

NewEvangelists.org

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Forward

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

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

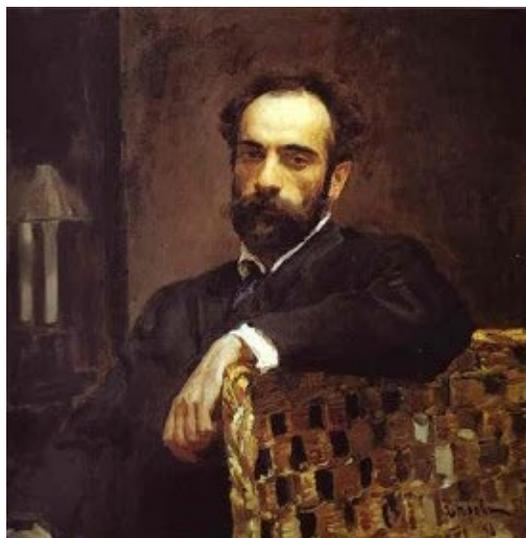
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Lent and Isaak Levitan [at Pauca Verba]



Lent was a miserable affair when I was a boy in the 1950's and 60's. The Catholic was supposed to suffer as a way of expressing love for the suffering Jesus. It didn't do much of anything to evolve us humanly, as it had mostly to do with external observances. We were to attend daily Mass (if possible), pray the Stations of the Cross, recite the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, go to Confession, strictly observe the laws of fast and abstinence, and above all (the Catholic hallmark and ultimate reduction) "*give up*" something.

That last bit, *giving up* something, left the door open for regrettable and silly abuses of the holy season. In my family, which had a fondness for drink, come Lent there were always some men who'd announce they intended to give up alcohol. I never met one who made it to Easter, but by the second week they were all drinking beer. When I once confronted my father about this he said, "*Beer doesn't count; it's not real alcohol.*"

But then, much of Catholicism had to do with *counting*. How much of a Sunday Mass did you have to be present for it to "count". What sins needed to be confessed for it to "count" as a "good" confession? While saying the rosary one could "lose count". If praying a nine day novena and missing a day were you to press on or start over for it to "count". It's naive to imagine Jesus somehow pleased with this kind of anxious spirituality.

Rather, *Lent is the Church's Springtime*. This means I've got forty days to somehow become more alive, more human, (what God has made us to be) so to celebrate well the Feast of Jesus' new life. And this holy work is done from the inside out. Lent, it seems to me, requires some introversion.

I'm reading a book these days, titled: **Quiet: The Power Of Introverts In A World That Can't Stop Talking**. Without getting into a big psychological discussion about introverts, extroverts and ambiverts, here's author Barry Schwartz giving a light-hearted indication of the book's theme:

"Memo to all you glad-handing, back-slapping, brainstorming masters of the universe out there: Stop networking and talking for a minute and read this book. In *Quiet*, Susan Cain does an eloquent and powerful job of extolling the virtues of the listeners and the thinkers - the reflective introverts of the world who appreciate that hard problems demand careful thought and who understand that it's a good idea to know what you want to say before you open your mouth."

Maybe each person is somewhat introverted *and* extroverted. But the American culture doesn't make much space for introversion (*which is not the same as shyness*), let alone encourage or reward it. We're encouraged more to be thought of as having a great personality with a fabulous white smile, capable of being a top-notch sales person, having celebrity or *star* power, being a trend-setter, a go-getter, a talker more than a listener, knowing the *art of the deal*. The King and Queen of the senior prom were never introverts.

I'm laughing now, remembering when my mother, returning from the 6th grade Parent-Teacher night, challenged me: "*Sister said: 'Mrs. Morris, sometimes I wonder if Stephen is even in the room'.*" Well I wasn't, I was a million miles away in a forest, or flying, or sailing, or investigating animals or in my 8'X8' garden, or in church. I had to go to summer school for failing arithmetic, (I hadn't paid attention) but I wouldn't give up the seminal treasure of my inner life for any teacher's idea of what it takes, or who I have to be, so to function well or succeed in *the world*.

It's hard for a Christian to live in this noisy, aggressive, opinionated, 24 hour-news-cycle, road-raging world. So for this Lent, I'd like to offer us something different - a rest (if even for a few minutes each of the forty days) on our way to Easter.

I've recently been introduced to the 19th century Russian Lyrical Landscape painter, *Isaak Levitan*. I'd say Levitan doesn't want us to consider nature as scenery, ("*Oh, look at the lake,*" as we zoom by) but to ponder our own *inner* landscape. Someone might say: "Well, that doesn't sound very religious." I'd disagree, because Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." *John 10:10* How intriguing is that! "*Have life to the full?*" How wonderfully mysterious! What could Jesus' words mean for me?

Levitan is a *Lyrical* painter? One art authority says that Lyricism is painting that has a *songfulness* to it - like a poem, but in paint. A Lyrical painter doesn't want to do what a camera would do, but to call forth from the viewer some emotion or feeling, some inner resonance. It's as if the painting whispers: *As*

you gaze here, do you have some memory? Does this touch some personal experience of yours? Do you hear some inner suggestion? Don't just admire what you see, but allow the scene to speak to you spiritually: the harmony, the tensions, the symbolic images, the movements and colors.

I would suggest that as God speaks to us from the bible page, God might also speak to us from an artist's canvas. Americans are not practiced in this kind of looking. Many of the images we encounter are media commercials speeding along so rapidly, our minds can't keep up. Or the exposure is to violent, materialistic, vulgar, sensuous pictures which drain us of spiritual energies.

I've not studied art, nor been trained as an artist, but I do like to look deeply, believing that the Holy Spirit is alive and active in surprising places. *"Earth's crammed with heaven and every common bush's afire with God."* Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

So for each of Lent's Forty Days (beginning Ash Wednesday), I'll post one of Levitan's paintings (he left us over 1000!) sharing some thoughts of my own - posts which I hope will help us to see with spiritual eyes. And you will undoubtedly have your own insights and sense of things as you stop to look. I'm thinking of the Christmas Carol: *"Star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright..."* Religion hasn't achieved its purpose if it's lost wonder.

This contribution is available at <http://paucaverba.blogspot.com/2017/02/lent-and-isaak-levitan.html>
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Do you struggle with pain? I do! I live with congenital clubbed feet. This means that I was born with all of my bones, from my toes to my pelvis, twisted out of alignment. In essence, my feet curve inward, where your feet stand straight. At birth, the doctors thought that I would never walk; that I would be in a wheelchair my entire life. Yet, I defied the odds, and at age two, stood up and started walking, albeit clumsily. This meant that I would need special shoes.

Throughout my almost 60 years, I have worn clunky, corrective shoes that help me walk somewhat normally. However, there are times, (and I am going through one of those times now), when *new* clunky, corrective shoes (basically handmade for me) cause me great pain. If they are not fitted just right, then I get tremendous nerve pain in my right foot; pain so great, I cannot use the new shoes (costing \$600 per pair!!!).

Normally, I have a high tolerance for pain, but when I try to walk in these new shoes, the struggle with pain is almost unbearable. In my suffering, I feel alone. Yet, it's at that point that I remember that Christ is standing right beside me. When I feel that nerve pain, I think of the nails going through Christ's feet. I suffer with Christ. Christ suffers with me.

If You Struggle with Pain, Then Suffer with Christ

For me it's shoes, for you it's something else. When life presents us with new challenges, painful experiences, or painful new clunky shoes, the question is, "What to do about it?" Some suffering is unavoidable in this life. We all have our own cross to bear. Christ asks us to pick up our crosses, persevere, have courage, trust in Him, and carry on. Therefore, when we struggle with pain, we are given an opportunity to suffer with Christ.

So, for me, I will keep going back to my pedorthist and tweak these clunky, corrective shoes until we get them fitted just right. I will persevere, be strong, trust in Jesus, and limp until this too shall pass. Sooner or later, I'll get these shoes fitted correctly. Then look out, and watch me run the good race!

A Southern Catholic Thing [at Smaller Mannhattans]



Not Seminary Ridge

Last month I found myself way in the back of the church a couple of minutes before Mass started. We typically arrive about 15 minutes early and sit near the front where I can see without glasses, so the back is a mysterious and alien place.

When I came in, the organist was playing the last notes of the prelude, then stopped. At this point, the whole church was dim, quiet, and packed. In front of me was the priest, a couple of deacons, eight or so altarboys, the censor and the crucifer, all close around the baptismal font, waiting.

Then the church bell rang 11 times. Within a few seconds of the last peal, the lights came up, and the small bell inside the nave was rung once. A second or so after that, the pipe organ let loose a huge belch of sound, the choir and congregation belted out the opening words of the entrance hymn, and the procession began to advance.

For the next few weeks I kept reflecting on that prepared waiting for the moment- it was so compelling in its dark, hushed stillness. It seemed familiar, but not from church...yet I had still imagined aspects of it before. Finally yesterday, or maybe this morning, I remembered- it's this:

"For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armstead and Wilcox look grave yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think This time."- William Faulkner,

Intruder in the Dust

As Kylie said in

Strictly Ballroom

, "That was unexpected."

Photo from the vestibule of St Mary's, Greenville SC

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Avoiding the Apostolate of the Outraged [at If I Might Interject]

Introduction

I saw a blog attempting to create a Screwtape Letter about these times. It started well, talking about one of the temptations facing our nation. But as it went on, it became apparent that the author (perhaps not intending it) was writing against a politician he or she obviously disliked. The post began attacking Catholics who supported this politician as being guilty of the same temptation and of betraying their faith. There was no attempt to consider other motives for this support, nor any attempt to distinguish between enthusiastic support and reluctant support. It was simply assumed that this politician's supporters either supported bad policies or did not care about them.

Lest people think I said this because I support this politician (I don't), I see people on the other side making the same rash judgments. If we don't support this politician, it means we either support or don't care about the evils from the other side.

As Catholics fight over this, I see some underlying assumptions:

1. The belief that only their own preference is right
2. The belief that those who disagree support the perceived opposite view
3. The belief that those who disagree must also act out of malice or culpable ignorance

Holding these assumptions can lead to self-righteous outrage. People who hold them not only think their opponents *wrong*, but also think them *morally bad* for reaching a different conclusion. However, even if the first assumption is true (the point to be proven), it does not make the second and third assumption true. Those points are rashly assumed because a person is offended others disagree with the way he or she sees it.

Not only a Political Issue, But Hostility over Disagreement

This isn't just a product of the 2016 elections. This involves any issue where there is a dispute over the morality of an action. For example, when it comes to the decisions of the Pope and bishops in communion with him, some people who assume their *own* position is right assume culpable wrongdoing or ignorance on the part of the Holy Father. But the whole point to be proven is whether the critic's position *is* right in the first place. Everything argued over motive for why a person is "wrong" is a [bulverism](#) unless they first proves the person *is* wrong.

But proving that a person is wrong is the step people *don't* take. Some Catholics assume that anybody who voted for Trump knowingly chose to betray the Catholic faith. Some Catholics assume that the Pope's calling for an investigation into individual culpability is a knowing choice to support divorce/remarriage. In both cases, Catholics think there is only one possible way to apply Catholic teaching, and to reject that particular application is to reject the Catholic faith.

Such arguments start with the fact that some Catholics *do* support things incompatible with Catholic teaching. The Catholic who supports abortion "rights" or torture is wrong. The Catholic who believes a valid marriage can be broken is wrong. However, just because some Catholics hold positions

incompatible with our teaching, it does not mean all do...

Some forget the difference and assume some = all

It is wrong to assume, from the fact that some Catholics act faithlessly, that *all* Catholics who disagree with our preferred position must act faithlessly. We need to investigate what the person actually holds and see if it is actually wrong. If it is wrong, we need to ask whether the person intends to oppose the Church or not, and what the circumstances are that lead to their position. When we do so, we will often find that the person *accepts* the Church teaching but disagrees with a certain policy on how to apply it.

If the policy is not the only valid way of following Church teaching, and the person is not trying to evade Church teaching in opposing a policy, we cannot accuse them of willfully rejecting the Church teaching because their politics are different. For example, to accuse a Catholic of “not really being pro-life” on the grounds that they doubt that a certain government policy will actually help defend life is unjust. But, if they merely give lip service to Church teaching while supporting actions that oppose the Catholic teaching, an accusation might be just. That’s what we must discern, and not assume.

Rash Judgment

We must ask what a person did, what their intentions were, and what the circumstances were that led to the decision. All three must be good to have a good act. But we cannot assume that if one or more were bad that the result is a mortally sinful decision to reject the Church. We need to accept the possibility that we have overlooked other legitimate ways to follow Church teaching, that we misread the person’s intention, or that we were ignorant of circumstances in a person’s life. These factors can lead us to assume guilt where there is not, or mortal sin where it is venial. When we do this, we run afoul of Matthew 7:1, where we’re warned against judging. It’s not opposing evil that is judging in this sense. It’s assuming bad will. It’s taking a “guilty until proven innocent” view of anything that seems “off” to us.

But the Church forbids that attitude. In the *Catechism*, she writes:

2477 *Respect for the reputation* of persons forbids every attitude and word likely to cause them unjust injury. He becomes guilty:

— of *rash judgment* who, even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor;

— of *detraction* who, without objectively valid reason, discloses another’s faults and failings to persons who did not know them;

— of *calumny* who, by remarks contrary to the truth, harms the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them.

2478 To avoid rash judgment, everyone should be careful to interpret insofar as possible his neighbor’s thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way:

Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another’s statement than to condemn it. But if he cannot do so, let him ask how the other understands it. And

if the latter understands it badly, let the former correct him with love. If that does not suffice, let the Christian try all suitable ways to bring the other to a correct interpretation so that he may be saved.

Catholic Church, [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#), 2nd Ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 594.

If we assume an evil act or an evil intention when there is none, we act unjustly.

Who Determines?

When it comes to determining what actions are incompatible with the teaching of Our Lord, we must accept the authority of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him. When a Catholic decides his personal reading of Church documents supersedes the magisterium, this is a rejection of authority. When a Catholic decides his confessor has no right to say X is wrong, this is a rejection of authority. That is incredibly dangerous when we realize what Our Lord said about rejecting the authority of the Church:

¹⁶ Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” (Luke 10:16).

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:17).

The person who refuses to listen to the Church will be judged. God is not mocked by those who feign obedience and act against His will. But we are not to assume that a political disagreement is a sign of feigned obedience. The person who knows his position is against Church teaching but justifies it by appealing to a “higher authority” (previous Church teaching, or perhaps rejecting all Church teaching while claiming to do so as being “faithful” to Jesus) does serious wrong. The person who acts against Church teaching out of ignorance or lacking the ability to give full consent (habitual sin formed out of ignorance) does wrong, but culpability is less.

Our Task

While we must oppose sin, we are not called to do so as some modern day crusader, fighting infidels and vanquishing them. Our task is emulating the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep to bring them back. This requires an attitude of gentleness and patience. If we think something is wrong, we must make certain we properly understand both the Church teaching and what the person intends. If we find that the person has not chosen an intrinsic evil, we must not accuse him of doing so. If the person has done wrong, but not done so out of willful rejection of the Church, we must not treat him as acting that way.

Even if the person has done wrong, we cannot act in a way which will drive the person away from repentance. If, through our actions, we get them so angry that they think our unjust behavior is Christianity so they want nothing to do with it, we have failed in our mission. Yes some will get angry because we say, “X is a sin,” when they are attached to that sin. Some will reject us regardless of how we act. Obviously we can’t help that.

But we can help how we behave. If we're so outraged at something we dislike that we treat the other person as an enemy to be vanquished instead of a person to be loved, we do wrong, even if we desire to defend Our Lord's teachings. Let us remember this when we disagree with each other.

This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2017/01/avoiding-apostolate-of-outraged.html>
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Gifts of the Heart [at Bible Meditations]



As Jesus sat near the Temple treasury, he watched the people as they dropped in their money. Many rich people dropped in a lot of money; then a poor widow came along and dropped in two little copper coins, worth about a penny. He called his disciples together and said to them, “I tell you that this poor widow put more in the offering box than all the others. For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had—she gave all she had to live on.” Mark 12: 41-44

While Jesus was eating, a woman came in with an alabaster jar full of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus’ head. Some of the people there became angry and said to one another, “What was the use of wasting the perfume? It could have been sold for more than three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor!” And they criticized her harshly.

But Jesus said, “Leave her alone! ...She has done a fine and beautiful thing for me...She did what she could...” Mark 14: 3-6

One way or the other, money really is no object. At least, that’s how it seems according to these gospel stories. The widow gave what she had. Her gift of a penny was more than enough, and valued by Jesus. The woman who anointed Jesus gave what she had, too. Her expensive gift was not rejected as extravagant, but also valued by Jesus.

In God’s economy, it’s not about how much or how little we have to give, but the love and sincerity behind the gift that counts. This applies to more than material gifts. What about the abilities and talents we’ve been gifted with? We don’t need to worry that what we have to share isn’t good enough. We don’t need to worry that we’d be showing off by putting our talents to use. When we are offering ourselves and our abilities to God, we don’t need to worry about other people’s opinions or comments. We don’t even have to worry about the results. Neither the widow’s penny nor the lavish perfume made a huge difference in the worldly scheme of things, but both were precious and appreciated by the Lord.

Every time we overcome shyness, or feelings of inadequacy, or fear that people will think we’re trying

to show off in order to share what we've been given, we are doing "a fine and beautiful thing."

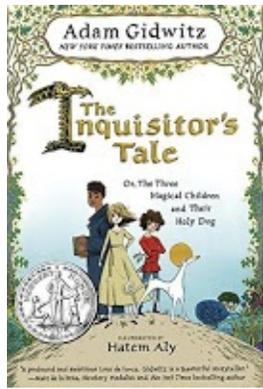
Prayer: Lord, help me recognize my gifts and share them.

Reflection: What are your gifts? Who can you share them with today?

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The Inquisitor's Tale: Not for Catholic Kids [at Read]



The Inquisitor's Tale

by Adam Gidwitz is a middle grade novel which was awarded a 2017 Newbery honor. It is the story of a medieval inquisitor who arrives at a French inn seeking information about three children whom King Louis IX wants to arrest - Jeanne, a Christian peasant, William, a Christian oblate, and Jacob, a Jew - and the dog who accompanies them. Various individuals drinking at the inn volunteer bits and pieces of the story of how the three children have come to be traveling together, first to escape from different unfortunate circumstances that threaten their lives, and later to rescue copies of the Talmud from being burned by the king. Only after hearing the others' stories does the inquisitor make up his mind about what he must do.

I try to make it a point to read children's novels with religious themes, not only because I like to find those rare gems that get it right, but also because I think someone should critique the books that get it wrong, especially when those books are critically acclaimed and recognized with awards. I had an open mind about

The Inquisitor's Tale

, and I honestly wanted to like it. I could tell early on, however, that this book was not going to be appropriate for my Catholic children, and that it would not be something I could recommend to other Catholic families.

As a Catholic parent, I feel it is important for historical novels involving church history to incorporate accurate truths about the faith. In many respects, this book does not. Since I haven't found a review that points this out, I feel that the voice of a practicing Catholic would be a valuable addition to the collective discussion about the book. This review, which contains many spoilers, including details from the ending, is my critique of

The Inquisitor's Tale

from a Catholic perspective, with reference to key areas that I find particularly important in religious-themed fiction.

THERE ARE MANY SPOILERS BEYOND THIS POINT.

Heresy

I want to begin with the concept of heresy. Though the Inquisition has been over for centuries, it is still possible to be a heretic. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines heresy as "the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same." When raising Catholic children, parents are called to teach them the fullness of the truth, and I would consider it part of my duty to avoid teaching my children heresies, and to correct heretical ideas my children may develop either through misunderstanding or misinformation from outside sources. It is this misinformation that gives me pause when it comes to reviewing

The Inquisitor's Tale.

The primary heresy addressed by this book is the notion that a dog (Gwenforte, based on a real-life dog named Guinforte) can be a saint. Throughout this book, individuals who recognize this belief as heresy are shown to be enemies of the three children, and made to seem evil and foolish. When knights arrive in Jeanne's village looking for the dog, they are tricked into swimming in the dung heap. When the inquisitor's identity is finally revealed, he admits that he was planning to kill the three children, and that he only changed his mind because he came to believe they were not heretics, but saints. Based on these events, it would be easy for a young reader to conclude that there is no real reason to correct heretical beliefs, and that the only motives behind such a correction must be driven by evil. The fact remains, though, that it is still a heresy today to believe that a dog can be a saint.

I teach religious education, and the question of animals and the afterlife comes up at least once a school year. During the discussion, no matter how young the kids, someone always voices an objection that begins with, "But in

All Dogs Go to Heaven

..." Kids are heavily influenced by all forms of media, and they are more inclined to believe what they see in a movie or read in a book than what I tell them in the 75 minutes I see them each week. A book like this, which does not separate the goodness of being spared death from the harm caused by believing in a heresy, is really confusing for a Catholic child whose faith is still in formation.

There is nothing in this story, or in the author's note, to explain that, while it would have been wrong for the inquisitor to kill the children merely to prove himself to his superiors, the decision not to do so does not automatically make the children right about venerating a dog. It seems very unlikely that a child could walk away from this book with an understanding of what the church actually teaches, which is that animals have material souls, cannot make moral decisions, and therefore cannot go to heaven to live as saints.

Religion as Fantasy

The question of whether a dog can be named a saint goes hand-in-hand with another problem I found in this book: the blurring of the lines between religion and fantasy. Religious faith often looks fantastical,

especially to non-believers. So much of what Christians believe is unseen, and if you are not familiar with Christian teaching, an angel can seem as likely to exist as a unicorn. Including a religious figure like St. Michael the Archangel in a story where there is also a dragon can make it seem as though both are imaginary, and that belief in one is as silly as belief in the other. (There are many stories about saints tangling with dragons, but these are usually Satan in the form of a dragon, not an actual dragon creature like the one in this book.) Having St. Michael appear in human form (as Michelangelo, one of the children's guardians and friends) really bothered me. This is because, though he sounds made-up, St. Michael is real. When St. Michael, the character, states that he has spent time in heaven with Gwenforte, this is now a situation where a real Christian figure is speaking a heresy. His statement undermines the authority of church leaders in the book, as well as the teachings I am trying to pass down to my own children. I can recognize that an author has the freedom to use poetic license, but I can't get comfortable with the idea of my kids reading a story where one of the saints of the church furthers a common misunderstanding about the faith.

And it gets worse. This book doesn't just play with saints; it also plays with God and Satan. There is a nun in the inn who, throughout the book, fills in gaps in the children's story when no one else present seems to have anymore details. She is always vague when questioned about how she knows all that she tells, but it is clear all along that there is probably something otherworldly about her. The revelation about her identity is not what I expected, however. Near the end of the book, the inquisitor asks Michelangelo who she is. Michelangelo gives a cryptic response:

"There are only two beings in Creation that I fear," he said. "One above, and one below. Strangely, when they walk the earth they both take the same form. Of a little old woman, with silvery hair, sparkling eyes, and a knowing smile."

I really wanted there to be another interpretation, so I read and reread the passage several times, but it seems to me that Michelangelo must be referring to God and Satan. And if that is the case, then there are many problems with this explanation. First, while it is possible for an all-powerful God to appear in any form he chooses, there is no evidence that God has ever appeared in any human form other than that of Jesus Christ. There is certainly nothing to suggest he has ever appeared as a woman. Without a clear reason for this to be the case, this just reads like a weird feminist twist on theology, and I find that offensive. Equally offensive is the notion that either God or Satan might be a cheeky old nun drinking and swapping stories in an inn. This cutesy attempt to domesticate the two most powerful forces in the universe clinches for me that this is not a book for Catholic children. Rather, this is a book that seeks to update the world's oldest beliefs for a 21st century audience and reduce them to mere fantasy. The hint at the fact that the nun might be either God or Satan also suggests an equality between God, the creator who exists outside of time and space, and Satan, a fallen creature of God, which is misleading, and again, fundamentally incorrect. Ordinarily, a book that takes such liberties with reality would include a major debriefing at the end, but while the author's note addresses many things, an explicit mention of his treatment of Catholic teaching is notably absent.

Moral Relativism

Another thing I dislike as a Catholic parent is moral relativism, the notion that what's true for one individual may not be true for the next, but that all these truths are equal. As a Catholic, I believe I have

been given the truth by Jesus Christ and his church, and that this is the truth for everyone, whether they believe it or not. If I did not believe this was the one and only fundamental truth, I would not practice the Catholic religion, or any religion at all. So when I decide whether a children's book about Catholicism is appropriate for Catholic kids, I consider whether the story allows for the possibility that there is a fundamental truth. This book did not necessarily need to claim that Catholicism was definitely true, but for me to feel comfortable handing it to a Catholic child, it needed to avoid promoting a relativistic approach to religion and allow for the possibility that there is one true religion.

Unfortunately, this book has two moments that seem to favor a morally relativistic point of view. One is minor. The three children decide to pray, and when one of them asks whether the prayer should be Jewish or Christian, they determine that it doesn't matter. This is not necessarily problematic, as it is true that Jews and Christians believe in the same God, and the prayer that follows is perfectly appropriate to both faiths. It only strikes me as a problem in retrospect, after reading another scene in the book. When the king offers a monetary reward to anyone who converts from Judaism to Christianity, Gidwitz writes: "Just a few days ago, William and Jeanne would have begged Jacob to follow Christ, and save his soul from damnation. Now the idea of it seemed ludicrous. If God would save their souls, surely, surely He would save Jacob's too. What difference was there between them, except the language in which he prayed?"

I am not complaining that Jeanne and William no longer believe Jacob will automatically be damned, because I don't believe that myself, and the Catholic church does not teach this about Jews or about any other non-Christians. I provide those lines only for context. It is really the final question here that is the issue. And my answer is that there are many differences between Christianity and Judaism, and language is probably the least significant. It surprises me that, in a time when diverse children's books are meant to be celebrating differences, this book seems eager to reinforce the idea that differences don't matter, and that all religions (including Islam, the book not-so-subtly interjects) are essentially the same. This book seems to espouse a worldview that specific tenets held by specific faiths are stumbling blocks to acceptance and goodness, rather than stepping stones. Rather than accepting each other's religious differences to promote peaceful relationships, the characters seem to set them aside in order to achieve unity. I don't think any parent who is raising a religious child wants that child to compromise his beliefs in order to maintain a friendship; rather, parents want their kids to make friends who will accept them as they are, faith and all.

Redemptive Suffering

Another major criticism of the treatment of religion in this book has to do with Chapter 23, which many have cited in their reviews for its depth and its poignancy. It is the scene when the three children begin to question why God allows suffering in the world, and they get into a discussion with a drunk friar who tries to explain it to them. His explanation talks a lot about the mystery surrounding God, and how we, who were not there at the beginning of time, have no way of knowing what God's true plan is. His advice is for the children to study God's earth as best they can so that they can understand a little bit when bad things happen. Then a minstrel chimes in to sing a song about a father and son who approach each other in battle, knowing that one will have to kill the other. The song ends without resolution, which bothers Jacob and William, but Jeanne finds the uncertainty beautiful. The minstrel then announces that God is a troubadour, who sees the beauty of the song he is writing because he is not in

the song himself. The topic is closed after it is determined that tragedies are not beautiful, but that the song to which they belong still might be.

This is all written very beautifully, and it is one of the passages that helps me understand why the Newbery committee selected it for an honor book. But a key component of Christian teaching about suffering is missing from the conversation. While I agree that God's plan is mysterious to us all, I was puzzled by the fact that a serious discussion of pain and tragedy did not mention the value of redemptive suffering or its ability to unite human beings with Christ on the cross. In fact, for a book with so many Christian characters, it doesn't say much about Jesus other than to make casual references to his birth in a manger, his ability to walk on water, and his admonishment to follow the Golden Rule. These basic facts really only skim the surface of the richness of Christian teaching and tradition, and this lack of depth, along with the lack of any real Catholic resources in the book's bibliography (beyond stories and legends about saints) result in an overall superficial treatment of Christianity by the text.

God's Name in Vain and Toilet Humor

Finally, I was irritated by the way this book makes it seem funny and cute to use God's name in vain. I would consider this a relatively minor issue on its own, especially since most of the swearing is true to the historical time period, but in this book, which is already so fraught with problems, it was just one more thing that set my teeth on edge. I am fine with using the language of the time period to add some color and depth to a story, but it seemed to me that phrases like "God's teeth" and "Jesus's boots" were placed in the story more for comic relief than atmosphere. I was also disappointed by the toilet humor. The most egregious example is the farting dragon, who is apparently taken from a medieval legend, but there are many mentions throughout the book of where people use the bathroom, and many of them seem gratuitous. (Even the knights searching for Jeanne in the dung heap, which does have bearing on the plot, seems unnecessary.) The toilet humor annoys me even more after seeing the author comment on Goodreads that a farting dragon should be all it takes to get kids to like this book. I feel that children's authors who write this kind of humor into their books send the wrong message to readers and demean the field of children's literature as a whole. Of course kids think this stuff is funny. It's up to adults to rise above it and teach them how to enjoy humor that doesn't rely on bad manners.

Conclusion

The Inquisitor's Tale

has an engaging premise, an interesting (if not entirely original) Chaucer-esque format, and many surprising twists and turns. The writing is not consistently great, but there are definite transcendent moments, and as an adult, I was able to appreciate those while also being mindful of the flaws in the treatment of religion. Kids, however, are still in the process of forming their religious faith. Kids who are growing in their faith need books that illustrate the church's teachings in real-world contexts so they can see how Jesus's words from long ago still have meaning for them today. They do not need a book that plays with beliefs they are just beginning to understand, and that concludes, in the end, that it doesn't even matter which religion they practice. Were I not a religious person, I think I would be able

to suspend my disbelief and perhaps enjoy the world of this story. As a religious person, however, the fantasy elements didn't ring true because they strayed too far from what I believe to be the truth.

This contribution is available at <http://www.readathomemom.com/2017/02/the-inquisitors-tale-not-for-catholic.html>
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Let Your Light Shine [at Creo en Dios!]

In today's Gospel from St. Matthew, Jesus instructs his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth...the light of the world." passage.

I've said this before, but I can't hear these lines without hearing in my mind the song from the musical *Godspell* based on these verses. Apart from the catchy tune, it is the emphasis on the admonitions that follow Jesus' command that I find so compelling.

You are the salt of the earth...but if that salt has lost its flavor it ain't got much in its favor.

You are the light of the world...but if that light's under a bushel, its lost something kind of crucial.

You are the light of the world – But the tallest candlestick ain't much good without a wick.

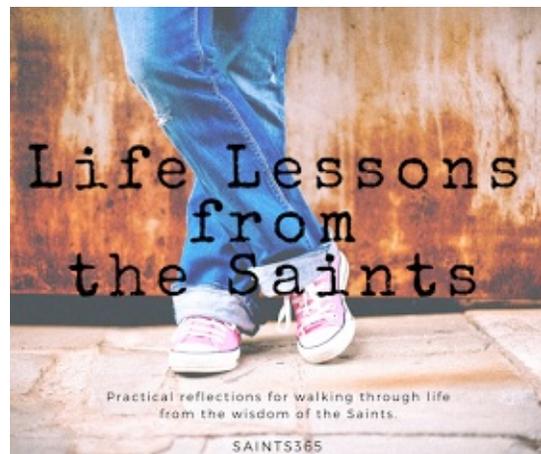
Let your light shine. Let your salt be bold. Not for our own aggrandizement, but for God's glory.

Jesus is crystal clear in the Gospels that coming to worship once a week and verbally reciting our belief in God is not enough. (Two chapters after today's Gospel, Matthew records Jesus warning that not all who say "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom.)

And so today, especially today – as we look out at the woundedness of our world, we would do well to examine how well we are heeding the command to be salt and light to the world.

This contribution is available at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com/2017/02/05/let-your-light-shine/>
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Life Lessons From Saint Peter [at Saints 365]



I LOVE St. Peter. The Scriptural accounts of the missteps of this outspoken, hot-tempered, passionate first Pope reveal a man who is flawed and weak.

I can relate

. Equally, the Scriptures reveal to us a man whose life has been thoroughly transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit - his flaws are remade into his greatest strengths.

I can relate.

St. Peter's life, like that of all the Saints, opens up to us a litany of examples that we can both meditate upon and imitate in our own striving for the heights of holiness in the trenches of everyday life.

Let's look at seven life lessons that we can draw from St. Peter.

Grace builds on nature.

Boldness was a gift that Peter possessed in abundance - a gift that made him a natural born leader. The problem with natural gifts is that they are not always directed to the right ends or exercised in the right manner. Time and time again, Peter's natural gift of boldness landed him in hot water with the Lord.
See

[Mt 16:22-23](#)

and

[Jn 13: 6-11](#)

for two examples.

Natural gifts need supernatural grace to purify them and build upon them. After Pentecost, Peter's

natural gifts had been anointed by the Holy Spirit and we see his propensity for bold statements now transformed into his ability to preach the core Gospel message (the

kerygma)

in power.

[\(Acts 2:14-37\)](#)

Like Peter, we too need to ask the Lord for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to transform our natural gifts and talents into ones that will bear supernatural fruit.

Perhaps one of the best-loved stories from the scriptures is that of Peter walking on the water. Here we see Peter, walking across the stormy sea at Jesus' command. This courageous act of faith is quickly overcome by the paralyzing grip of fear when Peter's eyes drift from Jesus to the wind and the waves which surround him. He begins to sink.

[\(Mt 14:27-33\)](#)

Like Peter, I too have had moments in my relationship with Jesus where my faith and trust has led me to "walk on water". Similarly, I can recall far too many episodes in my own life where my focus has been on the wind and the waves around me and I have hit bottom like a lead brick. This Gospel account teaches us so many lessons, but perhaps the one that strikes me the most is that fear is a block to faith. When we allow our fears of "what could happen" or even "what should happen" to block our faith, we effectively block the power of grace. The Lord knows this and the words "Be not afraid" are one of the most often-repeated phrases in all of the Scriptures. In moments of conflict between fear and faith, let us ask St. Peter for his intercession to help us keep our eyes on Jesus and continue to walk on water.

No sin too great for the Lord's mercy.

Denying the Lord is a grave sin. Jesus, in a discourse directed to the Apostles, warns them of the consequences of such a denial:

"But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father"

[\(Mt. 10:33\)](#)

He directly foretells Peter's denial to him.

[\(Lk 22:34\)](#)

In spite of these warnings, Peter does indeed succumb to his own weakness and vehemently denies that he knows Jesus three times.

[\(Lk 22: 54-62\)](#)

Luke's Gospel relates to us that immediately after his denials, the

"Lord turned and looked at Peter." ([Lk 22:61](#))

. I can only imagine that look of love and mercy - of sheer compassion that Jesus gave to Peter in that moment. A look which expressed his desire to forgive Peter and his knowledge of the great potential inside Peter in spite of his outward failings. No sin is above the mercy of the Lord. When we sin, we have only to seek that look of love from Jesus in the sacrament of Confession to be restored to his grace.

Discipleship sometimes requires a career change.

Peter's encounter with the Lord led him to abandon his fishing career to follow Jesus as his disciple. After only a few short years in training, he made a post-Pentecost career change to preacher, healer, foreign missionary and head of the budding universal church. None of these changes came up after reading

What Color is Your Parachute?

and meeting with a career counselor.

Encounters with Jesus still lead to career changes today. Not long after I experienced a powerful conversion in the year 2000, I was led to quit my six-figure job and trade my successful career for a life of service as a stay at home Mom. Nearly two decades later, I am homeschooling, studying theology, writing, speaking and still in awe of all the Lord has done in my life.

Not all disciples are required to make such dramatic career changes. What is required of all disciples is that we submit our career to the Lordship of Jesus and allow him to direct our path, trusting that his plans for our lives are far better than any that we could conceive for ourselves.

Try not to fall asleep in the chapel.

One of my favorite accounts from the Gospels is that of the Lord rebuking Peter, James and John for falling asleep while he was praying in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus says to Peter: “

Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." ([Mk 14:37-38](#))

Why do I love this account? Because more often than not, I too find myself giving in to the weakness of my own flesh. It is a comfort to me to know that I am not alone in my struggles. Prayer can sometimes be difficult. Every time I sit down to pray I battle distractions, fatigue, and the temptation to insert my own agenda into my prayer time. Far from being discouraging, Jesus' words spurn me on to continue to persevere in prayer in spite of the obstacles - asking the Holy Spirit to "come to the aid of our weakness".

[\(Rom 8:26\)](#) Share what you have been given.

In Acts Chapter 3 we read about the crippled beggar asking Peter and John for money. Here is Peter's reply:

"I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, [rise and] walk." ([Acts 3:6](#))

The crippled beggar was intermediately healed.

Peter gave the beggar a far greater gift than the alms that he was asking for. He gave him the gift of healing which he had received through the power of the Holy Spirit sent to the church by the Risen Lord Jesus at Pentecost. All of us, by virtue of our Baptism, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and like Peter, we too need to share that gift with others.

The sharing of what we have received may not always take the form of physical healing, but we must be open to opportunities to see through what people are asking for to what they really need. Our world is filled with people who are crippled in many ways - let us imitate Peter and boldly share the gift of hope and salvation in Jesus that we have received.

Peter writes in one of his letters a directive that applies to us today as much as it did to his readers nearly 2000 years ago:

"Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope..." ([1 Pet 3:15](#))

Our testimony is simply that: a witness of what Jesus has done for us which is the foundation of our hope. Peter goes on to describe the way this testimony should be delivered:

"with gentleness and reverence" ([1 Pet 3:16](#))

When we follow Jesus, people will be curious about our beliefs and our lives. Not all of us have dramatic conversion stories, but all faithful disciples of Jesus have moments of encounter with the Lord that can serve a lifeline to those walking in darkness. It is helpful to intentionally reflect on those special moments in prayer - perhaps even writing them down in a journal. In this way, we too will be ready to give this "explanation" to anyone who asks.

St. Peter, pray for us.

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Cloistered at the Carnival [at The Cloistered Heart]



I once had a dream about a carnival. Specifically, I dreamed I was living in a little house on carnival grounds. It was night, but

the light streaming in through my windows was bright and garish. It flashed bursts of purple and white and blue and yellow, ceaselessly, across walls and floors and faces.

There were other people in the house, sitting quietly in my little living room. The faces around were serene and still. I knew we were praying.

It was a "staying" sort of dream, the kind you carry with you throughout the day and perhaps long after. I felt it captured much of the essence of my life as a cloistered heart.

Like the house in my dream, my life is encircled by "the carnival." I don't have to look far to see the truth of this, although I often forget it. I live surrounded by so many things that don't really matter in the long run... things that carry the atmosphere of carnival... the chase after fun, self-indulgence, riches, entertainment, pleasure, the pursuit of what pleases me-me-me. Yes, that last sentence contains redundancies; and yes, the carnival does as well. Like a wheel spinning round and round going nowhere, the carnival spins back to self and I and me and mine and what I can

get

out of life.

It's tough not to get caught up in the carnival. After all, there is much in it that can be legitimately enjoyed. But oh, how easy it is to let the clamor and excitement, the music and neon, the magic and illusion take my focus off what really matters! It is a constant struggle.

How to live in the carnival while not being part of it? Perhaps, for me, a clue lies within the dream. I am to remain in that little house of prayer, in the cloister of God's will, wherever I may go. I am to keep the light of prayer lit within it, for that will illuminate the shadows and reveal the Truth of God.

Like a turtle in its shell, I can carry the cloister with me. I can live in a house of peace, in the midst of the carnival's neon glare.

"The world with its seductions is passing away, but the man who does God's will endures forever." (1 John 2:17)

This contribution is available at <http://www.thecloisteredheart.org/2017/02/cloistered-at-carnival.html>
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Radical Wife and Mother: Anni Harry [at The Koala Mom]

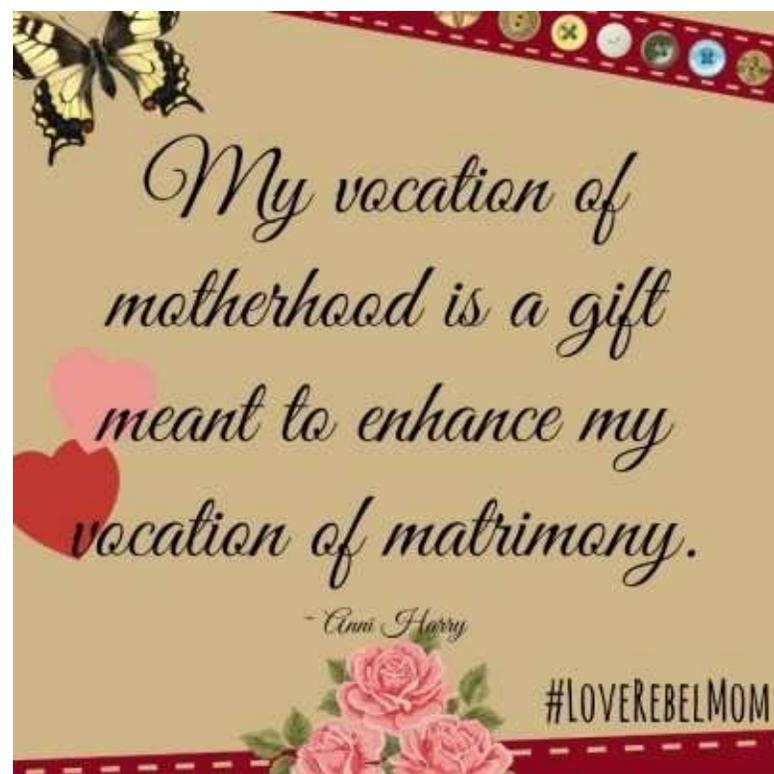
Today, [TKM contributor Anni Harry](#) is continuing my #LoveRebelMom series with a reflection on her vocation as wife and mom. In a world that looks down on motherhood, she is a proudly radical wife and mom who puts her family first.



Being a Christian in today's society is a calling to live a pretty radical existence. Christ Himself alluded to the struggles of living a Christ-centered existence when He gave us the Beatitudes found in [Matthew 5:1-12](#). In that teaching, He foreshadowed an existence which would indicate how difficult the Christian lifestyle would be, and offered us a glimpse of hope. He offered us hope of a time where we will be joined with like-minded men and women, together as (hopefully) the Church Triumphant.

Lately, I have been reviewing how my vocation of motherhood impacts me, and to a greater extent, how it defines me. I am first a wife. That is my sacramental vocation, and as such, I am happy. Throughout our marriage, I have learned the importance of upholding my spouse. I strive to hold more things in my heart than to [air my grievances](#) about petty matters with my husband to others.

I have begun to notice I have little in common with peers at outings. I try very hard to build my spouse up and affirm him, even when he is not present, instead of relying on cliché stories of the husband who is a lazy, bumbling oaf. My husband is none of those—he is the hard-working, intelligent, problem-solving head of our household. And he is my children's father.



Which leads me to my radical view of motherhood—radical by today’s standards. I have noticed many societal norms resting on the fallacy of children cramping mothers’ styles. Many mothers, and articles addressed to mothers, complain of feeling stifled, as though children are interlopers—little creatures infringing on the independence of mothers. Sure, many days are long and tiring, leaving me slightly starved for adult interaction. There may be days where I *do* feel stifled.

But here is the radical difference between societal norms and the light through which I view motherhood: I don’t feel stifled *because* of my children!

Instead, I feel stifled because I am afraid of failing them. I worry I am not doing enough *for* them. I worry I do too much that infringes on their access to me. Not their physical access to me, but their mental and emotional access.

I love being a mother. I love my side-kicks. While I am eager for my children to one day grow up and go to school, it isn’t because I want some downtime from them. Instead, I look forward to watching the lessons of life they will learn as they get older. I am eager to watch them grow and step onto the pathways that God has paved for them.

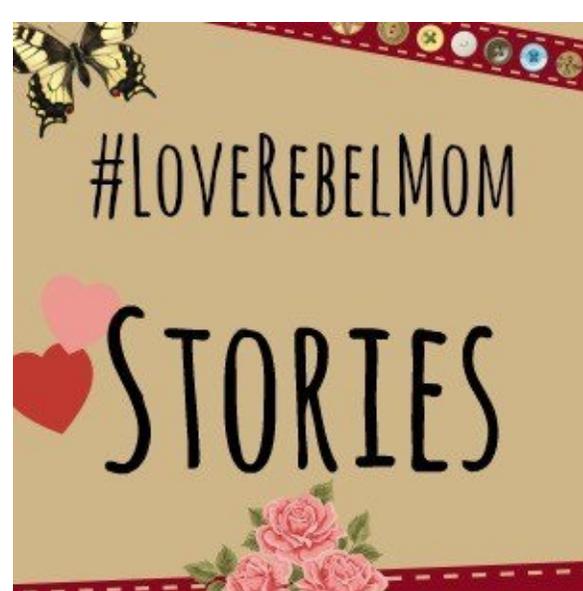


My view of the vocation of motherhood, which is a gift meant to enhance my vocation of matrimony, is pretty radical by today's standards. Believing my children to be another avenue for me to work to obtain God's loving grace and mercy? That is a pretty radical belief today.

And yet, this is where my faith leads me... to a pretty awkward, lonely place at dinner parties, where my children are often uninvited. My children and my husband don't complete me, nor do I live my life for their benefit. However, my roles as wife and mother do define me.

Being a wife and mother are my most important roles in life, giving me all the opportunity in the world to achieve my seat among the Church Triumphant.

Because of that belief, I proudly wear the title of "Rebel Love" and proudly bear the accusation of being a radical wife.



Anni Harry is a proud Catholic, Army wife, and mother to a three-year-old boy and five-month-old

girl. She currently stays at home, but has a BA in History and a Masters of Social Work (MSW). She is a cradle Catholic who spent time exploring various other religions and reverted back to the Catholic faith. She blogs about her faith, parenting as it pertains to her family and her professional experience, and the adventures wherever the United States Army sends their family! You can [follow her blog](#) or [find her on Facebook](#).



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What is the Catholic perspective on immigration and refugees? [at Boldly Catholic]



[John Burger at Aleteia provides great answers:](#)

The Church's teaching on migrants and refugees is based on the principles of solidarity and a nation's right to protect its citizens, but demands more from nations that are able to assist those in need.

"The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin," declares the Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraph 2241. "Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him."

The Catechism goes on to say:

"Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants' duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens."

With conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Ukraine and other places over the past several years causing massive problems of refugees and displaced persons, Pope Francis' pontificate has been marked by calls for a more welcoming attitude on the part of more prosperous nations and his own personal outreach, including visits to the Mediterranean islands of Lampedusa and Lesbos, flashpoints of the plights of refugees, and his orders for the Vatican to house refugee families. But he has also recognized the right of nations to deal prudently with the situation.

"It is inhumane to shut our doors and hearts to refugees," he told journalists on the flight from

Sweden to Rome last November, “but they also need to be prudent when it comes to working out how to settle them because it is not just about receiving a refugee, they also need to be integrated. If a country is able to integrate, then they should do what they can.”

He's got much more... please read [his entire piece](#) and that to which he links.

Carry on.

This contribution is available at <http://www.boldlycatholic.com/2017/02/what-is-the-catholic-perspective-on-immigration-and-refugees.html>
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Being chosen, belonging, being a deacon [at Catholic Deacon]

The opposite of being chosen is being left out. Being left out means not belonging. I don't know about you, but I want to belong and so I fear being left out. I am disappointed when I am not chosen. Even now in my fifties I still wrestle with this. Sometimes I internally lambast myself for not being more self-actualized. What makes this phenomenon even stranger in my case is that I am without doubt an introvert, which might mean not being chosen is a relief. Frankly, I often experience a contradictory tension, but that is a different subject perhaps for another post (perhaps not).

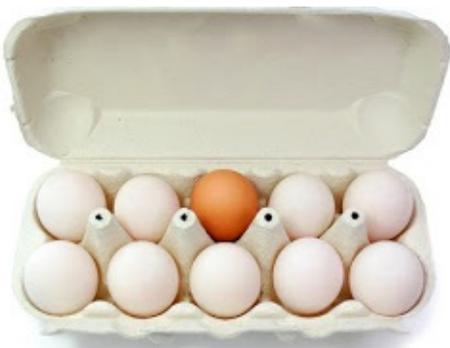
In the introduction to his beautiful book

[*To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*](#)

, the late John O'Donahue wrote:

While our culture is all gloss and pace on the outside, within it is too often haunted and lost. the commercial edge of so-called "progress" has cut away a huge region of human tissue and webbing that held us in communion with one another. We have fallen out of belonging

Two years ago last month I made the decision, prayerfully discerned with my wife from the previous Easter, to walk away from a position very much in the center of things, a place I felt chosen and where I felt belonged. My sense of being chosen and belonging, upon close examination, turned out to be, not exclusively, but in too great a proportion, a lot egotism. While I have not regretted my decision in the least and when I think about it would not want to return, there are times when I find myself, due to nothing external, feeling unchosen, like I don't belong. Based on a few events unfolding right now, which are actually somewhat remote from me and shouldn't affect me at all, I awoke this morning feeling down, feeling unchosen.



As I am wont to do in my healthier moments when I feel anxious, despairing, scared, or cast out, I offered this to the One to whom I belong (I won't go into how I react in my unhealthier moments, it's not good). Like most people of faith, I suppose, I pray better when I feel my need most acutely. This morning, I uttered, "Lord, I feel unchosen, like I don't belong." Without any delay, here's what flooded my soul: "Scott, I chose you by name in baptism. I chose you by name in confirmation. Holly chose you in marriage. I chose you in ordination for service to my people and the world."

If I refused to believe that Christ chose me, according to the mystery of His divine will and not for anything I am able to offer in return (St Paul's words to the Corinthians apply here: "God chose the

foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong"

[1 Cor 1:27](#)

), then I would have to resign myself to forever being the outsider, the one who doesn't belong, even if my life looked like one of belonging. Self-imposed exile is exile nonetheless.

All of this, oddly enough, confirms my diaconal vocation. In the third chapter of his book

[*The Heart of the Diaconate: Communion with the Servant Mysteries of Christ*](#)

, Deacon James Keating asserted that in ordination a deacon receives a brand, or a wound, indicating that he is no longer his own. It is through ordination that a deacon gives himself to Christ. In turn, Christ gives the deacon to the Church for service. Looking back over 13-plus years of being a deacon, I have often experienced my ordination as a wound. According to Keating, to be chosen in this way means to bear this wound "that renders [the deacon's] very being vulnerable to share Christ's own servant mysteries." Therefore, it makes sense that the essential "'work' of diaconal spiritual life is to keep this wound open" so that the deacon can "learn how to receive grace even while ministering."

Fundamental to being a deacon is seeing that nobody feels unchosen or left out, but to remind everyone, especially those on the fringes who are often truly left out, that they are chosen and belong.

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2017/02/being-chosen-belonging-being-deacon.html>
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Don't Tickle My Ears - Tell Me The Truth [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

After reading a recent syndicated column in my Diocesan newspaper, I could not remain silent. The columnist, Father Ron Rolheiser, a well-known Catholic priest and theologian, criticized a brother priest who had had the courage to preach the Truth.

Some background first.

For decades, observers have decried the absence of quality catechesis within the Catholic Church – this despite the universal recognition that many Catholics do not know or fully understand their Faith.

Several respected polls have concluded that as many as seventy-five per cent of those professing to be Catholic do not attend Sunday Mass on any regular basis, if at all. The number of non-attendees may be even greater than this reported percentage.

The salvation of its members' souls is the Church's primary mission. Yet rarely is the necessity of attending and participating in Sunday Mass ever addressed. When was the last time you heard a homily on the eternal consequences to those who intentionally ignore this obligation? Not too frequently I would suspect.

When priests have the courage to do so, they are often criticized. Such was the reaction of Father Rolheiser to the homily he heard.

Given the absence of so many Catholics from Sunday Mass, no reasonable person would question the need to encourage our brothers and sisters to return to Mass, to make that day holy, and to give to God the adoration and worship He deserves.

How best to do that? Not, I would suggest, by publishing Father Rolheiser's recent column on *Orthodoxy, Sin and Heresy*.

Let me share some excerpts from that troubling piece:

“Recently, while on the road giving a workshop I [Father Rolheiser] took the opportunity to go to the Cathedral in that city for a Sunday Eucharist. I was taken aback by the homily. The priest used the Gospel text in which Jesus says, I am the vine and you are the branches, to tell the congregation that what Jesus is teaching here is the Roman Catholic Church constitutes what is referred to as the branches and the way we link to those branches is through the Mass and if we miss Mass on a Sunday we are committing a mortal sin and should we die in that state we will go to hell.

*Then aware of what he was saying would be unpopular, he protested that the truth is often unpopular, but that what he just said is the orthodox Catholic teaching and anyone denying this is in heresy. **It’s sad that this kind of thing is still being said in our churches**” [my emphasis].*

Father continued [again with my emphasis]: **“Does the Catholic Church really teach that missing Mass is a mortal sin and that if you die in that state you will go to hell? No, that’s not Catholic orthodoxy, though popular preaching and catechesis often supposes that it is, even as neither accept the full consequences.”**

[I have included a link to his entire column [here](#).]

With all due respect to Father, may this simple man ask a few questions?

Does not [Section 2181 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) (CCC) state that “those who deliberately fail in this obligation [participation in the Eucharist on days of obligation] commit a grave sin”? Does not the same document at [Section 1472](#) tells us that "... Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the ‘eternal punishment’ of sin”?

Are not the phrases “grave sin” and mortal sin” interchangeable? Are we to also ignore [Section 1861 of the CCC](#) which teaches, in pertinent part, that “mortal sin...results in...the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God’s forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ’s kingdom and the eternal death of hell”?

I fully agree with Father Rolheiser that it is not for us to judge the condition of another’s soul at the time of death or whether or not that individual had responded to God’s invitation to repent of his sins. That authority and judgment rests solely with Almighty God. Thankfully.

But we are not judging anyone during their lifetime when we proclaim God’s objective and unchanging Truth - that deliberately and intentionally missing Mass on a day of obligation is a mortal sin and that if

one dies in that state unrepentantly, hell is their eternal destination.

We have a duty, in justice and charity, to preach and share that Truth, to help save souls. We have an equal obligation to question anyone attempting to render ambiguous a Church teaching that is crystal clear, even if we are only simple laypersons.

Father Rolheiser and the priest he criticized cannot both be correct. One is accurately setting forth Church doctrine; the other is tickling ears and misleading souls. I side with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the homilist.

Please correct me if I have reached the wrong conclusion. The eternal stakes are too high to leave this conflict unresolved.

If, however, my conclusion is correct, why would any Catholic newspaper publish this column?

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2017/02/monday-musings-dont-tickle-my-ears-tell.html>

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Second-Guessing God [at Do Not Be Anxious]

The Gospel was on the rich man (Mk 10:17). Jesus told him to “sell everything” earthly, so “you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me.” And the man went away sad. “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom,” Jesus told His disciples.

And I wondered: What are my riches?

The Garden of Eden showed us the commonly-held riches of every man and woman: They are prone to value themselves highly, even more than God. It is the Devil’s primary temptation: God’s laws are restrictive; you deserve this thing or that, and so it is right for you to have it. (We Americans like to say we have a “right” to what we want for ourselves.) Some rationalize a response to this temptation and their response. They convince themselves God can’t exist, because “A God would want me happy --- no pain, no sorrow, and total freedom.” And some convince themselves that God DOES exist --- “But I have to compensate for His shortcomings, His not loving me enough.” Most often these compromises occur through giving in to the desires of our body. Certainly Pride is at the top of these desires; we want to be honored, respected, and loved. But the five physical senses are also sources of temptations, and these are often satisfied by money: the big house, beautiful possession, trips, sex, and of course food. All these are the temptations of the body in every man and woman --- but for some there are more.

With the fall in the Garden of Eden, the average person became prone to the temptations of Pride, choosing self over God. Some, however, are NOT average people, they are gifted with even “better” bodies --- and for these the Parable of the Talents says: “From those who are given more, more is expected.” But even as the gifts of our body can provide us new ways to serve God and give more, they can also provide us new ways of being led astray from Him.

Two exceptional gifts which I have some experience with are the gifts of higher knowledge and beauty. Unfortunately, it’s often parents who first see these gifts in their children and focus undue attention on them, teaching them not as gifts to help the kids to serve God, but to serve themselves. They are treated as special kids growing up, different than their siblings, and then these “special” kids grow up expecting to be treated as special adults. They believe life is easier than it really is; that things are owed them, and later, they don’t know how to handle adversity which they should have seen in their youth. They come to think that attention given them is love, a deserved love. Their knowledge and beauty often lead to easy financial gains in their adult lives, which they treat as their due, not further gifts to be used wisely. These are the ones who would pass easier through the eye of a needle than attain heaven. At the root of their sins is the fact that they have never learned humility, from which flows true love of others --- the heart of the Gospels, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The rich man thought himself a good person --- like we do. He knew and followed the commandments --- like we do. But when Jesus said “give up your money and ways and follow Me,” he could not do it. The rich man knew the commandments and their good results, but he’d also grown up learning the value of HIS knowledge and its good results (money). Jesus was saying “Stop following what you know, and follow what I know.” Trust Me. And the rich man could not.

I understand that rich man’s reluctance.

Peter knew Jesus and acknowledged Him as the Son of God. And so when Jesus was walking on the water and told Peter to come, Peter immediately left the boat and started walking to Jesus. (Notice none of the others did.) But as Peter walked on the water he had time to think, and his initial trust faded, and he began to sink. I very much understand that hearing of God's call, and the subsequent forgetting of the initial trusting in God, and then thinking of what I am doing or plan to do. How often some good idea of God's didn't get done by me, because I had to interject my ideas.

I think Saul had to be knocked off his horse and blinded to make Paul as trusting a man as he turned out to be. At one point Paul saw the lame beggar and said "what I have I will give to you; rise and walk." I could picture myself in Paul's shoes; I could imagine the Holy Spirit urging me to heal the lame beggar in front of me. Unfortunately, I could also imagine what I would have done in Paul's spot. I would have thanked the Holy Spirit for opening my eyes to see the man in front of me, and been confident of the Spirit's healing powers --- and then I would have started thinking: "If I heal this beggar, he will be a poor man with no livelihood, but I know someone who might offer him a job, and someone who might give him a place to live." And then after I'd gone and arranged those things, I would go back to the beggar man, planning the words I would tell him: "Get up and walk; go see Sam for the job he has for you, and then Joe for a place to stay. Now thank Jesus for His blessings and have a good life." It would be a good healing. Only when I got back to where I had seen the lame beggar, I would find him gone. I wouldn't have trusted the urgings of the Holy Spirit without interjecting my own urgings. That's my problem, and one of many people. I have some blessings of intelligence, and I am used to thinking of good solutions to problems, and being rewarded. It's hard for me to ignore myself and trust in God's urgings, and just act on them.

Many of us want to be open to God's will; we pray that He would show us. And sometimes He does, but most often not the way we expected. And so we pause, and we think. And nothing changes in our lives, and we wonder why, and wonder if things will EVER change.

They won't, not if we continue to rely on ourselves, and our wisdom not His. We need to stop second-guessing God!

If anyone wants to be a follower of Mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

"We need to desire Mt Calvary as much as Mt Tabor. Only then will this hardest lesson --- that earth isn't heaven and never will be, that the path to abundant meaning and happiness passes through a daily cross, that unless we are willing to sacrifice our personal preferences and worldly desires we will never reach the goal for which we were created --- only then will this lesson be able to seep down into our hearts and spread into every corner of our minds."

-- **The Better Part**, Meditation 181

Silence [at Beware Yon Dragons!]

Listening to the radio one day, I heard my friend (who was the DJ at the local station) announce the next song, and then, rather than hearing the song begin, I heard silence; only a faint hum from the speakers. I waited about a full minute, and then quickly called her on the phone. "Did you forget to start the song?" After about a minute more of silence from the radio, she came on and said "So sorry about that couple minutes of dead air; we had a technical glitch here. We're back on track now, and here is the song you were expecting to hear."

Notice her terminology, "dead air". That is the way we think of it: "dead". Silence is not always appreciated today. I can think back a number of years when elevators, doctor's office waiting rooms, and a few other establishments were about the only places that you would hear piped in music (and that stuff was enough to cause waves of nausea). Much of the rest of the world was generally left peaceful (by comparison). Today, it is a different story. Now we have multiple video screens in the grocery store aisles, music over the loud speakers, and a flood of noise that is overwhelming. It is as though store owners think that we are unable to purchase their products unless we have a million noisy distractions to keep us from realizing we do not need most of the stuff they are forcing on us.

Silence is a forgotten beauty. Yes, most people still appreciate the silence of a quiet walk in the woods, or quietly watching a sunset, but that is a rarity rather a common event. Whether it is those who cannot go far without their ipod, those who are always watching or listening to something on their "smart" phone, or those who leave their radio on constantly in the car and the TV on constantly at home, we have been immersed in constant sounds.

This "noise inundation" is so much the case that when people come to the Mass they expect the same kind of thing. If the purification of the vessels after communion takes a minute or two, most people get fidgety if they do not have some music playing or the cantor singing something to them. This is not because it is "wrong" to have that moment be quiet. Rather, it is due, in most part, to the fact that we are so used to having "background noise" that silence almost seems like a bad thing; like "dead air". What are those moments of silence in the Mass supposed to be for? It may shock some people, but it is for personal prayer, meditation, and adoration. Those who refuse to engage during the Mass if there is a moment of silence are showing that they are not truly engaged in "active participation" in the first place (a vital requirement of the Second Vatican Council!).

This point is difficult to get across to modern day Catholics for two main reasons: first, we have become numb to the overwhelming flood of noise and entertainment that is constantly thrown at us; second, our spiritual disciplines have largely become flaccid. Put these two factors together and we find that people cannot "see the forest because of the trees"; or to put it another way, "they cannot recognize silence because their is so much noise". Let us look, therefore at a few extra sources to help us see the truth, goodness, and beauty of silence.

In the Catechism we are told that, "Sunday is a time for reflection,

silence

, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life." Interesting, is it not? We are not actually being told about the Mass, rather we are being told about the entire day of Sunday. It is supposed to be a day when we have some "silence", which grows our "Christian interior life". Here we are told that silence, in itself, has a value. It is not merely "dead air", but "living spirituality". That is quite a radical difference from our modern perspective. If Sunday as a whole should have some silence, then who are we to imagine that it is wrong to have some silence in the celebration of Mass itself?

When we are in the Mass, our every act, our every word, our every thought, should be directed toward the worship of God Almighty. That is what the Mass is all about: an interaction between God and man wherein He gives us His love, and we love Him in return. The Catechism further discusses what it means to "adore" God while in His presence. We are told that, "[a]doration is . . . respectful silence in the presence of . . . God." Those words should have great weight on our hearts: "respectful silence". In other words, the Church is telling us that there is such a thing as "DISrespectful silence". What would that look like? Let me fathom a guess: looking at your watch; checking your phone for a new text; heavy sighs; glancing around the Church to see what others are doing. These are forms of disrespectful silence. Respectful silence is, on the other hand, that genuine adoration that is given to Christ because of His amazing love for us, His unworthy servants.

It is not as though the Church made these ideas up, though. The wonderful truth about silence before God was stated many times in various ways in Scripture (both in the Old and New Testaments). One of the authors of the Psalms tells us of his devotion to God in terms of silent waiting (something very difficult for people who are used to instant foods and super fast download speeds). He says, "[f]or God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation (Psalm 62:1)." Silent waiting; an amazing concept when we live in a society that abhors "dead air".

In the prophet Zephaniah we find, not just an example, but an actual command. "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests (Zep 1:7)." The context of the verse cannot be more clear. When we approach God for the performance of sacrifice (as every Mass is), then we should recognize that there is need for some silence. It is hard for me to imagine that a brief five-second pause between the homily and the creed is sufficient to cover this (especially since the General Instruction for the Roman Missal says that this is merely for the purpose of reflecting upon the words of the homily!).

The prophet Habakkuk gives us another reference to the importance of silence in the context of worship. Although he does not use the word "presence" in this verse, the point cannot be missed. "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him (Hab 2:20)." His temple from the Old Testament has been done away with, and will never return. His temple, now in the New Covenant, is every Church where the body of Christ is reserved in the tabernacle. When God is "in" the temple, there is a need for silence. This is not saying that we should never speak or sing when in Church. There are numerous references in Scripture that tell us of the need and importance of voices praising God. Yet, right along with that truth is the truth that silence has a place; it is a place where we cannot allow ourselves to be the center of attention, and we can allow God to speak to our individual souls.

This is not, however, only something that is to be practiced while here on Earth. Even Heaven itself recognizes the importance of silence. In the book of Revelation, there are numerous references that point to the actions of worship in Heaven (in fact, much of the book of Revelation is a description of

what is going on in Heaven while there are trials here on Earth). There are millions of angels singing, there are people bowing prostrate before the Lord, there are creatures making testimony about God's greatness (all quite noisy events), and, there is one reference that specifically says that all in Heaven were silent for a time. "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour (Rev 8:1)." Half an hour; ponder that for a moment! Have you ever been completely silent for 30 minutes except when sleeping? Certainly there are a number of ways to do this, but the best would be in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (no prayers, no readings, just silence before God).

This brings me to my final point. At my Ordinariate community of St. George, in Republic, Missouri, we have times during the Mass where there is merely silence; part of the offertory, during communion, and during the purification of the vessels, there are times of extended silence. These are times when we intentionally do

not

have music playing, or a psalm being chanted. This is not because we are a small parish and do not have the means to develop a full choir or schola, it is because silence has value and beauty in itself. This is needed even more today than it was in days past when it was more common; precisely because of the noisiness of society (physically and spiritually). In God's house there is never "dead air"; there is "living silence", offered up for our spiritual benefit, and for God's glory.

This contribution is available at <http://bewareyondragons.blogspot.com/2017/02/silence.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

Nineveh 90 [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]



I found out about this about a week ago.

This starts **Monday, February 13th, 2017**

If you are reading this late, you can still do this--just start when you can!

90 DAYS
Nineveh 90
START FEBRUARY 13, 2017

CONQUER VICE
Grow in Virtue
PENANCE & REPARATION

- WEAR THE BROWN SCAPULAR •
- MINIMUM MONTHLY CONFESSION •
- FIND AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER •
- FIND A SUPPORT GROUP •

DISCOVER AND ROOT OUT YOUR PREDOMINANT FAULT AND ANY HABITUAL SIN

NO TO SELF
sweets or eating between meals
alcohol, soda or sweetened drinks
television or movies
music that does not lift soul to God
unnecessary computer time
meat on wed & fri

YES TO GOD
daily rosary, angelus
morning offering & night prayers
20-30 minutes mental prayer
daily exercise
seven hours of sleep
fast on wed & fri

54 DAY ROSARY NOVENA FEBRUARY 13 TO APRIL 7
33 DAY PREPARATION FOR CONSECRATION APRIL 10 TO MAY 12
MARIAN CONSECRATION MAY 13, 2017
100th Anniversary of the Holy Family of Fatima

more details and to sign up go to nineveh90.com

(I right-clicked on this image above, printed it and put it on my fridge)

This is what I saw. I immediately responded to the person that posted it, "I'm in!"

I have been wanting to do something special for the 100 year anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima for a while now and thought this *sounded* perfect.

At first.

Well, it *sounds HARD!*

As I read through it,

I thought to myself, "OK, this works, yes, I can do this, ummm, this would be hard, this I could do if I didn't have a husband, this would be easy if it were just me.

Wait a minute! I have to get 7 hours of sleep?

AND



My coffee? I have to give up my coffee? (my breakfast) I *cannot* give this part up.

I don't know if this is for me."

Then, I went to the website

I looked around, watched some of the videos,
and talked online with other women that want to do it.

I have a friend

[, Nicole,](#)

that started a Facebook group

(if you wish to join that group, please email me first! jamiejo99 (at) gmail.com)

Talking with other women, we are just taking it as a way to come closer to Jesus,
to bring our hearts and souls closer to God, through prayer and sacrifice.

We need to do the things we think we can.

Now to look at it all, to do it all, well, it looks *very* overwhelming and a sure-fire way to fail.

No one wants anyone to fail!

I'm picking some of the things that I'm going to do.

(or at least *try* to do)

Over this past week, I've realized the biggest and hardest thing for me is going to be getting to bed early enough to get up early enough.

Because, you see, my problem is I stay up *way too late*, and then sleep in *way too late*.

The problem with that is,

If I get up when the kids are already up, (8am)

then, I won't exercise, even if I put my exercise clothes on right away with the hopes of exercising. I won't make it to daily Mass because if I get up late, I won't have time to shower and teach school all before noon Mass.

See how my day really needs to start early in order for this to work for me?

So THIS WILL BE MY FOCUS.

GOING TO BED EARLY ENOUGH TO GET UP EARLY ENOUGH.

I think I'm going to call it,

"Early down, early up"

Wait a minute. I think there is already a saying that says something about birds and worms and something about rising....oh, well.

EARLY DOWN

EARLY UP!

90 DAYS
Nineveh 90
START FEBRUARY 13, 2017

CONQUER VICE
Grow in Virtue
PENANCE & REPARATION

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NO YES

TO SELF
sweets or eating between meals
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music that does not lift soul to God
unnecessary computer time
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TO GOD
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10th Anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima

more details and to sign up go to nineveh90.com

Again, this is just what *I'm* doing!

YOU can do what works for you!

- Wear Brown Scapular--Check!
- Monthly Confession--Check!
- Accountability partner? (this one kind of goes with the next one!)
- Support group? I've got these in the Facebook Group

[HERE](#)

but if you want to join, please email me first (jamiejo99 (at) gmail.com)

The NO's

- no sweets or eating between meals
- no alcohol
- no soda (this means Diet Cherry Coke Zero....I'll try! I'll try....which gives me an out, right?)
- no sweet drinks (if this means my coffee, then I'm not doing this one)
- no television (we don't have any) or movies. This one will be hard. Tom and I watch a show each night, I'm just going to not watch anything extra. Just with Tom and just family things with the kids.
- no music that does not lift the soul to God--this I can do, but, there's a "but" to this one, I'm going to use my music on my ipod to workout with, because working out is in the "YES" section. All other times, I can listen to Christian music no problem!
- no unnecessary computer time. Hmmm....bye-bye to Facebook. Except to check my Living Rosary Group, the Nineveh 90 group, check messages and maybe post some inspirational posts. I also get my daily Mass readings online in my inbox, and Bishop Robert Barron Gospel reflections, and a few other things that are Catholic and prayer involved. See how sometimes we pick the wrong "good"? It's good to pray and it's good to pick prayerful things to do online, but, going back to the way it was before online resources might be better. I think I will definitely need to maybe set a time limit on my online time. That will work too.
- no meat on Wednesday and Friday. Easy. On the Nineveh 90 site, they suggested fasting on those days on bread and water or doing maybe a liquid diet that day. I'm going to *try* to do the liquid diet thing on those days. Coffee in the morning (see above picture), with my V-8 and then a smoothie for supper. I can do this.

The Yes's

- yes to Daily Rosary
- yes to the Angelus I'm going to try to do this one 3x/day but not necessary at the specific times, the traditional times, you see, this is where we get nit-picky and end up failing and feeling bad about ourselves. I'm going to

try

to pray this beautiful prayer 3x/day, morning, noon (lunchtime) and night. Angelus is

[HERE](#)

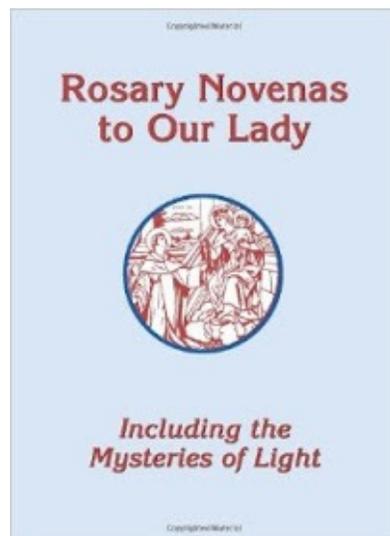
- yes to the Morning offering: O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all our associates, and in particular for the intentions of our Holy Father for this month.

- yes to 20-60 minutes of mental prayer. This I can do before/after Mass or in Adoration. Now here is one of those things that we can't put so much pressure on ourselves, we lead busy lives. It is a sacrifice but if, for some reason, I've driven kids to, I don't know, piano, choir, unicycling, and work all in one afternoon, well, maybe my work that day, as a mom is my mental prayer, my offering. We need to be flexible and not give up. If I fail on this, I have tomorrow to try again. I think this one might prove to be one of the harder things.
- yes to daily exercise. On the Nineveh 90 site they encourage this to be more intense during the 90 days, but, for me, if I'm exercising daily, well, that is intense enough for me. Period.
- yes, and this one hurts to say and I cringe, because I know it will be hard, yes to 7 hours of sleep.
- yes fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, liquid diet, see above in the "no's".

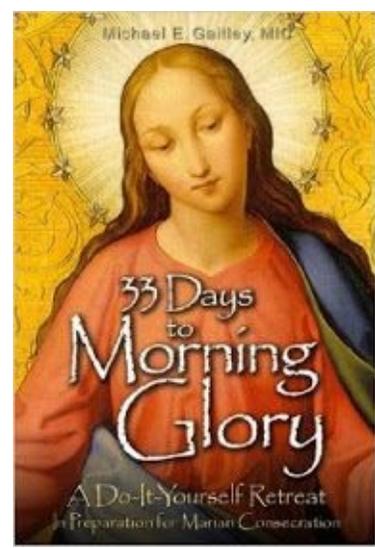
54 day rosary novena February 13 to April 7.

This is the book I use for this,

[HERE](#)



33 day preparation for Consecration to Jesus through Mary. April 10 to May 12 Marian Consecration on May 13th, 2017, The 100 year Anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima!



I'll be doing *this* consecration. It's simple, only need to read a couple pages daily.

What do you think?

Do you want to join me?

If you don't want to join the Facebook group, you can bookmark this post and we can discuss in the comments or you can email me! (jamiejo99 (at) gmail.com)

One question that has been on my heart though, is, what will I do for Lent?

What will I be able to do that puts Lent in its proper place?

How can I make sure this Nineveh 90 does not *take away* from Lent, but that it *adds*?

So far, my answer is The Divine Mercy Chaplet daily at 3pm if possible.

Another thing I have been thinking is maybe adding reading *every day*

to the little kids. I admit, it doesn't happen every day anymore. life gets busy.

Lent might be the time to get back to what's most important.

My 10 year old has wanted me to teach her how to sew on my sewing machine for months now.

Lent might be the perfect time to do that.

In a prayerful spirit, I ask, what are your thoughts?

EARLY DOWN

EARLY UP!

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2017/02/nineveh-90.html>
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| [Contents](#) |

God's Mercy is Scandalous??? [at Catholic Conundrum]



The author Fr. James Mallon has been known for this statement. The first time I read it, I did a double take. Scandalous? What? It seems to me that God's mercy and scandal should be pointing in the exact opposite direction. But then I began to think about this crazy concept.

God's mercy. Scandal.

God's mercy....Scandal....

Then it dawned on me, as it probably already has for you.

God's mercy = Scandal

It actually equals it! In our world, God's mercy became such a radical concept. It differed and continues to differ from our human, natural predispositions to mercy. Why? Well, to put it bluntly, God's mercy just isn't fair. At least not in our human-need-for-justice kind of fair.

In my house, every day is a test of fairness. Claims to the lack of it abound regularly.

"She hasn't cleaned as much as I have!"

"I fed chickens two times in a row. It's not fair! It's time for someone else to do it!"

At one time we even had a serious family discussion on why everyone's dishes jobs were not getting completed consistently. One of the kids said that in order to fill the dishwasher, the other person had to empty it. The claim was that the emptying often was not occurring, so the filler couldn't do her job.

Then my husband posed the question: "Depending on the circumstances, why couldn't you do both jobs? We don't want to promote lack of responsibility, but sometimes the reason is beyond control and it would be a great mercy."

I think I could have used a knife to cut through the silence at his question. I didn't have to read their minds to know what they were thinking..."We can't do that because it's not fair!"

However, their faces also revealed a light dawning. What their dad had put on the table was God's mercy. His mercy was difficult, challenging, and completely unfair to our humanness. But that was how they knew the difference.

God's mercy breaks what has become the mold of mercy in this world. And the breaking of this mold is scandalous. And, honestly, for the sake of my soul, I praise God for this scandalous mercy. There is so much undeserved mercy that He gives me every single day.

I would venture to say that His greatest example of this is in showing me that although I could never deserve it, I can someday enter into eternity with Him.

Wow. Can't get more merciful than that!

Sometime this week, let's take advantage of an opportunity to show God's form of mercy to someone.

I pray that God brings one to light and gives us the grace to be a radical example of His love in that moment!

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The Unexpected Confirmation Saint: One of God's Mercies

My oldest son will be [confirmed in the Catholic Church](#) at the end of the month. The link in the previous sentence explains the sacrament in a thorough, easy-to-understand fashion. Regarding names chosen at confirmation, it explains that:

“At Baptism, the name was chosen without the child’s consent because the child was too little to make the selection alone. Now, in Confirmation, another name — in addition to the first and middle names — can be added, or the original baptismal name may be used. It must be a Christian name, though, such as one of the canonized saints of the Church or a hero from the Bible.”

[As an aside, I highly recommend [Catholicism for Dummies](#) by Rev. John Trigilio, Jr. and Rev. Kenneth Brighenti, whether you are a “dummy” about Catholicism or not. Fully orthodox and plainly written, it’s a great reference.]

At my own confirmation, my class was encouraged to stick with our baptismal names. Therefore, I chose “Mary,” which is my middle name. While it’s certainly nothing that has kept me awake at night, I’ve always felt cheated by that choice. Because I had already been given the name Mary (and because Mary is the Mother of God), I already had a devotion to her. Confirmation was an opportunity to cultivate a new, unique relationship with another brother or sister in Christ, one already part of the communion of saints.

This sense of being cheated became keen as I witnessed my son’s selection of a confirmation saint. After mentioning for the past year that he’d likely choose St. John Neumann, a Philadelphia bishop with connections to our diocese and parish, he informed me he’d chosen St. Boniface.

Oh.

I knew nothing of St. Boniface beyond his name.

My son said he simply chose St. Boniface because they shared a German heritage. Not a very profound reason, but that’s okay.

And then he began to research St. Boniface. And that is when I began to thank God for His tender little mercies. These little glimmers that nothing falls outside the scope of His loving care. That all is part of His Divine plan; even small choices made with our own free will.

While writing a short paper about St. Boniface, my son read aloud to me. I stopped him after a couple of sentences when he told me St. Boniface was the patron of the Diocese of Fulda.

“Fulda? That’s where Grandma’s grandparents were from.”

Hmm. Isn’t that interesting?

“He founded or restored the Diocese of Bavaria? That’s where Pap Pap’s family was from.”

St. Boniface is also the patron saint of brewers, which pleased my husband, who has been doing some home brewing. He, however, is not the only brewer in the family as my son has taken to brewing sodas.

We can also thank St. Boniface for the Christmas tree. When he came across a Saxon tribe worshipping a Norse deity in the form of an oak tree, he, well, let me quote this because it's just so kick-ass:

“Boniface walked up to the tree, removed his shirt, took up an axe, and without a word he hacked down the six-foot wide wooden god. Boniface stood on the trunk, and asked, ‘How stands your mighty god? My God is stronger than he.’” (CatholicSaints.info)

St. Boniface [then directed attention to a little fir tree growing nearby](#), saying:

“This little tree, a young child of the forest, shall be your holy tree tonight. It is the wood of peace . . . It is the sign of an endless life, for its leaves are ever green. See how it points upward to heaven. Let this be called the tree of the Christ-child; gather about it, not in the wild wood, but in your own homes; there it will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts and rites of kindness.”

I watched my son's eyes light as he read about his patron. Wiseguy that he is, in answer to the question “How can you emulate your patron saint?”, he promptly replied, “I can tear down pagan temples and build churches there.” Which is something else St. Boniface did.

(I love the boldness of saints! So often in our politically-correct world, we're cowed into a cowardly meekness that goes well-beyond Christian civility and kindness, burying the Truth in the process.)

It's my prayer that this English-born bishop, martyred in 754 in what is now the Netherlands, may be a lifelong guide and intercessor for my son. Because I'm certain that it was not by accident that he was chosen.

Do you have a confirmation saint story to share? An unexpected connection to a saint?

This contribution is available at <http://www.carolynastfalk.com/2017/02/06/unexpected-confirmation-saint-one-gods-mercies/>
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You have dirt on your forehead [at On the Road to Damascus]



“You have dirt on your forehead.”

I remember saying this to the Catholics who came to work after receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday. How little I understood what that mark meant.

Ash Wednesday begins the Christian season of Lent. Lent is the forty days before Easter and signifies the forty days Jesus spent fasting in the desert before he began his public ministry. The word lent comes from an Old English word meaning lengthening, as in the days are lengthening and the rebirth of spring is coming. That is what Easter is – a rebirth. Death has been conquered and we are all reborn in Christ’s resurrection.

Lent is a time for fasting, alms giving, and penance. In ancient times Christians would put on sackcloth and ashes as a sign for all to see that they were being penitent. Out of this tradition many Christians today start the season of Lent by having a cross of ashes traced on their foreheads with the words;

“Remember man, you are dust and to dust you will return.” Or,

“Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

Lent is a time for fasting. We do not fast because God likes it when we suffer. God does not want us to suffer nor is he impressed when we do. We fast to show God our love for him and to strengthen our wills. Everything I have belongs to God. I am just a steward of these things for him. The only thing that is truly mine is my free will. When I deny myself something pleasurable I exercise that free will. The

devil hates it when we exercise because exercise makes us stronger to resist temptation. Satan loves spiritual couch potatoes.

Lent is also a time for alms giving – giving to the poor. If we are fasting we have extra we can offer to those who do not have these pleasures. We are to be more charitable during this season, giving not only money and food to those in need but our time as well. We can give alms by serving those not as fortunate as ourselves.

Most importantly, Lent is a time of penance. We are to look at our lives and be consciously aware of where we fail in our love for our Lord. We are to pray more and seek reconciliation. It is this purpose that the second person of God took on flesh and became the man known as Jesus of Nazareth. In his perfect love for us he offered up his divine blood as the payment for death brought on by sin.

Lent is our time in the desert, to prepare for the greatest gift of love ever given. When an important guest is coming we clean the house for them. During Lent we clean our souls to prepare for the arrival of the most important guest who will ever visit. We prepare to receive the risen Lord on Easter Sunday.

My heart is full because the tomb is empty.

So today I have dirt on my forehead as an outward sign to all that I am a Christian and that the season to prepare for Jesus is at hand.

*“Jesus said to his disciples:
“Take care not to perform righteous deeds
in order that people may see them;
otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.
When you give alms,
do not blow a trumpet before you,
as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets
to win the praise of others.
Amen, I say to you,
they have received their reward.
But when you give alms,
do not let your left hand know what your right is doing,
so that your almsgiving may be secret.
And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

*“When you pray,
do not be like the hypocrites,
who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners
so that others may see them.
Amen, I say to you,
they have received their reward.
But when you pray, go to your inner room,
close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.
And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

“When you fast,

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

This contribution is available at http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2016/02/you-have-dirt-on-your-forehead_10.html
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The Triune God came in the Person of Christ [at Catholic365]

Concerning the Trinity, some people ridicule it because they can't understand it. Recently, someone said to me:

The Triune God so loved the world that:

- 1- They came Themselves, or
- 2- They sent ONE of Themselves

Enlighten me; which IS it?

Although I doubt that he really cares, I responded to him as follows.

The Triune God came to us in the Person of Christ.

This is a mystery. But a mystery to which God has given us insight here on earth. Let me explain it logically.

You and I share a human nature, do we not? Yet we are distinct persons. So what's the difference between us and the Holy Trinity.

Well, the difference is our limited nature. Human nature is such that we are limited. We are restricted to our space. You, in yours and I, in mine. But Divine Nature is such that it can't be limited. The attributes of Divine Nature is such that it is Eternal, Omniscient and Omnipresent.

What does that mean? Well, that means that there can only be One God. God is eternal and therefore there is no "room" for any other God. If God were not eternal, then there could be many gods. But there is only one because the Divine Nature is eternal.

What about the persons? How can there be three Divine Persons? What is Person? A person is distinguished by an attribute that can't be shared. You and I share a human nature but we don't share a name, a personality, a body, a mind and many other characteristics. What is it that the Persons of the Holy Trinity do not share with one another. An identity, a role, a relationship.

The Father is in the Son, but the Father is not the Son.

The Son is in the Father but the Son is not the Father.

The Holy Spirit is in the Father and the Son, but the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

Three persons SHARE one Divine Nature.

BUT, you say, those three Persons aren't like you and I.

Correct. Each one of those Persons is eternal. We are finite. Each one of those Persons is God. We are human.

You might also say, but you and I share the human nature with many human beings. We are talking about a Trinity, not a multiplicity.

True. But the Trinity is revealed as such. If God had revealed a Quintity or even a Centurionity whatever, that is what we would have to accept. God has revealed He is a Trinity, nothing less and nothing more. Therefore we believe and accept it, although the Mystery is almost beyond the ability of the unaided mind to comprehend.

Then there is the mathematical response.

Certainly, $1+1+1$ is equal to three. That is only partially true however, because there are Three Divine Persons. But the three persons are also consubstantial. That is, they share the same nature. Since they share the same nature, then it is also correct to use this mathematical formula, $1 \times 1 \times 1 = \text{one}$.

And, we can explain the Holy Trinity by objective observation of the nature of all being.

A look at nature will show how the entire world reflects the Holy Trinity. If we look at space we see that everything is three dimensional. Everything has width, height and depth. Yet everything is seamlessly one. This is a reflection of the Holy Trinity.

If we consider time, we see that time has past, present and future. Yet where do we divide it? When does the past become the present and the present become the past? Time is also seamless. Time is one.

Everything in nature exists is three dimensional and everything in nature dwells in time. The Scripture clearly says:

Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Therefore, all of nature reflects the Blessed Trinity. All of nature, reflects God:

Romans 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholic365.com/article/6005/the-triune-god-came-in-the-person-of-christ.html>
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Building a Long-Term, Successful Joy-Filled Marriage [at Plot Line and Sinker (Ellen Gable, Author)]



Photo courtesy B & K Hrkach, Photography by Tim Baklinski

My recent [article at Catholic Mom](#):

Recently, when we were at a restaurant celebrating Valentine’s Day, we asked our waitress to guess how long we’ve been married. She guessed 20 years. I responded, “35 years.”

“Wow! How is that possible in this day and age? And you guys look so happy. Well, good for you.”

She didn’t wait to hear our answer for how it was possible, but as I reflected on the reasons, it became clear that the most of the long-term successful and happy marriages we know about have the following practices in common:

1. Pray Together and Attend Mass Together

Marital prayer is an ideal way to keep a couple emotionally, spiritually and physically close. We also try to say a daily Rosary together for our children (one decade for each son.)

The conjugal embrace is itself a prayer. With their bodies, husband and wife renew their wedding vows. Becoming one with our beloved spouse is the ultimate spiritual, physical and emotional experience. We become one flesh...so much so that sometimes, nine months later, we must give the representation of that oneness a name.

2. Use NFP (and throw away the contraception)

No, I’m not saying that couples should have as many children as possible. But what I am saying is that for the marital embrace to be honest and life-giving and joy-filled, it must be free, total, faithful and fruitful. **Natural Family Planning allows a couple to love each other as God loves: freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully.** NFP couples chart the wife’s fertility signs and, if avoiding pregnancy, abstain in the fertile time. They are not using devices; they are giving themselves fully and they are open to

children with each and every act of marital relations.

[See my previous post on the Theology of the Body in a Nutshell.](#)

[For more information on NFP, check out my previous post on NFP.](#)

3. **Treat Each Other With Respect and Kindness, Communication**

I know a few couples who fight constantly. These same couples brag that they have a great sex life. Well, they may have a lot of “good feelings” but when a couple is not getting along in their day-to-day life, sex, even ‘good’ sex, is not going to fix that. What about the husband who treats his wife in a condescending, critical manner, then expects her to be ready and willing to engage in the marital embrace . . . or a wife who constantly nags her husband, then wants him to be affectionate to her? Communicate deeply with one another; treat each other with kindness, respect and love.

4. **No Pornography**

Some secular marriage counselors recommend that a couple use porn to “spice up their sex life.” Instead of “enhancing” a marital sex life, viewing sexually explicit videos has the potential of destroying a marriage. St. John Paul II said: “. . . the problem with pornography is not that it shows *too much* of the person, but that it shows far *too little*.” **Porn trains people to be selfish about their sexuality, not selfless. It teaches them to think about sex as something they take, not something they give. Any behavior that causes a person to be self-centered or selfish is never good for marriage.** And . . . pornography can be **highly addictive**. Mary Anne Layden, co-director of the [Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program](#) at the [University of PA’s Center for Cognitive Therapy](#), called porn the “most concerning thing to psychological health that I know of existing today. . . . pornography addicts have a more difficult time recovering from their addiction than cocaine addicts, since coke users can get the drug out of their system, but pornographic images stay in the brain forever.”

5. **Date Night and Romantic Dinners (And Have Fun Together!)**

I enjoy romantic, candlelit dinners with my husband. Getting out and enjoying each other’s presence is a wonderful way to relax and enjoy time together. We’ve always tried to have a date night even (and especially) when the kids were small. When we were younger and had limited finances, sometimes our date night would occur in our own kitchen or at a park for a picnic. We often played board games together. And I have always enjoyed my husband’s strange sense of humor (he still makes me laugh!)

Why candlelit dinners? Candlelight represents sacrificial love (a light burns brightly while destroying the candle). Some Renaissance painters used to put a single candlelight into paintings to symbolize Christ’s presence.

6. **Focus on Your Spouse/Sacrificial Love**

“Intense love does not measure; it just gives.” This quote from St. Teresa of Calcutta is an ideal quote for marriage. Marriage isn’t all about “me.” It’s about “us.” Marriage is all about sacrificial love. What are your spouse’s needs? Think of his/her needs in all facets of your relationship. One thought I try to have when I wake up every morning is “What can I do to make my husband’s life easier today?” If he’s thinking the same thing, one can only imagine how much easier life will be for both spouses. Also,

notes in your husband's lunch, special messages left on his workbench or on her desk, daily texts are all ways to intimately connect during the day and let your spouse know you are thinking of him/her. The important thing is to focus on the other in all things.

7. **The Importance of Marital Intimacy**

Marital intimacy can seem impossible when a couple's children are small. A couple must be willing to "think outside the box." Attachment parenting and the family bed can usually be challenging. Consider another location for marital intimacy. Mom too tired? Perhaps Dad can take the kids out to the park while Mom gets a well-deserved rest after dinner. Dad too stressed? Mom can have a hot relaxing bath waiting for Dad when he arrives home. Even when the couple gets older and children are teens or adults, it can still be a challenge to find time for marital intimacy. The spontaneity of early marriage eventually gives way to planning for intimacy.

8. **Always Try to Give 100%**

A joy-filled marriage is not 50-50. As Christian spouses, both should try to be reaching for 100%. When we were dating, my husband asked me, "Ellie, how hard do you try to be perfect? In other words, what percentage are you aiming for?"

I thought about it for a moment and said, "Oh, I guess I'm shooting for 80%. After all, no one's perfect."

His response surprised me: "Ellie, if you're only trying for 80%, do you think you'll ever get there? You may only reach 60%. But if you try for 100%, you may get to 80%." After a while, it made sense to me. Neither of us are perfect, but we are trying our best.

Do you want to have a long-term, successful and joy-filled marriage? While there are no guarantees, couples who pray and attend Mass together, use NFP, treat each other with respect and kindness, avoid pornography, have frequent romantic dinners/date nights, have fun together, are self-sacrificial and try their best will have the greatest chance of having a joy-filled marriage.

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If You are Anti-Semitic, You are Anti-Catholic/Christian [at It Makes Sense to Me]

IT MAKES SENSE TO ME

By Larry Peterson

I have come to realize that I have changed. I am no longer the same cradle Catholic that espoused the brotherhood of Judaism. I am not the same because the words I was using then were never really heartfelt. I did believe them but I did not understand. Nor did I truly "feel" them. How could I? That all changed five years ago when I discovered my Jewish heritage.

I am a Catholic man. I love my faith and use it frequently as my steadfast companion, always ready to lean on it. Today I find myself actually sickened by the wave of anti-Semitism sweeping our nation and other parts of the world. My own people are being defiled by those consumed by a hatred towards people they do not know.

Our maternal Grandmother was an immigrant from Austria who arrived here as a teenager in 1908. We kids grew up with Grandma living with us and we took her for granted. We gave it no thought as to "where did she come from?" She was just always there.

Those questions would have come after we grew up a bit. But she died first and the questions were never asked. Mom and dad had passed on too so we could not ask them either (you can see that story [here](#)

<http://amzn.to/1T2soNh>

).

The thing is this. There was never any "grandpa". There was never a mention of him at all. As we grew older and wiser and became very smart teenagers, we began to question the story behind the missing grandpa. Years went by with no information and the search became virtually non-existent.

But you never know how things will go. Lo and behold, about five years ago I received a message on Facebook (kudos to Facebook) from none other than my long lost cousin, Vicki. She had been on a "quest" and located me. Like dominoes perfectly colliding, my sister and brothers and cousins all reconnected. Now, to the point of this essay.



Vicki had been wondering about our missing Grandpa too. She also had a tenaciousness that none of her siblings or cousins possessed. She had plunged into the murky waters of genealogy and found our long, lost grandfather. His name was Isidore Schul and he was a Hebrew man from Krakow. Our maternal grandfather was Jewish. The immigration and naturalization papers all confirm this. He made it to America in 1907.



I have written a number of times how the very first Catholic/Christians were Jewish. Jesus was a Jewish man. His mom, our sweet Blessed Mother, was Jewish. His step-dad, St. Joseph was Jewish, his apostles were Jewish and many of His followers were Jewish. Many of the first Jewish/Christians were killed for following and proclaiming Jesus Christ. They were martyrs for their new faith.

Understanding my heritage caused my transformation. I now embrace in my own heart the concept of my Jewish connection. The fact is, my maternal grandfather was a Hebrew man from Krakow. He was the only one on his side of OUR family who made it to America. What we have discovered is that the rest of OUR relatives from his side died in the Holocaust. We have no way of knowing about the fate of our great grandparents, Simon and Regina Schul. Either they died before the death camps began or in one of them.

During the Holocaust supposedly civilized people, both men and women, willingly went about participating in the systematic annihilation of close to 12 million people, including six million Jews.

Their leaders wanted to eliminate Judaism from the face of the earth. And the "good" non-Jewish, Aryan citizens did as they were told. They followed "orders". They almost succeeded in their quest.

I do not understand this hate. I know the anti-Semitism will continue unabated. I know the elimination of Christianity through torture and mass murder in the Middle-East will continue because of hatred. Thomas Merton once said,

“If you want to study the social and political history of modern nations, study hell.”

I believe that is true. Satan rules hell. Satan put himself there and his followers plunged right in with him. When I bring Holy Communion to someone the first prayer I say is, "We come to know and believe that God is Love. And he who abides in love abides in God and God in him."

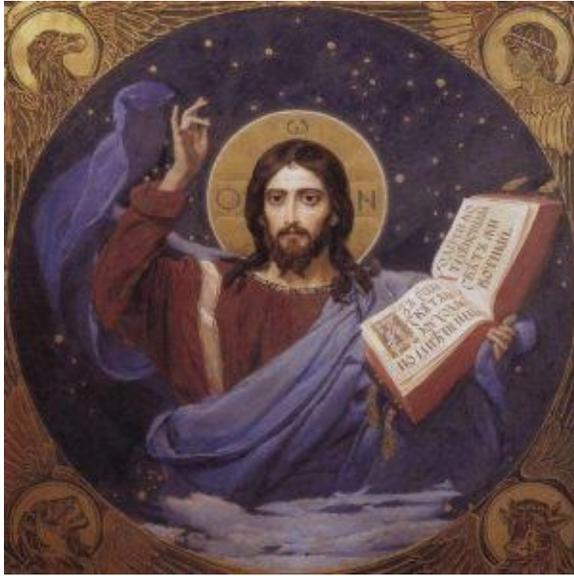
We must never forget that Satan is hate. Anyone who chooses to embrace "hate" embraces Satan and Satan him. This war between Good and Evil will continue until the God of Love decides to end it. In the meantime we must fight for the God of Love, no matter what the cost.

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Christian Mysticism and its Counterfeit



A Reflection on the Vatican's document on *New Age*

Spirituality.

The Vatican document on New Age Spirituality is subtitled, *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life – A Christian reflection on the New Age*. Published in 2003, it insists that a clear understanding of our own tradition is the best antidote to alien influences that have already led many astray. This is particularly true of the theory and practice of Mystical Theology where ignorance of their own tradition has led “many people to be convinced that there is no harm in ‘borrowing’ from the wisdom of the East”. The document continues by warning that, “*The example of Transcendental Meditation (TM) should make Christians cautious.*”

In the Western Christian tradition, a mystic is a person who not only knows with the eye of faith that God loves them but one who tangibly experiences that love as it rests and then rises within them to degrees of intensity that are totally dependent on the grace of God. The first Mystic was Christ himself. He was continually aware of his Father's love as it possessed every part of his personality. It was this experience that was the source of the inner maturity and security that made him the most loving and loveable person to have walked on the face of this earth. When those who were called to follow him came to know him, they came to know and love the God who possessed him, and who manifested himself through all he said and did. Without this love acting within and working through them, Christ knew that his followers would be incapable of doing anything, let alone live the otherwise impossible standards and ideals that he had taught them to observe for. “*Without me, you have no power to do anything*” (John 15:5).

Christianity, therefore, is primarily a mysticism because no one can possibly live the moral teaching of the Gospels unless they are given the power to do so. That is why the deep personal prayer that opens a believer to receive and experience the divine life is not only important but essential.

The second-generation of Christians who did not know Christ in his earthly life learnt from the oral and written memoirs of the first-generation Christians how to come to know and love him as they had done. The first meditation manual was the Scriptures, most particularly those texts that introduced them to Christ. When in later years ordinary people were unable to turn to the Scriptures through illiteracy, or

because native languages had not developed sufficiently to produce the necessary translation, or because many of the first translations were unacceptable to the Church, alternatives had to be found. Books were written on the life of Christ, meditation manuals were composed and devotions were devised like the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, and the exercises of St Ignatius to open to those deprived of reading the sacred texts at first hand, the opportunity of coming to know and love Christ.

All the great spiritual writers show that it is through prayerful reflection on the life and death of Christ, by whatever means, that knowledge gradually leads to love. Then believers begin to express their love and gratitude in the language of love. Finally, as in human loving, words become less and less necessary as all they want to do is to gaze at the One whose love begins to envelop them. Quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2705-2719), this Vatican document, reiterates that, “*Christian prayer is not an exercise in self-contemplation, stillness and self-emptying, but a dialogue of love.*”

At the beginning, this first stage of prayer is often called first fervour because it can be highly emotional and spiritually fulfilling. However, it cannot last. A profound purification must now take place to create a sufficient likeness in believers to prepare them for the union for which they yearn. Sadly, ignorance means that the clear majority give up regular reflective prayer at this stage, but for those who persevere through the ensuing dryness and aridity, a profound experience of God’s presence begins to envelop them.

Summing up the teaching of the Desert Fathers, Evagrius Ponticus (AD 345 -399) calls this period of aridity, *Accidie* and the experience of presence that follows it, *Apatheia*. St John of the Cross details the characteristics of *Accidie* in *The Dark Night of the Soul* whilst St Teresa of Avila does likewise for *Apatheia* in her masterwork *Interior Castle*. Through a sort of spiritual hide and seek, believers are purified by the alternating experiences of absence and presence that convinces them that it is God and not they who are in control of their spiritual destiny. At times they are cast into the depth of all but despair, at other times they are raised to the heights of ecstatic joy and to almost every state between the two before purification is complete. Then, what the early Fathers called *Theosis* or *Divinisation*, and their spiritual descendants called *The Transforming Union* or *The Mystical Marriage* takes place, enveloping the whole person, body, and spirit as they are possessed ever more fully by the same Spirit who possessed Christ

In the light of this brief résumé it is immediately possible to distinguish authentic Christian prayer from its counterfeit. Firstly, in the Christian tradition we are taught how to come to know and love God as embodied in Jesus Christ, by prayerfully reflecting on the sacred scriptures or through other traditional methods of meditation, not by using mantras to by-pass the mind. In the Western Christian tradition, meditation primarily means prayerful reflection on the person of Christ, to enter into him through love. In the far East, meditation primarily means the repetition of mantras.

If using these mantras leads to a certain inner stillness, peace, or what is sometimes called mindfulness, it may well contribute to a certain self-generated psychological equilibrium, but it must never be confused with the true mystical contemplation of God. This cannot be generated in a matter of minutes, but only in years of selfless giving in dryness and aridity and is then a pure gift of God. That is why this Vatican document insists:-

“*There is a tendency to confuse psychology and spirituality. Many of the meditation techniques now used are not prayer. They are often a good preparation for prayer, but no more, even if they lead to a more pleasant state of mind or bodily comfort*”

The notion that believers can come to experience profound mystical contemplation by their own unaided endeavour is to fall into the old heresy of *Pelagianism* – the belief that human beings can come to experience the presence of God within by what are in effect self-generated psychological techniques, or if you like, by various forms of mental yoga.

To appeal to the writings of John Cassian and to other Desert Fathers as confirmation that the Western Christian tradition teaches the use of mantras in the same way as the Indian tradition, is quite simply nonsense. This should be evident to any open-minded reader.

In the same way, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a favourite of those trying to justify the use of mantras. The author of this mystical work however, is not writing for beginners, but for those who after successfully meditating on the Life of Christ are languishing in *Accidie* or in the *Dark Night* when their minds and hearts are being drawn towards God in such a way that they have no desire nor any ability to meditate as before. The Author of *The Cloud* suggests the repetition of a word, not as a mantra, but as a practical device to help keep the heart and mind fixed as it were “*in naked intent*” upon God, not to generate inner psychological states where the attention is not placed upon God but on oneself. Using medieval symbolism, he encourages the believer to use a word such as, “*God*” or “*Love*” for instance, as a spiritual spear and shield. When used as a spear the word helps the heart’s desire penetrate the “*Cloud of Unknowing*” while at the same time parrying the distractions and placing them under what he calls, the “*Cloud of Forgetting*.”

The Cloud merely presents to medieval readers an ancient form of prayer, first referred to by Abbott Macarius who taught those of his disciples who were afflicted by *Accidie*, the use of a short prayer to do for them what the author of *The Cloud* wanted to do for his readers. He taught them to cry out to God “*To the rescue*,” or call out the name, “*Jesus*” so that he would come to the rescue. This is the origin of what later came to be called the *Jesus Prayer*. The *Prayer of Faith* was the collective title later given to various short prayers used most especially by those who languished in *Accidie* or in *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

To suggest that these prayers were meant to be used as mantras, as used in the Indian tradition, shows a total ignorance of the Christian mystical tradition. Hopefully this Vatican document will help to alert people of good will to the heinous heresy of Pelagianism that is once again being spread amongst us, often by people of good will who are nevertheless deceiving others as they have been deceived themselves.

First published on [Catholic Stand](#)

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God's Time, Not Mine [at Quiet Consecration]

Trusting in God is probably the weakest aspect of my relationship with Him. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, I can find myself lost in the worry about my future and in potential despair of ever finding a way to serve God and support myself. I want to trust Him....He has never let me down...but it would be so much easier if we could just have an agenda planning session once a week. Maybe after Mass on Sunday.

We would sit at my kitchen table, sharing coffee and some pastry. God the Father would lay before me His plan for me for say, the upcoming week. I would review it carefully and make some suggestions. He would consider those, perhaps make some changes to the plan that incorporate those suggestions, and we would smile at each other. Both on the same page, I would then turn my will and my life over to His care, in complete confidence.

And of course I know it does not work that way....and of COURSE I understand that His plan for me is always going to be better than my plan for me and YES, I get it - God does know what Happiness Is for Leslie.

But still....

Lack of trust in my Higher Power is hardly a character defect particular to me. Most human creatures have this same defect and while I hear us say out loud that we trust Him and know He has our back, I also know that often, when we speak those words, we are doing the equivalent of whistling in the dark as we walk past the graveyard. We are warding off our fears.

Sometimes we are not even subtle about it. I have said a variation on this:

I know that God has someone in mind for me and if I just do His Will and work on me, He will put that person in my life and I will fall in love with Mr. Right. We will live happily ever after....I know this...because I trust God.

Of course, we do not want to entertain the idea that God's Will for us may be for us to remain celibate and single...no, that could not possibly be right. Even when we SAY we believe this we usually qualify it to make ourselves feel better....or we try to comfort someone by saying, "Oh I know....the minute you just put that part of your life into God's Hands you will feel better...because He will put the right person there...."

Maybe.

Maybe not.

Maybe, and I have written about this before, trusting God is being willing to accept that His Will for me may not look even remotely like what I dream my life should be it may be that, instead of what I want, I get to live a life that is what HE wants me to live and therein find my own happiness.

For example?

I have been trying to get a job closer to home for the past two years. I have interviewed over and over and over again. Over and over and over again I have been turned down for jobs I am immensely qualified for that pay good salaries and allow me to live in relative splendor in terms of financial security.

I kept trying, but I had pretty much given up. I surrendered to the idea that God had something else in mind for me and I achieved the inner calm I needed to protect my sobriety and deepen my relationship with my Higher Power.

In the past six months things have changed.

A job opening appeared at my Parish. It pays about 1/2 of what I make now but it is 10 minutes from home and it is working with Catholic Curriculum for children.

I applied for it...just for fun.

My boss reneged on her promise of letting me work flex hours. I was told I would have to go to a regular 8 to 5 schedule and there was no recourse for me to appeal this decision.

I looked at the possibility of retirement and got the numbers. I knew it would mean a pretty meager existence but I also knew I could not live my life and travel two hundred miles in a day to my job working the hours they now demanded I work.

I was offered the position at my parish.

I added the gross amounts from pension and my salary together - and I will be making about 50.00 dollars more a month.

Today, I understand what God wanted me to do all those months and what He was preparing for me. I will say that, for the first time in my life, I surrendered faster. The fight was shorter, and it did not hurt as much.

Today, I believe that God knows what happiness looks like for me.

I can forgo the Agenda Planning Session.

Jesus, I trust in You.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2017/02/godstime-not-mine.html>
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Thy Will Be Done [at Theologyisaverb]

Thy Will Be Done.



THEOLOGYISAVARB.COM

Lately these four words have spoken profound volumes in my life. With the busy fast paced work of collaborative parish life, my own vocation as wife and mother, and the decision of putting our own house on the market, there is such solace in this simple prayer. In an Ignatian practice of pause, time spent in contemplation of each word prayerfully leads us to consider what God's word means for our lives today.

Thy

All that is within creation is God's alone. From the smallest grain of sand to the tallest mountain, from the fiercest storm to the most placid waters it is all His and in His control. From the tiniest spark of life placed by the Creator, to the life nearing the end of its days- God is present and attentive to our cry. In awestruck wonder I stand amidst it all and offer my gratitude both for the grandeur of all I see, but also for my place in His plan.

This week my cousin was fatally killed when struck by an automobile while crossing the street. His childhood was a difficult one growing up on the outskirts of Chicago, and he fell easily into a life of addictions as did his sister who died early of an overdose. On and off again homeless, he did have moments of stability but none lasted very long. With his mother and father now gone too from cancer, there were but a few that were close to him. Though he too, I believe, was loved dearly by his heavenly Father, he longed for that sense of belonging here on earth. The reported images of his passing, struck and laying dead in the middle of the road left me immediately heartbroken. Yet, how could I let my grief consume me when I know the certainty of the love and mercy of God's embrace? He is Yours now Father. May his struggle here meet your joy and forgiveness, and may he know that he is truly missed.

Will

Here there is a beautiful recognition that God is God and I quite simply am not. Truthfully, I do not want my life to follow my own inclinations, despite my repeated attempts to persuade or otherwise take the reins at times.

This week in bible study we turned towards Genesis-walking in the peace of the Garden, and experiencing the pain of our disobedience and prideful use of will. Do we too desire to have the wisdom of God? Whatever would we do if we did? I do not know about you, but I haven't always made the best decisions when I have acted on my own. What are the consequences even when we have achieved our immediate desire? The key can be found in the search itself- the longing for happiness. So often, we look for happiness not eternally, but rather satisfy ourselves with temporary happiness. Those things which pacify us but disappear quickly are our forbidden fruit. In consuming them they give us a feeling of self-empowerment, and control and cloud the reality of our utter dependence on God.

Oh, Lord please help my will to align with Yours! Please make straight my crooked paths and set everything right when I have forgotten your loving ways. Though I do not know the way ahead, I trust that you do.

Be Done.

Release of the outcome to the One in control of it all is essential in a life directed towards God's will. His time, His direction, His edits and our "YES!". Are we saying yes daily but our more accurate response is a maybe?

As anyone who has gone through the process of selling a home can attest to..one wishes not only for a good price but for the pain to end quickly. Living in a constant state of readiness and cleanliness is a work of wonder with a family of boys and a playful German Shepherd. Only week two and I who began this quest in an open surrender am already petitioning God to walk the right family through our home. I know, that God's answer might be yes..but it may be a no, or perhaps later. After we do all that we can do to prepare each day, what remains for each of us is for the resolve of the situation to "Be done".

Reflect: How do we respond when situations are slower than unexpected, or end unfavorably for what we would have desired? Can we let God who has the big picture take the lead? If not, what could we do differently?

Peace,

Elizabeth

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There is Power in Those Ashes



Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. –2 Corinthians 6:2 NAB

A few years ago, on Ash Wednesday, I attended a noon mass at a downtown church near our local university campus. As I sat down a small group of students sat in the row with me.

We smiled, and as the mass began, I could tell that they were there for the first time. I help the young girl next to me find the opening hymn and the readings for mass and she did the same down the row, as everyone nodded to me their thanks. As I looked around the church, I could tell that they weren't the only non-Catholics at mass that day.

When the time arrived to distribute the ashes, I stood and they followed me down the aisle to the distributor in our section.

“Remember you are dust and unto dust you shall return,” the words spoken and each student received their ashes. They made their way back to the pew and mass continued.

At the conclusion of mass, I had the opportunity to speak with each of them.

“Are you Catholic?” I asked the first young lady.

“No, she replied, I am a non-denominational Christian.”

Of the four students only one was a marginal Catholic, having been baptized as an infant but raised in a family that didn't practice their faith. The two remaining were agnostic.

“What brought you to mass today,” I inquired?

“The ashes,” they responded in unison!

“What about the ashes,” I asked.

They explained, “there is just something about the concept of lent that is very appealing to us. The dying to self, the giving up of something we take for granted, things that others might not have, the idea of a period of time where we reflect on our lives and what are purpose in life is, that is very appealing.”

Wow, I thought! Young people are always searching, searching for some meaning to their lives,

searching for answers to life's biggest questions. And, you know, if they are going to find these answers, then this is a great place to start!

For forty days, we are asked to die to self, rend our hearts and return to The Lord, and to pray, fast and give alms.

We sat in church and talked for a half hour after mass. We discussed the great homily the celebrant gave, and we talked about lent, ashes, and what lies ahead, the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As they left the church, they thanked me. In return, I thanked them for restoring my faith in their generation. At least these four, really got the message.

There is power in those ashes!

This contribution is available at <http://tonyagnesi.com/2014/03/there-is-power-in-those-ashes/>
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Our last Lent? [at Convert Journal]

Today is Ash Wednesday.

We “do” this every year at the beginning of the season of Lent. It is a tradition and marker. Green gives way to purple, [fish frys](#) blossom, Stations of the Cross are observed, we *will* go to confession, [Easter Sunday](#) is in the distance. Today, don’t focus on all of that. Today, focus on the *Big Picture*™.

When you go to church today, look at the lines of people waiting to receive ashes. They are from every culture, rich and poor, young and old. Not all will be with us next year. For some, while they don’t know it yet, this is their *last* Ash Wednesday. I wonder how many truly understand that possibility. Most are probably in reasonably good health and believe it likely that their earthly pilgrimage has at least a few more years. I hope so, but have been to enough [funerals](#) to know how wrong that can be.

Consider too, this could be *your* last Ash Wednesday. If by God’s grace it isn’t, then know for certain that some future one will be. Today we should reflect on that.

Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2017/03/our-last-lent/>
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Norma McCorvey, R.I.P. [at Leaven for the Loaf]

A few days ago, Abby Johnson on her Facebook page called for prayers for Norma McCorvey, who was very ill. I am now hearing that McCorvey has died at age 69, having lived for 44 years in the shadow of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that bore her pseudonym.

McCorvey went public, affirming her real identity and refusing to embrace being “Jane Roe.” Eventually, in the midst of a tumultuous life, she repudiated the Court decision and became pro-life.

On a visit to Texas last year, I went to Mass at a small chapel in downtown Dallas. The pastor turned out to be the man who had ministered to McCorvey when she professed the Catholic faith. Rather than talk about her, he demurred: “Leave her alone. She’s been too much used.”

Too much used. The attorneys who represented her in *Roe* can take some credit for that. For the briefest of overviews about McCorvey and the court case that thrust her into American history, read Live Action’s post from earlier this year, [7 Things You Didn’t Know About Jane Roe of Roe v. Wade.](#)

I think of her as one of the [voices to trust](#) whenever I hear an abortion advocate say “trust women.”

“I realized that my case, which legalized abortion on demand, was the biggest mistake of my life....but now I’m dedicated to spreading the truth about preserving the dignity of all human life from natural conception to natural death.”

“[I]t doesn’t make any difference what religion you are, or how young you are or how old you are, I think if they get up and go to these abortion mills, and stand there – and they don’t have to do anything, they can just stand there and pray, I think that would make a lot of difference. We have to be seen in numbers.”

May she rest in peace.

Let's Not Fail Them [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

The eighth and ninth chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy illustrate why every Christian should pray often – if not daily – for our clergy. Chapter eight highlights the appalling abominations the Jewish clergy were committing against God, even in His Temple.

“Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here,” God said to the prophet, who found *“every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel”* carved on the walls.

But that was not all. Ezekiel also saw *“seventy elders of the house of Israel . . . each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.”*

But that was not all. The chapter continues: *“Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us’”* And a few verses later: *[God] brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Lord's house . . . and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz”* (i.e. the goddess of fertility).

But that was not all. God brought Ezekiel into the inner court of the Temple where another dozen of the religious leaders had turned their *“backs to the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun”*

God's patience ended in chapter nine. He told His angel: *“Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.”*

The mark would serve to protect them from what happens next.

God commanded another angel: *“Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.”* So they started with the

elders who were before the temple.

And so the false shepherds, the hirelings, the wolves in sheep clothing inevitably met the judgment of God.

How does it happen that anyone can turn away from God after knowing Him? But perhaps the greater question is this: How does a pastor, elder, or priest turn back from following God? How do they who preach and teach about our great Savior, who perform intercessory prayers, and offer the sacraments, how do they think God is blind to the evil they do?

God is not blind. Patient, yes. But not blind. Ready to forgive, but ready also to execute wrath against any laity or clergy who insist on turning a stubborn shoulder to God.

People have not changed since Ezekiel's time. And neither has God. And therein lays the alarming character of these two chapters.

Christian – Pray for your pastors and priests. Pray for your bishops. Pray for your deacons. Pray for your catechists. All of us – laity and clergy alike – are susceptible to the subtle schemes of Satan who roams the earth seeking souls to devour. What better way to scatter the many sheep than to first ruin their shepherds?

Christian – our clergy and leadership desperately need us to pray. Let's not fail them.

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2017/02/lets-nor-fail-them.html>
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Controversy and confusion over Pope Francis and "Amoris Laetitia" [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

Thanks to some good Catholic Christian friends I've had occasion to reflect on and discuss these matters at some length over time. Time actually is itself a gift from God and in the time in between our exchanges, upon further reflection, by the grace of God it occurred to me that our "fencing" over such matters might get closer to the target by taking a more concrete approach. Let's examine different scenarios or venues in which to apply these principles, or to put it differently, two primary modes for dialogue over God's revealed truth and his will: first, the classroom mode, and secondly, the confidential mode.

In the "classroom" mode or approach

In a

classroom

, regardless of setting or age of the learners, the professor or teacher is expected to not beat around the bush presenting the material, in this case, God's revealed truth and subsequently the Church's teaching on it, and so to be very clear about the material and also to present specific cases to illustrate the principles. The clearer and more direct the presentation, the more likely the participants may have reactions, questions, comments, and hence a good discussion may follow. Along the way, the teachers apply their skills to observe and check out whether or not the material is being properly assimilated. Depending on the class's responses and reactions, it may take more or less time for the whole group to take it all in. It is the teacher's responsibility to map out over time the presentation and assimilation of the entire segment of the material and to prepare the class for testing and for practical exercises.

In the "confidential" mode or approach

In a

confessional

or in a priest's

cabinet

or

office

or when a person

confidentially approaches

a priest for personal advice and counsel, the classroom approach might risk being perceived as a

"dumping" of a whole lot of theory and stifling the person's ability to express their concern. If he is not careful, a young inexperienced and zealous priest, or even an older one, can "cut the person off and stop them in their tracks" by being too categorical too quickly, and demonstrating zero patience to allow the person the time to take it in and wrestle with it. Wrestling with God is one of the classic images of how God is ready and eager to relate to souls, as with Jacob who became Israel because of the wrestling, and as Jesus treated with his apostles and disciples.

What priests must quickly learn in their ministry is that most of the time, if not all of the time, when people approach us more formally in one of these or in similar settings, they initially put out a "feeler", i.e. a formulation of their concern that is a little more general, or apparently more theoretical. Whether they realize it or not, they are testing us, to see whether or not they can trust us, whether or not they can be safe with us, whether or not we will pour balm on their hurt or simply intensify the hurt by wounding them some more. People often already apprehend the truth, to some degree, and merely need to have it confirmed or clarified.

In the arena of conscience

People, or souls, are often already being disturbed by their conscience, and are often afraid that they are unable to accept or to take the full impact and brunt or burden of the truth or of God's will. In addition they often, as we all do, suffer under imperfect images or understanding of who God is, and the more fearsome, the worse it is for them. When people don't have fear of the Lord but only terror instead, they tend to manifest a conscience that is more scrupulous.

On the other hand, when people have a false view of God as loving and adopt a falsely "familiar" attitude towards God as "buddy" or as a God who is "permissive"; then they run the great and dangerous risk of presumption, of taking God for granted and avoiding his judgement or justice. The more they live and act out of fear / terror, or out of presumption / permissiveness, the less likely are they to ever truly understand morality or relate truly to God or know his love and mercy and finally respond with gratitude, praise, and a return of love that goes out to others.

Often, before we can say anything to them about the matter of their concern, it is more urgent to treat their misguided, mistaken, erroneous, or incomplete images or understanding of who God is and of what are his ways. Knowing the Lord's ways, or how God treats souls, makes possible the true "fear of the Lord" and is the beginning of wisdom. Jeremiah reported in 31:31-34 God's promise that the time would come, and it came with Jesus, when the Lord would make a new covenant with his people and they would all know Him, from the greatest to the least, and they would not need to be instructed because the Lord would instruct them himself.

After the example of the "Good Shepherd"

So, what proves better is for the priest to be receptive and just listen at first. After the soul's initial outpouring of concern, some priests may then "lay down the law" as it were, lest the person continue to "stray" and get more completely lost. However, what proves more effective is a similar skill as that put into practice by the teacher observing and measuring assimilation of the material, that is, it is for the priest to initially, before spelling out the truth, asking the person to say what they understand to be God's will in the matter, or how much they know of the Church's teaching about the revelation and will of God.

Then the priest can see whether or not the person knows the truth and is simply having a hard time accepting it or putting it into practice, or whether the person is stumbling around in the dark for not knowing God's revealed truth on the matter or the Church's teaching of it. The wise and experienced priest, like the counselor or therapist, then leads the person one step at a time, and while so doing, observes whether or not the person is able to take that step in and consider it. If not, then the reason or obstacle becomes the next point of focus, and so on. As in the classroom, with the individual, couple, family or other group, the priest will observe how much they are able to take the truth in and consider it, and it will become more apparent how long they have been struggling (often their whole life) and how much time the process may take.

We have to remember here that it is not our place to "force open" or "stretch by force" the opening of the consciences and wills. That is God's job and the Holy Trinity are at work on it 24/7. Our part is to discern how much we can do at any one sitting and invite the person to continue then with the next step, and so on. Secondly, we are to do all we can to help the person(s) anticipate to be tested in real time by the events of life and also by the Lord. Our role, like the role of every Christian to "walk with others in their faith journey", is to encourage souls and to learn the Lord's ways, to discover what the Lord is like, and to "Be a man and accept the Lord's discipline...." says 1 Kings 2

In a more

casual

setting such as before or after Mass or a coincidental encounter in public or other such "bumping into" each other, when a person puts an ethical or moral question to a priest, once again the priest must realize that just as in the more formal settings, people initially "test" us to see whether or not they can trust us not to hurt them, not to "rape" or "violence" them with the truth, wielding it like a club to subdue them or to impress it upon them and "control" their conscience, or contrarily, whether we will manifest respect for their conscience, i.e., whether we will respond in the knowledge that in the end it is for them to decide and to act in conscience before the Lord. God alone is competent to judge souls because He alone knows them better than we know ourselves.

People want to know that we will "release" them into the Lord's hands and allow them to conduct themselves upon the knowledge of the truth, just as parents do when they send their children out to go to school or to other activities out in the world. God trust us even to the point of allowing us to get it wrong, to makes mistakes, and to learn from them. In God's school we always have the option of learning the "easy" way and the "hard" way.

In conclusion, let us follow Jesus in his shepherd Pope Francis

In conclusion, then, I believe that a primary reason for the persisting confusion in public discourse over Pope Francis' "Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia" is that most participants in the public debate are functioning in the "classroom mode", whereas Pope Francis is appealing to both pastors and souls to leave the "classroom mode" to those other settings of learning, and instead, to pay closer attention to the "confidential mode".

Pope Francis gave the universal Church - with the conviction that Almighty God ardently desired it for his Church - the Jubilee Year of Mercy precisely due to the urgency of leading the Lord's flock away from "terror" of the Lord or excessive and false "familiarity" with the Lord and, instead, to real

experience of the Lord and both just (and so confessing to Him) and merciful (and so approaching Him in his priests without fear).

Pope Francis from his very first days as Bishop of Rome has been continually, energetically, and confidently exhorting pastors to show mercy through hospitality of spirit, kindness, understanding, patience, generosity, and gentleness; while simultaneously exhorting souls to practice greater trust in the Lord and confidence in his mercy and in his presence and power at work in his priests, and to approach God through priests and other people exercising pastoral ministry without fear.

The longer those engaged in this debate continue to avoid discerning the difference between these two modes, approaches, or objectives - the "classroom mode" and the "confidential mode" - the greater, thicker, deeper, and more destructive will the confusion become. That is what I have been trying to elucidate all along through my stumbling and bumbling comments and reflections; so thank you dear friends in the Lord, for granting me the venue and opportunity to clarify my thought.

This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2017/02/controversy-and-confusion-over-pope-20.html>
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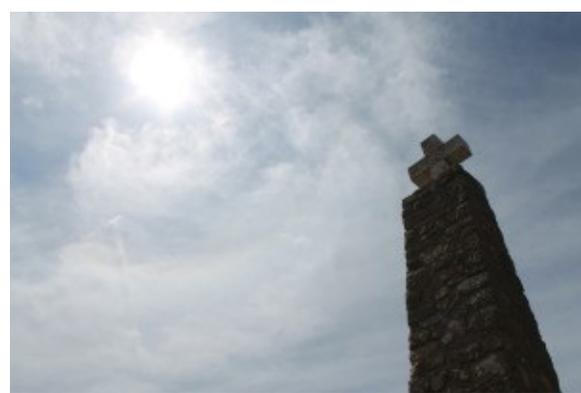
Letting Go [at work in progress]

Expanding upon [a reflection I wrote last year](#):

Pier Giorgio Frassati was the camel who passed through the eye of the needle, the rich man who was willing to unload the burden of his wealth in order to enter through the narrow way. He was surrounded by earthly goods, but he withstood any temptation to covet them. Most people born into wealth have difficulty letting go of the comforts they're so used to, but Pier Giorgio didn't hesitate to embrace the poor and offer them whatever he could. In him, there was no trace of the selfish fear that holds many of us back from truly seeking the good of our neighbor. We fear that to truly love another will mean risking all that we already have, but what we don't realize is that all the worldly things we possess are nothing in comparison with the value of a human soul—of our own souls, as well as those of our brothers and sisters. And what good is it to cling to the things that weigh us down if we can't enter the Kingdom with them? Whether it's money, goods, jobs, friendships, relationships, status, or time, we all have things that we are tempted to prioritize above all else because they give us a sense of security and comfort in this world. However, we are not meant to feel secure or comfortable here; the ride is supposed to be bumpy. We have been told to expect trials, to persevere through suffering, to be tested by fire. But in God, we can find a greater security: an anchor to the shore beyond, leading us onward through the crashing waves to our true home.

We are asked to give wholeheartedly—not just a partial gift, but everything we have and everything we are. This is not an easy thing to do, but we can trust that the Lord will not let our sacrifice go to waste. The fruit of our gift will be much greater in His hands than it would be in ours. We don't need to keep a tight grip on everything, holding on to a sense of control. We can trust Him to handle even our most precious gifts: our riches and our poverty, our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and our fears.

Each day, make an act of surrender to God, offering Him those things that you are most afraid to let go of. Give Him everything; entrust it all to Him. As you slowly learn how to loosen your grip on the things of this world, you will find a peace that is greater than anything the world can give you.



As we enter into Lent, take an inventory of your heart, reflecting on the comforts you cling to too tightly—maybe it's Netflix or ice cream or social media, maybe it's the temptation to focus on yourself instead of serving others, maybe it's a sense of complacency that holds you back from praying every day—and make a commitment to replace those things with prayer and service. Yes, it's going to hurt at first. But it's also going to give you a sense of freedom as you learn that those things are not what truly sustain you, and you are strong enough to go without them. Even

when they are all stripped away, you are still rich as long as you are rooted in God's love. These worldly comforts can numb us to a true sense of wonder at God's greatness; they hold us back from experiencing all the ups and downs of the human experience. This Lent, take the plunge; open yourself up to the depths of suffering and the heights of joy. Let go of the things that numb you, quiet all the noise in your life, and let God amaze you within the silence and emptiness.

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The Sine Qua Non of Solitude [at Peace Garden Passage]

“Without solitude, it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.” – Henri Nouwen

Funny how it came together. I was just returned from my cyclical stay at the Carmel of Mary Monastery, and as I opened my recently purchased book, “The Spiritual Life: Eight Essential Titles,” by Henri Nouwen, the heading of the next chapter quietly mocked me: “Solitude.”

I’d just returned from one of the most peaceful places I’ve ever experienced, and now, Nouwen was going to tell me the gift of what I’d just left. He was going to teach me what I probably should have had in mind driving onto the cloister property, but now would learn while looking in the rear-view mirror.



Of course, I sensed so much of it while on those lovely grounds, but Nouwen has an exquisite way of describing the spiritual life, and I knew he would bring me further in yet.

And of course, I knew he would challenge me, which he did. For in speaking about solitude, Nouwen spoke first of how difficult it is for us, in our noisy world, to truly achieve, as well as saying that without it, we cannot live a spiritual life.

“Entering a private room and shutting the door...does not mean we immediately shut out all our inner doubts, anxieties, fears, bad memories, unresolved conflicts, angry feelings and impulsive desires,” he explains. “On the contrary, when we have removed our outer distractions, we often find that our inner distractions manifest themselves to us in full force.”



One of the things about my visits to Carmel of Mary, which have become blessedly routine, is that I have never gone there without a project in hand. I could not imagine allowing myself to visit there truly to retreat, and go quiet. When I am at Carmel, it's because my life has spilled over and I need time away to sort through everything and really knuckle down on whatever project is demanding my attention.

Yes, I rise early for Mass. And yes, it is wonderfully peaceful and quiet. Generally, I am very productive there, and it is a relief to know that I have a place like this to go to when I'm overwhelmed.



But honestly, I've never gone there just to quiet down without some mission in mind. I just don't think I'd feel deserving, for one. How could I justify just taking time out for my own spiritual edification?

No, I go there with a bag of books ready to make some serious dents in my "to do" list. I know it's a gift to even have this chance at all, and I am so grateful. But I also sense that someday, I really need to go there and not have a project in hand.

Like Nouwen hints at, such a prospect is a little frightening. The thought of planning a visit there and bringing along little more than my thoughts, with only plans to really listen to God's voice, brings about a slight feeling of dread.

Please don't get me wrong. I am someone who loves the quiet. I am more comfortable with it, I think,

than most. But there is a limit to my comfort level with it, and yet I feel Nouwen urging me on.

“Once we have committed ourselves to spending time in solitude,” he says, “we develop an attentiveness to God’s voice in us.”

At first, he says, it may seem little more than “time in which we are bombarded by thousands of thoughts and feelings that emerge from hidden areas of our mind.”

In the beginning, he says, “solitude seems so contrary to our desires that we are constantly tempted to run away from it.” It is a matter of discipline, he says. When we stay with it, he continues, “in the conviction that God is with us even when we do not yet hear him, we slowly discover that we do not want to miss our time alone with God.”

Then, he says something profound. “We realize that a day without solitude is less ‘spiritual’ than a day with it.”

I can’t help but think of Adoration. I didn’t just jump right into it. I approached it slowly, hesitantly. At first, it felt strange, odd. Is that really the body and blood, soul and divinity of God’s dearly beloved son, our Lord Jesus Christ? Or is it just a piece of bread. I mean, really?

But then I returned, for a period during Lent only. And something happened. I began to feel that yes, it truly is Jesus there. And I became more familiar with the feeling. I no longer questioned it and it was then that the transformation happened. Not right away, but eventually.

Recently, I had been at Adoration nearly an hour when I realized I had not really even gazed at the Eucharistic host. Yes, I had bowed to our Lord and I had been conversing with him all hour, but...I didn’t need to look, to strain my eyes to believe. I could feel his presence that whole time and I just trusted in it.

Nouwen says that no matter how much we may resist solitude, this alone time with God, intuitively, we know that it is important. “We even start looking forward to this strange period of uselessness,” he says. Yes, it’s true.

“As we empty ourselves of our many worries,” he adds, “we come to know not only with our mind but also with our heart that we were never really alone, that God’s Spirit was with us all along.”

It is here where I pause, and maybe, dare I say, let a tear roll down my cheek. I don’t know if there is anything so beautiful as what is said there in that line I just typed. “We came to know...that we were never really alone.”

This is it. This is what the spiritual life really boils down to: that reality right there. “We were never really alone.” Here is the sweet consolation, the prize of a life spent groping for God. Though we can go long periods and not sense his presence, there comes a time, one precious moment, when we realize God never abandoned us. Ever. Not for a moment. And he never will.

Lent is coming, and each year, I seem to look more and more forward to it, because in Lent, we are given permission to seek out the quiet places where Jesus can begin whispering in our ears.

This year, like no other, it seems I am practically running to Ash Wednesday. I cannot wait to receive

the ashes on my forehead as the marked reminder it's time to pull back from the noise and begin to retreat inward; not to hide from the world, but to become more fully alive in it.

But we need the time, more than we can possibly realize. We need this excuse. We need to see that it is not something to dread, but a gift.

Solitude is our chance to know the love of our life better, and in turn, love others better. It is not something we should put off for a rainy day. It is an essential, a “sine qua non,” of the spiritual life. It's as utterly essential as the beautiful realization that God has been with us, every single moment of our lives.

Q4U: How will you approach solitude in the coming weeks? What about the idea of solitude scares you, draws you closer to our Lord?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2017/02/the-sine-qua-non-of-solitude/>
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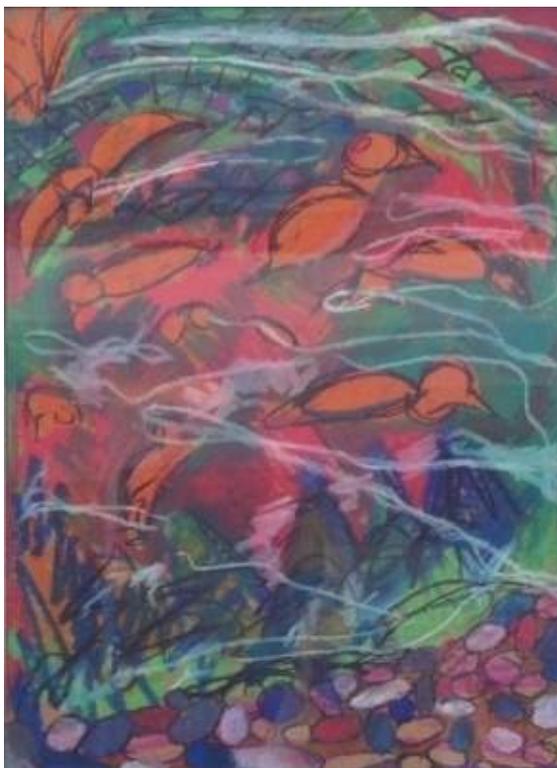
Calm in the Storm [at Making It In Vermont]

Years and years ago I was 23, I lived on my own in a big old apartment with french doors that had skeleton keys and I worked three part time jobs to pay for the luxury of my very own personal space. I ate ramen noodles and ice cream most days and learned to be grateful for the nutritious meals I ate at my parents house on weekends (you know the ones I scoffed at as a child).

It was during those tween-like, early twenties years, full of angst that I wrote poetry and taught myself moderately to play guitar and worked on my “art”, all with the backdrop of my mother striving to live through the biggest fight of her life. Her battle with stage 4 cancer.

I had always had a dark side, I remember feeling bouts of melancholy since early grade school, not knowing exactly how I fit into the world. It wasn't till college that I learned I could or even should use those feeling to fuel my art. I remember a friend saying after seeing one of my pieces: “It looks really well done, but why does everything have to be so gloomy!”.

Anyway, I remember this day, a few years after I had graduated from college, it was a stormy day in my soul and nature seemed to feel the same. I was sitting at the Gut, the tip of the peninsula where I grew up, with an ocean that reflected my mood. I watched the seagulls sitting on the waves keeping their equilibrium while everything rocked and rolled. After being planted on my bum on that stony beach for a while drinking it all in, I drove the half hour back home to my apartment, pulled out my oil pastels and drew with fervor on a piece of cardboard I had.



There is something I've always been drawn to about this piece and while some of my artwork has gone the way of scissors and tossed, painted over, or put away, this one has stuck around. I named it “Seagulls in a Storm”.

It has been on a few different walls in our house, but the last few years it has lived above our wood stove. I never meant for it to stay there that long. I have a big canvas I put together 3 years ago to replace it. The only problem is I just can't seem to figure out what to paint on that canvas.

And lately the angst-ee-ness of "Seagulls in a Storm" has really started to itch at me. It just doesn't seem to fit anymore, the melancholy that always came calling for such a large part of my life, has been calmed...

So I decided to look for a way to change the story.

Rummaging through some of my art, I found a collage I put together about 5 years ago from pieces of a painting I made in the dizzying months after giving birth to my very first son 15 years ago. Sleep deprived and hungry for something other than diaper changes, nursing, and rocking a colicky baby, being lost in paint was such a relief. The frenetic swirls of color from my early 30's reflect another sort of storm and another effort at painting it out.

The collage looked nice on the wall, but didn't do much to change the conversation.

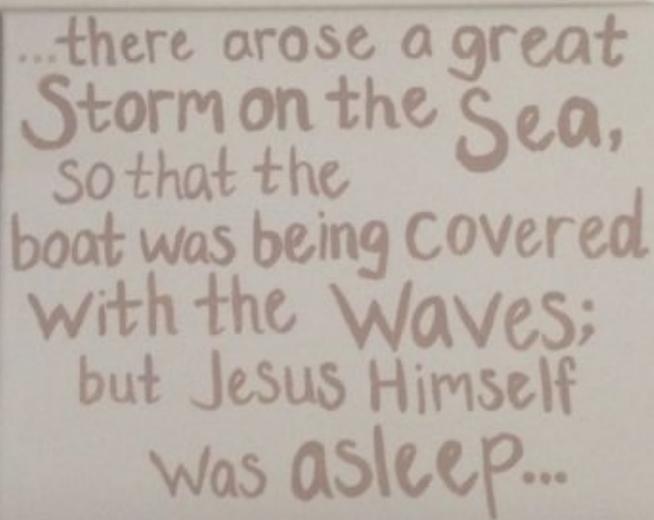
Then I thought about Jesus and His fishermen friends and that wild night out on the sea of Gallilee when He was napping in the stern of the boat they were on and all His friends started freaking out thinking they were going to die as the waves swelled and the wind blew. Waking Him up in terror the first thing Jesus does is shame them for having so little faith and then he did his Jesus-ee thing and stood at the stern and stopped all the swell.

So a few weeks ago I painted this and placed it under "Seagulls in a Storm":

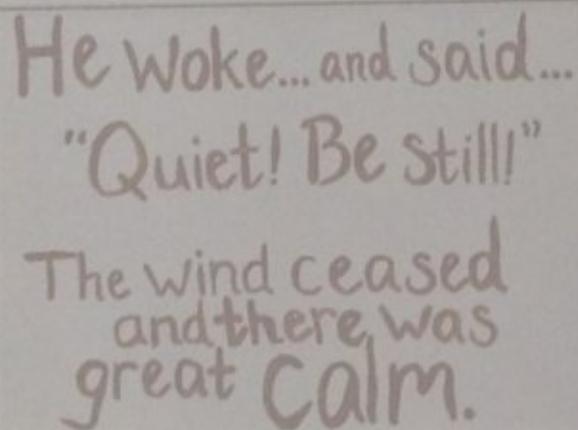


Then I grabbed a statue that one of my sons bought me for Christmas 2 years ago at a church bazaar. It is of the Infant Jesus at Prague, I never really knew where to put it until now.

And last night I spent the evening hours (thanks to my husband Kevin who made dinner and took care of bedtime) painting an excerpt from [Matthew 8:24-26](#) on a canvas and a framed piece of cardboard.



...there arose a great
Storm on the Sea,
so that the
boat was being covered
with the Waves;
but Jesus Himself
was asleep...



He woke... and said...
"Quiet! Be still!"
The wind ceased
and there was
great Calm.

Voila! Story. Changed.

But, it wasn't till tonight while writing this post that I actually saw how those seagulls I observed in my early twenties behaved just how Jesus wanted his disciples to act that night on the boat. I always thought of the storm and the motion of those seagulls like the turmoil in my soul. But, the ocean rocked and the ocean rolled and those seagulls didn't flail about frantic, they just moved right along with it, peaceful as could be. It was my eyes *and* my soul that couldn't SEE it.

I always saw the storm, instead of how the birds were reacting to it.

I now have a new story above our wood stove, a hopeful reminder when it is all breaking loose and 7 boys from teen to toddlers are screaming for my attention, or at each other, or when the world outside our door seems to be insanity, that we are called to find peace in the noise knowing that asleep at the stern or comfortably atop the waves like those seagulls, God calls us to faith and it is faith alone that will calm our storm.



With love from the not very ocean-ee but still sometimes stormy Green Mountains of Vermont,

~Lisa

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Adagio [at Grace to Paint]



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

For some reason, young people with musical instruments grab my attention. I have been asked to paint a young woman who plays the cello, so I am doing some studies of possible compositions before I try for a likeness.

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2017/02/22/adagio/>
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Matthew's First Reconciliation [at These Joyful Mysteries]

I mentioned in my last post how Matthew was thrilled that his First Penance had been postponed last week due to the snow. However, that feeling of excitement wore off the night before the scheduled snow date. At bedtime he was in tears and filled with fear. Some of us piled onto his bed to try to talk him off the ledge. Nothing really sunk in until Dad pulled up this picture on his phone.



We all had a good laugh at the look on Matt's face as he was talking with one of our parish priests. For some reason, that's all it took. His fear went away and off to sleep he went. I think confession is a scary thing, especially your first time.

The following night at the Penance service the gospel was the story of Jesus, The Good Shepherd. Ironically, just two hours earlier I had taught this lesson to my first grade CCD students. In class, we talked about what a shepherd is and what a shepherd does. The responses I got made me smile. The children reported that a shepherd takes care of his sheep. They used words such as

protects

, and

guides

, and

loves,

and

feeds.

Making the connection between a shepherd and Jesus was easy after that! Then I read to them the Parable of the Lost Sheep when Jesus leaves his 99 to go look for the one lost.

The homily that night kept the kids' attention. The priest had the church's lost and found box up front so the kids could see it. One by one he pulled things out of it. There was an umbrella, a pair of sunglasses, and even a set of keys, just to name a few. No one has come back to retrieve them. It was almost as if the owners of the items didn't know they were left behind. They didn't know they were lost.

He challenged the congregation: How does this relate to us? Are we lost? Do we take the time to seek out the shepherd who is always waiting to bring us back into the fold? This kind of discernment is critical, I believe. If we don't admit to being lost, we won't be found. And in turn, we won't have the opportunity to be

protected

, and

guided

, and

loved

, and

fed.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is our opportunity to be found. To lay it all out there, to hear His voice, and be forgiven. Oh! And let's not forget....to receive grace. What a gift!

Matthew did a great job. We stopped at the grocery store and picked up a gallon of ice cream to celebrate when we got home. It seemed only right.

This contribution is available at <http://thesejoyfulmysteries.blogspot.com/2017/02/a-first-penance-and-good-shepherd.html>
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Oatmeal For Lent [at A Catholic Citizen in America]



I'll be eating oatmeal for breakfast during Lent, and walking around more. If I was in England, I'd probably call it porridge, and that's another topic.

It'll be good for my health, and I'm sure that's one reason my wife suggested it. But that's not the only, or the main, reason.

Lent isn't about me.

It's part of the annual cycle of Advent, Lent, and Easter.

We're remembering and, in a sense, re-living what our Lord did, two millennia back now. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, [1095](#))

Lent is when we join Jesus in the desert. Sort of. (Catechism, [540](#))

Lent: A New Beginning



(Badlands National Park, South Dakota: semi-arid, not quite a desert.)

I live in central Minnesota, where the nearest dunes I know of are in the [Sand Dunes State Forest](#), a bit over an hour east of my town.

Folks going to the Dunes see savanna, forest, and wetlands: or go boating on Ann Lake. Even in drought years, Minnesota isn't a particularly dry state.

Heading west and a little south for several hours, I'd reach the South Dakota [Badlands](#). They look like a desert, but I'd have to keep going until I reached the [Great Basin](#) between California and Wyoming to find a [desert](#).



Happily, I can work at joining our Lord in the desert right here in central Minnesota.

Again: Lent isn't about self-improvement, or a road trip to arid land.

“Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ's victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God ‘with all their hearts’ (Joel 2:12), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord. Jesus is the faithful friend who never abandons us. Even when we sin, he patiently awaits our return; by that patient expectation, he shows us his readiness to forgive (cf. [Homily, 8 January 2016](#))....”
([Pope Francis](#)¹ (October 18, 2016))

Spiritual Training

Prayer, almsgiving, and fasting — the three vital forms of interior penance — are ways we fix our relationships with others, God, and ourselves. (Catechism, [1434](#))

About fasting: ordering [Lobster Thermidor](#) instead of [beef bourguignon](#) misses the whole point of penitential fasting.

There's nothing particularly ‘penitential’ about porridge. On the other hand, I don't like it as much as

the yogurt I've been having for breakfast. Besides, it'll save a few cents each day. I'll be serving my family, in a minuscule way, which is a good idea. (Catechism, [1616](#), [2201–2206](#))

Almsgiving is a good idea, too. It gives a measure of relief to folks who need the money, and helps the giver remember that this world is God's gift to **everyone**, not just whoever has the most stuff. ([Genesis 1:27–31](#); Catechism, [2401–2406](#))

I've talked about the universal destination of goods, Trappists, and getting a grip, before. ([February 10, 2017](#); [September 25, 2016](#))

Almsgiving is an opportunity to see our Lord in others.

“...Dear brothers and sisters, Lent invites us to ‘train ourselves’ spiritually, also through the practice of almsgiving, in order to grow in charity and recognize in the poor Christ Himself. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the Apostle Peter said to the cripple who was begging alms at the Temple gate: ‘I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk’” ([Acts 3: 6](#))
([Benedict XVI](#) (October 30, 2007))

After Peter helped the crippled beggar stand up, he was “walking and jumping and praising God.” The beggar, that is. ([Acts 3:7–8](#))

Miracles?

Miracles like that happen. ([Acts 2:22](#); Catechism, [547–549](#))

“**MIRACLE:** A sign or wonder, such as a healing or the control of nature, which can only be attributed to divine power. The miracles of Jesus were messianic signs of the presence of God's kingdom ([547](#)).”
([Glossary](#), Catechism)

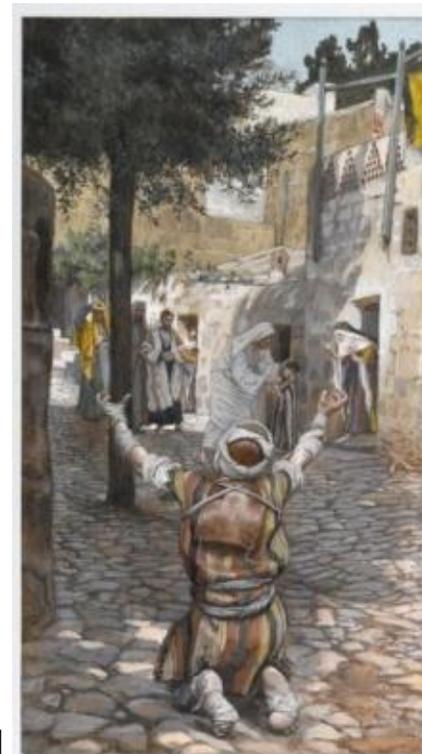
Accepting miracles is one thing.

Expecting God to act as a sort of magic wand, putting God's power “to the test,” is a bad idea. I'll get back to that.

As I keep saying, we've got brains. Using them is part of our job. Science and technology are tools, not transgressions. God gave us brains, and expects us to **use** them. (Catechism, [1730–1742](#), [1778](#), [2292–2296](#), [2402–2405](#), [2456](#))

Ethics apply, no matter what sort of tech we use, or how curious we are, and that's yet another topic. ([October 16, 2016](#); [August 21, 2016](#))

Where was I? Brains, miracles — almsgiving. Right.

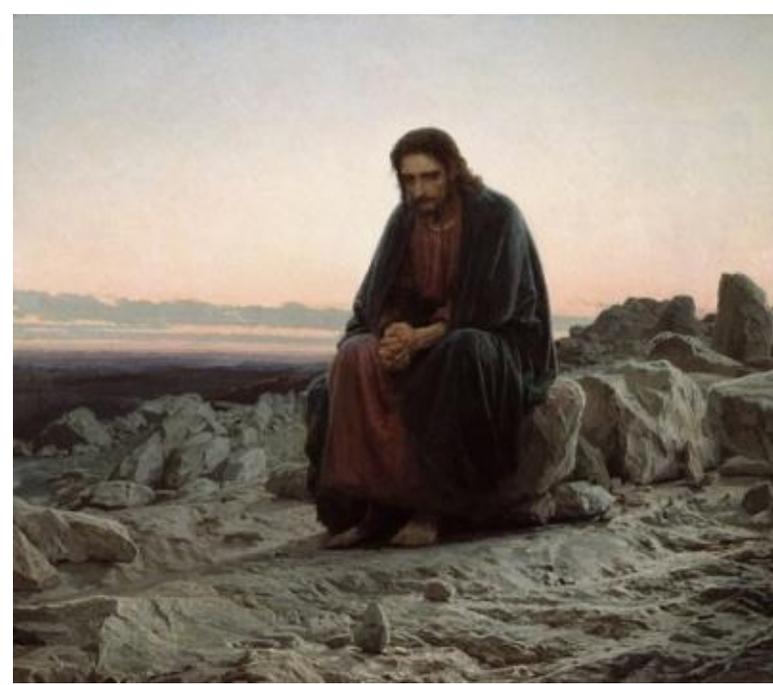


Giving to some charitable outfit can be almsgiving — or a prestige-building photo op. I’m not sure where filling out the ‘charitable giving’ part of tax forms falls on that continuum.

¹ “(But) take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

“When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites ² do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.”
([Matthew 6:1–2](#))

The Desert and Deuteronomy



(From Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi, via the Google Cultural Institute and Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

(Ivan Nikolaevich Kramskoi’s “Christ in the Wilderness.” (1872))

That brings me to next week’s Gospel reading, [Matthew 4:1–11](#). Pretty much the same thing is in [Luke 4:1–13](#).

It’s the bit where our Lord says “It is written: ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.’” ([Matthew 4:4](#))

“It is written” in [Deuteronomy 8:2–3](#), where that forty-year desert detour gets presented as a learning experience:

“...to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD.”

([Deuteronomy 8:3](#))

Quoting Deuteronomy was our Lord’s response to a three-part temptation: hunger, worldly power and prestige, and tempting God. The latter is “putting his goodness and almighty power to the test by word or deed,” and a very bad idea. (Catechism, [2119](#))

Tempting God isn't the sort of testing mentioned in [1 Thessalonians 5:19–21](#) and that's yet again another topic. (Catechism, [801](#))

Getting back to that desert encounter, our Lord countered the temptations with his relationship with God the Father. I think abstract principles, moral strength, or a code of ethics, can be good things.

But they're not what's really important in a crisis. Love is.

Jesus repeats what God said, in [Deuteronomy 6:13](#), [6:16](#), and [8:3](#).

Jesus loves his Father too much to let anything interfere with that relationship. That's a contrast to the disastrous choice the first of us made, making something other than God top priority. (Catechism, [538–540](#))

Still Shining

For two millennia, we've been passing along the best news humanity ever had — God loves us, and wants to adopt us. All of us. ([John 1:12–14](#), [3:17](#); [Romans 8:14–17](#); [Peter 1:3–4](#); Catechism, [27–30](#), [52](#), [1825](#), [1996](#))

Accepting the invitation or not is up to each of us, of course. We have free will. (Catechism, [1021–1037](#))

I decided that following our Lord makes sense long before learning who holds the authority Peter received, and that's still another topic.²

As an adopted child of God, acting like part of the family makes sense: to me, anyway. ([September 11, 2016](#))

God's 'family values' are pretty simple: I should love God, love my neighbors, see everybody as my neighbor, and treat others as I want to be treated. ([Matthew 5:43–44](#), [7:12](#), [22:36–40](#), [Mark 12:28–31](#); [Luke 6:31](#) [10:25–27](#), [29–37](#))

“Simple” isn't necessarily “easy,” and I've been over that before. ([December 11, 2016](#); [November 29, 2016](#))

Finally — Lent isn't about oatmeal or deserts. It's about the Word who brought us life, light, and hope:

“¹ ² In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

“He was in the beginning with God.

“³ All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be “through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;

“⁴ the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

([John 1:1–5](#))

More, mostly about acting like God matters:



¹ More about taking love seriously:

² I'm an adult convert. A little more about that is in "[Becoming a Catholic](#)."

This contribution is available at <http://brendans-island.com/catholic-citizen/oatmeal-for-lent/>
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The Perfect Game [at Walking the Path]



THE PERFECT GAME

In baseball, one of the ultimate achievements is that of the perfect game. The pitcher retires each batter in the course of nine innings for a total of 27 consecutive outs (professional level). It is a feat rarely achieved. In fact over the 140 years of major league baseball, it has been done 23 times most recently by Felix Hernandez in 2012.

Most recently the University of Connecticut's woman's basketball amassed its 100 consecutive victory translating into victories over four seasons. Quite a feat, but when they do eventually lose pundits will be dissecting their loss.



Last year my favorite basketball team the Golden State Warriors also compiled a winning streak of twenty-eight games. Perfection of a sort and as a fan I wished it would continue. If only I could go 28 days without sinning.

PERFECTION

Perfection is a word much maligned today as well as misunderstood in the terms of its application in the theological sense. We attempt to get to the "perfect weight." We rate people and things with the perfect 10. The word perfectionism is given to those who attempt to complete daily task seemingly without error. If you know a person who is like this you know that they can be very driven and become despondent if their task or interaction veers slightly off path. Everything must be perfectly aligned.

I am one of these people. Whether it is a work task, writing this blog, a project at home, or an athletic feat I can indulge in the self-flagellation that makes me a difficult person to be around. Yes, I am my own harshest critic. But where is God in all of this?

HOLINESS, TEMPLES, AND TURNING THE CHEEK

This in turn makes it difficult for me to adhere to today's teachings about holiness, being a temple of God, and turning the other cheek.

Moses is instructed by the Lord to tell the Israelites. "to be holy." Do not bear grudges or seek revenge. "Love thy neighbor as yourself," says the Lord. Holiness and perfection seem to be better suited for the saints. But with close examination of those we tend to put on a pedestal, one can find that they were not without fault, but indeed quite human.

Once one recognizes this a personal connection is realized. I struggled with the idea of holiness and saints for many years. It was only upon reading about people such as St. Augustine, St. Francis, Thomas Merton, and others that I began to understand holiness. It is not that I have to be perfect, but that I try to attain that perfection that the Lord is referring to.



MY BODY THE TEMPLE

In the second reading Paul talks of being a temple. For me this is difficult as I find my sinfulness as my downfall. The idea that the Spirit of God dwells in me can be far fetched and unachievable.

"Become a fool as to become wise" and "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain" are two lines that are challenging. I enjoy the attention that is showered on me when I achieve or "complete a task perfectly," but this is also quite dangerous. Increasingly I have become aware that this attention has only become to be because of God's infinite grace. No, I don't point to the sky as many athletes do, but I do give personal thanks.

The idea that the Lord knows my thoughts definitely brings me down off my stool of perfection and holiness. If I were to keep track during the course of a day or even an hour the number of unholy thoughts that arise from my fragile mind it would easily exceed the number of outs in a nine inning game .

But here is the catch. I am human therefore I am sinful and in need of God all the time. At times it seems that the Spirit has a reserved seat on my shoulder bringing to attention how I might react to these

thoughts or temptations. Thus as Paul states, I belong to God.

TURN THE CHEEK

One of the biggest challenges today is to turn the other cheek. In a society filled with trollers who are looking for the slightest opportunity to create a disparaging tweet filled with hate rhetoric it seems this is now a challenge long lost. Yet that is perhaps because the people who are indeed taking that action do not publicize their actions, but live out those actions. As many theologians have stated this doesn't mean that one passively accepts the evil actions of others, but instead extends the opportunity to love.

Recently I was following Oroville Dam Twitter updates as the spillway began to erode. Being from the area I had a legitimate concern for the people who lived in the flood zone. However, I was appalled by hateful rhetoric by internet trollers and those who wished death and destruction on those fleeing the rising waters. Internally I wanted to lash back at those insensitive people. Conversely I found there were those who instead of attacking those tweets, asked for prayers not only for those who were in danger, but for those who found it necessary to make such distasteful statements.

Likewise I found it refreshing today to read about a few people in our nation's legislative branch who are seeking to work together to solve the problems facing our country instead of engaging in social media slamming of their rivals.

Forgiveness is key here. Realizing that the person who may offended me is just like me a sinner. A personal reflection each day on my actions always brings this into perspective. I can quite easily on my stool of perfectionism cast judgement on others blindly. However, it doesn't take much for me to see another's actions in myself and my own past actions.

As Christians we are called to be set apart much like the Hebrews in the first reading. Being proactive in prayer for those who might have offended me helps me live out the message today. Giving up the right to strike back and stand is a challenging, but it is ultimately what the world needs. It is on the road to perfection in the deepest sense.

This contribution is available at <http://walkingthepathtoholliness.blogspot.com/2017/02/the-perfect-game.html>
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The Desolation Dog [at beautiful thorns]

Lent starts in just a few days. The first day is Wednesday, March 1st. If you are looking to grow deeper in your faith this Lent, you might want to consider reading the book,

[Discernment of Spirits](#)

by Fr. Timothy Gallagher. It is based on the rules of discernment by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The rule I personally found most helpful and one of the hardest to follow is rule number 5. Rule number 5 advises that you do not make a change during times of spiritual desolation.

The best thing to do in times of desolation is to wait upon the Lord, sit in his presence and allow Him to do a purifying work. That is so hard to do especially during times of desolation when we don't feel his presence! It is very difficult to sit still and wrestle with our own thoughts, weaknesses and sin. It is easier and feels more natural to run to idols or distractions.



We all have our own vices and means we use to distract ourselves. My personal weakness has been cute little furry animals. During times of desolation I have fallen into the temptation of adopting them (this is not a temptation or a sin if you aren't trying to fill a longing in your heart with it). The only problem is they don't always stay little and cute. They have also not always worked out for our family and we have had to find some of them new homes.

We currently have a desolation dog. I got her as a cute little puppy, two years ago, during a dry period in my spiritual life; reasoning that our kids needed the experience of having a pet, specifically a puppy. The only problem is now she is an adult dog who barks at anything that moves 25 yards from our house and she nips at kids. We can not bring her around other people, especially little children.

Hindsight, I should have sat with the Lord in the uncomfortable dryness instead of trying to fill that emptiness in my heart with a furry creature. I should have turned to the Creator instead of one of his creatures.

Failing to wait for God's best is nothing new to God's people. The bible is full of stories of people who didn't always wait for His best. Even Abraham who had tremendous faith in God, decided to take matters in his own hands when he took Sarah's handmaid, Hagar in an attempt to fulfill God's promise for a child. Ishmael was the result.

A couple of blog posts ago, I wrote a blog post entitled

[Rerouting](#)

, I talked about how God doesn't just have a plan "A" for us. If we mess up plan "A", he will give us plan "B" and so on.

It isn't too late however for us to resolve to wait upon the Lord and receive his best! We can choose His plan "A" for today!

What distractions are you tempted to run to when faced with dryness in your soul? This Lent let us resolve to let go of idols and distractions. Let us sit at the Lord's feet and allow Him to do a purifying work in us so we can grow closer to Him. Let us become more aware of his merciful love for us and that we are his beloved!

This contribution is available at <http://www.beautifulthorns.com/2017/02/the-desolation-dog.html>
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The Visitation and Saint Joseph [at Warrior's World Dad]

In the Gospel of Luke we read,

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

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

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

For the moment, let's be more thoughtful.

How will an elderly matron protect Mary from harm?

Mary was espoused to Joseph.

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

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

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

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

Really?

If this was your relative what would think of him?

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

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

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

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

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

the blanks.

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

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

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

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

This contribution is available at <http://warriorworlddad.com/>
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Solidarity HealthShare: The Catholic Answer to the Healthcare Dilemma

Through a group of friends here in Phoenix, I recently discovered the Catholic answer to the healthcare dilemma that faces many people in our country today. With the rise of medical costs for so many from the Affordable Care Act (commonly known as ObamaCare), Solidarity HealthShare, which understands the commonality to care for each other as stated in the Sacred Scriptures, stands to be the answer for so many that would be subjected to astronomical costs from the ACA or otherwise go without medical care.

If you are one of the many Americans enduring this crisis of rising medical costs, I would encourage you to check out and join a community of health focused American Christians who seek to practice quality healthcare rooted in Catholic principles. If you are seeking to control your healthcare and the healthcare of your family as you see fit, then [Solidarity HealthShare](#) is the answer for you. Solidarity HealthShare brings together like-minded Christians to share together medical costs and as the Gospel of Matthew states, to be “reconciled to one another” (Mt. 5:21) in unity.

Solidarity HealthShare desires to rebuild and restore a true healthcare system that is Catholic in every way as well as promote the teachings and traditions of the Church through her social teachings, which are rooted in self-sacrificial love and the sanctity of all human life. As Christians families, you will “practice the sharing of material and spiritual goods (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) #1948) and promote a network of members who will pray for each other and share in their Monthly Share Amount while growing together in a “human and Christian brotherhood” (CCC, 1939).



Solidarity HealthShare received approval from Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of the Diocese of Phoenix on October 4, 2016. In his letter, Bishop Olmsted says the following,

“At a time when many Catholics and other people of faith face challenges in making the best healthcare decisions for themselves and their families, Solidarity HealthShare can provide critical assistance to navigate options that are available.”

The CEO of Solidarity HealthShare, Bradley Hahn, is very hopeful that this ministry will be the answer for so many families seeking another avenue to care for their loved ones healthcare –

“We have spent several years searching for a way to help other like-minded individuals, families

and organizations pay for medical costs without violating their consciences or breaking their bank accounts...I'm happy and grateful to God that we have found and can now offer this ministry to the many people who have been waiting for it.”

For more information on [Solidarity HealthShare](#), I would encourage you to visit their website and see the options available. If you are aware of a family member or friend that is need of healthcare, and they refuse to subscribe to the Affordable Care Act, please forward this onto them as well.

I would also encourage you to Like and Follow Solidarity HealthShare on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Don't pass up this great opportunity to be member of a great Catholic community that will provide you with ethical and affordable options for your healthcare.

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2017/02/15/solidarity-healthshare-the-catholic-answer-to-the-healthcare-dilemma/>
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The Importance of Silence in a Call to Vocation [at Seton Magazine]

4 minutes

Summary

Finding the call of your vocation is important but often difficult. Jennifer Elia's simple answer—silence. After all, how else can we hear God's answer?

Our world is busy and noisy, and so is my home.

Quiet time seems hard to come by with active little boys and constant activity. However, I realize the importance of silence for my children to pursue [the path](#) God has designed for them. So, I try hard to provide opportunities for silence.

It does not happen every day, nor even every month, but I make sure it happens at least a few times a year.

Lent is our main time for seeking silence each week. I wish I could do it more often, but remind myself that at least we are doing it.

We all need silence to keep in touch with God and stay focused. Silence is even more important when discerning a vocation. I truly believe that our decline in religious vocations isn't because God is not calling, it's just that we are not hearing Him because of the competing noise.

1. God whispers in the heart

God is always speaking; we just need to take the time and space to listen. I have had a couple of experiences in which I actually felt like I heard someone speaking to me. It took my breath away. Most often, though, God's voice is heard in whispers laid on your heart.

Our world is very noisy. We like to have lots of activity and distractions. Everywhere we go there is music playing, televisions on, and people talking. Getting some quiet can be hard, but it is really necessary. When we take some time to be quiet, our mind and body get a break.

It's like a mini vacation. In the quiet, our focus can go from our world—of which each of us is the center—to concentrating entirely on God.

2. Time to listen and contemplate

Advertisement



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HOMESCHOOL NOW

Finding quiet is difficult, but when you do, you also need time to listen and reflect. Often we take those little moments and fill them with prayer requests. We talk to God, but how often do we listen for His response?

[Praying](#) for discernment is essential in finding your [vocation](#), but prayer is meant to be a conversation, not a monologue. While intercessory prayer and novenas are important methods of prayer, meditation and stillness must also be a part of our prayer life. It is in stillness that we receive the true answers.

I know this is difficult. Often, I can't wait for the quiet of adoration or some moments alone, and then my mind is full of distractions even when there are none around me. I think, "I should be praying," and then force out all the interior noise with the noise of my own voice praying.

It is hard to remember to listen, but make it a point to set time aside to just sit with God and listen for anything He has to say. Then give yourself a bit more time to reflect on what you are being called to do.

3. Reading the Scriptures in silence

The Holy Scripture is alive. It does not matter in what point in history you are living, or how many times you have read a passage, God can speak to you through those ancient texts. Sometimes, we can think that a particular passage has nothing new to offer us because we have read or heard it read at Mass a million times. However, even passages that we know almost by heart have something to offer.

Even with the Living Word of God, we need silence to have God's message make its way to our heart and head. When reading Scripture, find time and space to read slowly and think about what you are experiencing. First, pray for God to speak to you through the Scriptures.

When you have finished, meditate on the passage and consider what the LORD is telling you through those words at this moment. The same passage can give you completely different messages at different points in your life. Hearing and reading isn't enough—we need the [silence](#) to really listen!

4. Shrines and pilgrimages

While going through a particularly difficult and dark time in my life, several years ago, I was having trouble finding God. I finally designed a pilgrimage of nearby shrines for myself. Sometimes, finding silence in an unfamiliar place can help you to focus and listen.

Also, visiting places that honor saints and martyrs helps to awaken the desire to hear God's call. This year I intend to focus a bit more on this area for my children.

5. Finding your vocation in adoration

In the Gospels, Jesus commends Mary for "choosing the better part" as she sits at His feet while her sister rushes around the house full of distraction. When we make a holy hour in adoration, we are sitting at Christ's feet just like Mary did.

Some churches like to fill the void with music or homilies. There are people who do not like quiet adoration because the silence is unsettling and they do not know what to do with it. However, adoration in the quiet of Jesus' presence is one of the most profound experiences a Catholic can have. Once the clutter in your head has calmed down, and your list of intentions is exhausted, you are left with the LORD, and there He can speak to you directly.

The answers and guidance I have received in my holy hours, especially those in the middle of the night, have been some of the most precious moments of my journey of faith. So, I make it a point to bring my children to adoration every Friday in Lent, as well as Holy Thursday night.

6. The empty church

Do you have a favorite feast, liturgical season, or parish devotion? We all have those times that we look forward more than usual to going to church. My favorite Mass is always Holy Thursday; I think about it all year.

Have you ever thought of going to a church when no one is there and nothing is happening? In the pews of an empty church, it is only you and God. Staring up at the crucifix, your entire attention is on what Christ did for us, for you!

What will you do for Him? How do you see yourself when there is no one looking but Our LORD?

In an empty, silent church you have the space to read, reflect, contemplate, listen, and adore. Worship in a parish doesn't end with the final blessing of each Mass. When alone, kneel before the LORD and pray, "Here I am, LORD; I come to do Your Will."

What vocation does God have for you? Where is He calling each of your children? You will never know until you give yourselves the time, space, and silence not only to ask, but listen for His answer.

How do you find silence for yourself and your family?

[adoration](#) [children](#) [church](#) [elia](#) [family](#) [god's plan](#) [jennifer](#) [jennifer-elia](#) [lent](#) [pilgimages](#) [praying](#) [scriptures](#) [shrines](#) [vocation](#) [your will](#) 2017-02-20

This contribution is available at <http://www.setonmagazine.com/latest-articles/the-importance-of-silence-in-a-call-to-vocation>
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The Nineveh 90 for Kids [at Veils and Vocations]

I have found that the surest way to not get to post something is to put in a previous post when I will be publishing. It happens every time. Sorry about that! The Nineveh 90 began on on Monday. It may be four days in, but it is never too late to repent and amend your ways, right?



I signed up to follow the program and am finding it challenging, but I need a challenge right now. I'm truly hoping by the end of the 90 days, this plan has kicked my spiritual life into shape. After explaining the program and the purpose to the children, they wanted to get on board--well, at least the two older ones. It's wonderful that they are taking this on, but the requirements are a bit daunting even for an adult and I did not want it to become something I had to police for them. Nor did I want them to get easily discouraged. Fasting and praying are vital parts of building a solid faith formation. It needs to be something that can be met with success to become a life long practice. So, here is the modified version of the original 10 step plan. I took out the exercise and sleep requirement because they are getting plenty of each, so there is no need. However, alter this as you see fit. The legalistic nature of the program is not the point, being more mindful of our actions and offerings to God is!



- Pick a sin to beat

- Give up something each day

- Make a prayer bouquet for a special intention

- Wear the scapular

- Confession each month

- Listen to Mass readings each day

I will be posting photos of our prayer bouquets later this week. For instruction on how to make your

own look here. How is your Nineveh 90 going?

This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2017/02/the-ninevah90-for-kids.html>
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Ash Wednesday and Our Family's Lenten Traditions [at A Slice of Smith Life]

Speaking of sacrifices, another Lenten tradition our family does is the "bean jar". We have a bowl filled with dried kidney beans, then when a family member makes a sacrifice, they put a bean in the jar. Then on Easter morning the children will find that the beans that have accumulated in the jar during Lent will be changed into colorful and yummy jelly beans! I told the kids that on Ash Wednesday and every Friday in Lent they could get a "2 for 1" deal on their sacrifices, meaning if they do something on Fridays they can pull a toothpick and put a bean in the jar vs. choosing one or the other like on the other Lenten days. :-)

A few years ago we added

[these beautiful printables from Catholic Icing](#)

to our crown of thorns and bean jar.

I got the bean jar idea from

[Holy Heroes Lenten Adventure](#) several year

s ago and we decided to try it in our home during Lent. Our family loves

[Holy Heroes Lenten Adventure](#)

(and Advent Adventure) and you can register your email for free to receive weekly links all about Lent. I have learned so much along with my children!

Throughout Lent our family will be reading once again,

[A Family Journey with Jesus through Lent](#)

by Angela M. Burrin. We really enjoy this book as it is written to promote family prayer and the characters in each story for each day of Lent are children and families that live in Jesus' time. Then after each story that is based on scripture there is a "Jesus, Speak to Me" section where it is written as if Jesus is speaking to us. This is a wonderful book that has been great to read as a family each day during Lent!

Stations of the Cross



Many years ago, when my older two children were little I had them color printable stations of the cross. I then glued them onto construction paper and each Lent we tape them up in order on our dining room wall. Each Friday as a family we pray through the stations of the cross with these if we don't attend our parish's Lenten soup suppers and Stations of the Cross. I like the simplicity of these Stations of the Cross and maybe this year I can have my younger children color some to update these.



I can't remember where I got these particular coloring pages, but

[here are some other great printable stations of the cross that children can color from Kristen at Drawn 2B Catholic.](#)

Several years ago, I found a simple presentation of the Stations of the Cross for kids 10 and under and this is what we use to say the stations during Lent. It was in The Word Among Us Lenten Family Edition, Lent 2006 and

[HERE](#)

is a link to part of the article if you would like to review it. Only subscribers to The Word Among Us

can view this kid's version of Stations of the Cross in its entirety, however.

Speaking of Stations of the Cross this is one of my favorite crosses, which is a

[magnetic Stations of the Cross](#)

. I gave this cross as a gift to my husband's cousin who entered into full communion with the Catholic Church with my husband on Easter 2006. When she passed away, our family inherited this beautiful cross. I was able to track down where I bought this cross several years ago.

[St. Andrew's Church Supply](#)

carries them.





Bury the Alleluia Another Lenten tradition we started doing just last year was to "bury the Alleluia". Last year I wrote a post on [7 Ways to bury the Alleluia](#) at the beginning of Lent.



Make Homemade Pretzels Some years we get around to [making homemade pretzels](#) like in the book [Walter the Baker](#) that tells some history about the pretzel also. Did you know that the pretzel can be a good reminder that we can turn to the Lord in prayer and is an especially popular food during Lent? It's a fun book to read and the pretzels are easy and fun to do!



Meatless Meals



I'm always on the look out for meatless dishes during Lent and this Seafood Spaghetti dish is easy and delicious. You can

[find the recipe at my blog post from the archives](#)

On Ash Wednesday and during all Fridays during Lent, Catholics abstain from eating meat as a form of fasting and penance. For more information about the history of Lent, I would encourage you to read

[What are the origins of Lent? Did the Church always have this time before Easter?](#) In the article I learned something new when it stated, "*The word Lent itself is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words lencten, meaning "Spring," and lenctentid, which literally means not only "Springtide" but also was the word for "March," the month in which the majority of Lent falls.*"



Larabeth Miller at

[A Place in His Garden](#)

has a

[Crucifixion List for Lent](#)

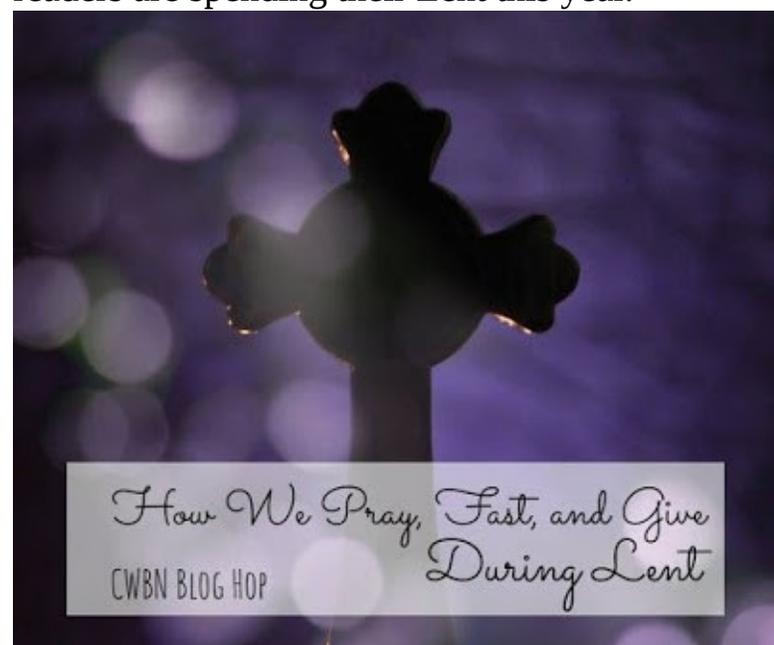
, which lists 20 simple, beautiful and sacrificial ways to unite our frustrations, crosses and sufferings to the cross of Christ. Go check it out and be inspired!

Be sure to visit my

[A Slice of Liturgical Life](#)

page for more of my Lent posts from the archives, as well as browse other liturgical seasons and feast days that our family has celebrated in the past.

This post is linked to the [CWBN Blog Hop](#) with #HowWeLent theme! Be sure to visit how other readers are spending their Lent this year.



This post is also linked to

[New Evangelists Monthly - March 2017, Issue #51](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://www.asliceofsmithlife.com/2017/02/ash-wednesday-and-our-familys-lenten.html>
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The Will of God.... Good and bad? [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

The things that happen to us throughout our lives are known by our Heavenly Father way before we were even born. He knows what we say, think, do, He knows us inside and out without a word spoken. Amazing to think of this as a mom, I know my kids forwards and backwards, but no, I really don't, not to this extent anyway.

God's Will

The things that happen to us throughout our lives are known by our Heavenly Father way before our birth. He knows what we say, think, do, He knows us inside and out without a word spoken. It is humbling to think of this as a mom, I do not know my children to this extent.

Everything that happens to us and around us...God allows. There is a reason for the good and the bad things that happen to us. It is hard to rationalize, however, why God would let bad things happen to those little ones that he loves. I find it tremendously hard not to try to save my children from harm or a hard life lesson....my bad. A friend told me once, "I've warned my children that there is no limit to my craziness when it comes to them." I have to agree wholeheartedly on this for me, as well, when it comes to my family. But there again a lesson learned the hard way is most often committed to memory...forever. The serenity prayer comes in handy during these times. It is probably the best prayer for raising children.

God grant me the serenity

to accept the things I cannot change,

courage to change the things

that I can change and the

wisdom to know the difference.

Can we, or are we able to trust our Heavenly Father? Trusting God's will is having blind faith, courage to face the unknown, or the known that is not too comforting perhaps. Mary's "Yes" is one example of trusting in both God's will and facing the scary known: the penalty of being discovered pregnant and not by the man she was betrothed to. Trust she did and God took care of her and the baby in the outcome. Throughout the bible the ancients' stories consist of times when God or His messengers brought orders, curious directions, or prophetic advice that made them follow and trust in His will. Now, however, it doesn't seem that we get the same luxury. But it was quiet then.

Oh the noise, noise, noise! In these times of smartphones, computers, and instant messaging it seems as though we trust in something other than ourselves much less our God. Listening to hear the voice of

wisdom has been reduced to Google, WikiLeaks, and Facebook rather than religious, parents, and the Bible. Getting anyone to put down the device and go face to face instead of Face Time is nearly impossible without resistance. Looking for silence in a noisy world, to stop the interactions and social time with strangers and distant audiences in search of conviction and legitimacy screams in the face of true logic and self-authenticity, truth, and spiritual direction.

Amidst this craziness of modern times, God's will is still there...waiting for our trust and courage. It will come good or bad, and it will be at the hands of God for a reason. What reason is unknown, but one thing that I do know, it will be for a good. He wants to prepare us, or strengthen us, or perhaps show us a new direction to proceed in life. Good or bad, it will be for the best and it will come whether we are on our smartphone, face timing with a friend, or reading this blog post.

The key is being open and trusting in our Heavenly Father that what he does is always for a good. There is nothing from our God that is evil or without love....nothing.

This contribution is available at <http://acatholicmumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2016/12/the-will-of-godgood-and-bad.html>
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Fatima, Kazan And The New Evangelisation [at Monks and Mermaids]





Pope Francis blessed six Centennial Pilgrim Statues of Our Lady of Fatima at the Vatican on Jan. 11 before sending them on tour in six continents. Hong Kong is the first place in the world where a statue landed.

"Pope Francis was really excited about this event. He looked at each statue, said a long prayer in front of each single one and gave his blessings," an organizer who escorted the statue to Hong Kong told ucanews.com. "He said he is expecting a news report of the pilgrimage journey too." One of the statues of Our Lady blessed by Pope Francis will visit our monastery at Pachacamac on the outskirts of Lima in the morning of February 13th. Holy Mass will be celebrated at 11.00am, and there will be an opportunity for confessions.

All during my growing up and for about the first ten years of my priesthood, we used to recite prayers for Russia. The priest would belt through the Last Gospel, give the Blessing, collect the paten and chalice under their veil from the centre of the altar, go down and kneel on the bottom step and recite with the congregation prayers for Russia. Originally they were for the restoration of temporal power to the Holy See (*sic*). In 1929 this was settled by the Treaty of the Lateran, but, in the following year,

Pope Pius XI ordered that the Leonine Prayers should be offered "*to permit tranquillity and freedom to profess the faith to be restored to the afflicted people of Russia*" But the following year, Pope Pius XI ordered that the Leonine Prayers should be offered "*to permit tranquillity and freedom to profess the faith to be restored to the afflicted people of Russia*" (*Allocution Indictam ante* of 30 June 1930, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 22 (1930), p.301). He was very concerned about the persecution and encouraged the foundation of the Benedictine monastery of Chevetogne as an outstretched hand offered to Orthodox refugees in western Europe.

Rightly or wrongly, we associated these prayers with Our Lady's request at Fatima for prayer and penance for the conversion of Russia. During the apparitions, Our Lady said:

The war is going to end: but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI. When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world"

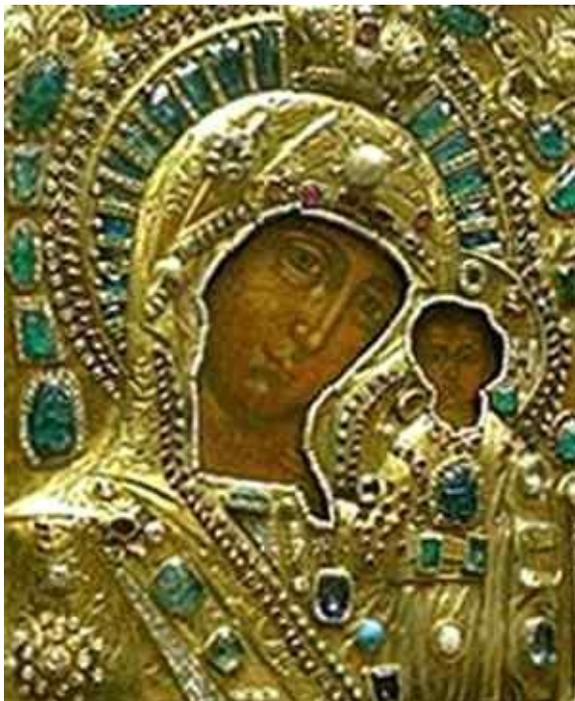
Of course, the apparitions took place many months before the October Revolution in Russia, also before any sign that Russia would be particularly dangerous to Christians - Holy Russia seemed to be stable, even if it was at war with Germany. To any who accept that this was Our Lady speaking, this is no difficulty. Anyway, it was not being generally read and interpreted until after the Communist revolution, and devotees of Fatima had no difficulty or doubt about the evils of atheistic communism. It is true that there is an extreme right-wing group who believe that ecumenism is from the devil and re-interpret the revelation accordingly; but, well, the Orthodox have the Athonite abbots!!

One rather surprising thing about Our Lady's teaching at Fatima is the idea that the prayers and penances of ordinary little people can, in some strange way, change the course of history, if they pray enough, if they do enough penance. Put this the other way round, when we encounter a situation of great evil, we cannot completely exonerate ourselves from what has happened: perhaps we have not prayed enough or lived enough of a Christian life, and so have contributed to this evil by not being good enough. It reminds me of Staretz Zosima who tells us to make ourselves responsible for all:

"But when he knows that he is not only worse than all those in the world, but is also guilty before all people, on behalf of all and for all, for all human sins, the world's and each person's, only then will the goal of our unity be achieved. [...] Only then will our hearts be moved to a love that is infinite, universal, and knows no satiety." (4.1.2)

for the story, click the title: One person who really believed in Fatima was Pope St John Paul II. During the apparitions Our Lady said,

"In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world"



Pope John Paul knew that between the feast of the Transfiguration (August 6th in the Julian Calendar, August 19th in ours) and the feast of the Dormition (Assumption) (on August 15th in the Julian calendar and August 28th in ours) in 1991, Communism fell in Russia. It culminated in a scene in which the Patriarch threatened any troops who fired on unarmed civilians would be excommunicated, and special forces refused to carry out KGB orders. This was the feast of the Dormition, and the Orthodox faithful believed that it was due to the intervention of Our Lady of Kazan. St John Paul II also believed this, and saw it as a fulfilment of the prophecy at Fatima. I think that he came to believe that the re-conversion of Europe would be heralded by the re-conversion of communist Russia, that a re-converted Holy Russia was of vital importance to the New Evangelisation, that it is in Our Lady's plan. Also, the Evangelisation would be strengthened by the prayers and penances of little people: in all kinds of ways, we will all become evangelists. Then he was given an old Russian icon of Our Lady of Kazan that had been given to the Sanctuary in Fatima. He returned it to Russia.



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The Belmont Journal [at Monks and Mermaids]



This is our monastery in England. Father Jonathan, who is the first monk you see in the video, is at present spending two months with us in Pachacamac Priory on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. Father Luke who recently died, Father Paul who is now abbot, and I first went out from Belmont in 1981 to make the foundation in Peru. Please pray for both communities.

This contribution is available at <http://fatherdavidbirdosb.blogspot.pe/2017/02/the-belmont-journal.html>
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