

NewEvangelists.org

new  
evangelists  
monthly

*August*  
*2017*

# **New Evangelists Monthly #56**

August 2017

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by Deacon Allen Tatara

## Forward

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

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

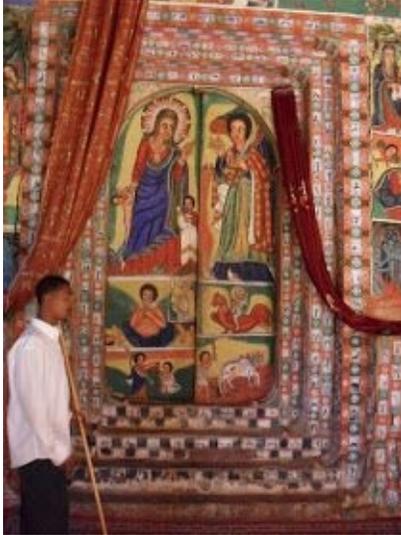
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## The 1000th Post ~ To The Father's Glory [at Pauca Verba]



**Here a young Ethiopian** man stands near a brilliant icon of the Annunciation in his church. Notice that in order for us to venerate the icon, not one, but *two* veils have been pulled back. In the Annunciation: the conversation Gabriel and Mary have concerning her pregnancy and God's advancing into our world in Christ - *the veil between heaven and earth has been pulled back fully and for all time.*

And this is the 1000th Pauca Verba post which began in March of 2013. Since then there have been 426,000 page views from countries all around the world: Ireland, Great Britain, Mexico, France, Russia, China, Australia, Italy, Poland and all across Canada and the United States. **Pauca Verba** (*a few words*) began in the late 1990's as a column in a little Sunday bulletin for young people in their residential school. Later it morphed into a reflection page for parish weekend bulletins until friends pushed a bit and together we envisioned putting it up online.

It's a blessed project for me because it has invited me to deeper learning, awareness, reflection and prayer. The folks who follow are 99.9% friendly - "*not for nothing*" in a contentious world where a single online word can start an ugly fight.

The purpose of the blog is not to indoctrinate anyone but simply to point to ideas for prayer and places where we might encounter and ponder God. Indeed, in numerology the number 1000 signifies the *Father's Glory*: God's beauty, awesomeness, joy and delight, wondrous imagination and invitation. *God's Glory* is the humility God displayed in coming to us in Christ.

God is wonderful, and everyday there is something to experience which re-introduces us to God. I don't want to miss out on any of that. That's what I hope to point to here.

**A word about the Thursday Intercessions:** I think of them as a great needle and thread pulling together the things of heaven and our weary world. Do they effect any change? Maybe. That's God's business. The purpose of the prayers is to bring my heart before God - a heart which I hope is increasingly defrosted and opened. God reads hearts.

***I send thanks, good wishes and a blessing to you and your homes.***

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This contribution is available at <http://paucaverba.blogspot.com/2017/07/the-1000th-post-to-fathers-glory.html>  
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What's right and what's wrong?

# Are we Losing Sight of Objective Truth?

virginialieto.com

I am an adjunct professor of Theology, who specifically teaches a morality course at the undergraduate level. Given the recent shooting at a Republican baseball practice, and the ensuing remarks from Congressional representatives that “we are on one team,” I was encouraged by the willingness of both parties to place vitriol commentary into the history books; to reset, so to speak, and begin toning down the rhetoric. However strong this intention may be, the spirit is weak. It will take more than mere effort to be more civil to one another. There is an underlying concern that must be addressed to allow civility to flourish. As a society, we must face objective truth, together.

## Objective Truth

The belief in objective truth seems to have taken a back seat to such erroneous concepts of morality as situation ethics, proportionalism and consequentialism. But before I get ahead of myself here, by diving too deep into these topics, let’s first define objective truth, as it is my greatest concern. We, as a society, are not working together to understand, and abide by, objective truth.

**Objective Truth:** “...those essential and innate human and moral values which

*flow from the very truth of the human being and express and safeguard the dignity of the person: values which no individual, no majority, and no state can ever create, modify or destroy, but must only acknowledge, respect and promote.”<sup>1</sup>*

Saint Pope John Paul II was succinct in his point that objective truth can't be slanted to suit your own opinions. He claims truth is truth, and we must come to grips with it. There is no such thing as “alternative facts.” Facts are undeniable truths. If our Congressional representatives will acknowledge, respect and promote objective truth, then the appropriate “tone” would naturally follow suit. Therefore, we must collectively address and identify objective truth, if we are to improve our discourse.

## **Filters That Deny Objective Truth**

Now, because we are human, we tend to perceive truth differently. We implement “filters” to justify taking certain positions; where, if we were to view unadulterated truth, we might act otherwise. Here's where the erroneous concepts of morality come into play.

Let's use a recent situation as an example. Earlier this year, the state of Montana held a special election to fill a vacant Congressional seat. On the eve of the election, the Republican candidate responded to a reporter's question by assaulting the reporter. Subsequently, on the evening of the election, after the votes had been counted, the Congressional candidate apologized publicly to the reporter for his actions. In addition, the now Congressman-Elect pleaded guilty to the charge of assault. These are the facts of the event.

How did people react to these facts? In an assortment of ways. Some people were appalled at the Congressman-Elect's actions. Others were supportive of the Congressman-Elect. For those who supported the Congressman-Elect's actions, it all came down to the applied “filters.” Now let's define those “filters” of erroneous moral concepts.

## **Filter of Situation Ethics**

*Situation Ethics maintains that goodness or evil of a given action is determined by the particular situation. The circumstances of an individual, according to this*

*opinion, form the prevailing criteria concerning the morality of the action.* <sup>2</sup>

So, in this situation (no pun intended), some people applied the filter of liberal versus conservative, in that the reporter represented a liberal news organization. The candidate was a Republican. Therefore, the liberal reporter “had it coming to him.” Failure to see the objective truth that no person deserves to be assaulted for whatever reason, because it diminishes the dignity of the victim (as well as the perpetrator), seemed to fall on some deaf ears.

## **Filter of Consequentialism**

*Consequentialists judge an action to be good or evil from the consequences that follow and not by whether or not the objectivity of the act reflects the natural law.* <sup>3</sup>

In our example, those who were more concerned about retaining the Congressional seat in Republican hands, were found to be “joking” about the incident, claiming that they must have “missed that class,” and were sorry that they had, thereby condoning the Congressman-Elect’s actions. On the day following the election, some Republican Congressmen were asked by reporters in Washington D.C. whether the Congressman-Elect would be welcomed, if found guilty of the charge. They responded that he would be welcomed. Had the consequence been that the perpetrator had been a Democrat, do you think the Republican response would have been the same? I seriously doubt it, as Consequentialists “*allow objective morality to take a back seat to the subjective standards of end results and outcomes.*” <sup>4</sup>

## **Filter of Proportionalism**

*Proportionalism is an expression of moral relativism that measures the moral goodness of an action according to a comparison between the good and evil effects.* <sup>5</sup>

Proportionalists looked at the event and noted that the reporter wasn’t hurt too badly, and that it was more important to retain the seat in Republican hands. So, therefore, the win outweighed any harm suffered by the reporter. Proportionalists lose sight of what is basically right versus wrong. If the outcome is more to their favor, then it is a good act. In this example, they rationalized the Congressman-

Elect's behavior, especially when he was giving his public apology during his acceptance speech. People shouted from the crowd, "You're forgiven." As if to say, let's move on because the good of his election outweighed the harm to the reporter.

## Embracing Objective Truth

I am concerned for my country. I fear that we are losing our grip on common decency. Our consciences are dulled when we apply "filters," to comply with what we want to see. I think it is time for us to face objective truth; to acknowledge, respect and promote it. For me, I take my first step toward doing so, by sharing with you what I have written today, so that you, too, can begin embracing objective truth. The next time you evaluate the moral equivalency of an act, check your "filters," and seek to identify the objective truth. If you were to do so, you wouldn't need to be concerned about whether your tone contained vitriolic speech.

In the example that I provided, one man assaulted another man. The perpetrator checked himself, knew he had done something wrong and apologized for his own behavior. He, personally, didn't try to "spin" the truth. He pleaded guilty. His sentence: 40 hours of community service, 20 hours of anger management courses and a \$385 fine. Now, if the rest of society, especially our elected representatives, could only evaluate moral acts with objective truth, we would be well on our way to building Peace.

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II. *Encyclical Letter: Evangelium Vitae. The Gospel of Life*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1995. Print. (EV 71).

<sup>2</sup> Armenio, Peter V. *Our Moral Life in Christ: College Ed. 2nd Ed.* Woodridge: *Midwest Theological Forum*. 2009. Print. p. 177

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179

If you would like to purchase an autographed copy of my book, *Adventures of Faith, Hope and Charity: Finding Patience*, then [click here](#).

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This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/moral-behavior-losing-sight-objective-truth/>  
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## I Kind of Hate July 16... [at Campfires and Cleats]

.....which is why I'm writing this on the 17th.

I couldn't bring myself to do it yesterday.

I really shouldn't though....

Hate that day.

That blackened square on the calendar in 1993.

Because it *is* the day a miracle happened.

The day for which our Savior suffered and died.:

It's the day my Dad entered into his Eternal Reward.

The day God invited him to come Home.

Selfishly, I so hate it - he was taken from us.

Joyfully, I recognize, of course, that Dad's suffering was

*finally, finally*, over.

And that a lifetime of living for the Lord would grant him

his hard- earned salvation.

And once home from the cemetery , Mom said....

Well that was the longest wake I hope any of us ever attend.

We came to refer to Dad's illness as a three year long vigil of waiting,  
watching and railing against God

Didn't he do enough? Give enough? Be enough?

That he should be stripped of his memories.

That he should need to search for his family in his last days,  
when we were all right there by him.

In time, our anger was assuaged. The ravages on our souls faded some,  
what with the day to day demands of life, obligations, responsibilities.

But the emptiness still remains.

And although I do hate the day that was his last here with us,

I'm in awe of the miracle that is our Faith.

The redemption that dad finally received for his worldly 77 year journey



<Erasmus Hall HS 1935>

This is a man who....

~grew up in Brooklyn, son of an Irish immigrant

whose mom gave him an Italian name so he "wouldn't stand out."

Yes, he was one of a couple of dozen "Vincent's"

on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn!

~ never went to college, but was the most intelligent,

quick thinker I ever knew.

~was abandoned by his own dad at a young age and so,

grew up to be the father he never had to his own five kids

~ enlisted in The War in December 1941, following FDR's

" A Day hat will Live in Infamy" speech..

Because that's what able bodied American men did

in defense of their country's freedoms, despite never having held a gun.



~was a member of The Greatest Generation, but hated that moniker.

Each generation is great in its own way, he'd say.

If "all" one had to do, he'd say, is fight evil and take freedom back on the world stage, well, that's a golden opportunity to achieve greatness. How easy is it step up to the challenge?

Yes, he was humble.

~Rose from the rank of Private to Captain in the US Army Infantry

within eighteen months,

forces and drive them out of The Philippines.

~ Took a short leave in October 1943 to come home and marry his girl...my mom...and drive across the US to Camp Roberts in Paso Robles, California, where he'd ship out again to the islands in the South Pacific, under attack by enemy forces.



~arrived home from the front lines in August 1945 to meet his daughter, his first born

~suffered PTSD, before it had a name and did not talk about the atrocities he witnessed, ever.

But did talk about a few scattered memories of his comrades.

40 years later.

~worked in publishing and instilled in all

of us a lifelong love of books, reading, writing.

~ was raised Catholic and practiced his faith throughout his youth, due to his Mom's fervent love of The Church.....

a convert from the Episcopalian Church.

Once returning from The War, he *attended daily mass for the rest of his life*, except when he was too ill toward the end.

~on many Sundays, challenged our young, new pastor on the intent of his homilies.

When they began thrashing out theology so much so that they blocked the church door for incoming parishioners to the following mass, their conversation was brought home and, thus, began a decades - long friendship which had Fr Kain included in most of our family Sunday events.

~always considered his children and his grandchildren his greatest accomplishments

~*always* had time for us, for anything we needed.

Despite his demanding job, which was stressful and paid him to afford us with the basics.

None of us ever felt we were lacking.

The redemption and entry to Eternal Life that Dad received.....

well that's what is helping me heal.

Even 24 years later.

A deeper love and reverence of our Faith and

the fundamental mystery that it simply *is*,

help the cavernous emptiness become not quite so daunting.

Here's to you Dad.....

A cup of bravery and courage and selflessness.



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!



While you're here.....

I've over a hundred titles---all subject areas, all grade levels  
from prek through high school.

After 13 years homechooling and 14 years as a classroom teacher,  
the classics, ecology, geology, American history,  
music, art, picture books...you name it.

More titles are being added continuously...!!

In this way, I will receive a small commission on the purchase.....  
at no cost to you.

THANK YOU!

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## The Hudge and Gudge Report [at If I Might Interject]

G.K. Chesterton, in his book *What's Wrong With the World* (Chapter IX), offers an account of two men—Hudge and Gudge—who desire to help the poverty stricken. Hudge sets out to build massive housing blocks that meet the physical shelter needs but are deeply oppressive. Gudge objects to the oppressive nature of these apartments and says they lack the character of the former homes. As time progresses, Hudge begins to defend the worst parts of the apartments as good, while Gudge begins to proclaim that people were better off living in the slums. Finally they reach the extremes where Hudge thinks all people should be living in these apartments and Gudge believes that poverty is good for people.

I find the account to be useful in examining the growing divisions and rigidity of factions. But, there is always the danger of thinking that “the other guy” behaves like Hudge and Gudge while we are defenders of truth and right. The problem is, Hudge and Gudge also think the problem is with “the other guy,” while they have the real solution. If we’re blind to our own rigidity, refusing to consider where we go wrong, we are in danger of corrupting our ideals.

This is especially true when Christianity intersects with determining moral state policies. Because the major political factions tend to be right on some issues and wrong on others, we tend to gravitate towards those factions that agree with what we think are the most important issues. But as factions get more extreme, it is easier to downplay the issues where the other party is right.

For example, I know some Catholics who are appalled with life issues besides abortion and euthanasia. They insist that all Catholics recognize these issues as important. But growing more rigid, they begin to downplay the actual issues of abortion and euthanasia. Some have gotten to the point of being more outraged at Catholics who are “anti-abortion but not pro-life” than by Catholics who are literally pro-abortion. But, on the other side of that fight, Catholics who recognize the evil of abortion and euthanasia fall into the trap of going from recognizing that those two issues are the worst evils to thinking other life issues are “not important.” Both of them are wrong when they go from promoting some issues they feel are neglected to neglecting the issues they think are less important. It becomes dangerous for the soul if it leads these people to think that others who oppose a moral evil are partisan.

It doesn't have to be about morality vs. politics either. It can also be, for example, the cause of liturgical wars. The Ordinary vs. Extraordinary form of Mass is a common battleground where some Catholics have become so involved in defending their own position that they refuse to consider the good from the other position. The defender of the Extraordinary Form is tempted to treat the Ordinary Form of the Mass as "clown masses" and other liturgical abuses. The defender of the Ordinary Form is tempted to view the Extraordinary Form as the haven for schismatics.

We need to realize that both of our major political factions are a mixture of some good and some evil. We need to realize that both forms of the Mass have good to offer the Church, and some weaknesses that need to be overcome. If we solidify to the point where we think that good is only found in our faction, but not the other, we risk embracing the evil of our own faction and rejecting the good in the other: once we reach that stage, we're giving assent to—or at least tolerating—evil in our faction, and rejecting good when it comes from another faction. That is incompatible with God's teaching, but we will have blinded ourselves to our disobedience. It saddens me, for example, when I see some Catholics say, "We'll never eliminate abortion so we should focus on other issues," or that "pro-abortion politicians support policies that reduce the need for abortion." This is Hudge and Gudge thinking. But so is thinking that says that "so long as abortion is legal, we can't worry about other issues."

The only way to escape this is to get rid of our Hudge and Gudge thinking. We need to recognize that our factions must be judged by Church teaching, and not that Church teaching is judged by our factions. If we believe that the Church stance on abortion and "same sex marriage" is proof the bishops are "Republican," we've fallen into the Hudge and Gudge trap. If we think the Church opposition to the government position on immigrants is "liberal," we have fallen into the Hudge and Gudge trap.

If we profess to be faithful Catholics, the Church must be our guide into right and wrong, because we believe that God gave the Church His authority and protects her from error. If we consider the Church teaching as the way to form our political judgments, we might be able to support the good in our preferred political factions while opposing the evil. We might also seek to reform the system rather than to just tolerate the least possible evil as the best we can hope for.

This means we must reject our partisan rigidity and be always open to the Church calling us to a firm standard of good and evil, while also being open to different ideas of carrying them out. We never compromise on doing what is right or being faithful to the Church. But we can consider whether our factional preferences are in the wrong. If they are, we must choose the Church over our preferences or factional beliefs. And if our factional opponents are *not* wrong, we must stop treating them as if they were.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2017/07/the-hudge-and-gudge-report.html>

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## Great Christian Open Secret [at A Spiritual Journey]

Today's Communion antiphon, based upon 2 Corinthians 5.14,15: *The Love of God impels us, so that those who live may live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised.* This is the great Christian open secret: By living for Christ and not for ourselves, we become free! The key to opening the door to freedom is surrendering to God. You have no peace only because you are still fighting him – elementary!

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This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2017/07/great-christian-open-secret.html>  
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## The war I must wage: destroying a piece of my own heart [at Catholic Deacon]

The way I live, think, and write it would be a fool's errand for me to try to keep up with all the political ups and downs of our present moment. Over time, I hope I am becoming less political. This is not a way of obliquely insisting that politics don't matter, they do, but not as much as I formerly thought. Because politics are provisional, seeking to be less political is my attempt at keeping politics in perspective. I am not a Republican, neither am I a Democrat. Given how these are understood in the United States, I can say that I am neither a liberal nor a conservative because, depending on the matter at hand, I am both a liberal and a conservative. Above all, I resist being in the thrall of any ideology.

I readily admit to finding the White House events from the Friday before last through yesterday to be both amusing and alarming. Maybe my interest is simply morbid curiosity, or is perhaps attributal to the ever-present sights and sounds of infotainment. In times like these there are a few working journalists whose writing helps me keep these provisional, even ephemeral, things in perspective. One such journalist is

*Rolling Stone*

's Matt Taibbi. His article

["The Anthony Scaramucci Era Will Be Freakish, Embarrassing and All Too Short"](#)

did not let me down in this regard. While it should go without saying (in the age of internet basic logic seems to fly out the window and some people insist on making invalid inferences, the popular name for which is jumping to conclusions), I have some pretty fundamental disagreements with Taibbi even as I find much of his work on what ails our republic politically and economically very insightful. In other words, as with many writers, philosophers, theologians, and economists, I find his diagnosis largely accurate, but part ways with him when it comes to many, by no means all, prescriptions.

It is way too easy to just provide a list of things that are wrong and walk away in

disgust. It seems to me that this is just what many Christians content themselves with doing. It isn't much more difficult to follow one's list of ills with a plea to turn back the clock, which amounts to trying to reverse the world like Superman. The idea is to somehow restore what is deemed as a better time in the Church and in the world. Neither does the answer lie in Christians abandoning the world. A priest named Jonathan Morris summed this up nicely on Facebook recently: "Engaging the world, in all its messiness, has always been the Gospel way. Isolating ourselves in a cocoon of likemindedness is the easy way out."

In his speech to open the Second Vatican Council,

[Gaudet Mater Ecclesia](#)

("Mother Church Rejoices"), the eminent historian, Angelo Roncalli, more popularly known as Pope St John XXIII, directly addressed those who see nothing but evil and who prefer trying to live in the past:

In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life. They behave as though at the time of former Councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life and for proper religious liberty.

We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand.

In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfilment of God's superior and inscrutable designs. And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the Church

A Christian is not one who stands looking wistfully behind the plow, but is someone who not only looks ahead to the full realization of God's glory, which is yet to be fully revealed, and who actively seeks to usher in God's reign by living it as a present reality. A Christian, to paraphrase the liturgy, is one who

waits in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. I think the two words in that statement that require emphasis are "joyful" and "waits" in that order. Either Jesus is Lord of the present moment (i.e., he is Lord right here and right now), or he is not Lord at all.

This brings me to the point I want to make. Being a Christian is not to participate in some fantasy role-playing game, killing time 'til the

*parousia*

. Being a Christian is to be one who engages reality as it is and not as s/he might want it to be and to do so according to

*all*

the factors that together make reality what it is and not something else.

When it comes to those so-called "hot-button" social issues that challenge our humanity on a fundamental level, about which many Christians in the U.S. are rightly concerned, issues such as sexuality, marriage, parenting, life and death, we need to grasp the reality so we can engage as salt and light. Let me take two issues: marriage and abortion. In the United States these matters are now constitutional matters. In other words, they cannot be changed by the collective acts of Congress and the president, let alone by state legislatures and governors. The longer the decisions that made them constitutional issues endure, the more they become settled law and the less likely it is the Supreme Court will overrule them no matter who is appointed to the court. Like it or not, this is the reality we must face full on. Is it possible to amend our constitution? Sure. It's fine to advocate for such amendments. However, there is nowhere near the consensus to make such changes to our fundamental law. In fact, when it comes to consensus-building, the momentum currently goes against such efforts. This, too, is part of the reality we must engage.

Politics cannot save us, but I am convinced politics can damn us. For Christians how we engage our society and culture matter as much, if not more, than those matters that prompt us to engage. It seems to me that when we quote Jesus from Matthew's Gospel (

[10:16](#)

) to the effect that, as sheep sent among wolves, we are to be "shrewd as serpents and simple as doves," we usually, if implicitly, elevate shrewdness over simplicity, or gentleness. The effect of acting according to this implicit understanding is that it usually leads to something like becoming wolves in sheep's clothing: saying all the right "Christian" things while acting contrary to the Gospel.



**"God Carrying Us," by Soichi Watanabe, based on [Isaiah 46:4](#)**

I am tempted to pose the question here, "Given our acknowledgement of reality, do we surrender?" The problem I have with posing that question is it assumes that the Church's and, hence, the individual Christian's, relationship to the world and to other people is one of incessant combat. In other words, it assumes life is a war and the Church is an army. If we take that stance, we are forced to decide if someone is an ally or an enemy. If an enemy, then someone not only to be resisted, but to be vanquished, routed, beaten. In my view, this is no way to follow Christ. I say that being well-aware that martial imagery for the Church is not foreign to the Christian tradition. It is foreign, it seems to me, to the New Testament. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in

### [Lumen Gentium](#)

, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, gave us to two complementary images for the Church on earth, which, during the Counter-Reformation era, an era ended by the Second Vatican Council, was called the Church Militant: "the People of God" and "the pilgrim Church."

As a Christian the only battle I really need to fight is the one within myself. As

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn observed in his book

[The Gulag Archipelago](#)

:

the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

In what is still the road map for evangelization in the modern world,

[Evangelii Nuntiandi](#)

, promulgated by Bl Pope Paul VI more than 40 years ago, he observed:

for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. As we said recently to a group of lay people, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." St. Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word.[1 Pet 3:1] It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity (par 41)

I think anything less what Pope Paul called for will prove futile. Besides, isn't it so much easier to reduce faith by conforming it to a secular political ideology and then engaging in political activism than to give humble, joyful witness to goodness, truth, and beauty for love of God and neighbor, by how I live day-to-day?

Practicing the fundamental spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and alms-giving, the latter of which primarily consists of selfless service to others, along with our participation in the sacramental life of the Church, are the means God

gives us both to fight our interior battle and to engage the world in love as it is and not as we wish it was.

For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith ([1 John 5:3-4](#))

Again, I had the best of intentions with regard to posting a

*traditio*

yesterday, but I did not do so. This only serves to prove, as I so often do, that intentions in and of themselves get you nowhere. So, our late

*traditio*

for this week is two Camaldolese monks who belong to the Hermitage of the Immaculate Heart in Big Sur, California- Fr. Cyprian and Brother James- with a simple and lovely rendition of one of my favorite hymns,

*Tantum Ergo*

:

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This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2017/07/the-war-i-must-wage-destroying-piece-of.html>  
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## Theology of the Body in a Nutshell [at Plot Line and Sinker]



So why NFP (or Natural Family Planning)? NFP is safe, healthy and effective. Most importantly, it is a morally acceptable way to avoid and achieve pregnancy.

If we look at the **four components of God's love for us (free, total, faithful, fruitful)** and compare God's love to marital love, we can discover how to live the Sacrament of marriage as the ultimate expression of spousal love.

**Free:** We need to be able love our spouse freely. If we ask for conditions, that's not love. If we force our spouse to do something, that's not love. If we cannot say no to our sexual urges, then we are not free.

**Total:** The love for our spouse must be total. We can't say, "Well, I'll give you everything, honey, except for my fertility." Total means total. (Re: CCC 1643).

**Faithful:** Obviously, faithfulness means we must only have intercourse with our spouse and no other. But if we want to be truly faithful to our spouse, we must be faithful in word, action and thought.

**Fruitful:** Marital relations **must be fruitful**, open to children, each and every time. That doesn't mean we will conceive (or want to conceive) a child with every marital embrace. It just means we need to be open.

**Birth control, in fact, destroys all four of the essential components** (free, total, faithful, fruitful). Birth control violates not only God’s plan in fruitfulness, but it also encourages an “I can’t say no” mentality to sex. When an action, device, medication or operation is purposefully used to remove fertility, a couple cannot give themselves totally, no matter how much they love each other. Contraception says, “I give all of myself to my spouse – **except** my fertility.”

Natural Family Planning allows a couple **to love each other as God loves:** freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully. Couples using NFP chart the wife’s cycle and, if avoiding pregnancy, they abstain in the fertile time. If they are planning a pregnancy, they engage in relations during the fertile time. They are not using devices; they are fully giving of themselves and they are open to children with each and every act of marital relations.

NFP allows us to love our spouse as God loves us: freely, with no reservation, faithfully and open to children. Marriage can be a holy vocation when a couple loves as God loves: freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully.

Want to live the highest expression of your marital love? Use NFP and be open to life.

For more information about the Theology of the Body:  
<http://thetheologyofthebody.com>

For more information on NFP:  
[www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org)  
[www.woomb.org](http://www.woomb.org)  
[www.creightonmodel.com](http://www.creightonmodel.com)

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This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2017/07/28/theology-of-the-body-in-a-nutshell-nfpawarenessweek/>  
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## **Black Theology, the Catholic Church in America and Communion Ecclesiology [at Saint Dominic's Media]**

N

o ecclesiology can be referred to as authentically Christian in America that does not acknowledge the significance of white racism and the resulting white privilege in American society and the American Church. To remain silent about the deadly consequences of white racism and the unjust white privilege that exists in the modern world invalidates any church's claim to a Christian identity. This includes the Catholic Church in America.

Nearly thirty-five years ago, progressive Catholics sponsored a conference entitled "Voices of Justice: The Challenge of Being Catholic and American in the 1980s." One of the keynote speakers, James Cone, issued a "theological challenge" to the Catholic Church. He stated:

What is it about the Catholic definition of justice that makes many persons of that faith progressive in their attitude toward the poor in Central America but reactionary in their views toward the poor in black America? ... It is the failure of the Catholic Church to deal effectively with the problem of racism that causes me to question the quality of its commitment to justice... I do not wish to minimize the importance of Catholic contributions to poor people's struggles for justice, but I must point out the ambiguity of the Catholic stand on justice when racism is not addressed forthrightly.<sup>[1]</sup>

Bryan Massingale, explains Cone's comments. He states, "[Cone's] contention is that there are critical faults and deficits in Catholic reflection on racism. He adduces this from an apparent disparity between Catholic concern regarding issues, such as poverty and the sanctity of life, when compared to the Church's peripheral attention given to the endemic racism of American society."<sup>[2]</sup>

Cone's reservations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of American Catholic reflection on racism also has been expressed by official voices within the Catholic Church. In 1989, the US Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics issued a statement commemorating the tenth anniversary of the national

conference's pastoral letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us: US Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*. Written in 1979, *Brothers and Sisters to Us* was the last pastoral letter devoted specifically to the subject of racism issued in the name of the entire national body of Catholic bishops. However, this anniversary committee found little worth celebrating. Instead, it concluded that:

The promulgation of the pastoral letter on racism was soon forgotten by all but a few. A survey... revealed a pathetic, anemic response from archdioceses and dioceses around the country... The pastoral letter on racism had made little or no impact on the majority of Catholics in the United States... In spite of all that has been said and written about racism in the last twenty years, very little—if anything at all—has been done in Catholic education; such as it was yesterday, it is today.[\[3\]](#)

Two years later, at a symposium celebrating the centennial anniversary of modern Catholic social teaching, Joseph Francis, an African American bishop, declared that the lack of attention given *Brothers and Sisters to Us* made it “the best kept secret in the church in this country.” He concluded by voicing sentiments very like those expressed by Cone:

Social justice vis-a-vis the eradication of racism in our church is simply not a priority of social concern commissions, social concern directors and agencies. While I applaud the concern of such individuals and groups for the people of Eastern Europe, China, and Latin America, that same concern is not expressed, is not incarnated for the victims of racism in this country... The question is, Is the quality of our mercy strained when black people are concerned?[\[4\]](#)

More recently, in 2004, twenty-five years after *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the US Catholic Bishops commissioned a study to discern its implementation and reception.[\[5\]](#) The commission's results paint a disheartening picture of the Church's relationship with the black community. For example, since the *Brothers and Sisters to Us* was first promulgated, only 18 percent of the American bishops have issued statements condemning racism, and of those very few address systemic racism found in America; rather, they address personal attitudes of direct racial malice. In addition, the commission notes that many diocesan seminaries and ministry formation programs are inadequate in terms of their incorporation of the history, culture, and traditions of the black community. Most disturbing is the commission's report that white Catholics over the last twenty-five years “exhibit diminished—rather than increased—

support of government policies aimed at curbing racial inequality.”[\[6\]](#)

These official statistics details the significant lack of compliance of the Church with its own recommendation contained in *Brothers and Sister to Us*. While racism is America’s most persistent sin, it appears that the Catholic Church has continued to be virtually silent about its significance in its seminaries, churches, and every other segment of the larger Catholic society in America. It prompts the question: Is *Brothers and Sister to Us* simply a “dream deferred”? Or stated another way, can the ecclesiology of the American Catholic Church be adapted in such a way that acknowledges the black American’s experience? Furthermore, what part, if any, does the black theological community have in reaching this end?

I will argue in this essay that the primary means of reconciling the relationship between the larger black community and the American Catholic Church must revolve around the shared significance of community between black theology and Catholic communion ecclesiology. Through a close reading of various Catholic Church documents, we will first review the Catholic Church’s emphasis on communal ecclesiology. This will be followed by a detailed look into the development of black theology, how racial injustice caused its emergence, and how it was the basis of a theological focus on the unity of the black community. I will conclude with identifying four essential characteristics of black theology, identified by James Cone, and demonstrate how these same characteristics are identified as essential in the Catholic Church’s definition of an authentic communion ecclesiology, thus providing a foundation to build a spirit of reconciliation between the black community and the American Catholic Church.

## **Communion Ecclesiology**

Some twenty years after the closing of Vatican II, the International Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops stated that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the council’s documents...it is the foundation for order in the church and especially for a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the church.”[\[7\]](#) In a later document, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith elaborated further that communion was a “two-dimensional concept.” The document states,

If the concept of communion, which is not a univocal concept, is to serve as a

key to ecclesiology, it has to be understood within the teaching of the Bible and the patristic tradition, in which communion always involves a double dimension: the vertical (communion with God) and the horizontal (communion among men).[8]

Jamie Phelps explains, “The vertical dimension, one’s union with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, is largely invisible, but is made visible by ‘the communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the hierarchal order’ within the Church.”[9] Thus, the Church is a visible sacrament of the invisible communion of God with human society. However, a close examination of one of the prominent documents of the Second Vatican Council; namely, *Lumen gentium*, reveals that while the Church is clearly identified as a visible sacrament of God’s communion with humankind, the concept of the Church as communion among men is more pervasive. Phelps points out four specific passages in the introduction of the document,

As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on, and, in the sacrament of the eucharistic bread, *the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about*. All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains.

The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits. By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, “Come!” Thus, the Church has been seen as “*a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*”

Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His Holy Church, *the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation* through which He communicated truth and grace to all.

At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right. *God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another...* So, it is that that messianic people... is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and

salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also *used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all*, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth.[\[10\]](#)

These passages of *Lumen gentium* identifies the nature and mission of the Church succinctly—the Church is a communion of all those who profess belief in Jesus Christ. The Church’s mission is to create a community of believers who grow in union with God, to be a transformative agent in a divided community of believers, and be a transformative agent in a world divided by sin and injustice. In short, the Church’s mission is essentially directed toward the formation of community transformed by faith and made whole by its healing message of the Gospel.

Papal and episcopal documents following Vatican II made more explicit the mission of the Church being community, and it did so by connecting social injustice with its ecclesiology of communion. Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum progressio* noted that the social question “tied all human beings together.” The Church must work to address social inequities by “building a human community where men and women can live truly human lives, free from discrimination on account of race, religion or nationality, from servitude to other men or women . . . where liberty is not an idle word . . . where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table.”[\[11\]](#)

*Octogesimo adveniens*, Paul VI’s apostolic letter on the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, rejected the domination that still characterized some human relationships within an urban industrialized world. The need for greater justice and sharing of responsibility among workers was emphasized. Attention was focused on need to recognize the place and dignity of marginalized groups such as “the handicapped and the maladjusted, the old, and different groups . . . on the fringe of society.”[\[12\]](#) *Octogesimo adveniens* particularly noted the sufferings of victims legally discriminated against because of their race, origin, color, culture, sex or religion.[\[13\]](#)

The document of the 1971 Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, underscored that social justice directed both toward the transformation of the world and relationships within the Church was an essential dimension of the Church’s mission, echoing the spirit of *Lumen gentium*. Furthermore, it made the assertion that economic growth had contributed to the increase of “marginal persons”

bereft of food, housing, education, political power, and responsible moral agency. These conditions of injustice placed a mantle of responsibility on the Church to develop paths toward justice in the world.<sup>[14]</sup> Like Christ Jesus, the Church's actions and teachings must unite in an indivisible way, the relationship of human society to God and to one another. Like Jesus, the Church faithful must be willing to give their total lives for the liberation of men and women by defending the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person.

This survey of the Catholic Church's teachings on communion is admittedly incomplete, but this brief synopsis indicates a strong ecclesial tradition that understands that the Church's mission to proclaim the gospel occurs through a two-fold action; namely, the creating of community and addressing issues of social justice; thereby, embodying Jesus' call to liberation and communion. This provides a foundation that can serve as a bridge between the black American community and the American Catholic Church. However, first let us develop an understanding of how community is reflected in the black experience in America and its relationship with black theology.

## **African American Value of Community**

The emphasis on community has been a primary religious value of black Americans that emerged early on from the influence of the first African slaves brought into America. John Mbiti, an African philosopher, notes:

Traditional [African] religions are not primarily for the individual, but for the community of which he is part. Chapters of African religion are written everywhere in the life of the community, and in the traditional society, there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach themselves from the religion of his group for to do so is to be severed from one's roots, one's foundation, one's context of security, one's kinships and the entire group of those who make a person aware of their own existence. . . . To be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of the society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.<sup>[15]</sup>

The African inclination toward community was not destroyed through the Atlantic Slave trade. African slaves desired the intimacy of the family. To satisfy this desire, black slaves forged an extended family as well as a new culture from

the diverse African cultures that were fused during slavery. Peter Paris tells us that when African American slaves and their descendants referred to themselves using the terms “African”, “negro”, and “colored”, they were reconstituting themselves into a new tribal unity or community. Through this community, they sought to preserve their dignity and self-respect, even though the same terms were used by the white culture to denigrate and oppress Africans.[\[16\]](#) They therefore adhered to “the primary goal of African moral life [which was] the preservation and enhancement of the community.”[\[17\]](#) When the “slave appropriated the formal features of their slave holders’ Christianity, with respect to ritual practices, language and symbols, they invested each of them with new meanings... [Community remained] the paramount moral and religious value among African peoples.”[\[18\]](#)

The concept “black community” became the appellation used to regard their community as an extension of family that was not restricted to blood relatives but included neighbors and friends. Even in the contemporary black community, the use of family titles such as brother, sister, and cousin to refer to playmates, family friends, and neighbors, regardless of actual familial ties, is commonplace. This essential concept of community is the basis upon which black theology and was built.

## **The Evolution of the Black Church**

The black struggle for liberation and community within church and society has an interrelated history. Both the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in the America compromised their authentic Christian identity by imitating within their own structures the same racial division characteristic of the surrounding society. Black members were subjected to the same segregation, marginalization, and devaluation within the Church as they were accorded in society. The churches uncritically adopted the prevailing racist ideology and relegated the Christian principle of the unity of humankind exclusively to the spiritual realm.

Historically, white supremacist ideology and an uncritical ethnocentrism led to the relegation of Blacks to the back pews of white churches. In Protestant communities, excluded from slaveholding congregations or denominations, separate Black Protestant denominations began to be established in 1750.[\[19\]](#) The first Black Protestant denominations arose out of the desire of Blacks to overcome the structural oppression of the white “Christian” churches whose social and religious practices denied the full humanity of its Black members and

thus their identity as person made in the image of God.

In separate churches, black Protestants could nurture and sustain their God-given identity, dignity, and culture as well as to experience community as a spiritual and visible reality. The use of the adjective “African” suggests that these separate black Protestant churches sought to adhere to the cultural value of community within their new churches in a manner that characterize their African ancestors and the authentic Christian tradition.

In Catholic churches, black Catholics, in their attempts to hold fast to the Christian tradition of class and racial inclusion, initially resisted the formation of separate parishes. They chose to establish “colored Catholic” organizations and fraternities. These groups focused on three activities simultaneously. First, they provided the spiritual nurture and affirmation of their full humanity and dignity denied to them in mixed congregations. Secondly, they combated the mistreatment of Blacks within Church and society. Finally, they struggled for inclusion by active participation within the mission and ministries of the Church as religious women, ordained men, and active laity.[\[20\]](#)

The perceived assumption, by both Catholic and Protestant white churches, of black intellectual or moral inferiority clouded their full acceptance and integration within these ecclesial communities. This marginalization denied the Black American legitimate inclusion as full participants in community which, due to their inherited African roots, was essential to their identity. This caused the emergence of their own theology; a black theology.

## **The Emergence of Black Theology and the Modern Black Church**

The origin of black theology has two significant contexts—the civil rights movement and the appearance of black nationalism. It is by no accident that those who directly influenced the development of black theology in the twentieth century were also deeply involved in the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Black theology did not come into existence from graduate study in seminaries or religious universities; rather, it emerged out of the struggle for black persons to be treated with human dignity by society and the Church. Initiated by the segregated Black Church, black theology was understood “as Christian theological reflection upon the black struggle for justice and liberation.”[\[21\]](#)

As is commonly known, the most prolific activist theologian and spiritual leader of the twentieth century was Martin Luther King, Jr. His writings emphasize the consistent centrality of community in the African American ethical tradition and the integral relationship of justice, and community within that tradition. King's leadership in the civil rights movement, although public, was never political; rather, it was a theological and ethical movement grounded in a notion of community. King's dream of the future for America and the world was expressed in his concept of "the beloved community,"

Contrary to current reverence for his work, King was not well received by the white American church establishment. Because blacks received little or no theological support from white churches, King had to search deep within his own history to find theological basis for their civil commitment to liberate black people. When King investigated into his religious history, he was reminded that the struggle of the black community did not begin in the 1950s with his Montgomery Bus Boycott, but had its roots stretching back to the days of slavery. To forge a theological witness to this knowledge, King, and later others, initiated the development of a black theology that rejected racism and affirmed the black struggle for liberation.

Thus, King's activism included strategic principles for the achievement of political and civil rights, but the purpose of that achievement was ultimately the establishment of an inclusive human community rooted in the Judeo-Christian love ethic. King once noted: "It is true that as we struggle for freedom in America, we will have to boycott at times. But we must remember... that a boycott is not an end ...the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community."[\[22\]](#)

Most remember King for his "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington in August of 1963. However, the integration theme in the black community began to lose ground after the march on Washington. It was replaced by the black nationalist philosophy of Malcolm X.[\[23\]](#) The riots in the ghettos of US cities were evidence that many blacks agreed with Malcolm's contention that America was not a dream; rather, a nightmare.[\[24\]](#) After Malcolm's assassination in 1965, the term "black power" began to replace the term "integration" among many civil rights activists. This rise in black power had a profound effect upon the appearance of black theology.

James Cone defines black power as "an attitude, an inward affirmation of the

essential worth of blackness.”[25] For the black community, the black power statement was the beginning of the conscious development of a black theology in which black ministers separated their understanding of the Gospel of Jesus from white Christianity, and identified it with the struggles of the oppressed, marginalized, and poor black community. This was a distinct detraction from prior understandings within the Black Church. Although black Christians contended that the racist behavior of white churches were wrong, they assumed that the theology of whites was essentially correct.[26] The black clergy in response to black power, was suggesting for the first time that white Christianity and the theology that justified it were empty. Black church leaders soon openly denounce white racism as the antichrist and would become unrelenting in their attack on its demonic presence in white churches. It was in this context that the term “black theology” emerged.

## **Cone’s**

Inspired by these developments, James Cone attempted to confront the silent complicity of Christian theologians and the churches in the continued perpetuation of racism. His initial work called for a profound paradigm shift in theology as well as within ecclesial structures and social patterns of relationship. Such a shift required an examination of the limits of the prevailing interpretations of Christology and ecclesiology that had legitimized ecclesial and social racism.

Examining the meaning and mission of the Church from the perspective of black theology can both strengthen and challenge the theological understanding of “communion.” Black ecclesiology, according to Cone, insists

The Church is that people called into being by the power and love of God to share in his revolutionary activity for the liberation of man. . . . The Church . . . consists of people who have been seized by the Holy Spirit and who have the determination to live as if all depends on God. It has no will of its own, only God’s will; it has no duty of its own, only God’s duty. Its existence is grounded in God.[27]

Therefore, the Church of Christ is not bounded by standards of race, class, or occupation. According to Cone, the Church is not a building or an institution, nor is it determined by bishops, priests, or ministers; rather, the Church is God’s suffering people. Cone has taken very literally the words of Ignatius of Antioch,

“Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church.”[28]

Cone reminds us that the Church is not defined by those who faithfully attend Sunday worship. As he says, “Christ was not crucified on an altar between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves...he is not in our peaceful, quiet, comfortable churches, but in the ghetto fighting”[29] suffering and injustice. Here, Cone is articulating the first of five characteristics of the Church; namely, the Church must suffer with the suffering—including the black community. In addition to this essential characteristic of the Church, Cone identifies three more distinguishing characteristics of the Church that require its orientation to be toward the black community.

In the New Testament, the Church has essentially three functions: preaching (*kerygma*), service (*diakonia*), and fellowship (*koinonia*). Preaching (*kerygma*) means proclaiming to the world what God has done for man in Jesus Christ. The Church’s mission is to tell the world about Christ’s victory over the alien hostile forces. Through Cone’s lens, we can compare Christ’s work on the cross to warfare. Through this lens, the task of the Church is to tell the world that the decisive battle in the war has been fought and won by Christ. Translated into the modern black experience, Christ has set the black community free from the enslavement of white power and privilege. This means the Church’s task is tell the oppressed, including the black community, that the powers that have oppressed them, that of racism and white privilege, has been commuted. Stated more precisely, the Church must proclaim the *kerygma* of liberation to the black community.[30]

Furthermore, the Church not only preaches the Gospel of liberation, it must also join Christ in the work of liberation. This is the *diakonia* or service of the Church. Though the decisive battle has been fought and won against injustice, the war is not over. It is the work of the Church to join Christ in the fight against evil. Cone cites Thomas Wieser this way,

The way of the church is related to the fact that the Kyrios Lord himself is on his way in the world...and the church has no choice but to follow him who precedes. Consequently, obedience and witness to the Kyrios require the discernment of the opening which he provides and the willingness to step into this opening.[31]

Christ Jesus has made the opening, and the Church must follow. In the twenty-

first century, where does he lead his people? He leads them to the black community.

Through the preaching of the Gospel, the Church calls the world to be responsible to God's act in Christ, and through its service it seeks to bring it about. But according to Cone, "The Church's preaching and service are meaningful insofar as the Church itself is a manifestation of the preached Word."<sup>[32]</sup> In this way the Church is also fellowship (*koinonia*). The Church must be in its own community what it preaches and what it seeks to accomplish in the world.<sup>[33]</sup>

Ultimately, the Black liberation ecclesiology of James Cone has emphasized that the Church as the Body of Christ must exhibit four characteristics: 1) it must suffer with the suffering; 2) it must proclaim the *kerygma* of liberation to Blacks as the liberating message of God's reign; 3) it must join in the struggle for liberation against the political, economic and social systems that contradict the Gospel of Jesus' liberating activity; and 4) it must be in its own community what it preaches and what it seeks to accomplish in the world, it must be a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality.

## **Black Theology and the Catholic Church—Broadening their Theological Horizons**

In his 1998 apostolic letter, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, Pope John Paul II declared that the year 2000 was to be a Jubilee Year during which Catholics were called to embrace the joy of repentance and conversion, a joy based upon the forgiveness of sins.<sup>[34]</sup> Foremost on John Paul's mind was disunity within the Christian Church, intolerance, the use of violence in the service of truth, and religious indifference. Because those sins that "have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his people" are among those which require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion, the Church has been invited to become "more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel and instead of offering to the world the witness of life inspired by the values of faith, they indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal."<sup>[35]</sup>

In his apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, summarizing the Synod of America held in late 1997, John Paul also stressed this call for repentance and

conversion.[36] He urged Catholics in America to engage in a new evangelization. He emphasized that conversion is possible only if it is rooted in one's encounter with Jesus in the New Testament, in the liturgy, and in the "real and concrete situation" of the complex reality of America.[37] Only by being reconciled with God can we be "prime agents" of "true reconciliation with and among [our] brothers and sisters." [38] The Catholic Church, which "embraces men and women of every nation, race, people and tongue" is called to be 'in a world marked by ideological, ethnic, economic and cultural division,' the 'living sign of the unity of the human family'." [39]

John Paul called the Church in America to a communion within and beyond itself. Commitment to communion is integrally connected to a commitment to black liberation. A social historical appropriation of communion ecclesiology in the context America will require a radical conversion by which the Church acknowledge the sinful nature of the systems of oppression within its ecclesial institutions and society which divide the human community. Acknowledgment of its complicity in the social sins that divide American society is only the beginning of the conversion. The Church must seek the forgiveness of those whom she has victimized by her past injustices; including the black community. Finally, both parties must work together toward human solidarity rooted in their shared emphasis of communion.

Within the Church, this reconciliation must be manifested in the development of more inclusive patterns of relationship between the black Catholic faithful and the Church. These patterns must allow the full participation of faithful black members of the Church in decision making, ministerial and social actions of the Church according to their capacity. Outside the walls of the Church, the call to communion resonates within both the larger black community and the Church.

They both possess a deep desire for liberation of the most vulnerable from dehumanizing patterns of relationship. This is where the emphasis must be placed.

Posing the question of what it means for a local church to live in "Pentecost communion," Richard Marzheuser suggests that a local parish must "welcome all [Christians] ... regardless of their nation, people, tribe, or language... In the triumph of Pentecost 'there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free, but Christ is all in all' (Colossians 3:11)." [40] In view of the history of oppression within the America, Marzheuser's interpretation regarding the ideal of Pentecost communion

provides the perfect picture of Christianity, but I assert that such a reality between the black community in America and the Catholic Church is possible only if both engage in the process of reconciliation based on community outlined in this essay.

The Christian social justice tradition, as illustrated in the life of Christ and evident in his Gospel, impels the Catholic Church in America to break her silence about the marginalization, devaluation, and, systemic oppression of blacks and other groups within the ecclesial, social, economic, and political institutions of this nation. The Catholic Church must begin to engage the new theological voices that have emerged in the last half of the twentieth century associated with black liberation theology. Likewise, black theological voices must continue to mature and deepen as they engage Catholic theologians whose cultural, class, and religious traditions differ from their own. Such a theological dialogue will reveal areas of continuity and discontinuity. While new questions will be raised, new understandings of God, Christ, and the Church will undoubtedly emerge. Both black liberation theologies and Catholic communion ecclesiology compel each to engage in a rigorous dialogue with scholars from diverse cultural contexts within this nation as we search the images and metaphors for God and God's mission that embody the truth and justice of those who desire to live in communion with God.

Cone's early experience made him initially less optimistic than King about the possibility of white American Christians transcending the boundaries of racism and the other systems of oppression that mitigate against the full historical embodiment or visible manifestation of communion in our ecclesial communities. Still he held fast to the image of King's beloved community and urged the black churches to engage in the ongoing conversion and transformation that will signal the full realization of this vision of communion in its broadest and most inclusive manifestation in our world. Cone insists, with Malcolm X, that the distinct contribution of the black experience and scholarship including black theology must become primary agents of both liberation and communion. Cone asserted, "We were created for each other and not against each other. We must, therefore, break down the barriers that separate people from one another. As we seek the beloved community of humankind."[\[41\]](#) Cone's vision is faithful to that of the Church understood as communion. Fidelity to that vision will lead black theologians and the American Catholic Church to broaden their horizons and embrace the whole human community through intra-ecclesial dialogue. Such a broadening of theological horizons will

lead to commitment to the realization of a just Church and society in which the Catholic Church and the black community dwell together in the communion of love.

## **Conclusion**

Black liberation theology and Catholic communion ecclesiology are not opposing theologies. One presupposes the other. No one can enter into full communion if one's relationship to the other is marked by indifference or oppression. As the Church enters the start of the third millennium, she has an opportunity to acknowledge their past individual and social sins, to ask forgiveness of one another, and to commit themselves to the living in communion as the people of God that Jesus envisioned at the end of his earthly sojourn. One can become one with others only if one can speak the truth of one's sinful past, asking and granting forgiveness, and reaching out to one another in a spirit of reconciling love and solidarity. Community is the pattern of communion manifest in the Triune God. This oneness can serve as a model of ecclesial and human communion. Only when the American Catholic Church speak and live in truth can she become a Church whose patterns of relationship become a sacrament of radical unity in diversity. To get to that truth one must break silent complicity with the social evil that has marred the past and continues to mar the present reality of black Americans.

Today, many question the relevance of black theology. I believe that black theology will cease to be necessary when and only when all men and women are free of sin and all that oppresses. Only then will all be embraced into the oneness for which Jesus prayed in fulfillment of his mission to lead all creation back to the fullness of communion with God, with one another, and with all creation; black and white.

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[3] Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics, *For the Love of One Another: A Special Message on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of Brothers and Sisters to Us* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1989) 39, 41.

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[9] Phelps, *Uncommon Faithfulness*, 117

[10] *Ibid.*, 117-119, emphasis added.

[11] Jamie T. Phelps, “Communion Ecclesiology and Black Liberation Theology,” *Theological Studies* 61(200), 675.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*, 675-677

[15] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1990), 3.

[16] This is prevalent in the black community today, particularly among movie screenwriters, hip-hop musicians, and athletes who frequently use what is common referred to as “derogatory terms” to signify their continued connection to the impoverished black community.

[17] Peter Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 63-72.

[18] *Ibid.*, 89

[19] Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 78; A complete listing of separate Black Protestant congregations and denominations founded between the years 1758 and 1908 is found on pages 83–86, but its inclusion is beyond the scope of this essay.

[20] *Three Catholic Afro-American Congresses* (New York: Arno, 1978). These 19th-century lay congresses sought to combat the impact of racial prejudice on blacks within the Church. They also provided a space where Blacks could act as agents of their own mission and evangelization in collaboration with white priests, religious women and men, and others engaged in Catholic ministry among blacks. I also consulted, though not cited directly, Jamie T. Phelps, “John R. Slattery’s Missionary Strategies,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7 (Spring 1988), 202–5. In this work, Phelps reveals that black Catholics often argued against separate churches since this accommodated racial prejudice rather than combating it. Slattery argued for separate churches for blacks.

[21] James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 7

[22] Martin Luther King Jr as quoted in Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 173

[23] See Alphonso Pinkey, *Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) for a detailed study of black nationalism. The best source for an introduction to Malcolm X’s nationalist views is Alex Hailey’s *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (New York: Grove Publishing, 1964).

[24] For the impact of the riots of the US ghettos on the civil rights movement, see Vincent Harding’s *The Other American Revolution*, (Los Angeles: University of California Center of African American Studies, 1980).

[25] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1969), 8.

[26] Before the rise of black theology, black churches accepted uncritically the theology of white churches, using their doctrines and creeds as if racist behavior of whites had no impact upon their view of the gospel.

[27] Cone, *Black Power*, 63-65

[28] Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans*, accessed April 22, 2017; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0109.htm>

[29] *Ibid.*, 66

[30] *Ibid.*, 67 and James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 131

[31] *Ibid.*, 68

[32] Cone, *Black Power*, 70.

[33] Genuine black liberation theology, according to Cone, would include embracing a “Black Jesus.” If the Church is a continuation of the Incarnation, and if the Church and Christ are where the oppressed are, then Christ and the Church must identify totally with the oppressed to the extent that they too suffer for the same reasons. In America, blacks are oppressed for their blackness; therefore, liberation could only be realized by Christ and the Church becoming black. See James Cone, *For My People*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984) pgs. 53-96

[34] John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, No. 31; accessed April 15, 2017; [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_10111994\\_tertio-millennio-adveniente\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_10111994_tertio-millennio-adveniente_en.html).

[35] *Ibid.*, 33

[36] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, No. 3; accessed April 15, 2017; [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_22011999\\_ecclesia-in-america.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america.html)

[37] Ibid., No. 12-13

[38] Ibid., No. 32

[39] Ibid.

[40] Richard Marzheuser, “The Holy Spirit and the Church: A Truly Catholic Communion,” *New Theology Review* 11 (1998), 63–64.

[41] Ibid., 318

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## By Guest Blogger Allison Gingras

In Matthew's Gospel with concern to prayer, Jesus says, "Pray then like this," then follows up with the glorious words of *The Lord's Prayer*, also known as the *Our Father*. Oblivious for most of my life of the origins of this prayer, I often resisted reverting to it while in prayer. Ironically, spending my time in my conversations with Jesus asking him to teach me how to pray better, how to grow closer to Him, and how to be more faithful to His teachings.

Had I opened the Scriptures or maybe even paid a little more attention during the readings at Mass, perhaps I would have discovered this connection much sooner. The quote from St. Jerome, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ!" was quite fitting of my situation.

The Lord's Prayer was not the only prayer to which I held a deep aversion. I felt this way about all the rote prayers of my youth. The Glory Be, the Act of Contrition, even the Hail Mary (just to name a few) all fell into this category. I thought these all just boring, insincere prayers taught to me as a child, but now as a "mature" adult I was perfectly capable of fashioning my own prayers or merely engaging in direct dialog with Jesus.

Included in this prayer evasion was the Rosary; partially due to the struggle to stay focused on the counting of the prayers and partially because I had convinced myself that there was very little value to memorized prayer. How foolish I was to discount the rich treasury of prayer that the Catholic faith had provided me.

I have since come to not only appreciate but rely on these prayers.

Here are three unique and unexpected ways I've learned to embrace and fully utilize the power of the Rosary:

## Spiritual Abacus

My mind likes to wander; keeping my thoughts on a subject for longer than 15 seconds can sometimes be a challenge. My short attention span wreaked havoc

on my ability to complete a Rosary until the Holy Spirit inspired a perfect plan for my brain. The beads on one of my favorite rosaries slide. As I fingered my way through the prayers, I thought how it sort of resembled a Chinese Abacus. Suddenly, I thought, “What if I use each bead to as a counter – creating a ‘spiritual abacus’?” My idea was to recall a particular person and/or intention as I moved from bead to bead.

Being a very visual person, I picture the person or where they live. That often leads to my mind shifting to, either another person in the same house, or another intention related to the same subject matter. Soon I found myself organizing intentions from decade to decade – praying for 10 women having babies; 10 neighbors from my childhood, or 10 people in need of work or new jobs. Before I knew it, the Rosary was complete, and I had [remained on task the entire time](#). The best part: much-needed prayers had been offered for at least 55 people – though that count was typically much higher as multiple names would sometimes pop into my head halfway through the Hail Mary!

## **Mileage Counter**

The “Spiritual Abacus” mindset worked wonders to keep me focused (most days), however, there were still lots of external forces in my home vying for my attention. One day the Holy Spirit showed me a wonderful way to overcome that obstacle as well. As I sat down to be the first prayer in a 54-Rosary Novena, I had a nudge to head outside to walk and pray. At first, I chuckled to myself at the thought – I do not DO outside. There are bugs and air (which can sometimes be very cold or oppressively hot), not to mention walking on the roads near my home can be dangerous. Since I could not shake the nagging desire to get outside, I obeyed, hence launching my now (nearly) [daily Rosary walk](#) habit.

Quickly I discovered that not only could my rosary walk help me focus but could also help answer my prayer to become a healthier me. I could even use my Rosary to keep track of my exercise time. A Rosary typically takes about 17 minutes to recite, most people aim to move 20 to 30 minutes a day – this equals (roughly) a rosary and a few extra laps. One priest I know prays all four mysteries on his walk helping him reach his hour a day goal. I’ve never been that ambitious; but I have been known to add a Divine Mercy Chaplet and /or an express novena of 9 consecutive Memorare prayers ([via St. Mother Teresa](#)) now and then.

## Better than Counting Sheep

One of my sweetest childhood memories is the sleepovers at my grandparents' house. The only trouble was my bedtime separation anxiety. My dad's parents lived almost an hour away, so bringing me home at 9 p.m., was not an option. My wise and faithful Grammie Perry (as we called her) had the perfect solution. She would hand me her Rosary, and tell me to pray it to fall asleep. "Great idea, Grammie! It is really boring and I will be out like a light in minutes."

Her plan was far more holy and helpful than that. She wasn't giving me the rosary to bore me, but to empower me to be brave and fill me with the peace I needed to sleep. My grandmother knew the power of prayer, especially to our Blessed Mother!

So, I would pray it and it would help me sleep; though the next morning there was sometimes this guilty feeling that I fell asleep before finishing all the prayers. Grammie Perry had an answer for that as well. It was her belief, and mine now as well, that if we fall asleep praying, our dear Guardian Angels finish the remaining prayers for us. To this day if I am struggling to fall asleep because I can either not calm my mind after a busy day or I am traveling and my sleeping arrangements are less than ideal, I pull out my trusty Rosary and pray!

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Allison Gingras is founder of [Reconciled To You](#), where she blogs, shares and speaks about the Catholic faith in our everyday life and the many opportunities life presents to discover the grace of God! She shares these with great enthusiasm, passion and a sense of humor. Allison is a WINE Specialist overseeing and facilitating the online aspect of the Between the WINES Book Clubs for [WINE: Women in the New Evangelization](#).

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## Who Is My Neighbor in the World of Today? [at Designs by Birgit]



In the book of

[Luke](#)

, an expert in the law asks, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. His examples guide us through several encounters with an injured man - all with diverse responses. Jesus then turns to the lawyer and asks:

Which of these three, in thy opinion, was neighbour to him that fell among the robbers? But he said: He that showed mercy to him. And Jesus said to him: Go, and do thou in like manner.

Digging deeper into the basis of this story, I find myself wondering how many minute details are regularly missed when it comes to the coincidental encounters we all experience.

### In Search Of Neighbor

Ever since my husband and I temporarily moved into a duplex while our tiny house was completed, the family across the way has intrigued me. Unlike the remote, pastoral surroundings of our new home, here we have close neighbors all around. We have become acquainted with some of them. Like us, the neighbor behind us also has a small dog, with a propensity for escaping her allowable geography, which has given us occasions for casual conversation. Next door, a precocious neighbor toddler is the same age as our youngest granddaughter and across the street, a neighbor dutifully cares for the needs of her aging mother. By chance encounters and common interests, I've found small familiarities with these families.

One neighbor, however, I have not met yet am intrigued by chance observations. Passively sitting in the driveway while the rest of our downsized belongings are loaded onto a small trailer, I ponder on the insight I have gained, just by reflective attention to a few details.

## **Physical Challenges**

If we are willing, there is much to be discerned by a casual glance now and again. This particular neighbor suffers from some debilitating physical ailment. Handicap plates on the car, the glimpse of a wheelchair, and thoughtful placement of a strategically situated side table speaks of someone who loves the outdoors but is confined to the inside while looking out. Sometimes there is a game of chess visible on the little table in front of the gleaming glass door but even so, the preferred vantage point is always outdoors.

## **Love of Nature**

There are robust hanging plants, thriving plants in pots, and a rainbow of vibrant flowerbeds all around the front yard. Their splendid garden features a riot of color. Nurture and care of this Eden are clearly evident.

This neighbor shares my love of animals. A chance glance in his direction gives a glimpse of not one but two cats, casually strolling past the glass door and then luxuriously perching on the sofa. At just about dusk each evening they head out to prowl and do what it is that our feline friends do under the cover of darkness. They quickly return to the welcoming arms of their humans, which indicates they feel loved.

Along with the array of blossoms, foliage, and pampered cats are several bird feeders - finches, robins, and humming birds all have their own specific feeding station. All of this appears to be easily viewable from the carefully arranged furnishings and the glass door.

## **Our Neighbor Is Tidy And Has Nothing to Hide**

Despite the obvious physical challenges faced, the yard and drive are meticulously kept. No offensive litter, neatly clipped grass, and much attention to order are evident in their landscape. Our neighbor portrays a tidy habit.

Open blinds, windows, and doors speak of the candid nature of our neighbor - there is nothing superficial. As open as a book, this person is living a full life despite the burdensome hand they have been dealt. There is a pure appreciation of life evident here and a richness not provided by merely temporal goods. By all appearances this neighbor finds boundless joy, fulfillment, and peace in what he has been given. His cup seems to overflow with an almost enviable God-given plenitude of riches.

## **Interact With Neighbor**

As I sit here today, our last day of inhabiting this bustling neighborhood, I can't help but wonder about the lives of the people we never came to know. Like us, they may be in transition. Some, like the elderly neighbor, are most likely here to stay – as their lives tranquility follow the setting of the sun.

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I've spontaneously prayed for these people, as they appeared out of their doorways and enclosures and have marveled at how much God loves each of us no matter how different our lives have been or are destined to be.

## **Opportunities Missed?**

What fruitful opportunities were missed and are now regrettably gone forever? Should I have crossed the street and struck up conversations? In retrospect, I inwardly answer, yes. Would I have found a receptive soul? Perhaps, I could have learned something of benefit to my own Eternity. What is done, is done, but a lesson to take away is to seek out opportunities and not blindly march through our days as single-minded, secluded souls.

The question I ponder now, is how will I present myself as a Godly witness to others? How will I show mercy to a mere acquaintance? Not in search of worldly praise but as a spiritually positive example of what it means to be a neighbor who is obedient to Christ. Are others' casual impressions of me valid or negatively warped by a lack of transparency or some faulty perception? Even as we seek to live our lives in the best way possible, we are reminded that our lives give witness to neighbor, concerning who we are.

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## Choosing Each Other [at Making It In Vermont]

I often think, when I see Jesus on the cross, about the pain of Mary...

Why didn't God just come into the world alone? Why did he use one of us? He could have redeemed us from this often difficult world all by himself without pain and a mum, but he didn't...

He knew that snapping his fingers and fixing it all, doesn't do much to connect us. When I am hungry and I eat, I am connected to no one and satisfy only myself, but when I am hungry and I share my food with someone, feel the pang of not being quite full, but do it anyway, I am connected, by choice and by sacrifice.

As much as we fight against it, we are connected when we choose to sacrifice for others. Whether it is in something very small or very very big, like the day Mary's son was nailed to the cross for us.

Her son, the same young-ish man who turned water into wine for her at a wedding when they ran out and she told the catering crew to "do whatever he tells you". The same man who raised his friend Lazarus from the dead after 3 days. The same man who stayed with his mum for 30 years, till the time was just right. The same child she boldly said yes to when the angel Gabriel asked her if she would become mother of God.

He trusted her, he created her, he loved her, but now... He allowed pain, excruciating pain, to pierce not only himself, but his very own mother. And in that pain they were connected forever. Nails pounded through precious hands and humble dirty feet. His life hanging there like meat... thirsty for water, thirsty for souls. She stands beside, she stands below, steadied by faith, faith in Him.

She stands, she watches, she boldly stays with, and holds her lifeless son when it has ended, her heart shredded.

Willing to experience it all. The joys and the sorrows. She said yes to it all as a young woman even before she knew exactly what her "yes" would mean. But

she trusted her God and that somehow somehow it would all work out for good.

And it did.

Her pain has not been in vain, her joys have meaning. She raised the son of God and then for us he was raised.

We all are given a yes or a no to this life we are given and we renew them constantly.

Mary's yes in retrospect was monumental, world changing.

We can't always fully grasp our "yeses", and how sometimes it may mean the cross and other times a wedding stocked with wine made from water (Ummm, that must have been a great time!). But each day we renew all sorts of little yeses and they matter. They bring us and those around us closer to becoming the people we were meant to be.

I imagine Mary when I say yes at whatever life is throwing at me. Mary, standing steadfast beside me, just like she was for Jesus, leading me by the model of her faith to her son, showing me a journey of joys and sorrows, sacrifice and choice, teaching me that in my yes, I am choosing more than just me.

With love from Vermont,

~Lisa

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## **Are Most Christians Clueless About Their True Identity? [at joy of nine9]**

A good friend, Martha, from Madonna House, “happened” to sit beside a self-proclaimed witch on an old bus heading towards the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Noticing Martha’s large cross identifying her as a member of the Lay Apostolate, the witch cynically remarked that most Christians were stupid because they were completely clueless about the potential power that existed within each of them. Chuckling, she pointed out all the people on the bus who were Christians. How did she know? The witch could “see” a blue light or aura around every baptized Christian. She then mocked Christians who acted like weak victims but was pleased that the power of the Holy Spirit was usually wasted on them and lay dormant.

At the time Martha was having trouble fasting and praying in seclusion twice a week. When her seat mate boasted that she fasted regularly for the destruction of Christian families, Martha was appalled. If a witch could fast motivated only by hate, surely she could fast with the help of the Holy Spirit while motivated by love. Surely she, who had taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience could start relying more on the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within her to live out her vocation to intercede through prayer. That encounter with a witch radically altered Martha’s attitude, inspiring a renewed zeal to live fully in Christ.

God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. When we ignore His indwelling Spirit, it is like owning an expensive computer which we never bother to plug in and use.

### **The Holy Spirit Dwells Within All Baptized Christians**

Christians, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#))



The light of Christ, His Spirit, dwells in all baptized Christians, whether we are aware of it or not. When Jesus said, “Remain in me as I remain in you” ([John 15:4](#)), He was stating a fact; He lives in us. Whether our experience seems to line up with Christ’s statement or not, the truth remains. Yet, most of us live our daily lives as if this were not the case; we are oblivious to the fact that we are actually the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul chastised the Corinthians for not

recognizing this spiritual reality when he wrote: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

We cannot experience anything of the spiritual life in ourselves apart from Christ. We do not acquire something personal in our experience because all the spiritual experiences of Christians have already been experienced by Christ. What we call “our” experience is only our entering into Jesus’ history and experience. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is clear:

The One whom the Father has sent into our hearts, the Spirit of his Son, is truly God. Consubstantial with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is inseparable from them, in both the inner life of the Trinity and his gift of love for the world. In adoring the Holy Trinity, life-giving, consubstantial, and indivisible, the Church’s faith also professes the distinction of persons. When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath. In their joint mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable. To be sure, it is Christ who is seen, the visible image of the invisible God, but it is the Spirit who reveals him. ([CCC 689](#))

Saint Paul also prayed that people would become enlightened “... that you may know” ([Ephesians 1:18](#)). We need our eyes opened so we may know the truth that the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts; if the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts we have the Father and the Son dwelling within. This is not merely doctrine but reality.

To many Christians, the Holy Spirit is unreal. They think He is as simply an influence for good, like a conscience, and that the Holy Spirit simply tries to show them how to be good. The trouble with the Corinthian Christians was not that they had not received the Holy Spirit but that they were not aware of His presence. They failed to realize the greatness of the One who lived in their hearts. Saint Paul wrote to them: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Saint Paul’s words are for Catholics today as well.

### **Through the Holy Spirit**

... “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” [[Romans 5:5](#)].

... This love (the “charity” of *1 Cor 13*) is the source of the new life in Christ, made possible because we have received “power” from the Holy Spirit [[Acts 1:8](#); cf. [1 Corinthians 13](#)].

By this power of the Spirit, God’s children can bear much fruit. ... “We live by the Spirit”; the more we renounce ourselves, the more we “walk by the Spirit” [[Galatians 5:25](#); cf. [Matthew 16:24-26](#)]. ([CCC 734-736](#))

A Christian is one with Christ, born again by His Spirit. A Catholic is not someone who merely agrees with a set of teaching, or strives to live a good life in his own strength and power. Living in, with and through the Holy Spirit is not for a select few saints or for the so-called Charismatics or Pentecostals. The release of the Holy Spirit and life in the Spirit is for all because it is simply the normal Christian life. Let’s honestly choose to humbly trust that God is wiser and smarter than we are and so give the Holy Spirit permission to take charge in our lives. Let’s choose to live a Holy Spirit led life and thus allow God’s power to heal and transform our world through us. Let’s simply choose to be who were really are.

***Be who you were created to be, and you will set the world on fire. – St. Catherine of Siena***



connecting with [theology is a verb](#)

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## Man & God



I have written, on and off, on my blog, *Travels of a New Christian*, since 2012. In fact, it has been over a year since my last blog. Much has happened since then, not the least of which is that I have completed my first book, *The Road to Spiritual Iron*.

Recent events and revelations have brought me back to my blog to start a series that I believe is long overdue. It's exploratory. I am not asserting that what follows in this series is of a foundational nature in my theology, nor am I using this series to attack Christianity. However, our Western culture had moved so voraciously, since the 1960's, in a direction other than that of the Christian hopeful, that it appears to be a good time to examine some of foundational characteristics of what has been called Christianity since the Roman Empire established Nicene Christianity as its state religion in 380 A.D., with the Edict of Thessalonica.

I will present this series in the form of a hypothesis, and I am confident that it will disturb those who consider themselves Christian; from the most

conservative to the most liberal. I ask for the reader's patience, and most especially, I ask for their open mind, as I am going to take us to a place that few have considered as a feasible, in fact, a divinely-appointed future for mankind. In order to do this, I am to begin with the simple concept of God, along with His possible characteristics.

Putting aside, for the moment, that several religions have already delineated the characteristics and personalities of their god(s), if one were to describe a god(s) whose characteristics reflected the sensory world, and not the spiritual world or any other immaterial world that is non-sensory, what would this (these) god(s) be like?

It seems the first thought would be to establish a number; a quantity. After all, the thought of continually inserting text surrounded by parentheses is wearisome. One god, two, three? How many gods would there actually be in order to create and maintain all of creation? I'm going to jump ship again in noting that such an exercise would yield an infinite number of options. There could literally be a god for every particular, or in retailing jargon, stock keeping unit (SKU), of all that exists. Let's drop this matter for now.

Moving on... but I just can't seem to yet. It's interesting that man, through his primordial, self-awareness renaissance, came to the conclusion that first, there was such a thing as a god, then second, that there were, in all likelihood, multiple gods. From there, as time moved along, things settled down until about three to four thousand years ago when a few cultures managed to whittle them down to one; or at least only one that they worshipped over all others. Interesting again... I guess this would account for tragedy and bad luck. I mean, if I were a self-respecting god, I'd be more than a little pissed that I was considered a second-rate god by some slovenly, puny bunch of mortals, and not the prime stuff. I'd toss a lightning bolt or two myself.

Now, sticking to the lazy and generally accepted notion that there is but one God, let's address this "worship" thing for a moment... Why would one worship a god? Using the word "god" as a name, with a capital G, it seems fairly obvious that one would worship a god over, say nature, because mankind was more than a little unintelligent, and cognition & reason had not really found its oars yet. Mankind was much like a rowboat without the oars in those early days; caught in the flow of the chance of life much like Tom Sawyer on the Mississippi River. No one knew where they were going, nor cared one bit;

except in the context of survival. Where's the food, shelter, and security? Things were pretty primal and basic back in those days.

Perhaps, they worshipped God because they simply could not explain anything in any other way. The world intruded upon them in a clamorous manner of sight and sound, provision and starvation, life and death; and primitive mankind had no sensible explanation. There just had to be something like themselves, yet something so much more than them that was responsible for their experiences as a mortal creature of sentience. I say, "like themselves", because it would be illogical to think that such a conclusion would propel a rock to divinity. Yes, we did consider the assets of nature as possible gods, but that didn't last for long; too rational. No, the thing we had in mind was more like us, but not like us. After all, we couldn't make light come and go, dark come and go, celestial faces travel through the sky day and night, wind blow, rain fall, thunder resound, and lightning crash. We also couldn't make food appear from nothing, nor carve out sheltering caves from solid rock. And though we sensed the urgency of sex, and practiced the art faithfully on a regular basis, we surely had little idea about how a child came into being. Uga must have been quite surprised with that whole birth thing. She was just bending over to pick up a flower. God was, therefore, born in the minds of mankind. That was surely the only cognition that made sense to a self-aware hominid.

This is fun! We have, so far, a god who is responsible for everything the tribe could not comprehend at all, and that was everything, and later could comprehend everything as something from God; once this god was concretely born in the tribe's mind, of course. Until that moment, they just kept running around in circles yelling "Juba, juba!" So, this takes us closer to the characteristics of this god, and I would imagine that everything that man gave thanks for would be a great place to start the list of attributes of God.

Man was alive. That's got to be a reason for thanking God. There was food, shelter, security, social networking (no smartphones yet), and the penultimate relief of a good orgasm. All good reasons to thank God. There has to be a relationship between why man gave thanks to God and just who God was in reality, and I do mean reality. Early god and the gifts that flowed from God were decisive to the survival of mankind. This was more than serious stuff; it was headlining stuff. The marquee always, in those days, read, "Now Showing: God!"

You know how Hollywood will get stuck on some actor, and there proceeds a seemingly endless parade of this actor as Hannibal, this actor as Philip Marlowe, this actor as Gertrude Stein, and this actor as the Grinch. Hollywood squeezes all the juice right out of the fruit until there's nothing left but pith and skin. Then, toss him they do and move on to the next. Kind of like that today. "Now Showing: Man."

So, it would follow that man thought it wise to give this god some measure of thanks; to give worship. I'm sure with each divinely-appointed gift came that measure of thanks. I am also sure, knowing mankind, that it evolved into a more or less lazy kind of thanks; the "I'm taking you for granted" kind of thanks. Aah! Know I see how worship, the authoritarian kind of worship got into the game. Ugo, husband of Uga, didn't give proper praise to God after running down an antelope, and a lioness came along and stole the tribe's hard-earned food for the week. The tribe's starving eyes of suspicion soon fell upon him, and with the alpha male's approval, Ugo was served for supper the next day. From that poignant moment forward, no one thought not to properly praise God for his provision, and there evolved the concept of a schedule for worshipping their god so as to ensure the god's good graces. It was the alpha male, along with his busy-body wife, who were in charge of making sure proper worship happened on schedule. Religion was born, and since this is a Christian blog, let's talk Christianese and apply its doctrines as we move along.

If man gives thanks to God, God must be a sort of good fellow, and since we think much of ourselves, we saw this fellow, God, as much like us; perhaps even in our own image. I'm happy to come to such a conclusion so early in this contest. It shortens this blog by a few hundred-thousand words. God is like man, but more so. Well, I guess the next question has to do with that "more so" part.

First, that "more so" part can only be expressed in the human language and is thus limited by man's intellect; leaving our understanding of God, as a reflection of the sensory world, to somewhere between a simple element and a prokaryote.

If man were to detest God, for all of the evil that is in the world, then God must be some sort of bad fellow, and since we think too much of ourselves, we see this fellow, God, as much like ourselves; evil. So, man and God are both good and evil.

I'm merely reporting the historical analysis of three millennium of the finest intellects of mankind. Personally, I don't believe the bad part about God, because I don't believe that God was made in man's image. I also don't believe that man was made in God's image, but that's an argument for later. I also don't believe that man is evil, and that's also another argument for later.

Since this is my blog, I'm going to declare God "good" and move forward.

I want to take a leap here into a hypothesis that might just reflect back to this first discussion regarding the characteristics of a god. Here goes.

Try to consider the possibility that God created and continues to create only good things. *(pause)* And try to imagine that no good thing can stray from being a good thing; for to see such happen would render God as less than good himself. *(pause)* This fits. This is easy logic. Now consider, therefore, that mankind is thus good and has not strayed from the course that God set forth for mankind when created. *(pause)* Mankind is evolving; this we must acknowledge, for man has changed in all ways physically and intellectually since recorded historical evidence began, and therefore, this evolution is of God's will. Here comes the hard part for many. Now imagine that where man is today and where man will be tomorrow is also in God's plan and of God's will. *(pause)* For many, it might be about time to get out the barf bag. I understand the concerted concern.

Is it not fact, we cry out in our anguish, that the society of Western mankind – you know those guys: los supremos – is rapidly abandoning God, with many even declaring God as "dead"? With this self-evident, how can mankind be on God's path and under God's will? This certainly cannot be good, which in turn, would toss the whole hypothesis out before it even gets started.

I've always enjoyed the sentence, "God is dead." as if God knocked god-self off after being rejected by one of the created. Or even better yet, as if Friedrich Nietzsche personally did God in at some Mixed Martial Arts event. And then there's the contradiction. If God is now dead, there must have been a time when God was alive.

I believe that people have a big problem with man's relationship with God because of two things. First, mounting distortions within Christianity of the true nature of God has produced an incomprehensible and unsolvable problem in

comprehending and thus having a meaningful relationship with the true god. We see this especially evident in the fact that there is an authoritative elite of clergy and intellectuals that have been appointed by the previous assortment of clergy and intellectuals as the sole arbitrators of God's truths. We believe somehow that God is so inadequate in God's ability to create, that "good" is more closely defined as "barely adequate". According to these elites, though man has evolved, God is still as far away from mankind as God was in the beginning. It's a lovely way to describe power.

And second, people focus solely upon the indoctrination of the particulars of a culture – not a surprise – that is of their own circumstances and generations, and thus refuse to consider the big picture. Remember, if your Christian, God doesn't think in minutes, days, years, centuries, or any other value of time. God isn't even in time; end of sentence.

The particulars. What am I talking about? A particular is any one thing in creation; an element being rather base; a porpoise quite complex. Particulars might be a set that yield another particular, but it is always that stock keeping unit that is part of the library of God's creation. That's the physicality of particulars. But there's another type of particular, and this type resides in the human intellect; both unconscious and conscious. Here, I'm talking about the mostly common events of both public and private action and discourse, that any culture focuses its collective consciousness upon.

For example, in today's world – the modern, Western world that is – much debate is given over to the sexual revolution in all of its forms. Also, the issues of family and marriage seem of great import. And what about the authority and size of government? Some demand more; some less. Guns, immigration, religion, race, etc., are all social particulars. These are the particulars of the cultural impetus that shapes the culture to come – albeit near future – of post-modern man.

Let's first deal with the second problem that man has in fostering a proper relationship with God; that being mankind's sense of the particulars. Getting that out of the way will permit one, who is willing to consider my hypothesis in full, to better assess what I am to say about the first and primary problem; authority, and its impending fate as the means to the salvific end of Christianity.

I'll address the issue of Particulars in my next blog.

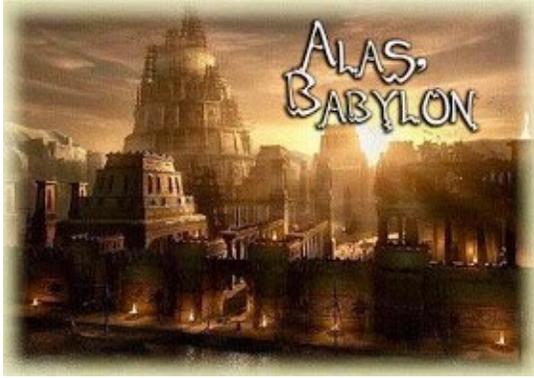
## God Bless – Reese

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## Alas Babylon: Fallen Into Sexual Immorality [at Christ's Faithful Witness]



*Then the kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her will weep and wail at the sight of the smoke rising from the fire that consumes her. In fear of her torment, they will stand at a distance and cry out: “Woe, woe to the great city, the mighty city of Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come.” And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, because there is no one left to buy their cargo. (Rev. 18:9-11)*

by Susan Fox

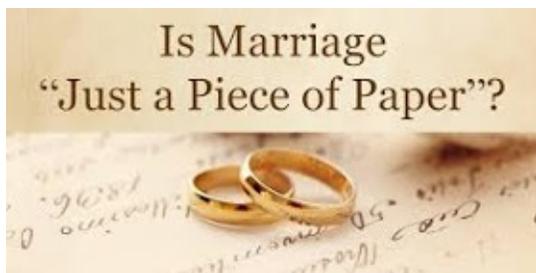
Civilisations rise and fall.

But few are able to tell why.

For me, the story begins in the tourist mecca of Port Townsend, Washington, U.S.A. on a sunny day in 2013. Born and raised in the United States, I am a relic of that bygone age of the 1950s — the last gasp of a mostly Christian nation full of churches and temples where lifelong fidelity in marriage and patriotism was respected.

On that summer day, however, I was with my dear atheist poet friend. If you love good writing in the U.S. today, you love pagans and atheists. Now I imagined as most of them present themselves as completely rational beings free of all religion, that she was of the same ilk.

She had just given me the sad news that her live-in boyfriend of 22 years had dumped her. The rat. However, she was



coming to the startling realisation that free love didn't work. "Susan, I was so proud of the fact that we stayed together 22 years without a piece of paper!" she wept.

To console her, I promised to take her shopping downtown Port Townsend. I forgot half the stores there sold New Age paraphernalia and books. One minute I was standing in the sunshine on a lovely seaside Victorian street corner with automobiles and ice cream stores, and the next minute I followed her into the dark and mysterious New Age.



There was nothing in that store that I wanted. I sat down and waited patiently. She looked at the counter full of rocks. They were small ordinary rocks, but some cost quite a bit of money. She was trying to be frugal. She began to tell me that she used to have a rock she kept in her pocket and she thought she lost it while still living with her boyfriend just before the break up. But now she would find a more meaningful rock to keep in her pocket. “Wait a minute,” I thought, “Did she suggest a new rock would get her a new boyfriend?”



Suddenly, I realised I had passed through another invisible curtain. I was standing in a primitive zoistic culture. That word may not be familiar to you. British anthropologist Dr. J.D. Unwin used the term to describe a society that loved magic rocks, permitted prenuptial sexual freedom, but had no religious rites. Unwin — author of *Sex and Culture* (1934) — studied the sexual behaviours of 86 cultures in every geographic region of the world through 5,000 years of history. He carefully categorised each civilisation by their religious rites and sexual activity. It was a very clever way of categorising numerous cultures with a wide range of beliefs.

Zoistic cultures were dead civilisations. They were on the bottom rung of the ladder: they had no temples, no burial rites, no chastity, no energy. Usually, they got swallowed up by a more chaste group of people full of energy and creativity. Or else they began to practice prenuptial chastity and they thrived.

Regarding one zoistic culture, Unwin wrote,

- “Any man may find a stone for himself, the shape of which strikes his fancy, or some other object ... which seems to him something unusual. He gets money and scatters it around the stone or on the place where he has seen the object of his fancy.”

This becomes a sacred place and the man the master of the sacred place or the rock. The owner of the sacred rock becomes rich and famous, especially if he successfully uses the rock to bring rain, end disease or find a new love interest. His neighbour would immediately come over to obtain a share of the power. The rock owner would charge for the privilege.

My friend paid \$15 for a little rock to keep in her pocket.



- “The man who was fortunate to possess such a stone was consulted in cases of sickness and distress... Such a man ... might carry the stone with him on his daily rounds.” Unwin continued.

Among the uncivilised cultures, Unwin categorised three types: zoistic (no temples, no funeral rites, but pre-nuptial sexual freedom); manistic (funeral rites for the dead and irregular or occasional sexual continence) and deistic (erected temples, had priests, insisted on pre-nuptial chastity.) The civilised societies he studied were deistic and rationalistic, which means they insisted on pre-nuptial and post-nuptial chastity.

Unwin found that cultures — supporting faithful marriage and prenuptial chastity — prosper, actually thrive in the area of the arts, science, commerce, architecture, colonisation and domination of surrounding cultures. Britain established colonies all over the world while at home, their wives were faithful, their daughters virgins.



"I offer no opinion about rightness or wrongness," Unwin said. He wouldn't even use "chastity," a word with Christian connotations. He calls it limited sexual opportunity before and after marriage. The results he discovered puzzled him, and he could offer no explanation.

"The whole of human history does not contain a single instance of a society which has advanced to the rational condition unless its females have been born

into an absolutely monogamous tradition,” Unwin wrote, “Nor is there any example of a group which has retained its high position in the cultural scale after less rigorous customs have become part of the inherited tradition of all its members.”

Is Europe and the United States sliding into zoistic and manistic cultures? Here in Austria, there are temples — Catholic Churches in every little town — but few families attend regularly. The days set aside to remember the dead, however, still attract a large crowd at the cemetery. So perhaps Austria could be categorised by Dr. Unwin as manistic.

We greet one another with *Gruß Gott!* or God’s Greeting. I myself was thrilled to find the Heilige Geist Apotheke (Holy Spirit Pharmacy), but it was operated by a Muslim. All the other drug stores have Catholic names as well in Austria. But young people here are living together without marriage, and most couples seeking to be married in the Catholic Church are already cohabitating.

"In human records there is no instance of a society retaining its energy after a complete new generation has inherited a tradition which does not insist on pre-nuptial and post-nuptial continence," Unwin wrote. That’s right. The completely unreligious British anthropologist found that societies flourished during times that sexual fidelity and prenuptial virginity was valued. But once sexual mores loosened, societies decline.

“If we make a god of sexuality, that god will fail in ways that affect the whole person and perhaps the whole society,” wrote Philip Yancey after he reread Unwin’s book, which he dubbed the [“Lost Sex Study.”](#)



Imagine that! It's not such a private thing to decide to live together without marriage. It destroys your culture. The opposite unleashes cultural creativity in arts, science,

economic prosperity and the spread of civilisation!

- “There are very few uncivilised societies who compelled a girl to confine her sexual activity to one man throughout her life; these societies, as we shall see, occupied the highest position in the uncivilised cultural scale. I do not know a single case in which a man was compelled to limit his sexual qualities to one woman; this custom has been in force only in some civilised societies. Those societies which have maintained the custom for the longest period have attained the highest position in the cultural scale, which the human race has yet reached,” Unwin wrote.

Alas Babylon. Weep United States. Farewell many European nations. Your sexual mores have sealed your fate. Your clouded unchaste minds have opened your doors to your demise: Islam, an aggressive culture that insists on female chastity. Your children will be ruled by Sharia law.

The genius of Unwin's completely secular study is that it provides empirical evidence for natural law, which is present in the heart of each man and established by reason. (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1956)

1. “For there is a true law: right reason. It is in conformity with nature, is diffused among all men, and is immutable and eternal; its orders summon to duty; its prohibitions turn away from offence... To replace it with a contrary law is a sacrilege; failure to apply even one of its provisions is forbidden; no one can abrogate it entirely.” (Cicero, Rep.III, 22, 33)

That civilisations prosper when they practice monogamy and prenuptial chastity is no surprise to a Christian. Our God Incarnate is Virgin in the flesh, born of a virgin mother. There is no conflict between natural law and divine law.

*“Therefore*



*the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel,”* which means God is with us. (Isaiah 7:14)

In the book of Genesis, we are told *“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* (Genesis 1:27) Original sin marred the likeness of God’s image in man. With God, we work hard *“in fear and trembling”* to restore that likeness in us, the Perfect Image found in the Person of Jesus Christ.

- *“Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my*

*presence, but now even more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12-13)*

What has this to do with chastity and natural law? St. Paul holds all peoples responsible for knowing natural law because God has made it clear to them.

- *“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.” (Romans 1:18-19)*

And God has made it clear that that sexual immorality before and after marriage has catastrophic consequences for a human being. *“For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure, or greedy person (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Ephesians 5:6)*

“Marriage, as we’ve always known it, wasn’t invented by a group of bishops. It arose from the nature of our procreating



bodies. Long before it was etched into legal documents or canon law, marriage

was etched into our flesh.” said Author Chris Stefanick of the [Chastity Project](#).

Nature instructed humans that for the survival of their species, fidelity in marriage was key:

- “At the risk of over-simplifying this: one can almost imagine, tens of thousands of years ago, cavemen “discovering” that the sex drive is ordered, by its nature, to the union of man and woman so that they can carry on the human race. Since children come from sex and demand so much responsibility, a caveman probably had to swear to commit to that woman before the other people in the cave, lest the cave chief hit him with a club for turning cave life into chaos—and marriage was born!” he added.

In Romans chapter 1, St. Paul says that man fell into idolatry. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for material images made to look like a human being or animals. Today we are talking about the harvesting of human organs in the womb, experiments on tiny humans in test tubes, political power, atheism itself and the love of money. I suppose keeping little magic rocks in our pockets would qualify too.

- *“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.” (Romans 1: 24-27)*

“It’s no accident that marriage has been between a man and woman and has involved a public ritual in virtually every culture throughout history.” Stefanick added. Now Unwin shows us empirically that promiscuity is also bad for the societies in which we live.

Unwin’s study suggests that if civilisations modelled their society on this pattern — prenuptial chastity, strict heterosexual monogamy, they also would attain prosperity and great influence in arts, science, and world affairs. Watch Uganda. It is pro-life, pro-family, Christian and encourages chastity among its rapidly growing population of 39 million with an average age of 15 (2015 revision of the World Population Prospects). They are on track to have the world’s largest population growth in the coming decades, according to the Population Reference Bureau, a think tank in Washington, D.C.



UGANDA FIGHTS FOR THE FAMILY: CENTER AND HEART OF CIVILIZATION

The African nation bravely stood up to U.S. President Barack Obama when he tried to stop them from passing an “anti-gay” bill in 2014. They thumbed their noses at the United States when Uganda was deliberately omitted from a three-country tour of sub-Saharan Africa by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. In response, they organised a Ugandan Pride parade to mock U.S. Gay Pride Parades. The Guardian Africa Network reported that on March 24, 30,000 people rallied in support of the “anti-homosexual” legislation, which is really a law against public indecency and rape.

Caught in a vast tide of sexual immorality, can the world be saved? In 1956, Pitirim A. Sorokin, founder of the sociology department at Harvard University and another secularist, released a work similar to *Sex and Culture*, called the *The*

*American Sex Revolution*. He agreed with Unwin: a loosening of sexual mores was a common factor in every decaying society.

The culture “that tolerates sexual anarchy is slowly but surely debilitating itself, impairing its collective health and endangering its very survival,” Unwin wrote. But Sorokin found that individuals who resist the ongoing sexual revolution can actually hinder the corruption process. If a whole stratum of a society remained committed to sexual restraint and monogamous marriage, “The process of decline can be halted.” Sorokin said.

If you drive the freeways of Louisiana on Sunday morning, it is possible not to see another car. In contrast, roads are packed on the West Coast on the same morning.

Where is the Louisiana population on Sunday morning? Follow Bishop de Jong on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/everarddejong>

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# Losing is Finding. Giving is Receiving. Dying is Living

Sermon by Fr. Joseph Mungai

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 2, 2017

St. John the Apostle Awasi Catholic Church, Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya

A lady lost her handbag in the busy shopping



mall. Fortunately, an honest little boy found it and promptly returned it to her. The lady was truly delighted and quickly examined her bag. She was astonished. “Hmm! What happened here? I know there was a \$100 bill in it. Now there are ten \$10 bills.” The boy quickly replied, “That’s right, ma’am! I learned the lesson. The last time I found a lady’s bag, I didn’t receive any reward. She didn’t have any loose change.”

People work best when they know there is reward. Employees work harder when there is raise in salary and benefits. The most wanted fugitive can be captured in no time when a large amount of reward is offered. Hence, preachers of the Prosperity Gospel effectively attract followers by constantly harping on the Gospel passage: “*Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap*” (Lk 6:38).

Certainly, God is not some stingy benefactor. As St. Paul assured the Romans, “*He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he*

*not also give us everything else along with him?” (Rom 8:32).*

He always offers reward to every good deed. That’s for sure. Jesus himself said so: *“Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”*

But we are surely missing the point when we do something good solely for reward. On his desk in the Oval Office, President Reagan kept a small plaque with the words: “There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he does not mind who gets the credit.”

As St. Francis of Assisi pointed out in his Prayer of Peace, “It is in giving that we receive; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.” Giving and doing something good, no matter how insignificant it may be, even a cup of cold water, is in itself our reward, for, as we always say, “God can never be outdone in generosity.”

Nevertheless, Jesus gives an important caveat: a reward comes at a great cost. The Gospel this Sunday, therefore, lays down the most fundamental condition for discipleship: giving up everything and carrying our cross for sake of Christ and the Gospel.

A catechist was teaching her five and six-year old children about the 10 Commandments. After she finished explaining to them the commandment to ‘Honor thy father and thy mother,’ she asked, ‘How about your brothers and sisters? What is the commandment that teaches you how to treat them?’ Quickly, one little boy quipped, ‘Thou shall not kill!’

Honoring and loving our earthly parents, our brothers and sisters, and our loved ones is truly laudable, and it is, in fact, commanded by God. Yet, no matter how important it is, it cannot override the greatest commandment of all, that is, to *“love the Lord, your God, with*



*all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37-38). Everything else takes the backseat: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:37).*

Interestingly, when we love God first and foremost in our life, our earthly loves are purified and enriched. The reason is simple: by loving God, the limits and obstacles brought about by our selfishness are surmounted, enabling our heart to expand and love all the more. Far from being downgraded, our earthly loves are fully enhanced and further dignified when the love of God takes precedence and supreme priority in our life.

Hence, losing is finding: *“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:39). Giving is receiving: “Give and gifts will be given to you.” (Lk 6:38); “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Dying is living: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn 12:24).*



WITH MY WHOLE HEART

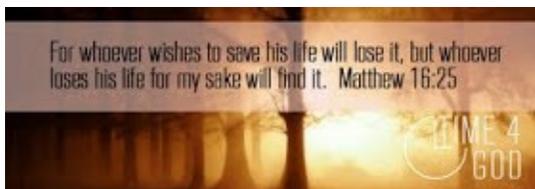
St. Teresa of Calcutta hit the nail on the head when she said, “When you don’t have anything, then you have everything.” That is precisely how the dynamics of divine economics works. God’s graces unceasingly flow in abundance. Thus, holding on to

something makes us incapable of receiving more. Letting go, frees us from

worldly attachments, and enables us to receive more. Carl Jung puts it this way, “Don’t hold on to someone who’s leaving, otherwise you won’t meet the one who’s coming.”

I believe everybody wants to follow Christ. Most certainly because of the promise of eternal reward in His heavenly kingdom. Yet, many of us cannot do so because of our attachment to creatures.

There is nothing wrong with creatures. What is wrong is attachment to them. It is like holding on to grass while falling down the cliff. All these are just creatures, limited and ephemeral. We hold on, rather, to the Creator, the source of everything. Letting go of a pail of water in order to prime the pump and have more abundant supply of water is truly wise.



Let me close with a quotation for an unknown author: “There are things that we never want to let go of, people we never want to leave behind. But keep in mind that letting go isn’t the end of the world, it’s the beginning of a new life.

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## **Do You Have Ears? Listen. [at Christ's Faithful Witness]**

Sermon by Rev. John Paul Shea

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 23, 2017

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Tucson, AZ



*"He who has ears, let him hear."* (Matt 13:9)

In today's Gospel (Matthew 13:24-43), we continue to reflect on Our Lord's teachings via the parables.

Our Lord uses these stories to "announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world." (Matt 13:35)

While Our Lord relates three parables in today's Gospel, we may notice that the Gospel begins and ends with the same story about the wheat and the weeds. It calls us to reflect on God's plan of salvation for our world.

Our Lord likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a farmer who sows good seed in his field. While everyone is asleep, his enemy comes and sows weeds all through the wheat, and then goes off. When the crop grows and bears



fruit, the weeds appear as well.

Our Lord explains that the one who sows good seed is God and the field is the world. The weeds are the work of the enemy, who is the devil. If the weeds are not immediately cut down then they can take over the whole field of wheat and destroy it. It is assumed that the farmer will want the weeds pulled up immediately. Yet, surprisingly, the farmer says, “No.” Let them grow side by side until harvest time then he will decide which are the weeds and which are the wheat.

My brothers and sisters, today’s parable shows us the shocking state of our world today as we await the second coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

God created this world to show the beauty of His work. He made us to follow His plan for our happiness. Yet, through the arrogance of the devil, evil has been sown in the world.

Therefore, as we await Our Lord’s return, let us persevere in our faith amongst the cultures and societies in which we live and stand our ground against the evils that surround us.

We all know how quickly weeds grow and how rapid weeds spread. First there are a few small weeds. Then after a little rain,



the weeds multiply and take over the entire area in which they grow. Our Lord warns us evil is increasing in this world.

Since Our Lord walked the earth, much evil has already been done within societies. Yet, over the past few centuries more is taking place. Since the Enlightenment, man has been more determined to create a world without God. The weeds of Rationalism, Atheism, Marxism, Individualism, Secularism have led men to turn away from God.

Now, as we enter the 21st century, new means of communication have spread evil ways of thinking to all corners of the world in unprecedented ways.

Everywhere we look today, the weeds of twisted thinking are destroying marriages, schools, homes and families.

Even Catholics are falling away from the truth. Politicians and lobby groups are telling us what was considered immoral only a generation ago is now good.

At the same time, some Church leaders are failing to resist the dictatorship of relativism. They need to call sinners to conversion with determination. The weeds are choking us all!

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel



message is a serious call to every Catholic to stay faithful to Christ despite the pitfalls of the society in which we live today.

Our Lord intended Catholics to be the salt of the earth. He calls us to be passionate about the truths of our faith as we prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God. God will help us, but we must commit our lives to Him.

Therefore let us renew our commitment to live in Truth and Love. Let us go to confession regularly. Let us pray the Holy Rosary daily.



For, this society in which we live today is passing away! Our Lord Jesus Christ will *"send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause*

*others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."*



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King Solomon had a problem. He had "700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines" ([1 Kings 11:3](#)). When the king has 1000 -- *one thousand* -- women in his life, who rules as the queen? Also, if Jesus is the New King of Israel, who is the New Queen? The Kingdom of Heaven was the restoration and fulfillment of the Kingdom of Israel, so who is the Queen of Heaven?



The answer lies in the following passage from 1 Kings 2. In this passage, [Adonijah](#) is asking [Bathsheba](#), the mother of King Solomon, to intercede on his behalf before the king.

## The Queen-Mother

But first, some back story: Adonijah and Solomon were both sons of King David. After their elder step-brothers, Amnon and Absalom had died, Adonijah considered himself the heir-apparent to the throne. Adonijah was the oldest living son of David,<sup>1</sup> and therefore had a better claim to succeed King David to the throne. Nevertheless, Solomon fought Adonijah for the throne. Civil War had erupted and Solomon emerged victorious.

First, [1 Kings 2:13-18](#) RSV-CE:

Then Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, “Do you come peaceably?” He said, “Peaceably.” Then he said, “I have something to say to you.” She said, “Say on.” He said, “You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel fully expected me to reign; however the kingdom has turned about and become my brother’s, for it was his from the Lord. And now **I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me.**” She said to him, “**Say on.**” And he said, “**Pray ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife.**” Bathsheba said, “Very well; I will speak for you to the king.”

Notice some of the important parts of this passage. Adonijah "prays" to Bathsheba, the mother of the King, that she would ask the King to grant Adonijah's "request." This may not be the definition of "pray" we're accustomed to hearing. Adonijah is not "praying" to Bathsheba as if she were God. To "pray" simply means to "ask" or to make a request. Also, notice that Adonijah knows that the king "will not refuse" his mother. How does he know this?



In the very next verses, Bathsheba goes to her son, King Solomon, with Adonijah's request ([1 Kings 2:19-21](#)):

So Bathsheba went to King Solomon, to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. And (1) **the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her;** then he sat on his throne, and (2) **had a seat brought for the king’s**

**mother; and she sat on his right.** Then she said, “I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me.” And the king said to her, (3) **“Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you.”** She said, “Let Ab’ishag the Shu’nammite be given to Adonijah your brother as his wife.”  
[numbers added]

What an important passage! Several things happened in this second passage that forever affected the structure of the Kingdom of Israel. (1) We see the king "rising to meet" his mother and then "bowing down to her." The king's subjects bow to him. The king bows to no one - except his mother. Before we get to (2), I'll first address (3). The king, himself, reiterates that he "will not refuse" his mother. This is a royal tradition that King Solomon is making a permanent fixture of the kingdom. He is literally about to "enshrine" it.

(2) This is extremely important. The king "had a seat brought for the king's mother" and from then on "she sat on his right". The king placed a seat for his mother beside the throne. King Solomon didn't just have a servant bring a seat for his mother, so she could sit in his court before him. The king set the seat *beside his own throne*. The mother's chair became a throne in its own right, a royal office subordinate to the king's throne.

This royal office of the Queen-Mother, called the *Gebirah* or the "Great Lady", became a fixture of the Kingdom of Israel. It lasted for as long as the Kingdom of Israel lasted. We see in [2 Kings 24](#), when Judah is at last conquered by the Babylonians and the Southern Kingdom falls to King Nebuchadnezzar, that the Queen-Mother, Nehushta, is still given precedence over the wives of King Jehoiakim (see [2 Kings 24:15](#)). [Jeremiah 13:18](#) also narrates the fall of Israel to the Babylonians in terms of the Queen-Mother losing her crown:

Say to the king and the queen mother:  
“Take a lowly seat,  
for your beautiful crown  
has come down from your head.”

The tragedy of this verse is finally undone at Revelation 12, where we see that the Queen's crown has been restored and fulfilled, but more on that in a bit.

## The Queen of Heaven

So, what has this to do with the Blessed Mother, i.e. the Virgin Mary? It might be obvious to you by now, maybe not, that the Queen of the Kingdom of Israel

was a prefigurement or foreshadowing of the Queen of the Kingdom of Heaven. How did the kings of Israel, with their many, *many* wives, resolve the issue of who would reign as queen of their kingdom? Every man only ever has one **mother**. The king's mother ruled as queen. This is the tradition of the "Queen-Mother".

This is why we call the Virgin Mary the "Queen of Heaven"! This is why we "pray" that Mary will intercede for us before the King, *because that's her royal office*.



## The Wedding at Cana

But there's more ... lots more! Check out [Part Two, "What's Really Happening at the Wedding at Cana,"](#) which shows how the scene between Queen Bathsheba and King Solomon is repeated and fulfilled *at the Wedding at Cana!*

Please share and comment below ...

P.S.: If you needed more proof that Mary is Queen of Heaven, just read [Revelation 12:1](#): "And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and *on her head a crown of twelve stars.*" This woman is then described as the mother of the Messiah, i.e. the Virgin Mary. Right there, in black and white, Mary is described as wearing a crown *in Heaven*. Why would Mary be wearing a crown? What is a woman called that wears a crown? A QUEEN, i.e. the Queen of Heaven!



1. Adonijah was actually the fourth son of King David. All together, David had about 18 sons according to the various accounts in Chronicles and elsewhere. David's first four sons were Amnon, by Ahinoam; Daniel (also called Chileab), by Abigail; Absalom, by Maachah; and Adonijah, by Haggith. Daniel (or Chileab) is thought to have been dead by the time Adonijah laid claim to the throne. Interestingly, Rabbinic tradition holds that Daniel-Chileab was one of only four ancient Israelites to have died without sin, the others being Benjamin, Amram, and Jesse, the father of King David.↩

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There is much, *much* more going on in the Gospel account of the Wedding at Cana than meets the eye. Why does it sound like Jesus is speaking disrespectfully to his mother? Why does Jesus refer to his mother as "woman"? Why does Jesus create wine from *bath water*? All this and more below:



In the last post, [the Hidden Throne of Israel](#), I showed where in Scripture the office of the Queen-Mother of Israel was first established and what this means for the Kingdom of Heaven. You may recall the scene between King Solomon and his mother, Bathsheba, at 1 Kings 2: 13-21. Now, in part two, I'll show you where in the Gospels this whole scene is repeated, except with Jesus and *his* mother.

## On the 7th Day, There was a Wedding at Cana

The [second chapter](#) of John's Gospel begins "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there." In the following verse, John adds "Jesus also was invited to the marriage." Though Jesus is always the center of attention wherever he goes, John is placing special emphasis in this scene on the role of Mary by introducing her first.

Notice the passing of days at the beginning of John's Gospel:

**Day 1:** "In the beginning ..." ([John 1:1](#)) **Day 2:** "The next day ..." ([John 1:29](#))

**Day 3:** "The next day ..." ([John 1:35](#)) **Day 4:** "The next day ..." ([John 1:43](#)) ...

then it skips to: **Day 7:** "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there." ([John 2:1](#))

Why is John setting up this seven-day format for the beginning of his Gospel? It was clearly more than seven days from the beginning of time to the Wedding at Cana, right? Why mention the passing of days if it's not chronological or even logical?

Because there is a *hidden* logic to it! John is setting up the first seven days of the NEW Creation in Jesus Christ. What happened on the seventh day of Creation the first time around? There was a marriage in Eden. Adam and Eve were married: mankind made its first covenant with God.

So who does St. John say is getting married on the 7th day of the New Creation? The newlyweds are un-identified, but who *is* identified? "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and **the mother of Jesus** was there. **Jesus** also was invited to the marriage." *Jesus and Mary, the New Adam and the New Eve.*

## The Queen-Mother is Petitioned/Prayed To

Notice the parallels between the **Wedding of Adonijah** from [1 Kings 2](#) (see [the last post](#) for more details) and the **Wedding at Cana** from [John 2](#):

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water."

In both situations, the king is asked to perform a task he does not want to do and both times his mother is petitioned to intercede before the king. In both situations, the king's mother is petitioned to intercede before the king, and in both, the king "does not refuse" her.

*John's Gospel is clearly describing the role of the Queen-Mother in the New*

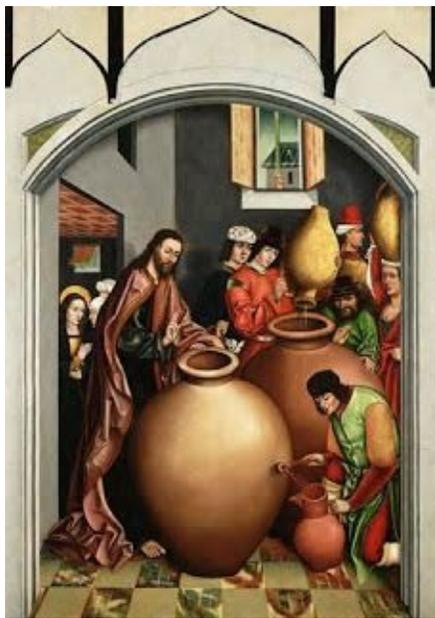
*Kingdom of Israel by referencing 1 Kings 2.*

King Solomon did not want to give Adonijah the bride he was praying for, because with that marriage would come an alliance that would tilt the balance of power against Solomon. Wise King Solomon, therefore, grants Adonijah's request and then kills him.

Jesus, the King of Kings, did not yet want to perform a public miracle, especially one associated with wine because wine would be associated with his "hour" which "has not yet come". Jesus "hour" would be the time of his Crucifixion when he would drink the four cups of wine at Passover, the last of which he would drink on the cross. Nevertheless, like Solomon, he grants his mother's request, creating at least 120 gallons of the finest wine from bath water.[1](#)

## **Connection to Baptism**

Notice that the jars were filled with water used for Jewish rites of purification, i.e. the Jewish rites from which baptism was born. Jesus, therefore, takes the dirty water left behind from the washing away of our sins and creates exquisite wine.



## **Sidenote: Jesus, Not Against Alcohol**

Also note - the wedding guests had been drinking *for days*, and Jesus creates for them, on the low side, *six hundred* more bottles of wine! That's a bottle of wine for every one of King Solomon's wives! After this scene, how could anyone say Jesus is against the drinking of alcohol? There were no little cups of grape juice

at this celebration, *just saying*.

## Jesus: Not Disrespecting Momma

I have often heard Jesus' words to his mother, "O woman, what have you to do with me?" used to show that Jesus had cast off this mother. First off, Jesus, even though he was both God and man, would never violate the Fourth Commandment, "honor thy father and thy mother." Even saying that is akin to blasphemy.

So, why then, do Jesus' words sound so harsh? Two things need to be understood: (1) Jesus refers to his mother as "woman" because he is confirming the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 and claiming Mary as the New Eve; and (2) "what have you to do with me" is a phrase indicating the speaker's submission to the will of another.

(1) The New Eve & The Protoevangelium Remember, the Wedding at Cana occurs on the 7th Day of the New Creation. Just as Adam and Eve were present on the 7th day of the Creation, so the 2nd Adam and the 2nd Eve are present on the 7th day of the New Creation. How is Eve referred to in Genesis? She is called "woman".

Amazingly, though, Mary, too, is called "woman" in Genesis!

I have written about Genesis 3:15, the *Protoevangelium* or "First Gospel", elsewhere, if you're interested: "[The First Prophecy in Human History](#)." The idea is that, immediately following the Fall, God tells Adam and Eve, "I will put enmity between [the serpent] and **the woman**." God speaks in future tense, i.e. "I *will* put", so God is speaking of a future woman. In the same verse, God also says the woman's seed will "crush the serpent's head," meaning her child will defeat Satan, i.e. she will be the mother of the Christ. This future woman, the mother of the Messiah, will be an enemy (enmity) of Satan her entire life, even from her conception - her ***Immaculate*** Conception!

Jesus speaks to this same "woman" at Cana, *the Virgin Mary*, and addresses her as such. This is why Jesus calls Mary, "woman", to show the fulfillment of the prophecy from Genesis -- that Mary is the New Eve!

(2) "What have you to do with me?" is the opposite of disrespectful There is one other time this phrase -- "what have you to do with me?" -- is asked in Scripture. Do you remember where? It's sort of an unlikely place.

This phrase occurs again in Mark 5. In this passage, Jesus exorcises the Gerasene Demoniac, a possessed man who lived among the tombs and had, several times, broken to pieces the chains which bound him. Here is Mark 5:6-7:

And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, “**What have you to do with me**, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”

The possessed man "worships" Jesus, saying "what have you to do with me." Though humans might mistake the Son of God for an ordinary man, demons *do not*. Jesus has dominion over the angels, even the fallen ones. After all, He created them. Therefore, they slam themselves to the ground before Jesus and "worship" him. In doing so, the demon directs the same phrase at Jesus that Jesus earlier directed at his mother. "What have you to do with me" does not convey disrespect at all, but quite the opposite. Jesus is conceding to the will of the Queen-Mother.

## Conclusion

Can you believe all this meaning is packed into such a short passage? Every Catholic needs to be armed with a thorough understanding of the Wedding at Cana - please share this with friends! Can you see now how important this passage is to the Catholic teaching on the Virgin Mary?

This short Gospel passage is a sweet display of love and affection of a son for his mother. *How grand the gesture!* The King of Kings bowing down to simple peasant girl and placing on her head a "crown of twelve stars." If we are to be like Jesus, we, too, must crown Mary the Queen of our everything.

Let me know what you think about this. Please comment below!

1. It should be noted that St. John Chrysostom interprets the water as being clean beyond doubt. He states that the jars are described in such a way as to remove all possibility of doubt regarding the miracle, both in terms of their purity, lest anyone think the water merely had the flavor of wine from wine previously stored in the jars (for these jars were "for purification rites" and hence had to be completely clean), and in terms of their volume, that it might be clear that so much water could not possibly be changed to wine except by divine intervention. ↩

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This contribution is available at <http://www.thescottsmithblog.com/2017/08/whats-really-happening-at-wedding-at.html>  
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In 2012, Kateri Tekakwitha became the first Native American to be a canonized a saint by the Catholic Church. Her second miracle occurred when a boy dying from an aggressive infection of flesh-eating bacteria was suddenly healed. That boy was Jake Finkbonner. And Saint Kateri is still at work in his life!

[Here's a link to the [article](#) as published on [Aleteia.org](#) for Saint Kateri's feast day]

# SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA

LILY OF THE MOHAWKS

INTERCEDES AGAIN  
FOR MIRACLE BOY



The  
SCOTT SMITH BLOG  
All Roads Lead to Rome

Portrait of Saint Kateri by  
Father Claude Chauchetiere,  
c.1696



## A Boy In Need of a Miracle: Background 2012

"It was the last game of the season, and it was the last minute of the game." This is how Elsa Finkbonner begins the story of her son Jake's fateful encounter in 2012 with necrotizing fasciitis, a rare, flesh-eating disease. "I was driving for a lay-in," Jake continues, "and then I got pushed from behind the back, and I hit my lip on the base of the basketball hoop."

Two days later, recounts Dr. Craig Rubens, a pediatric infectious disease

specialist at the Seattle Children's Hospital, the bacteria was burning across Jake's face as if the boy's skin was nothing more than parchment paper: "You're stamping it [out] on one side, and it's flaming up on another."

Then, Sister Kateri came for a visit. That's right, Sister, not Saint, Kateri. Jake's great-aunt brought a visitor, a nun, to pray at his bedside. "I recall looking at her with a stunned look," said Finkbonner, who also felt chills. "We had been praying for weeks for Blessed Kateri to intercede and spare Jake's life, and here was this woman and she had the exact same name."

"That was the last day that his disease progressed," [Elsa says](#). Sister Kateri had brought a relic of Blessed Kateri with her to pray for Jake. "I prayed with him and his family, and we placed the relic on his bed," [Sister Kateri said](#).

Father Tim Sauer, the Finkbonner's parish priest, says Kateri was the perfect intercessor for Jake. "No. 1, we're talking about two young people," Sauer explained in [an interview with NPR](#). "No. 2, we're talking about two people who come from Native American ancestry. And No. 3, we're talking about a person who herself suffered from a disease that disfigured her face." Tekakwitha's face was scarred by smallpox. Legend has it, when she died, her scars vanished. Saint Kateri Tekakwitha was an Algonquin-Mohawk who converted to Catholicism. Called the "Lily of the Mohawks," she lived in the Jesuit mission village of Kahnawake, south of Montreal in New France, now Canada, and was baptized at the age of 19, on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1676. Tekakwitha was [baptized "Catherine"](#) after St. Catherine of Siena – Kateri was the Mohawk form of the name.

## **“One Kid Down”: Saint Kateri Still Interceding**

I recently interviewed Jake's mom, Elsa Finkbonner. She told me about her family's recent encounter with now-Saint Kateri. Jake also recently received the Sacrament of Confirmation – I'll keep you in suspense, for now, about which saint he picked as his patron ... or patroness. Now, back to Jake's recent encounter with Saint Kateri:

"It was at this exact time last year," Elsa begins. "Jake went to Nicaragua and Costa Rica with the Spanish class at his high school." She makes sure to add that Jake and his classmates were not allowed to contact their parents during their two-week, full immersion experience. You can imagine how a mother must feel in this situation, having already come so close to losing her child despite all the best that modern, first world medicine could offer.

While Jake was still in Central America, Elsa continues "one night my husband,

Donny, had a dream. Jake came to him saying he needed our help and that he was scared.” As a good Catholic family, the Finkbonners know a father’s dreams, like those of Saint Joseph, are to be heeded. In his dream, Donny asked Jake what was wrong. Jake said that he didn't know, but to please help him. By the next morning, Jake’s parents were obviously growing extremely concerned, but, as a rule, were unable to contact their son or his teacher. All they could do was check Facebook, where one of Jake’s teachers had been posting photos with periodic updates of the trip. The teacher’s latest post read simply “one kid down” without any indication of which child. Can you imagine what Jake’s parents must have been experiencing at this moment? And the agony of not knowing?

Many parents in moments like these have been comforted by the Blessed Mother, of whom it was said “a sword will pierce your own soul, also” ([Luke 2:35](#)). The Finkbonner family, though, has been blessed with an additional intercessor. Elsa recalls praying daily for Saint Kateri to “keep watch over him and to bring him home safely to us.”

While anxiously waiting to hear which child was “down,” Jake’s parents were relieved to see a new Facebook post: a picture of Jake smiling and apparently in perfect health. A few days then passed before Elsa and Donny greeted Jake at the airport in Seattle. “We were so excited to see him,” Elsa recounts, “only to see that he was spotted from head to toe.”

Jake’s teacher then revealed to his parents that Jake had indeed been the “one kid down.” Jake had experienced a severe heat stroke in Costa Rica and had passed out. People were working on him from 9pm until 1am, Jake’s mother explains, trying to get him rehydrated and to regain consciousness. It was about this time that Jake visited his father’s dream.

The coincidence with Jake’s skin again been affected is startling, as well. He was so covered in spots, Elsa explains, that while getting off the plane and going through Customs, Jake’s teacher asked him to wear his sweatshirt. Otherwise, Jake may have been suspected of carrying the Zika virus into the country, which was then a major international concern.

“That was Jake's second near death experience, and I am certain that Saint Kateri was there for him once again,” Elsa states. “And we know that Jake came to Donny in his dream when Jake was so ill in Costa Rica.”

## **Plans for the Future**

Just as before, Jake recovered from his health scare and is doing great. He’s

getting ready for college and hopes to pursue a degree in medicine. After many, *many* encounters with plastic surgeons following the flesh-eating bacteria's devastation to his skin, especially his face, Jake was inspired to become a surgeon and has not wavered from this goal. Please join his family in praying for his goals *through the intercession of Saint Kateri!*

I left you in suspense earlier. Are you still wondering which saint name Jake picked for his Confirmation?

It was, of course, Saint Kateri!

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, *pray for us!*

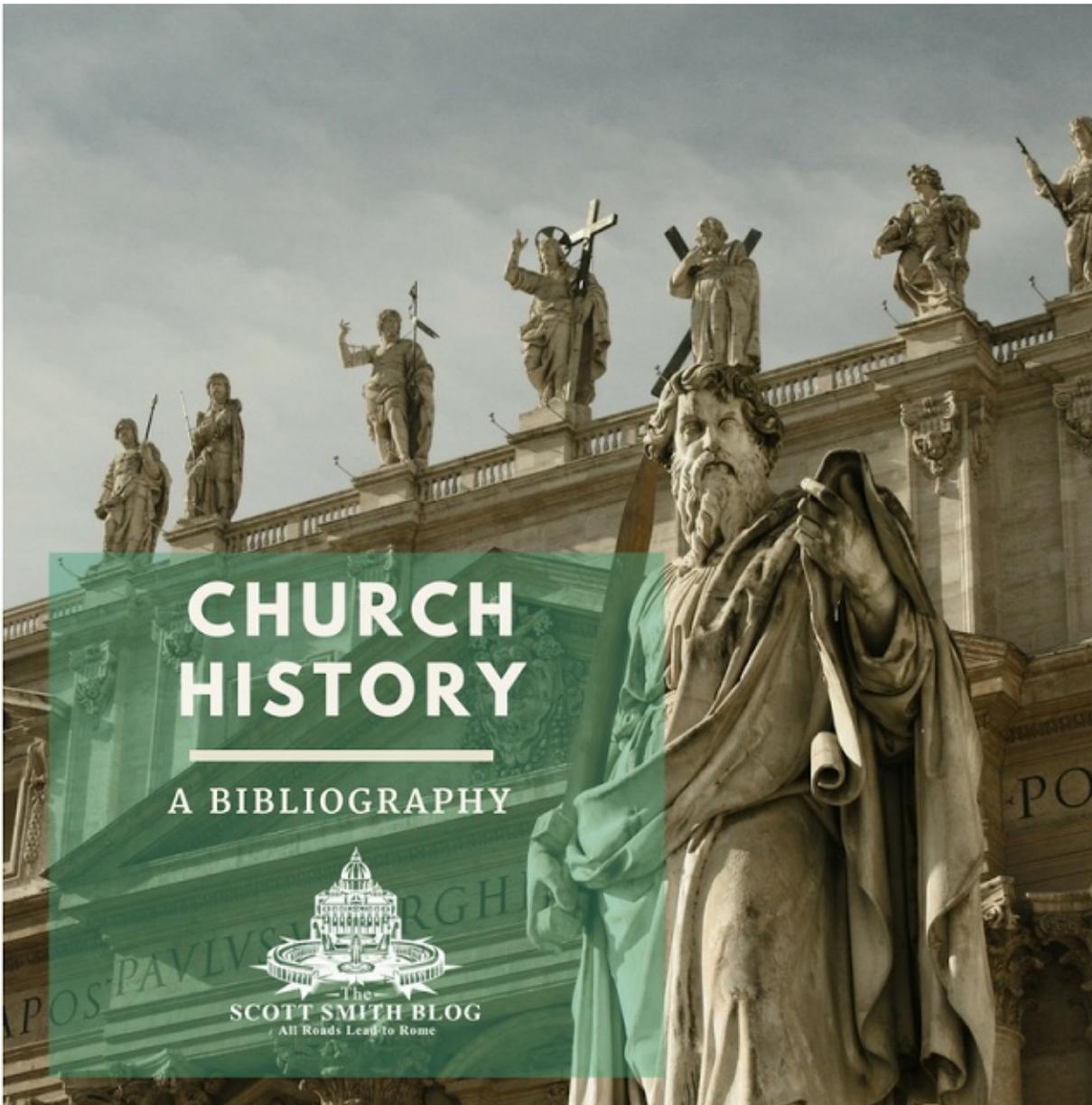
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I was recently asked for a good list of books on Church History. As a history nerd, I'm happy to oblige! I'm also posting my bibliography of Catholic Church history here in case it can help others.



## Textbooks

I taught Church History to high schoolers for some years and then converted the course for prison ministry at Angola State Prison. This is the primary text I used: *The History of the Church* by Peter V. Armenio (the green book below).

This textbook is part of the *Didache Series* by Midwest Theological Forum, which also includes a great introductory book on Scripture by Dr. Scott Hahn (the blue book above).

Though not a textbook, this next book is something of a classic for readers of Church history. This is *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* by Thomas E. Woods, Jr.:

Rather than presenting a narrative of the Church's history, Woods opts for a topical approach, but he does so focusing on the history of the Church prior to the Enlightenment and the writings of Gibbon. He covers the Church's vital role in the conversion of the barbarians; the importance of monasticism as a preserver of western civilization; the Carolingian Renaissance; the development of the university; the emergence of the Scientific Revolution; the glorious art and architecture of the medieval period; the rise of international law in the Catholic disputes over the nature of the soul after encountering American Indians; pre-classical economics; charity; and morality. Along the way, one learns lots of interesting facts and trivia. In the High Middle Ages, for example, every Cistercian monastery "had a model factory, often as large the church and only several feet away, and waterpower drove the machinery of the various industries located on its floor" (35). On the following page, the reader discovers that shortly after the year 1000, a monk flew a glider, which he had presumably built, more than 600 feet. Well beyond this fascinating minutia, though, Woods presents in an inspired fashion how the universality of Catholicism itself has given the whole of humanity the concept of inalienable rights, the natural law, and the dignity of the human person.

## **Video Series**

Some fantastic video series on Church History have been produced over the last 5-10 years. Top among these are the *EPIC* series by Steve Wiedenkopf and Bishop Robert Barron's *Catholicism* series:

While EPIC dedicates equal time throughout the entire 2,000 years of Church history, Bishop Barron focuses more on the early Church.

## Misunderstood Periods

There are many areas of Church history that are getting a new look from historians. Some of the darkest periods of history, or so we've been taught, weren't actually dark at all. One such period is the so-called "Dark Ages". This is the period following the collapse of the Roman Empire, which, it turns out, was more of a slow transition than a catastrophic *implosion*, as it's often portrayed.

Here's an interesting read on the so-called "Dark Ages" or the Medieval Period: *Positively Medieval: The Suprising, Dynamic, Heroic Church of the Middle Ages* by Jim Blosser.

Here's a [review](#) of *Positively Medieval* by J. B. Kelly of Catholic365.com:

Blosser, a professor of theology at Benedictine College in Atchison, KS, gives the reader a glimpse into the lives of some of the 'leaders and thinkers' of Western Europe during the Middle Ages, spanning the years 500 to 1500 A.D. (approximately). The book is divided into seven categories - missionaries, leaders, martyrs, monastics, mystics, thinkers, and Eastern Christians - and each category features four to six 'notables' in those areas. Some of the names are recognizable by many - St. Joan of Arc, St. Benedict of Nursia, Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thomas Aquinas - but there are several that are less-well-known, such as St. Odo of Cluny, Gerard Groote, Blessed Jan van Ruysbruck, and Robert Grosseteste. Blosser introduces you to each figure with a brief biography and historical context, and then proceeds to share stories of their life or pieces of writings that the individual (or one of their companions) left to us.

Here are some more books about other misunderstood historical periods, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Reformation:

This is the "Real Story of" series by Steve Weidenkopf, lecturer of Church History at the Christendom College Graduate School of Theology.  
Please let me know what is missing from this list by commenting below!

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## Your Joy May Be Complete



*“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” John 15:9-11*

Joy, the second fruit of the spirit from Galatians 5:22, a word used over 100 times in the old and new testaments, but what is it? What is joy?

Ask most people and they will say that it is happiness; but a true Christian understanding of joy goes beyond happiness.

It’s deeper, it’s from within, and it isn’t dependent on circumstances or good fortune. It’s not a fleeting feeling that is here when good things happen and leaves when we are in distress.

Joy, true joy, is a gift. It is a gift from God to those who belong to him.

It is an abiding sense that God is in control and no matter what happens we have His promise of salvation and eternal life. Have you ever noticed that as your relationship with Jesus increases so does your joy? God wants us to be joyful and His joy is there for the asking.

It is a gift that grows out of faith, gratitude, grace and love, the delight in being alive

He not only wants us to be joyful, but to delight in the joy of others as well.

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit.” Romans 15:11*

There is an old adage that the Dominican sisters would share with me. They would spell the word, J-O-Y and then would offer, J-Jesus, O-Others, Y-Yourself, in that order! If you want to be joyful put Jesus first, others second and yourself last.

As a adult, I have learned that this is the formula for servant leadership. Bringing joy to others fuels our joy as well. As we serve others, God will always keep our joy “tank” on full! It is His gift to us.

Want joy? Ask for it! Pray for it! Strengthen your relationship with Jesus, read scripture, and serve others!

And the second fruit of the Holy Spirit is JOY, so that Jesus’ joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

Be joyful my friend, it is a gift from God for each of us.

Your Joy May Be  
Complete



[TonyAgnesi.com](http://TonyAgnesi.com)

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**Saint Isaac Jogues was a merchant's son born in Orleans, France in 1607.** His father died just after his birth, leaving his education to his mother, a strong Catholic. From his letters home to his mother during his missionary work in New France, it's obvious that Saint Isaac maintained a close relationship with her.

Saint  
**Isaac Jogues:**

*A Mother's  
Influence on a  
Saint's Life*

As moms, St. Isaac's life can inspire us to invest in our children's education and to maintain close ties with them. Even when they are adults, they still need our prayers and influence in their lives. He was also likely inspired in his missionary work by meeting other great men of faith, who were serving in New France. As moms, we can share stories of the saints with our children and endeavor to help them meet and form relationships with others who will nurture their faith and vocation.

## Saint Isaac Jogues Early Life and Education

Isaac was ten when he entered the new Jesuit college in Orleans. [Donal O'Sullivan](#) says he

“showed early that quality of gentle strength that was to mark the man. A steady student, courteous in manner and expert in swimming and running, he entered into the strong stream of his school's religious life with the same zest with which he plunged into his native Loire.”

He began his novitiate training with the Jesuits in October 1624. The following year, he met Father Jean de Brebeuf, who was about to sail for New France. From 1625-1628, he studied philosophy at La Fleche. Louis Lalemant was one of the teachers there, and had two brothers and a nephew serving as missionaries in Canada. From him, Jogues may have heard stories that turned his heart towards the mission in New France.

He then taught literature for three years before studying theology at the College of Clermont, University of Paris. He was ordained in February 1636. That April, he sailed for New France with the new governor. [Lives of the Saints](#) records, “He was already recognized as an able scholar, with talents for writing and teaching.”

## Saint Isaac Jogues in New France

**Father Jogues wrote often to his mother from New France**, asking for her prayers. On his arrival, he told her, “It is difficult to experience in this world a joy more excessive and more overflowing than that I felt on my setting foot in New France, and celebrating my first Mass here.” He was also realistic about spending the rest of his life in New France, saying, “I have no hope of seeing

you in our lifetime. May God in His goodness unite us both in His holy abode!”

In August, he met [Fr. Antoine Daniel](#), who brought a report of the missionaries’ work among the Huron. Fr. Jogues was chosen to replace Fr. Daniel, who went to Quebec for a sabbatical. In September, he joined Fr. Brebeuf near present-day Georgian Bay.

Of their work, O’Sullivan notes, “Much of the missionaries’ life was spent either on the trail with the Indians or, in winter, in their hovels.” Despite this, Fr. Jogues’ letters to his mother convey great excitement: “I have always felt a great love for this kind of life, and for a profession so excellent, and so akin to that of the Apostles.”

## **Saint Isaac Jogues Among the Huron**

Immediately after arriving at Fr. Brebeuf’s mission (which had been established ten years earlier), Fr. Jogues fell ill of the fever. The missionaries had little food and lived in “crude huts” (*Lives of the Saints*). When they recovered, the epidemic broke out among the Huron, who blamed the priests. Fr. Brebeuf managed to placate them, but the Huron swung between favour for the priests and suspicion of them.

In 1639, another epidemic swept through the mission. The missionaries did what they could to help the Huron, but they were blamed for the illness again. When the priests recovered without assistance from the village sorcerer, Wynne says the sorcerer “was convinced that they were greater sorcerers than himself.” The priests’ belongings (books, letters, crucifixes), because they were strange to the Huron, became objects of suspicion.

The six years that Fr. Jogues spent among the Huron were years of constant danger. In [the Catholic Encyclopedia](#), Thomas Campbell says, “Though a daring missionary, his character was of the most practical nature, his purpose always being to fix his people in permanent habitations.” He traveled great distances with his fellow missionaries and was likely the first white man to reach Sault Ste Marie.

*Saint Isaac Jogues, pray that I may help my children to attain a good education and to read the lives of saints like you. May your life inspire me to maintain a close relationship with them and always keep them in my*

*prayers, even when they are grown and on their own. Amen.*



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This contribution is available at <http://thekoalamom.com/2017/07/saint-isaac-jogues-mothers-influence/>  
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## Sacred Art is Inspiring and Flourishing

In his April 4, 1999, [Letter to Artists](#), Pope Saint John Paul II said this in regards to sacred art,

“Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration!” In this spirit of profound respect for beauty, *the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium* recalled the historic friendliness of the Church towards art and, referring more specifically to sacred art, the “summit” of religious art, did not hesitate to consider artists as having “a noble ministry” when their works reflect in some way the infinite beauty of God and raise people’s minds to him.”

This quote mirrors perfectly what I experienced yesterday during my first visit to [The Sacred Art Gallery](#) in Scottsdale, Arizona. I can honestly tell you that sacred art, as John Paul II speaks of it, is very much alive and well in this inspiring and flourishing gallery. I had heard many wonderful things from friends about this place, but was not expecting to experience what I did with my own mind and heart. Two of the pieces were so moving, that I was nearly brought to tears just looking at them. It’s transcendent – like walking into a beautiful ancient basilica – you forget that you are in the middle of downtown Scottsdale.



In a world filled with waves of relativistic thought and art, The Sacred Art Gallery is answering the call, in their own way, of the Council Fathers of the Second Vatican Council and the words of Pope St. John Paul II by allowing a space to exist where sacred art can be viewed, commissioned, and bought by the individual person. Because sacred art like this is often not seen in secular galleries, and Phoenix doesn't have a museum with such art, this charming gallery is filling the void for those who are seeking goodness, beauty, and truth through the art that has spanned the centuries in the Catholic Christian world.

With the rise of more beautiful churches being built again, there is going to be a need for those churches to be filled with beautiful art. I can think of no better place to assist in this new endeavor, this new Renaissance, than [The Sacred Art Gallery](#). If you have the means of supporting your diocese or parish by seeking a commissioned piece, I would encourage you to reach out to the galleries page for [Commissions](#). If you want to assist in a project being overseen by the gallery, here is their [Patron page](#).

Not only does The Sacred Art Gallery display sacred pieces, but also if you are local to the Phoenix Metropolitan area or spending an extended period of time in the area (when it doesn't feel like the surface of the Sun), they offer [classes and workshops](#), most notably an Icon Writing Workshop.



A part from the beautiful sacred art experienced yesterday, I was also grateful for the guidance from Grace Minton Rivera, one of the art consultants at The Sacred Art Gallery. You can see her passion for the sacred art hanging all around her because each time she talked about a piece her eyes lit up and it was as if she was talking about it for the first time.

To conclude, I leave you with the words of Grace after asking her – what the response has been from people passing by or walking into the gallery. She said,

“So this is really just a spectacular place because of what happens when people step into the gallery. Sometimes someone will walk through the door, take a look around and say “Huh! So this is like, a church place.” And then they’ll turn around and walk straight back out the door. Others will come into the gallery and walk around the entire thing, looking at every piece of art and expressing their negativity for all of the pieces. They will stand in front of a sculpture of Mary in audible disgust. Nevertheless, they continue on through the entire place.

But there are times when something really amazing will happen. I’ll watch someone walk through the door and it’s like they automatically just shed a layer off of themselves. Almost like that feeling that you get when you walk into your house or your church. It’s a visible feeling that you see on these people, the feeling of being at home. That layer that you keep on yourself when you go along your way in the world to protect yourself kind of comes off when you go into a place and feel like you’re at home. It’s so beautiful to see because this gallery is really like a home for us all. The imagery that you experience in the paintings and the sculptures are familiar. They depict the stories of our faith and they visually connect us to our heavenly family.

When people walk through the door and are able to shed that layer it reminds me of the universality of our faith and the reason why we're here, in this gallery, in the middle of Scottsdale. This gallery is a home. It doesn't just belong to the owners and it's not just a place where we hang art. The Sacred Art Gallery belongs to Catholics and Christians. It's a place where you can walk in and shed that layer, and connect with something truly beautiful."

I encourage you to share this article with your family and friends, because beauty such as this must be experienced, shared and reflected by us all.



Note: Images reproduced with the authorization of the Sacred Art Gallery.

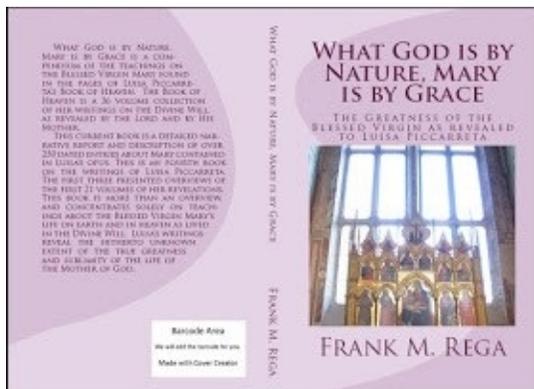
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## What God is by Nature, Mary is by Grace [at The Shield of Faith]

My new book, *What God is by Nature, Mary is by Grace; the Greatness of the Blessed Virgin as Revealed to Luisa Piccarreta*, is now available.



*What God is by Nature, Mary is by Grace* is a compendium of the teachings on the Blessed Virgin Mary found in the pages of Luisa Piccarreta's *Book of Heaven*. The *Book of Heaven* is a 36 volume collection of her writings on the Divine Will, as revealed by the Lord and by His Mother. The current book is a detailed narrative report and description of over 250 dated entries about Mary contained in Luisa's opus.

This is my fourth book on the writings of Luisa Piccarreta. The first three presented overviews of the first 21 volumes of her revelations. This book is more

than an overview, and concentrates solely on the teachings about the Blessed Virgin Mary's life on earth and in heaven as lived in the Divine Will. Luisa's writings reveal the hitherto unknown extent of the true greatness, height and sublimity of the life of the Mother of God.

This is a good faith sharing of my work on this very difficult and abstruse topic, based on the best available English translations of her work, and is not intended to be considered authorized, official, or definitive. Any eventual publication of a Church-approved English translation of her works should not affect the meaning or sense of the present book.

The source references to the entries from Luisa's 36 volume Book of Heaven are given after each use, and indicate the volume number and the date of the entry.

The Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta was a twentieth century mystic from southern Italy (1865-1947). She spent over 60 years of her life confined to bed, essentially subsisting only on the Holy Eucharist. She was a victim soul, who experienced intense sufferings, as well as visits and revelations from Jesus and Mary. For a time her spiritual advisor was St. Annibale di Francia, instrumental in obtaining Church approval for the first 19 volumes of Luisa's work, until his death. Her writings center on the importance of the Divine Will in the life of Christians, and the coming of the Kingdom of the Divine Will, as foretold in the Lord's prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Her Cause for Beatification and subsequent Canonization is being considered by the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

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This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2017/07/what-god-is-by-nature-mary-is-by-grace.html>  
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# Simple Guidelines for Profound and Effective Prayer [at Renew The Church!]

## *Introduction*

To describe the simple guidelines for vocal prayer, in a few words, is easy:

- Slow down.
- Pray attentively.
- Pray with fervent devotion.

I'll expand on the few words a bit later; first let's consider what prayer is, and why we ought to pray. Then, the question of how to pray becomes seen in the light it deserves. It is fundamentally, crucially, even urgently important to pray well.

## *What is Prayer?*

What is prayer? There are several ways to describe what prayer is; each of the descriptions below are worth some time to listen and to consider. They all come from men and women of prayer – men and women who have experienced what they describe. They are not academics; they are not (merely) theologians; they are witnesses. They have lived lives of prayer; they have experienced, and they know of what they speak.

The briefest definition of prayer I have heard is from St. John Vianney: “Prayer is nothing other than union with God.” (“Catechetical Instructions” – Catechism on Prayer, Ch. 8.)

Another saint of the Church, Therese of Lisieux, wrote: “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” (Catechism # 2558)

And more from the Catechism: “Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.” [St. John Damascene] But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart? [see Ps 130:1] He who humbles himself will be exalted; [Cf. Lk 18:9-14] humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when

we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” [Rom 8:26] are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. St. Augustine wrote, “Man is a beggar before God.” (Catechism # 2559)

The Catechism also includes this: “Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ.” (Catechism # 2564) “In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit.” (Catechism # 2565)

If prayer is truly prayer – if God is truly present with the one praying – if prayer is not merely talking to oneself, but in truth “union with God” – then prayer has a supernatural and divine dimension, pervading the natural and human dimension of the person in prayer. When we pray, we are not alone! Prayer is a union, a communion, a living relationship with God, an embrace of love.

If prayer is truly prayer, it is lived and experienced in a process – a growing, advancing process – a journey – a “living relationship of the children of God” with God Himself, the Holy Trinity. If we have a life of prayer, it is growing – and we are growing, in the life of prayer. If we have a life of prayer, we are on a journey of prayer in Him, to Him, with Him and with all who are in Him with us. To have a life of prayer, we must have times of silence and solitude with God alone. And with God alone, we are never alone.

### ***How then are we to pray?***

- Slow down.
- Pray attentively.
- Pray with fervent devotion.

These three requirements for praying especially vocal prayer well, are mutually linked. If we don’t slow down, it is very easy to pray unconsciously, merely reciting words out of memory, possibly day-dreaming and mentally a million miles distant from where our bodies are. Such is not praying! St. Teresa of Avila, writing to help her sisters in the Carmelites to grow in prayer, wrote of the very first steps:

... if it is prayer at all, the mind must take part in it. If a person neither considers to Whom he is addressing himself, what he asks, nor what he is who ventures to speak to God, although his lips may utter many words, I do

not call it prayer. Sometimes, indeed, one may pray devoutly without making all these considerations through having practiced them at other times. The custom of speaking to God Almighty as freely as with a slave—caring nothing whether the words are suitable or not, but simply saying the first thing that comes to mind from being learnt by rote by frequent repetition—cannot be called prayer: God grant that no Christian may address Him in this manner. I trust His Majesty will prevent any of you, sisters, from doing so.

( *Interior Castle*, 1st Mansions, Ch. 1, #9)

We must pray attentively! We must be attentive to who is praying, and to whom I am praying, and what it is that I am praying. When I am in prayer, I must be conscious of reality: without pretense or role-playing, without affectation, posturing or posing but in simplicity and sincerity. God knows me inside and out! He is not impressed with artificial flowers or theatrical oratory:

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?

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. (Isa 66:1-2)

*I* am praying; it is to almighty **God** that I am praying; and **this** is what I am saying in prayer to Him. Let us pray slowly enough that we can be confident that we are praying attentively, and devoutly.

Yes, let us pray with devotion – honest, sincere, full-hearted devotion. Devotion is consecration – commitment – self-offering, self-gift, self-donation according to these words, the words of my prayer, binding me to God and with Him in our covenant in Christ. As cited above from the Catechism, prayer is a “covenant relationship between God and man in Christ.” Christ has died to open the way for our union – to seal our union by a covenant in His sacred blood.

So, for example, if I pray, “Our Father...,” do I commit myself and consecrate myself to be brother or sister to all who are of “our Father”? Do I see us all as called into Him with one another? Is my heart big enough, and wide enough, to hold all who are of “our Father”? And is He held in faith as my Father? Am I living a life worthy of His Name, which I claim to possess in Him by faith? Do I mean it. in other words. when I say. “our Father”? If I do not mean the words. as

I say and remember this holy prayer, then my prayer ought to be for the grace and mercy of God to help me grow into meaning them, in sincerity and truth.

The life of prayer is a process, a life of growing and maturing in Him. He calls us all to holiness and to the perfection of charity. (CCC # 2013) The journey to holiness is the journey of prayer, a life of *prayer* and the *living* of the fruit of prayer: works of holy charity. Let us slow down enough to listen and to learn the truth of ourselves, and the truth of God. He calls us to a real, authentic union with Him. He created us for this union! And our hearts will be restless, until they find their rest in Him. (St. Augustine)

Let us resolve to make our prayer – even our most familiar vocal prayers of the Church – the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be – let us make our prayers true: truly from the heart, true in conscience. Let them be meant, and believed, every word. As St. Francis of Assisi said, very near the end of his life, “Brothers, finally, let us at last, begin.”

Thomas Richard

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This contribution is available at <http://renewthechurch.com/2017/07/24/simple-guidelines-for-profound-and-effective-prayer/>  
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## The Shameful Silence of Our Spiritual Shepherds [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

Watch out! The sheep are stirring - looking for their silent Shepherds to speak!

Every day human lives are violently destroyed within the wombs of their mothers and harvested for their body parts. This is EVIL always and under all circumstances.

For the most part, the Catholic Bishops in this country remain unwilling **as a group** to publicly call out this evil by name with one unified voice and to demand the end of all public financial support for such barbaric, inhuman and sinful conduct.

Yet, these same silent shepherds, under the umbrella of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), rarely hesitate to immediately criticize the latest health care, immigration, or welfare reform proposals – issues which are important concerns but about which reasonable people can disagree. **None** of those issues, however, are intrinsically evil as is the slaughter of innocent life and the trafficking in human body parts.

Harsh words? I think not. Truth often stings!

Bishop Frank J. Dewane, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development: recently announced: "The loss of affordable access for millions of people is simply unacceptable."

I am compelled to ask: “More important than ending the slaughter of innocent lives and the sale of their body parts?”

Certainly, we should address the health care needs of our citizens. But our Bishops’ primary duty is to stand up against EVIL and to save souls. To paraphrase Scripture: “What profits a man if he has government provided or subsidized health insurance, if he loses his soul? Of what value is health insurance to the human being whose life is violently snuffed out of his mother’s womb and whose body parts are sold?”

Ponder the wisdom of Father Giovanni Salerno, the Founder of the Missionary Servants of the Poor:

*“When the missions of the Third World are spoken of, many think that the best way to help the poor is to address their material needs: clothing, medicine, food, etc. In my life as missionary, after forty-six years, I have realized that the greatest gift we can give the poor is God and His divine grace through the Sacraments of the Church”*

Abortion and the selling of body parts are the sinful horrors of our time. These are the practices which must be unacceptable to our Bishops. The USCCB has an obligation to devote **all** of its energy, resources and moral authority to end these evils.

At a minimum, it must follow the recent example of the Southern Baptist Conference (SBC) which “officially denounced” Planned Parenthood as “immoral” and “called on Congress to immediately and completely defund it.”

According to an article published in the June 29, 2017 issue of *The Wanderer*, among the resolutions the SBC passed at its recent Congress, were the following:

*“We denounce the immoral agenda and practices of Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its affiliates, especially their role in the unjust killing each year of more than 300,000 precious unborn babies, its use of particularly gruesome illegal abortion methods, and its profiteering from harvesting of unborn babies’ tissue and organs...We urge the United States Congress to defund Planned Parenthood immediately and completely of all federal government support and that all state and local government funding that supports Planned Parenthood be withdrawn immediately and permanently.”*

Why has the USCCB as an organization not made the same public demands? Why has it not declared an all-out war against these evils and their agents? Why has it not demanded that elected officials bring an end to these horrors and their financial support of organizations who propagate such evil? Why is the end of these evils and the public financing of them not its number one priority?

This is not the time for our Bishops to remain timid and silent. The USCCB must speak clearly with one voice and take decisive action to end these evils. Now! Our heavenly Shepherd and King would expect nothing less from those to whom He has entrusted His Church and the souls of His creatures.

If I am wrong in reaching these conclusions, please tell me why.

Let us never stop praying for our Shepherds!

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## **Saint Anna Schaffer -- Bedridden and in Constant Pain from being Burned, She Gave it all to Jesus [at It Makes Sense to Me]**

### *IT MAKES SENSE TO ME*

The number of saints in the Catholic Church numbers in the thousands. In fact, the exact number is open to question. Among these are many saints most of us have never heard of. These saints are the obscure spiritual gems whose stories can take your breath away. Say "hello" to Anna Schaffer.

Anna Schaffer was born into a simple, hardworking family in [Mindelstetten](#) in Bavaria on February 18, 1882. The third of six children, Anna was a fine student who studied hard and received good grades. When she was a small child she had felt a deep calling to the religious life but circumstances sometimes hurl themselves into your path changing your destination.

Anna made her [First Holy Communion](#) on April 12, 1893. At that time she had a profound encounter with Jesus. She had not spoken to anyone about it but she wrote a letter to Our Lord telling Him to "do with me as you want...I want to atone and become a sacrifice to atone for all dishonor and offenses against you." She was 11 years old and was giving herself over to Christ.

Anna's dad passed away at the age of 40. The year was 1896. Anna, now 14, had already been working part time for a household in Regensburg but now her family was thrust into poverty. She had dreamed of one day entering a religious order but circumstances now forced her to give up thoughts of any more schooling and find full time work to help support the household. She acquired

several positions and finally landed a job in a pub called the Gameskeeper's Cottage in nearby Stammham. Part of her job description included doing the laundry.

The Victorian era washing machines they were using were designed to have a fire underneath and the rising heat would boil the water in the tub above. These "machines" had galvanized metal smoke stacks to vent the smoke outside the building. The stack on the machine Anna was using came loose from the wall. She was sure she could fix it.

Anna climbed up on the edge of the tub to force the pipe back into the hole. As she stretched up to reattach the pipe she slipped and fell into the boiling, sudsy water. In a flash she was up to her knees in the bubbling cauldron having her legs boiled. The date was February 4, 1901. Anna was 19 years old and her life had been changed forever.



Anna was rushed over to the nearby hospital. Everything they tried to do for her failed to help. They operated over thirty times and every time the pain was excruciating as they had to scrape dead skin away and re-bandage the poor girl's legs. She was given up as a "lost cause" and the experts assumed she would die from infection. Skin grafts would not take and Anna became immobilized.

However, for some unexplainable reason, Anna stabilized and three months later was sent home.

The local doctors, unable to help Anna, several times sent her to the University Clinic of Erlangen for treatment. But this brought her nothing but anguish as the "experts" experimented with various "new" treatments in their quest to help her. They even forcibly broke the joints in her feet several times to free them up from their immobility. The pain she endured must have been horrific. Her mother became her caregiver and would care for her daughter until the end of her life.

In 1898 Anna had seen a vision where Jesus appeared to her as the Good Shepherd and told her the suffering that was going to be hers before the age of 20. Jesus' prediction had now come to pass and there was nothing anyone could do to help her. Anna embarked on a journey of having to endure unimaginable pain every day as her legs would never heal. Open, festering wounds would always be present. But Jesus was in her life coupled with her deep devotion to the Blessed Mother. Anna Schaffer was about to inspire many more than just those in her local community.

Anna admitted in a letter that it took her two years to recognize God's will in her life as she had offered it to Him on her First Communion Day. She embraced God's will fully and Jesus appeared to her saying, "I accepted you in atonement for my Holy Sacrament. And in the future when you receive Holy Communion you will feel the pains of My passion with which I have redeemed you."

On October 4, 1910, Anna received the stigmata. From that day forward Jesus

would feel Anna's pain as Anna felt His. She wrote that she had the intense pain of the passion which increased on Thursday, Fridays, Sundays and on Feast days. She became a beloved person in the town and people began coming from everywhere to hear the gentle and comforting words she spoke. Every day she drew closer and closer to Jesus and the Blessed Virgin as Jesus united her suffering with His own.

In 1925 Anna developed colon cancer and, at the time, there was nothing anyone could do for that. On October 5, 1925, Anna was given Holy Communion. She opened her eyes wide and said, "Jesus, I live for you." Then she closed her eyes and journeyed home with her Lord.

Since 1929, Over 15.000 miracles have been attributed to the intercession of Anna Schaffer. In 1998 alone 551 miracles were recorded through her intercession (many of these have not yet been validated by the Church). Anna was beatified by St. John Paul II in 1999 and canonized a saint by Pope Benedict in 2011.

Saint Anna Schaffer, please pray for us.

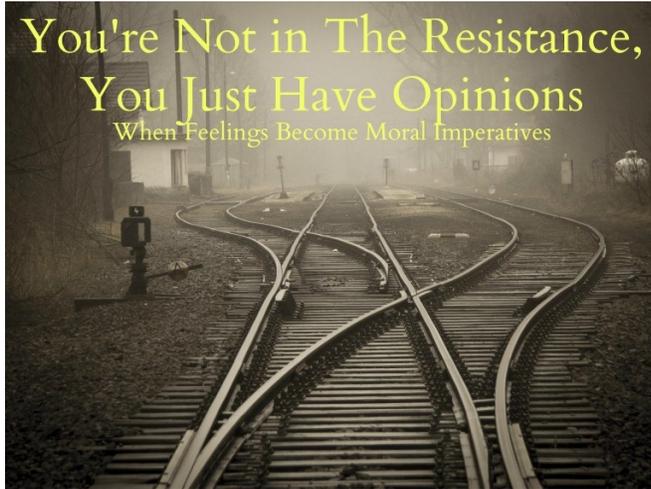
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This contribution is available at <http://slipperywillie.blogspot.com/2017/08/saint-anna-schaffer-bedridden-and-in.html>  
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## When Feelings Become Moral Imperatives



In my [last post](#), I talked about how, culturally, we don't even care what the truth is anymore. We're happy to let everyone have their own "truth," especially when it comes to the big questions in life. But the little things? We're *very* worked up about those.

We're all tempted to believe that our own preferences and choices are inherently superior. (Because obviously, if I would choose it, it must be the best, right?) They're not of course, and until recently it seems as though most of us understood that. More and more though, we are seeing the absolutizing of that which isn't and the use of moral language to describe non-moral issues.

In the (internet) circles in which I travel, I see this mostly in the realm of parenting topics.

An acquaintance posted an older article about the alleged "moral imperative" to end sleep training. (I'm not linking to it, because it's junk science and has been [rebutted in it's details thoroughly](#). But if you really feel compelled, you can find it easily.)

You guys. MORAL IMPERATIVE. Not to end poverty, not to eradicate disease, not to eliminate war. A moral imperative to end sleep training. I just can't. This

is not a moral issue. Different families have different bedtime routines. It's okay. Moral imperatives do not abound in bedtime routines.

Because I am a big girl who is learning to keep on scrolling, I mustered the self-restraint to shut up and mind my own business. Also, because sometimes People Are Wrong On The Internet and your husband doesn't appreciate it when you engage them and then rail at him all evening about it. Hypothetically.

But because I am a glutton for punishment, I had to lurk a little, just to drive myself crazy. In the comments, several women suggested the OP block/defriend a girl who thought the article was silly. Because, you know, if someone lets their baby fuss in their crib while learning to sleep independently, it means they are a reprehensible person who you don't want in your life.

I have seen some of these exact same women aggressively defend moral relativism in contexts like marital infidelity. Ideas like; if your spouse is not meeting your emotional needs, it's totally fine to seek an extramarital relationship with someone who will, if that's what's best for you. Because it's your body and your choice, and you should speak your truth. Or something.

But if you sleep train? There is a MORAL IMPERATIVE to stop you.

So, to summarize: You are allowed to destroy your family for the sake of your "needs," but you absolutely must rock and nurse that baby to sleep/all night long or you're basically Pol Pot.

(If you're not a parent, you're probably like, "What is she talking about? People argue about this stuff?" Yes, yes they do. Endlessly and viciously. Feel free to substitute another topic wherein people assume moral superiority- food and dietary choices spring immediately to mind.)

This is why [relativism is not a protector of tolerance and diversity, but a tool for totalitarianism](#). It allows us to make our personal prejudices and whims normative for everyone.

Why is this happening? Why are we obsessed with the minute details of the way other people put their kids to sleep, even though we affirm their right to dispose of those children if they choose and to structure their family in any way they see fit?

Because when you embrace relativism with respect to *actual* moral issues, you begin to impose moral judgment on things that are non-moral.

We are moral agents by nature. Because we have free will, we are responsible for our actions and authors of the story that our actions tell. On some level, everyone knows this and wants to be part of a compelling story.

Have you seen the, [“A woman’s place is in the resistance” meme](#)? Or people using the hashtag #resist when posting in opposition to some Trump administration policy?

This is not, of course, THE Resistance. People in the *actual* Resistance risked and often lost their lives working to save others. If they had indulged in just one public objection, the SS would have been at their door. Outraged social media posts that risk nothing are not remotely comparable to participation in the Resistance. Could you blame surviving members of the (actual) Resistance for being irritated by this appropriation of the name?

People are moral agents. We want to be forces for good (even if we’re confused about what that is, exactly). We want to be a part of the story and we want to be the protagonist. So we overstate our role, claiming both the moral high-ground based on how we put our kids to bed and membership in the Resistance based on our tweets (#irony).

The problem is that [when we don’t care about the truth](#), we make ourselves the arbiters of good and evil and our penchants and prejudices the standard. Members of the (actual) Resistance could tell us the story of how that ends.

SaveSave

SaveSave

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This contribution is available at <http://www.julia-harrell.com/2017/07/31/not-in-the-resistance-just-have-opinions-when-feelings-become-moral-imperatives/>  
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## You Lead I'll Follow [at Theologyisaverb]



Spiritual direction, it seems to me, is a beautiful dance.

An intimate sharing of self, a gracious reception of the Other. Each step towards self knowledge is but a lyrical movement towards acceptance of the pre-existing dispositions and disequilibrium within our lives. Oh the freedom of movement that comes with self acceptance! No longer are we resolutely restrained by the confines of our former self, but in desiring to model the steps of our divine Partner we can finally abandon our will for His.

This is what St. Ignatius would refer to as resignation or indifference, a course of abandonment from self seeking fulfillment to a desire to love and follow the

abandonment from self seeking fulfillment to a desire to know and follow the will of God for our lives. This conversion of self and discernment of our next steps is, of course, the fruit of spiritual direction. Yet, as mankind is by nature relational, this dance reaches its fullest potential in dialogue with and under the guidance of a trained spiritual director.

## Helpful Rules of the Road of Spiritual Direction:

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1. “Spiritual direction cannot be confined to the religious realm, as though this existed in isolation, but must deal with the whole man and his actual problems” *Friedrich Wolf, Encyclopedia of Theology, ed. Karl Rahner*. Because of this, the more authentic and truthful you are with the challenges you face in spiritual direction- the more helpful the time spent will be.

2. You must be open to hearing and giving consideration to what your spiritual director notices about you and your situation without automatically defending a position. In entering spiritual direction, you are eliciting a consulting perspective, not asking simply for an echo of your own. You may have not noticed something simply because you are too close, or too familiar with its occurrence.

3. If there is something in particular that you are aware of holding you back before a session, and your spiritual director is a priest, ask to begin with the sacrament of reconciliation. If this is the case but you are seeing a lay spiritual director, consider reconciliation at a nearby parish before your session. Otherwise, you may feel very self conscious of the sin, guilt or shame you are harboring and unable to be as open and ready to be moved through direction.

4. Spiritual direction does compel a response or corresponding action by **you**.

“nothing less than a real conversion is needed if the searcher is to accept the profound self-knowledge which he gains with the help of another...in a word to carry his own cross after Christ.” *Friedrich Wolf*

Simply speaking, once we see ourselves truthfully, in the light of faith, we begin to desire change. When we seek to follow Christ, we also wish to model our lives after him.

5. Letting go of that which prevents us from growing spiritually closer to God.

Very few choices in our life are without consequences, be they good or bad. So it goes without saying that which doesn't bring us closer to who God has intended us to be, is at best keeping us spiritually delayed.

6. Recognizing who we are now, allows us to envision who God wants us to be and to invite God into the decision making process. This is the ideal environment for spiritual growth! Our relationship with God grows as we partner together in all of the decisions-big and small- that come before us. We may just find that we are less stressed about the outcome, because we trust that we ask God to guide us in the first place!

**Reflect:**

Have you thought about seeking greater direction in your life? If so, research local spiritual directors in your area to find one that might be accepting new directees.

If you already have a spiritual director, does he/she challenge you to see things from a new perspective? Are you resisting or accepting of the task ahead?

Peace,



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This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2017/07/24/you-lead-ill-follow/>  
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## Using Vaccines Wisely [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

Using drones to deliver vaccines seems reasonable for places like Vanuatu.

But vaccines won't help if folks don't know how to use them correctly, or can't.

Others avoid vaccines because they believe warnings from dubious sources.



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### Health, Illness, and Getting a Grip

Being healthy isn't a mark of holiness. Neither is being sick. What counts is how we deal with what we've got. There's a great deal more to say about that, but not today. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, [828](#), [1509](#), [2211](#), [2288–2291](#), [2292–2296](#), [2448](#))

We're reasonably sure that folks have been getting polio for millennia. Polio epidemics weren't a problem until 1907.



I could blame the 1907 outbreak on the American Congress. They passed the [Pure Food and Drug Act](#) in 1906.

I think that was a good idea. But let's say that I don't, and have 'old fashioned values.' ([October 16, 2016](#))

Applying an earlier century's all-to-common spin on Christianity, I could claim that food poisoning "is a visitation from God."

The early, and mid, 20th century had it's oddball notions too. We've got a slightly different set today. They make just as much — or little — sense.

The last time a case of polio started in my country was in 1979.

Polio hasn't been eradicated yet, so someone could catch the disease before entering the United States. That hasn't happened since 1993,<sup>1</sup> but I think routine vaccinations are still a good idea.

Polio isn't the only serious disease, of course. But apparently some folks remember that it's something to avoid. That makes sense. Panic? Not so much.

Researching this post, I learned about what one outfit called the “The Great U.S. Polio Panic of 2015.”

The disease acted like polio, but wasn't. Several enterovirus D68 cases had been diagnosed, mostly in the Midwest, in 2014. I missed that “panic,” so it may have been limited to folks with specific reading preferences.

## Polio in History

When I finally started walking, it was with a limp. I've talked about hip dysplasia, doctors, and why I take medical ethics a bit personally, before. ([October 7, 2016](#))

This was the 1950s, so at least one person figured I'd survived a polio infection. It was a reasonable guess at the time.

Folks my age are among the last Americans whose parents might have reasonably feared another polio epidemic.

Polio epidemics started in the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> The disease is much older.

Now that we know what to look for, scientists and historians have traced polio



back several millennia.

I'll grant that a [retrospective diagnosis](#) on someone who died three millennia back can be debatable. And often is. Debated, that is.

We don't have photos or [oligonucleotide](#) mapping from Egypt's [Eighteenth Dynasty](#).

But we do have pictures. I think it's likely that the priest pictured on that [stele](#) had polio, and survived.

We also have [Siptah's](#) mummy, and some records from his time. He's a pharaoh you may or may not have heard of, who lived during the [Nineteenth Dynasty](#).

Something left him with a severely deformed left foot. A little over 32 centuries later, we're reasonably sure that he had polio: or something that acted like polio.

The first clinical description of poliomyelitis, polio, was published in 1789. That's when [Michael Underwood](#) described "a debility of the lower extremities."

The disease had quite a few names in my language during the early 19th century: Dental Paralysis, Infantile Spinal Paralysis, Essential Paralysis of Children, Regressive Paralysis, Myelitis of the Anterior Horns, Tephromyelitis, and Paralysis of the Morning.

[Jakob Heine](#) wrote a medical report on Lähmungszustände der unteren Extremitäten in 1840. It's pretty clear that the "paralysis of the lower extremities" he described was polio.

The disease wasn't common. Outbreaks were scattered and small. We didn't have polio epidemics before the 20th century. ([August 21, 2016](#))

**Iron Lungs: Not Missing the 'Good Old Days'**

Some folks recovered with no serious aftereffects. Some were crippled.

Some died because paralysis hit systems we use to breathe. By the 1950s, we'd figured out how to keep folks who couldn't breathe on their own alive with tech like iron lungs.



It was an improvement on the 'good old days,' but not by much.

In 1952 the first practical polio vaccine was developed in a lab.

We'd learned, the hard way, that careful testing makes sense. I'll get back to that.

Nobody died this time around, and the vaccine worked. Mass inoculations started in 1955. An average of about 20,000 folks were catching polio each year by then.

I went through an immunization sequence, and didn't mind at all when an oral vaccine replaced injections.

## Rio, 1904



(From Leonidas Freire, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

Brazil's [Old Republic](#) picked its first president the old-fashioned way. [Deodoro da Fonseca](#) led a military coup that removed Emperor [Pedro II](#).

Elections started a few revolts later. Women couldn't vote, and the *Política dos Governadores* made sure unsuitable candidates didn't get elected.

It wasn't all bad news. President [Francisco de Paula Rodrigues Alves](#) apparently thought smallpox inoculations would be a good idea. I think he was right about that.

However, if half of what I've read about the program is accurate, it could be a case study in how not to conduct a public immunization program.

The 1904 Rio de Janeiro 'Vaccine Revolt' was the high, or low, point.

Depending on who you believed, folks like the chap wielding a scalpel in that cartoon were to blame; or the broom-and-hatchet brigade.

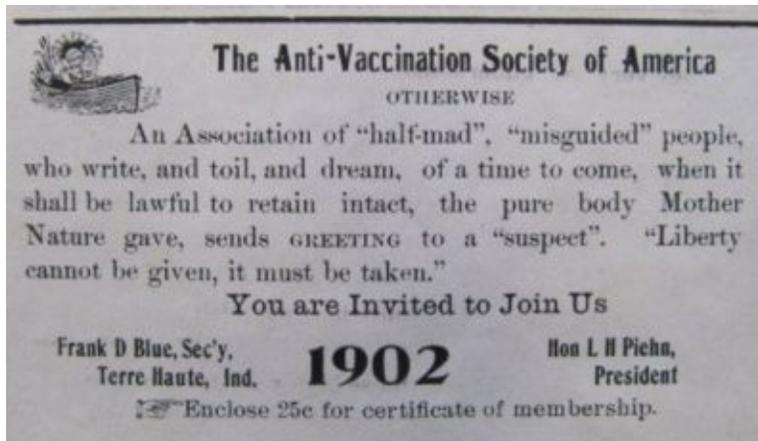
My guess is that official attitudes hadn't changed much since 1891, when the Inspector of Public Health reported that Rio promoted a "complete absence of moral virtue" among its inhabitants, who practiced "horrendous nudity and licentious behavior."

A much more recent, and academic, publication's author says that the problem was clashing cultural norms.

Government doctors didn't see a problem with going into someone's home and getting up close and personal with the missus and daughters. The folks with a "complete absence of moral virtue" didn't have the same 'doctor knows best' attitude, and did see a problem.<sup>3</sup>

Rodrigues Alves caught influenza during a pandemic, and died in 1919.

## **Fears and the 50s**



(From Anti-Vaccination Society of America, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

An [Anti-Vaccination Society of America](#) leader's daughter died from [sepsis](#) after being exposed to smallpox vaccine.

I'm not unsympathetic, but think working to convince doctors that washing their hands was a good idea would have been a better idea. ([October 30, 2016](#))

The Anti-Vaccination Society of America got started after a visit by [William Tebb](#). He was for social reform, against vaccination, concerned about premature burial, and paid for a drinking fountain in Burstow, England.

The fountain was dedicated to memory of the 400,000 horses killed and wounded during the Boer War. Tebb was also gung-ho about physical purity, food reform, and teetotalism. A colorful chap, in a colorful century. ([April 9, 2017](#); [November 11, 2016](#); [July 10, 2016](#))

America in the 1950s was colorful, too.

[Rock and roll](#) was getting popular, a particular brand of Christianity was on the move, and the [House Un-American Activities Committee](#) was hunting commies.

I said “colorful,” not praiseworthy.

That 1955 Keep America Committee flyer wasn’t, I think, mainstream.

But a decade later, I was running into folks who took such claims seriously. Some probably still do, with other vaccines on the ‘fear it’ list.

The third item of “the unholy three” was almost certainly a warning against the [Alaska Mental Health Enabling Act](#).

Congress said the Act would improve mental health care in Alaska. Land allocated to a mental health trust would generate funds for the programs.

The Keep America Committee’s story was much more interesting.

“...Mental Hygiene is a subtle and diabolical plan of the enemy to transform a free and intelligent people into a cringing horde of zombies....”  
(Keep America Committee (May 16, 1955))

Zombies? Maybe they meant that metaphorically.

Other folks seemed equally convinced that the Alaska Mental Health Enabling Act was an international conspiracy [masterminded](#) by Jews, the Catholic Church, or psychiatrists.

Alaska’s legislature passed a law in [1978](#) that allowed selling the Alaska Trust land. I’m quite sure they weren’t thwarting an un-American plot.

They said the land would be more useful in the hands of municipalities, and individuals; or as forests, parks or wildlife areas.

## At the Sign of THE UNHOLY THREE



Are you willing to PUT IN PAWN to the UNHOLY THREE all of the material, mental and spiritual resources of this GREAT REPUBLIC?

### FLUORIDATED WATER

1—Water containing Fluorine (not poison—no antidote) is already the only water in many of our army camps, making it very easy for saboteurs to wipe out an entire camp personnel. If this happens, every citizen will be at the mercy of the enemy—already within our gates.

### POLIO SERUM

2—Polio Serum, it is reported, has already killed and maimed children; its future effect on minds and bodies cannot be gauged. This vaccine drive is the entering wedge for nation-wide socialized medicine, by the U. S. Public Health Service, (heavily infiltrated by Russian-born doctors, according to Congressman Clare Hoffman.) In enemy hands it can destroy a whole generation.

### MENTAL HYGIENE

3—Mental Hygiene is a subtle and diabolical plan of the enemy to transform a free and intelligent people into a cringing horde of zombies.

Rabbi Spitz in the American Hebrew, March 3, 1946: "American Jews must come to grips with our contemporary anti-Semites; we must fill our insane asylums with anti-Semitic lunatics."

**FIGHT COMMUNISTIC WORLD GOVERNMENT by destroying THE UNHOLY THREE !!! It is later than you think!**

KEEP AMERICA COMMITTEE  
Box 200, Los Angeles 24, Calif. H. V. Goodwin, Secy. May 16, 1955

Claiming that mutant [grizzlies](#) enslaved Alaskan legislators with brainwaves from [HAARP](#) is tempting. But someone might believe me. That kind of trouble I don't need.

A 1982 lawsuit led to a 1985 ruling that selling the land was illegal. A lot of different folks and outfits owned much of the land by then. The snarl got sorted out in 1994.

Some folks were still stirring the anti-Alaska Trust pot in 1992. Maybe that conspiracy theory will be revived, if the Alaska Trust gets into the news again.

I think the best conspiracy claims, in terms of entertainment value, are the ones involving space aliens.

[David Icke's](#) lizard-men are among my favorites. As an example of such things, at any rate. He started warning folks that shape-shifting space-alien [lizard-men](#) rule the world in the 1990s.

Reasoned concerns about new medical technology, including vaccines, makes sense. The trick is sorting out facts and fears. ([August 21, 2016](#))

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## 1. UNICEF Drones



(From Getty Images, via BBC News, used w/o permission.)

(“Drones are already being tested for commercial deliveries in many countries”  
(BBC News))

[“Drone vaccine delivery trial for island nation Vanuatu”](#)

(June 14, 2017)

**“Lifesaving vaccines in the island nation of Vanuatu will soon be delivered to remote areas by drone.**

“A partnership between the government and the United Nations children’s fund (Unicef) will see a trial on drone medical delivery next year.

“The country is made up of a string of more than 80 islands – once known as the New Hebrides – many of which do not have airstrips or good roads.

“Most of the people live in rural areas and farm their own food.

“Vanuatu’s director general at the ministry of health said the test was a milestone for the small island nation....”

Getting vaccines to folks who need them makes sense. So does letting recipients know what the vaccines are for, and how to use them. Better yet, having someone with a little training on site to answer questions and at least supervise inoculations.

I’m pretty sure folks at UNICEF have thought of that.

This looks like a good idea. Part of a good idea, at least.<sup>4</sup>

These ‘drones’ are [unmanned aerial vehicles](#), aircraft that fly without anyone aboard. Some are updated versions of [model airships](#) used in 19th century music hall acts and radio-controlled model airplanes flying at least since my younger days.

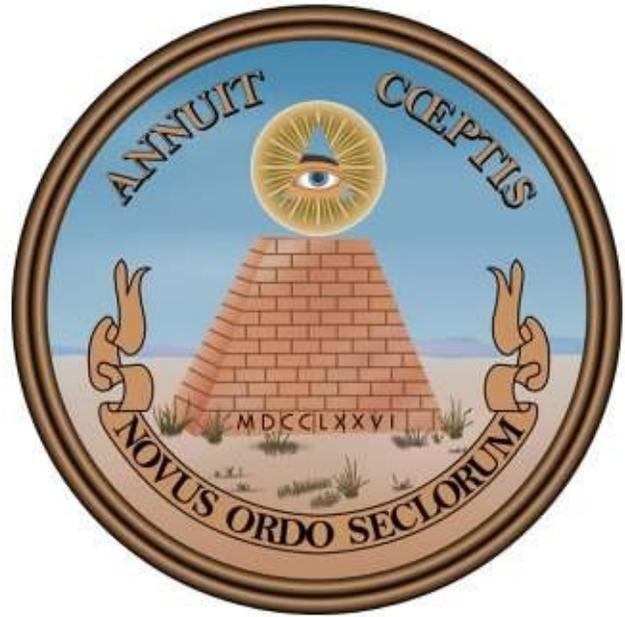
The last I heard, fully-autonomous drones are still in the research and development stage.

**‘Good Enough for a Story’**

Given the human capacity for silliness, I'm pretty sure that someone's going to have unreasonable fears of what UNICEF is 'really' up to.

The fears would make sense, in a 'good enough for a story' way.

[UNICEF](#), the United Nations Children's Fund, is part of the United Nations Development Group. For some, the UN connection alone would be enough for [heebie-jeebies](#).



Add news like [The Register's "flying robot killer death machines"](#) article, and stand back. The '[new world order](#)' conspiracy theory could rise from its unquiet bed and — here we go again.

I think UNICEF, and the United Nations, aren't perfect. But at the moment they are part of what we work with. If we're doing our job. ([June 18, 2017](#); [May 28, 2017](#); [May 21, 2017](#))

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## 2. Measles: Avoidable Deaths



(From SPL, via BBC News, used w/o permission.)

["Measles 'tragedy' kills 35 across Europe"](#)

James Gallagher, BBC News (July 11, 2017)

**“Thirty-five people have died in the past year from measles outbreaks across Europe, the World Health Organization has warned.**

“It described the deaths – which can be prevented with vaccination – as an ‘unacceptable tragedy’.

“A six-year-old boy in Italy [was the latest to die](#) from the infection. More than 3,300 measles cases have been recorded in the country.

“The most fatalities – 31 – have been in Romania.

“But there have also been deaths in Germany and Portugal since June 2016....”

Measles isn’t as scary as the [Black Death](#). It’s also a fairly new disease. Scientists figure it evolved from the [rinderpest](#) virus, about a thousand years back.<sup>5</sup>

Rinderpest was an often-fatal disease for cattle, so dealing with that virus was a priority. It’s now one of two diseases we’ve managed to eradicate.

Most folks who catch measles recover, if they can rest and don’t develop any of several occasionally-fatal complications. But since a few folks will die after getting measles, we’ve developed [MMR vaccine](#).

The notion that MMR vaccine causes people like me<sup>6</sup> comes partly from a fake [1998](#) article in The Lancet.

Result? A remarkable number of folks are scared of keeping their kids healthy. Not that they’d put it that way.

Bogus “scientific” research ranges from honest but stupid mistakes, through professional fraud, to crackpots and ethically-challenged journalists. Whatever the cause, it’s a bad idea. ([April 28, 2017](#); [December 16, 2016](#); [August 26, 2016](#))

What’s sad is that MMR vaccine works, and should be available anywhere in Europe. Those folks didn’t have to die.

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### 3. Congo Polio Outbreak



(From AFP, via BBC News, used w/o permission.)  
("Polio can only be prevented through immunisation"  
(BBC News))

["DR Congo polio outbreak 'from poor vaccine coverage'"](#)  
(June 14, 2017)

**"Two outbreaks of polio have been identified in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in a blow to the goal of wiping out the disease from the world.**

"The [World Health Organization](#) said there was a high risk the vaccine-derived virus could spread.

The strain of polio involved comes from areas with poor vaccine coverage.

A similar outbreak, linked to low immunisation rates, was confirmed last week in Syria...."

[Karl Landsteiner](#) and [Erwin Popper](#) isolated the poliovirus in 1909. Since then we've learned that it's an [RNA virus](#), a bit of RNA in a [protein shell](#).

Some RNA viruses, like the ones causing the common cold, are more of a nuisance than a threat. Others, like poliovirus and the [measles virus](#), are occasionally lethal.

A little over a century after Landseiner and Popper's work, we have comparatively safe and effective vaccines that can protect folks from the disease.

But like any other technology, the vaccines won't work unless they're used properly

property.

Some vaccines, including those used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, use viruses that are weakened, but not dead. [Inactivated vaccines](#), where the viruses are dead, are not necessarily safer.

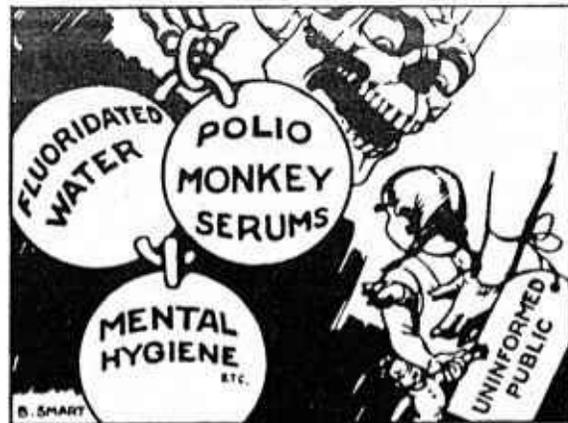
## Fear and Marketing

An emotionally-convincing tale could still be spun about the evils of vaccine, based on experiments done in the [mid 1930s](#).

Decades after two disastrous experiments, McCarthyism enthusiasts included “polio monkey serums” in their “sign of the unholy three” marketing flier.

Their “polio monkey serums” probably depended on memories of Dr. Brodie’s experiments for emotional impact.

### At the Sign of THE UNHOLY THREE



Are you willing to PUT IN PAWN to the UNHOLY THREE: all of the material, mental and spiritual resources of this GREAT REPUBLIC?

The New York University researcher had tried a dead-virus vaccine on himself and several thousand children.

They didn’t die, but many developed severe allergic reactions to the vaccine. They didn’t have immunity to polio, either.

Dr. Brodie’s career was essentially over. He died a few years later, in his late 30s. I don’t know why, although rumors of suicide are plausible.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. John Kolmer tested a weakened-virus vaccine on several thousand children, the same year as Brodie’s experiment. They didn’t acquire immunity. Several caught polio. Nine of them died.<sup>8</sup>

Happily, other researchers kept working. I talked about that earlier.

Medical research is a good idea, if it doesn’t expose folks “to disproportionate or avoidable risks.” (Catechism, [2292–2295](#))

We've learned a great deal since 1935. My guess, and hope, is that Dr. Brodie thought his vaccine was safe for human testing. Using himself as a test subject certainly suggests that. The results were still tragic.

Vaccines used in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), DRC, weren't experimental. The problems in that case were — complicated.

### **Disease: One of Many Problems**



(From Julien Harneis, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

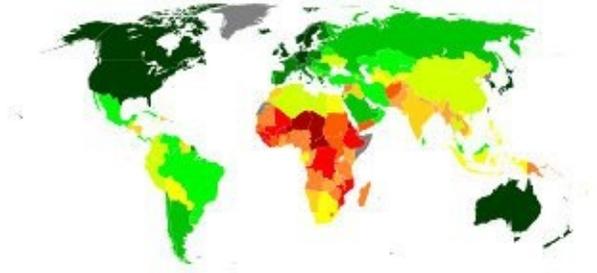
Folks in that photo, taken on the Congo River in 2008, were refugees. They were living on abandoned barges. The barges had once hauled agricultural and industrial products.

Polio outbreaks are just one of the problems folks in the DRC face.

Folks have lived there for — a very long time: 90,000 years, at least. My guess is that it's a whole lot longer. 'It happened earlier' seems like a common theme in our growing knowledge of Earth's past, and ours. ([June 16, 2017](#))

Folks living in the Congo basin should be prospering. Their land has abundant mineral resources, good farmland, a nice climate, and the [Congo River](#). The Congo is one of Earth's major rivers.

I think, and hope, the Congo will eventually be as filled with commerce as my continent's Mississippi.



That is in a hoped-for future.

Today, the territory is a mess.

The 2016 Human Development Index ranked the DRC's level of human development at 176 out of 187.<sup>9</sup> There are worse places to live, but not many.

### Appalling 'Philanthropy'

"Congo" is the name European sailors used for the river. It was the [Kingdom of Kongo](#) and [Kongo people's](#) major river.



"Congo" was arguably easier for Europeans to pronounce than the regional name, Nzadi O Nzere, River Swallowing Rivers.

"Mississippi" is what happened when Frenchmen tried saying Mshi-ziibi, "Big River." And that's another topic.

I won't blame all of the Congo basin's problems on Belgium. But Leopold II's rapacious rule was a bad idea, and conditions haven't been much better since.

From roughly 1390 to 1891, Kingdom of Kongo was a semi-independent nation, a sort of junior partner of Belgium.

Non-European slavers like [Tippu Tip](#) didn't make life easier for folks living there. Neither did Portuguese merchants who were major clients of the slavers.

On top of that, the kingdom's internal politics seem to have been rather intense.

In 1885 Belgium's King [King Leopold II](#) told other European leaders that he'd

be doing humanitarian and philanthropic work in Kingdom of Kongo. They apparently believed him, so until 1908, Leopold's "[Congo Free State](#)" was the king's personal property.

His notion of 'uplifting' folks living there was to relieve them of all the ivory, rubber, and minerals he could ship out. Even by the period's standards, his conduct was appalling.

International pressure convinced Belgian's government to rename Leopold's Congo Free State as the [Belgian Congo](#).

That lasted from 1908 to 1960. It wasn't quite more of the same.

The territory has been independent since then, endured a succession of dubiously-ethical leaders, and has been renamed a few times. It is currently not the worst place on Earth to live. By a narrow margin.

### **Why Pay Attention?**

Africa is a long way from Minnesota.

Why should I pay attention to what's happening there?

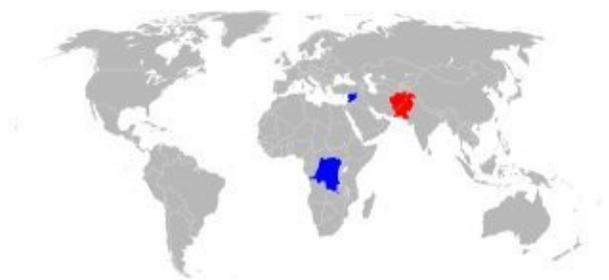
I'm interested in the science involved in sorting out the polio outbreak.

And I must not pretend that my neighbors are limited to folks I know personally. ([Matthew 22:36–40](#), [Mark 12:28–31](#); [Matthew 5:43–44](#); [Mark 12:28–31](#); [Luke 10:25–30](#); Catechism of the Catholic Church, [1825](#))

I think the World Health Organization's polio eradication efforts are a good idea. We've got a pretty good chance of succeeding, too.

Not "soon" by American standards, maybe. But we're down to a few dozen known cases a year. My guess is that we're no more than a few decades from putting polio on the "eradicated" list, along with smallpox and rinderpest. Or could be, if we keep working.

This would be a good thing. ([October 16, 2016](#); [August 21, 2016](#))



## Finishing the Job

I don't have a problem with polio vaccine, partly because I've long since gone through the process. So have many other folks.

I also looked into how a vaccine-derived poliovirus happens.

Vaccines with weakened live viruses are safe and effective. That's true only if enough folks in an area get immunized. Having creature comforts like water and sewage treatment tech helps.

Folks living in many, most, parts of the DRC don't. Many didn't get immunized.



Inadequate sewage treatment isn't a problem by itself. Not where poliovirus is concerned. It's still a good idea, for other reasons.

Where was I? polio, vaccines, sewage treatment. Right.

If everyone in an area is immunized, it won't matter that kids get exposed to the attenuated poliovirus. The viruses will die if they don't promptly reinfect another person. End of problem.

Even if an unimmunized kid gets infected with the weakened vaccine virus, the results are the same as if he or she took the vaccine normally.

The weakened virus will trigger an immune response, the kid acquires immunity, and the viruses die. When everyone's immune, all viruses are dead. End of problem again.

**However** — viruses, including the one that causes polio, mutate and evolve rapidly.

With enough unimmunized folks around, a vaccine-derived virus strain will keep moving from host to host. There's a chance that it'll change into a fully active virus. Then we have a polio outbreak. **Big** problem.

Getting polio vaccine to folks is a good idea. So is making sure that enough folks get immunized. This is a job that, once started, should be finished.

I put links to a range of technical and non-technical resources below. I strongly recommend the Rotary's "[Understanding the recent polio outbreaks.](#)"<sup>10</sup>

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## Dealing With Disease

I talked about medical history's highlights recently, from the [Ebers Papyrus](#) and [Hippocrates of Kos](#) to [Saint Hildegard of Bingen](#). ([May 12, 2017](#))

St. Hildegard's "Physica" and "Causae et Curae" helped lay foundations for the branch of philosophy we call science.

Nearly a millennium after St. Hildegard's work, we've learned quite a bit. We've also acquired some very odd notions.

Some, not all, Christians act as if using the brains God gave us is sinful.

Some, again not all, scientists act as if they think a core value of Christianity is avoiding knowledge. Considering the antics of some Christians, I can understand their attitude: but don't agree.

Some scientists, like [Gregor Mendel](#), have been unequivocally Christian and Catholic.

Mendel's [experiments](#) with peas and mice were much later recognized as groundbreaking genetics research. He was also an Augustinian friar and abbot, so his religious beliefs are fairly obvious.



Others, like [Louis Pasteur](#), weren't quite as blatantly Catholic.

In Pasteur's case, I think some assumptions about his beliefs may come from his refusal to mix religion and science. Mendel didn't either; but like I said, he was an Augustinian friar and abbot.

My culture's recent history might make imagining someone rejecting either faith or science easy enough. Attempting a 'scientific' faith or 'Biblical' science is another option. But not, I think, a good option.

### Trusting God, Within Reason

America's 'Bible thumper' subculture was developing 'creation science' during my youth. Small wonder so many Americans assume that religion and reality don't mix. ([March 31, 2017](#))

My experience suggests that thumpers started losing their penchant for ersatz Elizabethan English around the time 'creation science' hatched.



Their 'faith-based science' details were new, but the basic ideas remind me of Hawkins' imaginative effort to wrap new facts around his preferred reality:

"...Such is the Basis of Scripture, and such also is the legitimate deduction of History. But incontinent Liberality deceiving Faith, Reason, empty with the fumes of that same flattery by which we originally fell, cometh of the unhallowed embrace, and finding in the crust of the Earth certain animal Types...."

(["The Book of the Great Sea-Dragons, Ichthyosauri and Plesiosauri,"](#) Thomas Hawkins, Thomas; p. 1 (1840))

Embarrassing as 'creation science' is, I don't see it as a physically dangerous belief. Faith healing's far end is another matter. It's been quite a while since I've heard of someone dying because their religion was against medical treatment, so maybe it's on the wane.

Getting and staying healthy is a good idea. Within reason. So is prayer. **And** science. (Catechism, [1506–1510](#), [2288](#), [2289](#), [2292](#))

The idea that God has anger management issues, and smites folks with disease? I suspect that was more common in the 18th century than now.

“for a man to infect a family in the morning with smallpox and to pray to God in the evening against the disease is blasphemy; that the smallpox is a **judgment of God on the sins of people**, and that **to avert it is but to provoke him more**; that inoculation is **an encroachment on the prerogatives of Jehovah, whose right it is to wound and smite.**”  
(Contemporary reaction to inoculation experiments by American physician Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, circa 1720)

“Smallpox is a visitation from God; but the cowpox is produced by presumptuous man; the former was what Heaven ordained, the latter is, perhaps, a daring violation our of holy religion.”  
(A physician’s reaction to Dr. Edward Jenner’s experiments in developing a vaccine for smallpox, (1796) via [Psychological Sciences](#), Vanderbilt University)

Repeating what I’ve said before, and probably will again, I take my faith seriously.

Reading the Bible, frequently, is important. So is trusting God, and God’s truth. (Catechism, [101–133](#), [215–217](#))

Faith means willingly and consciously embracing “the whole truth that God has revealed.” (Catechism, [142–150](#))

“The whole truth” means just that: **all** truth. Not just the bits and pieces I like, or what we learned before some arbitrary date.

Since God created everything, including this universe, science and religion should get along fine. The same goes for faith and reason. ([Genesis 1:1](#); “[Fides et Ratio](#),” “[Gaudium et Spes](#),” 36; Catechism, [159](#))

**Living in Yesterday’s Tomorrow**

The RCA Whirlpool “[Miracle Kitchen](#)” went on tour, starting in about [1956](#). It included a microwave oven: one of the more accurate ‘world of the future’ predictions.

Quite a few folks were talking about ‘miracles’ then, the futuristic kind.

“...’Miracles You’ll See in the Next Fifty Years’ pretty much summed up the attitude of the day. We weren’t just going to see advances or novelties; we were going to see miracles....”

(“[Life in 2000 AD](#),” Tales of Future Past, David S. Zondy)



I can get nostalgic about the era’s silly ‘world of tomorrow’ enthusiasm.

I don’t think it made any more sense than today’s equally-silly pessimism. But imagining a future “where jetpacks were as common as galoshes,” as [David S. Zondy](#) put it, was fun.

Now that I’m living in ‘the future,’ it’s not as shiny as some folks expected. I like it, on the whole, and that’s yet another topic. ([June 23, 2017](#); [October 30, 2016](#))

The “Miracles You’ll See...” article in a 1950 Popular Mechanics magazine was, I think, overly-optimistic.

But folks who were my current age at the time, born in 1885, had reason to be enthusiastic about the next half-century. Particularly if they were like me, and remembered what living in ‘simpler times’ was really like.

## **Cholera and Miasma**

The first cholera pandemic ran from [1817 to 1824](#). We don't know how many died.

The second cholera pandemic, from [1829 to 1849](#), was probably just as bad.

Cholera went international again in [1852](#). That pandemic ran until 1860. The fourth cholera pandemic lasted from [1863 to 1875](#).



Details of the fifth cholera pandemic are debatable. Debated, anyway. What's more certain is that it lasted from [1881 to 1896](#), and killed a lot of folks. Again, we don't know exactly how many.

The sixth and seventh cholera pandemics, [1899-1923](#) and [1961-75](#), were more of the same. We haven't had another one since. Outbreaks and epidemics, yes. Pandemic, no. That's progress. Stopping cholera is also part of a job we haven't finished yet.

I'm not surprised that we don't have exact numbers for how many folks died in those global disasters. Survivors of an epidemic or pandemic understandably focus more on burying bodies and rebuilding their society, less on compiling records.

Another priority would be healing folks who are still sick. Or, better yet, keeping folks from getting sick in the first place.

Folks from Europe to China had noticed that disease was more likely near fetid swamps and other smelly places. Common-sense prevention, like not touching sick people, wouldn't keep you healthy.

The most obvious common factor was contact with foul-smelling air.

[Vitruvius](#), a 1st century Roman architect, noticed a connection between the "heavy, unhealthy vapors" of the [Pontine Marshes](#) and illness. ("De architectura," [Book I](#))

Miasma theory was the consensus scientific explanation for disease until about

130 years back. Other theories, like [contingent contagionism](#), had been suggested. The contagionism-miasma debate was big among doctors in the 19th century.

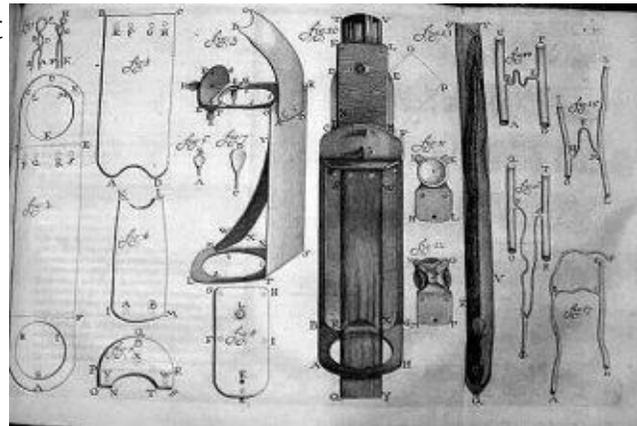
The idea that disease was spread by tiny “seeds” was over two thousand years old, but ‘bad air’ seemed a more reasonable explanation. That, we could smell. And correlations between ‘night air’ and disease were well-documented. Causation seemed plausible.

Certainly more plausible than the idea that tiny little critters we can’t see are bad for us. That idea took a long time to catch on.

### ‘Magic Bullets’

[Agostino Bassi](#) found a tiny fungus that made silkworms sick. In 1844, he said that maybe tiny organisms caused diseases in humans, too.

[John Snow](#) traced the [1854 Broad Street cholera outbreak](#) to a specific well. Meanwhile, scientists in Italy ignored [Filippo Pacini’s](#) isolation of [Vibrio cholerae](#), the cholera bacillus. Miasma theory was **really** popular.



Eventually, Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch produced evidence that couldn’t be ignored. My guess is that today’s [germ theory of disease](#) isn’t the whole story.

I keep saying this: we have a great deal left to learn.

Paul Ehrlich’s 1900 [Zauberkegel](#), magic bullet, isn’t “magic.”

It’s his name for a then-hypothetical agent that could be ‘aimed’ at disease organisms. I think naming something makes thinking about it easier.

In this case, it arguably helped Paul Ehrlich — he’s not the famous author — study human immune systems and develop [Salvarsan](#), the first effective treatment for syphilis.

That was in 1910.

We'd used [antibiotics](#) for millennia, along with other 'folk medicine' cures.

What made some 'medical miracles' of the 20th and 21st centuries, including eradication of smallpox and rinderpest, possible was learning **how** some folk remedies worked.

It's not 'magic,' and antibiotics aren't 'miracles.' All they did was make it possible, after millennia of suffering and death, to finally cure — and prevent — many diseases.

Follks living in the 1950s had reasons for their enthusiasm and optimism.

They had problems, too; some of them very serious. So do we. But we have cause for enthusiasm and optimism, too. Reasonable optimism:

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<sup>1</sup> Polio; nearly gone, but shouldn't be forgotten:

<sup>2</sup> Polio history:

<sup>3</sup> Rio de Janeiro, 1904:

<sup>4</sup> Delivery drones and all that:

<sup>5</sup> Measles background:

<sup>6</sup> Autism spectrum disorder and me:

<sup>7</sup> Suicide is a bad idea. (Catechism, [2280–2282](#)) I've talked about what the Church says, and why I decided against it:

<sup>8</sup> Polio science and technology, mostly:

- Wikipedia
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- National Institutes of Health
  - [“PVR poliovirus receptor \[ Homo sapiens \(human\) \]”](#)  
NCBI, NIH (Updated August 13, 2016)

- [“The Spatial Dynamics of Poliomyelitis in the United States: From Epidemic Emergence to Vaccine-Induced Retreat, 1910–1971”](#)  
Barry Trevelyan, Matthew Smallman-Raynor, Andrew D. Cliff;  
Annals of the Association of American Geographers; via NCBI (June 2005)
- [“Transgenic mice expressing a human poliovirus receptor: a new model for poliomyelitis.”](#)  
Ren RB, Costantini F, Gorgacz EJ, Lee JJ, Racaniello VR; Cell; via PubMed (October 19, 1990)

<sup>9</sup> Kingdom of Kongo to Democratic Republic of the Congo:

<sup>10</sup> Polio, mostly:

- [“Understanding the recent polio outbreaks”](#)  
Ryan Hyland and Teresa Schmedding; Rotary [non-technical FAQ/backgrounder]
- Wikipedia
- [“Notes from the Field: Circulating Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus Outbreaks — Five Countries, 2014–2015”](#)  
Michelle Morales, MD, Chimeremma D. Nnadi, MD, PhD, Rudolf H. Tagermann, MD, Steven G.F. Wassilak, MD; Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR); Centers for Disease Control (February 12, 2016)
- [“Coxsackievirus in children: How serious is it?”](#)  
Jay L. Hoecker, M.D.; Patient Care & Health Info; Mayo Clinic (January 17, 2015)
- [“Calibration of Multiple Poliovirus Molecular Clocks Covering an Extended Evolutionary Range”](#)  
Jaume Jorba, Ray Campagnoli, Lina De, Olen Kew; Journal of Virology; (May 2008) via US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health Centers for Disease Control
- World Health Organization

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This contribution is available at <http://brendans-island.com/catholic-citizen/using-vaccines-wisely/>  
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# **Battle for the Heart [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]**

## **A REASON TO BELIEVE**

**The Case For Christ –**

**The Head vs. the Heart**

**by Craig Johnston**

**Every so often I like to share something written by another. Today's post is written by Craig Johnston.** Craig and I attend the same men's fellowship at our church. He spoke to the fifty or so men a few weeks ago about his experience having been selected to sit on a Grand Jury in our county – and then made application to the spiritual warfare in which we are all engaged.

What he told us was important enough that I asked his permission to share his words with others. For the sake of space and clarity, here is an edited version of what he granted me permission to post.

Here is what he said:

On a typical day we'd hear 50-90 cases. I was shocked and a bit alarmed by the level and nature of crime in our community and those surrounding us. There is a proliferation of gang activity, family violence, drugs, prostitution, and so many cases a complete lack of regard for fellow human beings.

The level of crime and general lack of civility reflects a world engaged in spiritual warfare. There is no doubt we suffer from the effects of a growing segment of secular society that wants nothing to do with God or religion. God and religion are often portrayed as a *source* of our problems. God and religion, people believe, create an atmosphere of conflict and judgment, not of peace and understanding.

Many of the so-called intellectuals say the God of Christianity is a myth. They teach and proclaim across the media, the public square, and in our educational institutions and even our courts that logic, reason, and science preclude the need for our man-made “god”.

In their ongoing attempts to discredit Christian faith, they lump all faiths together, likening the violence done in the name of one religion to discredit all – as though all religions are equal or the actions of one individual represent the teaching of a faith.

And in denigrating faith in the God of the Bible, atheists and other anti-Christ evangelists achieve their goal of establishing a world where everything is a matter of personal perspective, a place in which morality is relative.

Law enforcement and the justice system do their best to provide a safe and civil society – but the history of the world dating back millennia demonstrate that the cure to the ills of our times will be accomplished not by putting one’s faith in people, but in putting one’s faith in God.

True faith results from not just knowing who God is, but a desire to knowing His nature and will for our lives. For most of us, I believe the journey of faith start

with the head and then moves to the heart. There are times even now when the Doubting Thomas in my head pulls me away from the direction my heart is leading. I'd like to share some words of encouragement that have helped me over the years that help my head get back in line with my heart.

Simon Greenleaf (d. 1853) helped put the Harvard Law School on the proverbial legal map. He wrote the three-volume legal masterpiece, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, which is still regarded as “the greatest single authority in the entire literature of legal procedure.” The U.S. judicial system today operates on rules of evidence established by Greenleaf.

While teaching law at Harvard, Greenleaf stated to his class that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was simply a legend; as an atheist, he thought miracles to be impossible. In a rebuttal, three of his law students challenged him to apply his acclaimed rules of evidence to the resurrection account.

Greenleaf accepted his students' challenge and began an investigation into the evidence. Focusing his legal mind on the facts of history, Greenleaf attempted to prove the resurrection account was false. Yet the more Greenleaf investigated the record of history, the more stunned he was at the powerful evidence supporting the claim that Jesus had indeed risen from the tomb. Greenleaf's skepticism was being challenged by an event that had changed the course of human history.

Among other conundrums, Greenleaf was unable to explain several dramatic changes that took place shortly after Jesus died, the most baffling being the behavior of the disciples. It wasn't just one or two disciples who insisted Jesus had risen; it was all of them. Applying his own rules of evidence to the facts, Greenleaf arrived at his verdict.

In a surprising reversal of his position, Greenleaf accepted Jesus' resurrection as the best explanation for the events that took place immediately after his crucifixion. It would have been impossible, he determined, for the disciples to persist with their conviction that Jesus had risen if they hadn't actually seen the risen Christ.

Greenleaf was so persuaded by the evidence that he became a committed Christian. He – and many former atheists and agnostics who committed themselves to disprove the New Testament account of Jesus – Greenleaf concluded that any unbiased person who honestly examines the evidence will conclude what he did—that Jesus the Christ has truly risen.

As if the resurrection of Christ isn't enough to convince the honest skeptic, the sheer number of Old Testament messianic prophecies provide additional reason to believe the veracity of the New Testament claims about Jesus.

There are no prophecies foretelling of Muhammad, Joseph Smith, Buddha, or any of the other founders of their religions. Yet of Jesus, there are literally hundreds.

For example, God told us through the prophets that a Virgin would conceive the Messiah, who would be born in Bethlehem but in some way would come out of Egypt, and be called a Nazarene. He would enter Jerusalem on a colt, be betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver, die a sacrificial death for us – and then rise from the dead. We even knew what His last words from the cross would be, how he would suffer the scorn of the crowd, and how soldiers would cast lots for his garments.

The mathematical odds of one person fulfilling the more than three hundred prophecies are impossible for us to grasp. For example, for the fulfillment of only eight prophecies is one out of  $10^{17}$ . That's 1 followed by 17 zeros. It looks like this: 100,000,000,000,000,000.

For one person to fulfill 48 prophecies is 1 followed by 157 zeros.

Yet, Jesus fulfilled more than 300 prophecies! I've not worked it out, but the odds of that happening have to be somewhere in the realm of absolutely impossible -- without the divine intervention of an omnipotent and omniscient God to whom nothing is impossible.

The battle for the heart begins with the mind. And victory in that battle begins and ends only with the God of History, the God of Reason, and the God of science and mathematics.

Christians know Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Noted Catholic author and priest, Fr Thomas Dubay came to this conclusion: “From the natural point of view we can come to know God from the vestiges of Himself that he has left in the splendors of the visible universe: the blazing red sunset, the snow-covered mountain peaks, the graceful flight of a bird, the breathtaking magnificent complexity of a single living cell. On a still more exalted level we know Him in the loveliness of the saints- but remains a knowledge of the infinite through the finite”

In a round-about way, Fr. Dubay was paraphrasing the 19<sup>th</sup> Psalm written 3,000 years ago: “The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world.

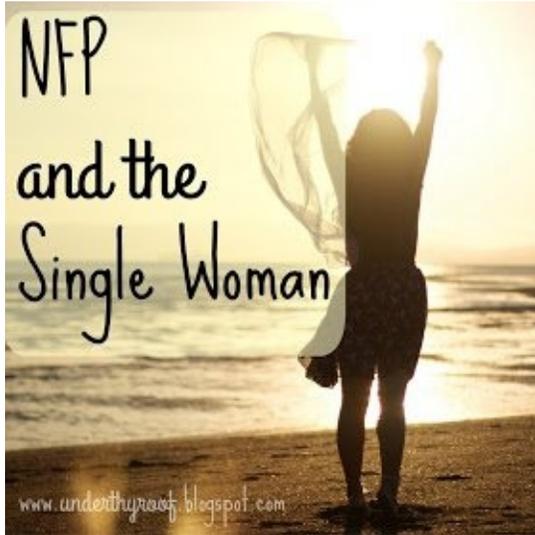
May God give those who truly seek Him eyes to see and ears to hear.

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This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2017/07/a-guest-post-battle-for-heart.html>  
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## NFP and the Single Woman [at Under Thy Roof]



1

It's that time of year again - NFP Awareness Week starts next week! This year I've decided to do things a little differently. When I looked at NFP materials, advertising, blogs, etc. there was consistently a specific voice missing: the single woman's.

That's frustrating. Married people do not have a monopoly on NFP, and it can certainly be of benefit to single women!

NFP is not solely about achieving or avoiding pregnancy. At its heart, NFP is about learning your individual body and why it does what it does. There is an amazing amount of misinformation out there about what is and is not normal

amazing amount of information out there about what is, and is not, normal when it comes to women's health. Why not encourage more women to learn about their bodies?

So instead of interviewing NFP couples, this year I sought out single women willing to share their stories of learning NFP. Let's meet the five brave women!

2



I am a 21-year-old birth doula, NET Ministries alumni, and life-long Catholic. I grew up being an older sister of a large family where I could see firsthand the beauty and purpose of God's design for fertility in my own family as we

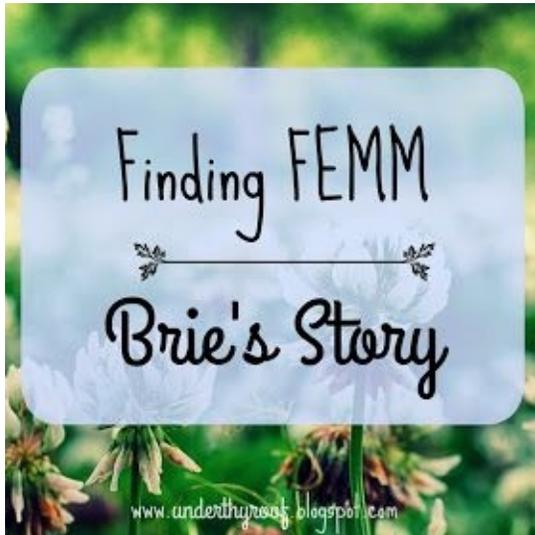
welcomed each of my younger siblings with joy and gratitude. As I grew older however, I began to believe the lies from the world convincing me that my body was my greatest asset in attaining love. My body became to me a hopeless disaster, with a few redeeming qualities.

3



I'm in my early 30s and single. I grew up in Colorado, but have also lived elsewhere which I feel gives me the qualifications necessary to claim Colorado as the best place to live. :) I have a theology degree from Notre Dame (go Irish!) and an MTS from the John Paul II Institute in DC, and now work admin at a small Catholic non-profit that helps evangelize lay Catholics. One of my favorite things to do is take my dog on walks. I also love hiking (like most good Coloradans), knitting, games, listening to 80s music and movie scores, and watching my favorite movies and TV shows (Parks and Recreation is one of my favorite go-tos). I have three siblings - two older, one younger - and they're all married to great people. I also have three nephews so far, who are lots of fun and two of whom I'm blessed to have as godsons, and I am also godmother to one of my dearest friend's daughter.

4



I grew up in Chicago, IL in a loving Catholic family. Formed by experiences in my faith, comm

unity and education, I felt the desire to

serve others both individually and also on a macro level. After college I spent time in service with FOCUS then began working in NYC at a NGO devoted to the dignity of the human person. It was there that I discovered

[FEMM – a women’s health program](#)

that I’ve dedicated the last 6 years of my life to.

5

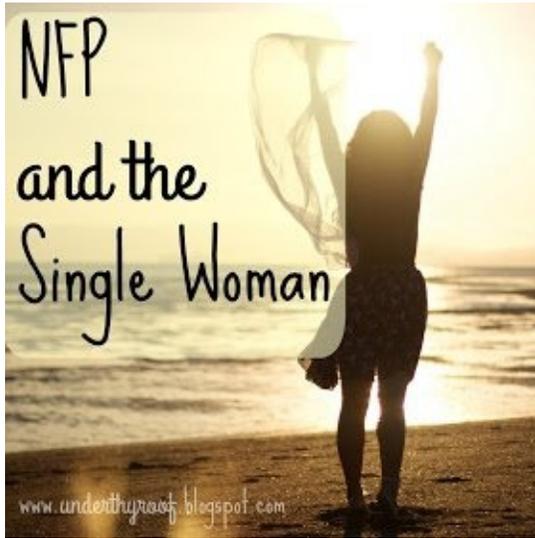


I'm Kate, 41 years old, never married, cradle Catholic. I have been a school librarian for about nine years since changing careers from the legal field. I live just outside of Philadelphia in the suburbs, not far from where I grew up. My parents have been married for over 46 years and I have an older brother and a younger sister, both of whom are married—so I am a happy auntie to five wonderful nephews (oldest is 19/youngest is 4 months) and one fantastic niece (almost 13!). [Read more of her story here!](#)



My name is Alejandra, and I'm originally from southern California, but am now living in Oakland in the Bay Area. I just recently became a licensed Architect – hooray! Believe it or not, you can't just call yourself an Architect right out of university, and I had to pass seven national exams and one state exam over two years to earn that professional title, so I'm pretty proud! I'm currently working at a high-end residential firm in Emeryville that does beautiful work in this area.

I speak three languages – Spanish, English, and Italian – because my mom is from Chile and I studied abroad in Italy. I'm forever grateful to my mom for making sure we were bilingual from the start – languages are one of my passions! In my spare time, I love to cook and bake, work in my garden, spend time at the beach, hike in the Oakland redwoods (or anywhere for that matter – we are blessed with so many natural gems here in the Bay Area!), read, draw and paint, hang out with friends, and most of all, horseback ride. I've recently become an equestrian and I take English riding lessons here in the Oakland redwoods. There is nothing more wonderful than being out there with the horses... Unless it's snuggling with my two adorable goddaughters of course!



Check back every day next week to read their full stories!

[Share via Facebook](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://underthyroof.blogspot.com/2017/07/nfp-and-single-woman.html>  
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## **Martha: Honesty, Boldness and Take-Charge Efficiency [at Creo en Dios!]**

Today the Catholic Church celebrates the Memorial of St. Martha, friend to Jesus and sister to Lazarus and Mary.

We meet Martha in two primary episodes in the Bible: the first when Jesus is dining at the home of his friends, and the second when Jesus show up after the death of Lazarus.

The first episode is a short one. Luke tells us:

As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feed listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.

It is interesting that when Jesus chides Martha, he didn’t say, “Why can’t you just be like Mary?” (Something more than one parent or teacher has said about a child when comparing the child to a sibling.) I suspect Jesus knew Martha never could be Mary, just as Mary never could be Martha.

We do need to recognize at the outset that we are all different. We possess different gifts and personalities. The common reaction to this Gospel episode, when Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better part is to say what Jesus didn’t say: Silly Martha – she should have been more like her sister Mary.

But we need to remember something. Here is a woman in a time when women didn’t speak up to men, and they certainly didn’t chastise them. Yet Mary has the boldness to speak her piece with Jesus. Many women of her time would have held their tongue. But Martha spoke what was on her mind, understanding that being in relationship with Jesus means speaking what is actually on our mind and in our heart. Not saying only what we think we are supposed to say.

We can't move forward with God unless we are honest about what is troubling us. It may be that Martha's point was misplaced; indeed, from Jesus' reaction we know it was. But that doesn't change that had she stayed silent, she would not have learned from Jesus. Only her honesty and courage in speaking up allowed her to do that.

So Martha represents honesty and boldness.

She also represents a take-charge organization and efficiency that the world could not operate without. Someone does have to do the cooking, change the sheets if Jesus and his friends are going to stay overnight. Someone had to make sure there is enough wine for everyone and so on. Martha, in the words of Joanna Weaver "is an administrator extraordinaire – a whirling dervish of efficiency with a touch of Tasmanian she-devil thrown in to motivate the servants."

So on this day, let us learn from Martha.

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This contribution is available at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com/2017/07/29/martha-honesty-boldness-and-take-charge-efficiency/>  
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## Lean into Our Lady, Mamas [at Wild Things Farm]

Parenthood is a funny thing. Those sweet little babies don't come with an instruction manual and a lot of the time, you're really just winging it.

My oldest is turning 15 today. Fifteen years ago, I walked into the hospital in southern Florida, they scooped out a screaming baby boy, and sent me home. I remember wondering what made them think I was qualified to take this little bundle home.

I was only twenty one, and we were twenty five days away from our first wedding anniversary. We were kids. And parents.

I still look around sometimes and wonder how this all is supposed to work. Who, exactly, thought I was qualified to do all this?! Adulthood seems like a farce sometimes. Surely I'm not the only one who feels like she has no idea what she's doing and just makes it up as it comes along.

On a wing and a prayer, it all seems to work out. We make the best choices we can, given the cards we are handed and then we pray that it all works out. God saw us to be qualified, so we pick up and carry on. We lean on Him and we lean on His Mother.

God was wise when He gave us Mary, a young mother who I am sure also felt unqualified for her job. But He called her and she said yes. We can lean into her when the tasks seem too much. I was clueless as I walked out of that hospital, a young mom to a little boy. She must have felt clueless, too, as she sat in that stable, a young mom *to the Son of God*. That seems a bit more overwhelming than any of our situations, huh?

Her fiat is our fiat. We say yes to His call and even when we feel overwhelmed, under qualified, and a bit of a mess, we can turn to Mary, because she understands.

As Gianna Molla, also a mama who I am sure questioned her qualifications, says:

Love your children. In them, you can see baby Jesus. Pray for them a lot and everyday, place them under holy Mary's protection.

Motherhood – parenthood – in no small and easy job. It's hard and exhausting and we often look around and wonder who thought we were cut out for such an enormous and daunting task. The answer is God. He found you capable. And he equips us for the task. He also sends us saints to emulate and His very own Mother to guide us and carry us.

So, carry on, good mamas. Fight the good fight and lean into Our Lady, everyday.

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This contribution is available at <http://sewmanywildthings.wordpress.com/2017/08/01/lean-into-our-lady-mamas/>  
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## **Question: I don't see anything in Scripture that says the 12 Apostles were baptized [at Catholic365]**

Question: I don't see anything in Scripture that says the 12 Apostles were baptized. I see where St. Paul was baptized. But not the 12.

It's in there. Not everything in Scripture is explicit. Protestants, hold to a rule that everything must be explicit in Scripture. But we don't.

So, where does Scripture say that the Apostles were baptized. Probably many places, but here are the three most obvious ones, where we can make this inference.

### **First, Jesus said:**

Mark 16:16 **He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;** but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Jesus doesn't hold the Apostles do different standards. Therefore, if they claim to believe, they must also have been baptized.

### **Second, Jesus also said:**

John 3

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ...**

We believe we are born again in Baptism and therefore, we believe that Jesus would have required the Apostles to be baptized, in order that they could be born again, before they could be His disciples.

And finally, Scripture also says:

**John 13:4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a**

**towel, and girded himself. 5 After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.**

You probably recognize the foot washing episode at the Last Supper? Right?

**6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?**

St. Peter balked at the idea that Jesus, the Son of God, would bend down to wash his feet.

**7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.**

Jesus tried to persuade him by saying that, although he didn't understand the meaning of the gesture, now, he would understand it, later.

**8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet.**

But St. Peter still objected. He didn't want to see his beloved Master doing such a humiliating task.

**Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.**

But Jesus said, "If I don't wash your feet, you'll have to leave my company."

**9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.**

To which St. Peter replied, "well, if washing is so important, then wash me from head to toe."

Pause for a moment. Here comes the part that addresses the question of whether the Apostles were baptized or not. Keep two things in mind.

1. Baptism means washing.
2. Jesus is washing the 12 Apostles' feet.

**10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet,**

**but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.**

Did you get that?

*He that is washed*, means, "he that is baptized".

*Needeth not to be washed save his feet* , means, "does not need to be baptized again, but needs to repent, confess his sins and be reconciled to God."

*and ye are clean*, means that he has been washed of his sins because he has been baptized.

*but not all*. This is a reference to Judas Iscariot, who was baptized, but did not believe. Thus, bringing on himself the curse of Mark 16:16.

Therefore, then, in this verse, Jesus says that all the people whose feet He washed, were baptized (i.e. washed). And since it is only the Apostles who were baptized, Jesus has just revealed that the Apostles were baptized. He just doesn't come out and use the word, "baptized". He uses a different word, which means the same thing.

I hope that helps.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.catholic365.com/article/6957/question-i-dont-see-anything-in-scripture-that-says-the-12-apostles-were-baptized.html>  
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## Stuck on the Way: The Simon-Veronica Loop [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



“For a moment, a vision more wonderful than that of Tabor is granted to the woman whose compassion drove her to discover Christ in a suffering man.”

~ [Caryll Houselander](#)

**Where do you sit in church?** Do you automatically gravitate to a region time and again, maybe even a particular pew?

Everybody does it, it seems – at least that’s what I hear from priests. Pastors know where their parishioners normally sit and what Sunday Mass they normally attend, and they take note if they’re missing – or if their perched in an unexpected location.

Then there’s us: Inveterate congregational nomads. Side aisle, center aisle,

Mary's side, Joseph's side – who knows where the Beckers will end up?

These days, however, on those rare occasions when we have a quorum attending Mass together (hard to do when you have older teens who can drive themselves), we usually end up on St. Joseph's side of the church near the cry room. I'm not sure why – we haven't had a wailing baby for much too long – but I'm happy to defer to familial consensus.

But when I'm on my own? For [daily Mass](#)? I prefer Mary's side between Simon and Veronica – between, that is, the fifth and sixth Stations of the Cross. It's a physical space where I feel spiritually at home, an intervening territory that pretty much epitomizes the state of my soul most the time.

Simon, you'll recall, was the country bumpkin that the Roman soldiers grabbed from the crowd to shoulder Jesus' hefty burden. The Gospel accounts indicate that he didn't volunteer, and the burden was reassigned to Simon only after the Lord, weakened by beatings, had stumbled under its weight.

Even so, [Simon's act](#), whether willing or not, is a striking metaphor for what it means to *become* a Christian, to *be* a Christian: We take up the Cross by taking up our own crosses, whatever they may be. Jesus told us as much himself – it's [right there in Gospels](#) for all to read – so it shouldn't come as any surprise that lived Christianity is associated with suffering and dying: Dying to self, dying to our pride and niggling selfishness, dying in ways we resent and resist. Dying, dying, dying, over and over again, way before we have to face biological death.

**So that's our starting place as believers** – “Simon helps carry the cross,” the Fifth Station. A short stroll and a genuflection brings us to the Sixth, “Veronica wipes the face of Jesus,” and we're confronted with an advanced stage of discipleship. Contrary to Simon, a drafted Christ-imitator, Veronica represents a willing, even eager apprentice. She lunges through the crowd, defying the Roman guards and their scourges, and applies a towel to the bloody face of love.

It's a desperate spectacle of compassion and affection, a moment of intimate connection between savior and saved, that leads to an unexpected result: A transfer of divine visage from Christ to cloth. The Lord's face grew bloody again soon enough, but Veronica's courageous compassion earned her a permanent and precious memento.

Unlike Simon the Cyrene, however, Veronica has no biblical pedigree. “As we read the Gospel account,” writes [Frank Sheed](#), “we miss one familiar figure – for Veronica was not to arrive for a good many centuries yet!” It’s true that her deed of compassion was well established in the Stations by about the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and that the traditions associated with a wondrous transfer of Jesus’ battered likeness to a towel go back much further. In fact, the towel itself, its sacred portrait faded into obscurity, is still preserved in the Vatican as a holy relic.

But did Veronica even exist? Her name could be seen as a [clever amalgam](#) of the Latin *vera* for “true” and the Greek *icon* for “image,” which itself seems to have been originally applied to the relic itself. It could well be that the “veronica” cloth paved the way for the Veronica character of the Sixth Station; that she was a pious invention which dovetailed nicely with an instructive narrative exhortation. “The name Veronica is to be found in none of the early martyrologies,” writes [P.K. Meagher](#), “nor does it appear in the present Roman Martyrology in connection with this legendary woman.” St. Charles Borromeo himself yanked liturgical honors associated with her story from the Milanese Ambrosian Rite.

**Still, legend or no, Veronica is right up there** on the wall of my church – as she is in your church, in virtually all Catholic churches and chapels. “Consider the compassion of the holy woman, Veronica,” writes St. Alphonsus Liguori in his classic [Way of the Cross](#). “Seeing Jesus in such distress...she presented Him with her veil.” Maybe there was no first-century Veronica; maybe the Sixth Station didn’t go down exactly like we recite it every Friday during Lent. Her legacy lingers intact nonetheless, and for me it endures as a singular spiritual goal.

For as much as I identify with the unwilling (or at least balking) Simon, my desire is to be a rash Veronica who assimilates the very likeness of Christ – no fear, no hesitation. It’s as if I’m drawn to that void stretching from the fifth to the sixth Station. It’s like a taut string on a steel guitar, and I get to be the fret to fret – from a religiosity of obligation to occasional high notes of energetic self-surrender, and back down again, over and over and over. No picking; no grand chords; no Christopher Parkening lightly skipping through Bach’s “..” Just a sloppy slide, a wavering rhythm, a warbling tune.

And if that image suggests a corny country-western song or a downer Memphis blues, so be it. Either (or both) could appropriately accompany my perpetual

interior languor – “I believe; help my unbelief!” ([Mk 9.24](#))

Which, of course, is why I [keep showing up](#) for daily Mass. I’m confident that its Music will continue to draw me forward – regardless of where I sit.

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

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This contribution is available at <http://godhauntedlunatic.wordpress.com/2017/07/16/stuck-on-the-way-the-simon-veronica-loop/>

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## Weedless [at With Us Still]

The beautiful flower bed saddened me enormously...and instantaneously.

Not the kind of reaction you'd expect a well-tended garden to elicit, perhaps. But there it is.

If you take a stroll through the overwhelmingly pleasant Washington Park in downtown Sandusky, Ohio, this summer...you'll come upon this:



Beauty, celebrating brokenness. A floral tribute to the quincentenary of regrettable division within the Body of Christ. Separation, with plenty of blame to go around—the split fed by the sinfulness of the Catholic and Protestant churches alike.

The tidy garden spot in Sandusky has haunted my spirit ever since I saw it a few weeks ago, but it's only in wrestling with this Sunday's gospel passage that I think I'm finally beginning to understand why it's been weighing me down.

The flower bed is practically weedless, you see. Which suggests that it has been tenderly cared for...and nurtured. Savored, in a way. Even relished...perhaps not unlike how we treat the doctrinal differences that have separated Catholics and

Protestants for these 500 years.

Which is to say, we Christians seem to take *pride* in our differences at times – when on some level, they ought to be experienced as a source of *shame*. Or at the very least, a cause of profound humility.

Instead, we tend to focus on the objective of weedlessness...toiling to tear out ‘invasive species,’ highlighting all the things that keep us apart. But this festering instinct is in direct contradiction to the wisdom Jesus shares with us [in Sunday’s gospel](#).

*His slaves said to him,  
‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’  
He replied, ‘No, if you pull up the weeds  
you might uproot the wheat along with them.  
Let them grow together until harvest...’*

In recent years, my participation in the interdenominational [Kairos Prison Ministry](#) has been a source of great blessing to me, personally. It has put me into direct contact with Christians of other traditions. It has given all of us—as Kairos teammates—the opportunity to act on the great commission recounted in another section of Matthew’s gospel: ‘Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...’ (Matthew 28:19) In our formation meetings, we talk about consciously setting our differences aside, so that we can focus on sharing the Good News. But perhaps what we’re actually doing is something more like allowing the wheat and weeds to grow together—as the Lord commands.

As I meditate on that Kairos experience...and on the words I hear in scripture this week...I notice that the [desire for weedlessness](#) can be counterproductive at times. There’s an arrogance in it. We don’t always know what greater good we might be uprooting in the process.

But we *do* have a blessed assurance, as St. Paul reminds in the passage we hear this week from his letter to the Romans (8: 26-27)—the assurance of the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance:

*The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness;  
for we do not know how to pray as we ought,  
but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.  
And the one who searches hearts*

*knows what is the intention of the Spirit,  
because he intercedes for the holy ones  
according to God's will.*

Come, Holy Spirit: Aid our weakness. Heal our divisions. Help to make our  
Body one!



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

*IHS*

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PRAY: Each Missionary needs to be open to daily prayer. There are so many aspects to this one concept alone that we might discuss, but for now, what we require is a regular effort to be in touch with God, the One, True God of the Holy Trinity. Everything we do must begin, be experienced, and end with an active awareness that God is present (as we pray), is eager to know us for who we truly are (as we contemplate) and is eager to greet us in other people (as we relate).

You will note that we do not mention prescribed words or prayer quotas. We feel prayer should cultivate an intimate relationship with God. Just as people don't use scripts in human friendships, there is no single formula when it comes to experiencing God. It must be a spontaneous, genuine and deeply personal experience, as individual as each one of our Missionaries. For some, this is reading; others, song; others, memorized words recited in the comforting rhythm of praise. Others prefer completely impromptu thoughts, remarks and recollections along the activities of the day.

Some people have not spent much time thinking about God. Some have no real idea what God is all about. Some feel God is unapproachable, or judgmental, or distant. All of that is okay, so long as you call this your starting point. All we ask is that you get to know God, so that He can get to know you.



CONTEMPLATE: Our Missionaries need to be learners: thinkers, artists, ordinary workers, puzzlers, dreamers, improvisers, makers and doers. The key is to approach our learning with wonder, not as a chore, always finding the end in discovering something about God and His designs – and how these relate to who we are, and who God created us to be. Whether our concepts are quickly understood or slower to make sense, they can still be pondered, imagined, tested and considered across the situations we experience each day. We do not memorize and move on; we seek to uncover the principles of spiritual nourishment in as many settings as we can.

Please note: Some people are very comfortable studying things, and others are not. There is just as much beauty in simplicity as there is in complexity. “Learning” takes countless forms. We are confident that, if you have the desire to be one of our Missionaries, you are already able to learn and contemplate; how else could you be considering our Missionary work in the first place?

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RELATE: By definition, all missionaries are sent out to connect with others. In the manner of St. Thorlak, however, we specifically use Matthew 18:20 as our Missionaries’ guiding principle. It is written that when he was appointed prior over the brothers of the monastery at Þykkvibær, Iceland, St. Thorlak “at once ordered their life so beautifully that it was remarked by wise men that they had never seen such good conduct where there had been a regular life for so short a time as there.” Later, when he became Abbot, St. Thorlak “began anew to hold a remarkable rule over the brothers over whom he was set. He commanded them to maintain love and concord between them and explained to them how much

was at stake, since the Son of God says that wherever two or three gathered together in his name that he would be among them” (*The Saga of Bishop Thorlak*, p. 7). Matthew 18:20 brought something remarkable to the brothers at Þykkvibær, and we want it to bring something remarkable to our Mission: God Himself. When we connect with someone else [*relate*], we share in their ideas [*contemplate*] and bring God present to us [*pray*].

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And, that’s it. That is how to become a Missionary of Saint Thorlak.

We just have to stop and ask – really – can there possibly be a more rewarding Mission than to bring God Himself to the people around us, simply by letting Him greet us in them?

As yet, we do not have any more formal structure than this. A “Guidebook for Missionaries of Saint Thorlak” will be available for download in the near future, as will “A Manual on Spiritual Starvation.” These can be used individually or in small groups, and will be designed to be locally available and self-directing.

The Mission of Saint Thorlak is meant to be accessible to anyone, anywhere. It is a way of approaching the life we live, in whatever our circumstances are, in wherever our geographic location happens to be. The digital age has greatly helped make such causes possible. It may well be that we grow to a point where we have a centralized headquarters and a large staff, and that one day we will resemble other missionary outfits from around the world. Our organizational structure is less important to us than putting our message to work. All we need to begin is two or more people in any given place, bringing God present there. The fundamental simplicity of a voluntary humility mindset allows us to get right to business. If it makes the positive impact we expect, we are prepared to expand with our numbers. Why make things more complicated than they have to be?

We have no intention of stopping short of solid establishment and long-term success. Formal structure will continue to take shape as our Mission grows; you can be assured of that. For now, though, spiritual starvation remains a real problem... and we’re not willing to wait any longer.

*\*This question refers to the Active Missionaries of Saint Thorlak. If your circumstances prevent you from*

*being an Active Missionary, you may wish to help us as a Domestic Prayer Missionary of Saint Thorlak. To learn about this very much needed aspect of our ministry, please see this [link](#).*

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## Spirituality and Religion - Two Sides of the Same Coin [at Quiet Consecration]

It is common within the rooms of most 12 Step groups to hear the following pronouncement, "This is not about religion, this is about spirituality". In fact, much of the argument against organized religion uses this foundation to launch their reasoning. Religion, they state, divides people but truly spiritual people do not.

At the risk of being contrary, I don't agree with that assessment.

As an example, I always look to my particular order - the Order of Preachers, more commonly known throughout the world as The Dominicans. Founded over 800 years ago by St Dominic de Guzman, this order reeks of a spirituality that flows specifically from the Catholic Church. The 20th century theologian Josef Pieper once suggested that one of our shining lights, St Thomas Aquinas, should be honored as St Thomas of Creation. Why? Simple. Aquinas, while doing everything as a result of a total love for the Incarnate Savior Jesus Christ, never stopped drawing full theological implications from St Paul's words to the Romans: from the beginning, from the very moment of the creation of the world, Gods invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

If one looks at legitimate Religious Teachings, one cannot help but note that the practice of Christianity in its fullness requires our total submission to and reverence for The Holy Trinity. Our goal, as Catholics, is to draw as near to God as possible and we do this through our Liturgy and the reception of Sacraments. If our agenda is to align our will with the Will of God, we are living a spiritual life.

Perhaps the problem is that there has been a redefinition of 'spiritual' to mean only that which involves burning sage, holding séances, meditation on a mountain in the Himalayan Mountains and Ouija Boards. I would argue that it is this co-opting of the word spiritual that has lead to society losing the essence of true spirituality.

Just as I reject the idea of a 'good old days' based upon statistics that show less divorce, I reject the idea that being religious means one is not spiritual. Can those two be mutually exclusive? Of course. Jesus warned us against those who pray for all to see or who make sure they are sitting in the front so everyone knows how much they are tithing. However, I also can tell you that I have met Buddhists who are cruel to strangers and Native Americans who reject anyone who dares to develop a spiritual path that differs from that deemed right by their Tribal customs. To me, what I see, is not the Religion that is at fault; rather, I see those who find it too difficult to practice it every day rejecting it as being at fault.

For many years I rejected my Faith Tradition because it was just not compatible with the lifestyle I was living. I kept the lifestyle because society told me I had a right to do anything and everything I wanted - with my body, with my mind and with my language. When that lifestyle exploded in my face, I crawled through the back doors of the 12 Step Fellowship I needed and discovered that in order to be successful in my recovery from the disease of alcoholism I would need to surrender my will to God.

WTH?

Today I work every day on that surrender. My surrender involves the goal of totality: my heart, my mind, my passions...my will and my body...my fertility...my sexual identity....my longing for companionship...my finances...my love for animals....my love for my family and for other people's children...all of me, good and bad. Unless I am willing to at least make the effort to give myself in total to The Holy Trinity I am not living my Religion. I am an empty gong.

I want to end with the words attributed to St Thomas Aquinas when he received Our Lord in The Eucharist for the last time:

"I now receive you who are the price of my souls redemption, I receive you who are the food for my final journey, and for the love of whom I have studied, kept vigil, and struggled; indeed, it was you, Jesus, that I preached and you that I taught."

I don't care what anyone says - That's SPIRITUAL.....

\*\*\*\*\*

For those who have a mind to pray, please pray for the repose of the soul of one of the greatest men I have ever had the privilege of knowing: Don Brown. A tireless worker in the 12 Step community, Don lost his life in a tragic car accident over the weekend. Please keep his soul in prayer and please keep his family in prayer. We lost a giant, but our loss is heaven's gain.

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## Perception is Everything! [at beautiful thorns]



What we focus on in life makes all the difference in the world! What we focus on can either invite God's blessing into a situation or hinder his blessing.

Do we look at a situation and see the majesty of God or adversity? Do we look at the world and see darkness or see opportunities for God's light to break through.

Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more (Romans 5:20).

Yesterday, I took my children to the pediatric dentist. My kids had been called back and I was sitting in the waiting room, waiting. A teenage girl walked in by herself. She had several facial piercings, a black shirt with curse words and vulgarities all over it, and an expression that said, "Leave me alone! I hate you and I hate life." Understandably, I think most of the mamas in that room were shielding their kid's eyes.

This girl ended up sitting near me. I felt the Lord's presence. I began praying for her. For a long time she would not look at me. Finally she looked at me and I was able to strike up a conversation with her. I smiled at her and said, "Interesting shirt." She replied, "Um, it's my friends." I said, "I bet your friend has had a hard life!"

I then got called back so I couldn't talk to her anymore but hopefully through those few words, I was able to show her the Lord's kindness and understanding.

Now, I could have looked at this girl as trouble, stayed away from her and kept to myself but I would have missed out on an opportunity and a "God" moment.

The right mindset doesn't just apply to people we come into contact with in life, but even difficult situations we find ourselves in.

A few years ago we went on a retreat as a family. The retreat grounds were beautiful! At first my kids were enjoying the beauty of nature all around us but then started noticing the bugs and started complaining. I told them not to focus on the bugs but God's beautiful creation. In that moment, God spoke to me that I have a tendency to do the same thing. I can often focus on the negative and fail to see what God is doing in a certain situation and see the opportunities that are available.

Also take a lady bug for example. Some people will see the lady bug and see a pesky bug. The lady bug is also called a lady bird. Some people will see this creature as something beautiful.

Recently, the Lord gave me a word for a friend but I do not think it was just for this person but for anyone who is trying to follow Christ. The word was:

"You have heard it said, 'When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.' but I say 'When life gives you lemons, don't see the lemons as adversity, but see them as opportunity. Opportunity to encounter an aspect of my nature that you wouldn't otherwise have been able to discover."

The majesty of God is bigger than any situation or circumstance we find our self in! As we allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2), we can find rest for our weary souls in his sovereign majesty!

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## One year as deacon [at Hermano Juancito]

On July 15, 2016, I was ordained a permanent deacon for the diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras. On June 13, this year I celebrated ten years serving in the diocese, first as a lay missionary and now as a deacon. What's different?



### Continuing my service

In many ways, I find myself doing the same as I did before ordination.

I am the main person responsible for the formation of catechists and youth leaders in the parish. I help in the formation of Delegates of the Word, extraordinary ministers of Communion, and base community leaders.



I also prepare materials for parish and other events. I'm working with two young priests on materials for next year for base communities, based on the Sunday lectionary readings. I prepared material for the Corpus Christi processions.

I visit the sick and elderly a bit more than in the past, bringing them communion. I also make greater efforts to visit more communities on Sundays that don't have a Communion minister to lead Celebrations of the Word with Communion. Our pastor sent me to some communities for special Ash Wednesday celebrations, for a Holy Thursday Celebration with Washing of the Feet Communion in one town, and a Corpus Christi procession with Celebration of the Word and Communion in a remote sector of the parish.



I continue my concern for the social needs of the parish. I continue to oversee the scholarships for *Maestro en Casa*, a weekend middle and high school program. I also have been serving as liaison between a newly formed coffee

producers association which is exporting coffee to St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Ames, Iowa.



I have also begun trying to revitalize the social ministry in the villages and sectors of the parish.

I preach often. I usually try to accompany our pastor for at least one of his five Sunday Masses and often for Masses during the week. He usually asks me to preach – to give him some rest.

I have done a good number of baptisms, most often during Mass. I have had one occasion to baptize a group from a nearby village outside of Mass.



I have done one wedding – but our pastor will be having me participate in the interviews for those wishing to be married in the church and then will unleash me to help him with some interviews.

Most of all I feel a call to deepen my commitment to the poor and see it in light of the Eucharist.

I have served as a deacon at a number of diocesan events:

diaconal ordinations, the Chrism Mass, and, most significantly for me, the diocesan Mass to commemorate the canonization of Mother Teresa. At that

Mass, as I purified the chalice, being careful not to leave even the smallest fragment behind, I looked out at the assembly and saw children from Amigos de Jesús, a home for children who are orphaned, abandoned, or come from extremely difficult situations. I recalled that I should be as concerned about the very least of them – and of others – as I was of the particles of Jesus in the chalice. In both I encounter Christ in His most vulnerable and powerless form.

I also feel a call to get out of myself more and visit the sick and elderly. I tend to be an introvert – one person here called me a hermit. But when I do visit I find myself being consoled, even as I try to console the sick. Being present to them in their need and, at times, helplessness opens me to the consolation which Christ offers to me. Being able to bring them Christ in the Eucharist is a privilege that cuts through any notion of rote in terms of communion and assisting at Mass. It also reminds me that Christ loves to be present with the people in times of distress.



I also find myself reflecting more on the relation of the deacon to the Blood of Christ and the witness of the martyrs. The deacon is, in a special way, the minister of the chalice, the Blood of Christ. After my ordination I have asked our pastor to allow me to hold the chalice when we distribute Communion by intinction – even if an extraordinary minister is distributing the Host. This has been our custom; I am there to hold the Blood of Christ so that it may be shared with others (and by others.)

The Blood of Christ reminds of a very specific call. When I raise the chalice at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, I often feel the call to give my life, my blood, for God's people – not necessarily being martyred, but definitely by pouring myself out for the people, especially the poor. Recently at a Mass at which Padre German recalled the witness of the bishop martyrs Monseñor Romero and Monseñor Gerardi, I felt tears well up within me as I raised the chalice. Am I willing to give my life every day for God's people, especially those endangered by poverty and violence?



I find myself being called to be more available,

*disponible*

– to use the phrase of Gabriel Marcel. I need to be more open to others' needs, especially when I am preoccupied with my concerns, my comfort, my convenience. I was moved and challenged when I heard of a Salvadoran permanent deacon who is working in gang-ridden neighborhoods in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. I feel so small and cowardly when I think of his openness, his availability, his risking his life for people on the margins.

Related to this, I find even more joy in just being here, accompanying the people – whether it be at a church event or when I'm working in the parish coffee field with other people or helping dig a ditch in Plan Grande.



This provides me a chance to get to know people on a more personal level. It also gives me the opportunity challenge people. I don't know how many young people I have urged to get married in the church. I used to do it before I was ordained, but now I tell them that I could preside at their marriage! What is a real gift is that I can do this in a way that doesn't make them feel demeaned. Many of them even get the serious aspect of my challenge, especially in a very light way.

Preaching is at times a challenge – especially when I try to get the right words in Spanish to express what I am thinking. At other times a message comes to me that I would have never thought of – pure inspiration from the Spirit. At times, though I have prepared a text, something happens and I am able to connect it more directly with the people at the moment of preaching. Other times, I start preaching and don't really have to think about what I'm saying. I do, however, try to preach for less than ten minutes and to get to the point as clearly as possible

possible.



Preparing for preaching has at times been filled with blessings. I often read the Sunday readings a week before and then try to let the readings penetrate my heart. At times I have something prepared but when I wake up I spend a few minutes in bed thinking of the readings – and a new message comes to me.

But one of the deepest experiences of this year has been being present at funerals. I find that God gives me words of consolation and compassion that I never thought I'd be capable of. One of my hardest funerals was for a couple who had been machete in their home. Our pastor called me early in the morning and asked me to preside at the funeral later that morning. As I tried to prepare all I could think of telling the people was to put all – the pain, any desire for vengeance, the feeling of powerlessness at the foot of the Cross. I still cannot believe that I was given such words of comfort and challenge.

The question is how can I serve better – serve God and those at the margins. The words and example of Pope Francis continue to sustain and challenge me.

For me, one of the critical aspects of this challenge is to bring the joys and sorrows, the griefs and anxieties of the world, especially the poor to the table of the Lord and from that table go forth with the love and compassion of the Lord to serve at the table of the poor.

A phrase from Father Paul McPartlin that I read while discerning the permanent diaconate resounds in my heart:

“The deacon stands at the altar and prepares the gifts with clean hands, but he stands also where the practical need is greatest, getting his hands very dirty.”

May I continue to get my hands dirty, may I continue to get my shoes muddy, as Pope Francis wrote in *The Joy of the Gospel*, 45:

“[The missionary heart] realizes that it has to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.”



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## Of Infinite Worth [at On the Road to Damascus]

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field.”*

We often look at this passage and think that heaven is the hidden treasure that we are to go out and find. When we find it we are to sell all that we have to buy it. Oh joyful the man who can buy the kingdom of heaven.

In actuality we are the treasure buried in the field. The field is death and all of us treasure is buried in it. Out of love for us God bought that field using his most valuable treasure, his only begotten son. Jesus’ blood was poured out into that field to redeem us from the bonds of death. God is the joyful merchant who regains that which was lost to him. We are a treasure to him, pearls of infinite worth.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind.”*

The offer of heaven is made to every person. It is made not only to Christians but to Hindus, Muslims, pagans, and yes, even atheists. I suspect that at the particular judgment we each will stand alone with Jesus before a charcoal fire. For those who have never heard of him Jesus will be his own best advocate. They will learn of who Jesus is from Jesus himself. And then, like with Saint Peter, he will ask us one question, “Do you love me?”

Love for Christ does not have to be perfect. It only needs to be present. Jesus meets us where we are at and will walk with us the rest of the way. We will be purified until only perfect love remains. We are the treasure buried in the earth. God finds us and cleans us up. He buffs us up until we are shiny and new again.

For those who hold no love for God in their hearts, those who cannot be persuaded by Jesus, those who choose themselves and reject God, those will be the fish thrown into the fiery furnace. These are the ones for whom the pain of hell is reserved. God condemns no man to hell but he does respect their choice to go there.

*“Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the*

*head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.”*

The head of a household is responsible for every member in the house, both family and servant. It is the responsibility of the head of the household to show those who are in his house how to get to heaven. We do not go to heaven alone. The kingdom of heaven is a family not an individual relationship. When we go to heaven we do not stand alone. We stand with every person we have helped get to heaven along the way. It is the responsibility of each and every person who can answer Jesus’ question with an imperfect “yes” to live in such a way that they become a beacon to all those in darkness. A beacon drawing others closer to God.

People should look to you and say, “I want what they have.” A righteous, upright life is a beautiful thing that draws others to live the same way. Be that beacon to those in your house. Let your love for God be present in all that you do. You are a treasure of infinite worth that God paid for in full. Infinite worth paid for in full. It doesn’t take a math major to see the impossibility of that statement and yet God did that very thing, for you.



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## What Does God's Kingdom Look Like? A Shared Experience [at A Moment From De Sales]

Jesus speaks often about His Father's kingdom. When He does, it is usually in parables. He describes it as a magnificent buried treasure, a tiny planted seed, and yeast-fermenting to name a few. Jesus encourages that each is worthy of seeking. He says that when we discover this kingdom, it will change our lives forever.

Is it like holding a winning lottery ticket giving us millions of dollars and security for decades to come? Jesus says it's even more than that! It's a treasure that fills us with joy and contentment transforming our lives that we never want to give it up. It is something that wells up from within. Nothing else is capable of ever matching it. Jesus is talking about a moment in our lives that puts us in touch with God the Father.

In trying to understand Jesus' parables about the kingdom, I recently had an experience that helped me to grasp their meaning more fully.

In the early morning through the dawn blue sky, an orange light with brilliant shades of purple pierced this fresh morning sky. And small puffy clouds kept swallowing the blend of colors, smearing them like an artist's palette across the vast morning horizon.

I was captivated and lost in the immensity of these brilliant colors. As I looked at the sky, I knew in an instant that God was in this beauty. This moment was His gift to me.

Through the tints and hues of colors, I saw that God loves me no matter what. In the beauty of this sunrise, God was embracing the world--reminding me that He loves me and embraces the world. Despite the catastrophic floods, terrorists' threats, greed and corruption, and the losses of those we love--God has a plan and it's still in effect.

Our God is alive. His plan is that we keep trying to be all that we can become, even when we fail. No matter because God continues calling us to try again.

Do you feel overwhelmed? God is near, acting through each sunrise and sunset to give us the joy we need. The new day is God caring for and seeing us, and this sunrise for me is proof that God is with us. Even if clouds come to darken our sky, they will pass because God is near.

These moments of beauty and joy they are God's gifts. They are given to help us forget for a little while that things can go wrong. They are reminders that God sees us, loves us, and cares for us. He is showing us that Jesus, His son, is always accompanying us. That moment is God's kingdom real and present. It is truly a pearl of great price that we want to buy at all cost.

This sunrise was a real-life experience of God's kingdom for me, and Jesus promises that this can be ours for all eternity. All of us experience similar moments in our lives. When a toddler son, who hasn't spoken, turns and suddenly says his first words clearly, "Mommy ice cream." Or the delight of a mother watching her daughter caress her own newborn daughter for the first time. And the good news that a son declared lost in battle is suddenly found alive and safe. These special moments are God telling us *I am here beside you*.

The kingdom of God transforms these ordinary life moments into spectacular moments of grace. Like my beautiful scenic sunrise is a small dose of what God has planned for everyone in eternity!

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## Soil and the Thorns of Suffering [at Sweeping Up Joy]



This blurry-ish picture is courtesy of Cee for [My Sunday Best](#). I'm wearing my favorite Lularoe Carly.

And here's the rest of the crew:



That about sums it up.

Every week, I go into Mass expecting to get a little note from God. (*The readings used by the Catholic Church are pre-set. The Catholics in Florida? Maine? Texas? All of us got the same readings this week. That's the paradox of the Catholic Church. It's both completely universal and completely personal at the same time. So cool.*) The message this week seemed a little obvious, though. I didn't have to do much work to dive in.

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. ” **Romans 8:18**

We've been in a fog about all the everything with Cee's condition lately. We squeezed in an appointment with the traveling rheumatologist on Thursday, and left sort of “meh” about the whole doctor situation. (Specialist tip: if the first specialist appointment opening is far, far away, take it and ask to be put on the waiting list. An appointment might pop up at last minute, but it's usually possible to get in sooner.) [Rheumy Number Eight](#) isn't probably going to get another date. (Have we really seen that many pediatric rheumatologists?!?! I think so!) The only thing this guy had going for him was proximity to our house. It doesn't seem like the guiding factor in forging a healthy relationship. Or maybe it is. Whatev. At any rate, we're feeling “the sufferings of this present time” pretty keenly these days.

In reflecting on The Classic Soil Gospel from Mass today, I realized again that the thorns of Cee's illness threaten to choke out all the little happy moments in our life.

*They are too much. We cannot bear these thorns, Lord. They are choking out all that is good.*

To a certain extent, we get the soil we get. The soil that happens to be in an area sets up farming for success or failure. For people in less fertile areas, getting in a crop requires heroic efforts of irrigation and fertilization. And we don't have much control over climate either. It doesn't matter how much my kids want to grow a banana tree. It ain't gonna happen here in Iowa. It's the same way with the thorns.

**The thorns exist beyond my control. I can't defeat them. But I can keep trying to figure out how to thrive in spite of them.**

I can control whether I smile or get exasperated when one of the kids says, “Guess what song I have stuck in my head?!?” for the hundredth time in a day. Whether I scroll through facebook mindlessly, sedating all the fears that threaten to take over, or choose to read a book out loud to the kids instead. And

I fail and choose wrong, and fail and choose wrong, and eventually occasionally make the right choice.

It's like trying to be patient and kind in the nanoseconds after stubbing a toe. Or while getting a sliver removed. Or after stepping on a lego. Our natural response is to growl and fuss and spew hurtful words so everyone feels just as sorry to be alive as we do.

The thorns are no joke. They hurt like the dickens.

Cee was reading a science magazine about the heart the other day, and the muscles in my own chest tightened. *Pericarditis. Pericarditis. Pericarditis.* If our life was a movie, would this be one of those scenes where the future is foreshadowed? Will the arthritis attack her heart next month, next year, as she sits here obliviously reading about chambers and ventricles and arteries today? These thorns, they hurt like the dickens.

With all the thorns, I forget to live. Caught up in the whirlwind of drug interactions and appointment scheduling and worst case scenarios. Fearing the thorns on the path so much that I stop moving forward. Knowing I've failed to harvest any fruit of any kind because I'm afraid of losing my fruit. Frozen in place, the thorns get stronger around me.

**Faith doesn't remove the thorns, it offers a way to work through them.**

Faith is the outstretched arm, encouraging us to put one foot in front of the other. Faith is the voice that reminds us about how far we've already come. Faith is the eyes that have seen the path further ahead and promise that the thorns will be gone someday.

Once again, my time at Mass this week brought me comfort in my challenges and challenged me out of my comfort. Note taken, God.

If you've followed Sweeping Up Joy for any length of time, you might be like,

*“Hey– isn’t this the theme of all the posts here? There are these terrible circumstances beyond your control that make you want to lock yourself in a closet with a box of tissues and some chocolate, but instead you’re choosing to be a functional human?”* Yup. That’s pretty much it. Except “Sweeping Up Joy” was a lot catchier than listing all that in my blog tagline. Just saying. So welcome, and thanks for following along. The thought that sharing about our thorny patch helps someone else keep moving forward makes everything a little easier to bear. <3

## **How do you get through the thorns of suffering in your life?**

PS– On Monday at 10:30am central, a boy from our parish is undergoing an unexpected and risky surgery. It’s supposed to last eight hours, so prayers throughout the day would be much, much appreciated. Thank you for remembering Jordan and his family! <3

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This contribution is available at <http://www.sweepingupjoy.com/msb-35-soil-and-the-thorns-of-suffering/>  
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## **The Power of Scripture during Crisis and Doubt [at Walking the Path]**

### **Monday July 10**

Fast approaching a week that would involve having a pre-operational check -up, follow up dental work for crowns that needed to be put in before surgery (both crowns were a result of two emergency root canals) and an MRI for persistent lower back problems, along with the usual daily challenges I found solace in Psalm 91 response for Mass, In you, My God, I place my Trust. Oh how reassuring as I assessed the week ahead of me.

In the Gospel Jesus cures the woman had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years who only touches his cloak. His response to her action is "Courage daughter! Your faith has saved you." He then proceeds to cure the official's daughter despite skeptics who saw his action as ridiculous. The woman is of particular interest to me as she approaches Jesus knowing of his ability to heal, but not willing to ask, but only touch him. Perhaps this because of shame. This makes me wonder about approaching God in prayer for what seemingly can be insignificant requests. The very fact that I can have faith should be enough, but isn't always the case.

Message to me the believer who is sometimes doubtful of the power of the Risen Christ, "Have faith!"

### **Tuesday July 11**



Busy day. First to the Pre-op appointment. During this time I find out that there was

miscommunication with my primary care doctors, the surgeon's office and my cardiologist in regards to the paperwork that should have forwarded. Somehow there was miscommunication but it works out. "Though you test me heart, searching it in the night, though you try me with fire, you shall find not malice in me." (Psalm 17). I find out that all my vitals are well.

Onward to an MRI for my lower back which has had given me all sorts of problems from tingling sensations in the leg to outright weakness. As I see it another test. For those of who have never had an MRI for the back or neck, it means at least 20-40 minutes inside a tube. I have some trepidation about the outcome of the results, but I spend time inside the tube praying. I have had six MRI's at this facility that the technician and myself actually know each other now and it is reassuring that he is a man of faith.

Once again a passage from Psalm 17, I will call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline you ear to me; hear my word. In Matthew Jesus goes around curing every disease and illness. There is a peaceful reassurance that all will be well. At the same time he tells his disciples. The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few. Here I see that I am being asked to be a message of hope and

not dwell on what seems to be attacks on my well being and soul.

### **Wednesday July 12**

I start my everyday with morning prayer and meditation. Reading from the Magnificat I encounter Psalm 59, Rescue me, God from my foes; and later on O my Strength, it is you to whom I turn. On the same page from 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No trial has come to but was is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength." Oh how I will need this today.

I am hit with a sudden bout of a urinary issue that sends me on roundtrips to the bathroom for three hours. Confused by this as I underwent a battery of tests at the hospital the previous week for my upcoming surgery, I begin to question what God is doing to me. When will this stop? My body seems to be in some type of warfare with itself. With this brings on anxiety and worry. The only relief I find is in prayer entrusting my will, my health to God, letting him drive this broken vehicle. Through all of this I also find peace in the Ignatian Suscipe prayer. Lots and lots of prayer get me through this day.



### **Thursday July 13**

Ah yes the dentist. Today more tests and trials. Being that I am having surgery it was necessary to have all dental work done ahead of time since I will not be able to have any work done for at least two months. So I venture to the endodontist to be examined for the root canals that were performed two weeks ago to make sure that there are no complications. I find that once there I was scheduled for the next week. I know that I was scheduled for this day, because the next week I am prepping for surgery. More time for surrender. No particular passage from today's Mass resonates, but only to place my trust in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. My crowns are successfully put in and off I go hopefully without any complications since I have a persistent infection that will not go away and might need further treatment.

### **Friday July 14**



"Trust in the Lord and do good" Psalm 37. More trials as my body goes through another round of issues causing me to eventually visit the local urgent care. I was discharged without diagnosis. In the process I find that I have lost 3 pounds in three days. Somewhat scary for a person who eats well. I also find myself under spiritual attack as the temptation to entertain evil thoughts seems to be ever present. Once again I find solace in Psalm 37, "The Salvation of the just is from the Lord; his their refuge in time of distress. I somehow make it through the day shaken, but grateful for the fact that I have the tool of prayer and Scripture. I can also find the small things that bring peace such as sitting outside and enjoying the doves serenading, the birds tweeting, and the gentle breeze that seems to arise as I sit still on the deck.

## **Lessons taken from this week**

Each and every trial is a chance to surrender unconditionally to God. It is a chance to turn what is seemingly bad to something good by drawing on the fact that I am so powerless over everything including my own body. Saturday's Gospel message reassures me that I need not be afraid for I am worth more than many sparrows. Turning to my heavenly Father in these times brings me every so closer. I know what lies ahead of me as I go into surgery this upcoming week, other than I am taken care of. Keep me in your prayers.

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## Life is Beyond Our Control [at Do Not Be Anxious]

It's been a challenging two weeks, and two events stretched my faith. I've written long stories about what happened, but I won't bore you. I think, perhaps, the event details were for me alone to consider, but the insights I will share.

The first event was a dream about terrible events. There were killings; there were suicides, and there were nuns listening to a sermon: "If these things are happening, they must be from God." My spiritual advisor and I discussed details of that dream at length and agreed: these were not the inspirations of a good spirit.

This past weekend I went on my annual Steubenville trip, to listen to speakers at Franciscan University. The Friday trip there included: confusing detours (I got lost), a terrible accident causing a very long delay --- and someone died, a slow conference registration process, hotel errors, a dinner order mix-up, and ---- the initial conference speakers I drove so far to hear seemed totally boring.

Before the evening's speakers began, I said my night prayers in the University's adoration chapel. They were peaceful. I went to the evening's talks and quickly decided that they too were boring --- and I mumbled aloud that I could better summarize the topics and books they were speaking of (and, of course, I had read them all). So, I retired back to the peace and quiet of the chapel. I spent many hours there in the chapel this weekend. And while there Friday evening, I pretty much resolved that God was telling me it was time to move on; this would be my last conference weekend here. I even drafted a letter to the conference organizers telling them (politely, of course) how they needed "to get with it." And, of course, I knew what "it" was.

But Sunday morning, as the early sun shone its rays into the same chapel, the birds outside could be heard singing cheerfully through the open chapel doors. And all seemed right. I recalled the miracle I had participated in yesterday, and the pleasant dinner conversations. And I recalled the one very enjoyable conference talk --- Patrick Madrid is always an interesting speaker. And then I recalled the vivid presence of God, received in Holy Communion and adored during the Holy Hour, and looked up at Him on the altar in front of me. No, I concluded, the bad events of Friday weren't any signs telling me to stop coming

to this event --- or at least, they weren't any signs from God. And I recalled words I had once read on the discernment of spirits: "Never make any decision to change your spiritual actions during a time of darkness" --- that when the evil one has influence on your thoughts. Then, (right after I wrote the prior sentence), I saw that today is the feast day of St. Ignatius, who wrote those very discernment words I just quoted.

Did I ever mention that I don't believe in coincidences??

On Sunday morning, before mass, was the conference's final speaker: Kimberly Hahn. And during her talk she told us this story:

Our prayers to God must be sincere, real, and not just words. Our time with Him must be as with a friend, not like time scheduled to do a chore. Let me illustrate the reality of true prayer with Him:

"Good morning, Lord. I'm here to tell You how much I love You. Lord, You are my everything, and everything I have is yours. I love You so much."

(A loud voice answers): **Thank you, Kimberly. I love you also. Did you say you had something for me?**

Yes, Lord. I came prepared to make my Sunday donation today (and she put some money on the podium in front of her).

**Is that everything? You said you wanted to give me everything.**

Well, yes, Lord, I want to give you everything. Here is all of my money (as she pushed a pile of cash across the podium); it's all yours. (And in a lower voice she said) I can use my checkbook for the groceries.

**You have a checkbook?**

Yes, I ... well, yes, Lord, I give you everything, even my checkbook. We can live on credit cards for a while.

**You have credit cards?**

Yes Lord. We have to live on something.

**I thought you said you'd give me everything.**

Well, yes, Lord, even these things I will give to you. You can have it all (as she pushes her wallet to the side of the podium for God). Well, I guess I'll head out to my car now.

**You have a car?**

(Taking a key off of a ring) Kimberly sighed and said: "Yes, Lord, even my car is yours."

**What are those other keys?** (By now, the audience is roaring every time God speaks.)

Well, there's our other car and the house keys and ...

**You have a house?**

(At that Kimberly looked up frustrated and angry): "Uh, wait a minute, Lord. You don't even need a house. Just what am I supposed to tell my husband when I get home?"

**You have a husband?**

(Another long pause) "Lord, I am sincere. All that I have I offer to you, even my husband. But if you take him, Lord, how will I raise my children?"

**You have children?**

"Okay, okay, Lord, I DO love You. I DO give You everything, everything that is mine I give to You. I love You. Everything."

(Now God pauses). **Kimberly, you know that I love you, and so I ask you if you would do something special for me.**

Anything, Lord.

**I created a man, a very good man, who I love. He is in need of a good wife. Will you take care of him, ... for me?**

Yes, Lord. Whatever You ask.

**Remember as you care for him, that he is mine.**

**Kimberly, I have some wonderful children I created, and I love them so much, but they are in need of a mother and father. Would you care for and love my children, ..... for me?**

Yes, Lord. I will.

**And to care for these I love, you will need a house and cars and money, so I give you these things to use well and to provide for these I love.**

Yes, Lord, I will use all these blessings You give me to love those you love.

**And remember, care for these well, for they are all mine.**

Yes, Lord, they are all Yours. And I will love them for you.

(And then there was a very long pause before Kimberly spoke again.)

**AND THAT IS REALITY!!**

I thought Kimberly's talk was a wonderful example of a reality we often forget. Not only did she give an example of serious prayer, but she also gave an example of sincere love of God. How often we are so totally engulfed in our own lives that we forget the true reality of our relationship with God. Daily, we are concerned with our jobs, our family, OUR possessions. We stress over our decisions --- or the bad ones others make.

We think we are so in control, even as we (sometimes) honestly reflect: "Things are out of control!"

My dream of the world's troubles, my concerns of a weekend that didn't start as I planned, and the miracles which I saw and felt: ALL of these things (and Kimberly's talk) are examples of the reality of my life --- and of yours too: Our life is beyond our control.

This is reality. But God is here also.

How can one letter of the alphabet be both so important and so unimportant? When Eve said “I” want that tree of life, she set in motion a reality which continues to this very day. As Kimberly’s story/prayer illustrated, it’s the reality of what “I” have/want/love versus what God has/wants/loves.

What we truly have is the life which God has given us, but all the events and creations around us are not ours, to have or control for our selfish purposes. These things and people in our lives are ours to love, as God would love them.

Actions in the world around us are not there to become anxious or angry over. We are only here to love and care for the gifts God gives us. The rest of creation is His to worry over, and ours but to pray over. A long, sincere, conversation with God, as a friend, always makes things better, and we can see reality as it really is.

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As mass ended this morning, the pianist led us in the closing hymn saying: “We’ll sing all four verses this morning,” (versus the two we normally sang). And so we sang:

### **O Church Arise**

O Church, arise, and put your armour on;  
Hear the call of Christ our Captain.  
For now the weak can say that they are strong,  
In the strength that God has given.  
With shield of faith and belt of truth,  
We’ll stand against the devils lies;  
An army bold, whose battle cry is Love,  
Reaching out to those in darkness.

Our call to war, to love the captive soul,  
But to rage against the captor;  
And with the sword that makes the wounded whole  
We will fight with faith and valour.  
When faced with trials on every side,  
We know the outcome is secure.  
And Christ will have the prize for which He died,  
An inheritance of nations.

Come see the cross, where love and mercy meet,  
As the Son of God is stricken;  
Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet,  
For the Conqueror has risen.  
And as the stone is rolled away  
And Christ emerges from the grave,  
This victory march continues  
Till the day every eye and heart shall see Him.

So Spirit come, put strength in every stride,  
Give grace for every hurdle;  
That we may run with faith,  
To win the prize of a servant, good and faithful.  
As saints of old still line the way,  
Retelling triumphs of His grace,  
We hear their calls and hunger for the day  
When, with Christ, we stand in glory.

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This contribution is available at <http://do-not-be-anxious.blogspot.com/2017/08/life-is-beyond-our-control.html>  
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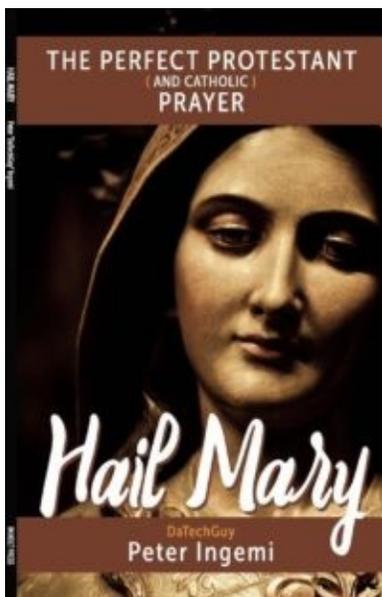
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## On the Hail Mary

Peter Ingemi, in his blogging persona as [Da Tech Guy](#), is a Massachusetts-based writer and political reporter whose blog is a staple for conservatives in the region. The writers Ingemi welcomes on his blog (a group that includes me) all get fair warning before coming on board that the boss is unapologetically Catholic.

In his new book, Ingemi puts aside political reporting and takes up a labor of love: [Hail Mary: the Perfect Protestant \(and Catholic\) Prayer](#) [Imholt Press, 2017, 80 pages, \$6.99 paperback, \$2.99 Amazon Kindle e-book]. Ingemi is donating a portion of every sale to his local Catholic radio station in north central Massachusetts.

The book's title is intriguing and perplexing at the same time. Ingemi is reaching for two audiences, and he's likely to score with his fellow Catholics. Will the word "Protestant" in the title appeal to anyone? Among my own acquaintances are people who identify themselves as Baptist, Lutheran, or simply Christian – but Protestant, however accurate in a historical sense, is not a label they use. I wonder how many of Ingemi's intended readers will get past his book's title.



Those who do will find a brief (80 pages), straightforward examination and celebration of the Hail Mary prayer. Ingemi writes in the hope that all Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, will come

to value the prayer's meaning.

Ingemi takes the reader through the Hail Mary clause by clause. In the early part of the prayer, the words are taken from Scripture, offering common ground for all of Ingemi's intended readers.

The second part of the prayer, following the invocation of the name of Jesus, also gets a line-by-line breakdown that flows naturally from what has come before.

This book could be one resource for any Catholic's personal education, because it illuminates a prayer so common to Catholics that it might be taken for granted. It also could equip Catholics to explain the Hail Mary to non-Catholic friends.

Ingemi's enthusiasm is irreproachable. He is nevertheless frank about the fact that he has no credentials as a theologian. This is a personal labor of love, not a work of scholarship.

If there is ever a second edition, the book would benefit from tighter copyediting and a sharper focus on readers who profess faith in Christ yet don't understand Catholicism or Marian prayer. The author assumes knowledge of some things which have yet to be proven or explained to non-Catholic readers.

As for his Catholic readers, they'd probably be pleased to see a future edition carry an *imprimatur*. I know from conversation with the author that he'd be pleased for his work to receive one.

At its best, Ingemi's book reflects faith that is informed by hope and charity, not by fear. Peter Ingemi sees the Hail Mary as a unifier for Christians. He will make a reasonable case for that to anyone, whether Catholic or not, who approaches his book with curiosity and good will.

*Note: I received and reviewed a courtesy copy of the book's text in proof form. Some typos and grammar detracted from the book's quality, but they may have been corrected in the final published version. This review contains an*

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This contribution is available at <http://ellenkolb.com/2017/08/04/openbook-august-2017-on-the-hail-mary/>  
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## Practice makes Perfect



Although we do not like to admit it, even to ourselves, we still believe that prayer happens suddenly, or never happens at all. We kid ourselves that saints are born, or created by an arbitrary decision of God who every now and then suddenly decides to top up humanity's quota. This is a comforting idea that we harbour at the back of our minds because it absolves us from any serious effort to live in union with God.

The predicament of the alcoholic is but a dramatic 'blown-up picture of all of us. The fact that our perilous plight is not so obviously dramatic is a mixed blessing. If it were, it would at least force us without undue delay to see ourselves stripped naked of all falsity and pretension, to face stark reality. Then we might come to a moment of decision that we might otherwise cowardly evade, drifting into a life of superficiality, merely existing on the surface of human experience. Often when an alcoholic hits 'rock bottom', they become serious about changing their lives by surrendering and dedicating their lives to God through hard work, by practising new habits.

Alice made no secret of the fact that she was an alcoholic, although she had been 'dry' for five months. She was only twenty-six when I met her, but she had concentrated the sufferings of a lifetime into a period of about five years. She had been through two marriages and was mixed up with a seedy set of degenerates who led her astray. In the end, she broke down under the strain of her lifestyle and took to the bottle. She used to drink between two and three bottles of whiskey a day. In desperation, she went to a local parish priest, but he could do nothing for her. On one occasion, he took her to Alcoholics Anonymous but she refused to go again, so even they could not help. Things came to a head when she threatened to denounce the priest to the police for sexually assaulting her if he refused to buy her more drink. This seemed to be the last straw. She was brought up in a strict Irish home, so the way she behaved towards the priest shook her into the realization of how low she had sunk. She smashed every bottle she could lay her hands on and rushed off screaming for help to Alcoholics Anonymous.

The leader of the centre told her there was nothing they could do for her until she reached 'rock bottom' and admitted to herself that she was an alcoholic, and absolutely helpless. Then they could step in and begin to help her to help herself. But until she faced reality and made this admission, they could do nothing. He admitted that one of the hardest parts of his job was to wait helplessly looking on until she reached the depths. He gave her a pamphlet containing the twelve steps of recovering alcoholics. The first was to admit they were powerless to help themselves and their lives had become unmanageable. The second was to come to believe in a power greater than their own which could restore them to sanity. The third was to turn their lives over to God as they understood him. The other steps amplified these and emphasized the need to face up honestly to past faults and to try to make amends to those whom they had caused so much suffering.

There can be no fresh start, no renewal in the life of any individual, group or community unless we are able to see and admit our own inadequacy and past failures. Once we begin to see, to experience and to admit our weakness, then we can begin to appreciate the fundamental principle of the spiritual life, namely that we cannot go a single step forward without God, not a single step. The Gospel does not say, "Without me, you will not be able to get very far." It says, "*Without me, you can do nothing.*" Without me – nothing!

The trouble is we just do not believe this, except as a purely academic principle of theology that we scandalously disregard in our day-to-day lives. We beat our breasts with a sponge, reach for a drink and nibbles, and slump down in front of the television. If we did believe it, then we would scream out for God's help; we would go to him, find time to open ourselves to his healing power and urgently create space in our lives for prayer. The space and the time we find in our daily life is the practical sign of our sincere acceptance of our own weakness, and of our total belief in God's power, which can alone help us.

You might say, "I would like to be a concert pianist or speak fluent French or become a scratch golfer", but I will only believe you mean it when I see you practice it for several hours a day. I will take you seriously when I see you hard at it, day after day on the piano, or studying French grammar, or tramping around the golf course. You would hardly meet a Christian, let alone a religious, who would not say he or she desired to come closer to God, to become possessed by him, to build up a deeper prayer life. But how can this be believed until they relentlessly practise prayer, day after day. The desire is not enough, any more than are good intentions. Every alcoholic desires to be better is full of good intentions, even high ideals, but something more is required.

Learning to pray, learning to open ourselves to God, is like anything else: it needs practice and it takes time. There is no accomplishment of any worth that I know of that you can attain merely by desiring to have it. We think nothing of spending hours a day and working for years to get a degree, pass an examination, or attain certain qualifications, and we quite rightly accept as a matter of course that the time we give and the energy we expend is necessary. Somehow we seem to think that prayer is an exception, but believe me, it is not. Those who wish to succeed in a particular accomplishment have to give hours of time, even if they have flair or genius.

I heard an interview on the radio given by Arthur Rubinstein, the concert pianist, some years ago. Here is a man who was arguably the greatest pianist of the last

some years ago. There is a man who was arguably the greatest pianist of the last century and yet at the age of eighty-four he admitted that he needed to practise for six hours a day. In his prime, he practised for nine! Although he had a musical genius at the age of three, it took a lifetime to master the technique necessary to facilitate and maintain the growth of that genius and to enable him to share it with others on the concert platform. The same could be said of hundreds of great artists, performers, athletes and people from all walks of life who reach the top of their particular branch of human achievement. What right have we to imagine that prayer is an exception to the rule because it certainly is not. We are supposed to be dedicated to the mastery of the art of arts and at best we drift aimlessly along like half-baked amateurs dabbling in something that demands the full potential of the professional.

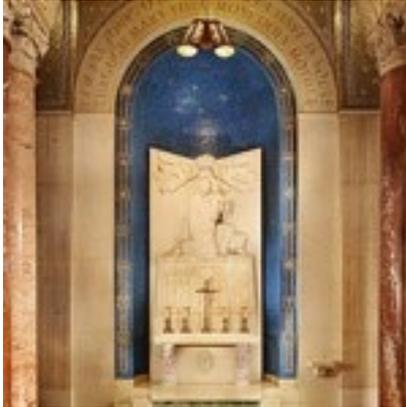
If we are only prepared to give the same daily time to prayer that would be required to reach a fairly reputable standard on the piano, then, in time, our lives will be dramatically and irrevocably changed. We might start with ten minutes a day and gradually extend that period as we master the preliminaries, but as the months go by, the period will gradually extend so that in the end the problem will be to restrain rather than prescribe a minimum time.

If all goes well, the prayer that starts and develops at set times ought to spread out gradually and filter through into the rest of the day. In the end, it will become co-extensive with all and everything we do. To begin with, the prayer period will be like a desert: dry, arid and barren. But it will eventually become an oasis in our lives that we cannot do without. However, that is not the end; it is only the beginning. In the end, the oasis will become a fountain that will well up and brim over to irrigate the whole of our lives, as what St Paul calls ‘the prayer without ceasing’ transforms our daily spiritual lives enabling us to say with him, *“It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”*

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This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/practice-makes-perfect/>  
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## Those Crazy Catholics Are At It Again: Marian Consecration [at One Pearl]



Mary, Queen of All Hearts Chapel in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The design is based on Montfort's devotion.

As Catholics we do some pretty weird things. We eat flesh and blood as the central act of our worship. We venerate the body parts of Holy people. We walk around one day a year with ashes on our foreheads.

But the thing that most non-Catholics do not get is our love for Mary. Mary, Queen of Heaven, immaculately conceived. Mary, Queen of all Hearts.

### What's the big deal?: Marian Consecration

Why is Mary so special and why should she be an important part of our spiritual lives? To answer this, I'm going to call on [St. Louis de Montfort](#). I owe my love and knowledge of Mary to this guy, who the Holy Spirit led me to when I felt very far away from God.

He wrote a few books, but the most famous details the [True Devotion to Mary](#). Montfort boldly claims that Mary is the easiest and best way to Christ. Therefore he was inspired to formulate a consecration to Jesus through Mary. Before you close the computer for even reading such sacrilege, think this through logically. How did Jesus come into the world? *Through Mary*. God obviously did that for a reason and thought Mary was very special. The first time I made my consecration according to Montfort's preparation, it changed my

life. I truly believe asking Mary to walk with me has deepened my relationship with her Son.

## **The Dawn of a New Day**

Since then, I have discovered [33 Days to Morning Glory](#), by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC. He begins with Monfort, but doesn't stop there. His "retreat" is a simple and accessible way to learn about and prepare yourself for Marian Consecration. He looks at Mary and our relationship with her through the lens of Maximillian Kolbe, Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa.

Jesus chose to come into the world as a completely helpless baby. He had to



rely completely and totally on Mary for nourishment. If he thought that was necessary, in our pride do we think we're above that?

Perhaps he wants us to rely on His mother as He did. Mary, who is full of Grace, always leads us to Jesus and God. Montfort makes this very clear distinction in his writing, so as to avoid any accusations of heresy. I like to think of it as Mary accompanying us to the throne of God. I imagine it's very hard for Jesus to say no to His mom...

[Mary knew Jesus more intimately than any human. If we want to get to know Him wouldn't it... Click To Tweet](#)

I will be using [33 Days to Morning Glory](#) to renew my consecration starting July 13th. Will you join me?



*O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.*

Originally posted 2012-07-07 22:53:12. Republished by [Blog Post Promoter](#)

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## NFP Awareness Week 2017 [at Alleluia is Our Song]



Happy NFP Awareness Week!

Natural Family Planning isn't an easy topic, but it is one that is close to my heart as a Catholic woman, wife, and mother. I am grateful for the knowledge that is out there for women to understand the value of this aspect of their femininity, and the opportunity that it gives husbands to honor and appreciate their wives with this knowledge. As someone who stands by the Church's teachings, has learned NFP, and also loves babes, I have written a couple of posts on the subject – which I link to below.

[Why I Said YES to Having Kids Right Away](#)

[Mom Guilt and NFP](#)



My biggest takeaway from the topic of Natural Family Planning is that it isn't just a method for steering clear of pregnancy, but it's a way of life that teaches and grows your heart. Not just because of what you are saying "no" to, but because at its heart, the Church's teaching on life and sexuality is Gift of Self. It is an expanding of our hearts. By its very practice, NFP teaches us generosity, whether it be in our unity and dialogue as spouses, in the discernment of truly serious reasons for postponing a pregnancy, or in saying "yes" to life.



If you have not heard of Natural Family Planning and/or are having issues with your fertility, I urge you to google Napro Technology and the Creighton Model of NFP. You won't regret looking into it. There is more information out there than what is being spread by most doctors who erroneously prescribe the Pill to countless women who often are unable to reverse the terrible damage that it causes to them and to their reproductive health.

Also, if you happen to be new to all this, I must ALWAYS recommend Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body ("Called to Love" by Carl Anderson is a good intro to it, if I remember correctly). Love all things JP II. <3

God bless you, and may you have a beautiful and restful weekend!



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This contribution is available at <http://www.alleluiaisoursong.com/nfp/nfp-awareness-week-2017>  
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## Observing Junebug - A Lesson in Choosing to Obey [at Catholic Conundrum]



"Junebug! Come here now!"

Our Mini-Australian Shepherd froze for a second, her eyes dancing back and forth between a tiny kitten and me in torn confusion.

Although annoyed with Junebug, I sympathized with her plight. She was born to herd, a job she took seriously when we operated a rare-breed pig farm years ago.

Since the pig farm folded, she and her daughter found themselves needing to be content with herding our free-range chickens, ducks and barn cats. So, when an area cat showed up on our front porch recently and delivered 5 kittens, the opportunity to keep the kittens within their "porch territory" was too much to pass up.

The problem with this opportunity is that although these kittens are not ours, we do need to find homes for them, and exploring the yard and its surroundings is a part of normal maturity. Another issue is that in preparation for other families, the kittens seemed to have become too comfortable with the dogs, losing a bit of awareness in regards to their natural survival instincts.

So, as I watched Junebug chasing the kitten who had gone "outside" the comfort zone of her territory, I knew that her desire to obey me and her strong herding instincts would clash dramatically, and there was little I could do but let her make her decision.

Isn't life like that for us? We hear God's voice calling us daily to follow His plan for our lives. Deep down, we really do want to obey, but sometimes the effect of concupiscence is rooted so deeply that we can find ourselves torn and confused as to which decision to make.

And God will never force His hand in our decision-making process.

For the good of our own souls, He waits, allowing us to respond in love to the unfathomable gift of His love that He breathes on us in every moment that comes to pass.

Each day we may find many of these "torn" moments. Today, let's try to recognize when they come our way, choosing to say *no* to our earthly baggage and *yes* to the God Who loves us beyond imagining!

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This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicconundrum.com/blog/observing-junebug-a-lesson-in-choosing-to-obey>  
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**The Art of Miscommunication [at Ordinary Time]**



I was just watching the movie Moana again. This time I was watching it in Spanish. I figured since I know most of the dialogue and song lyrics, this would be a good opportunity for me to pick up a few vocabulary words and common phrases. It's interesting to see how our languages are so similar but so different.

What to my English mind is a song about an existential crisis in which a young girl wants to find out who she and her people are, in Spanish becomes "tu lugar."

Your place. If I sang a song in English telling a young girl "Get in your place" it wouldn't go over well. That's part of the problem with not understanding the differences in culture and language. We often talk past each other. Even using the same words can bring about misunderstanding and confusion.

In times of transition, this can be exceptionally difficult. I have watched recently as two people spoke to each other. Both from different backgrounds and experiences. I found myself agreeing with everything they said to each other. Yet, both of them misunderstood the other. They both seemed to have gone away with some injuries, some pain from that conversation. I've watched it repeated throughout my life, especially when something super important is being discussed. We have to be careful about such things. When someone has a great deal of joy in something and you take it away, it leaves a scar. Words are much more than just things that don't hurt.

That's the most interesting thing to me about this parable from Jesus. A dragnet catches everything. The good the bad, the food, the detritus. When you drag along the bottom of a river you won't just find fish but also sludge, slime, and in today's terms trash. Jesus doesn't tell us to start grabbing the trash and throwing

it out. He says to let the wheat and the weed grow together. It's not up to you or me to decide who goes in the bucket and who gets thrown back into the ocean. It's also not our decision if we are going to be in the bucket either. We should have faith, hope, and trust... but not arrogance.

We often want to be the ones who do the sorting. We humans want to be in control and get the weeds out before the harvest. We want to be the farmer, instead of the plant. The fisherman instead of the fish. The net instead of the one captured in Christ's loving embrace. That's why I think communication is so important. Do not be afraid to approach the one you hear say something wrong, and say "Wait, I may have misunderstood you." Also, when you are misunderstood don't take it personally. Above all pray. Pray before talking. Pray after talking. Pray during talking. Let Jesus be the one who guides your words.

The reading from Exodus today reminds us of a simple truth about God. He goes where we go. That's what a Parish is all about. It is the Sacred Gathering space that we Catholics go to for worship. Where two or three are gathered, there He is. It is the tent of meeting so to speak, the place where the communal worship occurs and Jesus becomes substantially present in the Sacraments to nourish us and guide us. The most important thing in our lives should be that worship. Sports, recreation, personal enjoyment, health goals... all of these are secondary. That doesn't make them unimportant.. But who is more important than Christ? Let him be the net. Let him be the bait. You just point people to the feeding ground. Point them to the only thing that can heal scar, the grace and mercy of God.

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This contribution is available at <http://the-friar.blogspot.com/2017/08/the-art-of-miscommunication.html>  
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## **Happy 10th Anniversary for Summorum Pontificum! [at Servimus unum Deum]**

Almost one month ago, a special day in my faith life involving the Latin Mass occurred. In my 6th year of involvement as a Latin Mass server in organized masses within the Archdiocese of Toronto, two special 10 year anniversaries have come to pass.

October 30, 2016, marked the first, that of my allies and friends of St Patrick's Gregorian Choir, who with His Eminence ' permission, got to hold a

Cardinal Collins was present on the altar and was homilist for that great Mass of Church history.

The second 10 year anniversary is Church wide, that of the Promulgation of the Motu Proprio (immediately acting law)

, bestowing much freedom and a resurgence of the Latin Mass in the Church, by Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus, on July 7, 2017.

Because of that one act, I have been blessed to have served in multiple Latin Masses, since Oct 2011, organized by parishes or lay choirs/organization who operate in the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Toronto, although I carefully select what offerings I assist, out of rejection of that which causes division within the Church and is the new Jansenism/Pelagianism that is infecting from within, to even our youngest minds: Radicals Misrepresenting Traditionalism (herein RMT. ) Also see my fourth blog goal,

.

In honour of the 10th anniversary of SP, allow me to "pontificate" on how far things have seemed to have come, globally and locally. While there has been much overall progress, unfortunately, there are still plagues that are harming the Latin Mass from progressing even more than its current rate to helping restore Catholic identity, liturgical beauty and sacredness, and saving souls.

Now obviously, there have been more priests and parishes offering it in the last

three years, and the FSSP and/or ICKSP have obtained in North America the odd, new additional parish here and there. Further, in individual (arch)dioceses, more and more newly ordained priests are choosing to offer this form at the Mass, and even do it as their first Mass of Ordination. Some cardinals and bishops, including my own, Thomas Cardinal Collins, have either presided/celebrated the Latin Mass at the Pontifical Level, or contributed their presence on the altar during Solemn Level or Masses with "Presence" as part of the rubrics (e.g. they sit on a "throne" with the Archdiocesan crest behind them, on the Gospel side of the altar.)

Now, where I draw the line is the

### **inordinate amount**

of homilies devoted to such finger pointing. Clearly His Holiness should think about the number of times he does this, and perhaps, think about WHY he scolds the Traditionalists so much. Unfortunately, the Trads, even young trads, continue to slander/calumniate against the Holy Father and the rest of the Novus Ordo, even going so far as to agree with the horrible sentiment of it being a "bastard rite" and encouraging the SSPX to stay outside of the Church.

Regardless, their example only seeks to create a continually hostile environment in the Church, with recent finger-pointing,

### [in example](#)

, launched by Fr Antonio Spadaro against the radical Church Militant Internet channel, and rightfully so against the poisonous Internet "apostolate" who has been told by its regional archbishop ++Vigneron it is not aloud to call itself Catholic.

Even the more "balanced" trad bloggers who celebrate/partake in the Latin Mass, aren't afraid to continue embarrassing good trads or priests in orthodoxy who should be their allies in what they view as a theological-political war.

## ***ARCHDIOCESE of TORONTO***

In my Archdiocese of Toronto, things are progressing in a sense for the Latin Mass, but certain avenues are stalling, and the ever lingering smell of Satan, Radical Traditionalism, is infecting the minds and souls now of even younger

participants, who have none of the history or spiritual trauma of their older "friends" and are taking to online slander/detracting like their idols or "friends" in the EF.

First, there has been an increase in general, overall Masses of the TLM in Toronto, though the new offerings are not Sunday offerings. We need much more of those. Still, the more offerings, even occasional ones, the better. Further, some of these newly known offerings are small masses not in parishes, but word is spreading via technology (particularly Google calendar.). Should one have car, offerings even in the farthest reaches of Toronto ' s boundaries are even accessible (eg Schomberg.)

While I do not cover (with noted exception) the daily/weekly activities of offerings outside of the Archdiocese of Toronto, I can say that in other dioceses (e.g. Pembroke, London, Hamilton,) more offerings of the Latin Mass, even one or two spearheaded by recent ordinandi, have come to fruition. Also of note to mention is that some more younger priests are picking up/studying the TLM in their private time, and even doing their first TLMs, albeit with a few people or privately, in taking their first few baby steps in proficiency in the TLM.

Let us also not forget the incredible hard work of lay organisations or choirs in our diocese, such as St Patrick's Gregorian Choir, who work diligently and have faced much adversity in past, and even present, to organize high or Solemn Level Latin Masses, providing opportunities for laymen and clergy to partake in the Latin Mass, even just to attend the "Mass of Ages" and formation of countless saints. There is even a Latin Mass Triduum that happens every year now, though my allies and I (and this blog) have no affiliation or personal/professional relationship with those who organize the Triduum. I have never aided this Triduum in the past, though I might attend in the pews in the future, should a Holy Week give me an opportunity.

The biggest, new development in our archdiocese is the creation of not one but TWO Juventutem chapters. Juventutem, is in short, a young adults organization with chapters in multiple cities, which provide social interaction and spiritual formation via traditional Catholicism and the Latin Mass. Last year in 2016, a Toronto Chapter and a University of Toronto chapter were formed. I would link to the Facebook group here in this post, but they want to avoid politics as of recent, and therefore, you must do the search on Facebook yourself for the group.

While at first I declined to be connected in any way as some of the leadership of the group was RMT, and one member even engaged in unfraternal actions akin to a notorious other RMT in the Archdiocese before the St Mikes Cathedral Basilica Mass of 2016, I am glad to say that the person and I have reconciled to an acquaintanceship, and the leadership of Juventutem Toronto is now in a charitable and Church - respecting position (despite possible opinions of individual participants,) I've even joined the Facebook group. Some members even came to the offerings for masses organised by SPGC. And gradually more youth are connecting with the chapters, showing that young adults with even occasional love for Traditionalism are becoming more of a force in the Church. Bishops better listen if the Church and parishes are to have a future in their respective (arch)dioceses.

*Deep, darker concerns, both from RMT and the Church side. The vile poison still within ...*

What I have listed above is a good share of promise for the Latin Mass in Toronto. However, this progress is not as good as it should be, due to two factors: the hatred and bigotry of priests and established/employed laypeople in general (read: older pastors) against the TLM, and the Satanic poison of quasi - schismatic, Radical Traditionalism from the key players/leaders, which is now infecting the young adults in the movement to the point even a few are being imprudent and even calumnious/slanderous against the Pope and the Church/it's Communal Body of Christ (read: Non Latin Mass people).

Let's turn our attention to the Church side first. Sadly, there are STILL priests and bishops, and jealous lay bodies in the Church who are sick with pride or racism, who don't want ANYONE to either step on their territory, or worse, they only want certain people to conduct it, mainly themselves. Between my last two Masses with SPGC, sadly, I've become aware that there were MANY, SATANIC obstacles to holding the masses, some emanating from certain clergy themselves. Some offences were: territorialism, bullying/bossing certain choir members around, laying down conditions to hold Masses including (initially) including a stupid restriction of NOT using the required 6 candles for the Solemn Latin Mass, and diabolically Satanic racism exhibited by a clergy member. Thankfully, no specific offences have been inflicted upon the altar servers who assist in these Masses, but I will not be surprised in future if even WE are targeted unnecessarily. Me, at least it will be because of this blog of WITNESS, a blog trying to FIGHT the idiocies of the RMTs, but also to defend those who are doing the good works in the Latin Mass, and against those people

those who are doing the good works in the Latin Mass, and against those people who give to Satan's temptations in doing so.

Further, Pope Francis is a double-edged sword for the movement. On the one hand, he IS rightfully calling out sick and evil examples of those doing the Devil's work of gossip/slander in the Church, and rightfully points the finger at radicals and hypocrites, both Latin Mass side AND in the general Church, including wayward clergy. Unfortunately, Pope Francis is NOT pro-Latin Mass, though he will not expel it or kill Summorum Pontificum as long as Benedict Emeritus XVI is alive. Also, the Pope continues to anger the Latin Mass community, and even regular "orthodox" practicing Catholics with his comments, like the time he insulted large Catholic families with his Argentinian, poorly worded into English, sentiments about "breeding like rabbits." As long as he continues to make these sentiments into poorly translated words in English with his off-the-cuff interviews and fervorinos/daily homilies, he only serves to embolden clergy in the Church to throw away Tradition and to spite the Latin Mass crowd. Thankfully, we soldier on

*in spite*

of those "soundbites" from a biased Liberal media, and the majority of the Church also does, their own thing (whether it may be living an ordinary Catholic life, or a lack there of.)

Now, what about the Latin Mass side of the Church in the Archdiocese? Unfortunately, the Archdiocese of Toronto continues to not have a direct hand in governance. If they did, say, having a specific office that would monitor the

### **actions and behaviours**

of leaders in the community including certain clergy members, as well as establishing standards in catechesis and training of leaders, much of the darkness still present would erode. But sadly, they do not. As a result, those leaders and groups of people

*STILL hold sway*

over the mindset of the group, now ever encroaching into the next generation of youth. That's right, it's not not old cranky men, some with blogs to fear ... it's the next generation that will stall growth and acceptance by the Archdiocese of the Latin Mass

~~the Latin Mass.~~

To illustrate generally, a couple of my serving acquaintances, whom are more heavily invested in the Latin Mass than I am (and in a way, I am thankful I am not,) now do not regard the regular Novus Ordo highly. One, who is one of my closest friend in the Faith, simply ``tolerates`` the

### ~~Latin Mass~~

Novus Ordo (my words,) and won't sit close to the front in the Body of the Church unless out of necessity of the situation. He'll go to the TLM every Sunday when he can do it. Another of my acquaintances in the movement, recently, on Instagram, made a comment akin to Vatican II, having nothing good come of it, with a picture of either the layman's hand Missal or Breviary of the TLM. I politely, and to prevent him from making further errors that could be used against him by Church officers to excommunicate him via written evidence, fraternally corrected him to temper his language. No sooner than I did that, than an RMT friend of his interrupted using the classic ``I demand evidence`` argument (a.k.a. You are wrong I am right, so be quiet, and I will not listen to you anyways) to shut me up. I simply declined to respond to such an individual on the Instagram post, an individual whom I will now describe as a more specific example of the spiritual corruption of young people in the movement, which will stop the spread of the TLM in the Archdiocese and the Church.

On one of the RMT blogs I monitor, to stay aware of other Latin Mass leaders/groups/activities in the Catholic "Blogosphere," locally and globally, it seems a young man of 23 years old has become spiritually corrupted to the point he is now acting in the hateful mindset and behaviours of the older friends/role models he admires and affiliates with in the Latin Mass. I know who this young man is by name and picture, and was once in his physical presence at a recent event of personal note, but for the sake of things and to illustrate my recent concern for stunted growth in the Latin Mass, let's use his pseudoname, "Irenaeus," after a saint of the Church who fought against heresy.

On June 21st, on the blog of one of his "friends," Irenaeus attacked Pope Francis, the Vatican, and the Communal Body of Christ in the Novus Ordo, in a guest post. His post was a reply to the

[recent survey by the Vatican office for the Synod 2018 for Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment](#)

. Irenaeus' sentiment about not patronizing or coddling the youth as "special snowflakes" as a whole, I can agree with ... though not in the angry and spiteful way the author means it. And what was this now non-Novus Ordo, Latin Mass attending "yute" (his term) suggesting as a solution to the youth crisis in the Church? Removing virtually EVERYTHING of the following that is being offered and replacing it with the Latin Mass and Gregorian Chant, plus rigid catechesis [he likely implied the type of the old Baltimore Catechism series.] He mentioned to remove specifically: all youth ministry including Lifeteen and EDGE(TM) youth ministries, the ALPHA program, youth bands, all modernist music. Basically, replace all major church ministry/programming with the Latin Mass and its chant only. While I may not agree with elements of the Novus Ordo church/ministry, I would NEVER write this hate screed against all the people who work hard, as Catholics in this modern 2017 secular world and broken Church, with a smug elitist attitude.

More so, this author, a couple of weeks ago, decided to use a public Catholic facebook group, "

### [Toronto Catholic Youth](#)

," to further the ideas of the RMTs he hangs around with. by posting something from the twitter feed of Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB, CEO of Salt and Light media based out of Toronto. Fr. Rosica made a possibly not well thought out joke about Laudato Si and Mary on Jun 8/17 on his Twitter feed. Irenaeus uses the twitter to create a posting on a group that

**is made of many Catholics of all ``stripes`` (**

e.g. Novus Ordo and EF attending Catholics,) whereby he accuses Fr. Rosica of ``... willful manipulation of Scripture ... endorsement of a

*controversial document*

... sheer anacronism ...`` and to instill fear that Fr. Rosica will be our future bishop (as in to hate the priest and that he will bring ruin to the Archdiocese of Toronto.) Rosica is hated by the majority of Toronto Traditionalists because he attacked one of the Latin Mass movement's "heroes" in 2015 with threat of lawsuit, though via aggressive social media strategy, the suit was called of.

That said "hero" is the primary author of the blog that Irenaeus wrote his guest

post on, and let's face it, almost every 23 year old remaining a practicing Catholic would not care two pieces about Fr. Rosica or to take the time to make a hate and/or warning post against him. To have such disparaging attitude against the priest, it is clear that this 23 year old has been influenced by those senior friends around him. Worse, this misguided young man is a symptom of the poison of RMT-ism in the movement that is seeping into those who have no viable grudge or injury to then by members of the "institutional" Church (a.k.a. people, teachers, parents, priests) inflicted upon them in the name of the False spirit of Vatican II. To people like Irenaeus and his influencing friends/seniors, it's not enough to establish the Latin Mass in the archdiocese, or in the Church. Through smear campaigns in social media, they must wage war against the establishment of the "Novus Ordo" Church up to, and against, the Pope Himself, and every soul must be converted to the only "One True CHURCH" of the Latin Mass, regardless if they don't want to partake in the matter.

Am I insane to suggest such, and am just drinking the kool-aid of 70's theology Pope Francis? No. It is not just Spadaro and Francis that are sounding the alarm on spiritually poisoned youth in the Church. Fr. Raymond de Sousa, a well known Canadian priest from the Archdiocese of Kingston, ON, who co-chairs the conservative (theologically/politically/culturally) journal called "

### [Convivium](#)

," and is frequently consulted by the National Post newspaper and the Catholic "CRUX" news website funded by the Knights of Columbus, also vocalizes this concern regarding youth who are liturgical purists (read: RMT type Latin Mass youth,) set to have the Church their way, or no way. He did so

### [in this recent article](#)

for a British publication in print and online, the Catholic Herald, while discussing the validity of Cardinal Sarah`s recent proposition to fuse the EF and OF in some way, but also the rejection of most Latin Mass attendees/traditionally leaning Catholics of the proposal:

``... It is unlikely that apologies are going to be forthcoming. Yet Fr. Zuhlsdorf`s point about wounds requiring time to heal is valid; he may be right that

*the EF community is too wounded just now for reconciliation*

.  
***A challenge though is to ensure that wounds are not passed down to younger devotees of the EF who were not around to have their hearts riven***

."

Clearly, with examples like Irenaeus, who are adopting the hurt, pains, hatred, and even dare I say it, ever approaching to self-schismatic thoughts, of those whom they associate with in the Latin Mass, we have ever the more to be careful of, and even fearful of, with regards to the progress of the Latin Mass. As the expression goes, "With friends like these, who needs enemies?" While the generation of bigoted and racist, EF-hating priests and laypeople, will die off eventually creating a larger window of

### **potential growth**

, that growth will be stifled by the thorns and weeds of the garden, weeds mutated ``genetically speaking`` from the once hopeful seeds of youth in the Latin Mass, weeds created by those older friends/mentors who have said grudges against the

*institutional*

Church for (possibly) valid reasons.

### **SUMMARY**

In short, YES, the Latin Mass is a slowly growing snowball that virtually, cannot be stopped as numerous (

### **but not all**

) lay parents, teachers in Catholic schools, and clergy in the Church, FAIL to give their children the spiritual nourishment they require and to properly catechist them in the Faith. Merging and closing parishes in dioceses worldwide are proof of this failure. The Latin Mass WILL become a vital facet to the New Evangelization, and will become the spiritual solace for more and more people in the Church, as the desire for clarity, truth, and objective FAITH and MORALITY in an ever chaotic and crumbling world continues. I say this as both one who serves in the Latin Mass (at selective offerings not tainted fully by

RMT-ism) but also as a soon-to-be 34 year old Catholic male aware of societal and Church politics.

However, there is STILL much to be accomplished on a grand and local scale, with the biggest, NEW hurdle, being the very "rigid" youth that Pope Francis and Fr. de Souza are warning us about. It is now the NEWER generation of Trads who just might end up ruining it, as this will form two generations of an army that mistakenly, will serve the Devil via their so-called, puritan, crusade of liturgical and theological purity at the expense of the whole body of the Church and "Trads" like myself who won't drink their foul, spiritual poison.

Now I realize many of you will hate me, dismiss me, and even abuse the power of prayer to ask God to smite me (like how Protestants or non-Catholics say "I'll pray for you" which really means I'll pray you see things my way as you are wrong,) but if we do NOT fraternally correct one another, sharpen each other like iron

### **against**

those practicing RMT-ism, and expel such examples of anti-Catholic leadership, the face of the Latin Mass movement will NOT improve in the Church, it will be the face of the "angry youth" movement, and guaranteed, it will NOT be taken seriously, and even sanctioned against by the hierarchy. More and more, public/Catholic media is ALSO noticing in the WRONG way these leaders, including the Pope. If this continues to happen, we will return to a full banning of the Latin Mass. Don't think this can't happen to at the local level. There are ways to get around SP, or to just ignore the Church law anyways.

Finally ... don't forget all those people in our lives, family, friends, co-workers ... if we want to invite them in, just what will we be inviting them to? A church that hates it's highest leaders and bashes its neighbours, that demonstrates a superiority complex disguised as "pure" religion? One that shuts itself off from the rest, with only one difference between its non-Catholic brothers in Protestant "churches," valid sacraments? Most will NOT be called to that, and it will be a counter example to that order of Christ for us, sharing in his three-fold ministry of priest-prophet-king, to be "fishers of men."

I will continue to work at my end in doing what I can to ensure that the future I described does not happen. I will continue to do that in spite of my youthful Latin Mass brothers and sisters who have drank the poison of RMT-ism, and I

encourage ALL of you to do the same, in prayer, in time, in energy, in finances, and even in fraternal correction guided by TRUE CHARITY, HOPE, AND LOVE.

If we do all this, I am positive that despite institutional collapses in the Church, and other types of collapses in the world, we will triumph, and the Latin Mass will become, at least more highly accessible, and able to evangelize the Church at large, as we move onward from the 10th year anniversary from Summorum Pontificum. I'll be doing my part in the Archdiocese of Toronto as an independent layman via altar serving .... what will you do? Will you become spiritually sour like a lemon? Or will you add sugar to the mix and create lemonade? The choice is yours. Sin ... or Salvation?

Pax Tibi Christi, Julian Barkin.

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This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.ca/2017/08/late-but-warranted-happy-10th.html>

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## What Pearl? [at bukas palad]



Year A / Ordinary Time / Week 17/ Sunday

Readings: 1 Kings 3.5, 7-12 / Psalm 118.57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130 (R/v 97a) Romans 8.28-30/ Matthew 13.44-46

What do Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*, Wario in *Super Mario Land 3*, Benjamin Franklin Gates in *National Treasure* and Uncle Scrooge McDuck in *Ducktales The Movie* share in common?

They are all treasure hunters. Indiana Jones searches for the Lost Ark. Lara Croft seeks out the Triangle of Light. Wario chases after coins and treasures to get his own castle. Benjamin Franklin Gates hunts for hidden troves and secrets of America's past. And Uncle Scrooge McDuck is looking for a treasure chest.

Today's gospel reading presents us with a treasure hunter: the merchant who is searching for fine pearls.

Here is a merchant who probably had everything he wanted: a good business, a fine family, status in the community. But all this was not quite good enough. He craved something more: not gold or silver or jewels but that one incredible pearl—perfect in size, in colour, in shape. He had to have it. It had to be his. And finding such a pearl—one of great value, Jesus tells us—this merchant sells everything he had to buy it.

*The merchant sells everything he has to buy this pearl of great worth. This is how Jesus ends his story of the merchant in this second parable in today's gospel. He ends the first parable in today's gospel in the same way. Recall this ending: upon finding treasure hidden in a field, the man hides it again, and then in his joy, he sells all that he has to buy the field.*

Whether we stumble upon the treasure, like the man who finds it in first parable, or we seek it out like the merchant in the second parable, the way to secure the treasure is not by finding it. We secure it **by giving up all that we have so as to gain all that we find**. This is what the man in the field and the merchant of pearls do upon finding the treasure.

This is today's lesson for Christian life. It is not finding the treasure or the pearl that matters. Rather, what really matters is what we do after finding it. "He went and sold all he had and bought it". Taking hold of the treasure that God wants to give us involves our whole person. **We cannot search for the meaning of our life with a bit of ourselves; it is all or nothing.**

Do you and I realise how frightening this "all or nothing" call is, especially if we really want to secure the treasure God wants to give us? It is not a call; it is a demand that we risk everything, to "sell all we have", in order to receive all God wants to give us.

Perhaps the key to do this begins by understanding the joy that the man who finds the hidden treasure discovers. When we discover a joy that comes from God, a joy which is authentic, then our attachment to other things will be loosened, our priorities changed. Then, we will be ready to let our lives be changed in a way we cannot foresee, and which we cannot have managed simply by our will-power.

**Christian life is orientated for change:** changing from sinful ways to saintly ways. Christian life is about constantly working towards the self-improvement that Jesus models for us: to live in his Christ-like ways so that we become more like him, who is God made man. This is why Baptism does not call us to exist. It calls us to grow in faith with Jesus by living in communion with him and others through lives of selfless service. This includes the humility to repent for our mistakes and sins and the boldness to let God lift us up again and again. When we endeavour to do this well, we will allow God's grace to make us a lot more human, like Jesus, so that we can become a little bit more divine, like God.

We need a discerning heart to do this. **A discerning heart is attentive to God's voice and faithful to God's ways labouring in our lives and in the world to transform us.** Jesus had such a heart. So did Solomon as we learn in today's first reading. "Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong". Solomon's request is a desire for wisdom—that treasure that empowers one to discern.

But Solomon does not ask for this treasure for himself, for his own power, or for his own glorification. He desires it for service: to love others tenderly, to care for others justly, to walk with God humbly. Have we ever sought the kind of treasure Solomon seeks—a treasure that helps us to serve others, not ourselves? Should we be asking God for such a treasure and so change our lives around?

Most importantly, a discerning heart allows us to do what the merchant did to gain his pearl of great value—to give up all one has to gain all that one finds. The merchant can do this because he is able to discern that he has found the pearl of great value. More importantly, he is able to discern that he must let go of everything that will prevent him from taking hold of it.

You and I know how difficult it is to accomplish this freedom to let go of everything in order to receive that which is of greater value, that which is of God. We struggle with many burdens and worries that weigh us down and take us away from the joy of Christian life. We have many attractions that tempt us to live unChristian lives. Even the many things in our lives that are good—family and friends, study and work, travel and play—can become temptations that can lead us away from God and God’s plans for us. Indeed, we can spend our time doing many good things for others, praying devoutly and living a pious life and yet find that the center of our life remains curiously empty.

A discerning heart can help us to discern between what is good and what is better; **a discerning heart can help choose what is right by God and what is right for others.** Such discernment helps us to live the joy of the gospel Jesus announced.

In the adventure films we watch, Indiana Jones, Lara Croff, and the other treasure hunters expend energy and effort to venture to faraway places and to go into secret spaces to find the treasure they are looking for. A discerning heart can help us appreciate how God gives us all a hidden treasure differently— independent of our effort, even when we do not know what we are looking for, and always in spaces we are familiar with.

This is the good news the first parable proclaims of a man finding the treasure in a field. I’d like to imagine he has walked across this field repeatedly. He is familiar with its terrain. He finds the treasure unexpectedly. His find awakens him to what he had always wanted. This awakening is the discovery of God’s

treasure within us.

God awakened Solomon to the treasure he most sought after when God asked him what he wanted. God awakened Moses to the Promised Land in a dream. God awakened David to the task of building the treasured Temple for the Jews to worship God. God awakened Joseph to the joyful incarnation of God-made-man in Jesus. God awakened every Gentile and Jew to the treasure they had as earthen vessels containing the glory of God, as Paul proclaimed on his missionary journeys (2 Corinthians 4.7).

I wonder how many nights the merchant must have kept awake dreaming of that perfect pearl before it became a reality for him. Kept awake as he thirst for that one perfect pearl of great. Kept awake so that he would come to know that this great treasure constitutes the core of God's call for him to live fully.

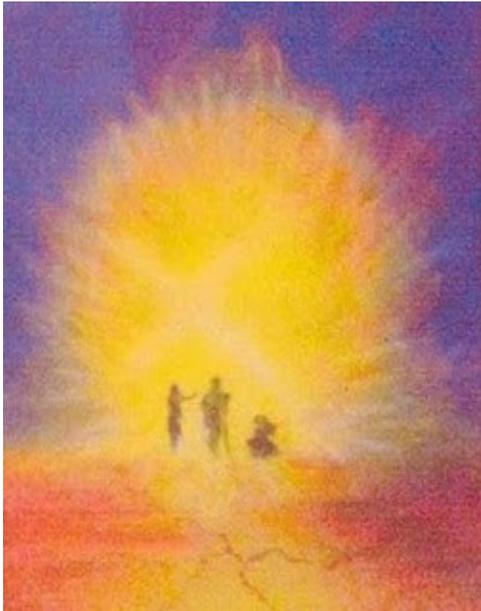
What about us? What is the pearl, this treasure of great value that we seek from God in our Christian life? Do we really thirst for this treasure like the merchant thirsts for God? How will we hunt for this treasure?

*Preached at Church of the Transfiguration, Singapore*

photo: [michaeldanner.net](http://michaeldanner.net)

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## Second Thoughts: "My beloved Son" and "Little Boy" [at Gentle Reign]



*"His face shone like the sun...a bright cloud cast a shadow over them" (Mt. 17: 2, 5)*

*"...the sudden flare of harsh light was the first indication that something unusual had happened. In that eerily silent moment, white clouds sprung from the clear blue sky." (Allan Bellows, "[Eyewitnesses to Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#)")*

I'm sure a lot of you sat there during your church services Sunday remembering that it was on August 6, 1945, that a US B-29 bomber dropped a bomb nicknamed "Little Boy" over Hiroshima, Japan, and perhaps 80,000 people lost their lives in the blast and ensuing firestorm. Half as many again died three days later in Nagasaki, and within a few months the death toll had climbed to well over 200,000.

What got me started on this was just the images in the gospel: the face of Jesus shining like the sun, a bright cloud casting a shadow. It was like the language that was used in books and articles I had read about the events of August 1945 to describe the atomic blast, though the latter was an event of historic disfiguration, not transfiguration, as the feast celebrates. And the language is peripheral, even disproportionate and dismissive to the seriousness of the devastation; but I hear words. I can't help it. In spite of the destruction wrought by "Little Boy"

words, I can't help it. In spite of the destruction wrought by Little Boy, language of eyewitnesses like Isao Kita, a weatherman about two miles from ground zero, borrows the language of a poet to describe his first reaction to the event: "...white clouds spread over the blue sky. It was amazing. It was as if blue morning-glories had suddenly bloomed up in the sky."



"Be Thou My Vision" was what we sang to initiate our celebration of the Transfiguration yesterday, and these two memorials represent distinct visions of the future of humanity. In the white flash and heat of Hiroshima, the bright cloud that continues to cast a shadow on our planet after over seventy years, there is the specter of escalating violence that seems to have no upper limit, a road for humanity that is epitomized and encapsulated in the horrific moniker of "mutually assured destruction." The normalcy of civilization requires that various nations and ethnic groups defend themselves against aggression and the possibility of aggression, the buildup of arms, the tangle of vassal states and alliances that compose the fragile network of the balance of power. The explosion at Hiroshima which vaporized a square mile and snuffed out tens of thousands of lives in an instant was an act of retributive "justice," revenge masquerading as necessity. It was

*disfiguration*

of our race.

In stark contrast, though, the

*transfiguration*

of Jesus on his trek toward Jerusalem and the cross was a moment of revelation, its radiance being another moment of God's unveiling an alternative path for humanity. God was saying, "Yes, here I am," in the face of the one who preached love of enemies, the blessedness of the poor, of the meek, of peacemakers and justice-seekers. "Listen to him, my beloved son" was what the voice in the cloud had to say of him of who, with Moses and Elijah, two faithful witnesses to God against the violence of Egypt's pharaoh and Ahaz, Jezebel, and the court prophets of Israel, was bathed in the sunlight and cloud of the theophany.

"Little Boy" fell on Hiroshima at 8:15 a.m. on a Monday morning in 1945. It was still Sunday here in the United States, where the people who gave the orders had attended church services a few hours before, celebrating "the beloved Son."

No one mentioned Hiroshima at my church yesterday. Do we ever even talk about the choice? Or do we think we are following Jesus even when we choose to support the very rivalrous powers of "normal civilization" that put Jesus to death? The choice between gods and empires is the choice between disfiguration or transfiguration, as Moses, Elijah, Peter, James and John all know, there in the company of Jesus, the beloved of God.

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This contribution is available at <http://rorycooney.blogspot.com/2017/08/second-thoughts-my-beloved-son-and.html>

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## My take on hand-holding during the Our Father at Mass [at Peace Garden Passage]

I can't remember my exact age when it started, but sometime in my post-Vatican II childhood, a few things changed within the context of Mass and church practices.

I remember, for instance, when Confession transitioned into the face-to-face method. Well, at least that option was now presented, though "behind the curtain" was still considered OK, too.

But at some point early on in my life, maybe even before this time, we started holding hands during the Our Father prayer.



<https://pixabay.com/en/affection-couple-fingers-hands-1853650/>

I don't recall being put off by the practice, necessarily. Everyone else was doing it. Other changes were happening. I guess I figured it was just the way things were now.

were now.

I do remember being shy as a little girl, and even the sign of peace that we extended to others after the Our Father made me a little uncomfortable. For some reason, I felt especially uncomfortable shaking hands with our priest, who was a wonderful man. I started hiding or ducking his outstretched hand whenever we were close enough for him to reach us during this time in the Mass. Thankfully we didn't sit in the front row often.

I mention this because it may help explain how I feel about the practice of holding hands at Mass now. Let me get this out of the way. I really don't love it. I won't say I hate it, because there have been times I've been part of it and it seemed right, but more often than not, and more and more lately, I have become very uncomfortable with it. It seems to be growing more complex in my mind, and more off-putting, as time goes on.

Lest you think I'm a total curmudgeon, let me explain. I think it started, really, when our children were small. Until that I point I don't recall noticing it being a problem, but as they grew a little, and started being a distraction in church — and sometimes “fighting” with each other even if in quiet ways — I started to really dislike that part of Mass. In fact I would come to dread it.

Every Mass, as The Lord's Prayer drew near, the kids would begin causing a bit of a scene in an effort to avoid the “cooties” generated by their siblings. So, rather than focusing on the words to the prayer as we were meant to do during that time, I would be distracted by this little game of my kids being annoying with each other, and my rising stress at keeping them from being ridiculous.

Finally, one day, I just said, that's it, and I quit the practice of reaching for my loved ones' hands during the Our Father. And to be honest, I have loved the change. I like the calm and the focus that happens when I am not having to deal with the distraction. I like not having to look around and see if someone is within reach our not during smaller Masses, for instance. I like the feeling of communing with God, even while my church community is surrounding me.

Over time, it just made so much sense. Not only is the distraction gone, but the sign of peace comes soon thereafter, so we still have the opportunity to reach out and show love to our neighbor and demonstrate communion in this way. It's just that the Our Father gives us a chance to really quiet ourselves in another beautiful and important way.

Just because I've gotten that settled within myself does not mean the stress has vanished. The consternation I feel now happens when some people are hand-holding and others are not. Especially since I have let go (literally) of the practice, I am still reminded that others prefer it. Sometimes when there are large groups of people holding hands, and others not, it feels like the group of hand-holders is exclusive somehow, and the others "on the outside." I feel in a way that we are, even if not purposefully, judging each other. I wonder if the hand-holders are thinking that I'm stuck up or too serious or not reaching out enough? I hope those who are not holding hands are not thinking ill of the others.

But even the pause in wondering this, by virtue of the fact that not everyone is doing it the same, seems problematic. The Church has not formally expressed whether hand-holding is wrong. You won't go to hell if you hold someone's hand during the Our Father! If this is something you grew up with and appreciate, you can feel confident it's totally fine.

The process I went through happened over time, and there was nothing snobbish about my decision. It was a practice matter. I didn't want the sibling silliness to continue, and once we stopped doing it, things did calm down and I loved the change. More and more, the words of the prayer began to be what my focus was, and the difference has enriched my soul.

But I still feel some tension over it, especially when, for example, I attend Mass with people who appreciate hand-holding. I know holding hands with my dad during the Our Father was very special to my mother, for example, especially since he'd been away from the church for over 35 years before his return, which was a miracle. I am sure it felt very beautiful to hold his hand after his return, knowing what it meant for him to finally be with her in worship, after his long absence. So when I've kept my hands folded during the Our Father and she's near, I do feel badly, wonder if she thinks perhaps that I am not being loving, or maybe it's a reminder to her of how much she misses my dad. And then I feel badly.

But this is where my comfort level is. I will hug my dear ones during the sign of peace. I'm not a cold soul. But during the Our Father, I really relish that chance to just focus on God, even as I am surrounded by loved ones and fellow sisters and brothers in Christ. Refraining from holding hands at this time doesn't make me feel alone, at all. I feel very connected to others, wherever my hands happen to be.

I do wish, however, that we would come to a place of agreement on this practice, so that the lingering awkwardness that I, and others, have articulated and feel frequently would disappear. I suspect the Church doesn't want to cause discord, but I think the discord is already there. Just like with any family, there are ways of being that can be enhanced when we are moving in the same direction for the most part.

All of this came to the fore again this week while listening to our local Catholic radio station, and hearing a priest from our area discuss hand-holding during the Our Father, along with an article he wrote back in 2009 that received a lot of attention, both praise and scrutiny.

It's a topic that touches more than the hands. It touches the heart, too. I don't think either practice — holding hands or not — is wrong. But I do hope that someday we can decide on one way or another, so we can truly feel the union with God and one another that The Our Father was meant to foster.

When I broached the topic on Facebook recently, the opinions poured in, from old and new Catholics, and even some Protestants, which I appreciated. It showed the diversity of thought, and that we really care about how we live out our faith. It matters.

We are all siblings in the Body of Christ, working things out together, offering our thoughts and experiences, in the hopes of one day finding ourselves together in Heaven, side by side, maybe holding hands, or wings, or not. But together nonetheless.

**Q4U: What is your opinion on hand-holding during the Our Father? Why?**  
(Hint: there are no wrong answers, even if you hold a different opinion than mine.)

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2017/07/my-take-on-hand-holding-during-the-our-father-at-mass/>  
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## **Boldly Catholic [at Boldly Catholic]**

[Bride-broom-priest-wedding-church-mnstudio-shutterstock\\_204855715](#)

[Bishop Robert Barron recently presided over the wedding of his niece:](#)

*She has been, all her life, a lovely girl, full of joy and good cheer—and eager to give herself in service to others. Her husband, Nelson, is also a fine person, and he took the courageous step of becoming a Catholic in anticipation of his wedding. So it was a joy to join my whole family in celebrating the coming-together of this splendid couple.*

*But in my homily for the wedding Mass, I pointed out that we were doing so much more than exulting in the goodness and happiness of these young people. For indeed, I explained, any secular romantic could so exult. We were gathered in church precisely because we appreciated Bryna and Nelson as more than a young couple in love, as radiant as that is. We saw them as a sacred sign, a hint, a sacrament of Christ's love for the Church. I pointed out how it is a peculiarity of Catholic theology that a couple exchanging vows at their wedding Mass do not so much receive a sacrament as they become a sacrament. Everyone gathered in church that day believed that Bryna and Nelson coming together was not a function of dumb chance; rather, it was the consequence of God's active providence. God wanted them to find their salvation in each other's company, which is to imply, God wanted them, as a couple, to carry out his salvific will.*

*To make some of this clearer, I suggested that we read the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana with fresh eyes. Commentators often point out how charming it is that the first miraculous sign that Jesus performs in the Gospel of John is not the raising of the dead, or the healing of blind eyes, or the calming of a storm. Instead, it is providing wine so as to make more festive a humble wedding reception. This shows, they maintain, Jesus' concern for the simplest things. This might be true as far as it goes, but such a reading overlooks the far greater truth which is actually the heart of the matter.*

Recently, as part of my regular Rosary prayer routine, I've begun to pray not just

for my marriage (my bride and I've recently celebrated our 36th wedding anniversary) but for all marriages. Bishop Barron's piece highlights why doing so is important.

Go read [the rest](#) of it... and be willing to pray for all marriages boldly.

There's good reason to do so.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.boldlycatholic.com/2017/07/-a-couple-exchanging-vows-at-their-wedding-mass.html>

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Universal Utterings  
for June 12, 2017

World be longer not

And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are.<sup>12</sup>When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled.<sup>g13</sup>But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely.<sup>h14</sup>I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. John 17:11-14

Magnify the LORD with me; and let us exalt his name together. Psalm 34:4

John 17:11-14 & Psalm 34

There's really only one way to strengthen the Lord's Word in His disciples as Jesus was trying to do for them by accomplishing a peace that many of them were failing to understand. Once they came to this realization of what they were doing, they were able to place them into their daily lives allowing an opportunity for them to understand what love, faith and hope would bring to the charity they would share with the world. So, Jesus spoke aloud to the Father wanting them comprehend he was fulfilling Scripture completely allowing them to realize together what it meant to exalt His Name for Salvation. Amen.

Join us in our daily prayer of forgiveness. I am sorry Lord. I believe You died and Rose for me. Prayers for all who have asked us to pray for them or we said we'd pray for. IN Jesus Name. Amen.

I am a poet obedient to Christ,  
Evangelist Thomas Cruz†Wiggins  
†Spirit led God inspired Christ fed†

†Spirit led God inspired Christ led†  
Ephesians 6:17-20

John 17 11 thru 14

World be longer not

World be longer not  
Father Holy Christ did go  
Him given Names not forgot  
One as We guarded You know

Fulfilling Scripture when Christ came  
He glorified the Father with His Name  
World not belonged Heaven would Reign  
Christ callers protected as if they were the same

© Thomas Joe Cruz†Wiggins  
June 12, 2017 @ 10:14 AM EST

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\*\*Can somebody say, “Amen!\*\*

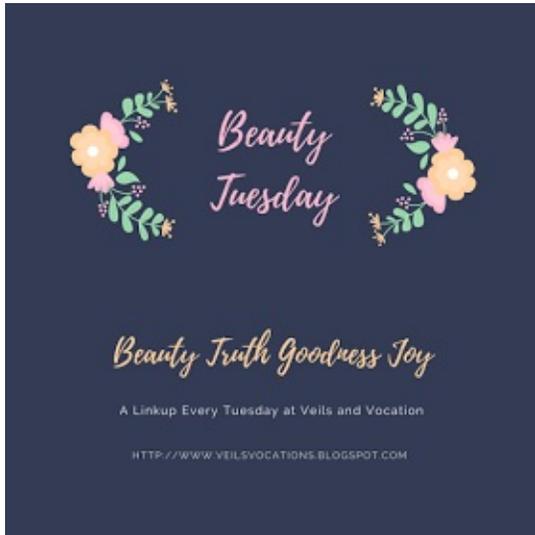
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## The Pattern of God [at Veils and Vocations]

It is Beauty Tuesday, again, please link up below and remember to link back to this post.



A number of years ago, I took a Bible Study class on the ancient Tabernacle of the Israelite. It was fascinating to realize how much care and preparation went into this traveling house of God. What has stuck with me the most, though, is how the Tabernacle mirrored Heaven. It was not just a random plan. The LORD was not just being persnickety in asking for precise adherence to His Plans. His Plans already exist and He was merely giving the human world a glimpse of the splendor of his kingdom.

Form, posture, and constrains of pattern matter. Our entire world is modeled on the patterns of God because His fingerprints remain in His Creation.

All the Earth adores His name, and in time all will bow before Him. Until that time, our liturgy is how we learn of Heaven. Like the Tabernacle, the liturgy is divinely inspired. It has been handed down over the ages to instruct and lead those who prayerfully attend in the ways of God.

Liturgy is beautiful not because of what man add to it, but because it is a gift from God, a royal celebration. Preserving and reverencing this pattern of worship is vital to the propagation of the faith and the evangelization of the

people.

We now have two forms of the Mass, and I am not going to debate which is more valid. The Vatican has deemed each licit and that is what I am accepting as true at this time. However, there is still a pattern to the Novo Order, it is not a license to remake the pattern of God in man's image. We must take pains to keep Christ the center of our liturgy and stay true to the ordained method of worship. It, like the Tabernacle, was not created by happenstance. The liturgy has purpose and function. It is solemn and reverent because we are sitting at the feet of Our LORD and Savior. Through the Mass we are welcomed into the threshold of Heaven where we are free to worship with the angels and saints.

The unity and universal nature of our Church is why we are called Catholic. That is our true strength, not the individuals but the Church as a whole being the Hands and Feet of Jesus in the world. Next time you assist at Mass, let your mind travel upward to the highest of Heavens, the to Holy, Holy, Holy. Remember that this is our sabbath, this is our feast of the Lamb. We must ever raise our hearts to Him and bow our heads in awe and wonder.

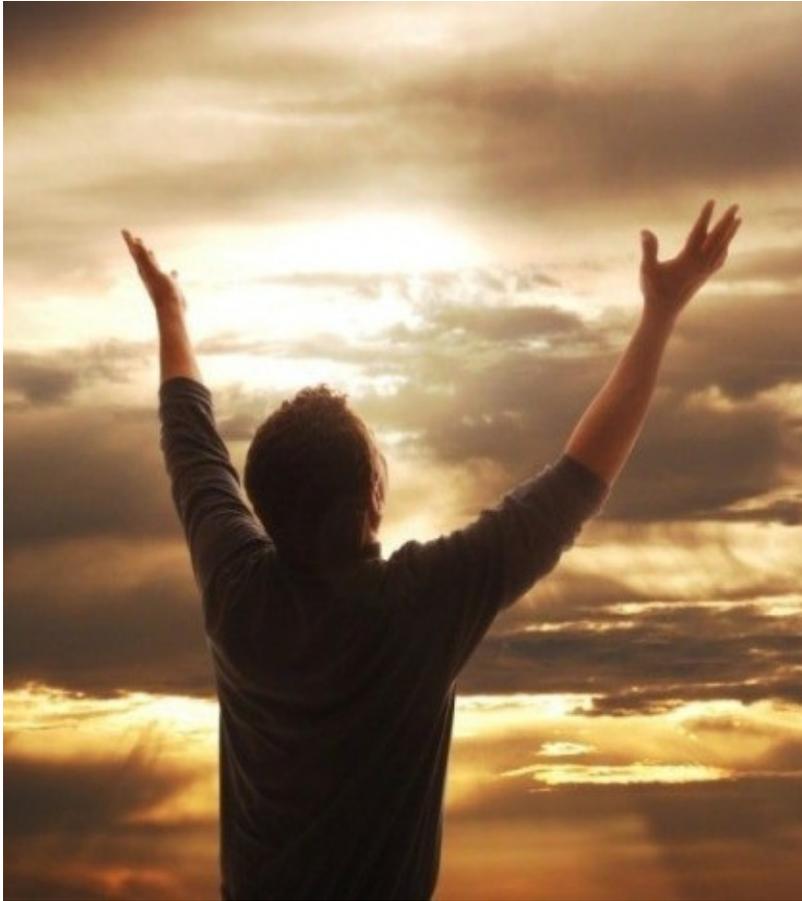
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## Are You at Hand For the Kingdom of Heaven? [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

*§ Are You at Hand For the Kingdom of Heaven?*



Our Father who art in Heaven

The Message that John the Baptist proclaimed before Jesus was baptized was:  
***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** (Matt. 3:2)

The Message that Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of His Ministry was:  
***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** (Matt. 4:17)

The directive He gave to the twelve disciples as He sent them out during His Ministry was:

***“And as you go, preach saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give.”*** (Matt. 10:7-6)

Dear fellow pilgrims in Christ Jesus,

The Gospels make it clear that the theme for evangelizing by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His Disciples was ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** And that the works that followed were miraculous confirmation of the Word that was preached. We understand that the term ***“Kingdom is at Hand”*** is used in these scriptures referring to the accessibility of entry to the Kingdom for those in the audiences who came seeking belief in Jesus, as the Christ

However, for us who have believed and are baptized the term no longer applies. For, according to Paul the Apostle, at our coming to Faith in Jesus the Christ we have already been translated to ***“The Kingdom of the Son”*** (see Col.1:9-14). Therefore for us the more appropriate question we might ask ourselves is ***“are we aware of the presence of the Kingdom in us?”*** And, subsequently, and more importantly, the question we need most to understand is... ***“are we at hand to the Kingdom of God that is in us?”*** That is, have we committed ourselves to be available to be at the service of the King in every aspect for our lives in the Kingdom?

Before continuing, it should be clear to us who have accepted Christ that what Jesus was proclaiming was NOT a material kingdom in this space-time continuum, but rather a Spiritual Kingdom under Christ and that, as a Spiritual Kingdom, every person who believes and repents becomes a participant in this Kingdom and under the Reign of the King.

It is also clear that from the citations and other scriptures that “repentance” is the main key to being received into the Kingdom. Repentance is not a “human work” in the traditional sense, indeed, it consists of Spirit-inspired words and action by the believer affirming their faith in the “promise” preached, to the extent that they renounce sin and turn their lives over to God. Of course, the “promise” refers to “The Word Of God”, the “Good News” of the Redemption and Forgiveness offered to those who turn from their worldly lives and believe the Good News of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice and resurrection.

True repentance is also NOT intended to be a one-time occurrence but an on-going practice in our lives. This is because although the forgiveness and

redemption we receive is eternally complete in Jesus, our repentance, in order to be sincere, is limited to our past and present sins – sins that we can only honestly acknowledge after we commit them. We cannot repent of sins we have not yet committed. That is why the Church through the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist provides us the means to maintain, throughout our lives, the state of grace we obtain at our reception of the sacrament of Baptism.

Belief and Repentance are therefore, not only the Keys to the Kingdom. but are also the Keys that permit us to remain in the Kingdom of God let us yield ourselves to Him so that His Spirit may function in us for Glory of His Kingdom!

This then brings us to a better understanding as to why we need to ask ourselves the question ... ***“are we at hand to the Kingdom of God that is in us?”***

Because, if we cannot answer that question positively, then we need to determine how we can move in our spiritual lives so that the “Kingdom”, that is, The King and His Love will reign in us in everything we do in our lives? And I mean everything ... relationships, words, thoughts, emotions, intents and actions. That, my friends is what it truly means to ***“be at hand for the Kingdom of God”!***

Now Jesus’ disciples faced the same problems we do. So even as they followed Jesus He noticed from their conversation and worldly concerns that they yet had to learn how to focus on HIM and His Word and leave their anxieties behind. So here is the direction He gave them ... ***“seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all these other things will be resolved for you.”*** (cf., Matt. 6:33)

The question they (and us) might yet ask would probably be ... ***“Lord I hear your directive but how do I seek the Kingdom?”***

The main answer the Lord gave them is a prayer. In fact it is a prayer we now call the Lord’s prayer but, in reality, it should really be called “the disciples” prayer because it is the exact prayer need by the disciples to the Father asking for access to the Kingdom (the Kingdom of His Love) that they were seeking.

Here is the text of that prayer:

***“Pray, then, in this way:***

***‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. [may] ‘Your kingdom come. [into us and through us][so that] Your will may be done [by us], On earth as it is in heaven. [and, to sustain us in your Kingdom] ‘Give us this day our daily bread. ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’***

***[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.] For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matt. 6:9-15)***

As disciples, this prayer then, should also be our prayer also. It is a prayer that is also our prayer of commitment to the Father and our yielding to Him and the Kingdom of His Love in our lives.

It should also be clear to us from the above citations and other scriptures that the main God-Given mission of the Church, and all believers is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, not only through words but also by the way we live out the Kingdom in faith.

In the citation below notice how Paul prays that the Colossian converts live out their lives in accord with the spiritual Kingdom that is in them (ie., Christ in us, the Hope of Glory). This prayer by Paul indicates how the Father places the Spirit of His Kingdom in us so that the Holy Spirit, working through our willing cooperation will see that ... “His will may be done on this Earth as it is in Heaven”. (see underlined portion in the citation below)

***“ For this reason also, since the day we heard of it (your faith in Christ), we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (By this you will see how by your abiding in loving obedience to Him...) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1: 9-14)***

In conclusion brethren, I also pray that the Lord guide you and led you through His Spirit that we may all be one as we live out our lives in His Kingdom so that

His Love may be made manifest through our unity in Christ Jesus. Amen and Amen.

Your Brother in Christ ... Bartimaeus

***Related Links ...***

[# Prayer to receive the Holy Spirit](#)

[Reclaiming Our Legacy In Christ](#)

[The Gospel of the Kingdom](#)

[The Kingdom of God: Our Spiritual Inheritance](#)

[Sweet Yoke of Love](#)

[Be Reconciled with God](#)

[Releasing the Spirit Releasing the Spirit](#)

...

( B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus' Quiet Place, [2008-2017])

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This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2017/08/10/\\$-are-you-at-hand-for-the-kingdom-of-heaven/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2017/08/10/$-are-you-at-hand-for-the-kingdom-of-heaven/)

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## Spiritual Lessons from Popeye

Every time I hear the words from Exodus, “I AM WHO AM,” I can’t help myself to think about the words of Popeye the Sailor Man: “I am what I am.”



Remember Popeye? He’s a runty, playful, squinty-eyed guy with a speech impediment who sails the seven seas, adopted an infant he calls Sweet Pea, and is in love with a tall, skinny woman named Olive Oyl. Unfortunately, his nemesis Bluto is also attracted to Olive Oyl and keeps trying to kidnap her. When Popeye comes to her rescue, Bluto beats up on him until he starts feeling weak. Then he eats a can-full of spinach (and occasionally the can itself), which immediately gives him superhuman strength in order to defeat Bluto.

Now this is just a silly little cartoon meant to entertain. But like every story ever told by anyone anywhere, there’s always an underlying meaning.

Why spinach? When you Google *spinach*, it states that its main nutritional element is iron. And when you Google *iron*, it shows it can symbolize inner strength and the will and determination to see things through to the finish. Like Popeye always says: “I’m strong to the finich cause I eats me spinach.”

And what about Olive Oyl? Surely the name of this goofy, gangly gal can’t mean anything important, can it? Check it out. Apart from its many heart-healthy benefits, olive oil has spiritual meaning. Olives come from the olive tree, which in the Bible is associated with love and charity. And olive oil was used for anointing kings and priests and for fueling lamps which, of course, bring light, and by association, enlightenment.

So I'd like to share my enlightenment of the three spiritual lessons I've learned about God's character from Popeye.

### **1. Popeye's name tells us about God, the Father.**

We know Popeye is named because one of his eyes bulges. But what if we break down his name a bit more?

Jesus taught us that God is "Abba Father." Abba Father is an intensely personal, loving, and tender reference that can be translated as Daddy or Papa. Taking us back to the 1950s, Papa was frequently shortened to Pop. Therefore, Abba Father is an intensely personal, loving, and tender reference to our heavenly Daddy or Pop.

The second part of the name, Popeye, focuses us on the eye. Scripture tells us, despite the fact that God is busy holding the universe together, He still has his eye on us and is always concerned about us – no matter what.

### **2. Popeye is strong and rescues the weak.**

In every episode, a bully is out to get Olive Oyl or baby Sweat Pea. It is therefore up to Popeye to make sure the weak are protected and saved from harm. Jesus is the savior of our souls and our ultimate rescuer and redeemer.

### **3. Popeye is what he is.**

Popeye always says: "I am what I am, and that's all that I am." What does God say about himself? "I AM WHO AM. This is what you shall tell the children of Israel: I AM sent me to you."

Now I realize that a cartoon character doesn't come close to our heavenly Father; but perhaps it will remind us to think more about the character of God. God is our Abba Father. He has His eye upon us and will always protect us. He is our savior. He is the great I AM. He is the One and only One we'll ever need!

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This contribution is available at <http://deaconallen.com/spiritual-lessons-from-popeye/>  
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## Here Comes the Judg(ing)



For some reason, I woke up this morning not praising God, but judging others. You may think that this is difficult because I haven't even "seen" anyone yet. But for some reason, I was judging these people in my mind. I'm not really sure where this comes from, but this happens far more than I care to admit.

I often get this thought in my head that people don't fit into the mold that I am trying to put them into. As I sit here writing this, I realize how terrible this action is. I am trying to make these people something they're not. I am forcing my rules of living onto others, and they don't even know that I am doing it. I am judging people according to my thoughts and beliefs. I am finally starting to realize when I am doing this, and I try to realign my thoughts as soon as possible. I was not placed on this earth to judge. That is not my job. God will judge – not me! My role is to love and serve the Lord and others each and everyday. I shall not judge because I have many obstacles of my own to overcome. I need to constantly pray for the strength to overcome my weaknesses and become more loving and caring.

It all comes down to realizing that I am not the one who is in charge. It is not about me and it's certainly not how others should conform to my thoughts, actions and preconceived notions. I will continue to pray for the knowledge and understanding to accept this reality of God being the one who has control of every situation. By placing my life in God's hands, I will be totally free of thoughts of judgement toward others. I will be able to love others for who they really are, and not what I expect them to be. I will be fully accepting of their gifts and talents and strive to live better because of them.

Help me, Lord, not to judge others – but to serve you with my whole heart.  
Amen.

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