

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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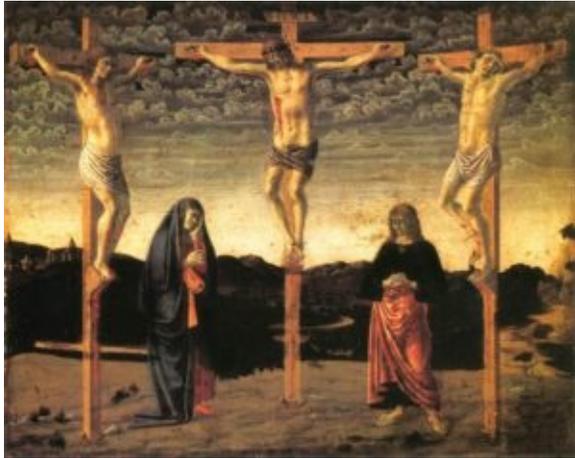
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3 Days and 3 Nights -- From When Till When? [at Catholicism and Adventism]

Did Jesus die on a Friday and rise from the dead on a Sunday? Or did he die on a Wednesday or Thursday? And did he rise from the dead on a Saturday?



Andrea del Castagno – Crucifixion

Various Christian groups have objected that the traditional Friday-to-Sunday timing is wrong. In particular, the offshoots of Herbert Armstrong’s [Worldwide Church of God](#) have tried to argue this point, mostly because they worship on Saturdays instead of Sundays, and if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead on a Sunday, then Sunday observance is pointless. Their arguments are lengthy, but they can be refuted with a few simple explanations.

It is important to note here that in the Bible, days begin at sunset. This is most relevant here in the crucifixion narratives, which show the sabbath about to begin as sunset approached on the day Jesus died.

The key verse in the crucifixion/resurrection timing debate is this:

Matt 12:40 (KJV) – For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Objection 1. It would seem that “*three days and three nights*” is a phrase that must be taken literally, and therefore Jesus spent 72 hours in the tomb in order for his words in Matthew to be true. The Bible does not count inclusively, and if Jesus was in the tomb for three days, that too means a 72 hour time period. If Jesus was buried shortly before sunset (John 19:42) then he must have risen shortly before sunset 72 hours later. Since Jesus rested in the tomb on the sabbath, and was risen by the next morning, he must have risen from the dead on the sabbath, shortly before sunset. 72 hours before the sunset that ends the sabbath is the sunset on Wednesday evening. Therefore Jesus was crucified on Wednesday and rose as the sabbath ended 72 hours later.



The Sacrificial Lamb – Josefa de Ayala, ca 1670

Objection 2. Further, there were two sabbaths in the week Jesus was crucified. One was the Passover day, 15 Nisan, which occurred on Thursday. The next was the weekly sabbath, which occurred on Saturday. Wednesday 14 Nisan was the preparation day mentioned in John 19:31,42, the preparation for the Passover.

Objection 3. Further, Jesus was typified by the wave sheaf offering, which took place on the day after the weekly sabbath during Passover week. This is not when Jesus rose from the dead, for he had risen from the dead 12 hours previously at the end of the weekly sabbath, but rather when he came out of the tomb.

Objection 4. Further, the above objections are confirmed by the two distinct rest periods when the women rested between buying and preparing spices and going to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. The women had no time to purchase spices on Wednesday between Jesus' burial and sunset. They rested on the sabbath that was Passover day on Thursday, and then on Friday they purchased (Mark 16:1) and prepared the spices (Luke 23:56). Then they rested on the weekly sabbath (Luke 23:56), and went to the tomb early on Sunday morning (Luke 24:1, Mark 16:2).

On the contrary, it is written – Jesus rose on the third day (Luke 24:46) and Sunday was the third day (Luke 24:21). Therefore he died on Friday, the first day of three in a series.



The descent from the cross, by Rembrandt

I answer that Jesus died on the day of preparation (John 19:31,42), which was a name for the day before the weekly sabbath. The weekly sabbath was Saturday, and so Jesus died on Friday. Furthermore, Jesus rose on the third day, counting inclusively, at the same time the wave sheaf offering was performed, on the morning after Passover day (Lev 23:11).

Reply to objection 1

“*Three days and three nights*” is an idiomatic expression that, if taken literally, contradicts other passages in Scripture. It stands in contrast with multiple mentions of “*the third day*” in the New Testament. If “*the third day*” is used in the Bible to refer to a day 72 hours from the start of counting, only then can “*three days and three nights*” be taken literally. Luke 13:32 shows Jesus speaking of “*today, tomorrow, and the third day*” – so the third day is the day after tomorrow, if we start counting today. If today is Friday, tomorrow is Saturday, then the third day is Sunday. Similarly in Exodus 19:10-11, God tells Moses to sanctify the people “*today and tomorrow*” and to be ready on “*the third day*”. If today is Friday, tomorrow is Saturday, then the third day is Sunday. Luke 23:21 confirms that the third day after Jesus died was Sunday.

Furthermore, Scripture shows that if Jesus had died on Wednesday, then Sunday would have been the fifth day, and if Jesus had died on a Thursday, Sunday would have been the fourth day. Scripture shows us such a 72 hour period, lasting from the morning of one day, through the next day, and the day after that, and ending on the morning of the fourth day. Beginning in Acts 10:3, Cornelius has a vision at the ninth hour. In verse 9, it is the next day, “*on the morrow*”. Verse 23 shows us the day after that, “*on the morrow*”. Verse 24 shows us the day after that, again “*the morrow*”. And on this day, in verse 30, Cornelius tells us that his vision was four days ago – “*Four days ago I was fasting until this hour*”. Cornelius counted this way: today, tomorrow, the next day, and then the fourth day. If Jesus had been crucified on a Thursday, Sunday would have been the fourth day, but Luke 24:21 and Luke 24:46 tell us that Sunday was the third day. If Jesus had been crucified on a Wednesday, Sunday would have been the fifth day, not the third. [Note: see further discussion of Acts 10’s four days in the comments.]



Commiphora myrrha

Therefore, following the way the authors of the Bible counted of three or four days, we can be certain that if Jesus rose on Sunday, then he had to have been crucified on Friday. “*Three days and three*

nights” is an idiomatic expression that emphasises three days, but not the number of hours involved. Esther 4:16-5:1 confirms this.

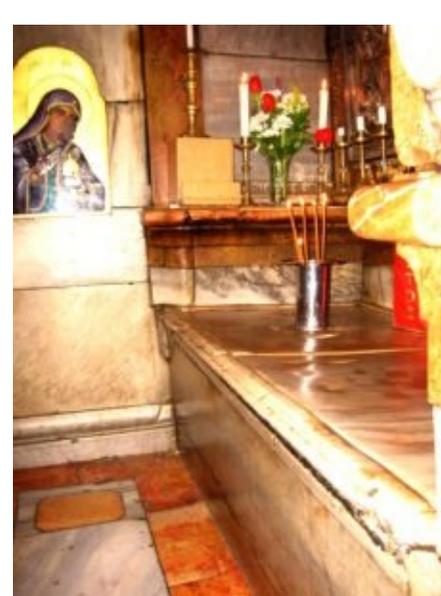
Reply to objection 2

Nowhere does the Bible state clearly that there were two sabbaths that week. This needs to be inferred after much convoluted rearrangement of Scripture. In each of the Gospels we see a three day sequence presented – preparation, the sabbath, and the third day. We see this in Matt 27:62-28:1; again in Mark 15:42-16:2; again in Luke 23:54-24:1; and finally in John 19:31,42-20:1.

The “*preparation*” day meant only the day before the weekly sabbath, not some preparation day for the Passover not called this in the Bible. The Greek word on the New Testament is “*παρασκευή*“. The word is used six times in the New Testament, all referring to the day Jesus was crucified, and it is defined in Mark 15:42 as “*the day before the sabbath*“. By the time of the New Testament, “sabbath” specifically referred to the 7th day of the week. In the Greek of the time, the term *παρασκευή* had become, for the Jews, a synonym for the day before the weekly sabbath. No textual evidence to the contrary exists. The Didache, a Christian document written between 70 and 120 AD, confirms that *παρασκευή* is a day of the week used for fasting. The longer (and more recent) version of St Ignatius of Antioch’s letter to the Trallians (dating to about 300 AD) refers to three consecutive days – preparation, the sabbath, and the first day – as being the days on which Jesus died, rested, and rose.

Knowing that *παρασκευή* was the name of the 6th day of the week in the Greek spoken at the time, just as *sabbaton* was the name of the 7th, the only way to interpret “*preparation of the passover*” was the way all Christians of the era interpreted it – the Friday associated with the passover. So call the day before passover “*preparation of the passover*” on a Thursday would literally sound like “*Thursday is the Friday of passover*“.

Reply to objection 3



The tomb of Jesus, adriatikus, Wikimedia Commons

The wave sheaf offering after Passover represented Jesus’ rising from the dead, and instruction is given in Lev 23:11. In keeping with the usage of the word at the time Leviticus was written, “*sabbath*” could

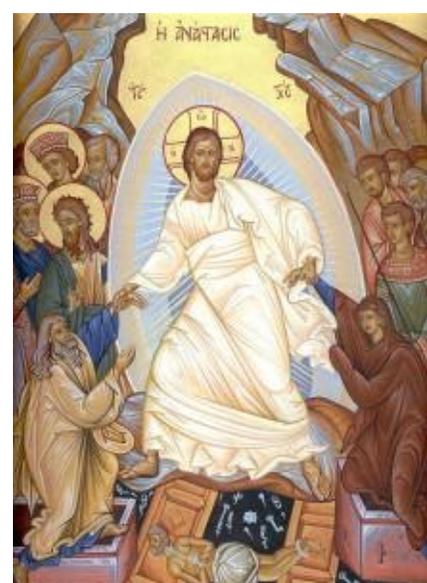
refer to the weekly sabbath or to Passover in this verse. However, we know it took place on the day after Passover, on 16 Nisan, whichever day of the week it occurred. The first century AD historian Josephus confirms that this was the Jewish interpretation of Lev 23:11, which states that the wave sheaf offering is to take place after the sabbath day, i.e. Passover day (Josephus, Antiquities 3.250–251), as does the Targum of Jonathan from the previous century (Targum of Jonathan, XXXI). Since 16 Nisan was therefore Sunday, 15 Nisan was on the weekly sabbath, and therefore Passover and the weekly sabbath were on the same day that year.

Furthermore, the argument that Jesus rose from the dead at the end of the sabbath but didn't exit the tomb until the next morning requires that, if a 72 hour period is used, Jesus spent about 12 hours more than 72 hours in the tomb, even though he was only dead for 72 of those hours. This would be in conflict with Matt 12:40, the verse being interpreted by the objectors as being a literal time period.

Reply to objection 4

There are no two distinct rest periods for these women any more than there are two distinct sabbaths that week. Luke 23:56 states clearly that the women prepared the spices on the same day Jesus died, and then rested on the sabbath. The verse immediately following, Luke 24:1, shows that on the first day of the week they took these prepared spices to the tomb. There is no indication that there is an entire unmentioned day between Luke 23:55 and Luke 23:56; in fact the text prevents this interpretation. Mark 16:1 causes confusion for the objectors, but it can be clarified by looking at the tenses. The objectors split Mark 16:1 and Mark 16:2 into two events taking place on two separate days (Friday and Sunday) with an unmentioned day in between. This is not the case. The purchasing (*ηγορασσαν*) is an act that took place in the past. When the sabbath was past, the women had already bought the spices. This was not a case of the women buying the spices once the sabbath had ended – it was a case of the sabbath ending with the spices already bought (prepared, in fact, the day Jesus died, as per Luke 23:56.) They didn't venture out at night, and so the next verse, Mark 16:2, follows immediately without a day between verses 1 and 2. The women arrived at the tomb, spices already bought and prepared.

In conclusion:



Icon of the Resurrection

1. Jesus died on preparation day, which can only mean Friday (Matt 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54, John 19:14,31,42)
2. “*On the third day*” means that the first day was the day before yesterday (Luke 13:32, Exodus 19:10-11)
3. Because “*the third day*” was Sunday, the day Jesus died was Friday
4. Had Jesus been in the tomb since Thursday, Sunday would have been the fourth day (Acts 10:30)
5. The women prepared the spices on the same day Jesus died (Luke 23:56)
6. Jesus was in the tomb on the sabbath
7. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, Sunday (Luke 24:21,46)
8. The day after Passover was the wave sheaf offering (Lev 23:11), the day Jesus rose from the dead (Luke 24:21,46)
9. The women arrived on Sunday morning to find the tomb empty

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Saint Catherine of Bologna's Seven Spiritual Weapons of Use to the Faithful in the Fight Against Evil [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



In her didactic treatise,

The Seven Spiritual Weapons

, Saint Catherine offers deep insight into combating Satan's lies and fighting temptation for the salvation of souls. Pope Benedict XVI called the seven spiritual weapons she identified as useful to the faithful, "A splendid program of spiritual life... for each one of us!"

"1. Always to be careful and diligently strive to do good; 2. to believe that alone we will never be able to do something truly good; 3. to trust in God and, for love of him, never to fear in the battle against evil, either in the world or within ourselves; 4. to meditate often on the events and words of the life of Jesus, and especially on his Passion and his death; 5. to remember that we must die; 6. to focus our minds firmly on memory of the goods of Heaven; 7. to be familiar with Sacred Scripture, always cherishing it in our hearts so that it may give direction to all our thoughts and all our actions."

Prayer to Saint Catherine of Bologna

Dear saintly Poor Clare, Saint Catherine of Bologna, so rich in love for Jesus and Mary, you were endowed with great talents by God and you left us most inspiring writings and paintings of wondrous beauty. You did so for God's greater glory and in this you are a model for all. May artists learn from you to use their God given gifts in full to exemplify the divine qualities of truth, beauty and goodness. Amen.

When Religion IS a Relationship [at A Faith-Full Life]

What if religion *is* a relationship? To make the claim, that Christianity *is* a religion – and not just a relationship with Christ, is very countercultural in today’s world. Subversive even. Everywhere we look we are confronted with slogans which assert that, “*Christianity isn’t a religion – it’s a relationship with*

~~Rules~~
~~Relationship~~
~~Religion~~

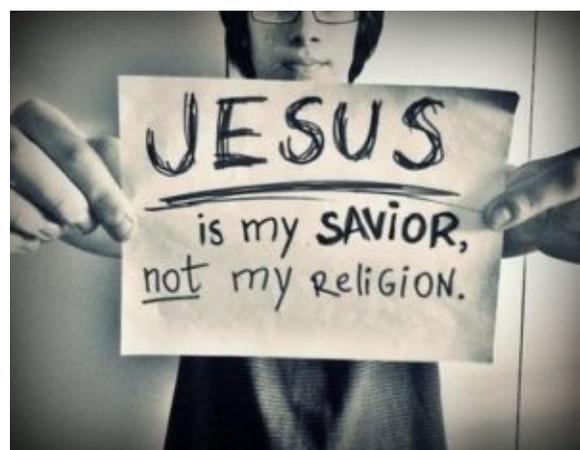
God.” We are told that, “*Religion kills, but Jesus saves.*”

And from the pulpit, no less, we are assured that, “*Jesus didn’t come to start a new religion.*” that, “*Jesus hates religion...but He loves you.*” Some will even wonder whether religion isn’t a trick of the devil to lead people away from God.

This topic has been coming up with some frequency in my conversations with others lately, so I thought I’d take a swing at it here.

What is Religion?

Perhaps we should begin by defining our terms. Merriam-Webster defines religion as “*The service and worship of God or the supernatural: commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance*” and secondarily, “*a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices.*”



At first blush, there seems to be very little in this definition that would unduly trouble Christians. And yet remember that virtually all of the anti-religion statements and memes circulating on the internet today are not from atheists or secularists, but rather from people of faith. People who refuse to call themselves religious, are hesitant to even label themselves as Christians, but nonetheless love Jesus.

Religion as an Institution

If I had to guess, I would presume that most Christians don’t take issue per se with religion as a

personal set of beliefs and practices. It's the "*institutionalized system*" part that gets them. But allow me to suggest something which you may find rather shocking.

God created religion.

Specifically, the Judeo-Christian faith as an institution, a "religion" as it were, is created by God.

I know, I know, religion is a bad word, a bad thing, something which kills the life of faith rather than sustaining it. It's a list of rules, and traditions, and various drudgeries, and should be avoided at all costs.

I know. I get it. Religion isn't cool.

...But don't change the channel just yet. Let's review the tape first.

In the Old Testament we find that it is God who calls Aaron to be high priest and the Levites to priestly service, even providing incredibly detailed instructions for priestly vestments.¹ It is God who commands sacrifice and oblation,² God who commands an altar, anointing oil, and incense,³ and God who gives the instructions for the construction of His Temple and its implements:

Then David gave his son Solomon the plan of the vestibule of the temple, and of its houses, its treasuries, its upper rooms, and its inner chambers, and of the room for the mercy seat; and the plan of all that he had in mind: for the courts of the house of the Lord, all the surrounding chambers, the treasuries of the house of God, and the treasuries for dedicated gifts; for the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, and all the work of the service in the house of the Lord; for all the vessels for the service in the house of the Lord, the weight of gold for all golden vessels for each service, the weight of silver vessels for each service, the weight of the golden lampstands and their lamps, the weight of gold for each lampstand and its lamps, the weight of silver for a lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each in the service, the weight of gold for each table for the rows of bread, the silver for the silver tables, and pure gold for the forks, the basins, and the cups; for the golden bowls and the weight of each; for the silver bowls and the weight of each; for the altar of incense made of refined gold, and its weight; also his plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord. "All this, in writing at the Lord's direction, he made clear to me—the plan of all the works."⁴

It is also God who sets forth both the moral law and the ceremonial law for His people, the nation of Israel.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but God created religion. It was His idea. His plan. His way of accomplishing His purpose.

But, many Christians will object saying, "Surely this isn't the case in the New Testament? Surely Christ condemns religion and only desires a relationship with us?" Well...let's take a look.

Jesus – Good Friend or God?



In the New Testament, Christ is incredibly clear that He has not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them.⁵ He establishes a Church – a religious institution. It is both visible and hierarchical. It is built upon St. Peter (similar to Aaron’s role),⁶ and secondarily upon the apostles (similar to the role of the Levites).⁷ It is authoritative, given the power to bind and loose on earth AND in heaven.⁸ It has juridical authority in the life of the believer – “*If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church;*” – including the power of excommunication.⁹ It requires our submission as believers, “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.*”¹⁰ It is the religious institution of the Church which is the “*pillar and foundation of truth.*”¹¹ In creating a Church, He creates a religion. He authoritatively reinterprets the Old Testament moral law, calling New Testament believers to a *higher standard of conduct!*¹²

With all this in mind, Christ Himself never speaks out against religion. How could He? It has been established by God, and He is God.

What He does do (frequently) is speak out against *religious hypocrisy* in the life of individuals – especially (although not exclusively) in the lives of religious leaders.

But, and pay attention here, He does this while simultaneously *affirming* their God given authority! “*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, **do whatever they teach you and follow it;** but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.*”¹³

In other words, according to Jesus, (and I’m paraphrasing here): Religion ain’t the problem. Not living according to your faith is. [\[Tweet This\]](#)

Hook-Up Culture Christianity

There’s one final aspect that we should consider when it comes to the utter disdain for “religion” found amongst those who nevertheless live what can only be described as objectively religious lives (service and worship of God, devotion to faith, etc.) and claim to have a “saving faith” and “relationship” with Christ.

When we look to Scripture, how does the bible describe this “relationship” which Christ has with His Church? I put the word relationship in quotes simply because it is a word that is entirely absent from the language of Scripture despite it’s popularity today. Nonetheless when we look for the type of “relationship” which Christ has with His Church we see this: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*¹⁴ In Scripture, the “relationship” that Christ enjoys with His Church is that of a marriage. You want intimacy with Christ? It doesn’t get much more intimate than a one flesh union. I’ve written a bit more on this topic in another article which you can find here: [An Intimate Union](#)

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

With that in mind, let me ask you something. How do you think my wife would feel if I were to say to her, *“Listen honey, I’m not really into all the rules and traditions that go along with marriage. I want a relationship with you, but I don’t want to put a label on it, I’m just not comfortable with that. After all, it’s not about a ceremony, it’s about love. It’s not about vows it’s about freedom. I don’t want a marriage, I just want a hook-up buddy.”*

The Ugly Truth

Are you ready for the ugly truth? Often we don’t want to admit to others that we are religious because it *obligates* us to a certain way of life, to certain practices and beliefs. The type of relationship that reflects Christ’s relationship with His Church is a marriage. It is covenantal. Sacramental. It makes promises and takes vows. We’d rather say, “I’m not religious I just love Jesus.” because it lets us off the hook when we’d rather not go to church on Sunday. Or when we’d rather not set aside actual time for prayer. We can be “spiritual” by just going on a hike and then get in a quick prayer during our morning commute. Saying that we aren’t religious gives us that latitude.

But Jesus said, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.”*¹⁵

And He also said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*¹⁶

And again He said, *“But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”*¹⁷

In point of fact, Jesus said a great many things about how to properly live life as one within the kingdom of God,¹⁸ which He came to initiate among us. In point of fact, Jesus *wants* a commitment from His bride. In point of fact, it is within this commitment, this marriage with Christ, that a one flesh union can take place. And it is through this one flesh union that we can become the very body of Christ.

And that is religion. The practice of our faith with and in and through Christ, as we follow and

obey Him. Religion, as created by God, provides the context for our relationship with Him.

Final Thoughts

While it is necessary for us as Christians to speak out forcefully against religious hypocrisy (and guard against it in our own lives as well) I would be hard pressed to assign “religion” to the work of the devil. The devil doesn’t create. Rather, the devil does what he always does, he takes that which is created good and perfect by God and he twists and deforms it until it is almost unrecognizable.

If we are uncomfortable admitting that we are religious, it is likely due to the fact that we aren’t serving and worshipping God correctly.

True religion doesn’t offend, it attracts.

We need to, as St. James exhorts us, return to “*pure and undefiled religion*”¹⁹ – not simply abandon it to the machinations of the devil. It is far too easy to blame an “institution” while letting ourselves off the hook for our own religious hypocrisy and pretenses.

Finally we should acknowledge that Christianity is meant to be communal – our faith is meant to be lived out together. It was never intended to be just me, my bible, and Jesus. And religion is what binds us together.

Spirituality is whatever I want it to be. Religion is the faith handed on once and for all.

*“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”*²⁰

It’s no good pointing our finger at “the church.” WE are the Church. The problem at the institutional level of the Church stems from a problem at the individual level. Namely, we are all sinners.

I am religious and I am a hypocrite. God have mercy on me a sinner.

Share us with your friends on Facebook, Twitter, or even by good old fashioned word of mouth!

Email us – afaith.fulllife@gmail.com or leave us a post on our [Facebook](#) page!

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1. Exodus 28-29:9 [↔](#)
 2. Exodus 29:10-46 [↔](#)
 3. Exodus 30 [↔](#)
 4. 1 Chronicles 28:11-19 [↔](#)

5. Matthew 5:17-18 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. [↵](#)
6. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18 [↵](#)
7. built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. Ephesians 2:20 [↵](#)
8. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 [↵](#)
9. Matthew 18:15-17 ...If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. [↵](#)
10. Hebrews 13:17 [↵](#)
11. 1 Timothy 3:15 [↵](#)
12. Matthew 5:21-38 You have heard it said, but I say to you... [↵](#)
13. Matthew 23:2-3 [↵](#)
14. Ephesians 5:31-32 [↵](#)
15. Matthew 16:24b-27 [↵](#)
16. John 14:15 [↵](#)
17. Matthew 24:13 [↵](#)
18. Matthew 5-7 [↵](#)
19. James 1:27 [↵](#)
20. Ephesians 4:4-6 [↵](#)

This contribution is available at <http://adamncrawford.com/religion-not-relationship>
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Lest Factionalism Blind: Reflections on Divisions [at If I Might Interject]

Catholics are called to be the light of the world and the city on a hill—in other words a visible beacon that shows others the way. Yet, increasingly, Catholics seem willing to adopt the tactics of the world to promote their position and savage their enemies. If something makes their enemy look bad, it gets repeated, even if they have not made certain it is true, or worse, they know it is false. The problem is, we are forbidden to do this. We are called to speak truthfully and with charity. This means we must investigate the claims alleged *before* we repeat them online. If we find them to be false, or doubtful, we must not spread them as if they were true.

It doesn't even have to be malicious calumny. All too often, people nowadays are willing to believe the worst about those who hold a different view about how to best be faithful to God and His Church, or about someone with a different political ideology. From that point of departure, they are willing to spread the accusations they hear without checking if they are true.

A growing number of Catholics are willing to believe that the Pope is teaching error because of the false accusations that have been formed by people misrepresenting his teaching. Never mind the fact that transcripts and interviews show he did not say what the headline quotes scream. These Catholics still believe the Pope intends to change Church teaching, despite the numerous times he has said exactly the opposite of what they accuse him of. What I find notable is the fact that people have been constantly been playing this game with politicians, making all sorts of accusations without basis—and that's the problem.

When the Pope teaches, or when the bishops teach in communion with the Pope, we are required to give assent. This isn't a political opinion or a party plank. It is a matter of the successors to the apostles binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). But if we treat the Pope like a politician, especially if we treat him like a politician we despise, we are rejecting God when we reject the Church (Luke 10:16). This is something the Church has taught long before the current system of nation-states, and it will be taught long after they fade away. Since the Catholic faith requires us to accept that God protects His Church from teaching error in matters of faith and morals, we can either accept it as true, or we can deny that the Catholic Church teaches truly. But if we deny it, our relationship with God and His Church is damaged (Matthew 18:17).

If we want to escape the trap of being alienated from God and His Church, we need to investigate whether things are as we think they are—both in the matter of whether a Pope or bishop actually said what foes accuse them of saying, and in the matter of whether we have properly understood Church teaching. I'm not talking about comparing what we think the Pope said with what we think a past writing of the Church said to determine whether he is "orthodox" or not. I'm talking about investigating what the Pope said, and how it was intended on one hand, and whether we actually understand the Church teaching we think he is at odds with. Once more, if we accept God's promise on protecting the Church from teaching error, then we must accept that He protects the Church just as much today as in any other era of the Church.

So, we cannot treat the Church teaching and Church teachers like politics and politicians. But if we just

stop there, we're still doing wrong. Why? Because the obligation to speak the truth in charity does not stop at the level of the Church. You might think one party or politician is wonderful, while another is a wrong. But you cannot treat the despised politician or party as if God's commandments on truth were set aside. Even when they do wrong, our obligation to do right continues. That means we cannot commit rash judgment or calumny against them, even if the false story generates enough outrage that we can replace a hated politician with a preferred one. We may not do evil so good may come from it.

I would say that our problem is threefold. First, that we treat those we oppose as enemies, rather than children of God, who also need salvation. Second, that we have sinned against charity and truth by spreading hurtful stories against those we see as enemies without determining if they are true or, worse, spreading them knowing they are false. Third, that we treat the magisterium of the Church as enemies.

Lest factionalism blind us to our sins, we need to undo this threefold problem. We must stop thinking of those we oppose as enemies. Yes, some people may have bad ideas, even harmful ideas. But God does not desire the death of the sinner (Ezekiel 18:23), but that they turn from their wickedness. That means correcting them with charity, lest our bad behavior leads them to think we are the evil ones. It means we cannot adopt the tactic that the ends justify the means in the hope we can drive those we oppose from power. Finally it means that when the Pope and bishops in communion teach, we cannot treat this teaching—even in the ordinary magisterium (Canon 752-754)—as if it were a party platform held by an enemy.

If we can keep these things in our heart, and practice them, we can be God's instruments in reaching out to those who are in error. If we refuse to change our behavior, we are part of the problem, and at the final judgment, we will have to answer for it.

This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2017/03/lest-factionalism-blind-reflections-on.html>
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'71: The Best Violent Movie You've Never Seen [at One Thousand Words a Week]

We may kill if necessary, but we must not hate and enjoy hating. We may punish if necessary, but we must not enjoy it.

~ [C.S. Lewis](#)

The whole purpose of this post is to prompt you to watch '71 (2015), because I'm guessing you've never seen it. Heck, I'll wager you've never even heard of it.

That's no surprise, because it was a flash in the pan when it came out a few years ago. I don't remember it ever showing up at the theaters around here, and, even if it had, I would've given it a pass. To begin with, the title itself is a marketing disaster. "1971?" I asked myself when I saw it come up in the [Redbox](#) queue last year. "What, a movie about hippies?" I was standing outside our Walgreens, on the prowl for a flick to watch with my teenage son. Since nothing else was even remotely appealing, I read the description of ['71](#) and decided to give it a shot.

It turned out to be a riveting experience – for both of us. Directed by Yann Demange, '71 is the story of a young, naïve British recruit, Gary Hook (Jack O'Connell), whose regiment is assigned to provide security in Belfast during [The Troubles](#). After a disastrous confrontation with rioting Irish nationalists and [IRA](#) sympathizers, the soldier gets separated from his unit and is effectively abandoned in a staunchly Catholic district. Forced to fend for himself, Hook relies on his wits and the good will of those he encounters to survive a night in enemy territory and make his way back to safety.

'71 is a whirlwind from beginning to end – we were rapt throughout: the action is constant; the violence (rarely gratuitous), abundant; the characters, three-dimensional and sympathetic – even the bad guys (mostly). In addition, the exquisite by David Holmes, shifting between calm guitar and rumbling drums, subtly propels the action forward – very reminiscent of the pulsating soundtrack in *Sorcerer* (1977).

And while the story is hard to follow, there are plenty enough threads to keep you engaged. It's hard to know exactly what's going on most the time – who's on which side, who are the good guys, who are the bad – but there's underlying urgency and pounding action that pins you down and demands your attention, beyond even the thrilling survival narrative of Private Hook. The urgency stems in large part from the confusion. In fact, I'd say the confusion is practically a lead character unto itself, and it's introduced at the very beginning of the film.

As Hook and his comrades are called to attention, a commanding officer announces that they won't be deployed to Germany as planned. "Because of the deteriorating security situation in Belfast, your regiment is now being deployed there on an emergency basis.... I take it you all know where Belfast is? Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom. Here. You are not leaving this country." The disturbing reality of the Irish civil war was that the combatants not only professed the same creedal faith, but also the same nationality and/or heritage. It was worse than World War I, where Christians fought Christians across the trenches – French Catholics and Anglican Brits against Christian Germans of all stripes. The unraveling of the WWI [Christmas Truce](#) depicted in the film *Joyeux Noël* (2005) was painful enough to watch, but not nearly as painful as seeing Irish Christians rip each other apart in '71.

It's also painful to watch the film's depiction of how young Irishmen were conditioned and seduced into killing. Without giving away too much, one character in particular is a case study in homicidal inducement. He resists, despite all the encouragement from his elders to give way and get over the hump of the first kill. He hesitates, he stalls, a sign that he hasn't completely lost touch with that inner voice telling him that murder is always, always wrong. At that point, it's hard to tell how much of his reluctance to shoot is rooted in his Christian upbringing, no matter how nominal, and how much of it is some fundamental instinct against taking another human being's life.

That there is such an instinct is unquestionable. “The history of warfare can be seen as a history of increasingly more effective mechanisms for enabling and conditioning men to overcome their innate resistance to killing their fellow human beings.” So writes West Point professor Lt. Col. Dave Grossman in [On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society](#) (1995). Grossman details the normalizing process that modern military machines utilize to suppress that resistance in men and women, and optimize both their willingness to kill and their efficiency in doing so. '71 is practically a cinematic adaptation of Grossman's Kübler-Ross-like stages of how we accustom ourselves to human slaughter. “The basic response stages to killing in combat are concern about killing, the actual kill, exhilaration, remorse, and rationalization and acceptance.” Prodding future combatants toward that rationalization and acceptance seems to be standard operating procedure for all kinds of armed organizations. Conscience, it seems, and [morality](#) have no place.

At the conclusion of the film, I shuddered and looked over at my son. He's turning 18 next year, and will have to cope with [signing up for the draft](#) and all that entails. Maybe it was unnecessary, but I felt compelled to apologize to him for a world in which violence has become the default response to so many problems. In addition, I made a mental note to call my friend Shawn at [Catholic Peace Fellowship](#) to get him connected with Cris – to set up a meeting for the two of them to discuss what it means to sign on the dotted line with Selective Service.

Also, I decided to write this post to urge people to watch this underrated and neglected film – and watch it with your teens, especially your sons. As bleak as it is, '71 contains a powerful undercurrent of confidence in our essential humaneness. “It is there,” Grossman insists, “it is strong, and it gives us cause to believe that there just may be hope for mankind after all.”

This contribution is available at <http://onethousandwordsaweek.wordpress.com/2017/03/04/71-the-best-violent-movie-youve-never-seen/>

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Good Works, While There's Time

International Women's Day is upon us again. I see the hashtag du jour is #ADayWithoutWomen, referring to a gender-based strike to show the world what happens when women bow out of work for a day.

They don't get paid, for one thing. Those of us who don't work on salary already knew that. To each her own, though. I'll leave the day-without-women adherents in peace.

There's another observance going on today, or rather a feast: the feast of St. John of God – [“the Waif,”](#) as he is described in one account of his life. He spent the last few years of his life in unstinting service to the destitute, for the love of God. My Laudate app (I do love certain bits of modern technology) advised me this morning of something the saint said:

“Labour without stopping; do all the good work you can while you still have the time.”

Those words startled me, coming as they did after I'd had my morning helping of Twitter and its hashtags. St. John might have been speaking to me. *Put the phone down. Stop trying to be clever. There's work to do.*

I know some women nearby who *are* doing good work today, and who without ill will are paying no attention to recommendations that they put everything down for the day.

A friend of mine is caring for her children, including a baby and a foster child. Don't tell those kids it's a day without women.

A neighbor of mine is sitting in the legislature at this moment, prepared to vote on numerous measures including some life-issue legislation. The session is expected to extend into this evening and then resume tomorrow morning. Opponents of the life-issue bills would be delighted if my neighbor would participate in a day without women. Ain't happening, though.

I'll be meeting a doctor later today, but not for a medical problem. She's new in town, and I want to welcome her. With the help of a Catholic hospital, she's going to lead an OB/GYN practice dedicated to NaPro Technology: wholly pro-life, not just abortion-free. Hers will be the first practice of its kind in my area. I'm glad she's not taking a day off.

Do good work while you still have the time. On this Women's Day, these women are showing how it's done. I need the examples, and I'm grateful for them.

This contribution is available at <http://ellenkolb.com/2017/03/08/good-works-while-theres-time/>
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Less of Me [at With Us Still]

There's a vile connection, I've noticed, between a certain pair of digital read-outs that are part of my daily routine.

Or perhaps it's a 'vital' connection.



Gak! I can't handle the truth...

Digital display #1 is on our bathroom scale...and let's just say that I gave that sucker an 'unprecedented workout' in early January – sending its numeric computations into realms that quite frankly it had never seen before.

Digital display #2 is on the treadmill that we keep in an upstairs bedroom nearby. Not coincidentally, *its* display hadn't changed a bit for several months prior to my early January weigh-in.

A noteworthy observation, perhaps, as we begin this holy season of Lent: If I want to see 'good news' when I step on the scale, it certainly helps to settle into a pattern of healthy practices on my exercise machine.

That's exactly what the Church teaches, I think, in encouraging us to develop habits of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during Lent. We hear a lot about repentance and sin throughout this season – and we *need* to hear it. We need to be aware of the muck, detritus and debris that can dim the glory of our souls.



Healthy habits can lead to Good News...

But we might need to be just a little careful about the connection we tend to draw... between our holy habits and the forgiveness of our sins. We don't fast and pray in order to earn God's mercy. Forgiveness is a gift, already given.

Rather, our Lenten practices are about clearing the ground...to allow *new things* to emerge in us. The Benedictine John Klassen, abbot of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota, [has written about this](#) dynamic – drawing a parallel to his community's practice of burning rotating sections of prairie on their grounds.

By mid-summer, the grasses in the prescribed burn area *are twice the height* of the unburned areas. Why? The burn leaves dark ash that absorbs the sun's rays. The ash is a nutrient-rich covering, waiting for the first rain to soak it into the ground. Finally, some seeds need heat to crack them open. Burning is the source of renewing energy, and ashes are the result of that burning.

I have seen firsthand how this process of renewal can work: This [blog](#) – and [its predecessor](#) – began four years ago as a Lenten practice...something 'new,' it turned out, that God desired to do in me. I am deeply grateful for that gift...even as I wonder what bright new blessings could flower from my meager acts of self-denial in 2017.

Care to join me on the journey? Let's explore how '*less of me*' might come to mean '*more of God*' in our little corners of the world. Let's [join with the Psalmist](#) in praying,

Give me back the joy of your salvation,

And a willing spirit sustain in me.

O Lord, open my lips,

And my mouth shall proclaim your praise!



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

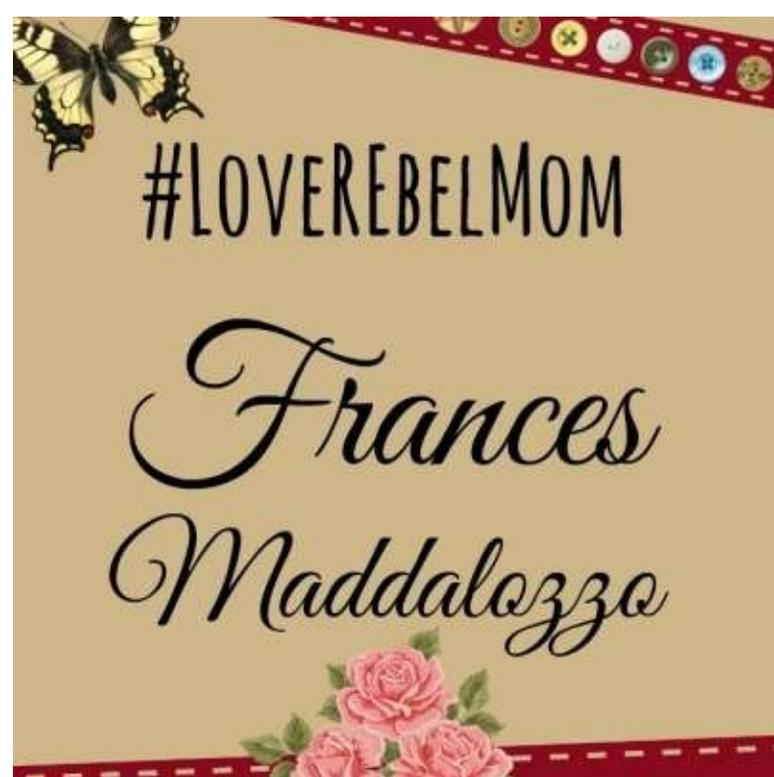
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This contribution is available at <http://withusstill.wordpress.com/2017/03/01/todays-find-less-of-me/>
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Give Yourself Permission to Not be a Perfectionist Parent [at The Koala Mom]

Since moving to Vancouver last year, I've often been asked, "Do you know Frances?" It seemed everyone in my Catholic mom circles knew this amazing lady. I was delighted to finally meet her in person (albeit briefly!) last week. Frances is the mom of seven kids and snatched a few minutes while her husband was off on retreat (ironically with mine) to write a post for my #LoveRebelMom series. Here's Frances' advice about being a perfectionist parent...



A good friend and mentor told me I have a tendency to be a perfectionist. I was shocked at this as I never classified myself in that realm. After having seven children, I thought I was anything but that!

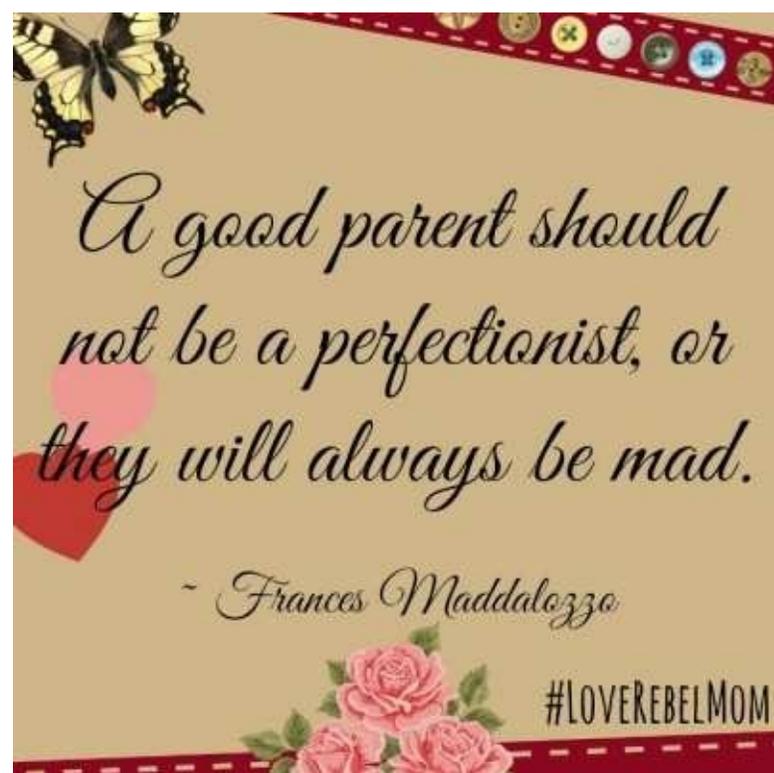
After carefully reflecting upon this, I realized I do have various tendencies that have hindered me from being the best version of myself. The best wife, the best mother I can be!

Prior to kids, I was impeccably neat, tidy and polished—at least in the outward appearance. I could hide my mess very well. I was one of those students who could not start studying until my room was spotless. During my university days, my desk had to be clear of any disorganization. While I was teaching, it was harder to keep my files and desk orderly. Now with seven kids, I have learned to ask for help and not be a perfectionist parent.

Needless to say, I am still the same way to some degree. I like order, I like my house clean and tidy. I feel tranquil when I can see things have their place.

However, the irony is that there is a big difference between then and now. Now, I have learned to

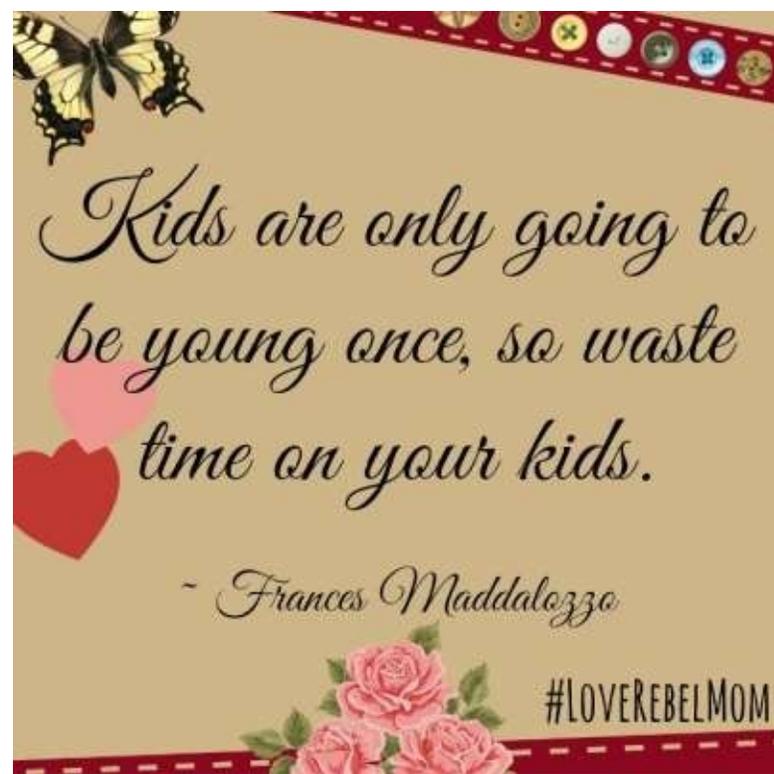
prioritize what is important, what will make my family life more seamless.



A good parent should not be a perfectionist, or they will always be mad. And believe me when I say we have been there. We have learned to let certain things go for the sake of peace.

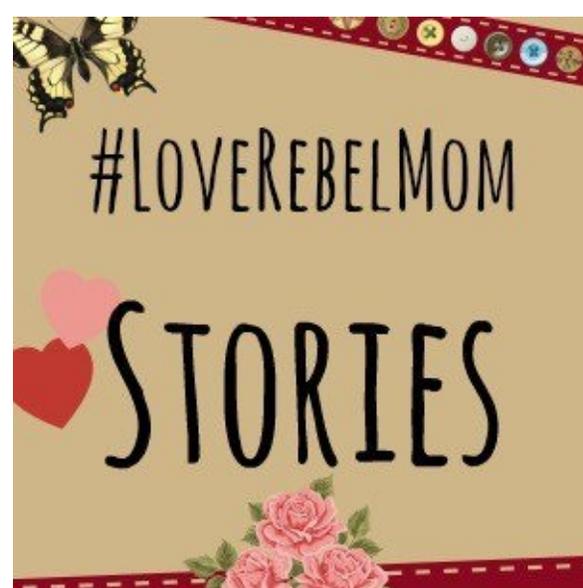
In our case, we made [a drastic life change](#) when we realized our laundry room was causing us a lot of grief. Now, the laundry room is one of my favourite places in my entire house! This is because we have structured it so that play clothes and pajamas are just sorted out and thrown into a child's designated basket.

I have now become a better version of myself as I am not letting laundry take time away from my kids, my hobbies and the things I enjoy! (Now that I think about it, I should plan our next date night because we aren't spending all this time folding laundry.)



As parents, often we need to let go of our perfectionism in order to see the bigger picture. What is the bigger picture? Well, it is the fact that kids are only going to be young once, so waste time on your kids. Spoil them with your time and energy! And minimize the tasks that can be reduced to a “meets requirement” grade.

Be gentle with yourself and give yourself permission to not be a perfectionist parent!



About Frances: I just started [a simple blog](#). I completed two degrees at UBC (a B.A. then a B.Ed.). But I have learned more about life and myself from the eleven years I have been a mom than all my years at University. Why? Due to the inspiration of many gurus in my life who have helped me seek to be the best version of myself through their example and encouragement.

I have been very blessed to be a stay-at-home mom. I am a homemaker whose paycheque will be redeemed when our children choose right from wrong, when our children look beyond themselves and think of others first! It is a beautiful thing when you can look at your husband and say, “Together we

make an incredible team, and these kids are the fruit of our love!”

It is through the example and sacrifice of my hardworking parents that I owe who I am today. My dad always said, “You hang out with turkeys, you will be a turkey. You hang out with eagles, you will soar with eagles.” This simple adage has remained me with me all my life and I have chosen to soar with eagles by my side to raise me up to be the best version of myself.



This contribution is available at <http://thekoalamom.com/2017/03/perfectionist-parent/>
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Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent.

Many of us look at this period on the Church calendar as a time of suffering and deprivation. Lent has historically been synonymous with a desert experience of dryness; a sense of loneliness, as if God is on vacation somewhere else. This connotes a sense of negativity. Yet, Lent affords us so much more, if we are willing to open our minds, hearts and souls to the various opportunities that make the Lenten season special in a positive way.

Lent, a Season of Faith, Hope and Love

Lent can be a time of renewal and personal growth; a time for getting to know Our Savior much better by reading Scripture. We can use this precious season to reaffirm our faith in God, by placing all of our trust in Him. It is a season filled with hope; a hope in Christ's promise to never leave us alone (Heb. 13: 5). During the Lenten season feel comforted by Christ's presence. We can also use this time to show our love for Christ, by doing good deeds for others. Lift another's burden. Put a smile on the face of someone who struggles just getting through the day. Pray for the living and the dead.

What Will You Make of this Lent?

Make this Lenten season a season of positivity. By doing so, you will find yourself growing spiritually, in a lasting way; growing closer to Christ. You will find yourself appreciating this season much more than in the past. Rather than being a season of deprivation, your mind, heart and soul will be open to the numerous graces that Christ wants to bestow upon you. What type of graces am I speaking about? This Lent look forward to receiving Christ's love, mercy, forgiveness and peace. Do something positive for your own spiritual growth this Lent. Then, on Easter Sunday morning, your mind, heart and soul will be filled with Christ's joy!

Defeat, Endurance, Loss: The Stuff of Lent [at Campfires and Cleats]

because there was always room in Aunt Mary's kitchen.



Aunt Mary had been ill for quite some time.

call, we weren't surprised although we were

still saddened, of course.

When someone is young (ish), is a vital and influential

part of your family's life, knows your history, shares your history,

when the call comes that is unexpected,

sudden and shocking...it can be truly hard to pick up the pieces..



< First Holy Communion April 2010 >

Our pastor and friend, Fr Charlie wasn't just a parish priest.

He perfected the art of *listening*.

Oh, believe me, we didn't see eye to eye on many issues.

Or even most issues.

He taught my boys how to

respectfully disagree...in addition to

teaching them how to live the Word.

He funeral mass was tough, but beautiful.

And he'll be missed greatly.



<First Holy Communion April 2008 >



A few years ago, I received an email from a fellow blogger

asking me to participate in a blog tour for her family's adoption journey.

To be honest, I was not familiar with Mandy's work at that time,

but came to become not only a follower of her writing and a friend

of hers as well as an admirer of her deep devotion to our Lord.

\



I was blessed to know Mandy Kelly, though I never met her "in person," and honored to have been a small part of her life, including her ten month old, Judah.

Last Monday evening, only hours after many of us interacted with Mandy through the blogosphere, she, her husband Scott and their two youngest, Lizzie and Judah, perished in a house fire.

It's still so difficult to fathom how and why and to realize that this world is now without beautiful Mandy.

Please pray for the Kellys' friends and family as they mourn the losses and especially for the oldest two children, who did survive the fire as they move on with their lives.

To read the inspiration and love

If you feel called to donate to the Kelly family's tangible necessities, the information on

how to do so is below Choose the 'Kelly fund' from the drop down options under the GIVE button.
<http://www.tbccayce.com>

Struggling with Lenten discipline isn't failure.

Every time we struggle, every time we ask for help
we see the boundless generosity of God.



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

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

If not, just click here to
quickly and easily so we can be in touch regularly!



This post contains amazon affiliate links....

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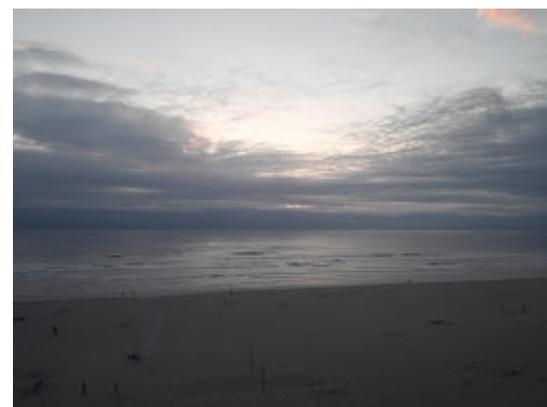
THANK YOU!

Help Me Understand! Should Not the Salvation of Souls Be Our Primary Concern? [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

Here is my contribution:

Help Me Understand! Should Not the Salvation of Souls Be Our Primary Concern?

[Originally published July 3, 2012 - We may have dodged a bullet temporarily. But sadly, nothing much has changed since I first posted this.]



I understand that in a democratic society, the Catholic Church and its members must try to shape social and political policies and to have their voices heard on the pressing moral issues of the day. There is no doubt that an increasing number of recent actions (beyond the HHS contraception and sterilization mandates) taken by the Obama administration pose real and imminent threats to our God given and constitutionally recognized fundamental right - freedom of religion. Freedom loving people of all religious persuasions and those of no religious affiliation must stand up and defend this fundamental principle – one which no man, no government, no nation has the right to restrict.

Nonetheless, I am at a loss to understand how political strategizing and judicial skirmishes, no matter how well-intentioned and necessary they both may be, should take precedence over the Church's primary duty - the sanctification and salvation of souls.

The Catholic Church has a duty to preach Christ's Truths in their completeness, not just the more palatable and less controversial ones, **to all peoples**, not just those who identify themselves as Catholic. The fact that many if not a majority of Americans, Catholic and non-Catholic, may not believe abortion, contraception, sex outside a sacramental marriage, sterilization and in-vitro fertilization are intrinsically

evil acts – neither changes those Truths nor exempts the Church from explaining and teaching those Truths **to everyone**. Jesus charged us to “make disciples of all nations” did He not?

Instead of using the present attack on our religious freedoms as an opportunity to simultaneously explain, with clarity, courage and love, why the Catholic Church teaches that the acts listed above are intrinsically evil, our current approach suggests we will defer that portion of our duty until after the public fight over our religious freedom has been resolved.

We may never have a better opportunity to save souls or a wider platform from which to explain God’s teachings in these areas to a broader audience than that which God has presented us with now. In fact, we may not have the freedom to do so at all in the future.

It seems to this simple man, that at least for now, too many are content to just preserve the rights of some Catholics to believe these Truths and wait to an unspecified time in the future to explain why all of us (Catholic and non-Catholic) should believe and live out these Truths in our individual lives. What of the lives ruined and the souls lost in the interim?

When was the last time you heard a homily on any of these evils? When did you last hear a priest preach on Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Human Life) or on *Evangelium Vitae* (Gospel of Life) written by Pope John Paul II or suggest that you prayerfully read and study these documents? When was the last time you read an article in your local secular or diocesan newspapers or had a parish speaker explaining the compelling reasons behind these fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church and the eternal consequences to those who reject them?

The more than forty years of silence in local parishes and in many Dioceses on these issues goes a long way toward explaining why more Catholics are not engaged in this most vital fight to preserve religious freedom in this country.

Make no mistake – the Catholic Bishops are absolutely correct to warn us of this unprecedented attack on religious freedom and to call us to pray and fight to preserve this God-given right.

But let me ask you this: What if we are successful in preserving religious freedom but continue silently condemning untold souls to eternal separation from a loving God because we lack the courage to teach and challenge them to live the Truth?

Now is the time to end the silence!

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2017/02/worth-revisiting-help-me-understand.html>

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Why I'm not impressed by wealth

Around Boston there are many neighborhoods where grand manses sit imposingly behind gates, surrounded by perfectly manicured lawns, with wildly expensive cars in their large garages. I can't remember exactly when I realized that such a lifestyle was out of my reach, but I am grateful that it was around the same time that I realized I didn't care to live in an enormous house.

At least in an area as expensive as Boston, you don't just work really hard and someday have a huge house. You either have inherited a ton of money, or you have devoted your career to making a lot of money, or both. I have done neither of those things.

(Now that I think about it, being rich is a lot like being skinny: you were either born with it, or you pursued it with single-minded focus.)



Though it's hard to remember now, there was a time when I didn't have to pay a whit of attention to the Trump family. I'd never heard the name "DeVos" or given much thought to Amway, and I'd never heard of Steve Mnuchin. But now I spend a lot of time pondering the mega-wealthy, and I have come to the conclusion that I'm not impressed.

There are very many things you can strive for in life, and some choose to put their focus into amassing more wealth than they could ever possibly need. I don't find that particularly admirable.

This is not to say that it is impossible to admire wealthy persons. We can all name interesting, generous, creative people who have pots of money, and multi-million dollar institutions that do a lot of good.

It is also not to say that one *must* be driven by avarice to become wealthy, but it's hard to deny that some of the ultra-wealthy are. And there are always other motivations: for some an abundance of financial resources means comfort, or security, or respect, or power.

When I hear that having much more than one needs is the same as being a "success", that equation rings hollow. I know lots of people who are successful: they have distinguished themselves in artistic excellence or athletic achievement, in gaining the skills they need to educate others, in practicing self-discipline, in learning to love their neighbors. Compared to these successes, making lots of money seems pretty boring.

What do you think? Does having a ton of money make someone a success?

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Stuck in a Rut [at Third Place Project]



Photo Credit: [ducdao / 123RF Stock Photo](#)

Learning to drive in a winter climate is a unique challenge. You need to know how to handle slippery conditions, make sure your washer fluid is topped up when the white stuff starts melting, and on those occasions where we get a large dump of snow, you have to learn to navigate the ruts that form in the streets. Residential areas are particularly unique, because they don't get road maintenance as often as the major routes do. This means that when you drive a small car like mine in a neighborhood filled with trucks, the ruts can often dictate where you're headed (whether you like it or not).

We had one of those significant snowfalls recently – likely one of the last of the year – and it got me thinking about something St. Paul wrote:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
-Romans 7:15

As I try to navigate my little Honda through these snowy ruts through our long Alberta winter, I've started to wonder if this is precisely what St. Paul meant about the moral life. After all, on many of these days I'm not driving the places I want to, but the ruts are pulling me to the places I don't want to go.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls this draw to do things/go to places that we know aren't right for us *concupiscence*. Much like those ruts which can draw you away from your intended destination, concupiscence is our inclination to do evil often in spite of the fact that we know it's not what's best for us (CCC 408). We do battle with our concupiscence as we recognize this pull (just like those ruts in the snow) and try to do something else. The problem is that the more we've driven down those roads – the more we've turned the inclination to do evil into a wrong choice – the more defined that path is, and the harder it is to do anything else.

When we study the human brain, we often talk about the ways in which the brain becomes 'wired' to do certain things. An example of this can be the route you take to work and the fact that you might be able to drive there without even thinking about it. Another example is the way in which we might deal with stress by indulging on food, shopping, or drinking. With any of these habits, there can come a point where we look at ourselves and wonder how we got here. It's at those moments that, like St. Paul, we begin to comment "I do not understand my own actions."

What's interesting is that the snowy ruts in my neighborhood disappear in one of two ways. The first is that a couple of times a year, a snow plow will come through my neighborhood and break up all the snow that's been packed into our street, and then it gets hauled away. But we know that there'll probably be another snowfall, and the ruts will return.

The other way that the snow goes away is in the spring – as the earth draws nearer to the sun and temperatures start to rise. This makes the snow melt. Ironically, this can make driving even trickier, as the freeze/thaw cycle can do a real number on the roads. But bit by bit, you start to see pavement again, and my little Honda will eventually be able to go wherever I want it to.

Here we find the key parallel between driving through snow and those moments we look at ourselves realizing that we don't understand our own actions. The fact is that God can intervene in the lives of people in much the same way as a snowplow. We've read these stories in scripture (Moses with the burning bush or St. Paul being struck blind) and sometimes you can encounter people whom He has led from addictions or from other sinful habits in dramatic fashion. Where this tends to be most effective is when the dramatic conversion experience was followed by a moving nearer to God – staying closer to the warmth of the *Son*.

The fact is that we don't need a dramatic conversion experience to make us draw nearer to the Son. We can't count on a snowplow to come through and break up every one of the ruts we might find ourselves stuck in. What we can and should do in each situation is to draw nearer to the Son who will help melt them away so we can be free. It is the love of God that melts the ruts away, slowly but surely, so that we can be free to do, be, act, pray, speak, serve more perfectly.

As we enter into the spring and approach the great celebration of Easter, we'll also be watching the snow melt away in this part of the world. That drawing nearer to the sun ought to be a reminder to each of us to draw nearer to the Son who will melt the ruts found in our hearts -those actions of ours that we least understand.

This contribution is available at <http://www.thirdplaceproject.com/stuck-in-a-rut/>
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When a loved one dies, our loss plunges us into deep grief [at In the Breaking of the Bread]

Over the years I have observed a number of deaths - from illness, accidents, suicides - over long drawn out periods or suddenly and unexpectedly, of people who died young or old or in between. Their deaths are particularly difficult to endure when the deceased were good people who were greatly loved by many, and I have found that there are several levels in the grief of those who felt close to them. The following factors are by far not an exhaustive list, given the great variations in the lives of human beings, but these probably account for a great portion of our grieving.

1.

You miss the deceased

simply for who he or she is as a

person

, who he was and came to be, and what she meant to you simply as a one that you have known and loved.

2.

You may miss the deceased

as your

son or daughter

, whom you would naturally expect to outlive you as a parent or live as long as you as a sibling or friend or coworker.

3.

You grieve the loss

of the ways in which their life would have unfolded - as your hopes for their future were inflamed when they were doing well - and so you grieve the loss of their future as a person.

4. It is natural for parents, for example, to

grieve the loss of a child

who, later on in life, would have been there to walk with them during their senior years and comfort and support them in old age.

That future is now lost

, and you grieve over it.

5. You naturally grieve your child as

parents

, as Mom and Dad, and

the loss of that relationship

with each of you and with what siblings there may be and with all of you as a family.

Your family is no longer quite the same.

6. You invested in your child who responded to you over the years. It is not surprising that you should grieve over the

abrupt interruption

of this relationship.

7. In the particular circumstances of the deceased person's final or life long struggle - with illness, or persecution, or addiction, or ill fortune, or any of a host of other troubled circumstances - you may have invested so much of yourselves, your time and energy, your finances, your

emotional investment

and

psychologically intense attentiveness

and

concentration

. As a result, in recent years you have been living at an abnormally intensive degree, which simply on a human level, could not do otherwise than go through a period of dropping off, which in comparison to the previously intensive emotional level would now appear to be depressive.

8. When it is a

premature death

you may be grieving inasmuch as this death may seem a failure or

bad end

to their long or intense struggle.

Without completely realizing it, and to varying degrees, it is not unusual for people who care to get "sucked into" a disposition of spirit or of mind and heart that is not really healthy, by virtue of the ways in which their life struggle

"reshaped their personality"

. For example, in the case of addiction it is now clearly understood in both medical and psychological fields as well as by social workers and addiction recovery workers to cause a

"social disease" of addiction which "makes sick or diseased" the relationships of everyone

relating to the addict as well as

all the circles

to which they belong, such as their family, place of work, friends, and so on.

Some of the manifestations of this "social disease" may be lying, denying the truth, pretending all is well, covering up for the addict, excusing the addict from taking responsibility for themselves, accepting to "perform roles" assigned by the addict to various members of each particular circle, and any number of other attitudes and behaviors that are "not normal" but troubled.

God's design, intention, and will is for each human being to develop from infancy to adulthood, from total dependence to autonomy, from selfishness to altruism.

The responsibility of parents diminishes as the responsibility of the offspring increases until the young adult "takes over" the entire responsibility for his or her own life. By analogy this is also true of the responsibility of individuals in other kinds of relationships. While an addict or any other person may develop degrees of caring for others and selfless service; people can yet remain underdeveloped in their ability and willingness to care for and take full responsibility for themselves.

As loved ones descend into dangerous attitudes and patterns that are self destructive, those who love them can fall into feeling

"overly responsible"

for the addict or person who is struggling; as though in their caring they have become the second wheel on a cart that had only one good wheel. You can come to so completely identify with the troubled person that their failure or bad end now feels like your own failure, and their death now feels as though it were somehow your fault.

In effect, in taking on an

exaggerated degree of responsibility

for the one who struggled and died you may have taken on yourselves a degree of responsibility for them that belongs exclusively to God, our Father and Creator. Your grief torments you with wondering "What if?" scenarios, as though you were God and had the power to save the person but failed to use that power.

All such thoughts are false, misleading, and dangerous, and in the end, they are part of the "enemy's strategy" to paralyze us, trick us into passing premature judgement on ourselves, and deceive us by distracting us from God's care and mercy; so that we stop trusting in God's judgement, God's loving mercy, God's divine providence.

9. To the extent that you have over recent years

"reorganized"

your lives around caring for the sufferer as you would for an infant, a handicapped child, or invalid parent, then to that extent you may have "stopped fully living" your own lives. As it happens for a person who gives up most of their autonomy to care for an invalid parent, spouse, sibling, or child over a long period of time; when it is finally over the person can often experience a "rude awakening" to suddenly find themselves older and with feelings that they have lost a part of their lives. They may or may not feel resentment to the recently deceased, but it is natural to have a sense of loss as we realize the passage of time in our lives, and especially the passing of our "best years".

10. It is to be expected that there is some degree of satisfaction in expending efforts to care for someone in trouble, especially when it is someone we love. When such a situation extends itself over a longer period of time, we develop "habits of thought, of feeling, and of action" which can

"take over"

our lives or a significant portion of our lives. When the period of caring comes to an end - even more so when the end comes unexpectedly - it is natural to experience this change as a shock. You may have gradually over some years reorganized your life around the sufferer and now, suddenly, the reason or need for this reorganization is gone. You

cannot suddenly just go back

to the way you were, but

will need time

to make this new transition, just as it took you time to adapt in the first place to put yourself at the more intensive service of the person in need.

11. While you were so busy and intensively focused on caring for your loved one, you would have felt the need to relativize or ignore some of your own needs and desires. To the extent that you have

neglected your own needs

, now you may find it difficult to face your own needs and admit them to yourself, and be troubled by false feelings of guilt, interpreting your inclination to care for yourself as "selfish". Such confusion is caused in part by a false or erroneous way of understanding the balance between care for others and care for ourselves. The more they manifested helplessness, the greater would have been your temptation to feel responsible for them and to neglect others and yourself.

12. To the extent you have succumbed to these or other such temptations, you would probably feel some

true and genuine guilt

for having neglected self care and your other relationships, including allowing the Lord to be God.

13. No one but God is perfect, with a close exception for our Blessed Mother Mary and, to lesser degrees, the saints. Sadly it is all too often the case that people - to varying degrees - have been

"beating up on themselves"

over these years over the effectiveness or quality of their caring for the one in need. This is like the so-called friends of Job who "beat up on him" trying to convince him that his suffering had to be a punishment from God, that he must somehow have done something wrong to deserve his personal disasters and suffering. Well, "get over it"! It is true that we are not perfect, nor should we expect to be - no more than we should expect to be all-powerful as God is - so that we all need to let God be God and to accept our circumstances and those of others in our lives, with trust in divine providence. We need to trust that God loves us more than we love ourselves, and to daily entrust our lives and the lives of those we love to God. While we may have been trying to do that, to the extent that you have been "beating yourselves up", then you need to repent of that and drop it.

14. Like it or not, even for people of great faith in and intimacy with God, as human beings we still care about who we are, the well being of our family, and our place in the extended family and in all the circles of our lives. It matters to us to "do well" at every level of our lives. When we lose a person for whom we have been expending our efforts to help them overcome illness or other troubles and in the end it all seems to end in failure, like it or not, there is bound to be some form of

"stigma" or feeling of failure

We can feel as though our efforts have not been "good enough" as a parent, as a person who cares, as a responsible adult, and so on.... We need to see the truth and let go of what is false in our feelings, and let the person go. We need to rediscover the value of our own lives and to resume living our lives fully as God intends for us to do, not only for our own good, but also for the good of others, for his glory, and for the good of his Church.

There may very well be other factors, other levels, in your deep and genuine grief, but the Holy Spirit will help you "peel the onion" of your grief one layer at a time and apply the healing touch of divine mercy to it, to you, moment by moment....

Dear Reader, if you are experiencing grief over the loss of a loved one, I invite you - alone or with your spouse or with your family - to sit, pray a little, and then read through this reflection, one line or sentence at a time. If you are doing this with someone else, stop to share your thoughts and feelings as you go, and only as you are satisfied with where it brings you can you then move on to the next sentence....

You may need to work at this a little each day for some weeks before you get through it all the first time. Then over time, God will lead you over some of these same issues again and again as his healing love penetrates more and more deeply into your mind, heart, psyche, and soul....

In the end, all will be well, as St Teresa of Avila used to say....

This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2017/03/when-good-person-takes-their-own-life.html>
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Mom, the Pats Won the World Series [at Making It In Vermont]

Ummm and yes that was my title till my lovely husband corrected me. Ha ha! Properly humbled.

Hi Mom,

I thought it might be a good idea to write down some of the stuff we were talking about this morning. Well the biggest thing of course is that the Patriots won the **Super Bowl** last night! Kevin ... you know him, that guy I had been dating for six months but you knew I would marry, and our four oldest sons watched it.

I remember watching The Pats with you, Dad, and the boys when I was a kid (ha ha funny how “the boys” meant Rocky and Larry my two older brothers, and now “the boys” in our house are my 7 sons). Anyway, the noise from football games used to drive me crazy, and truthfully I didn’t do much watching, I mostly sat on the couch in the same room with you all and read a book and looked up when I heard everyone yelling at the screen.

I have to admit that I still only have a peripheral knowledge of the game, but yesterday the kids really wanted to watch. So we put together a little Super Bowl meal of mini meatballs with dipping sauces for dinner and homemade cream filled donuts that Kevin made earlier in the day for dessert. Umm yeah, I married a man of many talents!

The three littlest boys were up to watch the start of the game, but by 8 they were tucked into bed. The rest of us curled up on the couch and floor together and dug in. We are not a football family and Kevin had to give a refresher to some of us as to what was going on, but everyone caught on pretty quick.

For most of the game... it wasn’t looking good. In fact it was looking terrible. The Pats got in their stride late in the game and turned it completely on its’ ears. Kevin kept saying “The game isn’t over till it’s over.” to sour faced boys and grumpy mumbles. Someone thought we should just turn it off altogether and end the misery.

And what if we had? What if we had? What happened in that game was nothing short of miraculous.

I’m not going to pretend I can talk football here. But in just a few hours last night we went from dejected and almost without hope to elated . At 10:30 after it was all said and done I called Dad and Marge and shared in the pure joy together. The boys knew how upset “Papa” would be if they had lost, so they were extra happy, for him, that the Pats had won.

Kevin and I sent the kids to bed knowing it’s school for most of us in the morning.

It wasn’t till 5:45 this morning after my shower, getting ready and thinking about that glorious game that I remembered you Mom, and started thinking and talking to you. It’s hard to believe that 18 years ago this morning you took your last breath here and your first breath... there. And how in those days after you died how even with Kevin, and Dad, and “the boys” (my brothers, not my sons), I just couldn’t see how the game could turn around...

But it did, just not in 3 1/2 hours like last night, it took longer, but wow, I mean wow...

I know you know, but, I have 7 sons Mom! And I moved from our home by the sea to Vermont with Kevin 11 years ago, and we make Maple syrup and on good apple years we press apple cider, I talk to Dad every day on the phone and love being an everyday presence in his life even though I live miles away, and I learned to love Jesus just like you said I would, and more and more and more. And life still gets tough sometimes, just like it did when you were living, but I'm learning to love the way that came just so naturally for you, the way of loving people where they are at and looking out for the underdog.

And last night I got to watch a miracle of perseverance and hope with my oldest sons and their Dad and this morning after the three older boys were off to school on the early bus, I got to listen to my 8 year old plunk out the hymn "[How Can I Keep From Singing](#)" while he sang the lyrics, all while diapers were being changed, and morning clothes were warming by the wood stove.

And then just in memory of you I steeped some Lipton tea in your Willow Ware teapot mixed in a little milk and sugar and sat with that guy you knew I would marry (before I knew it).

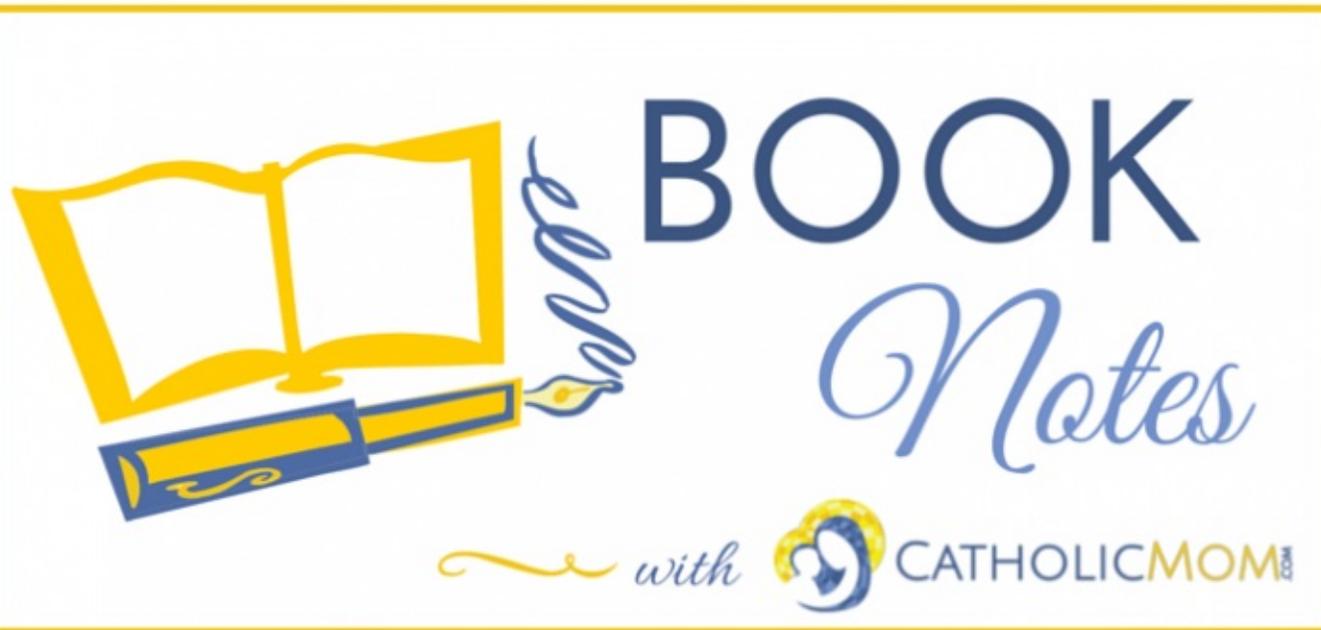
My did God turn my life on its' ears since you've been away Mom, and it doesn't mean I don't miss you, but it does mean the game isn't over yet and I'm still playing.

With love from your little girl here on earth who is thankful to the Pats for never giving up, and praying for that kind of hope and perseverance for us all.

~Lisa

This contribution is available at <http://www.makingitinvermont.com/2017/02/mom-the-pats-won-the-world-series/>
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Jesus, our Bridegroom, went *all in* out of love for us, to bring us all into his Church where his kingdom “already exists and will be fulfilled at the end of time. The kingdom has come in the person of Christ and grows mysteriously in the hearts of those incorporated into him, until its full...manifestation” (CCC, 865). Yes, Pat Gohn is fluent in the Catechism and encyclicals and uses their authority when necessary to solidify the soundness of her spiritual guidance in her new book, [*All In: Why Belonging to the Catholic Church Matters*](#).

Some Catholics, including members of Pat’s family who were victimized by bad Catholics and unholy priests, have cause to reject the Church and view it as splattered with the mud of scandal. Pat’s imagery of the Catholic Church, as the “mud-splashed Bride” of Christ, is brilliant!

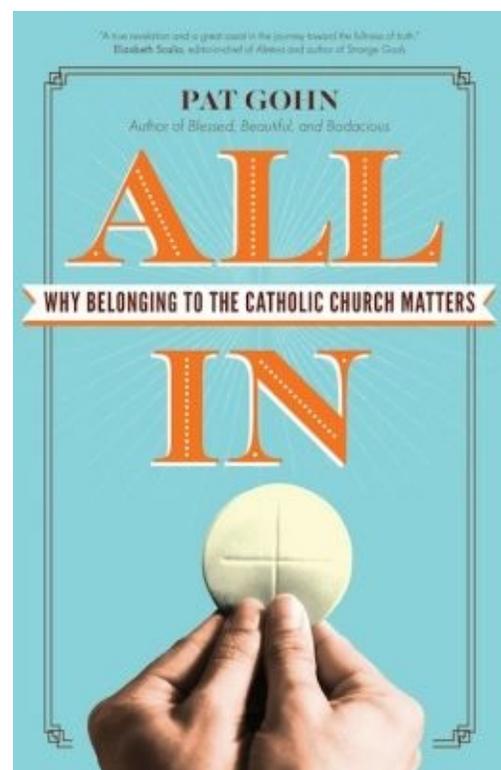
Some quickly adopt that misguided view and write off the mud-splashed Bride rather than explore her hidden beauty. Pat reminds us that the holy marriage between Jesus the Bridegroom, and his Bride, the Church, to date have never divorced, and never will.

God’s love made visible

God created marriage as a sacrament, to make his love visible on earth. That’s a huge gift for us and a huge risk for God to take! Pat learned that this gift of God’s love being made visible in her marriage is a microcosm of something much more vast and cosmic. The invisible God is all about making his love visible.

His plan of sheer goodness holds a secret remedy. “The most powerful gift of God’s love made visible was in the coming of his very self to redeem us. The gift of God’s love made visible is another way of describing the Incarnation,” she writes.

The Incarnation is the antidote for what Pat calls the “mud-splashed-Bride syndrome.” Jesus is the gift of God’s love made visible. His love poured into the Church makes her a ra



diant Bride, resplendent with graces.

Identity crises

Pat writes about the identity crises we experience whenever we separate ourselves from the reality that God gives himself personally to us in the sacraments. God baptizes us, making us his beloved children, giving us our greatest sense of identity. He nourishes us in the Eucharist. Jesus enters into us, his True Presence hidden **in** the bread and wine. God's life is alive in us through the sacraments.

When we disassociate from our baptism or when we fail to live the promises of our baptism, we step away from the family of God, the Church:

“We divide ourselves from our true identity as beloved ones. We have identity crises, and often lose a sense of our dignity.”

Pat reminds us that we can choose to mature in the spiritual life as we do in our natural life. To have an adult faith, we must grow up in our union with Christ,

“while being ever mindful of the gift of our spiritual childhood. To be a child of God is to learn to live with ongoing conversion, ongoing renewal. We are not going backward, we are being ever renewed.”

We make adult decisions about following Church teachings while keeping our child-like faith. We keep our faith fresh and alive so that we develop an intimate friendship with God.

Pat's story

Her personal story of maturing spiritually from a cradle Catholic of the John Paul II generation runs through [All In](#). As a teen, she committed her life to Jesus at a retreat. She was nourished in her faith in ongoing ways “through God's voice in the Bible, the graces I received in the sacraments, and through

the people in our parish faith community that surrounded me. But, for me, God used my marriage to profoundly shape my understanding of his love. God's love became visible to me."

Desperately needing to be a more nurturing and gracious mother, Pat turned to Mary, "to coach me, to mentor me, to allow her good influence to find a home in me."

Pat's faith, tested by cancer and other surgeries, brought moments of heart knowledge, not head knowledge of Jesus more closely. She writes,

"My life with Jesus was a slow burn, a friendship that grew over time. His divine friendship called me to participate in the community of my local church. He wanted me to form relationships with members of his Body, and to have Mother Church to nurture me and school me in her wisdom."

Good friends with Jesus

The result? "Today, I know Jesus not only as my friend, but as my healer, my redeemer, and my deliverer. He has accompanied me through some scary times and through the best of times." Pat writes that Jesus works in her life as a good friend, always wanting what's best, even when he needs to confront her to change.

"His love that I receive, especially in the Eucharist, gives me the confidence to change. . . .With Jesus as the Bridegroom, I am *all in!*"

What God has joined together, let us not separate – and Pat applies this to God's family, the Church, which shares a common Father and Mother.

"We have a Beloved Brother in Jesus, whose blood we share as we hold to a common creed, sacraments, and worship. The Church as Mother was part of the Father's will for us, to nurture the divine life in us. We never outgrow our need for our Mother Church, the Mater Ecclesia, until we reach heaven."

God's plan is to unite his family into the Church with the dignity he gives us at our baptism. Pat writes, "I'm *all in* when it comes to the Catholic Church, not just because it preaches heaven, but because it holds sacred *all* human persons."

I have long known Pat Gohn as a solid writer who inspires and challenges me. As expected, with [***All In: Why Belonging to the Catholic Church Matters***](#) (Ave Maria Press 2017), she delivers solid food to nourish our souls and give us confidence in our Catholic faith.



Pat Gohn is a Catholic writer, retreat leader, conference speaker, catechist and author of [***All In: Why Belonging to the Catholic Church Matters***](#) and the award-winning book [***Blessed, Beautiful, and Bodacious***](#). She is the host of the [***Among Women***](#) podcast and editor of *Catechist*

magazine. Gohn lives in North Andover, Massachusetts.

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At the Summer House in Twilight 1895 [at Pauca Verba]



Take a deep look. Is that a first star above the dark tree on the left? It is twilight: *"Starlight, star-bright, first star I see tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight."* Remember that? Levitan loved this time of day - the time of two lights. Morning twilight: moving from darkness to light. Evening twilight: moving from light to darkness.

Twilight is an in-between time. It is the time which suggests we're at the door or the threshold of something new. But notice this: the trees, the grass, even the sky, are more an impression holding the most important piece, the bright center of the summer-house porch, wordlessly offering this lovely invitation: step up, enter this place, pull up a chair, rest and commune in this re-assuring light.

I'm thinking of the Easter scene: It is Sunday. *Twilight*. The apostles have been speaking with the stranger on the long road to Jerusalem and then:

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, "It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over. So he went in to stay with them." *Luke 24:28,29*

Yesterday I found this on the side of my oatmeal box: *"If you have time to cook on the stove..."* followed by instructions for cooking oatmeal on the stove top which takes 4 minutes. *If you have time?! YIKES!* is it *that* bad that we have to preface a four minute meal preparation with *"If you have time?"* Well then, maybe the thing we might *give up* for Lent is the mad rush which keeps us from accepting Levitan's twilight invitation to join him on this porch of light.

Maybe we will experience some interior soul-surprise there. Levitan has left the paint a little thin on the fir tree to the right making the tree seem to sparkle. Can I use that word to describe my inner life - *sparkle?*

I've posted the *Summer House in Twilight* EXTRA LARGE, so we can *feel* it. If you're looking at it on a phone, be kind to yourself and find a larger screen at some point today.

P.S. If you don't know where this Lenten-Levitan "program" is coming from, scroll back to February 26 for an introduction.

This contribution is available at <http://paucaverba.blogspot.com/2017/03/at-summer-house-in-twilight-1895.html>
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Unconditional Support [at Shifting My Perspective]

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do. 1Thessalonians 5:11



During a recent snow day, I had my kids watch the movie [Greater](#) with me.

Based on a true story, it's about the pudgy and uncoordinated Brandon Burlsworth who dreams of becoming a football player for the Arkansas Razorbacks. With intense focus, extreme dedication, and really, really hard work, Brandon defies the odds and becomes one of the best walk-on players in college history. He also ends up getting drafted by a professional football team.

Sometimes I worry that my kids are becoming lazy and entitled. Like I saw on a billboard recently, I want them to understand that the only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary. My hope was that Brandon's hard work ethic would inspire them, maybe rub off on them.

As is usual, I think I learned more from the mom in the movie than my kids learned from Brandon. Not only did Mrs. Burlsworth love her son unconditionally, but she believed in him no matter what. When the twelve year old Brandon proclaimed his dream while sitting on the couch, watching TV, overweight and munching on potato chips, she affirmed him 100 %. Although everyone else saw the cold, harsh reality, her eyes of love only saw him as a success. When Brandon turned down a full scholarship to a college because it wasn't the home of the Razorbacks, the mom mortgaged everything to the hilt to pay for his first year at his dream school, the University of Arkansas.

At first I struggled with how passive the mom was. Most of the setbacks Brandon had were because she didn't see reality and guide him. She did nothing but love and encourage him, not wavering in her support, not even once.

What she knew, and it took me a while to figure out, is Brandon had plenty of people in his life telling him the harsh reality. She was the only mom he had. She knew that a mother's unconditional support beats an army of dream crushers any day.

Like Brandon, we all know plenty of naysayers who punch holes in our dreams. But how many of us get the gift of even one person in our lives who supports us, no matter what, no matter how crazy our

dreams are?

I am one of the fortunate ones who have that in common with Brandon. I have been blessed beyond measure with my own Mrs. Burlsworth. I may not have made history, but any success I have ever had can be traced back to my own mother, and her complete and unwavering love and support. Ask anyone who knows her and they'll tell you: I'm not stretching the truth about my mom, not one bit.

What saddens me, though, is my kids can't say the same about me. Of course I love them unconditionally; but I can't say I support them unconditionally too. Instead, I bring reality into the picture. I think I am being helpful by grounding them, when in fact, I am deflating them. Moreover, in my attempt to turn every moment into a teaching moment, I turn their dreams into lessons. All they end up hearing is, "Sure you can do that if you work hard, blah, blah, blah," when all they want to hear is "Of course you can!"

Right after watching that movie, I tried a little experiment. If you've read previous posts, you know my son [Mason is a slow-as-molasses kid](#). The other day, he needed to get dressed quickly. Usually I would have given him three different ideas of how to make that happen. Instead, I simply said, "I know you can do it."

That's all Mason needed to hear. In literally two minutes flat, he was back again, completely dressed. That may be normal for your kids, but never, NEVER once has that happened with Mason.

When I asked him how he solved the problem, he said he used the [as his tool](#). He knew he had to be fully dressed before he finished singing the song. Not only did Mason solve the problem I have been trying to solve FOR YEARS, but he grew ten feet tall with pride in his solution.

Needless to say, "I know you can do it" has become my new go-to phrase. I'm watching it transform my household. It's inspiring my kids to figure things out on their own, and conveys the message that I believe in them 100 %.

Everyday I try to be the best mom I can be: teaching my kids at every turn, all day long, about what is right, and how to accomplish things. I think it's time to talk less, and support more. I already love my kids unconditionally. Now it's time to support them unconditionally as well.

Questions For Reflection:

**** When my kids share their hopes and dreams, do I support them unconditionally? Or do I try to ground them in reality?***

**** When my kids struggle with something, do I try to teach them all the ways they can solve the problem? Or do I empower them to solve it themselves, truly believing they'll figure it out by themselves?***

This contribution is available at <http://shiftingmyperspective.com/2017/03/23/unconditional-support/>
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CatholicTeen Books.com Is Resource for Readers, Parents

A group of authors writing primarily for Catholic and other Christian teens has launched the website CatholicTeenBooks.com. The website provides teen readers, parents, catechists, homeschool co-ops, youth ministers, teachers and others with direct links to exciting, well-crafted books that raise the heart and mind to God and reflect the fullness and beauty of the Catholic faith.

The site is organized by genre and includes a wide range of books in the following categories:

- contemporary
- historical
- mystery
- speculative
- saints
- dystopian

Among those, you'll find suspense, romance, coming of age stories, and lives of the saints with age-appropriate themes including the power of intercessory prayer, the communion of saints, the Rosary, virtue, Theology of the Body, and respect for life at all ages and stages.

“Today more than ever, teens need to know they are beautiful and valuable creations of God,” said author of the contemporary Bird Face series Cynthia T. Toney. “Catholic fiction and nonfiction can show them.”

Rather than stuffy, dry stories of saccharine piety, readers will find lively stories that appeal to the modern reader addressing difficult issues such as suicide, abortion, grief, family relationships, disabilities, and dating, all informed by the light of faith.

“A growing number of Catholic authors are producing high quality fiction, as well as riveting non-fiction or fictionalized versions of historical people and events,” according to Stephanie Engelman, author of *A Single Bead*. “The goal of these authors is to teach as Christ taught – through stories. They take ordinary people, with ordinary lives and challenges, and write extraordinary stories meant to change hearts while teaching minds. While avoiding being preachy or didactic, these authors impart wisdom and support Catholic moral and social teaching.”

Many of the books included have been awarded the Catholic Writers Guild’s Seal of Approval. Several have also received awards from the Catholic Press Association as well as secular organizations. Some books are currently used in schools throughout the United States. All are available in both paperback and electronic format through Amazon.com and other retailers.

“An incredible amount of excitement surrounds this new website,” said Theresa Linden, author of the award-winning *Roland West, Loner*. “We hope to see it grow into something wonderful for God, helping young readers find books they will thoroughly enjoy and that support, rather than tear down their faith. And also, helping authors of Catholic teen fiction reach their audiences.”

This contribution is available at <http://www.carolynastfalk.com/2017/03/10/catholicteen-books-com-resource-readers-parents/>
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Above and More Than Earth [at The Cloistered Heart]



'In those soft tones which are so usual to them, the nuns bade us goodbye. As we came away, the Mother Superior said quietly, with a subdued and gently resigned fear lest we might not look upon the convent as it shone in her eyes and lived in her spirit: 'it is all very old fashioned and plain, but we love it. It is our home on earth and' (hesitating again) 'we think it is a little above and more than earth.' ([A Story of Courage; text slightly edited](#)) Reading these words, I see my own call. I am to live on earth, obviously, and I'm to interact with others, and I'm to be part of the world around me. All the while, however, I am called by God to rise above the persistent pull of sin. I'm to fix my eyes on Jesus, and to consistently choose His way above all that is contrary to His will. Perhaps this is why the idea of a cloistered heart so draws me. I cannot live behind the walls of a monastery, for that is not my vocation. But living fully for God in the midst of the world? That IS my vocation.

'You put it so perfectly,' I wrote to a friend some years ago, 'when you wrote of returning from your retreat at the monastery feeling disoriented and like someone who had to be convalescing after a long illness. We have a taste of consecrated life and we are never the same - never the same. The 'Motherhouse' of monasticism calls to us while we are out in the world 'on mission.' It is in some way, purely and simply, home. We are like those in a foreign land, having become acclimated enough to speak the language and to love the people. But sometimes, in the quiet of our hearts, we begin to long for others who can speak our native tongue. We are like refugees who love to meet those of their homeland, to share our cultural stories and sing the anthems of home.' *'Those experiences were so intense and holy to me,' writes a woman who spent a brief period of time in monastic life, 'that I have never been comfortable in the world since. It seems to me to be similar to what soldiers experience after being deployed into life-and-death combat in a foreign land - something so alien to our normal existence that it can never be fully explained in words to people who have not had that experience, nor can its imprint ever be erased from the soul.'*

My friends have experienced life in a place that is a little above and more than earth. As for me, when I left a monastery after my first cloistered retreat, I wished I could bring the bricks and stones with me. Which is not what I truly wanted to hold onto, of course. I wanted to bring back a world centered on and revolving around Christ. I wanted to bring home a steady routine of prayer. I wanted to bring back others who could share stories of God's goodness, and who would sing with me the anthems of Home.

In my everyday life, I continue the struggle to live fully for God, and I know you do as well. I pray that God will help each of us live fully for Him, whatever our states of life.

I pray He will teach us to live a little above and more than earth.

'From this valley of tears, turn your gaze continually to God, ever awaiting the moment when you will be united to Him in heaven. Often contemplate heaven, and fervently exclaim: 'What a beautiful abode there is above! It is destined for us!' Sigh longingly after its possession. Sometimes say.... 'Nothing on this earth pleases me; I no longer care for anything but my God. Yes, I hope, yes, I wish to possess Him, and I hope this is the mercy of God, through the merits of my Saviour's Passion and the dolors of my good Mother Mary.' (St. Paul of the Cross). Text not in quotes © N Shuman [thecloisteredheart.org](http://www.thecloisteredheart.org)

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Daddy . . . Wait for Me. Please [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

During my prayer in our hotel suite, a young child outside the door anxiously called to her father, “Daddy, wait for me, please.” From somewhere down the hall I heard a muffled response, “Come on, we need to go.” A moment later small feet pattered past my door and down the hall.

Caught up in the unseen drama, I replayed the child’s plaintive cry again and again in my mind, “Daddy, wait for me, please.” Although I couldn’t see him, I sensed impatience from his muffled response, “Come on, we need to go.” I guessed he thought they needed to hurry along to get to wherever it was they were going. I can’t know for sure about his impatience. As I said, his voice was muffled.

I let myself muse a while on the unseen scene played out for me in the hotel hallway – until the Holy Spirit suddenly changed my focus. No longer was this about the strangers outside my door. It was about me in similar situations when our children were young.

How often did one of them call out to me, “Daddy, wait for me, please.” Countless times, I’m sure, as I raced to get wherever it was we needed to get to. And I know I must have called impatiently behind me more often than I like to think, “Come on, we need to go.”

“Daddy, wait for me, please.”

How often did the Lord Jesus say to others, “Come, follow Me”? Lots of times. His offer is embedded from one end of the Gospels to the other.

And oh, how I want to follow Him.

Then why is it so often the case that I get so quickly distracted from following? Like a small child distracted by a bug crawling in the grass, or breezes blowing through leaves – or even by a piece of trash crumpled along the sidewalk – I so often get distracted by what really are trivialities of life that I take my eyes off the Shepherd and dally in the distractions.

And then I notice I'm no longer close to my Daddy in heaven.

“Daddy, wait for me, please.”

What causes a child to be so easily distracted and lose focus? Whatever it is of the many things that catch a toddler's eye -- whatever it is should not be what causes *me* to lose focus. At my level of spiritual maturity I should be much better able to fix my eyes on Jesus and follow Him wherever it is He wants me to go.

“Daddy, wait for me, please.”

It's important for me to tell you, never once has He ever turned back and said impatiently, “Come on. We need to go.” No. Never once. Instead, I've so often sensed Him call patiently to me, “Well . . . come along my darling, my beautiful one. Come along.” (see [Song of Songs, 2:10](#))

And never once has He ever turned back and said anything different to you when you call to Him.

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2017/03/daddy-wait-for-me-please.html>
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Reflections on Worship: Offering Our Sins

On February 28, I wrote about the first ever Lenten Video Study produced by the parish of [St. Mary Magdalene in Gilbert, Arizona](#). The title of the study is *Journey into the Desert: Reflections on Worship*. If you signed up for the study through our parish Flocknote service, then you have been receiving weekly videos that pertain to this study. To learn more about this study and how it came to be, here is the [article I wrote on February 28](#).

For today's article, I am sharing my video and reflections with you. I was assigned to focus on how we can offer our sins to God through Worship. Below is my video, the reading that goes with the video, which is from [The Way of the Disciple](#) by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, questions to answer, and then a prayer to recite. There are also additional resources at the end, including my favorite poem which was given to me in my Senior Seminar Class in the St. Ignatius Institute at the University of San Francisco 20 years ago by the aforementioned author.

Make time this week to prayerfully read and reflect on this excerpt...

“The great moral problem of the Samaritan appears to be that, in her search for love, she has had too many husbands. And her present “husband” really is not one at all. The frantic search for love, which often compensates for the lack of quality by sheer force of quantity, in the end has only created a greater void in the soul. After so many men, the woman finds herself alone, face to face with the Son of Man.

An interesting exegetical notation to John 4:18 (“You have had five husbands, and he whom you have now is not your husband”) refers us to 2 Kings 17:24: “And the King of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria, and dwelt in her cities.” These five pagan nations, which supplied occupants for Samaria, have been apparently symbolized by John in the woman's five husbands, to indicate the Samaritan's religious and moral perversion in the eyes of the Judeans, who had kept their faith and their race pure from foreign admixtures. The woman, personifying Samaria, and Samaria, personifying all sinners, together represent the human slide towards idolatry, self-indulgence, and the abandonment of God's Law. Note, too, the sexual connotation of the expression “they took possession of Samaria”. The fundamental question here is our tendency to allow ourselves to be seduced by any lover other than God. The present, sixth “husband” on call, who is not really a husband, would then refer to the current Roman occupation that in the end utterly destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

We then have a grand total of six husbands, who neither singly nor collectively have brought the woman any lasting happiness. After so much flirtation with love, the poor Samaritan still has to draw water alone at noontime, still has to continue looking after herself. What an unbearable burden, to invest so much in “love” and get so little in return! But Jesus is the seventh Man, who comes to remove this burden from her shoulders. Seven, as we know, is the number of perfection, the number signaling the end of the search, the fulfillment of all desire, the arrival home. What at first had been the mere breaking of a double taboo- Judean man talking to a Samaritan woman- is revealed at this point as something much deeper: if Jesus dares to approach her and speak so intimately with her, without her covering her face with a veil (note how even the disciples are a little scandalized: “They marveled that

he was talking with a woman”) it is because he is wooing her in order to seduce her heart and persuade her to welcome him as the Bridegroom of her soul.

We necessarily skip over all the other numerous aspects of the episode to conclude with one final theme: the conversion of the woman from needy sinner to disciple and evangelist. Jesus has peered into the depths of her soul and revealed to her her own innermost secrets, above all, her deep sadness at never having found a true love. But this revelation, far from frightening, depressing, or scaring her away, rather fills the woman with joy, the joy that announces the beginning of a new life. When he proclaims her sins to her, Jesus works a kind of exorcism that frees her of them. “So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, “Come see a man who told me all I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” The fact that Jesus has cleansed her soul with his gaze incites her to recognize in him the Messiah sent by God, the anointed Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

The abandonment of the water jar, like Bartimaeus’ throwing off his old rag, symbolizes the newness of life that derives everything from Jesus, a life that no longer needs to carry the same crushing and absurd burdens or repeat the same useless tasks. Notice that, throughout the episode, neither Jesus nor the woman ever drinks a single drop of water, even though everything was set in motion by thirst of the body. The two have been refreshed and satisfied by their dialogue of love- he by making himself known and inviting her to intimacy with him, she by opening up little by little to divine seduction and surrendering at last with all the jubilation and immense relief of an enslaved soul that exits to freedom.

Such liberation makes her hasten to her townspeople, the very ones who have previously rejected her. Now she cares little about her marginal status: the rejected one now breaks the barrier that Jesus has first broken in approaching her, but now in order to proclaim to one and all what she has found. “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” But this new disciple, who has drunk in Jesus’ essential teaching in what could be called a very accelerated crash course, is only an ambassador, the precursor who is followed by Jesus’ personal presence. Her personal witnesses opened up hearts and ears, preparing people to receive Jesus in person. She makes herself into a pure instrument of God’s love; now she seems consumed with one desire: to love Jesus and bring others to him.

The true disciple rejoices at nothing more than at hearing what the woman heard in the end: “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this indeed is the Saviour of the world.” What greater joy could be ours, too, than to know that many others may come to share in our own delight at having been found by Jesus.”

Reflect

After watching the video and reading the excerpt, consider these questions for prayerful reflection, journaling, and/or discussion with others...

- What in your personal life is the “water jar” or “old rag” that is keeping you from abandoning yourself completely to God?
- If you haven’t been to the Sacrament of Confession in some time, what is holding you back from God’s mercy and forgiveness? If you have been to Confession recently, what brought you to the Sacrament?
- Do you struggle to reconcile the sins of your daily life with your call to be a disciple in the world?
- Are you ready for a metanoia – a revolution of your soul – in your relationship with Jesus Christ

and his Church?

Pray

Consider making [The Memorare](#) a part of your daily prayer this week...

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

Additional Reading & Resources:

Read the story of the *Woman at the Well* in the Gospel according to [John 4:1-42](#)

Use an [Examination of Conscience](#) to help you prepare to receive God's mercy in the sacrament of Confession.

A Confession – Czeslaw Milosz (1985)

My Lord, I loved strawberry jam

And the dark sweetness of a woman's body.

Also well-chilled vodka, herring in olive oil,

Scents, of cinnamon, of cloves.

So what kind of prophet am I? Why should the spirit

Have visited such a man? Many others

Were justly called, and trustworthy.

Who would have trusted me? For they saw

How I empty glasses, throw myself on food,

And glance greedily at the waitress's neck.

Flawed and aware of it. Desiring greatness,

Able to recognise greatness wherever it is,

And yet not quite, only in part, clairvoyant,

I knew what was left for smaller men like me:

A feast of brief hopes, a rally of the proud,

A tournament of hunchbacks, literature.

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2017/03/28/journey-into-the-desert-reflections-on-worship-week-4-offering-our-sins/>
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Prayer Journal Prompts, Prayers and Pics [at Equipping Catholic Families]



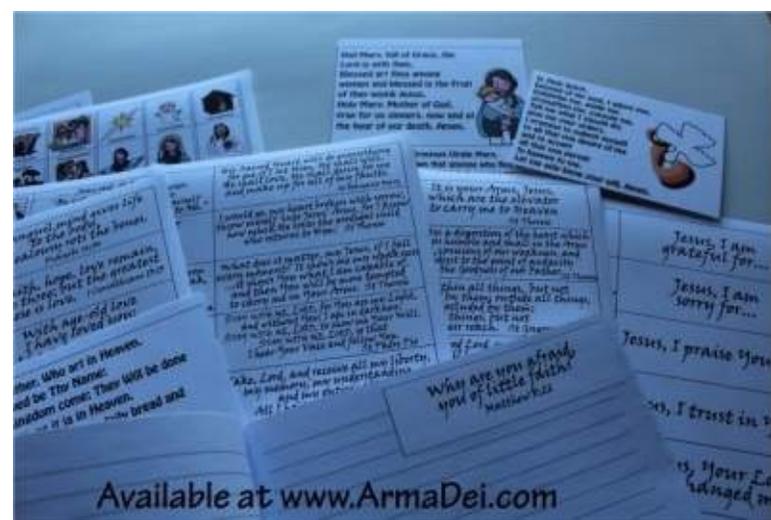
Last week, we quietly released a pretty awesome Craft Kit: [Prayer Journal Prompts: Heart to Heart with Jesus](#)

...we haven't seen anything out there like it!

The PDF includes 134 prayer prompts, 24 classic prayers illustrated with Kelly Saints, 100+ color stickers and 60 BW Saint stickers to help you take ANY dollar store notebook and turn it into a customized Prayer Journal, just for you!



We recommend printing the templates on full 8.5"x11" sticker paper*, lightly cutting along the lines to separate the prompts and artwork into stickers...and peeling off and applying just the prompts and images that appeal to you!



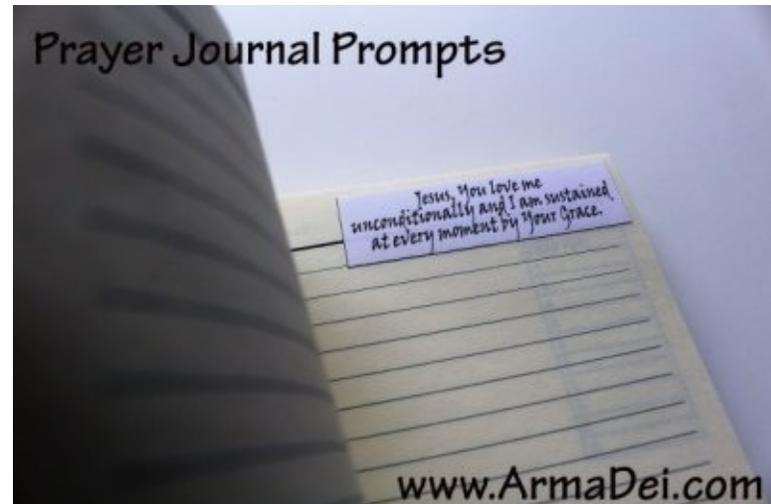
The Prayer Journal Prompts include *Questions directly to Jesus*, quick but powerful Scripture verses, Scriptural questions *from* Jesus, Saint Quotes, Saint Prayers and Excerpts of Preface Prayers from the Mass.

The 24 Prayers are classic prayers you've probably wanted to memorize anyway...what better way to have it handy in your Prayer Journal!



Prayer Journaling is an awesome way to step up your prayer life. I wrote about how I've been taught to do it here:

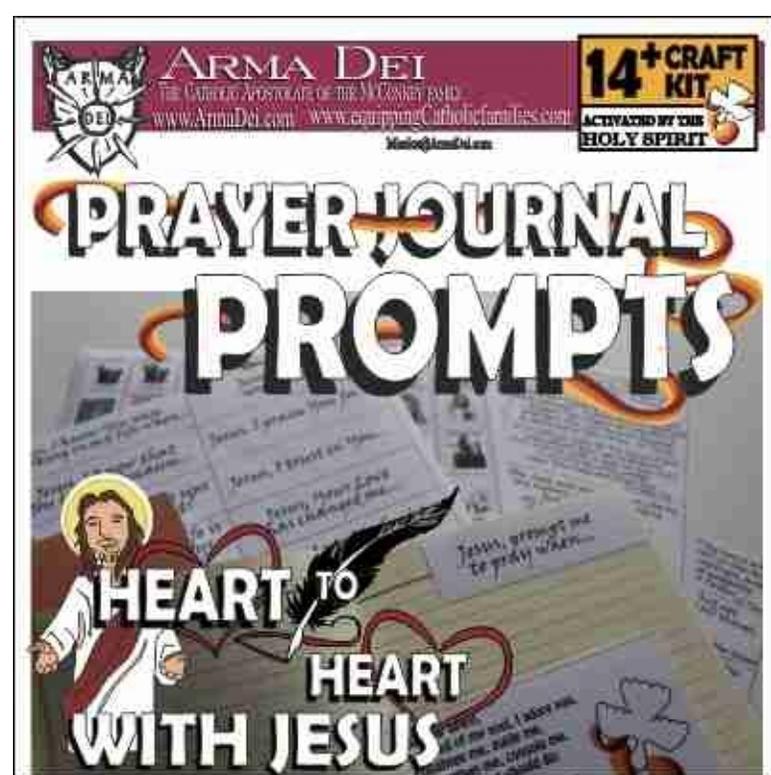
[How on Earth can I have a Personal Relationship with God?](#)



Do YOU want to give it a try?



Here it is:



Prayer Journal Prompts Craft Kit

\$15 PDF Download



and if you want to see a quick video about the new Prayer Journal Prompts Craft Kit, I've got TWO:

and watch it...the volume is a little crazy on this one:

...and if you're looking for a deal on full sheet label paper, check this *Amazon Affiliate link out:

This contribution is available at <http://equippingcatholicfamilies.com/2017/03/prayer-journal-prompts-prayers-pics/>
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My New Veil- A Review [at Veils and Vocations]

So, if you have been following my blog at all, you know that I am terribly behind in posts due to a particularly beautiful,

[Little Lady.](#)



hosted at [This Ain't the Igroom](#)

1

My top reason is that Marsha gave it to me. It makes me insanely happy to deal with vendors whom I know on a first name basis. Her shop has been added to my list of places to shop first, because, as per usual, dealing with a person is so much better than dealing with a corporation. Please, remember to support small, Catholic businesses whenever possible.

2

Marsha's shop name is

[Fleur-de-Lis](#)

veils and I have an affinity for all things French. When I was little, all I wanted was to live in an old boarding house all covered in vines in gay Paris!



3

The weight and drape of this veil is beautiful. It has a nice body and is not too stiff, and not too flimsy. The fabric of this veil is the main reason it is my favorite out of my small collection.

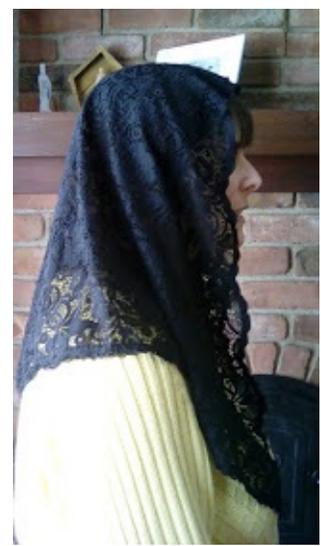
4

This veil is a rich black, with a bit of shine. Black has always been a color that I wasn't too sure about for veils. I didn't want something that looked frumpy and have seen black veils that are not a true black, but a bit faded. The color of my new veil is absolutely perfect.



5

I enjoy the feeling of how my veil falls on my shoulders. As I said before, the weight of this is beautiful. I have had veils that were so light, they could slip off and I would not notice. Part of my favorite parts of veiling is the physical sensation of the devotion. It draws me into the Mass and payer, helping my mind not to wander. I don't know if that sounds crazy, but it's the truth.



6

My Little Lady enjoys my veil, as well. She buries her face in it as I hold her and holds it gently in her hand as she drifts to sleep. It is such a sweet sight seeing her lovingly cuddled within my veil.

7

Lastly, the lace pattern and finished edges are superb. This veil has such detail and was crafted with exquisite attention to those details. While there are many veils that look common, this veil is elegant and feminine. I am already eyeing

[a veil](#)

for Cowgirl, perhaps for Christmas. Oh, and there is that

[pink, silk veil](#)

that would be perfect for Little Lady in a couple of years.

Thank you, Marsha for your sweet generosity! Your kindness has deeply touched me and I will always treasure your meaningful gift.

This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2017/03/7qt-my-new-veil-review.html>
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Living Stations Bring Children to the Foot of the Cross [at Seton Magazine]

4 minutes

Summary

In seven well-described steps, Jennifer Elia shows how to bring a Living Stations program to your parish to let the children live the Stations of the Cross.

For the past ten years, our family has participated in our parish’s “Jesus’ Walk of Love.”

My husband and I took over the program eight years ago, and it has become part of our Good Friday tradition. Here is a simple how-to so you can bring this program to your parish and let [the children](#) live the Stations of the Cross this Lent.

1. Script

The first, and most important part is to have a script. We use a wonderful one that has been passed down over the years in our parish. If you would like a copy, please comment below, and we will work out a way for you to get one.

The script includes a Narrator part for each station that explains what happened, any lines the actors say, a congregational response for each station, and questions delivered by the priest to get the children thinking about how each station pertains to their lives today. Here is a sample:

Station Four: Jesus meets His mother, Mary

NARRATOR: Here is Jesus, looking into the eyes of his mother, Mary. She must also walk this journey of love. The love of our parents for us is so very great. Do we take the love without giving in return? Do we demand that we have things our way? Just as Mary and Jesus could strengthen each other in such a sad time, we can support our parents with our love. We should give it gladly.

RESPONSE BY ALL: Jesus, please help us to learn to recognize how much our parents love us and give to us. We want to show them how much we care about them.

PRIEST: How do you show love for your parents?

Advertisement

**HIGH
TEST
SCORES**

#1

HOMESCHOOL NOW

ALL: Pray Hail Mary

SONG: Sing of Mary:”Sing of Jesus, son of Mary, in their home at Nazareth. Toil and labor cannot weary love enduring unto death. Constant was the love he gave her, though He went forth from her side. Forth to preach and heal and suffer, till on Calvary He died.”

2. Costumes

Most of our “costumes” are only costumes in the sense they change the appearance of the actors. We use a lot of tablecloths, pillow cases, old ties, and whatever else we can find. Costumes can be as elaborate or simple as you choose.

For our stations, we have a collection of lengths of fabric in different colors and patterns that are simply folded in half with a head hole cut along the seam. Every time I open the box, I wonder how we will look with such a rag-tag collection of clothes, but every year, once the children are costumed and placed throughout the church, those simple costumes work wonderfully.

Make sure to have something specific for Mary, Jesus, Pilate, and the Roman guards. These costumes, again, can be something simple like a couple of yards of fabric with a head hole, just make sure they are obviously costumes for each part.

So, Mary is in blue, Jesus is in white, Pilate is in purple, etc. In addition to robes, we have head scarves and belts (i.e rectangular scraps of fabric and twine or ribbon for belts).

3. Props

Now, you need to find some props. Props are very important, but remember, they do not need to be elaborate. Here a list of what you need:

crown of thorns/grapevine wreath

- parchment colored scroll for Pilate (we put his lines on the scroll)
- a royal looking large piece of fabric to be draped over Jesus and then “stripped”
- swords and chest plates for guards
- Veronica’s veil (a large piece of white fabric with an image of Jesus’ face on the underside.)
- a cross for Jesus to carry (ours is 6 feet long)

- hammers
- boards with nails partially hammered in
- various dice
- a cross for the crucifixion scene (shorter to accommodate the height of the children)
- two four foot 1 x 3" boards with ropes tied around each end. (These are used for the two criminals; they slip their hands through the ropes, so it looks like they are also on crosses)
- two cinder blocks (to prop up cross)
- a white sheet to use as the shroud

We use the dice, hammers, and boards with nails to provide “sound effects” but also to get the children involved in a hands-on way. At the tenth station, the dice are rolled to reenact the gambling for Christ’s garment. At the eleventh station, children hammer the nails to provide sound for the actors who are pretending to hammer Christ to the cross.

4. Get the pastor involved

At each station, as mentioned above, we have a reflection read by one of our priests. Some priests simply read the reflection, while others add their own commentary. I think the most important part is having a priest involved in the process.

Also, after our stations, our pastor offers a communion service and veneration of the cross. This is a very special touch that adds so much to the experience. It becomes a true time of worship, instead of being seen as just a school play.

I am always so appreciative of the priests and deacons who take the time during the busiest liturgical week of the year, to minister to the children and families to lead them closer to Jesus.

5. Music

There is not much music included because it is Good Friday, but it is still an integral part. The songs that we have in our script include [*Were You There*](#), [*Sing of Mary*](#), [*Lord, Let Me Walk*](#), and [*Jesus, Come to Us*](#). After the stations, we have a Veneration of the [*Cross*](#) and Communion Service. Both of these need music. We have replayed some of the above pieces, or covered with just instrumental music.

Don’t forget to organize musicians. We try our hardest to have children do this part as well. I recruit the musicians about a month in advance; but, the more time, the better. Some years we have had one girl play piano for all of the pieces.

This year we have a pianist, a flutist, and a violinist, playing various pieces. It is nice to have a cantor, but it is not necessary. One year, we had five girls volunteer at the last minute. Sometimes, we have one, sometimes none. However, in the end, it all works out.

6. Practice

Plan a practice a few days before your event. Allow for a least a couple of hours to organize everyone, plan costumes, read through the script, decide where each station will be, and teach the children the program.

We always do our practice on Holy Tuesday evening, since nothing is going on at our parish that evening. It also gives the children a few days to study their scripts before performing in front of everyone.

Then on the day of the stations, have a full run through with musicians, props, your priest, and altar boys, if they are helping. We have one altar boy carry a candle in front of Jesus as we process.

In years when we had many children involved, we have had an additional altar boy or Roman guard walking behind the procession to keep it moving forward. At each station, the participant (Mary, Veronica, etc.) follows behind the cross until the end.

7. Open it up to all

The stations are open to any children in pre-k and up who want to participate. However, we also open the walk itself up to any children in attendance that day. So, the children take the walk with Jesus and see up close what happened during [His Passion](#).

In years gone by, we left boxes of costumes at the door for anyone who wanted to dress up. This was fun but a lot of work for me, as I had to track down all the pieces, fold them, and pack them away.

If you have enough parent volunteers, this could be an additional way to bring the story of Good Friday to life for the children. After all, many hands make light work.

Does your parish celebrate Good Friday in a special way for the children?

[Header photo CC Matthew Green| flicker.com](#)

[children](#) [closer to Jesus](#) [crucifixion](#) [elia](#) [good friday](#) [jennifer](#) [jennifer-elia](#) [lent](#) [music](#) [parish](#) [passion](#)
[pastor](#) [props](#) 2017-03-27

This contribution is available at <http://www.setonmagazine.com/latest-articles/living-stations-bring-children-to-the-foot-of-the-cross>
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Beloved daughters, 'bearers of life-giving love' [at Peace Garden Passage]



My diocese, the Diocese of Fargo in eastern North Dakota, recently hosted its inaugural women's conference. Following a Redeemed Men's conference that took place in the fall, the Redeemed Women's "Beloved Daughter" event was tailored to the unique nature of women.

The opening keynote was given by Sister Mary Elizabeth, SV, of the Sisters of Life order, based in New York City. If you've ever been in the presence of these dear women, you will notice something special. They exude joy, and it is extremely attractive.

Sister Mary Elizabeth was no exception, and began her talk reminding us of the basics. "In every heart, there is a hunger to be chosen...to be cherished," she said. "Every person is loved into existence by God."

It didn't take long before tears began welling up in my eyes; not tears of sadness, but gratitude and long-forgotten recognition of truth.

"Each of us is a result of the thought of God," she continued. "Each of us is necessary...and continually held in existence by God."

These beautiful realities washed over the parched souls of the 700 women in attendance; words that, as women bent on serving others — often before ourselves — we seemed desperate to hear.



Sr. Mary Elizabeth SV opens the “Beloved Daughter” conference for the Fargo Diocese on March 11, 2017.

To offset the intensity, Sister, like all good speakers, brought in a few personal stories, including a few that prompted giggles. For example, she shared about the time she and some of her sisters were at an elementary school, and a little girl leaned over and asked one about her habit. “Why are you wearing that?” she asked, pointing to her head. Sister grasped to explain, in terms a young lady would understand, the nature of her fashion apparel. Finally, she said that she was married to Jesus, and her habit was like a wedding gown. The little girl took a long look at her, and then, with scrutinizing eyes, exclaimed, “He chose YOU??!”

Indeed, sister continued, in discovering our feminine nature, our deepest identity, we confront the reality that at bottom, we are “bearers of life-giving love.”

“This is our gift and our call,” Sister said. “It’s the way we will find purpose in our lives.”

She also told of a story she read about in Matthew Kelly’s “Rediscover Jesus,” about a man, a lapsed Catholic, who ended up sitting by Mother Teresa of Calcutta on a plane. After talking with her throughout the flight, and observing the actions of Mother and the other sisters, he remarked, “I feel as if I just met God’s daughter.”

We are all this, Sister reminded; through baptism, we are “daughters of the living God” whose “spirit abides in us.” And it is pure gift, she added. “Nothing can take it away.”

God is constantly looking upon us with love, she noted, and in turn, we offer back to others and to God “the love that our unique heart can give to him.”

“Most fundamentally, my identity isn’t something I post on Facebook,” she added, nor is it our attributes or even our circumstances. Rather, it is who we are at our core. Through delving into this, she

said, we discover that woman is “the crowning glory of creation,” and the world needs us — every last one of us — for a unique, live-giving purpose.

To access this, should we forget, Sister suggested spending time in Eucharistic Adoration. In “sitting under the merciful gaze of Jesus,” we can rediscover our truest identity, as did a young, wounded woman who stayed for a time with the sisters.

“Jesus transforms our wounds,” Sister said. “His mercy will always be greater than any sin.”

Q4U: In gazing upon you today, what does Jesus want to tell you most of all?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2017/03/beloved-daughters-bearers-of-life-giving-love/>
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Autism and Spiritual Starvation: A Problem, An Unlikely Patron and a Mission [at Celebrating Catholic Motherhood]

“There has to be a better way.” 38-year-old school psychologist Aimee O’Connell, having spent much of her career studying autism and related disorders of high sensitivity, already had a good grasp of these conditions from multiple, simultaneous angles. Growing up herself with Aspergers Disorder had been a contrast of high academic honors and clawing loneliness. Learning her own daughter had autism taught her to nurture first and keep professional expertise a distant second. Aimee was consistently frustrated that no intervention ever quite reached the core of her daughter’s need – and autistic inability – to feel valued by others.

A largely bypassed but widely recognized side effect of autism is this pervasive sense of loneliness that nothing seems to touch, which Aimee calls “spiritual starvation.” Countless destructive and self-destructive consequences of spiritual starvation can be seen among people with autism, Aimee noted, but so, too, in the culture at large. Social skills training teaches people with autism how to make friends, but it can’t convince them they are valuable to God and others if they can’t feel it. It is a problem becoming more rampant among all young people of our time, but most especially among those with autism.

As a Catholic, Aimee turned to prayer, Scripture and the wisdom of the saints to find a solution to spiritual starvation. Where, she wondered, was a Patron Saint of Autism? There were patrons of love and suffering, mental disorders, contemplatives and academics... but none specific to autism. Besides, autism isn’t so much a mental disorder as it is a combination of heightened sensitivity, processing overload and an inability to communicate between one’s true self and others. A surprise twist brought everything together for her in 2015 when her daughter, then ten, developed a typically autistic fascination with the country of Iceland. Now homeschooling, Aimee capitalized on her daughter’s interest and delved deeply into studying all things Icelandic – including their patron saint.

Meet Thorlak Thorhallsson, Patron Saint of Iceland.

St. Thorlak lived in Iceland from 1133-1193. He was a quiet, studious person who rose from a broken, destitute family to high offices within the Catholic Church, ultimately becoming Bishop in 1174. Like practically everyone else in the world, Aimee had no idea who St. Thorlak was or what he did. Out of curiosity, Aimee began reading the

Saga of Bishop Thorlak

, originally written in the 13

th

century but republished in recent years in English. She made some interesting observations. Thorlak was hyperlexic, for one. He rarely played as a child and scorned games as an adult. He thrived on academics and sought out people to learn from them, but shrank away from crowds and speaking. He was silent, almost to a fault, but not simply because he followed monastic rule. St. Thorlak easily fit the

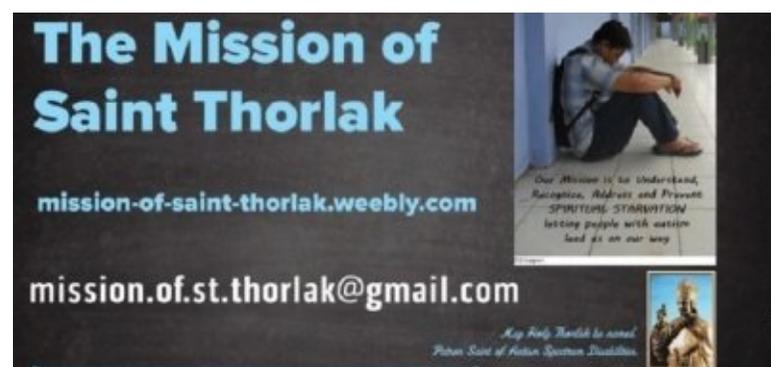
profile of someone with Aspergers, though that concept was far ahead of his medieval lifetime.

What fascinated Aimee most was the way St. Thorlak was said to have affected so many people's hearts. He was rule bound and unyielding in his upholding of God's law, which rubbed many officials the wrong way, including fellow clergy – yet he was beloved and renowned, even by his opponents, for his gentle, compassionate ways. The list of documented miracles at the end of the Saga is prolific, but it seems that documentation ended at the Reformation, when Catholic artifacts were pillaged or destroyed throughout Scandinavia.

Aimee asked: Where is St. Thorlak today?

Good question. There are a small number of statues and images of Iceland's patron saint scattered across the handful of Catholic churches and chapels in that country (which, as of 2015, had about 12,000 Catholics served by 15 priests, most of whom were ordained in other countries). Iceland marks "St. Thorlak's Day" on December 23 by serving up putrefied fish and drinking schnapps. But as far as being aware of who he was and what he did, most of that knowledge resides with historians and academics, who characterize him as a holy reformer and leave it at that. St. Thorlak seems to have settled quietly into the back of the history books, appearing even as an afterthought on the Church calendar of saints (St. John of Kanty has December 23's official spot on the liturgical calendar).

Aimee, with her own Aspergers, studied the puzzle until she found the solution. How did a painfully shy, rule-driven pastor win over such hardy, self-determined people, who readily adopted him as their spiritual patron? **Because his sincere desire to learn from people endeared him to their hearts.** Regardless of how anxious or rigid he was in his thinking, he engaged people with one key theoretical approach: "Can you be my friend?" – and changed the whole equation. It wasn't that someone stepped in and taught him, the person with a social disability, who didn't know how to mingle and glean from casual conversation, about friendship. It was he, the person with autism, who taught the ordinary person about the spiritual nutrition of friendship from his sincerity and vulnerability. Once this clicked, Aimee found her mission: The Mission of Saint Thorlak.



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"The Mission of Saint Thorlak aims to understand, recognize, address and prevent spiritual starvation, letting people with autism lead us on our way."

Aimee is committed to seeing this message reach the entire world as her contribution to combating spiritual starvation – and, since it absolutely requires people with autism, it ensures they will be fed in the process. Furthermore, Aimee will not rest until she sees St. Thorlak known, appreciated, and officially named the Patron Saint of Autism (although she acknowledges it is up to ecclesial authorities

to give his cause proper examination and determination). In the meantime, she encourages all to visit The Mission of Saint Thorlak webpage for meditations, prayers and activities for youth and young adults, including a series of upcoming retreats. Content is always being updated, so check back often. Most of all, Aimee hopes people will join her mission in prayer and spread the word.

St. Thorlak, Pray for Us!

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About the author: Among many things, Aimee O'Connell is a Catholic homeschooling mom, a certified school psychologist and a person with autism. She is currently helping to develop the Mission of Saint Thorlak as a spiritual outreach for people with autism and those who support them: "To understand, recognize, address and prevent spiritual starvation, letting people with autism lead us on our way." Visit the [Mission of St. Thorlak](#) website and [Facebook page](#) for more information.

This contribution is available at <http://catholicmom.com/2017/03/24/autism-spiritual-starvation-problem-unlikely-patron-mission/>
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The Wound of Misunderstanding [at TASTE and SEE]

FROM THE OUTSIDE
LOOKING IN,
IT'S HARD TO
UNDERSTAND.

FROM THE INSIDE
LOOKING OUT,
IT'S HARD TO
EXPLAIN.



HEALTHYPLACE.COM

Sad. That's how I feel. I wish I had the analogy I have now, when I went out for dinner and a walk with a woman I know. We talked about marriage and divorce and families and children. She struggled when I told her I had severe postpartum and major depression (Is any depression not severe?) when my sons were younger, such that I let their Dad be the primary caretaker when we got divorced. (Today they are grown and on their own.) She asked if I ever regretted my decision.

At the time, the question felt in-congruent, but I couldn't find the words to discuss it with her. Time has brought me insight. Regret? No, I didn't and don't regret my decision in the sense that I wished I never made it or I thought I was wrong for having made it. I knew it was the best arrangement for my sons. I did grieve however, for the lost time we could have had if I were healthier back then. I still feel it today at times. The emotional "I wish it could be different [for all of us]," but when I return to the rational version of that, it helps keep me grounded.

The woman with whom I was walking asked me if I had to do it all over again, would I make the same decision. I think my answer was hard for her to hear. She is a very protective and high energy type of Mom. My answer to her question was, "Yes, if everything was the same, and I was battling major depression such that I was incapacitated to take care of even myself - and my former husband was reliable, loving, caring, present, and put our children first, and did a wonderful job to include me in our sons' lives, like my former husband did - I would do it all over again."

I was incapacitated in ways that still bring tears to my eyes. Not being able to care for my sons due to major depression is like not being able to care for one's children due to cancer and undergoing the debilitating procedure of chemotherapy. It just can't be done without some level of neglect occurring, and I wish I could have conveyed that to this woman. Unfortunately, I think she left our visit judging me for what she thought was my choice to harm my sons by not choosing to let their Dad be the primary custodial parent. If only I knew the cancer analogy at the time.



I didn't give up everything in the divorce. I maintained and stayed responsible for the joint legal and physical custody I signed up for. My former husband and I lived quite a distance from each other, such that our set up was very similar to one parent having primary custody. Naturally, most people would assume it is the mother who has that. In this day of diversity and equal rights, one would think I would not have experienced judgment by others, but that's not true. Thankfully, more people have comforted and consoled me in my situation than have case me aside. They gave me room to grow and to heal and to internalize everything. Many professionals were also tremendous sources of help. I cannot thank them enough for having gone beyond the call of duty over the years.

So no, I do not regret my decisions, but I certainly grieve the losses associated with them.

Thankfully, Jesus is the ultimate Consoler, Advocate, and Judger, who is available to us all. If I knew about joining my suffering, and to the extent I could, joining the suffering of my children and former husband, to His salvific suffering on the Cross, I would have gone to him in prayer for that. Now I do go, and I carry any residual forward.

You can go too. Besides, what better use is there for one's suffering?

image - <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/74/bb/8d/74bb8d50862e65f851a281c097445681.jpg>
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Quit Your Complaining!



“If you are not grateful for the things you have, what makes you think you will be grateful for the things you want.” –Tony Agnesi

Every March, Diane and I are blessed to spend the month in sunny Naples, Florida. We love the nearby Vanderbilt Beach and walk the beach every morning for an hour and a half. We are so grateful to share this time together. Every year, I comment on how I missed my life’s calling as a beach bum!

Naples is an upscale city and most of the people here are retired successful folks from other parts of the country and seasonal vacationers. I love everything about the area except for one thing. In the 20 plus years we have been coming here I can’t believe is how unfriendly everyone is.

You would think that with the beautiful sunshine and near perfect sunny days everyone would be in a grateful, cheerful mood. But, that doesn’t seem to be the case. People here are always complaining about something. Somewhere along the way being grateful for your blessings has disappeared.

“And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

” –Colossians 3:17

And, what do they complain about? Here is sample of what I overheard in just one day.

A wealthy woman complained that her smart phone battery wasn’t lasting as long as it should. She blamed the sales clerk at the phone store.

A man complained that he had his drink flag up at the Ritz Carlton for over five minutes before the waiter arrived. He wanted his drink for free.

A woman at the coffee shop complained that the foam heart on her cappuccino was misshaped and wanted it replaced.

A young girl arrived at Dunkin' Donuts in her daddy's Tesla and ordered a jelly doughnut with the jelly on the side and was disturbed that they couldn't fulfill her request. She reluctantly took the regular jelly doughnut (with the jelly inside) and paid for it with Apple Pay on her iPhone 7.

An elderly woman complained that there would be a 30 minute wait to be seated in a popular restaurant. Her husband offered, "What else do you have to wait for besides death!" I liked him.

As I walked the beach, I smile and say good morning to everyone I passed. Of the many people I recently greeted one morning only one responded with a good morning reply. Most ignored me, turned their heads away or even worse, looked at me in disgust.

My point is that, even in arguably the sunniest, prettiest city on the gulf coast, people can't even say good morning. And for some reason they are ALWAYS finding something to complain about.

Gratitude and humility just doesn't seem to exist!

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

" -2 Corinthians 9:15

I was almost ready to give up on humanity when I had an encounter with a migrant worker.

His skin was dark and stained from too much sun exposure. His hands were chapped and cut. His clothes dirty from the fields.

As we made eye [contact](#), I smiled and said "Hello."

"Hello," He quickly responded.

"How are you?" was my automatic response.

He paused for a moment, raised his hands toward heaven, tipped back his head and rolled his eyes skyward, and didn't say a thing; not a single word. Without [speaking](#) he spoke volumes!

Without saying a word I heard;

Thank you God for my life.

Thank you God for being able to support my family.

Thank you for all the blessings you have given me.

Without speaking, he restored my faith in humanity. This man understands that all that we have is a gift from God and gratitude and humility lead to happiness.

Quite a contract, right? So I ask you, who is happier?

On one of our beach walks, Diane and I agreed that for the entire vacation we were not going to complain about anything. Every time one of us complained (OK mostly me) she would stop me and I

would have to say something that I was grateful for. After a while it became second nature.

I can honestly say that when you are conscious of your complaining and make an effort to stop and instead find something to be thankful for, it works! Why not give it a try.

Quit Your Complaining!

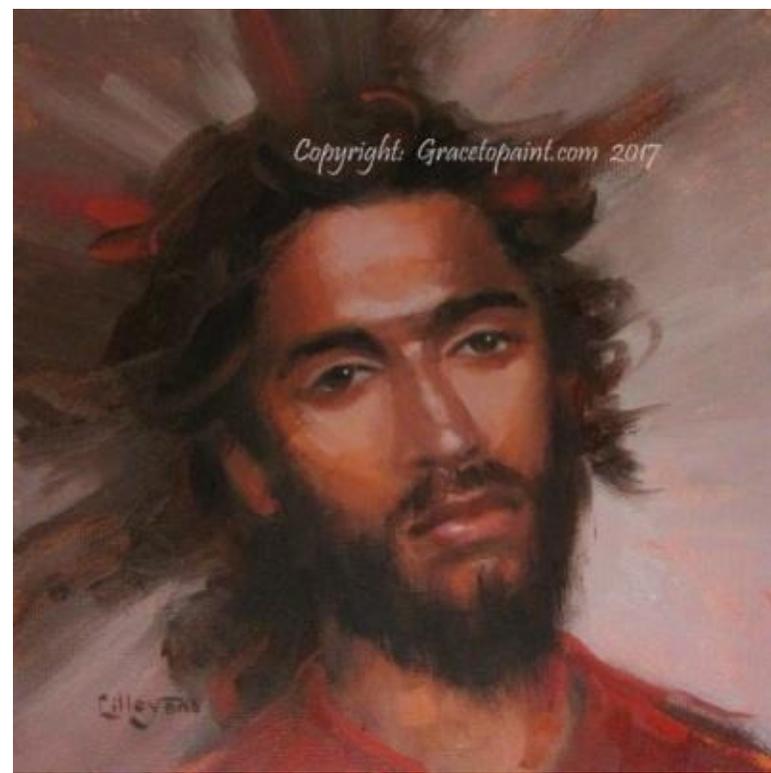


TonyAgnesi.com

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INRI [at Grace to Paint]



8×8" oil paint on cradled artist board; sold.

The Roman lettering of the first century gave us these initials for : Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum, or Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Today we still see the abbreviation atop our crucifixes. May we be mindful these days of Lent of all that he gave.

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How long will you be here? [at walk the way]

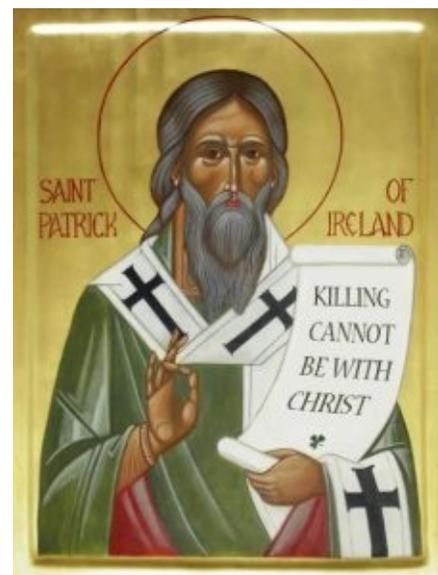
I came to Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras, in June 2007.

Before I came, some people in the US asked me how long I planned to be there. My response was, “Until God calls me somewhere else.”

For the first couple of years here, people kept asking me, “How long will you be here?” My response was “Hasta que Dios quiere” – “As long as God wants.”

Now I am seldom asked that question, since I’ve been around for so long and now I have a house in Plan Grande. But it is still something I need to ask myself.

But now as an ordained permanent deacon, I am tied to Honduras, specifically to the Church in the diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán. And so it is easier to say that I am here until I die or God calls me elsewhere.



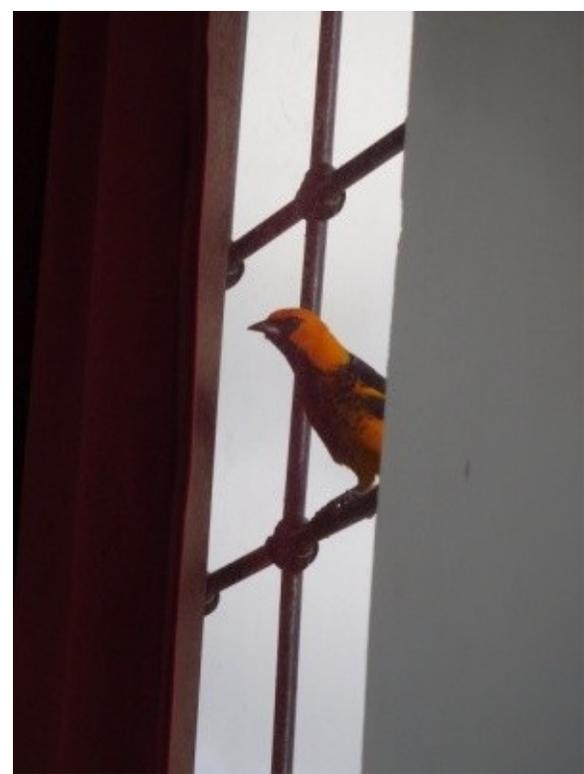
This was brought home to me this morning, reading a passage from Saint Patrick’s Confessions found in Vigils of *Benedictine Daily Prayer*. I felt that Saint Patrick was speaking for me:

“I am ready, if found worthy, to lay down my life gladly and without hesitation for His sake, and I desire to spend it here until death if the Lord grant me that wish.”

That is my prayer – if God wills it.

I desire to spend my life serving in the Church for and with the poor

This is so especially when I have these morning visitors: *chorchas* – orioles.



This contribution is available at <http://walktheway.wordpress.com/2017/03/17/how-long-will-you-be-here/>
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Those who find themselves ridiculous [at Catholic Deacon]

Nearly every Friday across most of the years I have blogged, I have posted and will continue to post what I call a

traditio

Traditio

, to remind both my readers, is a Latin noun that refers to the content of what is handed on.

Tradere

, by contrast, is a Latin verb denoting the act of handing on.

During Lent I have been dipping back into Heidegger's seminal work,

Sein und Zeit

, which translates into English quite easily as

[*Being and Time*](#)

. What is great about dipping into this work is being able to dwell on what strikes me whenever I take a dip. Today I read the sixth section of the second part of Heidegger's Introduction to

Being and Time

. He gave this section the title "The Task of a Destructuring of the History of Ontology." In reading it, I was struck by his treatment of "tradition" that occurs in the course of his discussion on the "historicity" of Da-sein. In German "da" means "there" and "sein" means "being." Da-sein, to give a brief description, is a subject capable of considering its own subjectivity, or a being capable of thinking about being. The "tradition" Heidegger refers to in this section and throughout his work, through which he sought to recover the question of Being, is the Western metaphysical tradition. Heidegger held that this tradition had forgotten the question of Being, which, in his earlier lectures on metaphysics, he set forth as "Why are there beings rather no beings; something instead of nothing?" This question is clarified even further at end of the section of the Introduction to

Being and Time

under consideration: "What does being mean?"

After noting that the "historicity," which I take to mean the inherent temporality hinting at the finitude of Da-sein, "can remain concealed from it," he notes that Da-sein can "discover, preserve, and explicitly

pursue tradition.” For Heidegger, “The discovery of tradition and the disclosure of what it ‘transmits’ [hands-on with regard to Being], and how it does this, can [and should, according to Heidegger] be undertaken as a task in its own right.”



Heidegger posited that because Da-sein is

being-in-time

, it “is determined by historicity.” Because Da-sein is

being-in-time

, “historicity” determines “the ground of its being.” So then, it is of necessity that Da-sein has a history. But history, or, more precisely, Da-sein’s historical memory, tends to forget. Just as, on Heidegger’s account, it forgot the question of Being, it forgets many other things too.

It is no great insight to point out that history usually conceals as much as it reveals. This is not just true with regard to the Western metaphysical tradition that Heidegger boldly and with some success sought to “destructure” by retrieving the question of Being, but with history in general. History, as it is handed-on, often consists of what might generously be called ironed out narratives, or simplifications that leave a lot out. Often what is left out, it might be argued, is not included because it is deemed unimportant. It is frequently the case, however, that things are left out, not because they are unimportant, but because they are inconvenient to the ideology being handed-on. This is not always conscious, even when the omission, which frequently and over time gives way to convenient additions and glosses, begins.

Take a story as well-known as Martin Luther’s initial presentation of his ninety-five theses. The narrative handed-on tells us that he made his objections to the sale of indulgences known by nailing them to the door of the church of the Holy Spirit in Wittenberg, Germany on 31 October 1517. It is this date we are commemorating this year as the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. But as Catholic Luther scholar, Erwin Iserloh, insisted way back 1961: the story is most likely a legend.

Iserloh noted that it was Philipp Melanchthon who first wrote about Luther’s bold hammering of his theses to the church door. But Melanchthon was not an eyewitness because he did not arrive in Wittenberg as a professor until the following year, 1518. Further, the story of nailing his theses to the church door did not appear for the first time until after Luther’s death. During his lifetime, Luther, who was quite dramatic in his speaking and writing, never made mention of having done this.

Luther’s theses were contained in a letter he wrote to his superiors on 31 October 1517. The title of Luther’s document was

[Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum](#)

. In it, he denounced the sale of indulgences. A

disputatio

was an invitation to dispute, or debate, a given subject. It's easy to forget that Luther did not set out to create a schism in the church, or to become a heretic, but to clear up the misunderstandings that led to the gross abuse of indulgences. In response to the Augustinian friar and professor of Scripture's proposed

disputatio

, the Catholic Church did not acquit itself very well. It was not until quite awhile later that Luther renounced his belief in indulgences altogether. Another example of "history's forgetting" is set forth well by Gary L. Macy in his book

[The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West](#)

.
Where am I going with this? According to Heidegger in the section under consideration,

Da-sein grows into a customary interpretation of itself and grows up in that interpretation. It understands itself in terms of this interpretation at first, and within a certain range, constantly. This understanding discloses the possibilities of its being and regulates them. Its own past- and that always means that of its 'generation'- does not follow after Da-sein but rather always already goes ahead of it

It is the awareness of this dynamic that allows Da-sein to interrogate and investigate the "customary interpretation" in which it has grown up, whether this is the metaphysical inheritance of the Hellenic/Roman/Christian West or the specific content of what is handed on as Christian tradition, which often depends heavily, too heavily some argue, on Greek and Roman thought. While the past, in a manner speaking, always beats Da-sein to the future, Da-sein's ability to "better remember" the past can shape and form the future.

What is our

tradio

for this Friday in the Third Week of Lent? It's James singing "Sit Down."

Those who feel the breath of sadness

Sit down next to me

Those who find they're touched by madness

Sit down next to me

Those who find themselves ridiculous

Sit down next to me

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2017/03/those-who-find-themselves-ridiculous.html>
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There Are Reasons People Hate Clowns [at V for Victory!]



I don't know how many of the three or four people who read this blog are priests; but if you are a priest or bishop, and you think you are there to entertain your congregation at Mass, this post is addressed to you.

Some of you priest celebrants at Mass cannot resist doing a clown act on the altar. Some of you confine this nonsense to your sermons, which is bad enough. Others of you pepper the liturgy with stupid jokes; or you constantly halt the liturgy in order to try to warm up the crowd with "humorous" asides. The nervous, raised-eyebrow tittering of your congregation suggests nothing to you.

You need to cut this crap out right now.

First of all, you are living, breathing proof of what a rotten idea it was (a) to turn the priest around to face the people during Mass; (b) to give him a microphone; and (c) to cobble up a liturgy where every part of the Mass has numerous different options for how it can be done, all entirely at the discretion of the priest-celebrant. (The new Mass has so many options to it, in fact, it is next to impossible for us in the pews to follow in the missal and know whether you are using a legitimate option or just making up your own.) No wonder you think it's all about you. No wonder that after decades of this kind of stuff, you are now convinced that you are *supposed* to be the center of everything. And having had your ego thus stoked all these years, no wonder you fight tooth and nail to resist the traditional Mass at your parishes, no matter how much your people might want it. You have weakened and fattened your flock up for the wolves on a steady diet of liturgical junk food, until the ones who still actually believe in the content of the Catholic faith are reduced to gritting their teeth and telling themselves that at least they

are getting the Eucharist.

Somewhere along the line, you clown priests convinced yourselves that you need to spice up the Mass with your own peculiar (and I *do mean peculiar*) brand of humor in order to be "pastoral." Well, let me give you the perspective from the receiving end.

You have no idea who all in your congregation is dealing with what -- not even those of you who bother to find out who your parishioners are (and not all of you do). That man sitting way in the back, in a corner, behind a pillar, has been away from the Church and the Sacraments for years and years, and is in shock over his realization that he has been leading a bad life. That miserable-looking, unfriendly woman who doesn't want to engage in pre-Mass ice-breakers or the sign of peace has just suffered a major bereavement. That couple off to the side with haunted expressions on their faces have no idea where their child is or whether they will ever see her again. Those teenagers who aren't singing along with the offertory hymn have just been told that their mother has terminal cancer. That stony-faced father with three little kids has just lost his job.

And here *you* come, administering blows on top of bruises with your "pastoral" method.

In the first place, you are not cheering these people up. You are trivializing and adding to their pain. Proverbs 25:20: *He who sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on a wound.*

In the second place, what these people most need, in the midst of these awful changes in their lives, is something that does not change. At one time, and until very recently, that was the liturgy, which opened up a window onto the supernatural. But your people can't see through that window, because you are in their face, dancing around in front of them while they are trying to look at something greater and more important than yourself. You have no idea how jarring your "improvements" to the Mass are. You have no idea, because you never listen. After all, *you* are the priest, and therefore, *you* know better. Nobody can tell you anything, so they eventually give up trying.

Since so many of the changes in the liturgy over the last 60 years or so have purported to be about going back to the "purity" of the early Church, maybe we should bring back the ancient practice of the laity rioting anytime they heard changes in the wording of the Gospel. The time has not yet passed out of living memory when it was considered a mortal sin for a priest to make changes to the liturgy *sua sponte*; that's another idea whose time has come again. It has not been considered so during this extended period of experimentation; but it's time we seriously asked ourselves whether it is possible that the objective sinful character of such acts can really have changed. The answer surely lies in the rotten fruits of experimentation, and the real pain it has caused us in the pews.

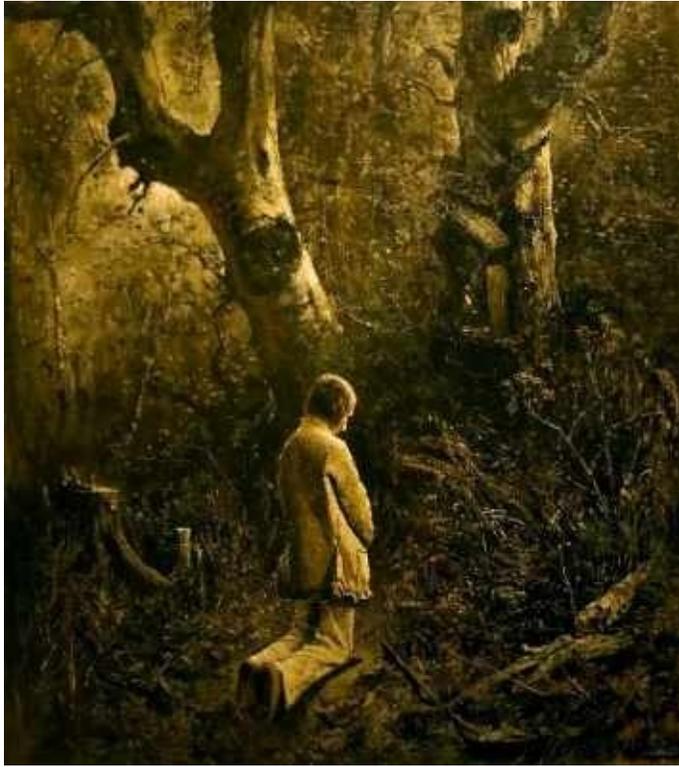
Priests, you have got to stop playing the fool at Mass. You are driving your flocks, and yourselves,

away from the True Shepherd, and you are going to have to answer for every one. The Bread of Life is Jesus Christ, not you. Stop giving us stones when we come to you for the Bread.

This contribution is available at <http://v-forvictory.blogspot.com/2017/03/there-are-reasons-people-hate-clowns.html>
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A Cautionary Tale for Lent



Some years ago, I shared a flat with a man called Caruthers.

If ‘morals make the man, and manners make the gentleman’, then Caruthers was the finest gentleman I had ever met, or so I thought for the first few weeks. However, as the weeks went by, I began to see that his manners were no more than a thin coat of veneer that hid the chipboard man within. Casual visitors were as impressed with him as I had been to begin with. He was always ‘so terribly sorry’ for everything. He was ‘so terribly sorry’ for beating me to the bathroom, ‘so terribly sorry’ for keeping me waiting for half an hour, ‘so terribly sorry’ for failing to clean the bath. He was ‘so terribly sorry’ too for emptying the fridge when he had his friends round, for leaving the washing-up for me the following morning, and for leaving my car with an empty tank when he borrowed it without asking. The trouble was, he wasn’t sorry at all and he kept on behaving in the same old way day in, day out. It is one thing to say you are sorry; it is quite another to mean it. If you mean it, you do something about it. No act of sorrow, no promise to do better next time however heartfelt it might sound, will do us any good, if we do not resolve and seriously endeavour to do better next time round.

Finally, as we become a little more aware of the moral stumbling blocks that usually trip us up, it is time to try and forestall them. If there is a lazy streak in us, or if we have a hot temper, or are prone to making ‘smart alec’ remarks at the expense of others, it is the time to take the necessary steps to avoid falling into these same faults in the forthcoming day. St Paul was the first to realise with such clarity, that it is in fact our very weaknesses, and that even includes our sins, that can become stepping stones to sanctity, if they only convince us of our utter need for God. For God’s power can find full scope in our weakness (2 Corinth 12:9). This is good news, because the truth is, in this life we will never stop falling no matter what. Remember the words of the hermit, Peter Calvay – *“When you stop falling you will be in heaven, but when you stop getting up, you will be in Hell!”*

The Difference Between Saints and Sinners

The difference between us and the saints is not that they did not sin and we do – they sinned just as we do, make no mistake about it. But what distinguishes the saint from the sinner is the speed with which they get up after having fallen. The saint does not waste precious time pretending that they did not sin, or by making endless excuses, or blaming others for what they know only too well was their fault. They get up again the moment they fall to seek forgiveness and begin again, knowing that they have sinned, but trusting implicitly in the mercy of God. St Francis said that the very moment that a person sins must be the moment to turn back to God begging his forgiveness – *immediately* and *without delay*. Herein lies one of the main differences between the saints and sinners like us. Only too often people simply cannot face their guilt so they run away from God and hide as Adam did in the Garden of Eden.

When God called out “*Adam, Adam, where are you?*” – he knew exactly where Adam was, it was Adam who did not know where he was, for he had lost his way trying to hide his sin and the guilt that shamed him. Sometimes we can spend years on the run, because pride won’t allow us to admit what we have done and, our inability to eat humble pie, means that we can spend half a lifetime suffering from spiritual starvation. What is even worse than the pride that comes before a fall, is the pride that follows the fall, because it stops us from getting up, sometimes permanently!

This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/cautionary-tale-lent/>
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Lent has just begun, a season of reflecting upon the suffering and death of the Lord and go with him to the foot of the cross. Many of the faithful offer up a token sacrifice for 40 days to better learn how to love. These sacrifices have meaning, these little daily sufferings in a small way, prepare our mind and bodies for any real sufferings that will inevitably come our way. For most adults, suffering is nothing new, anyone who has lived past their 18th birthday has experienced some suffering in their life. Suffering has value, if not, then how can we explain the salvific suffering and death of Jesus?



The Value of Suffering

I do not claim to be a theologian, but I am a human being who is a follower of Jesus Christ. I do my best to follow His commands and follow where he leads me and sometimes where He leads me is to the cross. When I was younger, I didn't understand why a good God would lead me to a place of suffering, but as I have matured in my faith and lived through many many periods of trial and personal suffering I am starting to see the value in this repeating cycle. Now I am not a glutton for punishment, but after each trial, I emerge as a better person with an increased faith in divine providence and His love for me. In other words, I trust God a little more each time I walk in the "valley of death" and still emerge at the other side. I know that God walks with me and that through each trial he is purifying me and leading me to a closer walk with Him.

No one wants to suffer, but because of the fall of man, our lives on earth involve suffering. It is the way in which we view our sufferings that will either bring us closer to God or cause us to reject him even more than we already have. Those are really the only two options. We either tend to trust God and believe that He loves us, or we tend to believe that if He exists He really doesn't care about us and certainly can't be trusted to have our best interest at heart. No matter which camp we fall into, God loves us and desires us to be in closer union with us. He uses the situations in our lives to compel us to trust Him more and to turn to Him in our time of distress.

I suppose that is the point is this section. God uses the suffering that we all endure in our lives to bring us closer to Him. If we are already fairly close to Him, he will use it to help us to love our neighbor like he does. For me, when I experience suffering, I grow in my love for my fellow human beings. We all suffer and for some, when they encounter suffering, they aren't very nice to other people (I have been this person). To love someone who is hurting is a challenge, but that is what they really need, someone to love them no matter how much they are hurting others while in their period of suffering.

The Value of Sacrifice

Back to Lent. During Lent many Christians give something up for 40 days. While I am sure there are many theological reasons why, I will briefly speak about how these small sacrifices can help us in our training to become saints. After all, that is our purpose in life, to become saints, to become holy and thus after we die, we go to heaven and be with God forever. Being a saint doesn't just happen by magic. Just as being a gold medal olympian doesn't just happen to anyone who desires it. There is a lot of training, long hours, pain and suffering while the body is conditioned and trained to be able to perform the desired athletic feat. The spiritual life is very similar, we must train our mind and body to be holy.

Since we know that trials and tribulations will come our way, we need to be prepared for them so that we turn to Christ for strength and not away from him. The spiritual training of self denial we undertake periodically, prepares our mind and our body to instinctively turn to Christ, this is otherwise known as developing virtue. We don't even think about it, we just do it because we have trained our mind and body to do it over the course of many months and years. If, as a youth, I had approached fasting and abstinence as training for the suffering that would surely come in my life, perhaps I would have been better prepared to handle those situations with heroic virtue.

Family at the Foot of the Cross



Ask any one who has been married for over a few years, or has children over the age of 3 and they will tell you that indeed family life is full of unexpected and “completely out of your control” situations that you have to deal with. Emergency room visits for kids and parents, the death or severe illness of extended family, house fires, tornados, car accidents, unemployment, pregnancy, mental illness, calls from the police, etc. What makes family life particularly difficult is that when you are a member of a family you become vulnerable to each other. When you say I do, you are promising to be intimate with each other, when you are open to a new life and are blessed with children, those children can cause you more suffering than you thought you could handle. In short, being part of a loving family means being at the foot of the cross. This is not a bad thing, Jesus did not attempt to explain why we must suffer, he

just showed us how to endure it and through it all love as the Father loves. Jesus can most definitely say to us, that He knows what we are going through and with faith in God, we too can make it through and give glory to God the Father.

You just never know what may happen and at times you may have to deal with one of more of these situations listed above. In just the past few weeks, we know three families that have experienced much suffering. One family lost their 22 year old son to committed suicide (due to untreated depression), another suffered the loss of an infant, and lastly a family lost a fairly young grandparent in a freak bus/freight train accident in a state almost 600 miles from their home which required the parents to leave their home in haste and stay in the other state for an extended period of time. In all these situations, these families turned to Christ in their time of need. They took Jesus up on the offer to help them carry their heavy crosses. Periodic fasting and abstinence is a very good way to prepare for trials such as these so that when they do come we instinctively turn to the Lord. None of these sufferings are short lived, the effects of these losses will be felt for many months and perhaps years. There will be times when these families will feel the burden is too much to bear, but with continued trust in the Lord, they will make it through the dark valley and will be in closer union with the Lord as He comforts them in their affliction.

Our lives will have trials and sufferings, there is no doubt about this, we can either take up our cross and follow Jesus or run from the cross and the Lord, the choice is yours. Jesus told us He is the way, the truth and the life and He offers to make our burdens light and to bring about good from our suffering. We just need to trust in Him and His Word. God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

This contribution is available at <http://www.yourholyfamily.com/the-family-at-the-foot-of-the-cross/>
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Loving Lent? [at joy of nine9]

Often people think of Lent as a time to share in the suffering of Christ yet when they try to suffer for Christ, they become morose, centring more on their own sacrificial devotions than on God.

Of course, Lent IS a time to get rid of the flub in our lives but only so we are able to connect more to the heart of our Beloved. I am thankful for ALL the suffering in my life because it has brought me



closer to God.

I once asked a priest what my life would have been like if I had not experienced suffering -if I had married a well-off dentist, had 1.25 kids and lived in an efficient, modern house. He put on a phony, pious face, put his hands together in prayer, and said in a high, mocking voice, “Oh, you would be a nice Christian lady, praising the Lord.” What he meant by that amusing bit of acting was that I would be shallow, without depth and strength.

If this is the situation, I say bring on real suffering, because I want—no I *need*—to live in reality.

I can think of no greater tragedy than to die and discover that I had deluded myself, simply living happily on the surface, eating, drinking, doing chores, sleeping, and yet missing out on the core reality of what it means to be fully alive, fully human, in relationship to other people and to God.

I rarely write about my pain, the struggle to raise nine kids with little money on a hobby farm. I only really write about the joy of mothering.

A friend also pointed out to me the other day that I never really talk about the long, dark periods in my life. I guess it is because joy always triumphs in the end in my life; I tend to forget about the painful years, the years of suffering. The love of little people, strong tea, laughter, and the Presence of God in the midst of chaos seems to crack anxiety and stress, but yes, I have been shattered by the demands of mothering.

Yet God always manages to use those moments when I am shattered to crack my heart and soul open to more of His presence and healing. It is like childbirth; the pain is forgotten when I hold my newborn. If there is no pain, no suffering, there is no baby or new growth in the Spirit.

I realize each difficult stage in mothering is normal, not a big deal because all mothers go through similar experiences. So I am not going through a dramatic or unusual crisis. I can see each difficult stage as a call from God to change and grow by going deeper, accessing the strength of the Holy Spirit within my own heart.

I want to live in Christ, healed, fully alive and strong enough to serve. I cannot tolerate the idea that my life was spent playing games, pretending to live, unable to love, whether as a mother, wife, daughter, or

friend. If that means I must experience suffering then so be it.

This contribution is available at <http://melaniejeanjeuneau.blog/2017/03/14/worth-revisiting-loving-lent/>
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Finding a Subject Worth Blogging About [at Quiet Consecration]

This morning on Facebook I spotted this in a friend's status post:

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

I was intrigued enough to offer an opinion by posting, in the comment section, my kind of convoluted idea that one should try to have the kind of reputation that matches their character. In other words, the two should not be so different as to make what other think you are diametrically opposed to who or what you are as a person. That being said, I get where the post is going - who or what I am (a good Catholic) may not be what the world designates as either good or Catholic. What I may be might be labeled according to the standards the world holds dear. What I need, therefore, is the strength to accept that the majority of people might reject both (character and reputation) as unacceptable. What I see as good may be seen as bad. Light may be considered Darkness. Which, of course, brings me to my character defect of wanting to be loved by people more than I want to be loved by God. This is not a good thing. The unyielding problem that I experience as a Catholic is the acceptance of the promise by Jesus Christ that the world, which rejected Him, will reject me. I mean, look, I get it and I understand it intellectually but that understanding does not preclude my wish for a universal Leslie K. Fan Club. Why do I have this need and why is this so darn difficult to be free of despite all the evidence I have that the need for love and acceptance by the world can be unproductive at best and damaging at its worst? The simple answer is concupiscence. The effects of The Fall have damaged human nature so that what was meant to be a need and yearning for communion with God is perverted to a singular need for acceptance by my fellow creatures. My love for my fellows should be rooted in, and secondary to, my love for The Father. What is meant, therefore, to be a loving extension of my need and yearning for communion with God grows to be a focus for recognition and love *from* my fellow creatures. My own fallen nature shifts my focus from Him to you...or it...or stuff...and inevitably that shift causes me trouble. It makes me lonely, angry, hungry when I am full and tired when I have had enough sleep. It makes me worried and depressed and anxious. It causes me to be overly confident in my ability to fix everything and it drives my need to control those around me so that my life will be settled and happy...if only they would listen to me, they would feel better and therefore so will I. What is interesting to me when I examine my conscience is the discovery that I can completely skip over the entire 'Love your neighbor as yourself' part of the commandment. In fact, to be honest, I change that to "Receive the love of your neighbor FOR yourself" - in other words, enough about me talking about me....let's talk about what YOU think of me. And it better be good...or else. Good works may not get you into heaven or insure your salvation but we know they are necessary for both or Jesus would not have clued us in that our actions will be the criteria for whether or not He recognizes us at the end of the world. In fact, He makes it pretty darn clear that there are actions we better be taking - we better be a member of His Church, we better be eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood, we better be visiting Him in prison and feeding Him and making sure He has clothes and a place to live. More importantly we better be acknowledging His authority and to whom He gave it before ascending into heaven. What I have to understand and discern is my reason for following His commandments. Wanting to avoid hell is a good start but my reason, if I am growing as a Catholic, should ultimately be to please Him, to be in communion with Him, to be like Him as much as I can. If my reasons for doing what is right remain rooted in selfishness (to avoid the pain and suffering of hell or because I really, really want to be seen as

a good person by the world) I miss the point. I become someone who does the right things for the wrong reasons and that makes me vulnerable to attack from the evil one. While I understand the sentiment expressed by my friend's Facebook post, I am held to a different standard. I should have a meeting of character and reputation. I need to have my actions reflect who I am and who I am needs to be in alignment with the Will of God, and not the will of the government or the latest political craze or the ideas expressed on Fox News or MSNBC. I have to be willing to proclaim the Truth not just because it is the right thing to do but because it IS Truth...not subjective but objective and real...not something but somebody. And I need to be a part of that Body.

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2017/03/finding-subject-worth-blogging-about.html>
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A warm welcome at Mass [at Catholic Review]

I've never paid much attention to what greeters do before Mass. I always smile at them and say hello, maybe compliment a scarf or comment on the weather. Still, I hadn't really considered it a significant job.

At our parish's Scout Mass this week, though, Daniel was a greeter, and he took his role extremely seriously.

Holding the church door open with his back, our first grader called out, "Good morning!" to every person who approached him. Then, because he had been told to give only one Mass program to each family, he would assess the group approaching him and say, "Are you a family?"

Some people would say yes. Others would say no.

Then our little Cub Scout would dutifully dole out the right number of programs.

With a few of the groups our little boy asked, it seemed unlikely that they were families. But he had his instructions, so he asked. Besides, how would he know which groups were families and which were people who happened to park near one another? As a transracial family, our family doesn't necessarily "match," and families come in many varieties.

A few of the people who may or may not have been families smiled at him and said, "We can share."

As for me, standing just a few feet away, I loved watching our little boy in action.

Many of the people walking through stopped to talk to him about Scouting. One lady commented on his two missing front teeth. Several praised him for his kind greeting. And I watched as person after person

came past him wearing a bigger smile than before their encounter.

Greeting may not seem like an important role. But we have the opportunity to brighten the life of every person we encounter.

As the opening hymn began, I told our greeter it was time to go in and sit down.

“But people are still coming!” he said—clearly appalled that I was asking him to shirk his responsibility. “Look! There are all those people still walking in!”

He was right, of course. So we waited a few more minutes and greeted some of the latecomers. Why shouldn't they be made to feel especially welcome? It may have been especially difficult time for them to get to Mass.

As the church bell rang, and the people streamed through the doors, I found myself thinking, isn't that person I see every Sunday someone I should know and connect with? Isn't that person pausing to praise my son hoping to help him become the good, kind man I want him to be some day? Aren't we all part of the body of Christ? Aren't we all a family?

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2017/03/19/a-warm-welcome-at-mass>
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Strengthen Your Lenten Journey Through Fasting [at Plot Line and Sinker]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

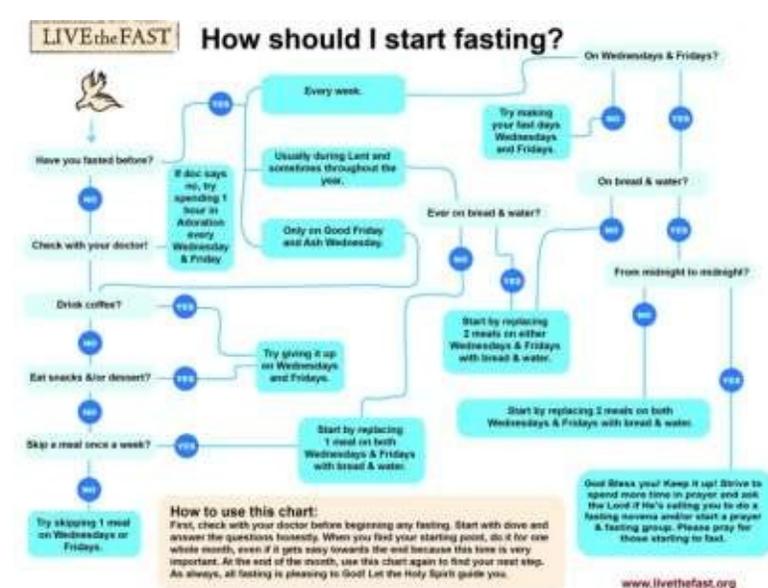
St. Jean Vianney once said, “The devil is not greatly afraid of the discipline and other instruments of penance. That which beats him is the curtailment of one’s food, drink and sleep. There is nothing the devil fears more, consequently, nothing is more pleasing to God.”

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

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

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

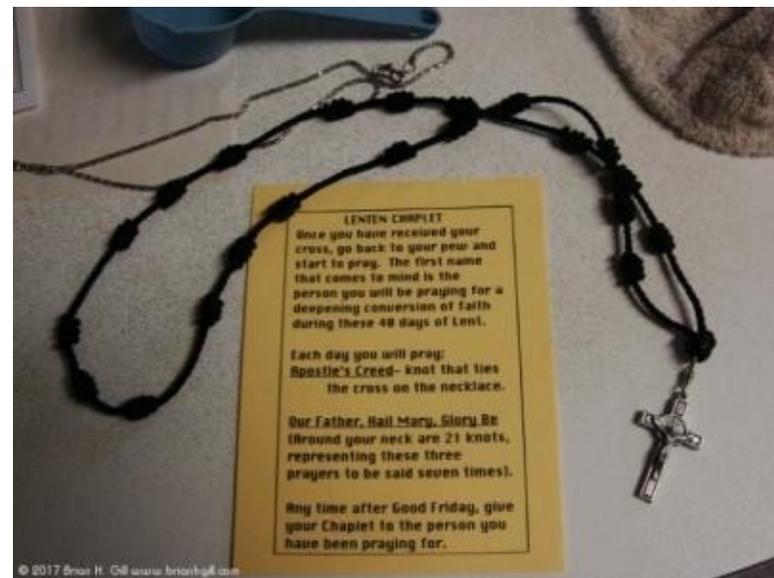
[Live the Fast](http://www.livethefast.org) is a Roman Catholic Apostolate that is focused on bringing more awareness to the discipline of fasting by offering educational resources on prayer and fasting, a prayer community that will inspire one to live the fast and providing nutritious fasting breads.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



Fasting graphic by Darcie Nielsen

This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2017/03/03/strengthen-your-lenten-journey-through-fasting/>
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Living With Consequences [at A Catholic Citizen in America]



I've missed one morning set, and several of the evening prayer sequences, in the routine I started February 13. ([February 19, 2017](#))

I'm doing a little better so far with the Lenten Chaplet. I started that Ash Wednesday.

Emphasis on "so far." I nearly forgot twice, which doesn't surprise me. There's a very good reason for my wife handling the household's schedules, and that's another topic.

This is where I could quote [Romans 7:19](#) and launch into a 'wretcheder than thou' lament. It'd be accurate, on one level, since I've felt this way often enough:

"For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want."
([Romans 7:19](#))

But I won't, since I think hypocrisy, inverted or otherwise, is a bad idea. I've talked about [Luke 18:9-14](#); [Colossians 2:18](#); and Uriah Heep; before. ([October 23, 2016](#); [July 31, 2016](#))

Feeling that I generally do what is wrong, not what I know is right, is understandable.

Spending decades with undiagnosed depression and an autism spectrum disorder left me with quite a few regrettable perceptions and habits. ([February 12, 2017](#); [October 14, 2016](#); [October 5, 2016](#))

Feelings aside, I know that I have trouble doing what I know is right and avoiding what is wrong.

Jonathan Edwards, Mark Twain, and Me

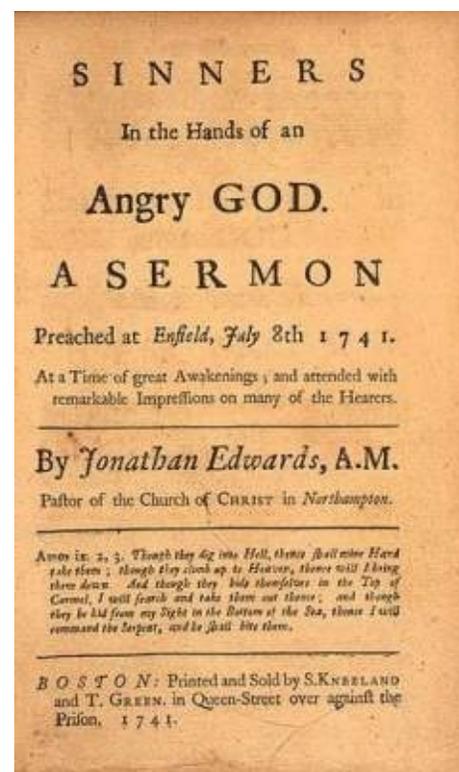
There's a reason for that, and it's not that I'm "some loathsome insect:"

"...every unconverted Man properly belongs to Hell...."

“...The God that holds you over the Pit of Hell, much as one holds a Spider, or some loathsome Insect, over the Fire, abhors you....”

“...you will be wholly lost and thrown away of God....”

(“[Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God](#),” pp. 6, 9, 15, 18; Jonathan Edwards (July 8, 1741) (via Digital Commons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln))



Edwards had, and has, a remarkable [influence](#) on America’s religious assumptions. I think that helps explain Mark Twain’s attitude, and my sympathy for it:

“I don’t like to commit myself about heaven and hell – you see, I have friends in both places.

“When I think of the number of disagreeable people that I know who have gone to a better world, I am sure hell won’t be so bad at all.” (Mark Twain, p.377 of Evan Esar, “20,000 quips & quotes” (1968))

“[H]eaven for climate, Hell for society.”

(Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), Speech to the Acorn Society (1901); via [Wikiquote.org](#))

“I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: ‘All right, then I’ll go to Hell.’”

(Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), via Bartlett’s Quotations, 16th ed.)

I also think, and hope, Jonathan Edwards meant well.

I was going somewhere with this. Let’s see: prayer, Uriah Heep, Jonathan Edwards, Mark Twain. Right. Got it.

Having sympathy for Twain’s “[H]eaven for climate...” quip doesn’t mean I think Heaven is filled with folks who wouldn’t associate with hellbound sinners and other riffraff.

One more thing, about Genesis and all that. As I keep saying, Adam and Eve aren’t German. ([October 21, 2016](#); [September 23, 2016](#); [August 28, 2016](#))

“**The Man Replied....” Sound Familiar?**

Today’s Bible readings start with [Genesis 2:7–9, 3:1–7](#).

That’s where Eve listens to the serpent, Adam listens to Eve, and they both make a really bad decision.

Then Adam firmly plants both feet in his mouth with this gem:

“The man replied, ‘The woman whom you put here with me – she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it.’”

([Genesis 3:12](#))

Right. They're both in trouble, so what does Adam do? Tries blaming his wife **and** God. That did not end well.

Making sense of Adam, Eve, Genesis, and my erratic success with prayer, means backing up a little. A lot, actually.

Still Basically Good

The universe is basically good. So are we — basically.

([Genesis 1:26–27, 31](#); Catechism of the Catholic Church, [299, 364, 369, 374](#))



Humanity was made “in the divine image.” We still are. ([Genesis 1:27](#); Catechism, [31, 355–361](#))

Each of us is a rational creature with free will. We can decide what we do or do not do. We are also responsible for the consequences of our decisions. (Catechism, [1730–1742](#))

The first of us listened to Satan, ignoring what God had said. ([Genesis 3:5–13](#))

We've been living with consequences of their decision ever since. (Catechism, [396–412](#))

That was a very, very long time ago.

I'm not personally responsible for those consequences. But I either deal with them, or pretend they're not there, which doesn't seem prudent.

“Original sin” is what we call the mess we're in. Here's how the Catechism defines it:

“ORIGINAL SIN: The sin by which the first human beings disobeyed the commandment of God, choosing to follow their own will rather than God's will. As a consequence they lost the grace of original holiness, and became subject to the law of death; sin became universally present in the world. Besides the personal sin of Adam and Eve, original sin describes the fallen state of human nature which affects every person born into the world, and from which Christ, the ‘new Adam,’ came to redeem us ([396–412](#)).”

(Catechism, [Glossary](#))

Loving ourselves, others, and God, is a struggle. That's because the harmony we had with ourselves and with the universe, and our friendship with God, is broken. (Catechism, [374–379, 398, 400](#))

That's the bad news. The good news is that human nature is wounded: but **not** corrupted. (Catechism, [405, 1701–1707, 1949](#))

Seeking Understanding



I don't understand God. Not fully. I can't. ([November 13, 2016](#))

God's God, I'm not. I'm a created being, like everyone else. ([Genesis 1:1](#); Catechism, [279](#), [285](#))

God is beyond time and space, **and** "here" in all places and all times. The Almighty is infinitely good, "a [mystery](#) beyond words." (Catechism, [206](#), [230](#), [268](#), [284](#), [300](#), [385](#), [639](#), [647-648](#), [2779](#))

On the other hand, 'faith seeks understanding.' [St. Anselm](#) wrote that, more or less. His first title for "[Proslogion](#)" was "Fides Quaerens Intellectum."

Latin isn't my strong suit, but I think "Fides Quaerens Intellectum" is "Faith Seeking Understanding" in my language.

That was about a thousand years back now, and the slogan stuck.

What I'm trying to say is that wanting to better understand God is a good idea. (Catechism, [156-159](#))

Understanding God would be easier if we weren't dealing with original sin. Our current default settings give us a distorted picture of God. (Catechism, [399](#))

I strongly suspect that's why it seems so easy to imagine ourselves as targets in a [shooting gallery](#), and God as someone blowing off steam.

"... There is no Want of **Power** in God to cast wicked Men into Hell at any Moment....

"...They are now the Objects of that very **same** Anger & Wrath of God that is expressed in the Torments of Hell....

"...In short, they have no Refuge, nothing to take hold of, all that preserves them every Moment is the meer arbitrary Will, and uncovenanted unobliged Forbearance of an incensed God...."

("Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God," pp. 5, 6, 12; Jonathan Edwards (July 8, 1741) (via Digital Commons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln))

[Jonathan Edwards](#) was not a Catholic, by the way.

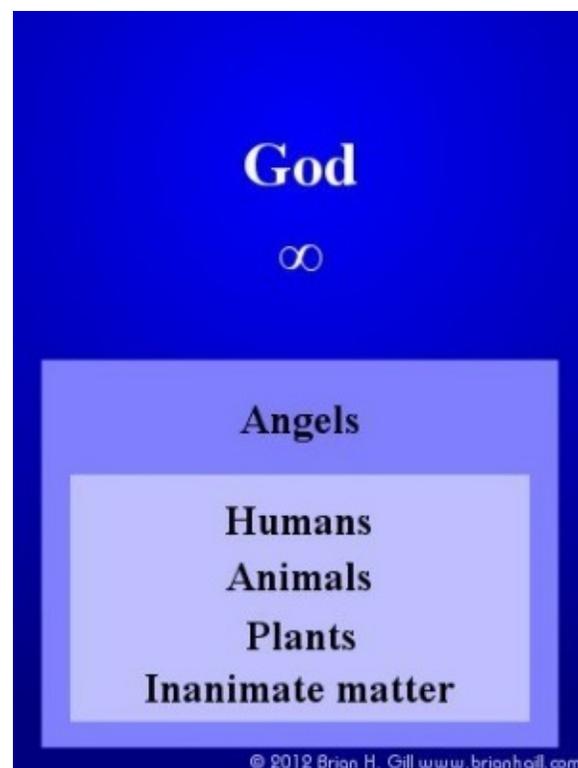
God the Father: Really

God 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](#))

I decided to accept the Almighty's offer. ([February 26, 2017](#))

Seeing God as a father can be scary.

Some fathers aren't good at our jobs. Some are quite simply bad at being fathers: taking out anger and frustration on other



members of the family, and that's yet again another topic — a sad one.

Happily, God isn't that sort of father. I can expect love, compassion, and help when I needed it. ([Psalms 103:4](#); Catechism, [268](#))

I can also expect learning opportunities.

My experience strongly suggests that God will keep letting me experience first-hand why some daft decision was a bad idea: like drinking too much. ([July 10, 2016](#))

I don't see that as a lack of love. I do see it as a good, if occasionally painful and embarrassing, way to help me learn why doing the right thing actually does make sense.

In the long run.

Making use of these opportunities in a timely fashion is — still another topic.

More of how I see God, love, and being human:

This contribution is available at <http://brendans-island.com/catholic-citizen/living-with-consequences/>

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Who Am I? [at Do Not Be Anxious]

Jesus was true God and true man, but it seems when we think on that fact we often are confused. How can He be two beings at once? And then we often dismiss that question with our quick-to-mind all-encompassing answer regarding God issues: He is a mystery. That's a true answer, sure, since we can never totally understand God, but it's also a cop-out, and a dismissal of the subsequent question which we really cannot dismiss. We know (but not understand) who He is, but: Who Am I?

My experience is that many of us were "made" by the people in our lives. From our parents to teachers to friends and family, we were formed by our interactions with others. We learned. We considered. And we acted based on how our minds were formed. "That's who I am," we sometimes say in justifying our recent words or actions.

Every man is free, having received his liberty from God; therefore, he has the right to govern himself according to his own judgment and personal views. – Divine Intimacy P346

Yet despite this freedom to govern ourselves, Jesus said: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself. – Mt 16:24.

But in this freedom: Who am I? We are more than just our free physical actions, and we are more than mere reflections of the men who influenced us. As we so often forget, in our lives there is God, too. He created us --- and what greater influence on us could there be than that? And most importantly, Jesus came to show us and tell us that God continually influences us; He interacts with us through our spiritual lives. He said: "I will send you My Spirit," to be with you always.

We seem confused how Jesus can be true God and true man, but in a very real way, we too are both spiritual and physical beings. Do we take the time to understand this about ourselves?

Jesus died to open the gates of heaven, and He gave us the Holy Spirit as a path to it. The doors of heaven are open, but (and here Jesus would strongly agree with the oft-stressed words of our culture), "we are free to choose." But the door to heaven isn't a mystery like the game show which asked: "Do you want what's behind door number 1, or door number 2 or door number 3?" Jesus lived and spoke and gave us the gifts of His Holy Spirit to help us see what is behind the door of heaven --- and it's more than we could ever imagine.

We just have to choose.

But how do we do that? Now you might say that: "Well, I prayed for God's blessings or even for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, but nothing happened." Remember, you are both spiritual and physical beings. How did the physical side of who you are now come about? Did your mom give birth and then set you on the doorstep and say: "Well, there's the world, go out and get an education, a good job, find a good spouse and have a good life. See yah!" No, of course not; all those things which lead to a good physical life came about because others' help, helping us to grow into that good person, able to lead that good physical life. So why would you think that a good spiritual life --- such a more important life --- would come about easier, faster than your physical growth?

Just as a baby's first words start the communication path which will support its physical growth, so our first prayers will start the conversation to bring about our spiritual growth. And at some point, just like in that math class with all its goofy formulas when we said: "Aha! I see it now!" So at some point we will say in our prayers: "Aha! I see You now!" And we will know Him, His love, and will desire to do ANYTHING to be with Him, always. And He will lead us home.

Our spiritual life starts with a simple: "I trust in You" prayer, and over time it ends with a sincere "I trust in You" conviction. It takes time for us to grow, physically or spiritually. It takes effort. It takes dedication. But the results will make us who we were created to be.

And then we shall truly know the answer to that most important question of who we are.

This contribution is available at <http://do-not-be-anxious.blogspot.com/2017/03/who-am-i.html>
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True Confessions [at Bible Meditations]



I confess my sins; they fill me with anxiety. Psalm 38: 18

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing. 1 John 1: 8-9

Where did some of us get the idea we have to be perfect to earn God's love? Why do we think we have to cover up our imperfections to be acceptable? The Bible's filled with stories of God's love and faithfulness—in spite of our sins. We turn our backs on God, not the other way around.

God knows our weaknesses better than we do and loves us anyway. What else is Jesus' parable of the prodigal son about? Or the parable commending the tax collector who acknowledged his sins, trusting God's mercy, as opposed to the religious official whose prayer to God was a spiritual resume? Or Jesus' willingness to go to the cross to do what we could never do for ourselves—perfectly obey our Creator? As St. Paul said, if we could put ourselves right with God by keeping the law, then Christ died for nothing. (Galatians 2: 21)

Covering up our flaws is the world's way, not God's. Denying our wrongs, blaming others, creating excuses, that's the way of the world. Trying to look good on the outside when we know the truth on the inside creates tension. No wonder the psalmist said his sins filled him with anxiety.

It doesn't feel safe to be honest about our liabilities in the dog-eat-dog world. On the other hand, it's a relief to be honest about our faults with God and with ourselves. Surely we can find at least one trusted human being we can trust to understand and to keep our sharing in confidence. It's fundamental to recovery for countless people in Twelve Step programs. The Catholic Church has wisely recognized it as a means of obtaining God's grace through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It does our hearts good to come clean in a safe atmosphere, and what atmosphere could be safer than God's welcoming arms?

Prayer: Lord, I trust in your mercy and love.

Reflection: What secrets are creating tension within you? How can you find a safe and trustworthy way to unburden yourself?

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Lazarus and Death in Sin [at Miss Alexandrina]



Today's Gospel reading is the bittersweet, and well known, story of Jesus' raising of Lazarus. I say bittersweet because, although the miracle itself is important, we are shown a side of Jesus' humanity that not often comes to light in The Bible: his empathy and his pain. The mere tears of Mary drive Jesus to Lazarus' grave to weep – a very human reaction to the death and loss of a friend.

As we know, there is a joyful and poignant ending to this miracle, so, despite its importance in Jesus' deeds, it's not what I focused on as part of this week's Mass readings.

All of this week's readings have a theme, though: death through sin and life through God. Repetition was strong in emphasising just how necessarily deadly sin is. And, as we walk in life ever nearer to another Eastertide, another yearly celebration of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins, the scriptures remind us just how crucial Jesus' life and the weeks leading up to his death are.

Take, for instance, the second reading this week: from St Paul's letters to the Romans:

“But if Christ lives in you, the spirit is life for you because you have been put right with God, even though your bodies are going to die because of sin. If the spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death, lives in you, then He who raised Christ from death will also give life to your mortal bodies by the presence of His Spirit in you.”

(Romans 8:10-11)

This contribution is available at <http://missalexandrinabrant.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/lazarus-and-death-in-sin/>
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How I Truly Feel about Confession [at Blogging While Nursing]



We never practiced confession growing up. You did something wrong—you go straight to God. It wasn't a Sacrament in my home, because we weren't Catholic—yet.

The closest anyone got to reconciliation was a quick “sorry” and that would be the end of it. Whenever we heard the words, many times it didn't seem genuine. We would say the words, but never admit what we were sorry for.

So, Reconciliation wasn't part of my family vocabulary. Even after our conversion to Catholicism, Reconciliation was an afterthought. After all, we accepted it, but we still fought with our Protestant way of thinking.

The Game Changer

All that changed for me a few years ago. While re-learning the faith I entered, I decided to randomly pick up, *7 Secrets of Confession* by Vinny Flynn. This once dreaded Sacrament became the one I love, and only second to the Eucharist.

In my earlier way of thinking, you went into a closet and tell a man your deepest darkest secrets. A person who you don't know, will know more about you than anyone else. That you wouldn't be seen as a great person but a deeply flawed person.

I have come to recognize that in that tiny box is a place of healing. A doctor for my soul. That man, is the ear of Christ, and he is there to doctor me.

I had to give up my earlier notions that I wouldn't be seen as perfect, as I like, and confessing my failings is what I needed to be closer to Him.

The peace that I was looking for came with these words, “you are absolved from your sins.” Even the

sins that I felt were too big for forgiveness, I'm told I am.

True Healing Begins

That is where the love and the healing begins. While I am sorry for sins, I know there is no turning back time. This Sacrament offers a way to move forward.

I go to Confession, often, not because I fear hell (let's be honest, that is a scary place to even think about), but I go to confession because I'm truly upset that I offended our Lord.

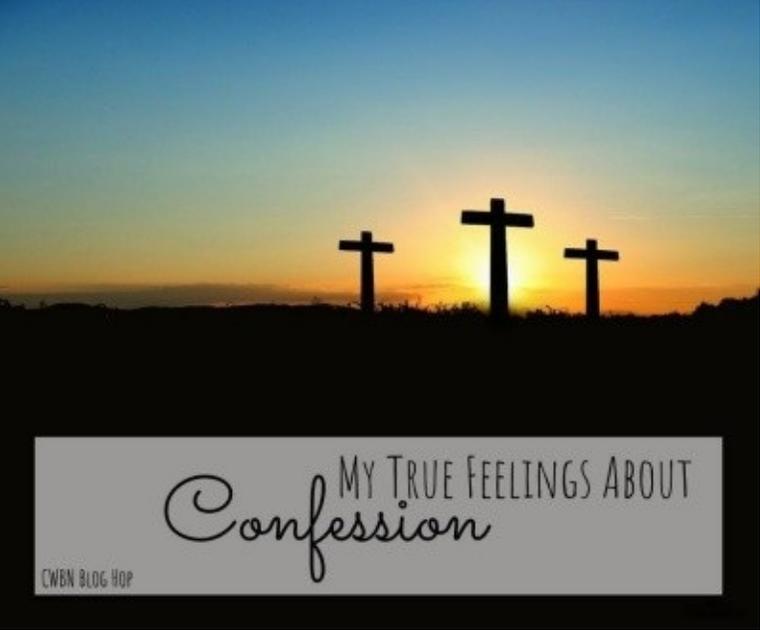
I see God as a loving Father. Who only wants the best for His children. No different than what I would like for my children. He gave me rules to live by—rules he offered in love. When I break those guidelines, I know that I've disappointed Him. I want to say sorry to Him as quickly that I can, and truly vow to not commit the same sin twice. Somehow, on top of all that, I want to show him that I was truly sorry.

Instead of seeing the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a torture chamber, I now see it as a place that offers the love and healing that we all need. It's my private appointment with my spiritual doctor.

It's the one place that reminds me that God sees me as I truly am. Not because He needs it, but I do.

So, growing up, the words, "I'm sorry" didn't carry much weight for me. They were empty words, from where I stood. This beautiful sacrament showed me that it's not just enough to say *sorry*. It taught me the meaning of a heartfelt apology. How our actions can offend, even hurt the relationships in our lives. Reconciliation taught me that relationships have to be mended. Finally, we have to try everything within our power to not destroy the relationship again.

This has been part of a Blog-Hop group of Catholic Woman's Blogger Network, hosted by [Reconciled to you](#). To read the next post, click on the picture below.



This contribution is available at <http://www.bloggingwhilenursing.com/2017/03/23/how-i-truly-feel-about-confession/>
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The Mercy of Almsgiving [at The Catholic Spiritual Life]

I recently heard someone summarize our Lenten observances as prayer, fasting, and fraternal charity. On the one hand, that's good: the heart of almsgiving is our love of neighbor, and discovering that our neighbor is our brother. Fasting denies ourselves so that in prayer we can turn to God and in almsgiving we can love our neighbor.



But the tradition – based above all on the first half of Matthew 6, in the Sermon on the Mount – does not say fraternal charity. It says almsgiving.

Almsgiving takes us a step further, because it specifies that the neighbor in question is poor where we are rich.

It means recognizing our own gifts. On this level, almsgiving brings together two things that seem like opposites. On the one hand, we should be grateful for all God has given us. On the other hand, we should deny ourselves. Those two seem to be in contradiction: we often find ourselves thinking that if we are grateful to God, we ought to feast, not fast. In almsgiving, we make our fast out of our neighbor's feast. We give thanks to God for what he has given to us by denying ourselves and sharing with our neighbor. Quite nice.

Almsgiving also means recognizing our neighbor's need. This recognition goes against our tendency to make excuses for ourselves and demands of our neighbors. I am needy, he ought to help me. But almsgiving calls us to recognize that I have more than enough, and my neighbor is hurting. We need to see how our neighbors hurt.



St. Martin and the Beggar

And almsgiving calls us to get over our assumption that when I lack, I don't deserve it, but when I possess, I do deserve it – and when my neighbor lacks, he does deserve it, but when he possesses, he doesn't deserve it. In its most basic, traditional form – what Jesus is talking about and the tradition practices – almsgiving means finding someone you don't know, someone whose merits you can't judge, and helping them out, purely out of mercy. It means renouncing our tendency to judge—and, even more, always in our own favor.

It teaches us to see ourselves as rich and our neighbor as poor. And it teaches that the right way to deal with that is to share our riches.

Where can we practice almsgiving?

I have said before and I will say again: the traditional call to almsgiving should remind us that there is something very strange about our society. If you read the life of any saint, they regularly came across beggars. Beggars have always been a part of life – including anonymous beggars, not just people you know all about and can judge worthy or unworthy. Jesus and the whole of the Bible treat it as a normal part of life that you will encounter beggars.

Why, in our normal American lives, don't we encounter beggars? This website is about theology and spirituality, not economics, so I can only assert as a moral judgment, not prove: we have constructed our entire American way of life on making sure we never see beggars – making sure we never have to give alms. That should disturb you. There are lots of beggars in America – we have just organized our lives to make sure we don't have to encounter them.

And yet there are beggars in our life. Elizabeth Foss, a homeschooling writer I very much respect, once pointed out that Jesus's words in Matthew 25 about caring for him in the hungry, thirsty, foreign, naked, sick, and imprisoned almost exactly describe the vocation of motherhood.

Mothers see more literal naked beggars than even the most traditional society. We might need some

metaphor for the foreigner, but our children’s lack of social graces, their inability to act according to our expectations, makes them pretty “strange”: can we welcome them nonetheless? And though they are not typically in prison, like the prisoner they are often accused, sometimes falsely, sometimes legitimately – and Jesus calls us to ignore that distinction and love them, be present to them, either way.

We can give alms to our children.

Sometimes I like to meditate on the Old Testament injunction to care for widows and orphans. I simply add to it that to the extent that I fail in my vocation, my wife is a widow and my children are orphans.



So along with caring for the poverty of my children, I can care for the poverty of my wife, who relies on me.

And so too I can realize that everyone who depends on me, at work, in my extended family, in my neighborhood, or elsewhere, even in my economic relationships, is an orphan and impoverished to the extent that I fail them. I give alms when I recognize that they deserve my generosity.

Finally, I give alms every time I recognize the suffering and poverty of the people around me. Real almsgiving teaches us, and our call to almsgiving calls us, to see the brokenness of the people around us and to come to their aid.

And it teaches us that, though prayer is the highest thing, our love of Jesus means not only “spiritual works of mercy” (which are not explicitly taught us by Jesus) but far more, “corporal works”: simply giving up our material stuff to care for the concrete needs of our neighbor. That’s why we have material stuff in the first place.

Where can you give alms?

This contribution is available at <http://professorjohnston.com/the-mercy-of-almsgiving/>
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Carrying the cross of history [at Rides the Sun]

One of the greatest artistic evocations of the grittiness of Lent is Peter Bruegel the Elder's 1564 painting *The Procession to Calvary*, which is housed in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum [Museum of Art History]. *The Procession to Calvary* is a large work, five and a half by four feet, featuring hundreds of small figures, with the equally small figure of Christ carrying the cross in the center of the painting. Bruegel included certain familiar motifs in rendering the scene: the holy women and the apostle John are in the right foreground, comforting Mary; the vast majority of those involved, concerned about quotidian things, are clueless about the drama unfolding before their eyes. What is so striking about *The Procession to Calvary*, however, is that we are in sixteenth-century Europe, not first-century Judea: Christ is carrying the cross through a typical Flemish landscape, complete with horses, carts, oxen, and a windmill. Christ is carrying the cross through history—right through the grittiness of everyday life.

A man who could see things as they are, like Peter Bruegel the Elder, would want us to understand that the “procession to Calvary” is taking place in our midst, too. He would be right to do so. Lent is a privileged time for recovering the sight that lets us see and enter the passion play going on around us.



The Procession to Calvary (1564). Oil on oak. Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

This contribution is available at <http://ridesthesun.wordpress.com/2017/03/03/carrying-the-cross-of-history/>
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Shall We Then Continue in Sin? [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

Shall we then continue in sin that Grace may abound? (Rom. 6:15)

God forbid! (cf., Rom, 3:31; 6:2; 6:15; 7:7; KJV)



“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (2Tim. 4:1-3)

Brothers and Sisters,

The signs of the times clearly indicate that we are indeed in the “Days of Noah” and the “Days of Lot” as indicated by Jesus in the Gospels (cf., Luke 17:16-28) and also in the “perilous times” as indicated by St. Paul to Timothy:

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.” (2 Tim. 3:1-9)



I am posting this article because we all need to be made aware of the many false teachers and preachers in our midst who are twisting the Word of God to peddle their “gospels” of permissiveness, self-indulgence, and prosperity as being “enlightened” forms of understanding scripture.

Recognizing False “Gospels” Regarding Grace”

Amongst the many false deceptive messages being delivered today is that of a libertine form of “Grace” (a licentious grace) that teaches that, because of Christ’s atoning work on the Cross we are no longer under “law” and can live pretty much as we wish and be assured of our salvation. Since all of our sins have been paid for and since we have all been reconciled with God through Christ, the moral law, declared by God for all humanity is of no more consequence to us who consider ourselves to be “under Grace”.

This devious, anti-nomian concept (lawlessness) is attractive to many in today’s world because it is in line with the ego-centric, self-centered, free-wheeling spirit of the current generation, who abhors any constraint on their ability to live as they please and who are in the process of being conformed to the “world”. It comes from a religious spirit that wants to put a fig leaf over their moral nakedness so that they may continue dabbling in the world system with its enticements, lusts, greed, and carnal excesses, without exacting any feelings of guilt. The intent of what is being taught is, of course, to attract uninstructed youth to fall into their snare by attempting to appease their consciences using selectively misinterpreted scriptures, out of context, telling them that “God’s Grace” has freed them to do whatever pleases them without losing their salvation – while all the while they are being used to satisfy the pride and greed of the false teachers, whose own spiritual lives are in tatters.

In the attempt to justify themselves the proponents of this deviation from the true purpose of Grace in our lives, teach that since God has reconciled us to himself in Christ it would be an act of unbelief to “repent” of our sins, since our sins have already been forgiven at the cross. In a previous post, [**“Be Reconciled to God”**](#) I provided a scriptural argument against this erroneous position. In that article I point out that it is the apostle Paul, himself, who, after having proclaimed that God has **“reconciled us to Himself”**, is, in this same letter, he then exhorts the Colossian believers to **“be reconciled to God”** (Col.1: 21-23). Clearly indicating to us, that we, whom God has reconciled, also need to respond to His infinite act of Reconciling Love by an act of faith that activates in our renewed spirit the reconciliation He offers. This act being our repentance.

Now that act of faith, is in effect, an act or word on our part, that acknowledges our godly sorrow, our need for reconciliation, and our willingness to receive God's forgiveness – an act that, directly or indirectly, expresses repentance, on our part. Being keenly aware, that this act of faith is incited by God's Grace and Love, as an act of gratitude and is NOT deemed by us as somehow earning a grace or favor that was freely provided to all humanity while we were yet sinners more than two millenia past.

Jesus: Regarding the Gospel of Repentance

After His resurrection. Jesus gathered his disciples at an unscheduled prayer breakfast and tried to explain to them that what had happened in Jerusalem during His Passion was all contained in the scriptures, saying to them ...

“...This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:44-48)



In the parable of the prodigal son (cf., Luke 15:11-32), Jesus, portrays very clearly how the Grace of Reconciliation is received through a sincere act of repentance. Namely, when the son who has left the father's house to “do his own thing” in a far-off land finds himself in a famine with nothing to eat and feeding pigs instead of himself, he, because of his circumstances, “comes to his senses” and says to himself “I will return to my father's house”. And the father, who, holding nothing against him, has been lovingly waiting for his son, such that when sees him approaching he runs to him and embraces him, telling his servants to provide the son with a family robe and sandals while he places the ring of family authority on his finger.

In this parable, Jesus paints an allegorical picture about how grace and repentance relate to one another! It is provided to us through scripture for our instruction to let us know how we are loved by the Father, without condemnation, and how we, in returning to Him, should respond to the unmerited Grace he showers upon us by accepting his embrace and the symbols of His love for us: the Robe, the sandals and the ring he places upon us, as unworthy as we are. But the story also tells us that when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and, although sensitive of our own unworthiness, we need to freely turn to the Lord without fear of condemnation, because we know in our hearts that He loves us and will accept us as we are. (see also my article on [***“The Prodigals Amongst Us”***](#))



In another allegory, Jesus tells us that our relationship (fellowship) with Him should be like the branches to the Vine, that is, in our attachment to Jesus. And, just like the branches, if we are to function and bring forth fruit, we must remain attached to the Vine. Otherwise, if we become detached (lose our fellowship with Him) we risk being like dried up branches that must be cut off and burned (John 15:1-8). Our fellowship with Jesus is, of course, is the outcome or the purpose for the Grace of Reconciliation and implies that this Grace, that comes through the Vine, must continuously flow in our lives in order for us to remain attached to the Vine and bear fruit for the Kingdom and the Glory of the Father. (see also my article on [**“Bearing Fruit Through Prayer”**](#))

Through Jesus parables like these and through the teaching of the apostles in scripture, the case can be clearly established that this Grace of Reconciliation through Repentance is freely provided to us believers, not only to enter into fellowship with the Divine, but also in order to continue in and maintain that fellowship throughout our lives so that we may bear fruit!

The Apostle John; Regarding Fellowship, Sin, and Confession

John the Evangelist affirms this thesis when he says in His first epistle...

“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” (1John 1:6-10)

And, in order to ease our discomfort, when we do sin, he says...

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1John 2:1-6)

The Apostle Paul: Regarding Putting on the New Self after our Justification

The apostle Paul also make some clear statements regarding how to carry out our responsibility to “walk as Jesus walked”, in our loving response to the Grace of Reconciliation and Fellowship which we freely receive at our justification. Now, it must be clearly understood, that this ability to maintain fellowship also emanates from the Grace of Reconciliation and reflects the work of the Holy Spirit in us in conforming us to the Image of Christ. (Rom. 8:29)

From all of this, It is should be clear to us that when we sin by living by the flesh rather than the Spirit we begin to break out of our fellowship relationship with the Divine and the Holy Spirit, who is in us, works in us to help us recognize our failings, so that through the on going Grace of Reconciliation, we may be brought back into full fellowship with the Divine.

I challenge you to take seriously, these statements from the apostle Paul, who is sometimes misunderstood or misquoted on the subject of being “under Grace and not under law”...

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”



By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

(Rom. 6:1-2)

Here also for your discernment, is his exhortation to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:17-32) regarding the sin problem amongst (apparently) justified believers, and what Paul proposes they do ...

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must

work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

To this, Paul, adds an important statement indicating that the intent of living a holy life after justifications is not to claim any gain on our part for His Magnificent and free provision of Grace, but to lovingly yield ourselves to Him in acknowledgment and thanksgiving for the sacrifice of His Son for our salvation.

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (Eph 5:1-14)

What then is to be our response?

In conclusion brethren, in light of what I have just presented and in light of the darkness that is coming over this world, I think we all need to pray and meditate on these scriptures and, in discerning God’s will, we should ask ourselves:

<>“Have I arisen with Christ?” or am I just sliding along in life with one foot in the “world’ and the other foot in “church”?

<>“Have I truly awakened to the light of Christ and the Resurrection Life He brings us, or am I still stumbling along in the spiritual darkness of the world and its enticements?

<>Let us then awake and rise up, understanding that the full intent Grace that God provides is not merely to “justify” us so that we can go to heaven, but to also give us the opportunity to yield ourselves fully to the Holy Spirit so that He may initiate the process of conforming our lives to the image of our master, Jesus. So that, being under His anointing for service, we may be filled with His Light and become envoys of His Light to this fallen world in which we live, for the Glory of His Name and for His Kingdom!

May God, our Father who loves us, and His Son who saved us, be praised for ever and ever. Amen!

Your Brother In Christ and Fellow Pilgrim ... Bartimaeus

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This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/\\$-shall-we-then-continue-in-sin-2/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/$-shall-we-then-continue-in-sin-2/)
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The longest journey is not one of a million steps but one of twelve inches [at On the Road to Damascus]

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

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

Believe what you read.

Teach what you believe.

And practice what you teach.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I believe in one God,

the Father almighty,

maker of heaven and earth,

of all things visible and invisible.”

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

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

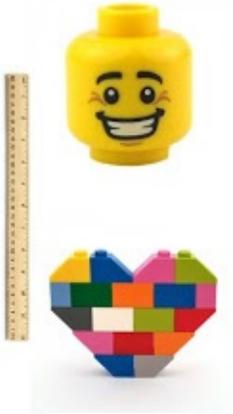
What the Catholic Mass does is act as a conduit between space and time. Our time, our reality is joined with all times at the one and only sacrifice Jesus made for all. In our visible reality we see the priest elevating the host at consecration. In the invisible reality, in that very spot stands the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

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

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

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

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



This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2017/02/the-longest-journey-is-not-one-of.html>
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Free Good Friday/ Stations of the Cross Adult Coloring Page [at Catholic Conundrum]



www.catholicconundrum.com

Adult coloring pages are certainly all the rage anymore, but there are reasons for that. For some, coloring while reflecting has even helped to enhance their prayer lives. As they focus on a specific phrase of scripture, symbols of their faith, or pictures of favorite Bible

or saint stories, their creative release opens up another window to hear God's voice.

As Holy Week draws closer, Justina will be presenting a short series of adult coloring pages - free to our readers. Click on the above example she has created for Good Friday or Stations of the Cross. Although perfect for adult and teen reflections, this would also make a great coloring page for younger ones participating in Stations of the Cross at home.

We hope you truly enjoy this beautiful way of entering in as we prepare our hearts for Resurrection Day!

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicconundrum.com/blog/free-good-friday-stations-of-the-cross-adult-coloring-page>
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Frassati Reflection: The Pain of Susanna [at work in progress]

The assembly condemned Susanna to death.
But Susanna cried aloud:
“O eternal God, you know what is hidden
and are aware of all things before they come to be:
you know that they have testified falsely against me.
Here I am about to die,
though I have done none of the things
with which these wicked men have charged me.”
—Daniel 13:41–43

But when they continued asking him,
he straightened up and said to them,
“Let the one among you who is without sin
be the first to throw a stone at her.”
Again he bent down and wrote on the ground.
And in response, they went away one by one,
beginning with the elders.
So he was left alone with the woman before him.
Then Jesus straightened up and said to her,
“Woman, where are they?
Has no one condemned you?”
She replied, “No one, sir.”
Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.
Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”
—John 8:7–11



At different times in our lives, we may experience the humiliation of Susanna—the anger and sorrow at being punished for something that is not our fault. However, we are not always innocent Susannas, unjustly accused. Sometimes, the accusations waged against us are entirely true. Sometimes, we might feel more like the woman caught in adultery: consumed by guilt and shame, our greatest weaknesses exposed before others.

The truth is that all of us are sinners. However, the only one with any right to throw stones chose instead to lay down His life for us on a Cross. Instead of handing us our just reward, He willingly took on the pain of Susanna, allowing Himself to be scourged and ridiculed and brutally killed for crimes He did not commit. He is so filled with love for us that, rather than see us succumb to sin and death, He endured

the deepest pain imaginable. He is the embodiment of innocence and purity, the Lamb of God sent to the slaughter.



So when we are unjustly accused, we can unite our suffering with that of Jesus, taking part in His plan for our salvation. We can be confident in God's justice, even when it seems that injustice surrounds us. We can offer up the righteous anger that burns within us and trust that it will be used for good.

And when we are justly accused, mired in sin and caught red-handed, we can fall to our knees in gratitude for God's plan of salvation. His mercy transcends even His perfect justice. The sacrifice of Jesus, His willingness to enter into the human experience with us and bear our sins, sets us free. He does not condemn us. And with His transforming grace, we can go and sin no more.

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1. Andrey Mironov, *Christ and the sinner* / [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)
 2. Domenico Morelli, *Cristo y la mujer adúltera* / PD-US

This contribution is available at <http://workinprogress.blog/2017/04/03/frassati-reflection-the-pain-of-susanna/>
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Hoping Against Hope [at Creo en Dios!]

Because yesterday was the Third Sunday of Lent, the Catholic Church today celebrates the Solemnity of St. Joseph (usually celebrated on March 19). As a result, today's Mass readings include an additional reading, a passage from the book of Romans about the faith and hope of Abraham.

Paul gives us a beautiful description of the hope of an old man: Abraham "believed, hoping against hope," that God would fulfill his promise to make him "the father of many nations." I love that phrase: hoping against hope.

It was an absolutely crazy promise to have trust in: Abraham was over 100 years old and Sarah's womb is was "dead" (in the words of the Hebrew Scriptures). How in the world could Abraham become the father of many nations? How could Abraham believe in God's promise?

The short and simple answer is that his prior experience with God had given him faith. In other words, you can only dare to hope against hope if you can see where God has already been in your life.

And that is what we need to do, to take time looking back over our lives and seeing where God has been, where God has operated. I encourage looking back because in doing so we are likely to see evidence of God's presence where we may not have noticed it at the time.

Seeing where God has been, appropriating our prior experience of God, gives us the hope of Abraham. And that matters not only for each of us individually, but for all those with whom we come in contact. Just as Abraham's hope in God is something we can look at and draw strength from, your own hope is a source of strength for your families and others who come in contact with you.

This contribution is available at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com/2017/03/20/hoping-against-hope/>
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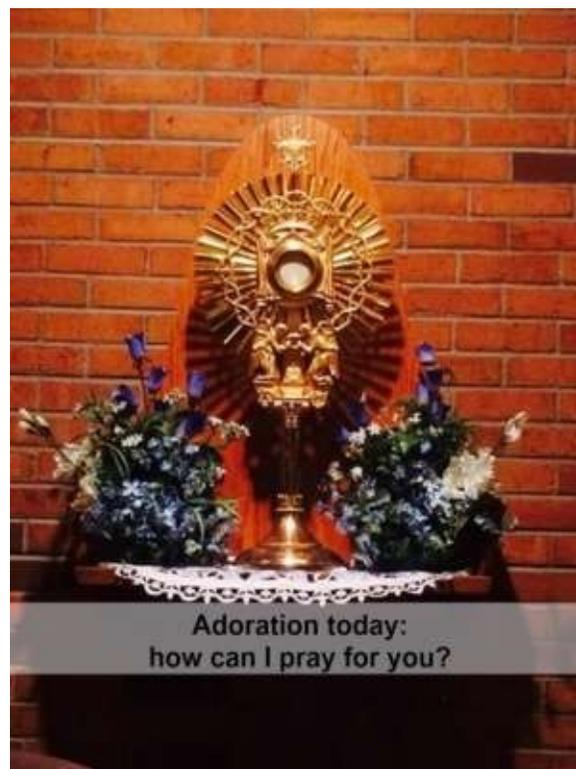
Tech Talk: Prayer and Social Media [at FranciscanMom]

I've been a regular at Eucharistic Adoration for [just over two years](#), and it's taken me this long to find a way to use the time as a prayer intercessor for others.

For too long, I'd gone to the Adoration Chapel with an agenda and a tote bag: a spiritual book (or three) to read, a rosary, a journal, and my iPad so I could pray Liturgy of the Hours. It was getting to the point where Adoration was another task to check off my list, a quiet hour to read a book I'd promised to review. Check, check, check.

Checking off tasks is not what Adoration is supposed to be about.

I'd been noticing for a while that my friend [Allison Gingras](#) would share on Facebook that she was heading to Adoration, and offer to pray for any special intentions people posted. I knew she wouldn't mind if I adopted her idea, so I created a graphic with a photo from our Adoration Chapel and shared it on Facebook for the first time in late February.



The response was tremendous. Over 40 likes. Over 35 comments. And a whole host of messages with private intentions. And I wasn't just hearing from Catholics. I filled 2 index cards, both sides, with intentions posted in under 3 hours.

People are hungry for that intercessory prayer. People carry secret burdens and don't always know how to ask for help, or even prayer over their situation. It's a comfort to know that someone else is holding them up in prayer.

I took those two index cards and my rosary to the chapel. I always pray the [Franciscan Crown rosary](#), and it's a good thing it has 7 decades, because at one bead per intention I needed all those prayers to

cover my list, plus my family and one general prayer for any late-breaking intentions (I wasn't checking Facebook in the chapel.)

Later that day I got an email from one of the deacons at our parish, who's my friend on Facebook. He wanted to let me know that he and his wife were going to begin inviting their Facebook friends to share intentions, to be prayed for during their Adoration hour.

He also said that this is a great way to evangelize. I hadn't thought about that, but it's true. Originally I'd hesitated to mention on Facebook that I was going to Adoration—but this has shown me that it's something needed and appreciated.

I created a [rosary prayer intentions printable](#) to use each week to list intentions: my own, as well as those of my friends on Facebook. It's also a Franciscan Crown Rosary tutorial. [Download this printable](#) and set it up for your "intentional rosary."

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This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2017/03/06/tech-talk-prayer-and-social-media/>
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What are those prayers muttered quietly by our priests during Mass? [at Boldly Catholic]

Eucharist

Found this intriguing... and inspiring:

The Mass is a composition of prayers, both personal and communal. The role of the priest during the Mass is to act in persona Christi capitis (in the person of Christ, the head). This means that when I stand in front of the congregation, Christ uses me (conformed to Him through Sacred Orders) to continue His work as Head of the Church. This is why whenever I greet the laity during Mass, you respond, “and with your Spirit!” You are acknowledging the presence of Christ the Head, operating through my spirit, conformed to Christ.

***Every time I speak for Jesus, I speak out loud, leading the people of God through the communal prayers.** However, I am still Father Mike; I still suffer from the effects of sin, making me terribly unworthy to carry out this awesome ministry of standing in the place of Christ. At nine times during the liturgy, I need to stop myself, recognize this unworthiness, and humbly beg the Lord to allow me to fulfill my sacred duty. These are the secret prayers; **I say them under my breath because they are personal prayers, between me and God.** Of course, if you really want to know what I am saying...!*

- 1. The first prayer occurs during the Alleluia. Recognizing that I am about to read from the Holy Gospel, that the Word of God will be made incarnate through my voice, I pray to God, “Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your Holy Gospel.”*
- 2. At the conclusion of the Gospel, I raise the Book of the Gospels to my lips, and ask God to heal his Church; “Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away.”*
- 3. During the preparation of the altar, I add a drop of water to my Chalice, and sum up the entirety of Incarnation theology in a simple prayer to God, “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” There it is! Jesus took on our humanity, so that we could share his divinity...but only through the grace of God!*
- 4. After praying over the bread and wine, I bow my head and pray a silent prayer to God for myself and my congregation, “With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God.”*
- 5. The next prayer occurs when the servers wash my hands. This washing is not really for the sake of hygiene, however, is made clear by the prayer, “Wash me, O Lord from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”*
- 6. During the Lamb of God, I fraction the host, place a little piece of the host into my chalice, and silently pray, “May the mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.”*
- 7. Immediately after this prayer, I bow my head and pray, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, who, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, through your Death gave*

life to the world, free me by this, your most holy Body and Blood, from all my sins and from every evil; keep me always faithful to your commandments, and never let me be parted from you.”

8. *Before consuming the Body and Blood of Christ, I whisper a little prayer to God, “May the Body (the Blood) of Christ keep me safe for eternal life.”*
9. *Finally, after communion, as I purify my chalice, I pray, “What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity.”*

So there you have it; the nine silent prayers whispered during Mass. Please remember that, even as we priests pray for ourselves, we still need you to pray for us as well!

Stolen from a forum at [ClaritasU](#).

This contribution is available at <http://www.boldlycatholic.com/2017/03/what-are-those-prayers-muttered-quietly-by-our-priests-during-mass.html>

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Is it in the Spirit of the Mass to pray in the Orans position during the Our Father? [at Catholic365]

I think so, here's why:

What is the “orans” posture?

The orans posture is an ancient “prayer” posture. It is, sort of, humorously described, in an incident where Moses, prayed with arms outstretched, for the Israelites to defeat their enemies. His hands got so tired that his attendants had to hold his arms up. Because every time his arms drooped, the Israelites would begin to lose the battle. They eventually won.

Jesus died in the “orans” position

Did you know that? I didn't. Moses praying in the orans posture, centuries before Jesus was even born, is considered a “foreshadowing” of Jesus' posture on the Cross.

Think about that, Jesus could have died in any posture. But he chose to die upright with arms extended in a position exactly like that of a person in prayer.

In other words, God designed all of salvation history with the aim that Jesus would die in the prayer or orans posture.

The orans is a cruciform posture

If Moses foreshadowed the Crucifixion when he prayed in the orans position, that means that the orans position is a symbol of the Crucifixion. If you look at anyone praying in the orans posture from behind, they make the shape of the Cross.

What do we celebrate in the Mass?

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The one remaining Sacrifice for our sins. In the Mass, we unite ourselves with Christ. The water that is added to the Precious Blood. That water symbolizes us. The grains of the wheat that are crushed to make the bread, those symbolize us. We are united to Christ in the Eucharist. Let me show you how St. Paul said it:

Galatians 2:19 For through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. **I have been crucified with Christ; 20 yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me;** insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.

This is what happens in the Mass. This is what we celebrate.

But isn't the orans position restricted to Priests?

No. But even if someone claims that it is, we are all baptized “priests, prophets and kings”.

What about holding hands in the orans posture?

I don't think there's a problem with that either, as I explained in [a previous article](#).

Does the Church forbid this stance?

No. In the years since I've been back to the Church. A little more than thirty now. The Church has put a stop to:

a. milling around at the time of the sign of peace. Do you remember when people would walk all around the Church, apparently trying to shake everyone's hand? I rarely see that anymore. And when I do, I also witness the People of God admonishing that person that it is wrong to do so.

b. people rushing the altar at the consecration prayer. Do you remember when people would come out of their pews and surround the altar after the sign of peace but before communion? I only witnessed that a few times. But it was quickly put to an end, by the Church.

c. glass containers for the Precious Blood. Do you remember when most of the chalices were made of a see through material? I do. The Church decided that it was more appropriate to make the chalices out of a precious metal.

I could go on and on with examples of behaviours the Church corrected in the Mass. The Church has proved to me that She is completely in charge when it comes to the Mass. So, if the Church considered it wrong to hold hands during the Our Father, or to pray in the orans position during the Our Father, I am absolutely certain that She would have put a stop to it a long time ago.

Obedience, the Spirit of Christ

Having said that, remember that mine are simply the opinions of a lay man. There is one thing that is in the Spirit of the Mass, because it is in the Spirit of Christ:

Philippians 2:8 he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

So, if the Church says that we are no longer to pray in the orans position or that we are no longer to hold hands, I'll be the first to stop. I hope you will also.

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholic365.com/article/6193/is-it-in-the-spirit-of-the-mass-to-pray-in-the-orans-position-during-the-our-father.html>

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Praying Scripture - Lectio Divina [at Renew The Church! - website and Blog]

The Catechism teaches much about prayer that can help us to grow in prayer. It can help us know why we should grow in prayer – why we should want to grow in prayer. To begin this post, let us observe one truth about prayer that we need to know from the beginning: prayer takes effort, it can cost us to pray, it is beautiful and necessary that we pray – but know this, prayer is a battle.

Prayer is a battle.

CCC 2725 Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and he himself, all teach us this: prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in His name. The “spiritual battle” of the Christian’s new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer.

Prayer is a battle first against ourselves: we can resist prayer, consciously and subconsciously. And prayer is a battle against the enemy of all souls, including yours and mine, the evil one the devil. To defeat the enemy, within and without, it helps to have a plan. A ancient plan for prayer, that reaches back at least to the early centuries of the Christian Church, is “Lectio Divina”, “Sacred Reading” of Holy Scripture.

Lectio Divina is a method, a system, an attitude, a plan with which we can listen more carefully to matters and truths of God, Sacred Scripture especially, so as to receive – or grow in – holy faith. It is a process of four steps:

- lectio – listening to a passage of Scripture,
- meditatio – meditating upon that passage,
- oratio – praying in accord with the truths of that passage,
- contemplatio – resting in the contemplation of those truths.

In each of these four steps, the battle awaits! In each of the four, who will be the subject of attention: myself and my thoughts and opinions, or God and His divine Truth? Indeed, will I even wage the battle to be attentive to anything? Maybe I will let my mind wander like a butterfly from flower to interesting flower, with no commitment to any of them. Maybe I will day-dream, randomly, forgetting the flowers altogether. But if I am cooperative with this ancient practice of Lectio Divina, and if I am attentive to Him and His Truth, wonderful things can happen, in my praying Holy Scripture.

Lectio Divina, in the form we are discussing, dates to the 12th century and a Carthusian Abbot Guido II. In about AD 1150, he wrote to a fellow monk of “A Ladder of Four Rungs by which we may well climb to heaven.” Here he described a method of 4 steps by which one could practice Lectio Divina – literally “sacred reading” – in a disciplined way. Dom Guido wrote:

“This is the ladder Jacob saw, in Genesis [“Jacob’s Ladder”], that stood on the earth and reached

into heaven, on which he saw heavenly angels ascending and descending, with God leaning upon the ladder.

Understand now what the four staves of this ladder are, each in turn.

- *Lectio – Reading*, is busily looking on Holy Scripture with all one’s will and wit.
- *Meditatio – Meditation*, is a studious insearching with the mind to know what was before concealed through desiring proper skill.
- *Oratio – Prayer*, is a devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil.
- *Contemplatio – Contemplation*, is the lifting up of the heart to God tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness and savour.”

Essentials Needed in Praying Scripture

To point out the obvious – no plan, method or process of praying Holy Scripture can insure spiritual success without supernatural intervention. That is, we need grace – the grace, the presence, the active assistance of the Holy Spirit whose “assigned ministry” (so to speak) by God the Holy Trinity is to lead, to guide the members of His Church “into all the truth.” We need to listen “in the Spirit” to hear the words written “in the Spirit” concerning the Word, the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A second obvious factor that must be present is the human person listening. He must not be merely “present” physically – more than “body-presence” is needed. He must be there, as St. Teresa of Avila said, with both attention and devotion. He must be there not in the audience, sitting in the dark in the last row of the auditorium, so to speak: he needs to be close to the words written and resting on his table or in his lap. He must be close, his life on the line; his mind alert and attentive to come to know ever more of God and His Truth – his will, his heart quick with assent to do all that he hears God’s will that he do. Attention and devotion are the offerings required at this altar, indeed the self-offering – the return of one’s self to God our Creator and Father – pleases God, as He wrote:

Is 66:1 Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?”

Is 66:2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the LORD. But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

“Trembles” at His word? Yes. Such describes well the profound reverence – awe – fear before the All-Holy God, with which a humble, contrite soul would rightly approach Him in His word. His words are the words of life. When Jesus asked Peter if he and the others would leave Him, watching many who did leave after hearing the hard sayings of His teachings. But Peter responded,

Jn 6:68 ”Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life;

Jn 6:69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

You then who will stay with Him, who want to hear His words of eternal life – this “method”, *Lectio Divina*, can be a help. An earlier post will continue this discussion. Maybe after a short break, please follow this link to “part II”, for more on the subject:

[Lectio Divina – and Praying Scripture \(part II\)](#)

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Silence Can Be A Sinful Form of Bullying [at Catholic Stand]

Although popular wisdom proclaims silence is golden, in some circumstances silence can also be a form of bullying. As humans, our basic needs go beyond sustenance and shelter for our mortal bodies. God has endowed us with an intrinsic need for love as well. Communication becomes a vehicle for that love. We live our lives yearning to be heard and to be understood.

The Quiet Bullying of Silence

There is a healthy use of silence to compose our thoughts and calm anger which can be of great benefit but sometimes an extended period of punishing silence causes pain to the other. In one way or another, we have all used silence as a weapon against another. Showing a cold shoulder or ignoring someone because of some real or imagined indiscretion can be a pain inflicting tactic. Whether a school friend or significant other, sometimes our intent is to inflict the pain of denying the victim our company. In self-righteous fashion, we withhold ourselves from them and leave them with the pain of silence – of being shunned.

Silence as Pride

The sin of pride comes to mind. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), “the root of all sins lies in man’s heart”. ([CCC 1873](#)) As we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we recite words that ask God to “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”. In calling down the same judgment on ourselves that we hold against others, we should attempt to soften our hearts to the pain of others. Yet in building an artificial distance between ourselves and another, we erect a wall of pain and isolation, one that will cause another to suffer. Again, looking to our own experience we begin to realize that silence does cause pain. The pain of silence becomes apparent when we are the ones who are shunned, unable to plead our case, ask forgiveness, or perhaps even understand the perceived transgression.

Spreading the Pain

Calculated silence takes on a deeper, more hurtful dimension when others are pulled into participation. Emotional blackmail can cause group silence, thus increasing the pain of the one who is cut off. Again our Faith tells us not to err by leading others, or ourselves, into sin.

Refusing to Talk

Sometimes the harshest punishment for some deduced transgression is to say “I don’t want to talk about it”. The injustice of denying communication leaves injuries on both parties that may not even be justified. Allowing an explanation may find the faulty words were much more benign than they were

perceived.

Perhaps, though, the words did intentionally inflict pain. After some thought, there was repentance and a desire for forgiveness. However, the barriers built by silence became impenetrable. In situations such as this the injury sustained by both parties, inflicted on their very souls, is harmful. As a recent radio host on Catholic radio explained, repressed emotion – especially anger – can have a harmful effect on both the mental and physical well-being of a person.

The Spiritual Cost

There is also a spiritual cost. Bullying silence can become sinful. If we are admonished to [forgive “not just seven times, but seventy-seven times”](#), then are we not also bound to break the silence and allow another to speak his peace? Since the Lord confused man’s speech due to the Tower of Babel, mankind has struggled with inadequate communication. The least we can do for justice is to give a fair hearing to those who stand accused.

The Bible on Forgiveness

From the Beatitudes to the Lord’s Prayer, we are admonished to be merciful, to forgive, and that our own judgment depends on our judgment of others. Scripture is full of instances encouraging forgiveness but how can there be forgiveness if silence stands in the way?

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” [Mark 11:25](#)

This Lent presents an inspirational opportunity to put the hurt feelings and accusations behind us. As we focus on fasting, prayer, and alms giving, wouldn’t it be a merciful gift to fast from the bullying sin of silence?

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicstand.com/silence-can-sinful-form-bullying/>
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