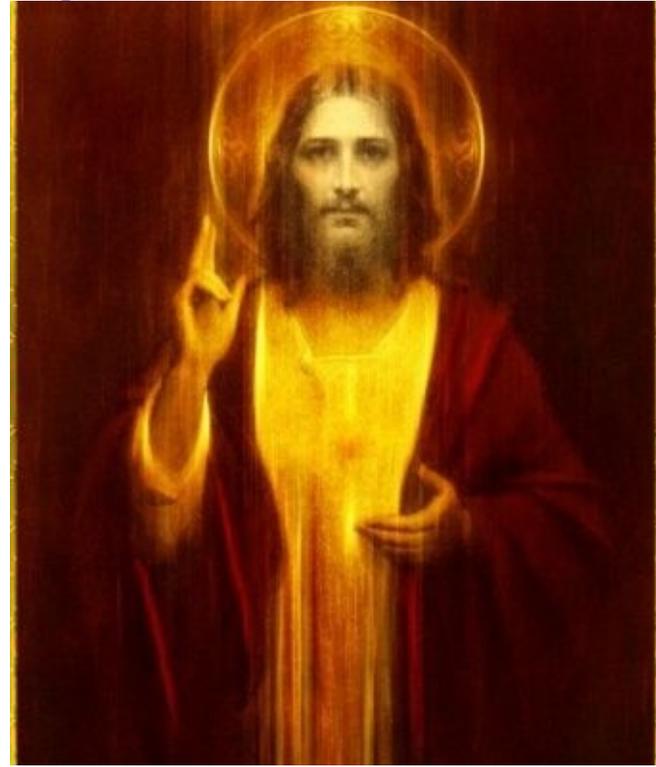
² Anyone who tries to do good and avoid evil is on the right track. I became a Catholic after learning who currently holds the authority our Lord gave Peter. ([Matthew 16:17–19](#); Catechism, [551–553](#), [781–801](#), [874–896](#))

This contribution is available at <http://brendans-island.com/catholic-citizen/conservative-liberal-no-catholic/>
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HTTP/1.1 200 OK Server: nginx Date: Sat, 11 Feb 2017 16:36:37 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Transfer-Encoding: chunked Connection: keep-alive Strict-Transport-Security: max-age=86400 Vary: Accept-Encoding Vary: Cookie X-hacker: If you're reading this, you should visit automattic.com/jobs and apply to join the fun, mention this header. X-Pingback: <https://melaniejeanjuneau.blog/xmlrpc.php> Link: ; rel=shortlink X-ac: 3.atl _dfw

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Surprised By Three Miracles [at joy of nine9]

Modern, educated folk tend to dismiss the miraculous, preferring to believe science will eventually provide a plausible explanation for the inexplicable. For the cynical, only the ignorant or gullible set out on desperate pilgrimages seeking cures or chase after Charismatic signs. Many Protestants think miracles were only for the [age of dispensation](#) of grace; for somber Calvinists, supernatural deeds are not performed today. However, there are countless, hidden souls who have experienced authentic miracles but they have been bullied into silence.

The Roman Catholic Church Believes in Miracles

At least Catholics believe theoretically in miracles. The word “miracle” comes from the Latin word for wonder and, literally means “a sight to behold” because they reveal the glory of God. The miracles of Jesus were messianic signs demonstrating that the Kingdom of Heaven had come to earth. As [The Catechism of the Catholic Church 547-50](#) tells us: “Jesus accompanies His words with many “mighty works and wonders and signs,” which manifest that the kingdom is present in Him and attest that He was the promised Messiah (Acts 2:22)”.

[The Congregation For the Doctrine of the Faith](#), the oldest of nine congregations of the Roman Curia, was founded to defend the Church from heresy. It explains that belief in the miraculous has existed throughout the history of the Church and quotes St Augustine, an esteemed Doctor of the Church, who personally witnessed miraculous healings:

The Fathers of the Church considered it normal that believers would ask God not only for the health of their soul, but also for that of their body. With regard to the goods of life, health, and physical integrity, St. Augustine writes: «We need to pray that these are retained, when we have them, and that they are increased, when we do not have them.»(19) St. Augustine has also left us the testimony of a friend's healing, obtained through the prayers of a Bishop, a priest, and some deacons in his house.(20)

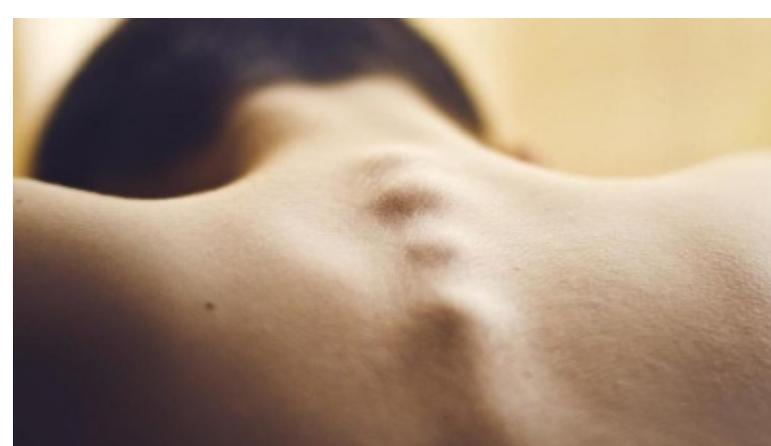
The congregation even gives instructions on how to pray for healing.

I think the Almighty delights in shocking confirmed skeptics with surprise physical healings because miracles shatter their world view and often trigger a conversion. I was healed unexpectedly. Even though I professed a belief in the healing power of God, when I was healed, my whole life was turned upside down.

It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. [Daniel 4:2-3](#)

God Straightened My Spine

It is hard to believe, I know, but God healed my spine at a conference for Sunday School teachers. The crowd consisted of down-to-earth housewives, mothers, and some benevolent grandmotherly types. My friend and I were the only Catholics in the group which added to a feeling of alienation. I came grudgingly and I really did not expect to learn anything more than a few interesting tips on how to hold a child's interest. Actually, I was pretty fed up with learning techniques. I *needed* to receive more from God because I was depleted. I did not need more facts. What I craved could not be taught and it did not look like it could ever happen in such a setting.



Then a nurse, with a freshly scrubbed face in running shoes and jeans, announced she had a gift of praying for people with crooked spines, scoliosis. My friend elbowed me and I shyly raised my hand only a little higher than my head. The nurse spotted me right away, "Come right up here to the front and I will pray with you for a physical healing." I sighed and stood up front, trying to open my heart to God

but feeling self-conscious and doubtful. As she prayed for me, I felt nothing- no heat or tingling, stretching or shifting of bones. When the nurse had me touch my toes again, I assumed I would fail this test. Instead, the nurse excitedly announced to the crowd, “Her spine is straight”. She smiled at the audience. Then she sat me down on a chair, “Look, your legs are now the same length. How do you feel?”

I was in shock as I stared at my one leg which had been 2-3 cm. shorter a moment ago. I reached back to feel my back; my spine seemed straighter but my mind started to race, as I wondered how this could be true. I did not feel anything. Surely if muscles and bones, never mind nerves moved and shifted, stretched and realigned, surely I would have felt something, wouldn't I have? I ran to the washroom and looked in a huge mirror. Sure enough, my body looked completely different but my mind could not process what I saw in the mirror. So I did not allow myself to feel elated right away. Weeks later, when my chiropractor looked at my back and was struck dumb and my agnostic mother wept with shocked joy, then I allowed myself to relax and simply accept the bizarre with gratitude. I had to admit I was healed.

Signs and Wonders

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;

I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. [Psalm 9:1](#)

Signs and wonders strengthened the faith of the disciples in the gospels. Jesus promised future followers would perform even greater miracles than He did when they live in God and the Holy Spirit lives in them. As Saint Paul explains in [Philippians 4:19](#), “my God will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Supernatural miracles happen when the children of God are desperate, without recourse to any other solution to solve their problems. As parents of a large family, we depend on Him to supply many of our basic necessities. Even our skeptical children concede God seems to provide in mysterious ways but we were all rattled by an unexpected miracle one winter.

The Oil Tank Never Ran Out



In mid-January, when our furnace was serviced during its annual cleaning, the repairman red-tagged our oil tank just before we needed another delivery of oil. Red-tagged means an oil tank is an environmental

risk and it is illegal for any oil company to fill it. Since my husband's uncle had a barely used tank worth \$2,000.00 to give us if we could hold out till the spring, we decided to try to heat our old house with wood.

We kept the thermostat at 18 C (66 F) instead of 20 C (70 F) to conserve fuel because the woodstove was at the far end of the house, not in the middle. Since we usually topped the tank up every three to four weeks when it was really cold outside, we were worried about how long our oil would last. Of course, we were on edge and kept dashing down to the cellar to look at the fuel gauge but it did not move; that old furnace never stopped running. It was quite disconcerting. Finally, near the end of February, we relaxed and enjoyed this unexpected miracle right into April.

God; Jesus looked at them and said, "With man, this is impossible, but not with all things are possible with God." [Mark 10:27](#)

Why Would God Multiply Decorative Panelling?

However, our third miracle was even more unnerving because we observed the inexplicable with our own eyes. Even my 21-year old daughter, who questions and argues about everything, still grudgingly admits that only a miracle could explain what happened at our house a few years ago.

This puzzling divine intervention was really frivolous. We would have simply made do without a miracle this time. When God supplied us with a multiplication of heating oil, we were desperate; we needed heat when it was -25 C outside in the middle of a Canadian winter but why would God multiply decorative panelling?



My husband, Michael, was installing oak wainscoting halfway up the wall in the bathroom, hall and down the main staircase of our 140-year old home. Unfortunately, even before the first landing in the stairwell, it was obvious there wasn't enough oak to finish the job. We resigned ourselves to using a wider, lighter panel for at least one side of the stairwell. However, there was just as much of the oak left

after Micheal finished both sides of the stairs as before he had even begun. The pile of wood simply never went down; the configuration of the stacked wood looked exactly the same as before he started the stairs. It was unnerving, to say the least. Just to make sure we realized the full ramifications of this divine intervention, the pile of cut ends was at least 2 m. high. This demonstration of extravagant love shocked us but God was probably laughing at our confusion and questions.

Why would God bother to work a miracle like this? Usually, any intervention from God in our lives has filled a real need. All we could come up with is that God is in charge and will meet all our needs effortlessly. It has nothing to do with fasting, prayer or our holiness but has everything to do with His grace, mercy, and sense of humor when we live as His children.

I have been privileged to witness three miracles so far in my life- a physical healing and a multiplication of heating oil and of wood. Even skeptical teenagers could not deny the power of God because all three miracles were “a sight to behold”, manifesting the glory of God. As for me, I am no longer afraid of future catastrophes either in nature or in society for I am a child of God and I can trust that whatever happens, God is in control.

[Daniel 4:2-3](#) “It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. “How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation.

linking with [theology is a verb](#)

This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanjuneau.blog/2017/01/24/surprised-by-three-miracles/>
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No Reason for Bravado [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”
(Luke 22:31-32)

Satan is on a search-and-destroy mission. And his primary target is the church leadership team. If he can destroy your bishop’s testimony, or your pastor’s, the catechist, or the choir director, the collateral damage to the average pew-sitter is usually devastating.

Of course, even those who do nothing more than sit in the pew each Sunday are not safe from the devil’s stratagem. Every Christian, even the laity, has a bull’s-eye painted on his or her soul. If the devil can destroy any Christian’s testimony, then think of the collateral damage he causes in the person’s family, among friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

Anyone who walks close to Jesus knows that the days in which we live are evil. A deeply visceral, spiritual darkness has spread across our world like a rancid shroud. That’s why every Christian must remember, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)* Here is what the apostle also wrote to the church at Ephesus: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. (Ephesians 6:12-13)* I am reminded of Peter’s bravado when speaking to Jesus: *Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.*” (Mark 14:29) To which Jesus responded: *“Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.”* (verse 30). But Peter protested, this time vehemently: *“Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.”* (Verse 31)

Oh, how often have I sounded like Peter! Perhaps you have, too. No wonder the Holy Spirit warns us: *So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.* (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Any Christian in the pew -- and perhaps especially in leadership -- can weaken, bloodied in the Satanic battle for our souls. The fight is too serious to enter the fray unprepared. It is too deadly to wage on our own. Oh, Holy Spirit! Remind us of that full armor of God (Ephesians 6:14-18). Remind us, Oh, Lord, to daily *“pray for one another,”* because *“the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”* (James 5:16) Oh, Lord, hear our prayers. ----- My book of prayer strategies, although written specifically for a Catholic audience, has sufficient overlap to other Christian groups to assist your prayer efforts. <http://amzn.to/2jltojF>

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The Virgin of Tenderness [at walk the way]

One of my favorite icons of Mary is the Virgin of Tenderness, also known as the Vladimir Mother of God.

There is a stunning icon of the Virgin in the church of St. Thomas Aquinas in Ames, Iowa, written by Yaroslava Sumach Mills.

The iconographer worked with the parish to write an icon that fits so well into the church – for example, the color of Mary’s mantle matches the color of the rosewood of the altar.

Yaroslava came to Ames and spoke about her work and even provided the parish with a series of photos of the icon being written. She also left a line drawing of the Vladimir icon.

I brought a copy of that line drawing to Honduras and have passed it on to the catechists in the parish of Dulce Nombre so that the children can color the icon or make copies.

Wednesday, I went to the village of Pasquingual to lead a Celebration of the Word with Communion for the father of one of the Delegates of the Word there. On the wall of the church there were several drawings, including this one of the Vladimir Mother of God, by Nicol, one of the children there.



I was overwhelmed. Nicol captured the life and spirit of the icon.

You can compare this with the line drawing she had



or with this detail of the original



We may have a young iconographer in our midst.

And so we pray,

Mary, Mother of God, pray for us and for all the world.

The Resolution to end all Resolutions



A hermit I know used to say, “When you stop falling you will be in heaven, but when you stop getting up, you will be in hell.” The fact of the matter is, we all fall. The secret of spiritual growth is how long we take to get up again. St Francis of Assisi used to say that the difference between a saint and a sinner is not that the saint does not fall, but the speed with which the saint gets up again. Reflect for a moment on how many times you have failed to keep your New Year’s resolutions. It is pride that prevents us from getting up after we have failed and soon we will have forgotten all about them. Here is a bit of advice from my friend the hermit. “Try not to spend your life endlessly making resolutions that you never keep, just concentrate on one resolution that will help you keep them all.”

The theory is simple. We are all weak, so even if we do manage to keep an odd resolution here and there throughout our lives, we will never manage to keep them all, never mind conquer the sins that continually topple us. So, make just one resolution, and that is to turn and open yourself to receive *Love Unlimited* as much as you are able, each day. Then your life, and the life of your family will be changed irrevocably for the better. The reason is simply this – *All things are possible with love that are quite impossible without it.*

So, here is the principle. Do not give up anything you like or enjoy, unless it prevents you from giving some quality space and time each day for God in prayer. There is nothing more important than trying to surcharge your own limited love with his unlimited love each day. Prayer is but the traditional word used to describe how we go about doing this. The more you come to know and experience this love then, without realising it all those things that you once thought you could never live without, simply fades away. If this can happen in human love when the love of another can totally absorb you to the exclusion of all else, how much can this happen in divine love? The quest for this love, however, can only begin when we sincerely seek and find the daily time to receive it.

I was talking to a friend of mine last week about sport, and he was saying that now middle age is on the horizon he is finding it more and more difficult to play with anything like the success he used to have. He told me he had to practise what he calls *energy management*. In other words, he has only a limited amount of energy these days, so he must use what little energy he has to best advantage. So, he freewheels whenever he can and uses what energy he has to maximum effect at crucial moments of the

game.

It is the same with us when it comes to the spiritual life. We are all weak and only have a limited amount of energy at our disposal. So, instead of dissipating it trying to do everything and ending up doing nothing, we need to practise *energy management*. In other words, use what little energy we have to maximum effect. This means trying to organise our daily lives so that we have regular times of access to the most powerful energy available to us. As this supernatural energy or Love begins to surcharge our own, we will be able to do what is quite impossible without it. Jesus himself did exactly the same because he recognised that in freely choosing to enter into our weak human nature, he needed the help and strength that only his father could give. He realised that he needed to structure his own life in such a way that he could have access continually to the help and strength that he needed from his father. That is why he regularly went to the temple and to the synagogue with his disciples, and that is why he often went alone for more prolonged personal prayer into lonely places. However, in addition to all this, he needed daily personal prayer too, as we do.

It was the custom of orthodox Jews at that period to pray five times a day as Muslims do today. Jesus criticised his own contemporaries for the way they made such an exhibition of themselves at these prescribed times, ostentatiously praying in public to impress the plebs with their piety. He did not criticise them for doing what he would certainly have done himself, but for the way that they did it. When you pray, he insisted, “*Go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you*”. We need to do the same if we are going to maintain any momentum in our spiritual journey.

When lifestyles and work-patterns changed in subsequent centuries, Christians no longer found it possible to stick to the prescribed times that Jesus would have used with his disciples, except in religious orders where the practice is continued to this day. That is why for laypeople the practice of morning and evening prayer began to take its place, but sadly in recent years this seems to be disappearing. It is no good saying we simply don't have the time, because it is rarely true. A recent survey for the BBC discovered that an average person watches television for over thirty hours a week. So surely, we could give up a couple of hours here and there for the only salt that will give savour to our lives and give meaning to what can so easily be meaningless without it.

I went into our local fruit and veg shop recently to pick up a lettuce that I forgot to buy at the supermarket, and came out with much more than I bargained for. I made some reference to a television program that I thought the young woman who served me would have seen the previous evening, only to be told she did not have a television. It seems that a trip to India with her husband had converted them both to Buddhism. She and her husband spend their evenings reading and meditating and they rise at five thirty every morning to do the same. If only we took the practice of what we believe as seriously as she does!

It made me rethink the structures in my own life that had been looking a little wobbly at the knees of late, and learn from a young woman half my age. Time simply must be programmed into our daily lives if we are to follow Jesus' example seriously. If he needed daily access to his father to nurture and sustain his spiritual life, how much more do we? This is the first lesson that all the saints learnt from Jesus, but we become mixed up because we read the story of their lives backwards, and so totally misunderstand the principles of the spiritual life that made them what they finally became.

We read about their unrelenting selflessness, their heroic virtue and their feats of super-human

asceticism, and we wrongly believe that we can only become like them by imitating what they did. This is of course a recipe for disaster that has destroyed the youthful idealism of many a would-be saint. Saints become saints not by performing heroic virtues, but by first opening themselves as Jesus did to the only Love that will give them the power to perform heroic virtues. If we only try to copy what are the effects of love, we are doomed to failure. We must copy the saints by realising as they did how weak they were and unable to do anything by themselves. Then we will open ourselves to receive the love that made them such loving people. They were the first to learn how to practise the *energy management* that enabled them to manage their lives better than anyone else.

We too must make *quality space and time* in our daily lives to tap into the supreme energy which is *Love Unlimited*. As this Love begins to penetrate and surcharge our own weak human love, we will be able to perform the sort of heroic virtues that should characterise everyone who claims to follow Jesus Christ. Then, animated by the same love that animated him, the world will come to see that Jesus is not dead but alive in us and in all who choose to receive him, and so seeing, they will come to believe.

Instead of making long lists of resolutions then, that we will never have the energy to keep anyway, why not just make one that will eventually enable us to keep them all.

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/resolution/>
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Faith is Spelled R-i-s-k [at Sunflower Sojourn]

Recently, I heard a speaker assert that faith is spelled r-i-s-k.

There is much truth in that statement. When Mary said “yes” to the angel Gabriel, she knew her unwed pregnancy (by the Holy Spirit) would bring misunderstanding, and very possibly much worse. Simon and Andrew left their fishing nets, their very livelihoods, to follow Jesus when He first called! What a huge risk that was! How were they going to survive? What would their families think? ***Those of us living the Christian life today know that we also must take risks.***

It’s risky to talk to someone about Jesus or offer to pray for or with them. It may open you up to rejection or persecution. You may lose friendships and even status due to your faith.

It’s risky to make decisions based on faith when they don’t make sense on practical levels. Sometimes (many times) the Lord asks us to sacrifice money, personal gain, and our own desires for *humility*.

It’s even risky to live your life as a Christian at all! We “walk by faith and not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7) The world tells us we are foolish and throwing our lives away by basing our lives upon something unseen. Nowadays, more and more, living the Christian life is cause for being called “intolerant.” **Everything except Christianity is tolerated!**

Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat. Peter did, and he walked on water! I think with us, too, He is asking us to do things we’ve never done before. It’s 2017, friends. We’ve been stuck for far too long. It’s time for us to step out of the boat. It’s time to take a risk. ***It’s time for radical faith.***



courtesy of unsplash.com

Sunflower Sojourn

I am committed to sojourning with you toward Jesus Christ, the Son, as we seek to become the people we are called to be in every aspect of our lives.

January 25, 2017

[Uncategorized](#)

[disciples](#), [Jesus](#), [persecution](#), [prayer](#), [radical faith](#), [risk](#), [St. Peter](#), [tolerance](#), [trust](#), [walk on water](#)

This contribution is available at <http://sunflowersojourn.wordpress.com/2017/01/25/faith-is-spelled-r-i-s-k/>
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Will the Real Women's Movement Please Stand Up?! [at beautiful thorns]



It has been a while since I have blogged. Not because I haven't had anything to say but more because I have had too much to say concerning various topics and trying to organize my thoughts and focus on just one topic seemed too hard and time consuming!

There have been lots of changes in our household! Two of my daughters are now going to the Catholic school connected to our parish. They were previously homeschooled. The Lord often calls us to persevere through hard circumstances but when he is in it, there is usually an underlying peace and joy. If something feels like drudgery and against the current, I think we need to question and re-evaluate whether we are in God's will. That is ultimately what caused my husband to leave his insurance job and for us to end up in Indiana. That is also what led me to start sending my kids to school instead of homeschooling. It has been a big transition but I think it will be really good for them. I also feel a weight lifted off my shoulders! I am still homeschooling one of my daughters who has some learning difficulties and I feel good about that. She benefits more from one on one interaction than she would in a classroom setting.

On another topic, the women's march this past weekend got me thinking and remembering. About 7 years ago, the Lord started speaking to me about a women's movement that he was going to raise up. I do not believe this feminist, pro-abortion women's movement is it. Why do I think this? Well, because it seems to be vulgar, self-serving, self-promoting, exclusive and does not allow pro-life women to be a part of it.

Then I got to thinking and praying about what a true women's movement, led by the Holy Spirit would look like. I believe it would be just the opposite. The devil must sense something is about to spring up. He loves to copy and counterfeit. Everything that God has, Satan has a counterfeit for. There is even a counterfeit for all the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

There is false love, peace, joy, etc... True

love

is sacrificial, just look at the cross for an example! True love is also rooted in truth. True

peace

surpasses all understanding! True

joy

isn't just a feeling of happiness but a euphoria that comes from being in the will of God despite external circumstances!

A true women's movement led by the Holy Spirit would not be self-serving, 'my body, my choice' but would be concerned about and respect the rights and dignity of all women from womb to the tomb. A true women's movement would be concerned about human rights abuses, human trafficking, pornography because it objectifies women, and sex-selection abortions that has killed millions of baby girls around the world, especially in China and India. I believe a true women's movement would also celebrate the beauty and femininity of women as God created them!

Okay, off my soap box but praying that the real women's movement will rise up and show the world what real women and sacrificial, Christ-like love looks like!

*Edited to add - I just would like to clarify that I do not think women who participated in the Women's March are evil. I know some really good women with good hearts that went to the march. Their intentions were pure and reasonable. I also admire the courageous pro-life groups who went even though they were

[spat upon](#)

, charged and

[pushed to the ground](#)

. I think it is good that they were a presence there. My take on the March however is it fell short and missed the mark, and did not represent all women.

This contribution is available at <http://www.beautifulthorns.com/2017/01/will-real-womens-movement-please-stand.html>
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If You Love God and His Priests [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]



The tragic truth about our Catholic Church today and far too many of its bishops, priests, religious and lay people is the failure to make the Sacred Eucharist the center of our lives, as our Lord has commanded us to do.

In far too many parishes, we have, for all practical purposes, ignored and abandoned our Eucharistic Lord imprisoned in tabernacles behind locked doors.

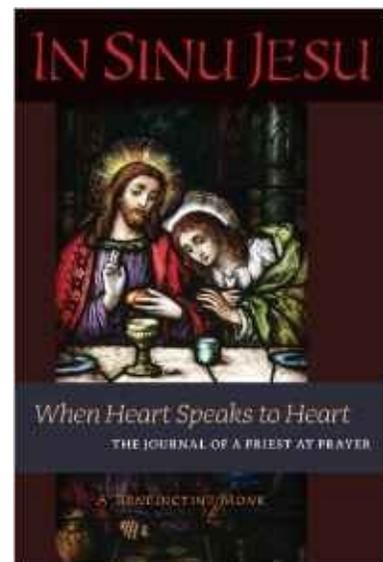
When we are in His Presence we often act irreverently and as if He were not there. Multiple surveys have concluded that few holding themselves out as being Catholics actually believe that our Lord is really and substantially present in the Eucharist.

We have lost the sense of the sacred, using our Church buildings not exclusively as places of worship, prayer and adoration but for such inappropriate activities as secular community events, pageants, slide shows of our graduating students, the viewing of secular movies, coffee cafes and socializing.

For centuries, our Lord has been calling us “to come to Him in the Sacrament of His love.” His requests have fallen on deaf ears, hard hearts and cold souls.

This cannot continue. We have to do something about this disgrace **NOW!** We must speak candidly about this crisis in our Church to our priests, bishops and to each other – the salvation of souls hinges on our doing so.

Let me suggest this simple step to you:



If you share the concern about the loss of the sacred and belief in the Real Presence, if you can feel our Lord's pain over being ignored by so many of His creatures, and if you love Him and His priests than you **MUST** give your pastor (as well as yourself) a copy of the recently published journal of a Benedictine Monk entitled In. [*Senu Jesu – When HeartSpeaks to Heart – The Journal of a Priest at Prayer.*](#)

Father Joachim Schwarzmuller of Krefeld, Germany had this to say about this book: “*In Sinu Jesu* has the power to inflame the desire for Eucharistic adoration. It is a powerful expression of Our Lord's thirst to draw us deeper into His friendship, to heal wounds, and thus to renew the Church.”

No one who is sincerely seeking to make God the center of their lives can prayerfully read this journal and persist in disbelief and irreverence toward His Eucharistic Presence among us. Nor could any such person continue to ignore our Lord's desire to “share with you the secrets of His Heart”.

Just ponder the following brief, bold, challenging excerpt from *In Senu Jesu* and you will understand what I am trying to convey in this brief post:

My Most Holy Eucharist is not only My Sacrifice offered to the Father, although in a bloodless manner; it is not only the sustenance of souls, nourishing them with My very Body and Blood; it is also the Sacrament of My divine friendship, the pledge of My burning desire to remain close to all who seek Me,

to all who need Me, to all who would spend time in My company.

This is why it so grieves Me that churches are locked and that 'I am left for days on end alone in the tabernacle. I would draw souls to My open Heart, I would have them experience what it is to abide in the radiance of My Eucharistic Face, I would give Myself in intimate friendship to souls drawn to Me in the Sacrament of My love, but you priests, shepherds of souls, have forgotten that keeping open your churches is integral to your sacred ministry. I would pasture souls in My Eucharistic presence, but you, by continuing to close My churches to souls, frustrate and contradict the desires of My Eucharistic Heart. There is sorrow in heaven over this. It is not difficult to keep My churches open and to provide for the spiritual needs of those who would readily enter them in search of My friendship. The obstacles are not those of which you think; the obstacle is a lack of faith, a loss of belief in My real presence. My priests will be held responsible for the coldness and isolation that has come to surround Me in the Sacrament of My love. How I desire to see My churches open! Open the doors of My consecrated houses and trust Me to fill them with adorers in spirit and in truth!

We are not accustomed to such frankness. These words may make us uncomfortable. They should.

How will you respond?

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2017/01/monday-musings-if-you-love-god-and-his.html>
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Being Poor and Being Alive [at bukas palad]



Year A / Ordinary Time / Week 4 / Sunday

Readings: Zephaniah 2.3, 3.12-13 / Psalm 145.6c-7, 8-9a, 9bc-10 (R/v Mt 5.3) / 1 Corinthians 1.26-31 / Matthew 5.1-12a

We gather around this altar, as we do every Sunday. Today our gathering is a little different: there's a festive air.

More red dresses and shirts dot the pews. Many of us are buoyant in spirit because of the good conversation, hearty laughter and happy catch-ups we've had at reunion dinners and from visits to the elders and friends. The young and single however remain expectant for the ang pows in many a handbag this morning. I believe we've all come with greater awareness for the goodness of abundance in our lives—so much indeed for us to celebrate in thanksgiving.

Today's gospel passage offers us an added reason to celebrate. It is however easy to miss it because of our familiarity with Matthew's presentation of Jesus teaching the Beatitudes. We are familiar with the details: the location, the disciples and crowds, Jesus teaching. We are familiar with the purpose of Jesus' teachings: to describe conditions for a new way of living and promised blessings to all who live this way. Conditions and blessings such as:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

And, blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

We are familiar with Jesus' Beatitudes because of the countless homilies we have heard about it, the many reflections we have read about it, and the spiritual experiences we had about it in prayer. Our familiarity with the Beatitudes is good, but it can blind us to a reason for us to live more gratefully as Christians.

What exactly is this reason? How will we find it as we read the Beatitudes?

We will find this reason in our attitude—that is, the disposition of our hearts—to welcome Jesus and the Beatitudes he teaches. We'll know it when we recognize and accept it. What this attitude is is **our poverty to receive, to welcome, to accept and to celebrate Jesus.**

The Jesuit Dan Harrington taught me Scripture in Boston College. Whenever I remember his Ascension Day homily, I think of this question I asked when I heard it: "Where is Jesus today?" Dan's brief but succinct homily centered on these phrases: "Jesus came; Jesus cared; Jesus died; Jesus rose from dead; Jesus saved; Jesus went up to heaven; no more Jesus." They challenged all of us gathered at Mass that day to acknowledge that the risen Jesus remains with us and amongst us even though he has ascended. Yes, Jesus lives with us still—he is especially to be found with the downtrodden and needy, for he is small like them. His Spirit is real and alive amongst them.

The very first Beatitude Jesus teaches is about God's blessing on human poverty. It is a blessing for all who are oppressed and in need.

The Greek word for 'poor' in this passage on the Beatitudes literally means "beggar". Beggars are the truly poor: they are in need for they have nothing at all, including no access or right to choice. Beggars depend on the mercy and generosity of others.

We are really not so different from beggars. Yes, we have our material wealth. Yes, we have intellect and skills. Yes, we have enough abundance to celebrate Chinese New Year, and some of us even have the boldness to want more. But if we dare to look at ourselves honestly, we might discover that we are indeed poor, poor like the beggars. Poor in our hunger for forgiveness. Poor in our woundedness for healing. Poor in our loneliness for love. Poor in our thirst for life. **Poor because we depend.** We depend on another family member or friend or stranger, or even an enemy, for forgiveness, for reconciliation, for healing, for love, for life.

But more than another person, we ultimately depend on God: depend on God for our physical and our spiritual needs. **We know we are beggars because we desperately long for God.** And God gives us Jesus to meet our deepest human need for mercy, again and again.

Yet our poverty for God and for God's mercy is ironically all that we need to give back to God. Such poverty is our wealth. It is all that God asks us to first offer to Him as we gather around his altar today. Not our abundance, not even our liberty, our memory, our understanding, our entire will, all that we have and we call our own. Before all else, God asks us, "Give me your poverty".

This is why I think Jesus shows us the way to God through the Beatitudes. These conditions to live in God's ways and the blessings to receive God's promises are founded on this first Beatitude Jesus teaches: "Blessed are the poor in spirit".

To live a life poor in spirit, a life of radical dependency on God, from moment to moment, is what Jesus teaches as the foundation of Christian life.

We are not the economically poor and destitute. But we are like them because we have no choice about many things and the myriad circumstances in our lives. Like beggars who are the poor in spirit, we come to God and beg for mercy, blessings and life.

We can't beg God, we can't depend on God, however, unless we first recognize our poverty of spirit. But we need to do more than recognize it; we need to understand our poverty. Understand it from God's point of view—that our poverty of spirit is, in fact, a blessed "emptiness to be filled to overflowing with Jesus' peace and most affectionate compassion"*

Today's good and happy news is that **God treasures our poverty.** Jesus teaches this truth in the Beatitudes. Wise are we who will make this truth the bedrock of how we live and love, how we play and pray, how we act and interact with others.

We are and we will always be poor in spirit. God recognizes this reality of human life. And God loves it even more in us because being poor in spirit humbles us before God. **Only in humility can God's mercy transform us.** Blessed are we who recognise God's mercy laboring for us in our poverty. Then, we will know how to celebrate it well: by doing onto others in poverty what God does for us who are poor in spirit.

In a few minutes we will come to Communion. We will receive Jesus who gives himself to us that we might have life to the full, and so enjoy happiness, freedom and peace. We will take and eat. We will be nourished by God through Jesus, our daily bread. Then, we will depart to continue our Chinese New Year celebrations for a few more days, and thereafter return to school and work and daily life. Our families, our schools, our work places, even our recreation and prayers spaces, that we will return to will be the same: still incomplete and broken, still soiled and stained. Yes, there's a need to improve them.

Yet it is in how we live our poverty of spirit, individually and together, in these very spaces that we can discover, again and again, that we are never poor but rich—rich because God comes to us in our imperfect ways as we live in this imperfect world to always give us abundant life.

So let's see today's celebrations in a different perspective as are now gathered around the altar. Isn't our poverty of spirit then a very good reason for us to celebrate even more this Chinese New Year—even more than the abundance of goodness that we have and possess, because this poverty is in fact God's gift for us to enjoy the fullness of life in Jesus?

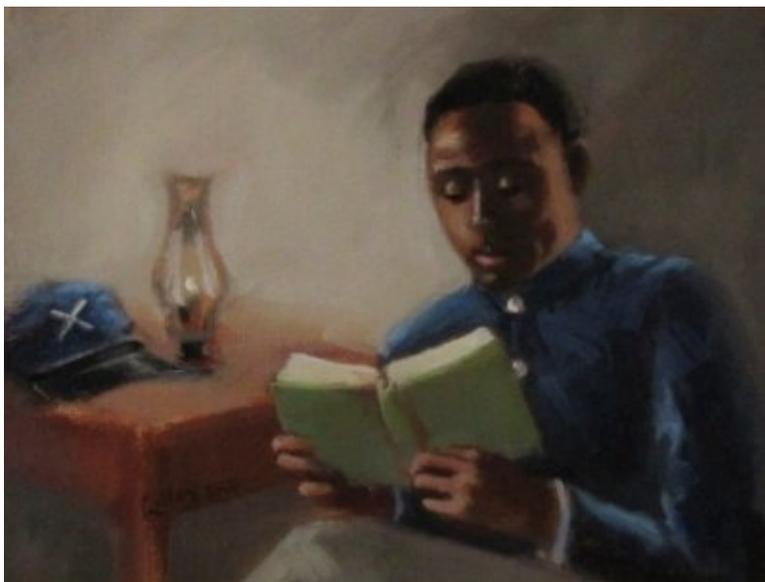
**Inspired by monks from the Trappist Monastery, Spencer, Massachusetts*

Preached at St Ignatius Parish, Singapore

photo: www.borgenmagazine.com

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2017/01/homily-being-poor-and-being-alive.html>
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Respite [at Grace to Paint]



6×8" oil paint on primed canvas sheet; use 'comment' below to inquire.

I added three images of men reading to my collection. Today starts Black History Month, and this image holds many layers of meaning for me.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2017/02/01/respite/>
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Stubborn Old People [at Do Not Be Anxious]

The topic at the coffee shop was the stubbornness of old people. The owner's father, just home from his hip surgery, stubbornly refused help in walking from his children. Last night, getting up alone to use the bathroom his father fell, and is in the hospital --- again. "I told him to let us help him, but he's just a stubborn old man."

My contributions to the conversation were tales of my mom's stubbornness, and her refusal to use a walker to help with her unsteady steps, until she too fell --- and never walked again. And in the period afterward she gave up eating for a period of time, willing to give up life rather than accept that she could no longer walk. Stubborn!!

As I drove to church and sipped my morning coffee, my heart was opened to a wider view of our conversations: it's not just walking we are afraid to lose --- and it's not just old people. If you've never had the hard conversation of having to ask mom or dad to give up their driver's license because they had become a danger on the road, well, you are blessed. And how many of us have heard (perhaps often) these words: "What? What did you say? ... No, I don't need a hearing aid. If you'd just speak up and stop mumbling I could hear perfectly well."? It's a conversation conducted by many in a yelling tone of voice, to be heard over the booming noise coming from the television set in the background.

And what of younger people, even children? How many of us have noticed that our kid's school grades began dropping and thought it a strange thing, because we were sure they knew their lessons. Sometimes it took a note from the teacher to get over OUR stubbornness: "I don't think (Johnnie or Suzie) can see the blackboard." And so then we tell the children we think it's time for glasses --- and then THEY resist; they don't want to be different from the other children.

The fact is none of us want to be different, even as we all ARE becoming different.

We resist change. Why is that? Losing our sight, or our hearing, or our ability to walk causes most people anxiety. They are not acting stubborn in resisting the change; truly they are acting normal. Often change is hard to confront and accept, and in part that is because change is most often gradual. It's the "-ing" part of changing that is the problem. Change often sneaks up on us, until someone points out that we HAVE changed, and then we resist what they see as obvious. "Dad, I love you, but you need help walking." And then we get angry --- both of us do --- because we think the other person can't see reality.

But it's not just changes in our body we resist. How many winters did you resist getting out those winter gloves? And how many summers did you resist that first cutting of grass? And what happened when "the obvious" candidate for president didn't get elected and we resist others' saying: "that's how things are in our country." "No," we respond, "they're not! You're just biased or -phobic, or stubborn." But change HAS happened in our country, gradually, and we didn't notice it until others pointed it out. And we're all angry--- over what is.

And what of you the reader and I the writer of these thoughts about reactions to change? Perhaps we might look at them as some story book tale: "Yes, that happens to some people, but not to me." And so

we look in the mirror, and we can't see ourselves as we really are. We are ALL changing, as our body ages and as our mind takes in new things around us, all of which are changing. Most of the changes around us are gradual, and we find it hard to see them. And one of the things that changes gradually and is most hard to see, to accept, and is most hurtful when finally noticed, is a change in relationships.

Sometimes there is a trigger to make us see ourselves as we really are: I am alone. My marriage has fallen apart. My children don't love me. This job sucks. I don't know God, and if He exists He doesn't know me. As good a person (as we know we are), we find it hard to see and say those things about ourselves, because they're bad things. Oh, and if confronted suddenly by someone else, we instinctively resist "their opinion": "I am NOT alone; I have lots of friends. My marriage is okay; we're just busy sometimes. My children love me but they've got lives to live. My job is good; it pays well. And of course: I'm a good Christian, I go to church each Sunday --- except when something really important comes up." (Something more important than God?!)

And especially on that last item, the most important of relationships we SO can't see ourselves. But God can.

Do you think He looks at us with an angry face: "You're so stubborn; why can't you see that?" Or does He look at us as a loving father: "Those things I want for are for your own good, and because I love you." And why do we so often respond, if not verbally then in our heart: "You don't know me."

Look more closely in the mirror: Who doesn't know who? Who can't see the change that has gradually happened in their life, and in their relationship with God --- and not for the better. And who, in their anger, and frustration, and loneliness, won't confront something as obvious as the image in the mirror, and won't talk about it? And won't pray about it?

I'll tell you who: just stubborn people. Period. The ones who are suffering the most are those who don't know they are suffering --- or won't admit it.

- - - - -

And as these thoughts gelled in my head, I heard Ann Murray's soft voice begin singing on the radio:

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder

Consider all the works Thy hand hath made.

I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,

Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee:

How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee:

How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

This contribution is available at <http://do-not-be-anxious.blogspot.com/2017/01/stubborn-old-people.html>
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Interruptions [at Bible Meditations]



The apostles came back and told Jesus everything they had done. He took them with him, and they went off by themselves to a town named Bethsaida. When the crowds heard about it, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about the Kingdom of God, and healed those who needed it. Luke 9: 10-11

The crowds interrupted Jesus' private meeting with his apostles. How did Jesus respond? He welcomed the intruders.

When I'm interrupted, I'm a lot crankier. If unexpected events frustrate my agenda, my exasperation is as plain as the thinly disguised frown on my face. Although I usually rise to the occasion, it often involves working towards acceptance rather than being instantly welcoming.

Why is that? Because I forget that my agenda is not God's agenda. I forget that I was created to know, love, and serve God, as my childhood Baltimore catechism told me. I forget that serving God does not mean flawless execution of my itinerary, however noble my intentions. I forget that God's definition of success is not my own—or the world's—definition of success.

If Jesus is my role model, success is welcoming others warmly when they interrupt me, sharing God's love with others—whether that means offering them encouragement, listening to them, or just not snapping at them for getting in my way.

Someone—I wish I could remember who—once prayed, “Lord, may I take every interruption as coming from you.” What a powerful thought! Interruptions might be sent by God to jar me out of my prideful, narrow focus. God's plan is better than mine, but sometimes I need reminding. How about you?

Prayer: Lord, help me welcome the people and events you send my way today.

Reflection: When we call on Jesus, he's never too busy to welcome us warmly. Can we pass it on?

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Success in Today's World [at Quiet Consecration]

Life is a series of events. How we manage those events determines our success as human beings.

Whether or not I accept the above declaration as true hinges on how I define the word success. If I drop that word into a Google Search engine, I am told that success is a noun. I am told it can mean three things:

1. The accomplishment of an aim or purpose
2. The attainment of popularity or profit
3. A person or thing that attains desired aims, purpose, popularity or profit

I look at this definition and I ask myself, does this definition fit?

What is my aim or purpose? For a Catholic, my aim is to love God, to serve God and His creatures and to spend eternity with Him in heaven. My purpose is to be a saint, to be (in the words of a popular Catholic writer), the best version of myself that I can be so as to bring glory to His Name. My purpose, my aim in this life is to be the type of person that attracts others to Him.

Will this allow me to attain popularity or profit? Maybe. I will, most likely, be very popular with some people and I might even be able to support myself while living the principles of Catholicism in the workplace. I also have to accept that, with other people, I will not be very popular. With those people who put the world first I will be considered an odd ball. My experience is that people are uncomfortable with odd balls and have a tendency to try and make their lives miserable. There will also be that group that will adopt some or part of the Christian life and proclaim that they have 'reformed' the Teachings of Jesus Christ and anyone who still clings to the 'old ways' is a bigot, a hater, a person not in touch with today's reality.

My popularity, therefore, may not manifest itself in any earthly way. I won't be elected to city council if I proclaim myself Pro Life. I won't get to be the mayor if I state I do not believe in same-sex marriage. Sure, I can tell people that I do not intend to not honor the laws of the land but they are going to have to accept the fact that I am a Catholic, I do not believe in sending tax payer dollars to organizations who provide abortions and I do not believe the government has a right to license a sacrament. This stance will not get me elected to anything, including dog catcher.

My profit will probably be small. I am not very business like. I am good at administration stuff, not entrepreneurial stuff. I like the fact that I am about to retire after 30 years at my job and will collect a little pension and medical care for the next 35 years (I plan to live at least as long as my Mom and she is 95 right now).

Yet my profit, at the end of time, may be the greatest of all - I will not lose my immortal soul. If I stay the course and walk the talk, I can hope to be saved. I can hope to hear those words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant".

Success is, as I see it, manifested in how I handle the every day trials and tribulations that come my way. It means I must acknowledge that I have it really good right now - no one is holding me at an airport, no one is shooting at me as I walk to Mass, no one is telling me that God has okay'd my rape at the hands of Isis and that I should be grateful to be able to be a slave of someone who thinks women like me do not matter. I do not have to march through the streets dressed as a woman's body part in order to feel important. I am, right this minute, successful.

Tomorrow may be less successful...I don't know. It is not here yet. What is here is today and today, because of a loving God and His Church and 24 years of being in the 'pure breath league', I am a success.

How about you?

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Scripture alone - a tradition of men [at Catholic365]

Scripture says:

Mark 7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men,

A tradition of men, such as the one mentioned in Scripture, would be the doctrine of Scripture alone, which gives all individuals the right to interpret Scripture any way they want. Thus, invalidating the God given rule that one must obey those He has put in charge of our souls, in the Church.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Those who follow the erroneous doctrine of Scripture alone, replace God's authority with their own and make Scripture say what they want it to say, rather than what God wills. Therefore, they claim that attending the Mass is unnecessary. Whereas, Scripture says that missing the Mass intentionally makes one God's enemy:

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And that is just one of the traditions of men, or should I call them, errors of men, that Protestants follow and whereby they replace God's Commandment with their tradition.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholic365.com/article/5994/scripture-alone-a-tradition-of-men.html>
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Misunderstanding the Old and New Covenants [at Washed, Sanctified and Justified]



There is a misunderstanding of the Two Covenants, but it is in the sense that one is works based and the other is not.

On the contrary, they are both faith based, as Scripture attests. Read Heb 11 and see annotated therein, the list of the Old Testament faithful, who obeyed and did the works of God, by their faith. They are put there as an example for us.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, ...

11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Those who have enough faith, will do the works which God wills for them to do. Old Covenant or New.

James 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

So, what is the difference between the Old and New Covenants? It's illustrated in this parable:

Matthew 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

The first set of laborers, are those who do not accept the Sacraments. They will work their entire life, but will not be judged until they come to the Judgment Seat of Christ. At that time, those who claim salvation by faith alone, will be Judged by Christ. Whether they are truly saved, they will learn at that time.

The second set of laborers, are those who accept the Sacraments. Those who take them seriously, repent of their sins and do their best to obey God before and after receiving the Sacraments. They receive the Sacraments and are credited with righteousness for believing that God will keep His promises and for hoping in God for their salvation. Judgment comes to them in this life, everytime they approach the Altar:

1 Peter 4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

God only saves those who do His righteous works, whether it be through the Sacraments or at the Judgment Seat. Both Covenants are based on faith. And in both Covenants, faith without works, is dead.

[covenants.html](#)

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Importance of the Sacraments [at CatholicBibleTalk]

Protestants confess their sins. However, they don't go to a priest to do it. We pray to God directly for forgiveness of our sins

So do Catholics. But we also go to the Sacrament of Confession in order that our souls be washed of our sins in this life. That is the benefit of the Sacrament.

Whether you're Catholic or Protestant, confession is a must. Very true. Because without repentance, there is no salvation.

Yes, I realize this. I didn't mean to infer that you would not have gone to Christ in prayer to confess. I should have cleared that up, but thanks for doing so. What you don't realize is that they "think" they are confessing to God. But in fact, they are not. They are simply recounting to themselves their own guilt.

One does not need to confess in order for God to know that they are truly repentant. God is omniscient. The benefit of the Sacrament of Confession is in the CONFIRMATION by the Minister of God that God has heard the repentant sinner and washed away their sin.

2 Corinthians 5:20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

This is the doctrine of Baptisms. Every Sacrament is a Baptism.

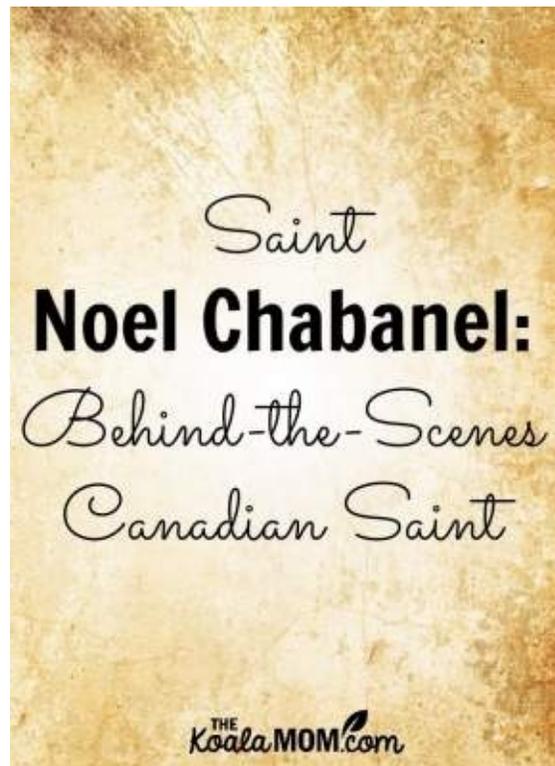
Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. The Protestant who denies the benefit of the Sacrament of confession, has, by his unbelief, condemned himself.

But he that approaches the fountains of grace, the Sacraments, including Confession, with sincere belief that God can do through that Sacrament what He promised, that man is saved.

This contribution is available at <http://catholicbibletalk.wordpress.com/2017/01/30/importance-of-the-sacraments/>
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Saint Noel Chabanel was born on February 2, 1613 in southern France. His name is less well-known among the Canadian martyrs. Like many of us moms, he worked in the background, doing everyday tasks. He sacrificed a life of ease to work with the “savages” of North America.

There were likely people who told him that he was wasting his education and abilities, just as moms today are told that when they choose to stay home with their children. Saint Noel’s faithfulness to God’s calling on his life can inspire many of us today to continue in the work that God has given us as well.



Noel became a Jesuit novice at the age of seventeen, following in the footsteps of an older brother. After his first vows in 1632, he taught rhetoric at several Jesuit colleges in Toulouse. He then studied theology for two years in preparation for his ordination in 1641. After that, he returned to teaching rhetoric, this time at Rodez.

During this time, Chabanel was likely familiar with the *Jesuit Relations*. These were the record of Jesuit missionary activity in New France (now eastern Canada). Historian Peter Ambrosie calls the *Relations* “one of the world’s most famous records of adventure, history and heroic sanctity, unique because they were history written on the spot in the hour of its making.” These fanned his desire to become a missionary himself.

Saint Noel Chabanel in Quebec

Father Chabanel arrived in New France on August 15, 1643. He received a warm welcome from [the Jesuits there](#). Just the previous year, [Rene Goupil](#) had become the first Jesuit martyr after being captured, tortured, and murdered by the Iroquois.

Fr. Chabanel spent his first year in Quebec as a chaplain at the Ursuline convent. He also worked with the French soldiers and colonists in Quebec. During this time, he met Fr. Jean de Brebeuf, who served

as supplier for the missions.

Saint Noel Chabanel among the Huron

In the summer of 1644, two parties taking supplies to the Huron missions were ambushed by the Iroquois. The governor of New France finally provided an armed escort for Fr. Chabanel, Fr. Brebeuf and another priest to travel. They arrived at Ste. Marie in September and Fr. Chabanel began his studies of the Huron language. Unfortunately, he had great difficulty with this, as recorded by his superior: “Once here, even after three, four, five years of study of the Indian language, he made such little progress that he could hardly be understood even in the most ordinary conversation.”

Because of his educated, upper-class background, Fr. Chabanel also struggled to adapt to the lifestyle of the Huron. Historian Edward Spillane records that Fr. Chabanel “felt a strong repugnance to the life and habits of the Indians, and feared it might result in his own withdrawal from the work.”

Fr. Chabanel was sent in 1646 to another mission a short distance away from Ste. Marie. Because of his inability to speak the Huron language, he served in lesser roles but remained as busy as the other missionaries. Here, he also pronounced his final vows as a Jesuit. He returned to Ste. Marie in 1647 to help serve the Huron refugees.

In 1647, after Fr. Isaac Jogues became the second Jesuit martyr, Fr. Chabanel was given the opportunity to return to France. His great dislike of Huron food and culture, as well as his own spiritual dryness, likely made that an appealing offer. However, he refused, vowing instead that he would remain with the Huron until his own martyrdom—though he expected this would be “bloodless” as he daily gave himself up in service to the Huron.



Saint Noel Chabanel's Death

The Iroquois threat to the Huron missions grew worse in 1648. [Fr. Antoine Daniel](#) became the fourth Jesuit martyr when his village, only eleven miles from Ste. Marie, was attacked by Iroquois. Fr. Brebeuf, serving six miles away at St. Ignace II, asked for help. Fr. Chabanel arrived that fall, “considering it a great privilege to be associated with this giant so courageous by nature and so endowed by grace” (Ambrosie).

During that winter, Fr. Chabanel helped build the mission. In February 1649, Fr. Chabanel was sent to St. Jean to help Fr. Charles Garnier. Even as he left, Fr. Chabanel had a premonition about his own martyrdom as well as Fr. Brebeuf’s. Barely a month later, he received the news of Fr. Brebeuf’s and Fr. Lalemant’s deaths.

While Fr. Chabanel worked at St. Jean, the other Jesuit missionaries dismantled Ste. Marie and moved their mission headquarters to Christian Island on Lake Huron. The constant attacks by the Iroquois had destroyed most of the Huron villages and decimated the Jesuit flocks. In December, Fr. Chabanel was called to Christian Island because of famine at St. Jean and his superiors’ fears about the missionaries’ safety there. On his way, he was killed by a renegade Huron who threw his body into the Nottawasaga River.

Saint Noel Chabanel Today

Along with the [other seven Canadian Martyrs](#), Noel Chabanel was canonized in 1930 by Pope Pius XI. Ambrosie calls him “the silent hero of the hard trail, a patron of misfits, patron of the lonely, disappointed and abandoned.” Today, schools and churches across North America are named for him.

Saint Noel, you gave up a life of ease for a difficult, thankless life of service. When I find my own tasks disagreement or hard, may I remember your example of persistence and love to those around you. Pray that I might also serve God by serving my family and friends. Amen.



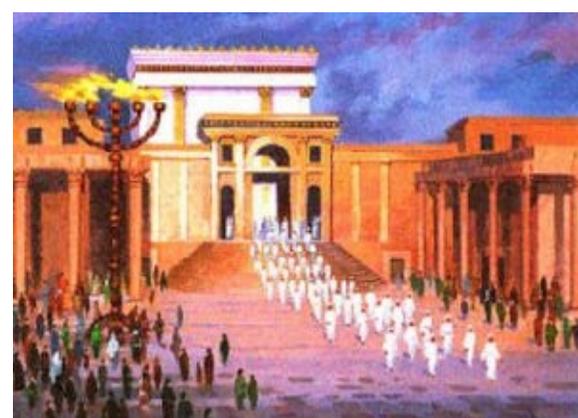
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But what we sometimes fail to realize is that the God's purposes for saving us through the offering of His Son go beyond the majestic demonstration His Love and Mercy. It goes beyond that so far as His desire to conform us to the image of His Son, right now, in the lives we are living in this world. . Here is what the scripture tells us about the Father's desire: ***“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn of many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*** (Rom 8:28-30)

In reconciling us to Himself, the Father also called us to be conformed to the image of the Spirit of Christ He that He has placed in us at our conversion and baptism.

The response He expects to His call is, that we, through the gift of our free will and out of agape Love, offer ourselves totally to Him so that through the transforming power of His Holy Spirit He bring to life in us the very Spirit of Jesus, His Son. And so, through that transformation we can truly become His instruments in bringing forth His Kingdom into this world — for in this way Jesus can continue fulfilling His Mission through our dedication (consecration) of ourselves to Him and His Purposes (NOT ours). Praised Be His Holy Name!



Dedicating ourselves to Christ

On several occasions I have written of the need for us to formally dedicate (or set our lives apart for God's use) our lives to Jesus at least every every New Year so that the life we live out will continue to be His Life in us and not just our own self-willed vision. In this way, though our dedication (or consecration) , His Spirit will continue working in us and though us to empower us in bringing forth His Kingdom in to this fallen world, thus conforming us more and more in the image of His Son.

The need for dedication should be obvious to us. For as we walk our path with Him in this world the more the “world system” attempts to make inroads in us to deviate us of from our “narrow path” with Jesus as we grow spiritually in our fellowship with Him. When the purity of our intent begins to weaken through the incursions , we begin to confuse our divine directives more and more and thus losing our ability to hear His Voice and follow His Spiritual Directives for our lives. Our ability to walk in His Word also begins to fail us as we become distracted by the World and the circumstances the Evil One begins to throw at us to dislodge our faith.

That is why the Apostle Paul exhorted the newly discipled Roman believers to consecrate themselves as the first step in opening themselves to the transforming help of the Holy Spirit in maintaining the

holiness to which they had been called :



St. Francis giving Himself Totally to God

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Romans 12:1-3)

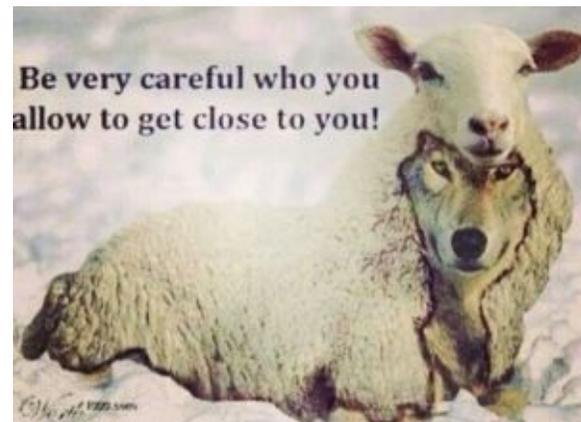
And similarly he instructed the Ephesian community on how to respond spiritually to the incursions of the evil one in their lives, saying, ***“... be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph. 6:10-17)***

Now in order to be strong in the Lord and maintaining the strength of His Power in us and through us, we must always be alert that we do not fall into letting our fallen humanness (the flesh) control us. For this reason, our self-dedication helps us to avoid complacency and always be obedient to God’s commandments as we live our our lives dedicated to Him.

It is usually for lack of dedication that we become complacent in our walk that we fall into our fleshly tantrums. As Paul tells the Galatians (and us): ***“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21)***

Of course, the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist are there to keep us on the right path. However even there the enemy may still intervene through His deceptions when we are not careful as to the examination of our consciences. But consecration lets the Holy Spirit work in us to strengthen us by an act of our will to be partners with the Divine by submitting ourselves to His Reign in us, so that as the “disciples prayer” states, “His Will may be done through us, in this world was it is in Heaven”.

Without an intentional dedication (or consecration), it difficult to be spiritually alert for the enemy’s deceit and snares that easily divert us from the Father’s perfect will for our lives. For we know the enemy will use even the smallest of our weaknesses to disempower us from fulfilling Christ’s calling for us.



For instance, the enemy may introduce a person into our lives who appears to be one of us but is in reality a wolf in sheep’s clothing whose intent is to cause us to falter. Therefore, We must always seek discernment and wisdom whenever a new person enters our select relationship group. Consecration releases these necessary gifts in our lives so that we can truly “imitate Christ” in our spiritual walk with Him. Praised be His Holy Name!

Also we must remember that the Lord has upgraded His command for us to “love” one another. Yes, what He is seeking in us is not just to love (philos) our neighbor as ourselves but to love (agape) one another as He has loved (agape’d) us. Yes, He wants to transition us from a purely human brotherly love to his divinely implanted agape Love that is in us (see Rom. 5:5). In John’s Gospel here is what He tells His disciples (and us) : **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:34-35). It is by and through this agape Love exhibited in our fellowship that identifies us as His disciples. Again, without an intentional dedication to Him , we cannot on a human level attain to the “agape” level of Love He is asking us to live out.

As disciples, however we also have responsibilities. The main one being obedience to His Commandments (ie., directives). Not just the ten commandments but personal directives where He instructs you to do something in His Name. Obeying such directives usually requires the exercise of Agape Love, where you negate your own will to do His will.

“Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; (1John 2:3)

Here is the sad news, then, if we disobey the directive of Agape Love for one another, we are no longer

considered as belonging to His Kingdom of Light and have re-entered the Kingdom of Darkness!

“Whoever says, “I am in the light,” while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.” (1 John 2:9-11)

The good news is ***“... that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”*** (1John1: 5-10)

So, if we fall in our walk with Him, we should always remember that His forgiveness is always available through faith and sincere repentance. All we have to do is ... “ask and you shall receive”.

In our walk with Him just keep in mind the word of encouragement that the Lord gave to Joshua: ***“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. 9” Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”*** (Joshua 1:8-9)

Remembering that, as Dedicated Lay Christians, the strength we receive comes directly from the Indwelling Spirit of His Love that unites us with Him when we believe and obey His Word, for ... ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*** (1 John 5: 15)

When we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit through an intentional (formal) dedication, the work we do in following His leadings is NOT our work but HIS! So prepare yourselves for the New Year ahead by intentionally offering yourself as a “living sacrifice” to His Spirit and learn to follow His leadings so that His Will is done and NOT yours as you walk the path of true discipleship.

In this coming New Year, brethren, I leave you with the following list of things that will help you know whether you are indeed walking in the Spirit and NOT in your fallible human flesh. So that as you walk the walk with Him in as disciples in full Obedience to His Word and His Love, you need to be aware of the following...

Incorrect Attitudes to be Avoided :

Complacency (taking everything for granted without first checking with His Spirit), Naivety (unwarranted trust in yourself and others), Prideful Self-Assurance

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

...

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This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2017/01/18/\\$-dedicating-our-lives-to-christ/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2017/01/18/$-dedicating-our-lives-to-christ/)
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A Writing Jumpstart: Catholic Writers Conference Online [at Erin McCole Cupp]

Has your writing dream stalled on you? The jumper cables have arrived!



Join us! [The Catholic Writers Guild will hold its 6th Catholic Writers Conference Online February 17-19, 2017.](#) From the practical to the sublime—and probably some ridiculous thrown in there just for fun—this conference will give your writing dreams and goals a boost all from the comfort of your own home. CWCO features low registration cost and NO costs for travel, lodging and meals (I mean, unless you want to take your laptop out for dinner and drinks).

If that's not enough to tempt you, my first CWCO is where my publishing career got its start. Seriously. I'd been stalled for about six years, then someone invited me to CWCO. That's where I was contacted by FQP, and that's what got me the contract for [Don't You Forget About Me](#). [You can read that story here.](#)

Maybe you need more of a tow truck than a battery jump? Hopefully I can be that tow! Humble presenter, at your service...

The Other Side of the Desk: What Being an Editor Taught Me About Being a Writer

(Friday, February 17, 1:30-2:30pm)

Did that editor get my submission? How important are all these formatting rules anyway? Most of all, WHAT IS TAKING SO LONG? Writers have lots of questions when submitting work to and coordinating with editors. This presentation will demystify several aspects of the submission and publishing process while giving you the tools you need to build stronger relationships with the editors in your life, from acquisitions time all the way through those final copy edits.

I attended my first CWCO because someone invited me. This is me inviting *you*! What are the reasons you think you can't participate in this conference? Give me a shot at helping you find a way through, and put your "can'ts" in the comments!

JUMP START YOUR

WRITING DREAMS



This contribution is available at <http://erinmccolecupp.com/2017/01/20/a-writing-jumpstart-catholic-writers-conference-online/>
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Finding beauty and joy on the planet of the apes [at Mere Observations]

This morning I was greeted with a story that broke yesterday about the mentally disabled man who was kidnapped, tied up and [tortured while his ordeal was broadcast on Facebook Live](#). I have not watched it. After reading initial reports last night I chose not to watch before bed. I chose to not watch again today after receiving a few emails from friends about it as well as seeing it on social media.

Social media. Satan's greatest invention, don't you think? I do. Social media itself is a tool and therefore neutral in its nature. But man, being a fallen creature, tends to corrupt the neutral. This is why after a two year experiment with Twitter I had enough. I still have an account but haven't logged on in a month. I've removed Facebook from my phone and allow myself 20 minutes a day at work to glance at it. Like Rabbi Jonathan Sacks I believe we need to get [beyond the politics of anger](#).

At the end of Wendell Berry's novel [Jayber Crow](#) the title character says:

This is, as I said and believe, a book about Heaven, but I must say too that it has been a close call. For I have wondered sometimes if it would not finally turn out to be a book about Hell – where we fail to love one another, where we hate and destroy one another for reasons abundantly provided or for righteousness' sake or for pleasure, where we destroy the things we need the most, where we see no hope and have no faith, where we are needy and alone, where things that ought to stay together fall apart, where there is such a groaning travail of selfishness in all its forms, where we love one another and die, where we must lose everything to know what we have had.

Increasingly social media, or our media in general, seems to be to be a book about Hell.

During those brief daily interludes on Facebook I began to notice that a friend of mine from Mississippi was daily posting the blog entries for a blog called [Sean of the South](#). After a week I read one entry. Then two. After the third I signed up to have his posts delivered to my inbox each day. I recommend it to you as well. His writing reminds me a little of Jean Shepherd, the man who wrote the stories that the popular movie A Christmas Story is based upon. Shepherd is also the voice that narrates the movie. I've read three of his books and often laugh along to his stories. Sean Dietrich can do the same, though he is also a bit more somber at times. This morning's offering, a story he called simply ["Good"](#), was an excellent antidote to what happened in Chicago. I'll let you read it for yourself, but I will include a small portion of it here.

Anyway, I feel I owe it to you to admit: I don't know much about life—I have the lack of training to prove it.

Even so, I'm a person who believes in something. In miracles. Small ones I've seen with my own eyes. In people. In things that terrify the sapsuckers who write the nightly news—folks who earn livings reporting on the worst mankind has to offer.

Well, I think life is a lot more than a string of bad headlines.

Me too brother.

As if to punctuate this point I saw this story about [three little girls and their garbagemen](#) posted to Facebook this morning. Read the story (or watch the ABC News video).

But Jeff, that young man today is hurting. He's been traumatized. *Aren't you angry?*

Of course I am, but what good does that do other than increase my blood pressure and make my day more difficult than it is? One of my friends that mentioned that the story out of Chicago likened it to "life on the Planet of the Apes". I can't disagree with him and have the same thought when I spend too much time looking at nothing but social media and the news. We are approaching a tipping point of a dark nature. I've seen several pundits and cultural observers agree with that assessment. It may indeed get very much worse before it gets better.

(Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.)

On Facebook sometime in late 2015 having had enough of all the political shouting and anger I wrote "I choose Joy." I wrote those three words as an affirmation and reminder to myself to avoid falling into the pit of despair that can result from immersing oneself in the cesspool. I will also add that I've further chosen to focus on the beauty that surrounds us all. Because if we but open our eyes it is there, present in our fellow human beings, our families, our pets, music, scenery. It's there.

On January 1 we said goodbye once again to our son as he left our driveway and headed back to his base in California. Later that day my wife and I decided to go to a movie for my birthday and saw *Collateral Beauty*. After seeing a trailer for the film I suggested to her that we go. There's no CGI. No superheroes. I liked the cast. It looked like a simple, but interesting, story. While critics savaged the film on my Flixter app I read five times as many viewer reviews that were positive. I'm glad we went.

I'm not going to write about the film's plot. From [IMDB](#):

Retreating from life after a tragedy, a man questions the universe by writing to Love, Time and Death. Receiving unexpected answers, he begins to see how these things interlock and how even loss can reveal moments of meaning and beauty.

During the film a character recalls the words a stranger said to her when facing a tragedy in her own life: "Don't forget to notice the collateral beauty."

So looking back at the last few weeks I've noticed it:

In my household while my oldest son was home during his two week holiday leave from his Marine base.

In my wife's hands as she repaired the small holes in Nolan's camos just as she had sewn the holes in his baseball uniforms throughout his youth.



In the madness and activity surrounding our daughter's Christmas Concert.

In my daughter's face while she sat next to me and her two brothers watching Rogue One in 3D. I glanced over in time to watch her mouth open wide and her small hands reach out in front of her.

In our beagle Buster as he was once more reunited with his master and was virtually inseparable from Nolan's lap for two weeks.

In the batting cage where Jonah has spent the last three weeks working on his swing because in his words he "wants to continue to improve". He hopes to play college baseball one day. His words. Not mine.



In the home of our longtime friends who invited my wife and I over one night to enjoy the wet bar they'd built in their basement after years of discussions. It was present in the laughter, conversation and glow of our cheeks after several recipes involving scotch and bourbon served in a glass.

In the liturgy, music and faces of our fellow parishioners at Mass on Christmas Eve.

In the soft glow of the Christmas candle burning in the center of our Advent wreath after I prayed Matins after midnight on Christmas Eve.



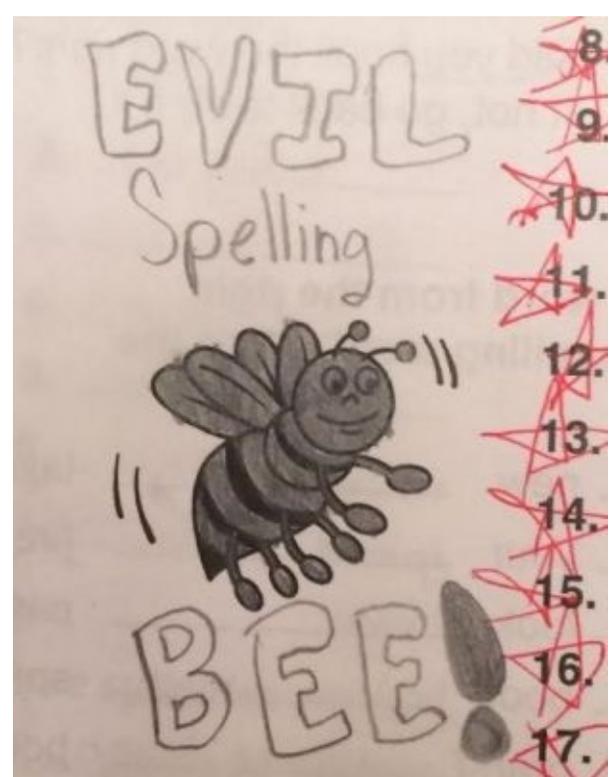
In our visits with each side of our families to gather for food and presents. In particular I saw it in the face of my two-year old nephew as he climbed on my lap and allowed me to take a 60 second video of himself laughing at his image on my phone's screen. For the next hour he took my phone away and watched again and again and again the image of himself laughing at himself. And he laughed a beautiful laugh and smiled a beautiful smile.

In the impromptu game of darts that broke out New Year's Eve on our back patio in 20 degree weather between my three children. Nolan had purchased a dartboard to take back to his barracks. He leaned it against the brick wall and from 8-10pm he played with his younger siblings. My daughter was in her robe and slippers, but her face was warm with laughter and competition. I joined in a game of 301 with them before we went inside to warm up.

In the game of Nerts that my wife and I played with our two youngest afterwards. It has become a bit of a family tradition to play this frantic card game since 2014 when our oldest was at boot camp. This year after one hand he offered to sit in for me as his brother's partner. For the first time in three years the boys beat the girls at Nerts. Next December 31 when he's not with us while he's on deployment I'll once again partner with Jonah and hopefully do well or else ring in 2018 by hearing how awful a partner I am.

In my daughter wishing me a Happy Birthday after counting down to midnight on New Year's Eve "Happy 50th birthday, Dad!" After explaining to her that I was now 49 she replied "Really? You look older...like you're 50." She's grounded until I turn 50 next year.

In reviewing my daughter's homework from school, and laughing at her clever creativity in which she turned a spelling test into a cartoon project of sorts.



In the many birthday wishes graciously sent by friends and family.

I saw beauty in the blanket of softly falling snow outside my window just last night.

On January 1st after Nolan left our driveway we were too late to attend 10:30am Mass at our home parish so we journeyed a few minutes south to attend the 11am Mass at a neighboring church. And there, once more, I saw beauty. It came to me in these words from Holy Scripture during the Old Testament reading from Numbers, Chapter 6:

The LORD bless you and keep you!

The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!

And I thought to myself "What a wonderful blessing to use to greet others in 2017."

I guess where I'm going is this:

The Beauty is always there, if you but look long enough while standing still.

The Joy is there too. It is our reaction to encountering the Beauty.

Both are present. We just need to stand still long enough to notice.

This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2017/01/05/finding-beauty-and-joy-on-the-planet-of-the-apes/>
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The Great Blessings in the Catholic Faith [at Renew The Church Blog]

The Catholic Church has been entrusted with the fullness of divine revelation, revealed perfectly in the divine Person of the Word become man, Jesus Christ. As the apostle John wrote:

1Jn 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—
1Jn 1:2 the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—
1Jn 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Who is this “we” who were there with Him, to see and hear and touch Him? Those who were called into supernatural fellowship (Greek κοινωνία – *koinōnia*) with Him and with one another. This supernatural fellowship is made possible because of the Gift who is God Himself, given “within” human persons, the indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit. This divine fellowship was the beginnings of His one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church (ἐκκλησία – *ekklēsia*, the “out-called”) – the men and women called out of the world and into Christ to share in His holy and eternal life! This sharing is possible only in, and by virtue of, the divine Holy Spirit, sent and given by the Father and the Son.

This same Holy Catholic Church today calls all men and women, in the name of Christ, out of the futility of this world and into the life of the Son, Jesus the Lord. This Church, His Church, can enable human persons to find, to receive, to embrace and to hold fast to their divine vocation to return to God, to live in Him in the fullness of life forever. This embrace of Christ is found and experienced in His way, a way of four facets, or dimensions:

1) **The Truth.** Jesus the Word of God is Truth. He entrusted to His Church of Apostles the fullness of revealed Truth, insured in them by the abiding Holy Spirit sent to be with them (and their successors) until the end of time. Because of this certainty, they and their successors could do what He sent them to do, with doctrinal certainty. His Church was entrusted with His Truth, thus they could teach, thus they could make disciples:

“make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Mt 28:19-20)

2) The means of divine grace: **the Sacraments.** Knowing the Truth is not enough to live in the Truth! Men and women need the power of God in them, to live His truth and thus to be His faithful witnesses for others in the world. Thus God empowered His Church with the seven-fold storehouse of His sacraments each with its particular sacramental graces: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Confession, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony and Holy Orders.

3) The true path of living His life: **Christian Moral Truth.** Knowing the Truth of God, and receiving the empowering grace to live His will, is still not enough to enlighten the actual path that human persons walk “in real life,” to know and to choose the way of righteousness in real-life situations today.

Catholic moral principles give this light to men and women of today, married and single, living in a world far different from that in the days of Jesus, but guided by His Spirit, as He promised, light for “things that are to come”:

Jn 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

4) Finally, there is that “dimension” or “facet” of life in Christ that must be included and considered: it is **Prayer**. We are called into the life of prayer, *to grow in prayer*, to grow in communion with Him, in His life. Every Christian has, by virtue of the abiding Holy Spirit, an “interior life” that is begotten by the Spirit, vivified by the Spirit, nurtured by the Spirit, and is satisfied and fulfilled only in intimate personal communion with God in the Spirit, and with brothers and sisters in that same Spirit. This “interior life” is the life of *communio* – of *fellowship* – of *koinonia* enjoyed by the Apostle John in the early Church:

1Jn 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

This treasure – in its four-fold completeness – the Church was given, and her charge is to preserve and protect it in its fullness, and to offer it to all men in darkness that they may become free, finally, in Him.

These four aspects of Catholic Faith are much more fully developed in our current [***Catechism of the Catholic Church***](#), available for exploration on-line. As Jesus said, “Come and see.”

This contribution is available at <http://renewthechurch.wordpress.com/2017/01/04/the-great-blessings-in-the-catholic-faith/>
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It's so Ordinary [at Every Day Catholic, Deanna Bartalini]

Ordinary Time, the color green, this year we are listening to Matthew tell us about Jesus' ministry and maybe, just maybe it seems a bit – well, ordinary. And it is. And it should be.

But let us not be hasty and confuse ordinary with boring. Just a few weeks ago we celebrated the Incarnation and now we have some time before Lent begins.

What do we do in Ordinary Time? We listen and learn about what Jesus did while with us. We hear the miracles of healing, casting out demons, and calming storms. We try to understand the parables and where we fit in those stories. We spend time learning who Jesus is and how he wants to lead us to his Father. This Ordinary Time prepares us for the next season, Lent.

There is wisdom in this cycle of time. While it may seem like nonstop celebrating is fun, we all know that it isn't. Just as little children need routine and structure, adults do as well. And so the Church provides it.

If we are trying to grow in our faith, then we will use it to our benefit. Take small steps to incorporate more of the “ordinary” into your daily life. Read the daily readings, pray a rosary or chaplet while driving the parent taxi, listen to uplifting music, and remember to pray before meals and at bedtime.

Live in Ordinary Time fully engaged. Our lives are filled with ordinary moments and some of it can be boring. It is those very things, though, that we work out our purpose in this life and salvation in the next.

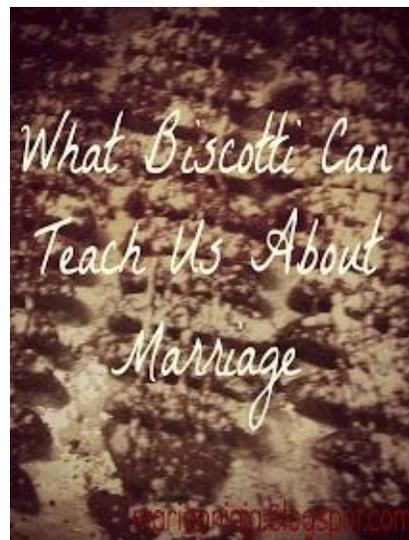
What is the one thing you can focus on during Ordinary Time that will help you in the seasons to come?

This contribution is available at <http://www.deannabartalini.com/>
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Saturday, January 14, 2017

What Biscotti Can Teach Us About Marriage [at Sacrifice of Love]

Several weeks ago, I was hit with the sudden desire to make biscotti. I had never made biscotti before, and I had only eaten it a few times. But, thinking about how elegant and sophisticated it seems, I decided that I would make some during the Christmas season. I could give some away as a gift, and keep the rest for our household consumption. As I began mixing together ingredients for [Double Chocolate Biscotti](#), I gleefully thought that the end result would be a tasty treat to munch on with my coffee and tea. Little did I realize that these cookies would teach me about marriage.



I dutifully mixed the dough, formed it into logs, baked it, sliced it, and baked it again. The entire time, I was both thrilled and nervous.

This is going to be such a great treat when I have afternoon teatime! What if the cookies all crumble and fall apart when I slice them? I feel so fancy!!!!

Finally, I turned the oven off, and sat back in my chair, a satisfied look on my face as I glanced over at the tray full of fresh biscotti. My husband looked at the cookies, and then looked at me. "You should dunk them in chocolate," he suggested. I really liked that idea, and told him that after dinner, I could dunk them in melted chocolate. My husband thought some more, and then decided that no, I should drizzle melted chocolate over the cookies. Well, I liked that idea even better! I imaged fancy stripes of chocolate adorning my beautiful biscotti.

So, after dinner, I excitedly melted some chocolate chips. Without thinking much about how one elegantly drizzles chocolate, I grabbed a fork-I figured that the chocolate could easily drip down from the spokes with very minimal mess-at least, that's what made sense in my mind. After my husband started protesting, though, I put down the fork and took the baby from him so that he could take charge of the biscotti. Within a matter of minutes, he was piping melted chocolate out of a bag and across the rows of biscotti. After a dusting of powdered sugar, the cookies looked fantastic.



In marriage, it can be really easy to think that just because you're skilled in one area, you know better than your spouse. Pride can crop up, and it's simple to refuse help. I think that stay-at-home moms can especially face this challenge regarding the kitchen or childcare. We're at home, working in the kitchen and with our children for more hours than our husbands, and we can think that we know best. *But, we're not experts. We don't know it all, and there are plenty of times when our husbands have a better way to accomplish a kitchen task or calm a baby.* I am much more experienced in the kitchen than my husband, but I didn't know the best way to adorn the biscotti. If I had decorated the cookies, they probably would have looked very sloppy!

It is also important to know what we aren't good at, and we can't be afraid to ask our spouse for help. I am not a perfectionist, and while I'm learning to value the physical presentation of food more, I still struggle with putting forth the time and effort to finish off a dish so that it will look beautiful. My husband, on the other hand, is very good at painstakingly detailed and slow work, and he likes to do tasks well. So, while plating food attractively is currently a weakness of mine, this was a task which my husband could accomplish very well. **I've found that in marriage, it is important to remember that I'm not in this alone, and to ask for my husband's help-and not only can he help me with my task at hand, but he can help me improve myself, so that I will become better at accomplishing that task in the future.**

Finally, this incident showed me the importance of being lighthearted and not taking things personally. There was a time in my life where I would feel offended and hurt if someone who didn't know much in the kitchen came in and finished my task better than I could. However, living like this simply builds misery, anger, and resentment. When I stepped aside so my husband could finish the biscotti, for a split-second, I thought, *Really, can't I just finish this off myself?* but then quickly banned those types of thoughts from my mind. It wasn't a big deal, and definitely not something worth getting hurt or offended by. My husband could decorate this tray much better than myself, and getting to watch clouds of powdered sugar *poof* in the air around him was fun!

Marriage is amazing. I have been learning so much about humility, about my need to ask my husband for help, and about the necessity of not taking things seriously. This has been a fantastic journey, and I'm so excited to keep learning and growing with my husband.

I'm also pretty excited to make more biscotti, because it's extremely delicious, makes me feel sophisticated, and is a perfect excuse to drink more coffee and tea ;)

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Being All In [at Shifting My Perspective]

Whatever your hand finds, do it with all your might.... Ecclesiastes 9:10



There's a concert hall just one exit north of us called [Tupelo Hall](#). It's a funky little venue in a restored barn with BYOB and only 250 seats. I love the intimacy of it, and the musicians it draws. Usually they were big names once; now they're on their way down in the fame game, but still just as amazing.

We went last Friday night. The opening act was the [Jamie McLean Band](#). You have to figure that as the opening band, these musicians were looking to grow their audience, make a name for themselves. But as I watched the lead singer look around at all the gray hair in the room, I imagined him calculating the average age to be about fifty. Realizing that we weren't the crowd that was going to catapult his career, he seemed to deflate a bit.

Then he started to play, and he transformed.

People talk about a "calling" as a person's true purpose for being on earth. Without a doubt, Jaime McLean's calling is to sing and play guitar. The music seemed to transport him. Although he was completely rocking the house, it was as if we weren't even there. Yes, he was playing for us; but more so, he was playing because music is the life blood that pumps through his veins.

Sitting in the front row, I watched him in awe. I couldn't help thinking that I want to be a mother like he is a musician. I want to show up for my kids, like he showed up for us. I want to be all in for them, like he was all in for us.

Of course he's not "on" like that twenty-four/seven. He played for all of forty-five minutes. Then he didn't have to rise to that level again until the next night.

Likewise, we moms don't have to be rock stars twenty-four/seven for our kids, fully present and focused on them every minute of the day. No one could handle that much pressure, nor would it be healthy. We shouldn't teach our kids that the world revolves completely around them.

But during those moments, those moments when our kids need us most, we need to be all there for them.

Like we weren't the crowd Jamie McLean dreamed for, those moments when our kids need us the most aren't the Hallmark moments either. They're usually the difficult times, the messy times. They're the 3 a.m. nightmares, the discipline problems at school, the inappropriate searches on Google, the bullying on the school bus. But these are the times when kids truly need their mom. If we handle these moments right, we'll inspire them to walk the path that grows their character, not the path that chips away at their soul.

I've lived a few of these [crossroad moments](#). Each time, I knew I wasn't equipped to deal with them. But every single time, grace led me to prayer: not just that, "God, please help me" prayer, but that on-my-knees-in-my-heart stance of complete begging, begging for the Holy Spirit to give me the right words, and to guide me out of the labyrinth of trouble. When I am all in like that in prayer, He never lets me down.

Music wakes up my soul. It reminds me that life is filled with beauty and joy, and as much good as I am willing to see.

The Jamie McLean Band woke me up and reminded me of who I want to be as a mom, and they gave me hope that I can be her. Making Hallmark moments with my kids is great. But my true calling is to be all there for the messy and difficult moments, no matter how hard they may be.

Questions For Reflection:

**** Do I embrace the difficult and messy parts of motherhood?***

**** Do I see their value?***

**** Do I feel equipped to deal with the hard parts of my calling?***

**** Can I be all in in prayer to the Holy Spirit for the right words and guidance for the difficult moments?***

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Towards an Ecclesiology of Merciful Love: Triumph of Faith or Failure of Love? [at Monks and Mermaids]

SCHISM: TRIUMPH OF FAITH OR FAILURE OF LOVE?



AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Back around 1964, at the suggestion of one of my professors, I attended the "Semaine Liturgique" at the Institut Saint-Serge in Paris. One of the interesting people I met was an old ex-Jesuit who was an expert in Syrian Christianity. He invited me to his home which was a Syrian chaplaincy, and I concelebrated at the Divine Liturgy there, following an English translation, while he celebrated in Aramaic. He told me about what happened the day he joined the Jesuits. He arrived, an eager teenager, at the door of the Jesuit noviceship at the same moment as another boy whose name was Henri de Lubach. They put their suitcases down in the hall and waited for someone to show them their rooms. On the wall was a large chart called "The Triumphs of the Church", with a list of such triumphs down the centuries. It began "The Church triumphs over Arianism, the Council of Nicaea, 325AD; the Church triumphs over Nestorianism, the Council of Ephesus, 449AD;" and continued right down to "The Church triumphs over Protestantism, Council of Trent, 1545 to 1563" and, "The Church triumphs over Modernism, Pius X, Pascendi, 1907." The two youths looked at the list for a time, and then Henri de Lubach turned to his companion and said, "One more triumph like these and we shall have nobody left!"

BEFORE THE CREED IN THE BYZANTINE LITURGY



Just before the Eucharistic Prayer and after commemorating the Communion of Saints comes the Creed, sung by all. The Celebrant says:

"Peace to you all".

and they reply:

"And to your Spirit".

the Celebrant:

"Let us love one another, so that with one mind we may confess our faith",

the choir:

"In the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the consubstantial and undivided Trinity".

Then comes the creed, and, while it is being sung, the celebrants wave the chalice veil over the gifts. (See the photo at the top of this post.) In one symbolic gesture, the Church emphasises a) the coming of the Holy Spirit whose love for the Church we share in our own mutual love, b) our common understanding of the faith that is the fruit of our mutual love as we understand together, and c) the consecration of the bread and wine in which we are about to share.

This teaching from Catholic/Orthodox Tradition is expressed by the Romanian Patriarchate when it speaks about the controversy surrounding the Orthodox council in Crete in 2016:

Any explanation regarding the exposition of Orthodox faith must be given within ecclesial communion, not in a state of rebellion and disunion, because the Holy Spirit is, at the same time, the Spirit of Truth (cf. John 16:13) and the Spirit of fellowship or communion (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:13).

This raises the question, Can mutual antagonism or even lack of mutual love and trust be sufficient causes to result in schism and accusations of heresy? Can a schism which is hailed as the triumph of truth over error be rooted in a rather grubby failure to love one another as Christ has loved us?

This question must bear in mind that Catholic Tradition has its origins in the Eucharistic communities whose chief characteristic is the synergy between the Holy Spirit and the Church by which the Word is preached, the sacraments are conferred and, centrally, the Eucharist is celebrated. As the history of the local church from the time of the Apostles till now is reflected in its liturgy and its understanding of the faith, Tradition is pluriform in its origins. However, as Word and Eucharist are identical in every celebration, notwithstanding the differences in form and culture, so each local church is identical to all others in that each and all are the one body of Christ. It is safe to say, Where the Eucharist is, there is the Church. The one guarantee that each church is authentically the same as the rest is mutual recognition by the rest.

We shall look briefly at three occasions in which I think it can be demonstrated that lack of love played its proper part in bringing about schism or deepening schism where it already exists.

Let us examine the Nestorian Schism and the Assyrian Church of the East, the Monophysite Schism and the Coptic Church, and the case of the papacy and Orthodoxy. These will be nothing more than skeleton arguments and shall leave much unsaid.

There are three major divisions in apostolic Christianity, the Oriental Orthodox, the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholicism. One great historic difference between them is their relationship or lack of it to the Byzantine Empire: the Assyrian Church belonged to the rival Persian Empire and was not invited to the ecumenical councils; the Copts belonged to the Byzantine Empire but wanted independence; while the Latins looked at the Roman Empire with nostalgia but the Byzantine emperors were too weak to function in the West so that the western peoples had to look to themselves. The other great difference was cultural. The Oriental Orthodox were strongly influenced even in apostolic times by Jewish converts to Christianity and, especially in Syria and Ethiopia, it can be said that their Christianity is semitic in form. The Assyrians and Syrian Orthodox have their liturgy in Aramaic, the language of Our Lord. They also have their classical theological texts in the form of stories, hymns, poems as well as homilies and other texts. In contrast, the Orthodox are heir to Greek abstract thought, to Socrates and Plato and the Greek Fathers. The Latins, living within a kind of chaos, put much emphasis to

I - The Nestorian Schism and the Assyrian Church in the East.

The Syriac Tradition in Christianity

Dr Sebastian Brock of Oxford

"3. In spite of the coming of so many westerners (Greek Nestorians), who were in exile, the Church of the East remained a Semitic, Syriac, non-Gentile Church. It retained its ancient forms of worship; it did not alter its doctrine; it continued to pursue its long established goals."

- [Assyrian Forum](#)

We must bear in mind that the Assyrian Church of the East that rejected the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) was situated in the Persian Empire and not in the Byzantine Empire. As invitations to attend the early ecumenical councils were made by the Roman emperor in Byzantium and sent only to the bishops of his empire, the Assyrian Church was never invited. It accepted the decisions of the Council of Nicaea (325), but only 85 years after it met. Another important point is that they

spoke Syriac, a version of Aramaic, the language of Our Lord, and not Greek. Their liturgy was and is in Aramaic, and it could be argued that, along with other Oriental Orthodox, they are the true successors of the very first Jewish converts; they are the voice of semitic christianity. Ancient Syria was divided by the two empires, with Antioch, the religious capital both for Hellenistic Jews and Christians, being within the Byzantine Empire. It was where followers of Christ were first called Christians and, beside becoming one of the five main patriarchates of the universal Church, it was also one of the two leading schools of theology, the other being Alexandria. Thus, while the parts of Syria that was under Persian rule, that are now in Iran and Iraq - modern Mosul is ancient Nineveh, were largely cut off from life in the Byzantine Empire, the main part, centred on Antioch (now in modern Turkey), was, in contrast, a very important centre. Its rival for dominance in that part of the Empire was Alexandria, the source of grain for the whole Byzantine Empire, and also was the cultural centre of the civilised world, famous for its intellectual life and philosophical thought. This philosophical sophistication is reflected in its christology.

The Church in Persia was steeped in Jewish biblical thought, and their theological way of teaching in their school in Edessa was for the teacher to read a passage of Scripture while the students wrote down their interpretation. Until the middle of the fifth century, their main model and book of reference was St Ephrem; but, as he only translated and commented on a part of the Bible, they translated the complete works of St Theodore of Mopsuestia who commented on Scripture in the same way as they did, as near to the literal meaning as possible Theodore of Mopsuestia became the main interpreter of the Church in Persia. Here is Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev's interpretation of Theodore's christology:

Theodore made a sharp distinction between Jesus the man and the Word of God, speaking of the "inhabitation" of the Word of God in Jesus as in the "temple"...representatives of the antiochene school, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius of Constantinople, suggested the following terminological expression of the unity of the two natures: God the Word 'assumed' the man Jesus; the unbegotten Word of God 'inhabited' the one who was born of Mary; the Word 'dwelt' in the man as in the 'temple'; the Word put on the human nature as a 'garment'. The man Jesus was united to the Word and assumed divine dignity. When asked the question, "Who suffered on the Cross?" they would answer, "The flesh of Christ", "the humanity of Christ", his "human nature", or "the things human". Thus they drew a sharp line between the divine and human natures of Christ. During the earthly life of Jesus both natures preserved their characteristics, so if one speaks of the unity of the two natures, this unity is mental rather than ontological: it exists in *our* understanding of Christ, in *our* worship of him; we unite both natures and venerate on Christ, God and man. **(my source: The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian, Introduction, page 18)**

On what beliefs and doctrines does the Assyrian Church of the East differ from Eastern Orthodoxy?

1 Answer John Grantham, delegate at German Old Catholic synod since 2007, parish council member in Berlin, raised Anglican/Episcopal Written 12 Jan 2015 There is no easy answer to this, but it has to do with possibly differing Christological views regarding the two natures of Christ. Historically the Assyrians were accused by both Rome and Orthodoxy of Nestorianism, but the Assyrians themselves

have claimed that that is not true, and it is not even historically certain what exactly Nestorius taught. What Rome and the Orthodox claimed was that Nestorius (and with him the Assyrian Church) denied the full and complete union of Christ's human and divine natures, the Hypostatic union that is considered dogma by all Chalcedonian churches (which includes Rome, most Western Christians, and the Orthodox). While it is true that Nestorius refused to use the title Theotokos or "God-Bearer" for Mary, it is by no means certain that that is the reason why.

The Assyrians then went into schism amongst themselves after 1552, with one branch joining the Roman Catholic communion, and the other remaining independent. That independent part is what is now known as the Assyrian Church of the East.

The Assyrian Church, meanwhile, explicitly denied that they followed Nestorius' teachings as recently as 1976, and there has been an ongoing rapprochement between them and other churches since at least the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. It may well be that the schism between the Assyrians and other churches was all a major misunderstanding, or it may be that the Assyrians gradually came to adopt the same views as the Orthodox and Rome. Hard to say for sure.

A MODERN DECLARATION OF FAITH

We believe in one God the Father, the Omnipotent, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God; the Only-Begotten and the Firstborn of all creatures. He who was born of His Father eternally before all worlds and was not created, true God from true God, of the same nature of His Father, by whom the worlds were made and all things were created, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and became Man. He was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary; He suffered and was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, and was buried and rose on the third day as it is written, and ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of His Father; He shall come again to judge the dead and the living. We profess two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ, namely that He is fully God and fully Man, and in two Qnome* everlastingly and inseparably united in the one person of Sonship. We profess that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave birth to the one Son of God become Man.

The Theology of the Church of the East has been stated briefly and clearly in the following Hymn of Teshbokhta

Composed by Mar Babai the Great in the sixth century A.D.

a noted theologian of the Church

One is Christ the Son of God,

Worshiped by all in two natures;

In His Godhead begotten of the Father,

Without beginning before all time;

In His humanity born of Mary,

In the fullness of time, in a body united;

Neither His Godhead is of the nature of the mother,

Nor His humanity of the nature of the Father;

The natures are preserved in their Qnumas*,

In one person of one Sonship.

And as the Godhead is

three substances in one nature,

Likewise the Sonship of the Son is

in two natures, one person.

So the Holy Church has learnt,

to confess the Son, who is Christ.

* Qnuma, is an Aramaic word. The nearest equivalent is the Greek “hypostasis” in Latin “substantia” and in English “substance”.

[We shall see how it is so easy to misunderstand once we translate from one language to another. In classical Christian vocabulary, "hypostasis" means "person" and not "substance", so that "the natures are preserved in their "qnumas"" can mean that in Christ there are two persons!]

II - THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX WHO REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON (451)

Oriental Orthodoxy, also known by several other names is a communion of Eastern Christian churches that recognize only the first three ecumenical councils – the First Council of Nicaea in 325, the First Council of Constantinople in 381 and the Council of Ephesus in 431.[5] This communion is composed of six autocephalous churches: the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.[6] Oriental Orthodoxy has approximately 84 million adherents worldwide. Oriental Orthodox Churches uphold their own ancient ecclesiastic traditions of apostolic succession and catholicity (universal doctrine). These Churches rejected the definition of the two natures of Christ

(human and divine), known as the Chalcedonian Definition, which was issued by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Over the following two centuries, one by one, they discontinued their communion with the Great Church, and developed separate institutions that did not participate in any of the later ecumenical councils.

Furthermore, in the Coptic Encyclopedia, W.H.C. Frend defines monophysitism as a doctrine:

opposed to the orthodox doctrine that He (Christ) is one person and has two natures..... The monophysites hold.... that the two natures of Christ were united at the Incarnation in such a way that the one Christ was essentially divine although He assumed from the Virgin Theotokos the flesh and attributes of man

EPHESUS AND CHALCEDON

Metropolitan Hilarion continues to treat the tradition of St Cyril of Alexandria:

The alexandrine tradition which, in the person of Cyril of Alexandria, was in conflict with Nestorius, opposed to the antiochene tradition another understanding of the unity of the two natures: the Word *became* human and did not merely assume human nature; the unbegotten Word of God is the same person as Jesus born from Mary; therefore it was God, the Word himself who 'suffered in the flesh' (*epathan saki*). Thus there is one Son, one hypostasis, 'one nature of God, the Word incarnate' (*mia physis to theou logou sesarkomene*). The latter phrase, which belonged to Apollinaris of Laodicaea, cast the suspicion of 'mixture' and 'confusion' of the two natures on Cyril of Alexandria. Cyril's Christology was confirmed by the **Council of Ephesus** 431 but rejected by the east-syrian theological tradition, which remained faithful to the christological terminology of Theodore and Diodore.

Why did the East Syrians reject Ephesus? Here is Metropolitan Hilarion again:

Why did the east-syrian tradition not accept the Council of Ephesus? The answer is not concealed in the personality of Nestorius- he was barely known in Persia even by name until the sixth century- but in the procedures of the Council. The Church of Persia did not accept the Council mainly because it was conducted by Cyril of Alexandria and his adherents in the absence of John of Antioch who, upon his arrival to Ephesus, anathematized Cyril. The christological position of Ephesus was purely alexandrian: it took no account of the antiochene position, and it was precisely the antiochene (and not 'nestorian') Christology that was the Christology of the Church of the East.

Then came the Council of Chalcedon that was accepted neither by the Church of the East nor the Church of Alexandria, but did integrate both the alexandrine and the antiochene traditions into one single Tradition in the Catholic/Orthodox Church.

Why did the Oriental Orthodox churches reject Chalcedon?

The majority of the bishops who attended the Council of Chalcedon, as scholars indicate, believed that the traditional formula of faith received from St. Athanasius was the "one nature of the Word of God." This belief is totally different from the Eutychian concept of the single nature (i.e. Monophysite). The Alexandrian theology was by no means docetic. Neither was it Apollinarian, as stated clearly. It seems that the main problem of the Christological formula was the divergent interpretation of the issue between the Alexandrian and the Antiochian theology. While Antioch formulated its Christology against Apollinarius and Eutyches, Alexandria did against Arius and Nestorius. At Chalcedon, Dioscorus refused to affirm the "in two natures" and insisted on the "from two natures." Evidently the two conflicting traditions had not discovered an agreed theological standpoint between them.

"*Mia Physis*"

The Church of Alexandria considered as central the Christological *mia physis* formula of St. Cyril "one incarnate nature of God the Word". The Cyrillian formula was accepted by the Council of Ephesus in 431. It was neither nullified by the Reunion of 433, nor condemned at Chalcedon. On the contrary, it continued to be considered an orthodox formula. Now what do the non-Chalcedonians mean by the *mia physis*, the "one incarnate nature?". They mean by *mia* one, but not "single one" or "simple numerical one," as some scholars believe. There is a slight difference between *mono* and *mia*. While the former suggests one single (divine) nature, the latter refers to one composite and united nature, as reflected by the Cyrillian formula. St. Cyril maintained that the relationship between the divine and the human in Christ, as Meyendorff puts it, "does not consist of a simple cooperation, or even interpenetration, but of a union; the incarnate Word is one, and there could be no duplication of the personality of the one redeemer God and man."

([COPNET](#) - Fr Matthias Wahba)

Politics - Emperor Marcian was supporting the Tome of Leo upon which the definition of Chalcedon is based, while the Egyptians were against the emperor. (Those who were in favour of Chalcedon were called "kings men" or "Melkites", not "pope's men", even though they were supporting Pope Leo's Tome.) Pope Leo was also very active in support of the primacy of the Holy See. 2. Their hostility to the antiochene position made them refuse to acknowledge the formula "Two distinct natures", specially as Nestorius agreed with the formula. 3. Loyalty to the "*mia physis*" formula they had received from St Athanasius.

Why did the Assyrian Church of the East reject Chalcedon? It was impossible to translate the Chalcedonian formula from Greek into Syriac. Metropolitan Hilarion puts it this way:

The Greek word *hypostasis* in this context meant a specific person, Jesus Christ, God the Word, whereas the word *physis* (nature) referred to the humanity and divinity of Christ. When translated into Syriac, however, this terminological distinction could not be expressed accurately since in Syriac the word *gnoma* (used to translate *hypostasis*) carried the meaning of the individual expression of *kyana* (nature); thus Syriac writers normally spoke of natures and their *gnoma*.

Consequently whereas Severus of Antioch thought that one *hypostasis* implied one nature, diophysite writers claimed that two natures imply two *hypostases*.

In Syriac the Chalcedonian formula did not make sense!

An Assyrian metropolitan speaks

in an Australian Coptic parish

The Schism from a Coptic perspective

**COMMON CHRISTOLOGICAL DECLARATION
BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
AND THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST**



His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, give thanks to God who has prompted them to this new brotherly meeting.

Both of them consider this meeting as a basic step on the way towards the full communion to be restored between their Churches. They can indeed, from now on, proclaim together before the world their common faith in the mystery of the Incarnation.

As heirs and guardians of the faith received from the Apostles as formulated by our common Fathers in the Nicene Creed, we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity who, in the fullness of time, came down from heaven and became man for our salvation. The Word of God, second Person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in assuming from the holy Virgin Mary a body animated by a rational soul, with which he was indissolubly united from the moment of his conception.

Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us in all things but sin. His divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation. In him has been preserved the difference of the natures of divinity and humanity, with all their properties, faculties and operations. But far from constituting "one and another", the divinity and humanity are united in the person of the same and unique Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ, who is the object of a single adoration.

Christ therefore is not an "ordinary man" whom God adopted in order to reside in him and inspire him, as in the righteous ones and the prophets. But the same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity. The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is the reason why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as "the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour". In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as "the Mother of God" and also as "the Mother of Christ". We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety. This is the unique faith that we profess in the mystery of Christ. The controversies of the past led to anathemas, bearing on persons and on formulas. The Lord's Spirit permits us to understand better today that the divisions brought about in this way were due in large part to misunderstandings.

Whatever our Christological divergences have been, we experience ourselves united today in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace. We wish from now on to witness together to this faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, proclaiming it in appropriate ways to our contemporaries, so that the world may believe in the Gospel of salvation.

The mystery of the Incarnation which we profess in common is not an abstract and isolated truth. It refers to the Son of God sent to save us. The economy of salvation, which has its origin in the mystery of communion of the Holy Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit —, is brought to its fulfilment through the sharing in this communion, by grace, within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which is the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Spirit. Believers become members of this Body through the sacrament of Baptism, through which, by water and the working of the Holy Spirit, they are born again as new creatures. They are confirmed by the seal of the Holy Spirit who bestows the sacrament of Anointing. Their communion with God and among themselves is brought to full realization by the celebration of the unique offering of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This communion is restored for the sinful members of the Church when they are reconciled with God and with one another through the sacrament of Forgiveness. The sacrament of Ordination to the ministerial priesthood in the apostolic succession assures the authenticity of the faith, the sacraments and the communion in each local Church. Living by this faith and these sacraments, it follows as a consequence that the particular Catholic churches and the particular Assyrian churches can recognize each other as sister Churches. To be full and entire, communion presupposes the unanimity concerning the content of the faith, the sacraments and the constitution of the Church. Since this unanimity for which we aim has not yet been attained, we cannot unfortunately celebrate together the Eucharist which is the sign of the ecclesial communion already fully restored.

Nevertheless, the deep spiritual communion in the faith and the mutual trust already existing between our Churches, entitle us from now on to consider witnessing together to the Gospel

message and cooperating in particular pastoral situations, including especially the areas of catechesis and the formation of future priests.

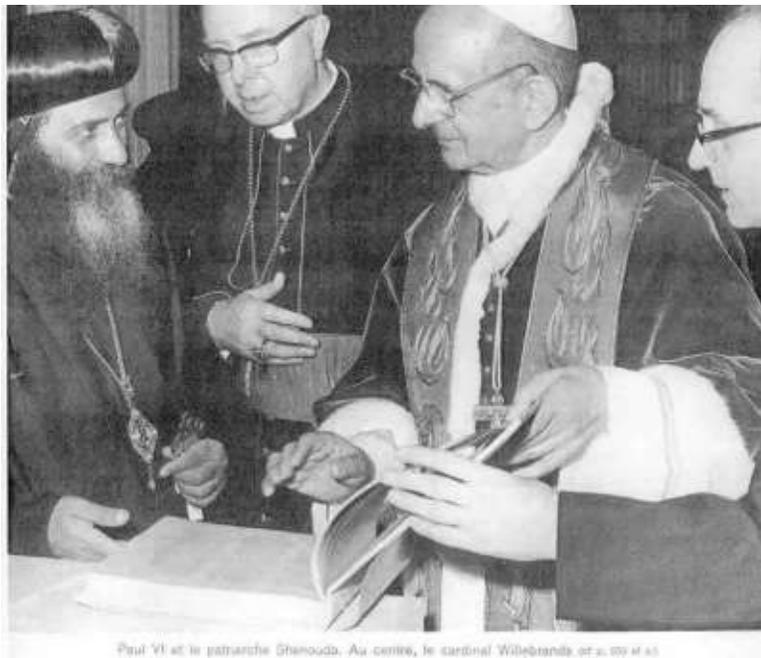
In thanking God for having made us rediscover what already unites us in the faith and the sacraments, we pledge ourselves to do everything possible to dispel the obstacles of the past which still prevent the attainment of full communion between our Churches, so that we can better respond to the Lord's call for the unity of his own, a unity which has of course to be expressed visibly. To overcome these obstacles, we now establish a Mixed Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

Given at Saint Peter's, on 11 November 1994

K. MARDINKHA

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

COMMON DECLARATION OF POPE PAUL VI AND OF THE POPE OF ALEXANDRIA SHENOUDA III



Tower of St. John in the Vatican gardens

Paul VI, bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and patriarch of the See of St. Mark, give thanks in the Holy Spirit to God that, after the great event of the return of relics of St. Mark to Egypt, relations have further developed between the Churches of Rome and Alexandria so that they have now been able to meet personally together. At the end of their meetings and conversations they wish to state together the following:

We have met in the desire to deepen the relations between our Churches and to find concrete ways to overcome the obstacles in the way of our real cooperation in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ who has given us the ministry of reconciliation, to reconcile the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:18-20). In accordance with our apostolic traditions transmitted to our Churches and preserved therein, and in

conformity with the early three ecumenical councils, we confess one faith in the One Triune God, the divinity of the Only Begotten Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Word of God, the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His substance, who for us was incarnate, assuming for Himself a real body with a rational soul, and who shared with us our humanity but without sin. We confess that our Lord and God and Saviour and King of us all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God with respect to His Divinity, perfect man with respect to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united with His humanity in a real, perfect union without mingling, without commixtion, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without separation. His divinity did not separate from His humanity for an instant, not for the twinkling of an eye. He who is God eternal and invisible became visible in the flesh, and took upon Himself the form of a servant. In Him are preserved all the properties of the divinity and all the properties of the humanity, together in a real, perfect, indivisible and inseparable union.

The divine life is given to us and is nourished in us through the seven sacraments of Christ in His Church: Baptism, Chrism (Confirmation), Holy Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony and Holy Orders.

We venerate the Virgin Mary, Mother of the True Light, and we confess that she is ever Virgin, the God-bearer. She intercedes for us, and, as the Theotokos, excels in her dignity all angelic hosts.

We have, to a large degree, the same understanding of the Church, founded upon the Apostles, and of the important role of ecumenical and local councils. Our spirituality is well and profoundly expressed in our rituals and in the Liturgy of the Mass which comprises the centre of our public prayer and the culmination of our incorporation into Christ in His Church. We keep the fasts and feasts of our faith. We venerate the relics of the saints and ask the intercession of the angels and of the saints, the living and the departed. These compose a cloud of witnesses in the Church. They and we look in hope for the Second Coming of our Lord when His glory will be revealed to judge the living and the dead.

We humbly recognize that our Churches are not able to give more perfect witness to this new life in Christ because of existing divisions which have behind them centuries of difficult history. In fact, since the year 451 A.D., theological differences, nourished and widened by non-theological factors, have sprung up. These differences cannot be ignored. In spite of them, however, we are rediscovering ourselves as Churches with a common inheritance and are reaching out with determination and confidence in the Lord to achieve the fullness and perfection of that unity which is His gift.

As an aid to accomplishing this task, we are setting up a joint commission representing our Churches, whose function will be to guide common study in the fields of Church tradition, patristics, liturgy, theology, history and practical problems, so that by cooperation in common we may seek to resolve, in a spirit of mutual respect, the differences existing between our Churches and be able to proclaim together the Gospel in ways which correspond to the authentic message of the Lord and to the needs and hopes of today's world. At the same time we express our gratitude and encouragement to other groups of Catholic and Orthodox scholars and pastors who devote their efforts to common activity in these and related fields.

With sincerity and urgency we recall that true charity, rooted in total fidelity to the one Lord Jesus Christ and in mutual respect for each other's traditions, is an essential element of this search for perfect communion.

In the name of this charity, we reject all forms of proselytism, in the sense of acts by which persons seek to disturb each other's communities by recruiting new members from each other through methods, or because of attitudes of mind, which are opposed to the exigencies of Christian love or to what should characterize the relationships between Churches. Let it cease, where it may exist. Catholics and Orthodox should strive to deepen charity and cultivate mutual consultation, reflection and cooperation in the social and intellectual fields and should humble themselves before God, supplicating Him who, as He has begun this work in us, will bring it to fruition.

As we rejoice in the Lord who has granted us the blessings of this meeting, our thoughts reach out to the thousands of suffering and homeless Palestinian people. We deplore any misuse of religious arguments for political purposes in this area. We earnestly desire and look for a just solution for the Middle East crisis so that true peace with justice should prevail, especially in that land which was hallowed by the preaching, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and by the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we venerate together as the Theotokos. May God, the giver of all good gifts, hear our prayers and bless our endeavours.

From the Vatican, May 10, 1973.

WHAT ALL THIS CAN TEACH US.

Two churches of apostolic origin, each with its own tradition that springs from the synergy between the Holy Spirit and their ecclesial life as eucharistic community down the ages and shaped by its culture and its historical circumstances. The Assyrian Church of the East has a semitic culture and is isolated from the church of the Roman Empire because it has grown up in the Persian Empire and did not get invited to ecumenical councils. Alexandria is an intellectual hub of Eastern Christianity, supplier of grain to the Empire, yet wanting independence from the Greeks. The two traditions clash, each considering the other to be heretical. They are both regional versions of the Christian faith that cannot recognise one another. The language of both sides are, perhaps, inadequate, the Antiochene expression of the Incarnation leading some to suppose that the unity of the two natures is in our own minds rather than in the Incarnation itself, while the Alexandrine tradition led some to believe that, for them, divinity and humanity are somehow mixed into a single divine-human nature. Yet both traditions are the fruit of a single eucharistic life, both churches daily invoked the same Holy Spirit, and, many centuries later, both churches could sign a common declaration of faith with the Holy See on a subject that had previously bitterly divided them from each other and from Catholic communion.

I believe this has much to teach us about the other divisions in Christendom and may indicate the way to resolve them.

THE FOUNT OF UNITY AMONG CHRISTIANS

1 John 4, 7...

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. *God is love, and whoever abides in love*

abides in God, and God abides in him.

John 6, 55 - 57

My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him. As I, who am sent from the living Father and draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me.

John 17, 21 - 23

May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you, that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.

Christ is the source of the Church and we are Christians because Christ lives in us and we in him. This is the basic Christianity, not our version of it but Christ's.

Where the Eucharist is, there is the Church because it is in the Eucharist that we receive his body and blood in such a way that we are in him and he in us: we are the body of Christ. The Catechism says:

1324 The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life."¹³⁶ "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.

Now there is only one Eucharist, wherever by whoever it is celebrated, in Rome, Peru, London, Baghdad, Moscow, Alexandria or Mosul; and in every single Mass is "*contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.*" Where the Eucharist is, there is the Church. There is only one Mass in which Christ is priest, victim and altar. As St John Chrysostom said, just God said, "Let there be light," and this command from eternity resonates for ever throughout creation, so Jesus said, "This is my body... This is the chalice of my blood," and this becomes true at every Mass.

There is only one Eucharist, so that the priest celebrates in persona Christi because Christ is the celebrant at all masses as we approach the heavenly tabernacle, and all who participate in one Mass also participate spiritually at every other Mass, across time and space, and even across the things that divide us. Ignorant Orthodox monks may call the pope "anti-Christ", but they share the body and blood of Christ with him every time they take part in the Divine Liturgy. The whole of God's Church is visibly present through every local congregation.

The liturgy is always the work of the local church, and it the source of all the Church's powers, as Sacrosanctum Concilium tells us:

ch 1, 10. Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic

works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper.

This means that the sources of Tradition are the multiple traditions of local churches through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Some opponents of this understanding of the Church accuse us of adopting the Anglican branch theory, but this is not true either historically nor theologically.

Historically, the origin is Russian Orthodox. Metropolitan John Zizioulas says that the importance of the local church given in Vatican II

Mainly to the so-called “eucharistic ecclesiology” of the Russian theologian Nicolai Afanassieff, who formulated the axiom “wherever the Eucharist is, there is the Church”. This meant that each local Church in which the Eucharist is celebrated should be regarded as the full and Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic theologians were influenced by this approach and, as a result, a theology of the local Church entered the documents of the Council.

Theologically, the Branch Theory was an effort to give legitimacy to the Anglican Church as a separate entity. Eucharistic ecclesiology takes legitimacy away from all divisions, seeing them as evidence of our shortcomings, of our worldliness. The unity of the Church, whether we are speaking of the local church, the regional church or the universal church, or of any kind of Christian community living, has been given by St John:

With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.

We are to be so united that the world is surprised by it: it is to be what attracts the world to the Gospel. Divisions are what hide Christ from the world and keep the world in ignorance of Christ. Even any kind of universal unity that mirrors that of the world itself is not sufficient.

Does that mean that we should forget all that divides us, and just come together. Unfortunately, it isn't that simple. Being united to one another implies, not only being one with our neighbour, but also across time. We owe our very existence as churches to the passing, from one generation to the next, of the apostolic tradition in the form it has come down to us. Becoming one with our neighbour in the present involves reconciling our traditions one with the other, as we have seen taking place between our Assyrian and Coptic brethren. In that way, the Catholic life of the whole Church will be deepened and enriched. To ignore the past in favour of a modern but rootless unity may be legitimate for some Protestant communities, but it would be a denial of our very being as Apostolic churches.

APPLYING WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR TO THE CHURCH IN OUR DAY

Vatican I was similar to the Council of Ephesus in that it was intolerant of any opposition, and anyone whose view was different from the dominant one was shouted down.

Ephesus gave us Catholic teaching we have benefited from, and we call Mary Mother of God till this day; but it was unaware that the alexandrian tradition was not enough and that the Church needed the Antiochene tradition too. Thus, Ephesus cried out for Chalcedon. It was not Chalcedon's fault that its doctrine could not be translated into Syriac! What did Vatican I cry out for?

Vatican I was unaware of the fact that the Eastern Orthodox tradition is also Catholic Tradition, that it has the same origin in the apostolic preaching, the same stream of living water brought about by the synergy between the Holy Spirit and the local eucharistic communities, and the same fruit in generations of saintly living. Objections to Catholic teaching that come from the Orthodox tradition are not the same as those made by people who live outside the Tradition. As the Catholic Church as body of Christ is whole in all its parts, and while we accept that Vatican I, as supreme expression of western Catholic tradition, was assisted by the Holy Spirit, the dogmas made no sense to Orthodox tradition.

There is a need to dig into both traditions to see where they meet. This is what is happening in the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue; and this dialogue is making real changes in how we understand the papacy.

We are going back to the sources and are asking ourselves what St Ignatius of Antioch meant when he said that "the Roman Church presides in love." We are moving away from the Catholic Church as a "perfect society" and the pope with universal jurisdiction claimed and accepted by the Church, and we are accepting that the "Church as communion" and the pope as universal minister of love is a deeper, more Christian understanding of the Church. It also explains why popes in the first millenium were practising their ministry whenever they exercised it by loving people and churches outside the patriarchate of the West, without any need for a special dogma to back them up As Pope Francis says,

“Real power is service. As He did, He who came not to be served but to serve, and His service was the service of the Cross. He humbled Himself unto death, even death on a cross for us, to serve us, to save us. And there is no other way in the Church to move forward. For the Christian, getting ahead, progress, means humbling oneself. If we do not learn this Christian rule, we will never, ever be able to understand Jesus’ true message on power.”

In a diocese, he said, the bishop is the "vicar of that Jesus who, at the Last Supper, knelt to wash the feet of the apostles," and the pope is called to truly be "the servant of the servants of God."

"We must never forget: for the disciples of Jesus -- yesterday, today and forever -- the only authority is the authority of service; the only power is the power of the cross," he said.

Both in our pastoral work and in our ecumenism, we must always remember that we must act in such a way that Jesus can use us as instruments of his presence. His is the only presence that saves, but he can save through us or through anyone who is willing. He is the Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep in the sheepfold in search for the one. He never allows the walls of the sheepfold to keep him away from a lost sheep, even if he built the walls himself. They were never built to keep sheep out: only to protect those who are in. Christ is the human face of God's merciful love which gathers people into communion with himself. We must be ready to break our routine, look anywhere and everywhere for opportunities to serve, so that in our service they may encounter Christ. Also, we must be alert to meet him in strange and unexpected ways ourselves and be open to what he wants to tell us.

We are already one with all who have encountered Jesus, all who dwell in him and he in them. Even if they are Protestants and know nothing of the Mass, they are connected with the Mass by their faith in Christ, and we are present in the Mass for them as well as for ourselves. Let our apostolate be an outreach of love that reflects the love of God for all.

Pope Francis again:

Speaking about the encounter brings to mind “The calling of St Matthew”, the Caravaggio in the

Church of St Louis of the French, which I used to spend much time in front of every time I came to Rome. None of them who were there, including Matthew, greedy for money, could believe the message in that finger pointing at him, the message in those eyes that looked at him with mercy and chose him for the sequela. He felt this astonishment of the encounter. The encounter with Christ who comes and invites us is like this.

Everything in our life, today as in the time of Jesus, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man, the carpenter from Nazareth, a man like all men and at the same time different. Let us consider the Gospel of John, there where it tells of the disciples' first encounter with Jesus (cf. 1:35-42). Andrew, John, Simon: they feel themselves being looked at to their very core, intimately known, and this generates surprise in them, an astonishment which immediately makes them feel bonded to Him.... Or when, after the Resurrection, Jesus asks Peter: "Do you love me?" (Jn 21:15), and Peter responds: "Yes"; this yes was not the result of a power of will, it did not come only by decision of the man Simon: it came even before from Grace, it was that "primarear", that preceding of Grace. This was the decisive discovery for St Paul, for St Augustine, and so many other saints: Jesus Christ is always first, He primareas us, awaits us, Jesus Christ always precedes us; and when we arrive, He has already been waiting. He is like the almond blossom: the one that blooms first, and announces the arrival of spring.

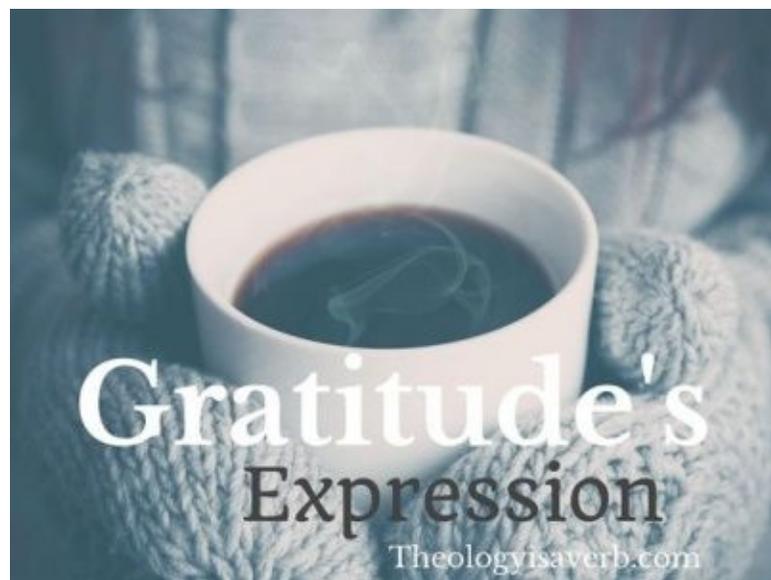
Dr Peter Kreeft on being

both Catholic and Protestant



“Today we are witnessing the persecution of Christians and... I was just in Albania... They told me that they didn't ask if you were Catholic or Orthodox... Are you Christian? Boom! Currently in the Middle East, in Africa, in many places, how many Christians have died! They don't ask them if they are Pentecostal, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox... Are they Christians? They kill them because they believe in Christ. This is the ecumenism of blood.

Gratitude's Expression [at Theologyisaverb]



This week I once again had the blessing of sitting round a table with religious leaders from within our community from all different walks of faith and backgrounds. The purpose of our meeting not for the proselytizing or the conversion of one another, but the sharing of grace, and desire to serve and work towards a better tomorrow. Each one of us knows that there are many things, premises or subtleties, which we would most assuredly disagree on and yet that is not the reason we are there.

With a warm bowl of homemade soup, and sandwich in hand the fellowship began and the conversation unfolded. As one delightful woman, of Jewish decent, was relating a recent story she paused to add, “Though it is a small thing really.. I don’t know, it made me feel rich.” This insightful aside prompted a searching repose of soul for the small things which we found immeasurable appreciation for. Time with our family, nourishing meals, the comfort of our bed, and warmth in the bitter cold.

Today as the forecast for blizzard conditions with snowfall up to 16” reveals, the last one holds special importance in my thoughts and prayers. Safety and warmth in this kind of weather simply are a luxury that many of our homeless, low income and elderly cannot afford. Right now, I wonder if “Adam” has found a place to hunker down and ride out the storm, or if “Sue” whose home is now her car has found her place on the snow laden roads. Many of our elderly and poor too, due to the rising cost of utilities, cannot warm the house adequately and if the heat goes out do not have a backup.

I mention this not to invoke a feeling of guilt but to illustrate gratitude’s corresponding response. For, gratitude and action go hand in hand. [John 9](#) tells us of the man born blind who healed by Jesus went forth and witnessed to others of the healing he had received. Then when he encounters Jesus again he professes an even deeper belief. But do we? How to we respond to God’s generous gift of love and mercy in our lives? Does our initial thankfulness fizzle or does it lead us to a greater understanding of God’s will for our lives?

What then is it that makes me feel rich?

Well more than the gift itself- it is the overwhelming presence of gratitude. For with this comes a

yearning desire to go deeper in our relationship with Christ – to share what we now recognize as priceless with others. In experiencing God’s generosity, what once appeared small now becomes a precious treasure. And rather than keeping this to ourselves, we wish for others to partake as well and know in our hearts that there is a way.

Reflect:

Take time today to ask yourself, “What is it that makes me feel rich?”. Are there others that may not readily have access to this gift or for which this is a luxury? How can I better respond to God’s generosity in my life, and encounter Christ more fully in others?

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth".

This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2017/01/09/gratitudes-expression/>
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Even when you feel you are an outsider, you are never alone [at Catholic Review]

When I was a child, I wasn't allowed to eat food with artificial dye in it. It was the 1980s, and my mother may have been a bit ahead of her time in worrying about dyes and preservatives.

When you're a first-grader at your school Valentine's Day party, it isn't easy to turn down all the red and pink food in the room. But that was the family rule. So I passed on the colored treats, and I found the world kept on turning.

My mother was most likely thinking about my health. But I learned something else. Throughout my childhood, my parents found opportunities to show me that sometimes you have to go against the grain. They opted out of sex education classes at school and taught us what we needed to know at home. They took us to the March for Life. They showed us that sometimes the more difficult path is the right one to walk.

They helped me feel comfortable with being on that path, even though they must have known there would be times I would walk it by myself.

In recent days, I have been feeling a little alone. Maybe you have, too. Maybe the questions and issues and conversations are bigger than you can get your arms around. Maybe no one's voice seems to be speaking to or with yours. Maybe when you do speak, you feel misunderstood. Maybe you aren't even sure what to say.

“It is, I think, that we are all so alone in what lies deepest in our souls, so unable to find the words, and perhaps the courage to speak with unlocked hearts, that we don't know at all that it is the same with others,” said Sheldon Vanauken in his book, *A Severe Mercy*. So many people feel alone—many with a loneliness I may never understand.

Watching the images of people marching at the women's march on Saturday, I knew with certainty that

this event was not for me. Listening to the words and messages, I knew they were not speaking to me. I saw no room for myself—as a woman and a wife and a mother and a Catholic...as myself—at that march.

Watching the crowds and seeing how they were celebrated, I felt like an outsider. I hear the voices, I see the messages, but they are not for me. Those people marching may have good hearts and good intentions, but they are not singing a song I am called to sing.

I do not want to protest. I want to help build a better future, a future I believe—I know—is possible. I want to advocate for peace, for love, for joy, for justice, for life. If you do not hear your voice in the crowds either, what is God asking of you?

The path you take to make a difference may not be an easy or an obvious one. It might not come with clever phrases or matching shirts or a designated day. It might not be celebrated on social media. It might mean some friendships become strained, and others are enriched.

It's your path to take, and it's worth taking. Maybe only you can walk that path, with your own voice, your own questions, your own vision, your own hopes and dreams.

“Remember,” St. John Paul said, “you are never alone. Christ is with you on your journey every day of your lives!”

And so He is.

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2017/01/24/even-when-you-feel-you-are-an-outsider-you-are-never-alone>
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