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monthly

*January*  
*2018*

# **New Evangelists Monthly #61**

January 2018

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## Forward

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

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

eBook editions such as this are available within a few days following submission deadlines (the second Saturday of each month). eBook formats include .mobi for Kindle users, .epub for most other eBook readers and .pdf for everyone else.

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## Psalm 63 ~ "My soul clings to you." [at Pauca Verba]

**It has been said** that Psalm 63 contains the most warm and intimate expressions of human love for God in the entire Psalter. This no-frills, cliff-hanging monastery may have something to teach us about a later verse.

**Verse 1:** What a lovely image, "*My soul is thirsting for God.*" We know what a powerful thing thirst is. Thank God we live in a water rich part of the world. Can I name a time in my life or some personal experience when I felt a great thirst for God. Maybe the psalmist composed this psalm while in the desert as he uses the words *dry* and *wearying*. Ever felt an inner thirst for God out of a dreary and waterless time?

**Verse 2:** The word "*gaze*" sums up the psalmist's experience in the temple. *Gazing* is silent and interior. He's not singing, not studying, not listening to a sermon - just looking. It is said of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha that "*She prayed more with her eyes than with her lips.*" Some of us are so conditioned to prayer as words, we might have trouble understanding Kateri's method or accepting it as legitimate for ourselves.

**Verse 3:** God's loving-kindness is better than life. We are each born of God's creative love: a thought of God, a breath of God. And I exist to live in and out of that understanding and to extol God, honor and praise God!

**Verse 4:** "I will lift up my hands." Better yet, "Lift up your hearts," we say at Mass. Some people go through their entire religious lives never having really lifted up their hearts. They might subscribe to the Vatican newspaper, make Holy Hours and have nuns and priests in the family and still go to their graves without every having lifted up their hearts. A lifted up heart holds *felt need*: the felt need to praise, to thank, to love, to know and experience God more deeply.

**Verse 5:** "...a song of joy on my lips..." C.S. Lewis says "There's no such thing as a sad Christian." Often the world's poorest people understand this the best. How did the world ever get the idea that to follow Christ leaves one dour, miserable and humorless? *O Jesus, make us glad!*

**Verse 6:** The psalmist says, "Even if I'm wide awake in the middle of the night, I want to be awake to God who holds me up, sustains, encourages, directs and urges me on."

**Verse 7:** The mother bird spreads her wings over the desert nest, creating a shade umbrella to protect her vulnerable chicks. God is like that.

**Verse 8:** Here it is, "*My heart clings to you.*" I want to *hang* onto every word of Christ, every action, every thought of Christ. Knowing first hand the vulnerability we experience living on this planet, I want to cling to Christ the rock, the way this no-frills monastery at the top of the page hangs on. Wouldn't it be a shame if a young fellow signed on with this monastery and never made that heart-connection, but settled for the negative desire just to escape a "wicked" world.

**Verses 9 and 10:** The psalmist can't help himself. He can't finish his song without lapsing into a self-pitying lament about how his enemies are treating him. He asks God to take care of them with a sword and to let jackals eat them.

We have to stop looking for the enemy *outside* ourselves. Turn the verse on yourself - the enemy within. That is, whatever wants to take you down: pride, self-will, money-lust, the panoply of little gods before which we burn the incense of emotion. *Be brave!*

**Verse 11:** Now he seems to have quickly come to his senses, returning to the praise of God. *"I'll join the king and rejoice in God."* Then the psalmist offers one last thought: God really doesn't like lies. Some of us fuss a great deal about the tiny lies we call "white" - telling a friend his sock, tie and shirt color combinations work well, or her hair is lovely, or the charred food is fine. I don't think those are the lies God detests, but the big deal lies that come *from the top*, and which leave people less protected, less secure, less healthy. Those lies *really* get God worked up.

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This contribution is available at <http://paucaverba.blogspot.com/2017/12/psalm-63-my-soul-clings-to-you.html>

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## The little horns and Antiochus [at Catholicism and Adventism]



Here we continue looking at the prophecies of Daniel.

### Outline:

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Daniel chapter 8](#)
3. [Daniel chapter 7](#)
4. **The little horns and Antiochus (this post)**
5. [Daniel chapter 2](#)
6. [Daniel chapter 9](#)
7. [Matthew 24 – The Olivet Prophecy](#)

### Are the two little horns the same?



Antiochus Epiphanes coin

Not everyone agrees as to whether the two little horns of Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 are the same entity. Some of the questions they ask are related to slight differences, especially the discrepancy between 2300 days and 3.5 years. The

slight differences – I don't see why they are significant: one horn subdues 3 kings, the other horn isn't recorded as doing so. This is fine if the two are complementary. The only significant problem is 2300 days vs 3.5 years. For those who consider 2300 days to be years, then 2300 years certainly cannot be 3.5 years. But we saw before that 2300 days really means 2300 morning and evening sacrifices, and that's 1150 days, very close to 3.5 years, which may be a simple rounding off.

The similarities are too strong to ignore.

Daniel 8:

- Little horn comes from the one of the successors to Greece
- Antiochus fits well

Daniel 7:

- Little horn comes from the one of the successors to Greece
- Antiochus fits well
- Little horn period is over before Christ's ascension

In the previous posts on [Daniel 7](#) and [8](#), we saw that Antiochus Epiphanes was partly, but accurately, described in each.

To recap, we will put them in a table to see how they correlate.

<b>Daniel 7</b>	<b>Daniel 8</b>	<b>Antiochus</b>
Subdue 3 kings		Yes
Speak great words against the most High	Magnified himself as the prince of the host of heaven King understanding dark sentences	Yes
Eyes like a man	Magnify himself in his heart	
Mouth that speaks great things	King of fierce countenance Mighty Waxes great	Yes
	Waxes towards south and east and the pleasant land	Yes
	Destroy the mighty and holy people	
Wear out the saints	Casts down some of the host of	Yes

	heaven and stars	
Think to change times and laws	Takes away the daily sacrifice Cause craft to prosper	Yes
	Broken without hand	Yes
3.5 years	1150 days	Yes
Then the Ancient of Days and his kingdom	Then sanctuary cleansed	Yes

## Does the New Testament comment on the little horn?

In Matt 24, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Even if you consider Matt 24 to refer to the end of the world, Jesus makes clear parallels between what happened in Antiochus' day, and Daniel, and the future event.

Jesus refers in verse 15 to Daniel, and the abomination of desolation.



Antiochus sacrificed pigs in the temple

Jesus then goes on to list several warnings that come straight out of the account of Antiochus' persecutions in the books of the Maccabees:

1. When you see the abomination of desolation (1 Macc 1:57)
2. Flee to the mountains (1 Macc 2:28)
3. Leave your possessions (1 Macc 2:28)
4. Woe to pregnant women and women with babies (1 Macc 2:9, 1 Macc 2:14)
5. Pray that it may not be in winter (the abomination of desolation was set up on Kislev 8, in winter)
6. Pray that it may not be [on the sabbath](#) (1 Macc 1:57, 1 Macc 2:29-41)
7. There will be a great tribulation ([read all of 1 Maccabees](#) to see how this

was the worst attack ever on the Jewish people, with an attempt to obliterate their worship completely)

Jesus told them to follow the example of the Jews under Antiochus, and to pray to avoid the same timing.

I think this clearly puts Antiochus as the fulfillment, in Jesus eyes, of Daniel 8's little horn.

Given the similarities with the little horn of Daniel 7, I conclude that whenever Daniel is given a vision of a little horn, God meant it to be clear that they were one and the same thing.

### **Further reading:**

[Antiochus IV Epiphanes – Is he the little horn?](#) ... by Dale Ratzlaff

[Daniel 8 – Antiochus and Antichrist](#)

[Daniel's Prophecy of Antiochus Epiphanes](#) ... by Jason Jackson

[Is the Little Horn of Daniel 7 the Roman Catholic Church?](#) ... by William Bell

[The Maccabean Revolt](#) ... Ancient History Encyclopedia

[The Revolt of the Maccabees](#)

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## The Church's "Great" Popes Lived Out Heroic Virtue [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



Three Popes in the history of the Church have been honored with the designation "the Great". Pope St. Leo I (440–61), Pope St. Gregory I (590–604), and Pope St. Nicholas I (858–67). This is not, however, the result of official Church decree. The pontiffs so named have been duly singled out through the popular acclaim of the faithful on the occasion of their deaths and over time by tradition. Since his passing in April 2005, Pope St. John Paul II has been variously accorded the title.



**Pope St. Leo the Great**

Pope St. Leo, one of the best-known popes from the 1st millennium, was a

native of Tuscany, and initially served as a deacon under Pope St. Celestine I. Leo was a force to be reckoned with in diplomatic proceedings, which is why Pope Sixtus III sent him to resolve various disputes as a deacon. Leo's skills as an administrator enabled him to deal judiciously with the disintegration of the Roman Empire and guide the Church successfully through various consequential doctrinal disputes.

During Leo's papacy, the universal Church and secular authorities recognized the supreme pontiff as the true leader of Christendom. He ruled on questions ranging from Church discipline to controversies among prelates, and authored numerous theological works. The most popular was the

*Tome of Leo*

which greatly shaped the Church's teaching on Christ's consubstantial union with God the Father at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Leo died in 461 and is buried in St. Peter's Basilica. His feast day is celebrated November 10. He is among the Doctors of the Church.

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### **St. Leo the Great on Christ**

*"He who could not be enclosed in space, willed to be enclosed; continuing to be before times, he began to exist in time; the Lord of the universe allowed his infinite majesty to be overshadowed, and took upon him the form of a servant..."*

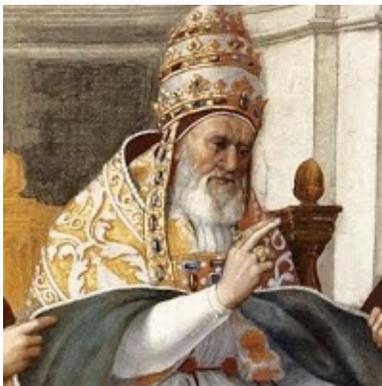
— Pope St. Leo the Great

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When Attila the Hun threatened to invade and conquer Italy, it wasn't an emperor or a deputy who went and talked Attila out of it. It was Pope Leo. Records show that after meeting with Leo, Attila retreated from Rome. The most plausible cause is that Leo prevailed upon Attila, making so great an impression that Attila left, stories range from Leo offering Attila a sum of gold (unlikely) to

Attila suddenly seeing a vision of Christ in priestly robes bearing a drawn sword, threatening to bring death and obliterate the Hun army should they proceed with their attack.

St. Leo in particular contributed tremendously to the Church, including (through a particular devotion to St. Peter) helping to develop our understanding of papal primacy. O God, who never allows the gates of hell to prevail against your Church, firmly founded on the apostolic rock, grant her, we pray, that through the holy intercession of Pope Saint Leo, she may stand firm in your truth and know the protection of lasting peace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. Amen.



### **Pope St. Gregory the Great**

Born to an aristocratic Roman family around the year 540, St. Gregory was a public servant into his thirties, then retired to be a monk. He was a fan of the great St. Benedict, devoting a whole book to the saint's life and miracles, and encouraged the spread of monasticism during his papacy. Pope Pelagius II called Gregory away from his life of solitude to act as papal nuncio in Constantinople. After the pope's sudden death from the plague, Gregory was elected on February 3, 590. He reluctantly accepted this holy summons to serve as Rome's bishop.

It was Gregory who is owed thanks for spreading the faith in England and Gaul. He sent St. Augustine of Canterbury and companions there as evangelists, and for keeping the faith alive among the Franks (ancestors of the French). He did dispute the emperor on several new laws, but made sure to approach each situation with proper humility: as a loyal subject rather than a man on equal

footing. Due to the depleted infrastructure in Rome by that time, Gregory was tasked with handling everything from feeding Rome's poor, to managing the vast amounts of Church property, to rebuilding aqueducts and discussing the most equitable ways to use Church resources. A meticulous and generous man, he left the Church in vastly better shape than he found it, hence his title, "The Great."

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### **St. Gregory the Great on Repentance**

*"If we knew at what time we were to depart from this world, we would be able to select a season for pleasure and another for repentance. But God, who has promised pardon to every repentant sinner, has not promised us tomorrow. Therefore we must always dread the final day, which we can never foresee. This very day is a day of truce, a day for conversion."*

— Pope St. Gregory the Great

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St. Gregory the Great was perhaps most known for being a prolific writer and teacher, having authored four books, several sermons, and over 850 letters that survive to this day. He is responsible for several liturgical customs that still exist. The Our Father's current placement in the Mass, various prayers recited according to liturgical season, and some additions to the Roman Canon all originated from him. Gregorian Chant, though it bears his name, only came from Gregory in seed form; that attribution first appeared nearly three centuries after Gregory's death.

Pope St. Gregory, now recognized as a Doctor of the Church, died on March 12, 604. He was acclaimed as a saint almost immediately. His feast day is celebrated September 3 in the Latin Church. Almighty God, who cares for your people with

gentleness and rule them in love, through the intercession of Pope Saint Gregory, endow, we pray, with a spirit of wisdom those to whom you have given authority to govern, that the flourishing of a holy flock may become the eternal joy of the shepherds. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you, together, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



### **Pope St. Nicholas the Great**

A Roman from a noble family, Nicholas was well-known, even before becoming pope, for his holiness, goodwill, intelligence, and ability to lead. A subdeacon under Pope Sergius II and a deacon under St. Leo IV, Nicholas was elected to the papacy on April 24, 858. He wasted no time revitalizing the Church. With the Holy Roman Empire in shambles and Christian morality in a deep state of decay, Nicholas the Great led the Church well through a time where things could easily have devolved into anarchy. His enlightened stewardship proved to be a blessing.

Many bishops of the time were living worldly, decadent lives. One of Nicholas' hallmarks was reforming and renewing those standards to which bishops and priests should be held. He twice excommunicated the archbishop of Ravenna, for being a tyrant who extorted his subordinate bishops and imprisoned his priests, not to mention forging papal documents and abusing the pope's representatives. Nicholas also battled the archbishop of Reims, over the pope's supremacy, but fortunately the issue was resolved without the archbishop having to be removed.

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## St. Nicholas the Great on the Church's Certain Doctrine

*"From the time the Christian religion began to be spread, she has held unchangeable and taught uncorrupted throughout the world the doctrines which she has received once and for all from her patron and founder, St. Peter."*

— Pope St. Nicholas the Great

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Nicholas dealt with an emperor wanting a divorce, a foreshadowing of Henry VIII nearly 700 years later, when Lothair II left his lawful wife, Theutberga, to marry another woman. The area bishops, who were controlled by Lothair, approved of his abandonment, as did a meeting of bishops where papal representatives were bribed. Nicholas, never one to back down, convened his own meeting, wherein he duly reversed the decision and excommunicated his representatives. Even Lothair besieging Rome for two days couldn't discourage Pope Nicholas, despite the pope himself effectively being imprisoned without food in St. Peter's during that time. Lothair ultimately reconciled to the Church and to the pope, seeking forgiveness.

During his time in office, Pope Nicholas continued to restore churches and was an active proponent of the religious life, considering he himself lived monastically, through and through. He died November 13, 867, and after death was venerated as a saint. Almighty Father, lover of souls, who chose your servant Saint Nicholas to be a bishop in the Church, that he might give freely out of the treasures of your grace: make us mindful of the needs of others and, as we have received, so teach us also to give; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2017/12/the-churchs-great-popes-lived-out.html>

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## A Light Rising From Iceland [at The Mission of Saint Thorlak]



Iceland is probably best known by others in the world for its remarkable natural beauty; perhaps, too, for having the world's oldest parliament, for their meticulous preservation of Norse culture and literature, their admirable national literacy rate, and their exemplary system of renewable energy. Iceland is not, however, particularly known for its noteworthy figures in Catholic history. In fact, few people know much about the Catholic Church in Iceland beyond those practicing the Catholic faith there now, comprising less than five percent of Iceland's entire population, and consisting largely of immigrants.

Every part of the world has seen its share of holy men and women over the centuries. The very idea of being Christian is to live a life of virtue and charity, so, arguably, the Canon of Catholic Saints is like a "Who's Who List" of model citizens to emulate from among the hundreds of thousands of other solidly good-living people in human history. It can furthermore be argued that one need not be Christian to lead a virtuous and charitable life, and we say this to emphasize that we are all part of a common humanity called to be generous in caring for one another before we call ourselves anything else.

Iceland saw its native son, Thorlak Thorhallsson, make this list in 1198. Eight

hundred and nineteen years ago, in the thick of the Middle Ages, before the big name saints even came onto the world scene... tiny Iceland notched a bona fide canonized saint.



In the same historical period that would later record the lives of household-name saints such as Francis and Clare, Bernard, Benedict, Dominic, Rita and Joan of Arc in other parts of Europe, Thorlak of Iceland got there first.

How did it happen, then, that Thorlak made it into this Who's Who, the Canon of Catholic Saints, in 1198... and yet is barely known today?

It's all about timing and placement, even with Catholic saints. Keep first in mind that Thorlak was locally canonized in 1198, as the Pope then was not a world traveler as he is today, and Iceland was extremely isolated geographically. Local canonization was the norm around the world, not just in Iceland. Thorlak's canonization was thus valid and recognized throughout Europe. However, it did not stop there. In 1984, Pope John Paul II officially recognized Thorlak as a Catholic saint and declared him Patron Saint of Iceland. This statement is a magnificent data point. A pontiff, who himself would be declared a saint, acknowledged and reaffirmed the holy example and patronage of Thorlak seven hundred and eighty six years later. Talk about staying power!

Proclaimed by John Paul II! What an achievement!

### **Why is Thorlak not widely known?**

Timing and placement: Thorlak was a beloved figure in Iceland until the 1500s, when the Catholic religious establishment was razed in the Protestant

Reformation. Catholic traditions were obliterated for many years before they would be re-examined centuries later to glean any spiritual good from the remnant of their memory.

We can gratefully thank the diligent Icelandic historians for preserving Thorlak's name and legacy. As time will do, though, his life's color has grayed into the shadow of medieval memory. He is catalogued as a strict, no-nonsense bishop who established and enforced rules. He is noted for taking on politically powerful chieftains over their refusal to cede property to the diocese and their reluctance to conform to church rules regarding their behavior. This characterization fits well into the old order, and he certainly did do these things. Iceland, unmatched in maintaining their historical identity, has ensconced him as their Model Medieval Bishop. December 23, the feast day of Saint Thorlak, is marked as a cultural holiday, Þorláksmessa, commemorating him even to this day.

As a Model Medieval Bishop.



It's pretty hard to relate to that today. It's harder, still to live it up in celebration of someone who cracked the moral whip and demanded property. And it's nearly impossible to do so when it is exactly one day before Christmas Eve.

How do we make a meaningful feast day for a saint who did... (*what did he do, again?*)

We can't read from his writings. They have been pillaged or destroyed by fire.

We can't venerate his relics. They, too, were pillaged and destroyed.

We could have a meal that hearkens back to the past, but what we end up commemorating is the preparation for Christmas Eve, not Saint Thorlak himself.

How do we toast a Model Medieval Bishop when his life has absolutely no common context, no application whatsoever to our lives today?

By bringing him present with us. That's how.

By knowing him. By knowing his story. By realizing his light.

By doing what we call Missionaries of Saint Thorlak to do every day.

To simply notice him and ask: "Can you be our friend?"



Remarkably, if anyone should take the time to pick up the historical texts and start reading, we see what made him a saint in the first place. He was not named “saint” because he was a Model Medieval Bishop. He was recognized as a holy man because he bucked this establishment.

Saint Thorlak’s entire priesthood – in a remote land bound by the Medieval Church – was indeed one of establishing and enforcing rules. But he did so with unprecedented *mercy*.

Mercy. Now, there’s a word we have all heard. In fact, in 2015, Pope Francis declared an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, calling on people worldwide to rediscover and embrace compassion, understanding and forgiveness... to reconcile with one another, and with God. To stop living like rule-bound Pharisees and live like Jesus, loving others because we love God and we affirm the presence of God-in-others.

“Mercy” is not a word we associate with the Medieval Church.

Saint Thorlak lived his entire priesthood with unprecedented mercy – at a time when mercy was not widely taught, and was not widely shown... in a country used to making its own rules, whether the Medieval Church agreed or not... in a powder keg of power clashes waiting to happen.

Saint Thorlak lived *mercy*. He established rules by demonstrating the spiritual motives behind them. He expected the best from his countrymen – but he knew how high the moral standards of the virtuous life were, and how powerless most of us feel to reach that high. He knew the rules, he knew the reasons, and he knew the harsh penances to be assigned to those who didn’t reach them. (Those were not just legend; they were reality.) So, what did he do? He counseled people individually about living more virtuously, determined their penance, and then assigned them a fraction of the prescribed debt of prayer or fasting. The remainder, he took upon himself, and completed for them. He slept little and ate little, between the prayer and fasting he did on behalf of his flock, but worked no fewer hours because of it. He simply denied himself leisure.

Folks: Did you get that? **St. Thorlak was a serious, dour-faced bishop because he saw how difficult the Church’s punishments were, and he performed them for us.**

Penitents saw what he did for them, and it made them pause. Here was someone with the right to lord power over them and to exclude them from good standing, from the one institution that could help families barely surviving on a remote island that was subject to harsh seasons, rough seas and dangerous weather. Instead of shaming and scolding people for their weakness, he shared in it – without compromising the morality he was teaching. He did not excuse immorality. He pointed it out and proclaimed the better way. But he took the punishment. In everything he did, he showed mercy.

Thorlak lived mercy in many other ways. He personally invited destitute and diseased people to dine and stay with him in his own residence, but he did so in secret, so as not to draw praise for something he felt he ought to do as a matter of course. He championed the dignity of women, taking political leaders to task who openly kept numerous mistresses while wife and children were used for show. He set up funds for poor families so that they could remain together rather than split apart for lack of provisions.

Where are these remarkable stories of Saint Thorlak? Are they legends, exaggerated with retelling, romanticized over time?

No! They are found throughout the same texts cited by historians, starting with The Saga of Bishop Thorlak. They are all right there, in plain sight!

Saint Thorlak is not hidden in the shadows of time. It is, rather, that few people take the time to see the light of his mercy, which was far ahead of its time.

**Perhaps the light of Saint Thorlak has been hidden in the shadows of time because he was more a saint for our time.**



Last week, we proposed marking Þorláksmessa by letting those in our path know

how they bring light to us. Not only is this consistent with the way Saint Thorlak lived, but it brings to life the timely verse from Luke 1:78 as we head toward Christmas: “In the tender mercy of God, light from heaven will break upon us, shining on those who dwell in darkness.” (Since we’re talking a feast day in Iceland, we can’t help but notice the play on words at a time when Iceland receives just over four hours of total daylight).

We close with this miracle account from The Saga of Bishop Thorlak, a very literal case of light rising from Iceland: “During the winter, the eve of Maundy Thursday after the death of Bishop Þorlákr, a farmer called Sveinn saw such a great light in Skálholt over Bishop Þorlákr’s tomb that he could hardly see the church for it” (chapter 20).

**May we all be witness to this light rising from Iceland. May we be part of it. May we contribute our own light to this celebration of mercy and love of God through the way of Saint Thorlak.**



By Andreas Tille (Own work) [http://fam-tille.de/island/winter/0207/2003\\_032.html](http://fam-tille.de/island/winter/0207/2003_032.html)

Skálholt in Winter

*There will be no Missionary Thought next week as we pray with everyone around the world: **Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth, PEACE to all people of good will!***

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This contribution is available at <http://mission-of-saint-thorlak.weebly.com/mission-activities/missionary-thought-for-the-week-of-december-18-2017-a-light-rising-from-iceland>  
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| [Contents](#) |

Since the Church claims that the Old Covenant has never been revoked, does this mean that today's practice of Judaism is salvific? I will answer this question and more through the intriguing prophetic figure of Elijah!



This presentation is presented in both video format as well as written format. I will be examining the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in the New, using the prophet Elijah as the figure to deliver this teaching of the Church. I have broken this into two videos and the text follows, which includes all of my referenced sources.

Part I

Part II

## **The Prefiguration of Christ in the Prophetic Figure of Elijah**

**Matthew J Bellisario 2017**

*“Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For amen, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”*

(Matthew 5:17-18)

1.

## **Biblical Typology Explained**

The Old Testament is an often misunderstood and neglected canon of Sacred Scripture especially in modern Catholic scholarship. Catholic publications on Old Testament studies are outnumbered immensely by Protestant publications. As Catholics we must ask an important question. Does the Old Testament have anything to say to us today, or is it simply an outdated canon of Scripture that deals primarily with the Israelites? The simple fact is, to truly understand the Old Testament, we must first have a proper understanding of the New Testament. There are many events in the Old Testament where we can see prefigurements of Christ, showing us the true significance of the events. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that the Church, "...has illuminated the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son."

[\[1\]](#)

Typological or spiritual exegesis of the text is how we come to understand these prefigurements.

To comprehend Biblical typology, the four senses of Sacred Scripture are important to understand. The senses of Scripture are broken into two main categories, the literal and the spiritual, and there are three types of spiritual senses, the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical. First, we must determine the literal sense of the text which can be either historical or metaphorical.

[\[2\]](#)

In this brief study we will be examining portions of First and Second Kings, which are defined as historical books containing real events even though they are not written in modern historical prose. The prophet of Elijah is the subject of this typological investigation. Considering the historical events concerning this prophetic figure we will be looking primarily to two spiritual senses, the allegorical and the moral. The allegorical will point to the mysteries of Christ and the Church and the moral will point to the Christian moral life.

2.

## **The Old Law Fulfilled and Transformed in Christ**

Before we begin to look at our prophet, a brief examination of the Old Covenant being transformed and fulfilled in the New is in order. The Church teaches that the Old Covenant has never been “revoked”

[\[3\]](#)

, but what does this mean? It does not indicate as Cardinal Walter Kasper seems to think that the Old Covenant can still be followed by today’s Jews in some form and be salvific.

[\[4\]](#)

In order to grasp the status of the Old Covenant in relevance to the Jews we must have a wider perspective so that we can see that the form of the Old Covenant has been changed or transformed in Christ. Christ being the transformation and fulfillment of the Old makes the New Covenant established through the Church the only way now possible of continuing in the unrevoked Old Covenant. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, “that Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Law to “perfect it and bring it to an end in His own self, so as to show that it was ordained to Him.”

[\[5\]](#)

The history of Israel is a preparation for the Jew and the Gentile to receive the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. All the precepts of the Old Covenant including the ceremonial are observed forever in their “fulfilled reality.”

[\[6\]](#)

When we say then the Old was not revoked, we are not saying that nothing has changed for the Jews. We are saying that in order for them to continue in their relationship with God they must enter into Christ who has fulfilled and transformed the Old. Our prophet, Elijah then can be better understood in light of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His New Covenant through His Church

of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant through His Church. Lastly, it is important to note that when the figures of the Old Testament cooperate with God, they are implicitly cooperating with Christ. Again, we look to Aquinas who holds that in all places and times there are two kinds of men, good and evil, those who accept God's call and those who reject it.

[7]

Those like the prophets should be seen in the reality of the coming of Messiah. Using Biblical typology, we are now prepared to see how the prophet Elijah prefigures Christ and is likewise fulfilled in Christ.

### **3. The Prophetic Figure of Elijah**

The figure of Elijah (Elias) falls between 1 Kings 17 (III Kings) and 2 Kings 2 (IV Kings). This period is known as the division of the kingdoms between the north, Israel and the south, Judah. The events in the life of this prophet contain many prefigurements of Christ concerning His Church and the way we are called to live the Christian life. Elijah whose name means "Strong God" is often known as the prophet of warning and judgement. Elijah comes abruptly into the Scripture passages of 1 Kings 17 with a dire warning of a severe drought that will descend upon the land because of the wicked ways of Ahab. (1 Kings 17:1) This sudden appearance of Elijah establishes the mysterious and often grave mannered leitmotif of this prophet. He often delivers a warning followed by a delayed punishment that often seem severe but after a second look are often merciful for the sin committed in hope of the sinner's repentance. After a series of warnings, punishments and miraculous events, Elijah chooses a successor Elisha and then leaves in just as an abrupt manner as which he appeared by being taken up into the clouds in a chariot.

## **Fulfillment and Transformation of the Old Covenant [at Catholic Champion Blog]**

King Ahab and his malevolent wife Jezebel are the primary figures who bring

down the wrath of God through the prophet Elijah. Although we see Elijah proclaiming warnings for their evil in worshipping Baal, we also see merciful acts done through the prophet as well. As we will see Elijah can be viewed as a prefigurement of Christ and His Church. In a manner of speaking Elijah begins his ministry in a similar manner as Christ begins His role as prophet calling for the repentance of sinners. Elijah warns of coming punishment of three and a half years drought for the evil the king and his wife did which was “more than all that were before him.” (1 Kings 16:30) The punishment is fitting being that Baal was considered to be the god of rain and fertility. Christ likewise after proclaiming “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” warns the Jews of impending punishment for their evil ways, “And seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them: Ye brood of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matthew 3:2-7) So we have from the start the prefigurement of the call to repentance and a warning of punishment for not heeding the warning.

After delivering the dire message Elijah then flees to the wadi Cherith by the command of God where he is fed by ravens and drinks from the wadi or stream. There are two typological realities in this event; St Ephraim says the first being the wadi signifies the coming baptism of the Lord.

[\[8\]](#)

The second is the food brought by the ravens being like the miracle of the manna in the desert, another prefigurement of the Eucharist. Some of the Church Fathers even proposed that the ravens were angels in disguise.

[\[9\]](#)

Another irony is that the raven was considered unclean and thus shows God’s command and providence over all of creation. It is also interesting to note the prefigurement of the apostles ministering to the Gentiles in the symbol of the raven. Several of the Church Fathers see the dark raven coming to Elijah as the Church of the Gentiles. Persecution is also another unifying reality for both Elijah and Christ. Elijah fleeing from the evil king and his wife clearly prefigures Christ by the fact that Elijah suffered persecution by the Jews, being scorned and often threatened with death. “Elijah left his own people, and Christ deserted the synagogue.”

[\[10\]](#)

“Amen, I say to you, that no prophet is accepted in his own country.” (Luke 4:24)

One of the most astonishing miracles of the Old Testament is the resurrection of the widow’s son in Zarephath. After the wadi runs dry God commands Elijah to go and stay with the widow in Zarephath. After being fed miraculously by the widow with an endless food supply, which is also a prefigurement of the Eucharist, the widow’s son died. Just as Christ resurrected Lazarus, Elijah resurrected the boy. This is the first time a resurrection miracle is recounted in Sacred Scripture. It is significant and aside from the resurrection itself it has several typological meanings in the event. First, we see a similar merciful love for the widow and her son that Jesus shows in how He chooses to execute this miracle. Saint Augustine and Ephraim view this resurrection event of Elijah on several levels. Elijah in seeing the faith of the widow, stretched himself over the child three times symbolizing the Trinity. It also symbolizes the mysteries of Baptism and the resurrection believers will have in Christ.

[\[11\]](#)

The widow herself being a Gentile also typifies the New Covenant which would be for the Jew and the Gentile. Finally, the widow gathers two sticks when Elijah meets her, symbolizing the mystery of the cross. The widow’s faith shows that even the faithful in the Old Testament desired to die to this world through their faith in God. They were implicitly professing dying to oneself in Christ, through the future Sacrament of Baptism in the Church. The widow then falls into the category of one who is good according to Thomas Aquinas mentioned earlier. We have then in this encounter with the widow prefigurements of faith in Christ, the Sacrament of Baptism, the Holy Trinity, and the resurrection of those who believe in Christ, including the Gentile.

The next main event for Elijah is his reappearance to Ahab after fleeing, to demonstrate the foolishness of the worship of Baal. We have a faceoff between the priests of Baal and Elijah. They both prepare their altars and are prepared to

call upon their deity to accept their sacrifice. The heathens in their ritual call upon Baal to no avail, and Elijah mocks their insolence. Elijah then performs his ritual calling upon God. He covers the wood and fills the trench around the altar with water in jars three times symbolizing Baptism and the Holy Trinity. Then fire descends from above consuming the burnt offering. What is significant to the early Biblical commentators concerning this event is the typology of the Holy Spirit descending upon the Church. Saint Ambrose among others write, “Christ baptizes in fire and spirit. Hence, you read of this type in the book of Kings, where Elijah placed the wood upon the altar and told them to pour water on it from urns.”

[\[12\]](#)

Ephraim the Syrian views this sacrifice on Carmel which abolishes the pagan sacrifice as the prefigurement to Christ’s eternal sacrifice on Golgotha.

[\[13\]](#)

In this ritual the prefigurement of Baptism, the Holy Trinity, Christ’s sacrifice and Pentecost are to be found.

Once the pagan priests are dispensed with Elijah will end the drought. He travels near the sea and prays calling on the one true God to end the drought. He sends his servant to look towards the sea, but his servant sees nothing. Elijah commands him to go and look seven times, and then the rain finally comes out of the sea in the appearance of a hand or foot, depending on which translation you read. This is a manifestation of God similar to the cloud that appeared to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. There are two main points of interest here. First is the number seven representing the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit. The second is the significance of the three years and six months of the drought till the rain falls. Our Lord’s ministry on earth was also the same period of time. So, we see the three and half years of anticipation and then the coming of God in both instances. With Elijah it was the life-giving rain, with Christ it was the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Church.

One cannot overlook the similarities of the apostacy in Elijah’s time as there will

be at the end of time in the fulfillment of the Church's journey on earth. In the condemnation of the idolaters it is made clear that only a very few remain faithful to God, in this case 7000. We see a prefigurement of the final judgement that will come upon mankind with the earthquake and the fire that Elijah witnesses. Then God is found in the "still small voice". (1 Kings 19: 9-13) Christ also claims rhetorically that only a small remnant will be found when He returns, "But yet, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8) After the final judgement of course comes the eternal "still small voice" of God in heaven. We see then the dual nature of mercy and justice in both Elijah and Christ.

Finally, we come to the astonishing abrupt end to Elijah's earthly journey which also contains a strong typology in Christ. As we know, Elijah does not die, but is taken up in a chariot into heaven. He along with Moses uniquely return in the Transfiguration with Jesus on Mount Tabor. There is no mistaking his assumption into heaven with Christ's ascension into heaven. There is also an overlying symbolism of Christ conquering death in those like Elijah who are faithful. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live: And everyone that liveth, and believeth in me, shall not die forever." (John 11:25-26) Before Elijah goes he appoints his successor Elisha in a similar manner as Christ appoints His apostles to carry on His work.

## **5. Christ's Fulfillment and Transformation of Elijah**

As we have seen, Christ is clearly prefigured in the prophet Elijah. More importantly we also see the events of Elijah being transformed and fulfilled in the divine person of Jesus Christ. He is one of only two figures, with that of Moses where we see this transformation physically happen. The most significant event of this reality can be seen in the Transfiguration event that is recounted in the New Testament books of Matthew (17:1-6), Mark (9:1-8) and Luke (9:28-36). This event does not occur to merely show the divinity of Christ, or to bolster the faith of the apostles that were present, it is much more. It proclaims the actual fulfillment and transformation of the Old Covenant which is represented in the two prophets. Moses and Elijah are conversing with Our Lord speaking

about an anticipated event that is about to be fulfilled. “And behold two men were talking with him. And they were Moses and Elias, appearing in majesty: and they spoke of his decease, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:30-31) Christ appears luminous indicating His divinity through which He will accomplish this fulfillment. Why is it that they appear in a cloud similar to that on Mount Sinai? According to scholar J. Severino Croatto the cloud that hides the speakers foreshadows Luke’s description of the ascension of the risen Jesus. “It was inside the cloud (on Mount Sinai) that the divine revelation was received. So this “Sinaitic” frame joins the prophet Elijah to the interpretation of the divine word.”

[\[14\]](#)

Jesus in effect appears in His glorified state joining the Old Covenant to the Word Himself.

After the conversation in light of the prophesized sacrificial event that was to come, both of the Old Testament prophets disappear. They do not stay as Peter, James and John, the present apostles thought they would. This is demonstrated by the fact that they volunteer to put up tents for them. In their minds they are going to stay for a while. This disappearance of both Old Testament prophets is not happenstance. It indicates that the divine Son of God, Jesus Christ is now the only mediator, interpreter, and teacher for the people of God.

[\[15\]](#)

On Mount Tabor Elijah’s journey finds its fulfillment and transformation in the divine person Jesus Christ, for He alone remains. “And lifting up their eyes, they saw no man but only Jesus.” (Matthew 17:8)

## **Fulfillment and Transformation of the Old Covenant [at Catholic Champion Blog]**

1.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana; 2nd Revised & enlarged edition April 16, 2000)

2.

Lawrence Feingold.

*Typology, How the Old Testament Prefigures the New. Talk #1*

(Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series 2013)

3.

Walter Cardinal Kasper.

*Dominus Iesus*

(17th meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, New York, May 1, 2001)

4.

Matthew Levering.

*Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas*

. (University of Notre Dame Press; 1 edition April 15, 2002.)

5.

Marco Conti.

*1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*

(IVP Academic; First edition June 21, 2008)

6.

J. Severino Croatto.

*Jesus, Prophet Like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher Like Moses in Luke-Acts.*

(Journal of biblical Literature 124/3, 2005)

7.

Note: All Scripture quotes were taken from the Douay Rheims version found at <http://www.drbo.org/index.htm>

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[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana; 2nd Revised & enlarged edition April 16, 2000)  
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[2]

Lawrence Feingold.

*Typology, How the Old Testament Prefigures the New*

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*Talk #1*

(Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series 2013) 3

[\[3\]](#)

Catechism of the Catholic Church. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana; 2nd Revised & enlarged edition April 16, 2000) 121

[\[4\]](#)

Walter Cardinal Kasper.

*Dominus Iesus*

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[\[5\]](#)

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*Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas*

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Matthew Levering. *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas*. (University of Notre Dame Press; 1 edition April 15, 2002.) 23

[\[8\]](#)

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*1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*

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[\[12\]](#)

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J. Severino Croatto.

*Jesus, Prophet Like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher Like Moses in Luke-Acts*

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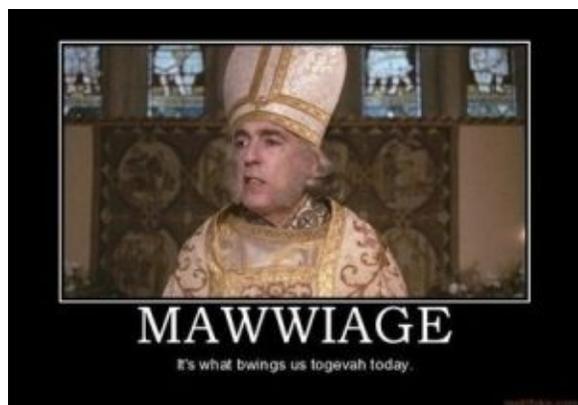
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# Unfolding The Wedding at Cana [at Third Place Project]



In a lot of ways, it's fitting that Jesus' first miracle takes place at a wedding. Marriage is one of the key threads found throughout scripture: the Bible begins with a married couple in the garden of Eden (the early chapters of Genesis) and concludes with the wedding feast of the Lamb in the book of Revelation. Woven throughout scripture, the relationship between humanity & God is often compared to a marriage, with God being the groom and we the (often unfaithful) bride. Jesus' presence at a wedding that early in the Gospel recognizes the tremendous value of marriage, which He elevates to the dignity of a Sacrament in the life of our Church.

That being said, what Jesus does at this particular wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12) teaches us several notable things about Him, about the Kingdom of God, and about what God wants for you and I.

When we started this study, we talked about the ways in which the [first part of John 1 mirrors the creation stories found in the book of Genesis](#). The wedding at Cana gives us one more, as it takes place on the *seventh* day in John's Gospel. On the first day, we first hear of the ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:19-27). The next three big events all begin with "the next day," making day #2 the day Jesus is recognized by John as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29-34), day #3 the calling of the first disciples (John 1:35-42), and day #4 the calling of Philip and

Nathanael (John 1:43-51). After these *four* days, we read in John 2:1 that on the *third* day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee ( $4 + 3 = 7$ ). After the creation of the world, God gave humanity the seventh day – the Sabbath – as the first sign of His love and goodness. Similarly, on the seventh day of John’s Gospel, we encounter the first sign of Jesus’ love and goodness with the miracle he’ll perform for a newly married couple.

The story is probably a familiar one: Jesus and his disciples are at a wedding where the hosts run out of wine. Jesus’ mother, Mary brings this to Jesus attention and, after an awkward exchange, Jesus has some servants fill stone jars with water. When the steward draws out the water, he finds that it has been transformed into the *best* sort of wine.

When you look at it more deeply, you begin to see that this story represents much more than just an act of kindness on Jesus’ behalf.

First of all, the exchange between Mary and Jesus is certainly an awkward one. When Mary brings the need of this couple to Jesus’ attention, His reply seems almost disrespectful: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). There almost seems to be a tone of refusal in Jesus’ question, which is a good reminder that He is guided solely by His father’s will rather than the real or perceived needs we see in front of us. Mary’s bringing of this issue to Jesus, and her subsequent instructions to the servants to “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5) represent a fundamental principal of Christian life: we are to follow Jesus’ directions in all that we do. They also remind us of Mary’s maternal role in the life of the Church, that we believe she brings our needs to Jesus when we ask her to pray for us.

Second, the fact that Jesus had the servants fill the six stone jars used for washing rituals is significant. After the fall of humanity, Scripture tells a story of a people (us) who become overwhelmed by sin. Jewish tradition at the time was filled with various cleansing and sacrificial rituals which are unable to fully reconcile humanity to God. Jesus replaces the empty rituals of Jewish washing by a sacrifice which repairs that which was broken, and which gives us (via the Sacraments) the strength to no longer be overwhelmed by sin.

Finally, the fact that Jesus’ miracle provided not just wine but the *best* wine is important. Not only does this wine prefigure the Eucharist and the new wine of the Heavenly Wedding feast, it’s also a reminder that no matter what we are able

to give to God, what He gives us in return is better than anything we can hope for. God's love for us is like this wine: abundant, of tremendous quality, and given for us as a sign of His limitless devotion to us.

*(This is the fourth part of [a Bible study I'm hosting](#) with students at St. Peter the Apostle CHS in Spruce Grove during the 2017-18 school year.)*

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| [Contents](#) |

## Jonesing for a Belly Laugh: Of Rimshots and Resets [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



*What the people need is a way to make ‘em smile.*

~

**Oh my gosh, it’s been a harrowing year** – you, too? How about a little levity to round it out.

So, René Descartes is sitting in a café. A waiter approaches and asks, “More coffee, Mr. Descartes?”

After a moment, the philosopher replies, “I think not.”

\*Poof!\* (Insert [rimshot](#) and cymbal splash here.)

Yeah, it’s a groaner, but it’s a good one – one of my favorites. It’s short, it’s clever, and it pokes fun at philosophy – who wouldn’t love a joke like that? My kids have heard it a million times. In fact, around my house, you can simply say, “I think not – *poof*” and you’ll probably get at least a snort if not an actual pity-laugh.

Regardless, shared laughter is almost always a good thing. It elevates the spirit, distracts us from our travails, and lightens our mutual loads. It buoys courage and restores hope – and it’s contagious, thank God. Someone giving way to a

serious fit of giggles will inevitably create ripples of mirth among those nearby, even if they have no idea what got it started. Like that Descartes joke. My littler kids, who know nothing of philosophy, grew up laughing at it along with the older kids just because *they* were laughing (the first dozen times at least).

Sure, there are times when laughs are inappropriate, but humorous resets are frequently desired and desirable. St. Francis de Sales alludes to this idea in his [Introduction to the Devout Life](#). He writes of *eutrapelia*, the Greek virtue of jesting and taking “friendly, virtuous enjoyment in the amusing situations human imperfections provide us.” While warning us off anything that approaches scorn or contempt, De Sales makes it clear that goofiness is not only a good thing, but often preferred to its alternative.

To illustrate, he tells a brief anecdote about King St. Louis of France: “When a religious wanted to speak to St. Louis after dinner about certain lofty subjects, the king told those present: ‘This is not the time to quote texts, but to regale ourselves with jokes and puns.’” Even kings need a break now and then – tell him the one about René Descartes (ba-bum, splash!).

**And what’s true for kings is true for the rest of us**, a perspective brought to life on the screen by director Preston Sturges in [Sullivan’s Travels](#) (1941). It’s a movie about moviemaking, but much more than



that. It’s also a movie about why people generally go to movies in the first place: To forget their troubles, to escape and retreat, and, more often than not, to laugh.

I discovered *Travels* by accident. It’s mentioned in another film, [Grand Canyon](#) (1991), which I’ve actually never seen all the way through. But some glorious serendipity brought me in touch with a particular *Canyon* clip in which Steve Martin’s character, a movie producer, lectures Mack (Kevin Kline) about filmmaking:

Mack, did you ever see a movie called *Sullivan’s Travels*? That’s part of

your problem, you know, you haven't seen enough movies. All of life's riddles are answered in the movies. It's a story about a man who loses his way – he's a filmmaker like me – and he forgets for a moment just what he was set on earth to do. Fortunately, he finds his way back. It can happen, Mack. Check it out.

All life's riddles being answered in the movies was a huge stretch, I admit, but I was intrigued by the "finding his way back" theme of *Travels*. I tracked it down.

What a find.

John L. Sullivan is a successful director of screwball comedies who decides he wants to make a serious film about serious stuff (over the objections of his studio bosses). Accordingly, he chooses a serious book, *O Brother Where Art Thou* (yes, there's a [Coen brothers connection](#) here) about social justice and the "common man," and he hits the road as a hobo to get some firsthand experience of the common man's lot.

The director discovers more than he bargains for, and when his plans to alleviate the misery of the poor by personalist wealth redistribution goes awry, he finds himself among their number – not as an observer, but as a fully vested participant. Injured, jailed, and isolated, Sullivan is indignant, but his dire circumstances lead to a revelation: Yes, suffering demands alleviation and injustice demands redress, but in the meantime, a bit of humor goes a long way. "There's a lot to be said for making people laugh," Sullivan says in the end, as he puts aside his plans for a serious movie. "Did you know that that's all some people have? It isn't much, but it's better than nothing in this cockeyed caravan."

**The killer is that our cockeyed caravan is chock full of laugh-bait these days,** but so much of it is dead center in the scorn and contempt arena that De Sales cautioned us about. The stuff we gravitate to – in the movies, on the internet and TV – tends to galvanize ill will rather than dissipating it. It accentuates division instead of drawing us together.

No thanks.

For me, I prefer the tried and true when it comes to lighthearted fare – stuff I can count on to make me laugh out loud, over and over again, and without a lot of political or ideological overhead. When I'm overwhelmed or down, I turn to

Dave Barry's writings, like his annual "[Year in Review](#)" in the *Miami Herald*, and archived NPR "[Car Talk](#)" gold from Ray and Tom Magliozzi. Plus, there are plenty vintage screwball comedies out there to be enjoyed – the kind that



John L. Sullivan would've made. Classics like Capra's [You Can't Take It With You](#) and *It Happened One Night*, for example, plus anything from the Marx Brothers and the entire [Thin Man](#) collection starring Dashiell Hammett's Nick and Nora Charles – wise-cracking sleuths who mix [mayhem with their murder mysteries](#).

But, let's face it, the undisputed master when it comes to evoking hilarity is P.G. Wodehouse, and it seems like I end up [back on his doorstep round about this time](#) every year. Winter has settled in for a couple months, a new semester of teaching looms, and I'm getting regular email reminders from TurboTax about my annual financial slog. Bleah. That's the cue to go hunting for a Jeeves and Wooster volume or two to carry me through to the other side.

**Now here's the beauty of being acclimated to Wodehouse's whimsical genius** is that it simply doesn't matter where you dip in. You're practically guaranteed to hit a jackpot of jollity every single time. Here, let's try an experiment. I just went into our home library and plucked down the first Wodehouse volume I laid eyes on: A tattered paperback of *Thank You, Jeeves* (1933). Open it up in the middle (p. 81), and here we go:

"Will you keep quiet!"

"Of course, of course."

"You keep shoving your oar in...."

"Sorry, sorry. Shan't occur again."

And so on – already hooks me in, I tell you. Clearly, some kind of ruckus is underway and Bertie Wooster is in the thick of it. It's like I'm already present in the scene and I can hear the voices and I start to relax. It's a tonic, almost magic.

It was also a magical tonic to those who read it the first time back in 1933 – right when the Great Depression was in full swing. The world needed lots of laughs back then, and [Wodehouse supplied them](#). It's noteworthy that the Great Depression was also the incubator for many of those Sullivan-esque [comedies](#) we keep mentioning. The more challenging the times, it appears, the greater market there is for sweet release in gales of glee.

So happy new year – hopefully a better one than the last. May your troubles be few, but when they come (and they will), brace yourself, have courage, and arm yourself with Wodehouse and companions. No need to go it alone.

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## **Where Love Is, God Is [at In the Breaking of the Bread]**

### **A World Day of the Poor Story – The Joy of Encounters Given and Blessed by God**

It happened at the Late Sunday Mass on the first World Day of the Poor, November 19th, 2017. Two weeks later, a Deacon wrote this note which in turn received the reply which follows from the Priest.

*Two Sundays ago a crippled man entered after the last chance Mass had begun. He attracted my attention because of his demeanour.*

*He stood throughout most of the Mass. During the reception of Holy Communion I do not think he received. When I returned to my place he stood a little ways off from me. However, now he was in front of my line of sight and was facing toward me.*

*At the end of Mass, he stood with one hand on the horn of the bench where I was kneeling down following your blessing. I stood as usual as you processed to the confessional. I greeted you with my usual salutation, Praise be to God.*

*You passed this man as you briefly spoke with someone you appeared to know. The crippled man continued standing there awkwardly, and I resolved to bless him seven times (within my heart). Upon opening my eyes, I reached out and touched him with one finger on the hand, which continued resting on the horn of the bench in front of the kneeler.*

*I looked into his countenance and slowly he raised his head and faced toward me. Then, I held my gaze with his for what seemed like a very long time. I felt it was a great blessing for me.*

*I do not remember getting up and passing by him to bow before the Lord before taking my leave of the Church. However, on the return trip home I remained in a state of sustained joy. Several days later, it was brought to my attention that Sunday was the First World Day of the Poor.*

*An afterthought was that this man did not seek or gesture for money or help. He was just there. And it never entered my mind to offer him money. It was simply an encounter in the Lord's temple. A profound one at that.*

*Do you remember seeing the man I have described? Has he ever presented himself before (I do not recall ever seeing him there)?*

**Response from the Priest:**

I believe that was the same night when after hearing confessions I went to chat with a few people who had waited for me. The poor man asked where he might use a phone to call for a cab. I brought him over to folks waiting for me because I just knew they would be willing to give him a lift, since they were going in his direction.

While we were talking about it a young woman came up and, having overheard, said that she was going very near to where he lived and would be delighted to give him a lift.

So that is how it ended. Divine Providence arranged for that poor man to be a blessing to many.

Pope Francis calls us by his words of encouragement and example to allow the Holy Spirit to open us up to such gratuitous encounters with Divine Mercy and Love, especially in those people we would not normally notice or from whom we would not normally expect much good.

That poor man manifested his great joy at being noticed, welcomed, valued, and helped. In turn, his gratitude became yet another blessing on all who witnessed these encounters. Where love is, God is.

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## Mary's Song [at With Us Still]

Just before dawn this morning, I heard a prayer that took my breath away.

A mother, Mary – a dear friend, and one of the ‘regulars’ at our 6:30 daily Mass – offered up a petition for the repose of the soul of her son, Danny.

It’s not the first time our ‘daily Mass community’ has prayed for Dan. Stricken with cancer, his health had ebbed in recent months...and so we’d been storming the heavens regularly on his behalf. Sadly, his life’s journey ended earlier this week. And as we prayed again this morning, I was struck by the tenderness in his mother’s voice – and the long-ago name, ‘Danny’, with which she commended her precious son into the presence of the Lord.

My heart breaks for Mary and her husband George, and for their whole family... to suffer so great a loss, especially at this time of year.

My heart is filled with wonder, too, at the odd liturgical coincidence that provided a mystical — and salvific — context for this mother’s touching prayer today.

The first reading on this third-to-last-day before Christmas is [from the book of Samuel](#). It recalls the heart-rending action of another mother, Hannah, for whom a son was the answer to her fondest, deepest, soul-healing desire. Hannah, much like my friend Mary, somehow understands that this child is (and will ever be) more ‘gift’ than ‘possession.’ And so in the presence of Eli, she is able to say:

*I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request.  
Now I, in turn, give him to the LORD;*

As I reflect on the scene, it occurs to me just how extraordinary it is – in part because our mailbox is so crowded these days with Christmas greetings, more often than not containing a photo (or two or three) of the latest additions to our friends’ clans – the babies or grandbabies they welcomed in 2017. Every one of them seems just about *perfect*, at least in the grown-ups’ eyes. So how can you imagine that any one of them would be willing to let their babies go?



Then in [today's gospel reading](#), we hear from Mary, the mother of Jesus. There's a beautiful song of praise on her lips, anticipating the joy of the *truly* perfect son she has not yet seen:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.  
for he has looked upon his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.*

Jesus is perfect, we know. But he's also a heart-breaker. Like my friend's son, he leaves his mother's life far too soon. He leaves Mary at the foot of the cross. Leaves his mother to wonder what good could *possibly* come of such a gruesome scene.

Yet, immense good *does* emerge from Mary's heartbreak. An incalculable gift: the world's salvation.

So even in our suffering, in our often-troubling experience of human imperfectability, we find there is good reason gaze into, and beyond, the veil of tears. Mary's song tells us where to seek the ultimate victory – in the faithfulness of God...in God's blessed and mighty assurance that we can never be robbed of hope:

*[The LORD] has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

Come, Lord Jesus!

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

*IHS*

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## This Advent: Be a Witness [at Theologyisaverb]



Those close to me know the great joy I receive from helping others. And yet time and time again, God has repeatedly shown immense blessings that could only be found through humility and from the depths of my own need. The following modern story is one such instance, that came to mind in reflecting on Mary's witness in her own advent journey with the birth of Jesus.

In 1999, in expectation of my second child, both loyalty and confidence in our physician required traveling the distance to our family OBGYN even after we had moved away. Normally, I would have taken the highway back, which made for a much shorter trip. Yet, that day, I felt I was being led to take the longer way which could be upwards of an hour's drive. God alone knew what was to occur and why it would be so imperative that we be on that road that day.

With a healthy third trimester visit "under my belt", I headed home exhausted but joyful of what was to come. That is until the sudden jolt and drop of my SUV and the petrifying sound of a complete tire blowout. Riding it forward to stabilize, then finding the shoulder I had avoided a almost certain collision had I been on the highway. Having witnessed the incident, two other drivers would offer assistance. One of which, seeing my condition walked with us to a nearby home set back a ways from the main road. If she had been in a hurry that day,

her calm, kind disposition did not indicate.

Just imagine, if you can, the sight of a very expectant mother knocking on your door with a toddler in hand. Would you welcome their unplanned visit? To my surprise not only did this family offer the use of their phone, but opened their home and hearts as well. With hot cocoa and cookies in hand, we took a seat at the family table and conversed at length while awaiting my husband's hurried arrival. We spoke, however, not as strangers but as if we were family and had known each other our whole lives.

Some years ago, my dear friend Barbara who had answered my need that day with a warm smile went home to Jesus. In offering a generous heart to all, she lived her life as a witness to the self-sacrificing love and joy of Christ. Because of her, our families have together celebrated numerous weddings, births and deaths. Through it all, we always loved a tremendous sharing of life and the delight in conversation.

As an interesting footnote, Barbara's daughter Jeannine was to be the maternity nurse on duty for both of the birth of my younger sons. God knew the blessing that we would each receive, and it was certainly not by chance that we met. As I grow older I realize that sometimes it is in our greatest weakness and need that God is able to bless us the most. This Christmas, may you all truly be a witness, as Barbara was, and welcome in the passerby.

### **“Witness” by (my grandpa) Carl Ferrell**

He placed his hand upon the head  
of a heartbroken child;  
The hungry they shared part of his bread-  
He cheered them with a smile.

Those who were caught in Satan's snare,  
This man did not disdain,  
But lifted them from their despair,  
And set them right again.

We serve our God by things we do,  
Not by things we say,  
His was a life of service, true-  
He witnessed every day

me witnessed every day.

Peace,

*Elizabeth*

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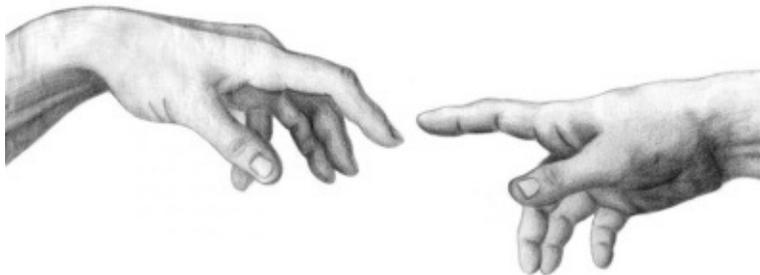
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# Finding Christ's Joy In My Deepest Wounds [at joy of nine9]

**melanie jean juneau**





## **Finding Christ's Joy In My Deepest Wounds [at joy of nine9]**

“In my deepest wound, I saw your glory and it dazzled me.”- Saint Augustine.

Most people assume they will automatically feel cheerful during Christmas. Not only does the Church celebrate the birth of our Saviour with joy, secular society also promotes the idea that everybody is happy during this season, bombarding us with images in the media of lighthearted people giving gifts and enjoying each other's company. In fact, there is so much pressure on people to be in good spirits during Christmas, many sink even deeper into depression when they are unable to force themselves to even crack a smile. Often, I also feel depleted and empty during the days leading up to Christmas, dismayed my emotions do not line up with my beliefs and certain there is something wrong with my spiritual life. The more I try with my own willpower to get in the Christmas spirit, the worse I feel.

## God is God and I Am Not

You would think by now I would have learnt to simply wait for God to fill me with His joy in His own good time. For decades, The Holy Spirit has delighted in showing me who is really in charge of my emotions. For example, one year a friend dropped by on Boxing Day to give me a tall stack of hand knitted dishcloths. Unexpected joy bubbled up instantly when I received this simple gift from a friend who was in pain herself. Foolishly, I had tried unsuccessfully to manufacture a good mood for days. It was only when Christ took my eyes off myself as I gratefully received a sign of love from my friend that God could fill my spirit with His joy. As Father Henri Nouwen [explains](#), “real care means the willingness to help each other in making our brokenness into the gateway to joy.”

## Walking in Darkness

Logically, I am often legitimately exhausted by Christmas morning but my own wounds seem even more apparent not only because I am tired but because I pray. Christ’s light reveals more darkness within us as we learn to live more fully in His Presence. It is true that people are only aware of their own inner darkness when it is contrasted and revealed by the Light of God. It is important, then, to really experience and taste the reality of our own inner darkness.

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
Upon those who lived in a land of gloom  
a light has shone. [Isaiah](#)

[9:1](#)

As Jesus said in the Gospels, only the sick need a doctor, only those who realize they are in the dark, seek the Light of Salvation. The Pharisees thought they were fine, perfect, holy even and so they did not need or even want a saviour. Instead, they hated Christ. Only those who *realize* they are in prison will be freed by Christ. “O Key of David, open the gates of God’s eternal Kingdom; come and free the prisoners of darkness!” Over and over again, I am reminded how to accept my brokenness rather than fight it with my own strength and willpower. Only then can I discover the glory of Christ’s power in me.

[The Catechism of the Catholic Church:](#)

**2546** “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”<sup>338</sup> The Beatitudes reveal an order of happiness and grace, of beauty and peace. Jesus celebrates the joy of the poor, to whom the Kingdom already belongs:<sup>339</sup>

When we touch our wounds, accept our spiritual poverty and stand in prayer, vulnerable but waiting expectantly, then we have the capacity to receive from God.

### **Stand in Prayer With Open, Empty Hands**

To live as a child of the Father means I stand with empty hands before the Almighty because when I am weak and open, I have the prerequisite humility to receive from God as well as from others in the Christian community. As a mother of nine children, living with little disposable income, it was always a challenge to prepare a Christmas celebration for my kids. Our parish priest and school insisted on delivering a Christmas hamper and gifts to our house every year. Of course, I wanted to protest every year because many of the farming families in our parish and school were not well off. Yet, I knew they *needed* to give. I had no choice but to let go of my preferred image as a strong, spiritual mother who was completely self-sufficient and accepts gifts with grace and gratitude. After every yearly delivery by a group of smiling parishioners, I saw quite clearly that those who gave to us were delighted and blessed by giving. I realized [Henri J.M. Nouwen](#)’s statement was true, “In our own woundedness, we can become sources of life for others.”

### **Surprised by Joy**

Joy is definitely not merely happiness nor is it something I can mimic on my own nor is it a something I can earn. Ironically, God often blesses me with joy when I am exhausted and feeling like a failure because joy is not dependent on my health, circumstances, or emotions. I love to control but when my safe little world shatters and I am left feeling desperate, God has an opening to fill me with *His* joy when I turn to Him. Then it wells up and overwhelms my emotions at unexpected times, sometimes at seemingly inappropriate times. When I first committed my life to God, I did not even know such a gift of the Spirit actually existed in reality. So, I can identify with C.S. Lewis and say with him that I was [Surprised by Joy](#).

No matter the hardships and trials we experience in this life on earth, we can choose to abandon a solitary, grim existence and embrace the indwelling presence of the Child Jesus and choose to live in Christ. When I surrender and accept the joy of the Lord, others who understand they are broken and wounded will catch spiritual joy from me. The joy of the Lord is contagious, a powerful tool of evangelization among the anawim, God's little ones. The witness of joy is all about a pure movement of the Holy Spirit and not about our own efforts to appear cheerful, articulate about our faith, perfect and holy. In fact, when I remain strong as a result of my own efforts, I cut myself off from God because it is the weak and poor who have the prerequisite humility to receive Christ's joy.

“Christmas is joy, religious joy, an inner joy of light and peace” and “speaks of tenderness and hope.” [Pope Francis](#)

Yet, even if I feel down on Christmas Day, I will wait on God, trusting He is in charge of all, even of my emotions for who I am to question the ways of the Almighty? After all, when I have experienced a flip from despair to joy in a blink of the eye, surely I can surmise that the state of my emotions does not reflect the state of my faith. I can wait in darkness, in peace, to be purified and transformed till He gifts me with the encouragement of joy once again.

connecting with [theology is a verb](#)



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## Advent & Looking to Mary [at Sunflower Sojourn]

Today marks the beginning of Advent.

**Like other Jews, Mary (mother of Jesus) longed for the fulfillment of the prophecies promising a Savior to Israel.** (Never could she have imagined, even in her wildest dreams, that *she* would be the one to bring Him into the world!) **In my life, I'm (still) waiting for the fulfillment of so many of God's promises to me.**

**As I go about Advent, I am going to look at Mary and the hope of her Son.** No matter how painful the waiting (for all kinds of fulfillment), I want to be strong as Mary was. I want to trust His promises to me. ***I want to grasp onto His faithfulness, to trust, even when there is no hope within my line of sight.***

**I want to say “yes” as Mary did, and not to count the cost.** Her cost for saying “yes” to conceiving the Savior could have meant death for her. I don't know if the cost for me will ever mean physical death (as a martyr), but it does mean dying to myself and my own plans every day.

**I want to say “yes” and not question why He asks a certain experience of me.** Mary didn't question why she specifically was being asked to carry out the *magnificent* task of carrying the Son of God within her womb and mothering Him. She simply said: ***“I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.”*** (Luke 1:38) I have many questions about why I am asked to carry certain things. Why am I entrusted with this or that? Yet, His plan is sovereign and wise. **I want Mary's courage to simply say “yes,” only looking forward and keeping my eyes on Him.**

**I can't imagine the temptation to impatience there was for Mary during her pregnancy.** Can you imagine being told by an angel that you would conceive in a supernatural way...And not only that, but that the child would be the Savior of all humanity! Mary protected Jesus in her womb for 9 months and waited all those months to behold her beautiful Savior face to face. She must have faced persecution for her out of wedlock pregnancy, most people not having a clue of Whom she carried. Yet she carried the evidence of what people believed was sin in her body, waiting and waiting to hold Him, and for the world to know Who

this special Child was. In all of my waiting...To finish school for a more fulfilling job where I will no longer live paycheck to paycheck, in waiting to meet or know who my husband is, in waiting to find a more permanent living situation...Impatience. **Yet most of all, longing for the day I meet my Redeemer face to face, and live in perfect joy forever with Him and all the saints. Waiting.** There is always something to wait for. The waiting, the longing, the feelings of never being settled...**Mary teaches me to wait.** She is teaching me endless strength, and to have faith. **She shows me the example of a woman who followed the Lord without fear, no matter where it led her.**

**So now I step into Advent, a season of the Church where my daily lived experience is made manifest.** I'm thankful to have Mary to look to for the virtues I need the most at this time. **Most of all, I'm grateful that she said "yes," so that our Savior could come into the world!**

**"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!" Luke 1:45**



Courtesy of [Howard Lyon](#)

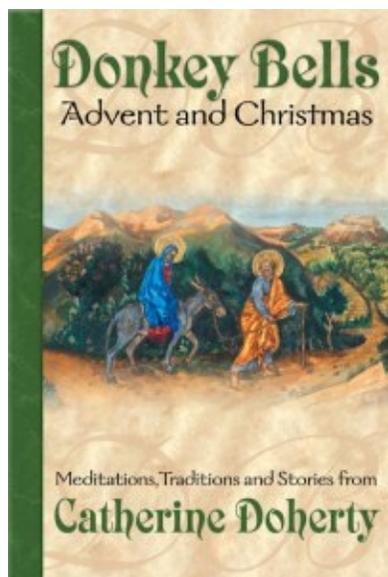
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## **Donkey Bells (Advent and Christmas) by Catherine Doherty [at Plot Line and Sinker (Ellen Gable, Author)]**



One of my favorite Advent books and one that I read every year at this time is a book by Catherine Doherty called “Donkey Bells,” published by [Madonna House Publications](#). I love to read this inspiring book curled up in a comfortable chair by the wood stove, a hot chocolate or apple cider beside me, Advent and Christmas music playing quietly in the background. This lovely book is filled with heartwarming stories, customs and traditions (such as the Advent wreath, baking, the blessing of the Christmas tree) and moving reflections for the season. It is a beautiful way for children, teens and adults to prepare their hearts for Christmas.

I love this story from [Donkey Bells: Advent and Christmas by Catherine Doherty](#)

(Available as a paperback and e-book)

Donkey Bells (by Catherine Doherty)

It came to me, during these days of Advent, that I should share with you a custom which is not necessarily liturgical but which adds to the enjoyment of this lovely season. It has deep spiritual connotations; at least it did for our

family, and for many others I knew when I was a young child.

When I was a little girl, my mother used to tell me that if I was good during this holy season of Advent, and offered my little acts of charity and obedience throughout Advent to the little Christ Child for a gift on his birthday, then sometime during Advent, at first very faintly and then quite clearly, I would hear bells. As she put it, the first church bells.

These were the bells around the neck of the little donkey that carried Our Lady. For mother explained that Our Lady carried Our Lord. She was the temple of the Holy Spirit, the first 'church' as it were, since Christ reposed in her. And the donkey, carrying Our Lady and sounding his bells as he walked, wore the first church bells.

Around the second week of Advent, mother wore a little bracelet that had tinkling bells. As she moved her hand I could hear them tinkle, and I got excited because I associated them with the donkey's bells.

As young as I was, my imagination would build up a lot of little stories about the trip of Our Lady from Nazareth to Bethlehem — stories which I would share with my mother, and which would spur me on to further good deeds and little sacrifices.

During the third week of Advent, mother's bracelet miraculously got many more bells on it. The sound grew louder and louder as Christmas approached. It was wonderful.

My brother and I used to listen. Mother's bells were first around her wrist and then around her knee too. Then more bells, as it got closer to Christmas. We were really excited about them.

I introduced this little custom in Madonna House. During Advent, I wear a kind of bracelet that can be heard as I walk or move, in whatever room of the house I may be. The members of our family tell me that it spurs them on, even as it did me when I was a child, to meditate more profoundly on the mystery of Advent.

Here at Madonna House, we have begun in these last few years to make a collection of miniature donkeys — of wood, glass, ceramics, rope — you name it. And we have an album of Christmas cards (which we save from the many we receive) that depict the donkey in the manger scene.

The presence of the donkey and the ox in Scripture is symbolic of the prophets who foretold the Incarnation. And also of the fact that “the ox and ass know their Master’s voice, but Israel doesn’t know the voice of God” (Isaiah 1:3). So, you see, there is some spiritual foundation for my love for the donkey which brings such great joy to my heart.

I’m sure that, as a child, Christ rode on a donkey many times. And also as a man, of course. In Scripture we know of only two times: one was when the donkey carried Our Lady, who in turn carried God, from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The other was when the donkey carried Christ into Jerusalem as the people laid palm branches before Him, proclaiming him king.

Let us think for a moment: What kind of animal is a donkey? It is a beast of burden, the animal of the poor. Once again, the immense theme of poverty is illustrated in an animal. God chose the humblest, the smallest in status, because among the animals the donkey is considered very low. So God is teaching us a lesson here — a lesson of humility, of poverty, and of simplicity.

Have you ever seen a newborn donkey? Well, every donkey has a black cross on its gray fur, a marking which is especially noticeable just after it is born from its mother’s womb. It gets less clear as the donkey matures, but still is visible. I share this fact with you to teach you to open your heart to the bells of the donkey that carried Our Lady and also God.

The breath of the donkey and the ox made the stable warm. So we meditate on several things at once: the poverty and humility of the donkey God chose, and which should be our poverty and humility; and the breath of our love, which should warm God in our neighbor constantly.

Let us remember that the donkey also had no room at the inn. Neither woman, nor man, nor donkey had a place at the inn. So they went to live in a poor stable that wasn’t too well prepared for animals, let alone as a decent habitation for human beings.

Now, another meditation comes to us. Think of the millions of people who are left homeless on our streets. Tragic is this situation. We, as apostles, must be very careful that we do not exclude anyone from the inn of our heart.

I pray that our heart, our soul, our ears will hear very clearly ‘the bells of the donkey,’ not only in Advent but throughout the year. For whoever who is pure of

heart and childlike shall hear the bells of the donkey ring in their life.

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If you have a favorite Christmas or Advent story, please feel free to share!

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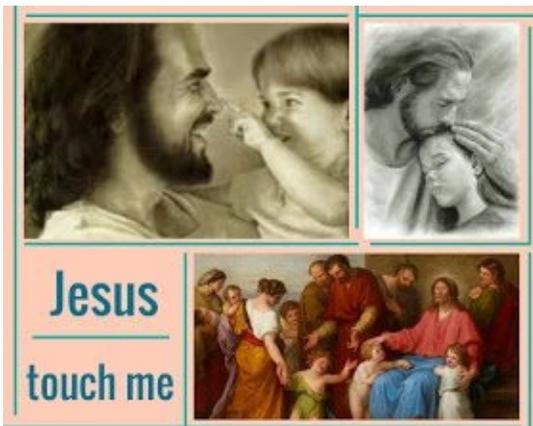
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## Touch Me [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Lawrence Fox

The “*children (were) being brought to Jesus so that He might touch them.*” (Mk. 10:13).



“Where in the Old Testament is there an example of multiple children being brought to a patriarch, holy man, prophet, or rabbi so that he might simply touch them?” The homilist’s question was insightful. Let’s consider the request “*that He might touch them*” and more specifically the action verb “to touch” as it relates to man’s desire to experience the

presence of God through the senses.

*“Now show me your glory.”* Moses desired “to see” the face of God. The Lord answered, “*You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*” (Ex. 33:18 & 20) Man passionately wants to experience God with his whole nature. In fact we are told to love the LORD, our God, with our whole heart and our whole soul and our whole strength. (Deut. 6:5)

This is because man's knowledge begins in and through the senses. Man abstractly understands the "form" of things in nature without taking the actual material into his

mind. He sees a rock, recognises it, but the rock is not physically taken into man. This is evidence of that man is a spiritual being. He has a rational soul.

Man's experience of things outside himself begins with his senses. We are not born with innate knowledge (as taught by the Platonists). We observe reality through the senses and see that nature over and over again pursues a destiny of perfection. This enables man to reason that he himself has a destination (perfection). But man's desire for perfection is insatiable leading to the reasonable conclusion that man's perfection is not rooted in the corporeal realm but in the cause of all being. This desire for the source of all being leads to the Person of Jesus Christ.



*“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”* (1 Jn. 1:1) So the Apostle John shows that faith in Jesus Christ builds upon the testimony of holy men and women who saw Him, heard Him, touched Him, ate with Him and *“recognised Him in the breaking of the bread.”* (Acts. 24:35) This is in keeping with man's knowledge of reality beginning in the senses.



St. Thomas' profession of faith "*My Lord and my God*" flows from a request to touch the wounds of Christ. "*Then Jesus said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'*" (Jn. 20:27) Thomas' desire to touch the wounds of Christ is a complementary movement of the heart as Moses' desire to see the face of God.

Thomas is looking for something tangible so as to see with the eyes of faith. He reasons to faith while other's assent to faith without seeing. The intellect of both remain in the state of inquiry until the end is reached (i.e. the beatific vision). Moses on the other hand wants to see, so as to increase what is seen with the eyes of faith. Thomas saw the man once dead and now alive, and so he believed saying, "*My Lord and My God.*" His human senses enlightened his intellect which moved the will to make an act of Faith about that which "*eye has not seen, and ear has not heard....*" (John 20:28) Let us not fault Thomas. All men desire to see, hear, taste, touch, and smell the things of God; which is why God became man and dwelt among men.

Now we look at touch in the Gospel of Mark. Mark exposes the reality of the need to touch God. He uses the word "to touch" (*hapsētai*) four times within the Gospel. The first is to identify the reason people were bringing their children to Jesus. A person reading these words may sometimes miss what is being made obvious. **Like Moses, the people of God want to see and touch the things of God.** Jesus said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matt. 5:8) and again, "*Phillip if you have seen me you have seen the Father.*" (John 14:9) Why is there this rush to see and be touched by Jesus?

Mark, a couple of chapters earlier in the Gospel identifies people in the village of Bethsaida, “...as bringing forward and begging Jesus to touch a blind man.” (Mk. 8:22) This



pattern of touching is repeated again when Mark identifies a woman -- subject to bleeding for twelve years -- touching Jesus' clothing, “When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his

clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. (Mark 5:25-29)

When the authors of Sacred Scripture repeat a word, theme, or event, the reader is being called to attention. For Mark the expression “to touch” testifies to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ; God's Word became flesh and blood and was therefore not a bodiless Gnostic demiurge. As Moses wanted to see the face of God, the people want their children to be touched by Jesus expressing ever so deeply that the flesh of Christ is a cause for belief, a means for healing, a source of consolation and sanctification, and an opportunity for man to worship God in Spirit and Truth (Jn. 4:24) “To you all flesh will come with its burden of sin; too heavy for us our offences but you wipe them away.” (Ps. 64 [65]) Jesus obliges man's request since, this desire between God and man “to touch” is rooted in our creation.

In the Old Testament, God Touches Man. Jeremiah the prophet writes, “Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and said to me, ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.’” (Jer. 1: 9) Jeremiah receives his

prophetic vocation as a result of being touched by the hand of God. God speaking through Jeremiah tells the people of Judah that He will establish with them a new covenant, *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...”* (Jer. 31:31-34) When Jeremiah spoke these words, the house of Israel was removed from the Holy Land by the Assyrians (721 BC) and the house of Judah was soon be taken into captivity by the Babylonian Empire (597 - 581 BC). Israel’s and Judah’s restoration would be a miraculous manifestation. God’s new covenant with humanity including the restoration of Israel and Judah would be manifested miraculously with the touch of God’s hands, *“And Jesus took bread (with his sacred hands), gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you...”* (Lk.22:19-22) To be touched by Jesus is to partake in God’s presence and holiness; this is true even for the most simple things in nature.

In Old Testament, the profane is made sacred by touching the sacred. The laws and ordinances of Moses incorporated numerous instructions on ritual cleanliness and uncleanness -- again what could be touched and not touched. (Leviticus 5:2-3, 12:4, 22:4-6) Sacred Scripture reveals that vessels dedicated for worship and which touched the altar of sacrifice were made holy, *“For seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it; then the altar shall be most holy, and whatever touches the altar shall be holy.”* (Num. 4:15, Ex. 29:37)

Peter identified Jesus as God’s Holy One, *“We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”* (Jn. 6:69) Paul describes the people of God as *earthen vessels* who received a tremendous and precious blessing from God. (2 Cor. 4.7) Paul has in mind the image from the Old Testament in which things touched to sacred things become sacred things. Being touched by God and the things of God bring about healing, forgiveness, blessing, and sacredness. For example in the Book of Kings, there is the story about some Israelites



burying a man and when suddenly seeing a band of raiders they throw the man's dead body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet. (2 Kings 13:21) Elisha it should be remembered received a double portion of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies all things. In fact, Elisha's body was so anointed with the Holy Spirit that even his dead bones healed. But the touching of holy things not only brings healing; it brings forgiveness.

In the Old Testament, forgiveness and blessing are conveyed by touch. The Prophet Isaiah's lips were touched by a flaming ember taken from the altar in heaven and he was made clean, "*With it the (Seraphim) touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."* (Isaiah. 6:7) The prophet Daniel -- while in exile in Babylon with his people -- received a vision of *the Son of Man* coming to him and touching his lips, "*And behold, one who resembled a Son of Man was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke...*" (Dan. 10:16) Who is this Son of Man which places a word within the mouth of Daniel?

Jesus who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8 ) is that Son of Man who touches the lips of Daniel the Prophet. Here in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is the Son of Man who is now extending his hands so as to touch the children in the land of Judah. Jesus continually identified Himself in the Gospels as the Son of Man. (Matt. 8:20; Mk. 2:10, 14:21; Lk. 7:34; Jn. 1:51)

Jesus is something greater than the Prophet Ezekiel who is constantly identified

by the Lord God as “son of man.” The High Priest Caiphas demands that Jesus identify Himself to the Sanhedrin, “*Are You the Christ, the Son*



*of the Blessed One?”* Jesus replies, “*I am,*” adding, “*and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.*” At this, the high priest tore his clothes and declared, “*Why do we need any more witnesses?*”

Being touched by the holy things of God imparts a blessing upon a person seeking the face of God. It should be noted all three Synoptic Gospels recount the story of the woman, who suffered with bleeding for twelve years, as being miraculously healed by simply “touching” the tassels of Jesus’ garment. The



sacred authors write, “*She came up behind him and touched the edge (tassels) of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.*” (Lk. 8:44, Mt.9:20)

The people of Judah bring their children to Jesus so that He might touch them; so that the children may become sanctified and prophetic like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Daniel. The people of Judah bring their children to Jesus so that He might touch them so that they would be able to look upon the face of God, like the blind man in Bethsaida and be made clean like the haemorrhaging woman. The people bring their children to Jesus (the son of Man) so that they -- as earthen vessels -- may be made holy and sanctified to live as vessels upon God's Holy Altar.

In response to the faith of the people, Jesus blesses their children, repeating something which happened earlier in His life as an infant when He Himself was touched by created man.

Luke writes in the Gospel, *“When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him (Jesus as an infant) to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.”* (Lk. 2:12) They are immediately met by the holy man Simeon, who is identified as righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit leads him to Mary and Joseph bringing the infant Jesus into the temple. Simeon takes the infant (brephē) Jesus into his arms and



praises God. Some thirty years later, things are turned around. Jesus as the Messiah is greater than the righteous Simeon because in Jesus is the fullness of consolation. Luke by identifying the word infant (brephē) reverses the infancy narrative. This time people are coming down from Jerusalem and presenting their children and infants (brephē) to Jesus Christ (of Nazareth). Like with

Simeon, the Holy Spirit now draws people with their infants to Jesus who takes the infants into His arms. Jesus who was identified by Simeon as being the cause of men rising and falling in Israel — seeing the movement of the Holy Spirit — now touches the infants so they may rise and not fall; He has become a father to the children of Judah. One of Jesus’ prophetic names is ***Everlasting Father***. He is the Father of All Nations.

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And*



*he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, **Everlasting Father**, Prince of Peace.”* (Isaiah 9:6) In the Old Testament, the father of the family blessed his children, giving especially his firstborn son the blessing of inheritance. In Christ Jesus, everyone becomes an adopted first-born child of the Father. Jesus identifies his disciples as “children” in the Gospel of John. (Jn 21:5) The placement of hands by the patriarchs upon their children was an outward sign of paternal authority and the bestowing of earthly blessings. Jesus placing his hands upon the children and infants was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah which identified the Messiah as the ***Everlasting Father***, *“As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD. “My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants--from this time on and forever,” says the LORD.*” (Is. 59:21) It is Jesus who gives to every generation the promise, *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* (Jn 14:3) Jesus blessing the children in the land of Judah points to Psalm 147 which states, *“O praise the Lord Jerusalem! Sion praise your God! He has strengthened the bars of your gates, He has **blessed** the children within you...”* Jesus’ touch is sacramental. We partake in the things of God by touch.

When the apostles saw the people bring the children to be touched by Jesus, they attempted to mitigate the situation. Jesus was not pleased with their behavior and said, *“Let the little ones come to me; the Kingdom of God was made for such little ones.”* Jesus told Nicodemus that a man could not enter the Kingdom of God unless he was born from above. Jesus by His words and



deeds enables the Church to understand that the gift of the Holy Spirit as received in Baptism belongs to believers and their children and infants.

Jesus command his apostles, to *“Baptize all nations...”* and on Pentecost, Peter tells the people that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for them and their children, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise belongs **to you and to your children** and to all who are far off, to all whom the Lord our God will call to Himself.”* (Acts 2:39) Each child baptized by the Church fulfills the prophecy about the name of Jesus, “Father of the world to come.”

Moses commands the people of Israel to *“Love the LORD your God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength.”*

Man’s knowledge of God begins with the senses and in the fullness of time God became flesh to so that all God’s children might be touched by Him.



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## Stealing Focus [at Shifting My Perspective]

“... and greet no one along the way.” Luke 10:4



*Shifting My Perspective* The Middle School in our town issued Chrome Books to all the students this year. I was thrilled because our ipad keyboards are falling apart.

I thought my kids getting Chrome Books would streamline things, cut down on the amount of time they spend on homework. Although that’s the case with Zack, it’s having the exact opposite effect on Mason.

I did a random check-in one day while Mason was doing his homework in his room (his [homework HQ](#)). I saw his Chrome Book screen before he could minimize it. He was on his email account when he should have been doing Membean (a vocabulary website). When I asked him if he’d been checking email often, instead of doing his homework, he glanced away and mumbled, “Yes.”

I put on my disappointed face and told him that wasn’t cool. I was trusting him to use his Chrome Book responsibly, and to stay focused on the task at hand. I told him I would be doing a lot more random check-ins now that I knew about this little habit. He admitted that was necessary, apologized, and said he’d try harder.

As I walked back downstairs, I realized the irony of things: emails is the exact same thing that steals my focus.

Typically, I jump on my computer to send a quick email to a teacher or friend. My plan is to get back to the task I'm supposed to be doing, in three minutes or less. But before I know it, an hour has passed. Then there's a child tugging at my sleeve, dinner is burning, and I realize I did it again: I fell down the rabbit hole of technology, and lost my way back.

In Luke 10:4, Jesus is sending out seventy-two disciples to pave the way to all the different places He intends to visit. He gives them very specific instructions on what not to bring, what to do, and what to say.

I've read this passage dozens and dozens of times before. But this time, "greet no one along the way" caught my attention. It really puzzled me. If Jesus was asking these people to spread the news about Him, why would He tell them to greet no one along the way? Aren't they supposed to develop relationships with people on His behalf? Don't all conversations begin with a greeting?

It took me a bit to figure out that the key words here are, "along the way." It's as if He were saying, "Be careful. What we think is a useful tool can be our undoing."

Of course greeting people is the first step in building relationships to spread the word. Of course email can be my efficient way to contact someone or respond quickly. Of course Mason needs to check his email to see if his teachers have assigned more homework.

But there are two sides to everything: pros and cons. If the disciples chat so much en route, they'll never get to their destination. If Mason and I spend all our time on email, we'll never get our work done.

Every day we have tasks and assignments to complete. On a grander scale, we've all been sent to this earth to make it a better place.

In order for us to achieve all that, we need to figure out what our major weaknesses are: What are the things that seem benign on the surface, but actually end up swallowing our time, and stealing our focus. If we don't identify our time stealers, and draw firm boundaries around them, we'll never accomplish what we are meant to do.

## **Questions For Reflection:**

**\* *What steals my kid's focus?***

**\* *What can I do to help my kids draw firm boundaries around whatever that is?***

**\* *What steals my focus?***

**\* *What firm boundaries can I draw around whatever that is?***

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# A Dark Churning Blindness Engulfed Humanity. It was called Nominalism

by Susan Fox

“‘What is Truth?’ said jesting (Pontius) Pilate. And then would not stay for an answer.” Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) based on John 18:38



So let's do a post-mortem on Truth.

Let's find its grave and dig it up.

Its final burial occurred sometime during the Renaissance, the so-called age of “Enlightenment,” when a well-meaning group of humanists despised and eliminated the principle of ontological truth — simply that “all that exists is true,” according to Josef Pieper, Neo-Thomist author of *Living the Truth*.

We wring our hands and pray for our countries, but we don't realise that the end of modern civilisation began in the heads of our ancestors when “objective reality” came to mean: whatever the majority believes is true (consensualism or positivism); whatever technology will allow (materialism); whatever can be measured or falsified in an experiment (positivism); whatever can be experienced in your senses (empiricism); or whatever you subjectively decide it is (relativism, nihilism).

Knock, knock: “*Is truth a property of reality?*”

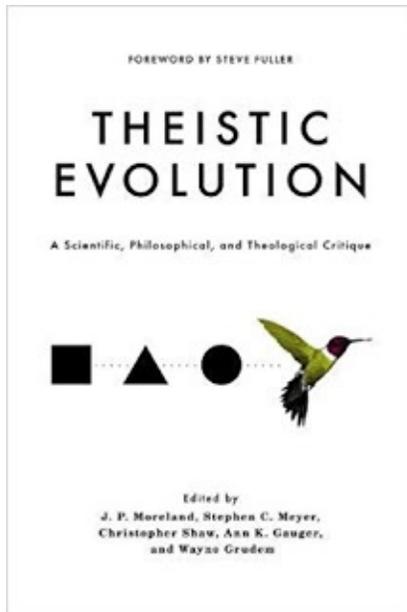
Who’s There? Jakob Thomasius (1622-1684): “*No, truth does not reside in reality but in the mind that perceives reality.*” I love this one. Atheists on Twitter like it too. I always ask them to close their eyes, believe their desk is *not* in front of them and walk through it! Keep trying.

Matter speaks! “I am hard and impassible.” There is a Mind in which matter is an Idea. That’s why it exists. That’s why you can’t walk through it. That’s why your dog instinctively walks around it. But that’s so 5th century B.C. (old-fashioned) Ask presocratic Greek philosopher Parmenides of Elea, who argued that reality is a unified and unchanging singular entity. “What is” is. Period.

“All existing things, namely, all real objects outside the soul, possess something intrinsic that allows us to call them true,” observed St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church (1225-1274). And from his thinking, Neo-Thomist Josef Pieper (1904-1997) explains further that inasmuch as a thing has being, it has truth.

“To be or not to be, that is the question!” exclaimed Hamlet, but real being, which is true, conforms to the knowing mind and is not to be at all unless it is known. Only an Infinite Mind can know at once the totality of all existing things. “And this means that the primordial forms of all things reside in the creative mind of God, that the intrinsic forms of all things are nothing else but God’s knowledge somehow imprinted in those things,” Pieper wrote.

It is God’s creating Mind, knowing reality, that brings the objective order into being. It almost seems to work according to laws that a Master Programmer wrote. Take a look at the recently published book, [“Theistic Evolution: a Scientific,](#)



Philosophical and Theological Critique.” Featuring two dozen highly credentialed scientists, philosophers, and theologians from Europe and North America, this study provides the most comprehensive critique of evolutionary creation yet produced and it gives hard scientific evidence for Intelligent Design.

Research Scientists Ann Gauger, Ola Hössjer and Colin Reeves argue that chimpanzees, which have 95% genetic similarity with humans, do not necessarily share common ancestry with men.

They argue for a unique origin of man based on the fossil record, genetic differences, the amount of time required to accumulate the necessary adaptations, and evidence from population genetics that we might have come from two first parents. They suggest species share genetic similarities because they have the same Intelligent Designer, who used similar design in different species to perform similar functions.

“It is stated as fact that things look like they evolved by natural processes. But things do not look like they evolved. (In molecular biology, there are) many good reasons to believe things *were* designed...There are also many examples from the design of larger-scale structures like the eye or a bird’s wing; even the complementary and interlocking nature of the biosphere all give evidence of design. In fact, biologists are continually told that they must remember that things only look designed— they really aren’t,” wrote Dr. Gauger, senior research scientist at Biologic Institute in Seattle.

In what way can this research contribute to a deeper understanding of human nature? Pieper brings us the answer. Reality can only be objective in relation to me if the human soul possesses the ability to potentially know the totality of all things, an ability placed in us by an Intelligent Designer, who Himself brought all things into being by thinking about them.

“The human soul is that entity without which we cannot conceive of truth as a property of existing things. Reality as such — and so everything that has being — can only claim truth (objectivity) if in turn the subjectivity of the knowing mind is seen as facing the totality of all that is.” wrote Pieper. Man is a spiritual creature so amazing that he can know potentially all existing things. And that's why reality does not exist only in my mind, but outside of myself. And I was designed that way -- made in the image of the Intelligent Designer.

A crocus pushes out of the cold ground in spring. It recognises what it can touch — dirt, moisture, warmth -- even snow. It has an intrinsic existence -- the ability to relate to its environment.



Wow, weeds are very successful at relating to their environment! I met Francis, our gardener, the other day. He was disgusted, holding in his arms long verdant strings of something he called “chicken guts” in German. The rock sits there. It is dumb. It is without intrinsic existence. But even lifeless things are alive in the mind of God.

The spider in my apartment races around the floor. Until he is sitting in an established web, which he created in a corner of the room, he does not feel

comfortable. He knows the slightest movement of another being brushing his web.

My cat may go outside and explore its immediate environment, but she is unlikely to book a plane ticket to Arizona. Such an idea would never enter her head, and when she made that trip she hid under the airplane seat quietly. She was very frightened.

“The higher form of intrinsic existence, the more developed becomes the relatedness with reality...The higher potency of the soul the more comprehensive is the sphere of objects toward which it is ordered,” Pieper said, noting that the world of the plant does not go beyond what it touches. The insect or animal reaches as far as its own sensory perception will allow it.

The world of the spirit-endowed person, the “I,” spans the totality of all that exists. I can make plans, book a plane ticket to Austria, and go to school in a foreign country. Or



alternately I can build a space ship and visit the moon. I can see a stone, and know it without pulling it physically into myself. Knowing a stone, moving to Austria, flying to the moon requires spiritual work. “The world of the spirit is the universe of being.” Pieper concluded.

In the words of anthropologist Max Scheler (1874-1928) “Such a spiritual being is .. not tied to a particular environment but rather... oriented to the world.”

Man has neither fur to keep him warm, nor claws to protect him. Unlike other species, he must receive care from his parents for many years after he is born in

order to survive. But he has hands that allow him to fashion tools for any purpose using his own creative imagination. And having the cognitive power to reach universal essences, which are invisible to the senses, he has access to the whole universe. “Because the spiritual soul can grasp universal essences, it possesses a potential into infinity.” St. Thomas Aquinas speaks from the Middle Ages.

Reality is the foundation of ethics. Ethics is to choose the good which is in accord with reality. You have a chocolate brownie. Let’s taste it. Do you stick it in your eye?



Ouch, no the purpose of the eye is to see, not to taste! Stick it in your mouth. Yum. Putting a chocolate brownie in your eye is not in accord with reality. It is in fact an injustice to the eye. Those who wish to know and do the good must turn their gaze on the objective world of being, Pieper says, not upon their own or arbitrary ideas and models, not upon values, not on your own conscience. Do not try to invent new ways of tasting food! Gender ideology basically ignores these rules. By choosing to self identify by a different sex, individuals try to erase reality -- their own identity.

Strangely, the ability to know reality allows us to act virtuously. “Virtue is the seal of the cognitive power impressed upon the will.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) “The fundamental law of man is to act according to reason,” Pieper wrote. But if a man is not oriented to objective reality, his conscience does not have the tools necessary to judge moral good.

So when people in the Renaissance despised the principle of ontological truth (a transcendental property of all that is, involving the orientation of every being toward another being) man’s ability to see and judge the moral act largely evaporated.

A dark churning blindness arose and engulfed humanity. It was nominalism, the basis of all the ism's I mentioned earlier, truth based on empiricism, relativism, positivism, and materialism. It is the doctrine that universals or general ideas are mere names without any corresponding reality. Only particular objects exist. I can say this person is more like me than a donkey, so I will call him a man. But the Idea of man, the form of man does not exist in the Mind of God or anywhere. Nominalism makes you stupid. That's Pieper's conclusion.



A Dark Churning Blindness Engulfed Humanity  
Nominalism

By living only in particulars, testing truth by whether it can be measured or made falsifiable, man never asks the question “What is the meaning of life?”

Enter radical freedom with no restraints. Create your own reality! “There is no such thing as human nature!” exclaimed French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Believing his ancestors made up God, Sartre decided arbitrarily to erase Him from existence. This had rather tragic consequences because *man was nothing* — unless he made something of himself. Not surprisingly objective reality also disappeared. Sartre argued that man existed, but he stripped him of his essence made by God:

“We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees himself as not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it.” Sartre said in a lecture given in 1946. No surprise, I found his quote on a Marxist website.

Pope Benedict XVI weighed in on the matter: “Sartre regards the freedom of man as his damnation...What is exciting about this proposition is that the

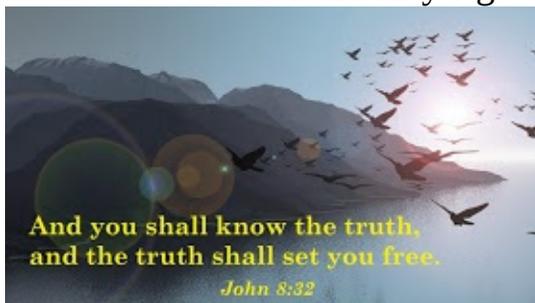
separation of freedom and truth is carried through quite radically here: there is no truth. Freedom is without direction or measure,”

the pope spoke enthusiastically in his landmark book on *Truth and Tolerance*. “Yet this complete absence of truth, the complete absence of any kind of moral or metaphysical restraint, the absolute anarchic freedom of man constituted by his self-determination, is revealed, for anyone who tries to live it out, not as the most sublime exaltation of existence, but as a life of nothingness, as absolute emptiness, as the definition of damnation.”

Being freed from truth, Sartre does not live freely, on the contrary his meaningless life is a form of slavery. Even worse he has encouraged others to live in slavery. One can see the ugly footprints of his thinking in the lives of countless woman who have suffered an abortion in the name of “choice.” Choice, isn’t that freedom?

Many times women’s mental health is imperilled by abortion. One woman showed me pictures of the fruit of her abortion, a beaker of blood. “See,” she said, “It’s not a human being.” She did not realise that she would look the same — albeit a larger volume — if she was all chopped up. Her loss of objectivity actually endangered her mind.

“The idealist ethics of the last century has largely forgotten and denied the determination of morality by reality,” Pieper wrote in his conclusion, “But ethical realism receives very significant corroboration from the fact that modern



psychology, beginning from an entirely different starting point, and influenced especially by the discoveries of psychiatry, emphatically declares that objectivity is one of the most important prerequisites of psychic health.”

Goodbye Aristotelian law of non-contradiction — one truth cannot contradict another. Hospitals today are fighting with the best technology available to save

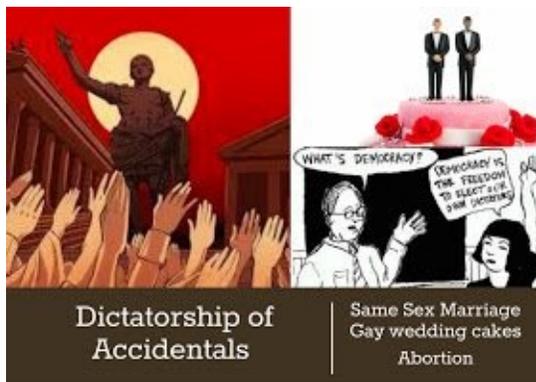
the life of one pre-born child, while down the hall another pre-born child is deliberately drowned in a bucket. Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) said that without the principle of non-contradiction, rational discussion would be impossible for we could not distinguish between a human being or a rabbit.

That day has arrived.

Goodbye Ethics. “Is” and “ought” have suffered a divorce. Mrs. Right and Mr. Wrong are sitting in diapers in the nursing home. Yes, we mourn the loss of religion. But at least empiricism will fix my refrigerator! I comfortably have all the conveniences of modern life. Nevertheless, the real rot in our civilisation is our reason, which is supposed to rule our conscience according to truth.

Man — male and female wearing genderless pant suits carrying iPads — has become a mindless barbarian with a nonexistent compass for truth living under the “*dictatorship of accidentals.*” We have become cave men carrying — not a club, but a nuclear bomb. Craving absolute freedom, we have lost all freedom to Marxism, Communism, Socialism, Big Welfare Government, the U.S. Supreme Court, Government Elites, Gender Ideology and the court of popular opinion. How ugly the face of modern man, who was once nobly made in God’s image.

“The chance occurrence of a majority becomes an absolute,” gently railed Pope Benedict XVI. Think about it! The state of Oregon passes an “equality” law that makes it illegal for a bakery to refuse to make a “same-sex” wedding cake. A Christian couple, refusing to bake the cake, are fined \$135,000, their bank accounts seized and they lose their livelihood. This is the tyranny of accidentals!



“For there is still such a thing as something absolute, beyond which there is no appeal. We have been handed over to the rule of positivism and of the erection of what is accidental, what can indeed be manipulated, into an absolute value. When man is shut out of the truth, he can only be dominated by what is accidental and arbitrary. That is why it is, not (Christian) “fundamentalism,” but a duty of humanity to protect man from *the dictatorship of what is accidental* and to restore to him his dignity, which consists precisely in the fact that no human institution can ultimately dominate him, because he is open to the truth.” Pope Benedict wrote.

But we are not open to truth. The prejudice against Christian bakers, photographers and wedding hall owners becomes common thinking in society. People on Twitter will fight to the death to defend the “gay” couple mistreated by the “evil” Christian baker. Look what happened on the issue of abortion! The baby in the womb is just a blob of cells, a beaker of blood left over from an abortion. Goodbye freedom linked to Truth. This is the dictatorship we live under today — positivism founded by Austrian jurist Hans Kelsen (1881-1973).

“Truth is replaced by the decision of the majority, he (Kelsen) says, precisely because there can be no truth, in the sense of a binding and generally accessible entity for man.. Culture is set against Truth.. This relativism, which is nowadays to be found, as a basic attitude of enlightened people, penetrating far into the realm of theology, is the most profound difficulty of our age.” Pope Benedict XVI declared.

However, while legislators elected by voters may still rule in some places, in the United States, six people in black robes created a non-existent right to same sex “marriage” on June 26, 2015.

Now we see the vile consequences of abandoning truth and leaving it up to science and majorities to decide it. Truth completely escapes us. And so does freedom.

“The idea of natural law is today viewed as a specifically Catholic doctrine, not worth bringing into the discussion in a non-Catholic environment,” Pope Benedict told the German Bundestag in Berlin on Sep 22, 2011. This came about

because of “the idea that an unbridgeable gulf exists between ‘is’ and ‘ought.’” The positivist understanding of nature has come to be universally accepted, he said. In the words of Hans Kelsen, Nature is “an aggregate of objective data linked together in terms of cause and effect.” Hence “no ethical indication of any kind can be derived from it,” the pope explained.

"Virtue, ladies and gentlemen, the word virtue is dead," said Paul Valéry, French poet (1871-1945). Let the “party” begin.

A positivist conception of nature and reason is purely functional and incapable of producing any bridge to ethics and law, Benedict told the Bundestag. “Anything that is not verifiable or falsifiable, according to this understanding, does not belong to the realm of reason strictly understood. Hence *ethics* and *religion* must be assigned to the subjective field.” Think Peter Pan, Tinker Bell... pixie dust.

Pope Saint John Paul II attempted to extricate modern man’s reason out of the mud of modernism in his 1998 Encyclical Letter *Faith and Reason*:

“Freedom is not realised in decisions made against God. For how could it be an exercise of true freedom to refuse to be open to the very reality which enables our self realisation? Men and women can accomplish no more important act in their lives than the act of faith; it is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth,” the pope wrote.

Starting in the Renaissance, countless human thinkers removed the concept of truth as “all that exists” to whatever people think without seeing the consequences. Their busy little brooms ushered God, human nature and reality out into the dustbin of history. Without truth, without God, without transcendence, man lost his freedom.

“The truth of Christian revelation, found in Jesus of Nazareth, enables all men and women to embrace the ‘mystery’ of their own life. As absolute truth, it summons human beings to be open to the transcendent (*not subject to the limitations of the material universe*), whilst respecting both their autonomy as

creatures and their freedom," Pope Saint John Paul II wrote.

“Christian revelation is the true lodestar of men and women as they strive to make their way amid the pressures of an immanentist habit of mind and the constrictions of a technocratic logic,” the Pope continued. “It is the ultimate possibility offered by God for the human being to know in all its fullness the seminal plan of love which began with creation. To those wishing to know the truth, if they can look beyond themselves and their own concerns, there is given the possibility of taking full and harmonious possession of their lives, precisely by following the path of truth.”

German newspaper commentator Jan Ross (Die Zeit) agreed with the pope. The loss of theology and metaphysics (philosophy dealing with being, knowing and identity) has made thought “not just more free, but also more narrow,” adding that some people are “rendered stupid by lack of faith.”

“Reason, in turning away from the ultimate questions, has rendered itself indifferent and boring, has resigned its competence where the keys to life are concerned: good and evil, death and immortality.” Ross wrote, adding that the voice of Pope John Paul II defending faith and reason, “has given courage to many people and to entire nations and has sounded hard and piercingly in many people’s ears and has even aroused hatred; but when it falls silent, that will be a moment of frightful silence.”

Benedict finishes that thought: “And indeed, if no one talks about God and man, about sin and grace, about death and



eternal life, any more, then all the shouting and all the noise there is will only be

a vain attempt to deceive ourselves” while the voice of true humanity falls silent.

For me the tragedy is watching people deceive themselves so thoroughly. I often take time to speak to atheists on Twitter who see my Catholic tweets and want to argue with me.

The first thing they say is “Prove the existence of God.” I always say, “no,” because there is no way to prove the existence of God to materialists using empiricism. How do you prove the existence of a spiritual being using data that is measurable in an experiment?

I always assumed they were deliberately “setting me up” with this question. So one time I mentioned that. I was shocked. The atheist I was speaking to honestly believed because no one could prove the existence of God using empiricism, God didn't exist. She didn't realise she had shut out the real world by her own philosophy and therefore could not find the truth.

Pope Benedict calls it the *world's windowless concrete bunker*:



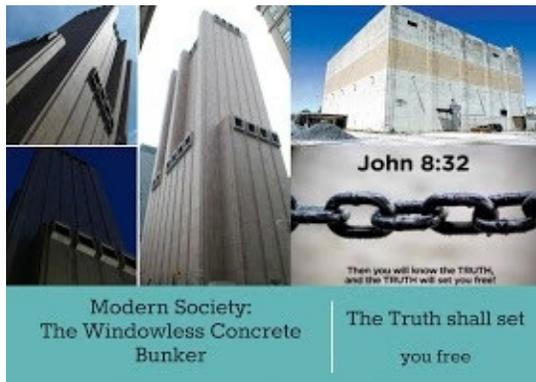
“In its self-proclaimed exclusivity, the positivist reason which recognises nothing beyond mere functionality resembles a *concrete bunker with no windows*, in which we ourselves provide lighting and atmospheric conditions, being no longer willing to obtain either from God's wide world,” he told the German Bundestag in 2011. “And yet we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that even in this artificial world, we are still covertly drawing upon God's raw materials, which we refashion into our own products.”

Christians can actually find consolation in the material world. Knowing that everything came from the “Eye” of God, one can find a connection to God holding a piece of wood. Remember the Mind of God Who thought of it, and in thinking of it, brought it into being. Praise God for its beauty, its texture and its

shape. "Do not wander far and wide but return into yourself. Deep within man there dwells the truth," St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430 A.D.)

With respect to Truth, modern man -- without Christianity -- appears to have buried himself in the realm of consequences. He now sees "same sex" marriage and abortion as an issue of justice. Children misled by this line of thinking, become adults, and then leave the Catholic Church because it condemns both.

They are trapped. They have been raised in a windowless concrete bunker. "The windows must be flung open again, we must see the wide world, the sky and the earth once more and learn to make proper use of all this," Pope Benedict pleaded.



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**Ola Hössjer** received a PhD in mathematical statistics from Uppsala University, Sweden, in 1991. Appointed a professor of mathematical statistics at Lund University in 2000, he has held the same position at Stockholm University since 2002. His research focuses on developing statistical theory and probability theory for various applications, in particular population genetics, epidemiology, and insurance mathematics. He has authored around eighty peer-reviewed articles and has supervised thirteen PhD students. His theoretical research is mostly in robust and nonparametric statistics, whereas the applied research includes methods of gene localization (linkage and association analysis), and the study of short-term microevolutionary dynamics of populations. In 2009 he was awarded the Gustafsson Prize in Mathematics.

**Colin R.Reeves** holds a PhD from Coventry University in the UK, where he was professor of operational research. He is a chartered statistician, and his research interests focus on the mathematical and statistical foundations of evolutionary algorithms, on which he has published extensively. His book *Genetic Algorithms: A Guide to GA Theory* (with Jonathan Rowe) was the first systematic treatment of evolutionary algorithm theory. Recently retired as professor emeritus, he continues to be active in research, consultancy, and conference speaking.

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This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.co.at/2017/12/truth-or-consequences.html>

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## How to Accumulate Great Wealth [at On the Road to Damascus]

Mavis Wanczyk was the winner of the largest single lottery payout in United States history. She won a whopping \$758.7 million dollars in August 2017. The single, lump sum payout was \$480 million or \$336 million after taxes. With a drop of a ball Mavis' life changed in an instant.

I began fantasizing about what I would do with so much money. I could live a life of luxury. I would of course make all of my family members immediate millionaires. Then my mind drifted to imagining how much charitable work I could do with such abundance. How many of us have secretly tried to bargain with God? If you would just let me win this lottery I promise to feed the poor and cloth the naked...

In Matthew 25: 14 we read the parable about the talents. A master is going away on a journey. He entrusts large sums of money to three of his slaves so that they can earn him more while he was gone. When he returned he found that two of the slaves doubled what they were given. To these slaves he entrusted even more money and responsibility.

The third slave had taken what he had been given and buried it in the ground. He returned to his master exactly what he had received, no more or no less. The master became enraged over this, stripped the slave of everything he had, and threw him out of his house. The slave was now less than he was before for he had nothing. He was naked and starving.

How many of us are like that third slave? How many of us take what we have been given, even if that is just a tiny amount, and bury it in the ground of our personal desires? I would do more for those in need but I haven't anything left after making my two car payments, my house payment, and the payments on my large satellite TV package with the football network. Plus the latest I-Phone just came out. If that weren't enough the dock at the cabin needs repairs...

It is easier to be charitable when we have an excess of everything. It is far harder to be charitable when we are just getting by or worse. Yet, we are called as

Christians to be charitable at all times. No matter what our financial situation we all have something we can give, even if that is nothing more than a smile or a kind word.

The master has given us talents and he expects us to use them do multiply the good in this world as much as we are able. If we are good at it we will be given more responsibility and more to do good with or we will be put in a place where our ability to do more with less is in great need. If we are like that third slave, well, we will have our reward here on earth.

I don't need \$759 million dollars to make a difference in another person's life. For that matter, I don't need money at all. But if I give of my time and treasure I will be given more to do more with. Do not build up treasure here on earth. You can't take it with you. Give it away freely and build up treasure in heaven. You have been given talents from the master. How will you double them before he returns to collect on his investment?



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This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2017/12/how-to-accumulate-great-wealth.html>

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## Getting Past Prayer Paralysis [at Under Thy Roof]



"Would you like to lead us in prayer?"

That sentence will send most cradle Catholics into an anxious mental dizzy.

"What do I say? Am I getting too personal? We did not cover this in CCD. Oh my gosh THEY'RE LOOKING AT ME!"

Extemporaneous prayer, meditative prayer, Lectio Divina are all well beyond my comfort zone.

But they shouldn't be! Prayer is a skill and it needs to be practiced and developed.

Parents are to be the first, and primary, catechists to their children (CCC 2226). That means if I'm lacking knowledge or practice in prayer skills, it's my God-given job to get it together.

Thankfully, Catholicism is not a solo practice. Tools abound! I have been very impressed with *The Catholic Family Book of Prayers: A Treasury of Prayers and Meditations for Families to Pray Together*. It's a skinny book (fits easily in my purse) and successfully covers the essentials of prayer, with beautiful pieces of art throughout.

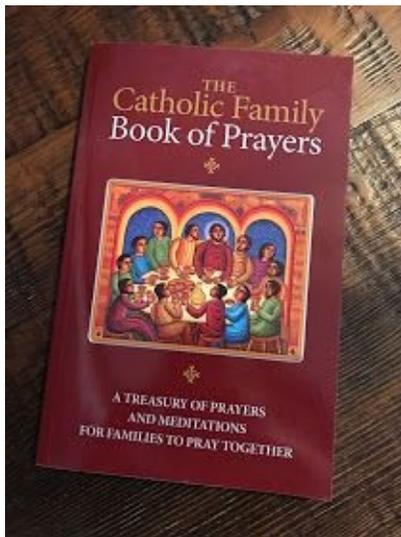
My personal favorite thing is the section on meditation and contemplation. It has step-by-step guides, with SCRIPTS, for leading your family in Christian meditation, Lectio Divina, praying with Sacred Art, and examination of conscience. If I can teach reading with a script, I can certainly handle a family meditation!

The book is a fantastic cheat sheet for all of those surprise additional prayers at the end of rosaries. When 2 or 3 are gathered...Catholics add prayers! The simplicity of the book means it only takes seconds to find prayers you might have learned once upon a time, but could use a refresher on the fly (\*cough\* Anima Christi).

I'm not

*good*

at extemporaneous prayer, but it no longer feels impossibly difficult to get started.



You can find The Catholic Family Book of Prayers in digital and hard copy directly from

[Gracewatch Media](#)

, or hard copy on

[Amazon](#)

.

*I was provided with a free copy to review by Gracewatch Media, but all impressions and claims are my own.*

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This contribution is available at <http://underthyroof.blogspot.com/2017/12/getting-past-prayer-paralysis.html>

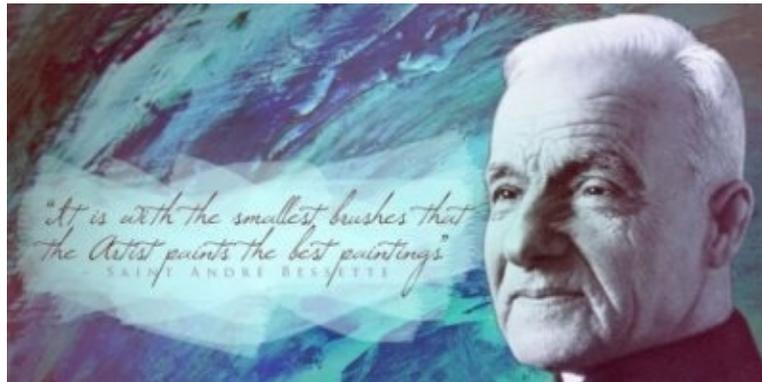
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January 6th is the feast day of Saint André Bessette of Montreal. I first learned about Saint André when a friend of mine named his son after the French Canadian saint. I'm sorry to say I didn't know of him sooner than that, especially given the deep connections between my Louisiana home and the French Canadians of Montreal. Many of the people in my home town, including my family, are descended from the French Canadians that immigrated from the adult home of Saint André.

Read more about this wonderful example of humility and perseverance below.

Also, scroll down to the end if you're looking for the **Prayer to Saint André for Healing** or the **Prayer to Saint André for his Intercession**, provided by the Congregation of the Holy Cross.



## Saint André Bessette: Montreal's Miracle Worker

In the city of Montreal, Province of Quebec, Canada, on a rise of earth known as Mount Royal, there stands a religious edifice of staggering proportions. It is three hundred and sixty-one feet high, taller than either Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York or the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

Its girth is so massive that it could hold within itself any one of most of the world's great shrines, including Saint Anne de Beaupré and Saint Paul of London. The cross atop its domed roof can be seen for miles around, guiding the

millions of pilgrims who come there each year. It is the Oratory of Saint Joseph, a worthy tribute to him who is the head of the Holy Family and the Patron of the Universal Church.

If one were to ask any Canadian for the name of the person who built this magnificent House of God, he would be told, “Brother André.” Yet, this little lay brother’s name does not appear on any of the official records of the building of the Oratory. He was only a porter — a doorman — at a college owned and operated by his religious congregation. He was a little man, both in size and, if one were to judge by appearance, in importance. He was not a priest; therefore he could neither offer Mass nor preach. Because of poor education, he did not know how to read or write until he reached the age of twenty-five.

How is it, then, that this little brother is known and venerated all over the world as the little saint who built the Oratory of Saint Joseph in Montreal? It is our privilege within the following pages to provide you an answer to that question.

## **The Early Years**

On August 9, 1845, Alfred Bessette was born to Isaac and Clothilde Bessette, the eighth in what would become a family of twelve children. The Bessettes were a poor French Canadian family who lived in the farming village of St. Gregoire, thirty miles from Montreal, and about the same distance from the border of the United States. Isaac and Clothilde were devout Catholics who, by their own example, taught their children the virtuous habits of prayer and hard work, habits which were to become for little Alfred the key to his ultimate sanctity as Brother André.

Alfred was born a very sick baby; so sick, in fact, that his father baptized him shortly after birth, fearing he would not survive. This lack of physical health and strength stayed with him throughout his entire life, yet he lived to the incredible age of ninety-one.

Recalling what he could of those early years, Brother André later told of how happy they were for him, of how great was his love for his parents, especially his mother, who had special affection for her frail child. But that happiness was soon tempered by tragedy. When he was six years old, his father was killed in a lumbering accident near the town of Farnham. Four years later, his mother, trying to raise twelve children single-handedly, contracted tuberculosis and was forced to put the children up for adoption. Keeping with her only the feeblest one, Alfred, she went to live with her sister, Mrs. Timothée Nadeau, in St.

Cesaire. Two years later, in 1857, she died. Brother André later recalled, with great love and affection, her last days. Knowing her end was near, she summoned her children to her bedside and addressed them sweetly:

“My dear little ones, it has been six years since your papa left us to go to Heaven. The good God is coming to look for me in my turn. Pray for me. Do not forget the tomb of your father. My body will repose beside his in the cemetery at Farnham. From the height of Heaven I will watch over you.”

These parting words from his devout mother left a lasting impression on the frail youth. Years later, he would say of her, “I rarely pray for her, but very often I pray to her.”

Alfred was but twelve years old when his mother died. He was now an orphan, separated from his brothers and sisters. But the next ten years of his life would see the accelerated formation of a saint.

After the death of his mother, he remained with the Nadeau family. Timothée put him to work on the family farm, but, try as he may, little Alfred could not cope with strenuous farm labor. He simply did not have the physical stamina required to perform the chores asked of him. Then his uncle sent him to a cobbler to learn the shoemaking trade, but this didn’t work either. The poor lad was so clumsy that he was constantly pricking his fingers with the sharp cobbler’s awl. This scenario was repeated over and over again: He would take a job and work at it as hard as he could, but always his poor health made it impossible for him to continue. Here are Brother André’s own words describing these years of his life:

“I was never very strong. From the time when I was a little boy, ten years old, I have suffered from dyspepsia [indigestion]. It seems as if I was always sick from it. I have had it all during my life, and it still annoys me.

“When I was living with my uncle and was very young, I could not go to school much because I was always sick. Once I tried to become a shoemaker, but I could not stand bending over and being inside the place so much, and my health made me give it up. Then, after a little while, when I thought I was strong enough, I tried to become a baker, but again I found that my health would not let me do inside work. It seems that I was never very strong.”

So much for the physical deficiencies of little Alfred Bessette. Now let us tell of the one great strength which made this peasant weakling such an exceptional boy — his astonishing holiness.

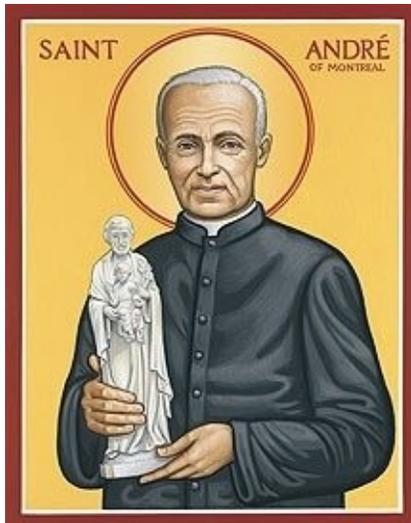
## **Father André Provençal**

During the canonical proceedings for his cause, Father Henri Bergeron, C.S.C.,

related a comment made to him by Brother André's sister: "Ah, if you only knew my brother in his youth! On Sunday he passed the greater part of the afternoon in the church."

We should not quickly pass over this statement without reflection. Sunday was probably the only day of the week on which the boy had no assigned chores. It was most likely the only time he had to play with other children in the village, but Alfred chose to stay in prayer for "the greater part of the afternoon." This is truly heroic in a child.

It was during this time that he came into contact with the priest who proved to be the worthy spiritual tutor of a saint, Father André Provençal, the Curé of Saint Césaire. It was Father Provençal who instructed little Alfred for his first Holy Communion. It was Father Provençal who inspired devotion to Saint Joseph. And it was also this holy parish priest who put Brother André on that road which, for him, would end in perfection — the road to a religious vocation. Even in his youth, Brother André practiced severe penances. His aunt, Madame Nadeau, several times had to take away instruments of mortification from the boy. A leather belt pierced with tacks and worn around the waist, an iron chain, and sleeping on the floor were all penances that his poor aunt had to forbid for fear of his health. Little Alfred never disobeyed; when he was told not to practice one penance, he simply adopted another. Some may think these penances were just childish excess which would fade away with maturity, but they continued throughout his lifetime, making him a truly mortified religious. Penance is nothing without prayer, though. And here was the true sign of the lad's holiness: He relished being united with God in prayer. His spare time was spent either in the presbytery of the parish, talking to Father Provençal, or in the church itself in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, absorbed in prayer for hours at a time. It was during these years that he started what was to be his lifelong habit — long, deep conversations with Saint Joseph. In his Epistle to the Philippians (3:20), Saint Paul said, "Our conversation is in Heaven." For our little French Canadian pauper, these words were not a pious platitude, but a beautiful reality.



## To the U.S. and Back

About the year 1863, when he was eighteen years old, he emigrated to the United States, thinking that the milder climate of New England and the opportunities for better employment would benefit his frail health. He settled in Connecticut and worked in various towns including Hartford, alternating higher paying, but more strenuous, factory labor with less difficult, lower paying, farm work. Not much is known about this period except that his vagabond existence never changed; it seemed he would always be a wanderer.

Many years later, Brother André related an incident from his laboring years: One day, while working in a field, he stopped momentarily to rest. As he leaned on his rake for support, he asked Saint Joseph where he would die. At that moment, he had not exactly a vision, but a vivid daydream in which he saw a large stone building with a cross on top. He had never seen this building before, but received a definite mental impression of its size, proportion, color and windows, all of which suggested a barracks. Years later, the vision was confirmed when he became the brother porter of that very building — the College of Notre Dame in Côte-des-Neiges.

Biographers have assumed that, since Brother André actually died in a hospital in Saint Laurent and not the College of Notre Dame, he misinterpreted his dream. But this is not so, for the word “death” can have many meanings, naturally as well as supernaturally. Just as in the case of the Old Testament Joseph, it was in the mystical sense that this dream was fulfilled. Alfred did die at the College of Notre Dame. When a priest stood over him and pronounced, “Alfred Bessette, henceforth thy name will be Brother André,” Alfred Bessette died, cloaked in the black pall of the religious habit, and Brother André, a

religious of the of the Holy Cross Congregation was born.

We will discuss his religious vocation soon enough. For now, let us continue with his travels: After three years in the United States, the young wayfarer returned to his native country, still a vagabond and, by worldly standards, still a failure. But he came back weary of the world, for it had nothing to offer him but distractions from the things of God.

While in New England, his associates used to marvel at the fact that almost all of his spare time was spent in prayer. Little did they know that this was only the beginning, for Alfred wanted to give himself completely. Though as yet he had no plans for the religious life, he knew that he would have to take leave of worldly affairs to enter a greater union with his Beloved. It must have been a wondrous thing to see the pious young man begging for guidance, storming Heaven with petition after petition, and offering up his many trials and sufferings in an effort to discern what his true vocation was.

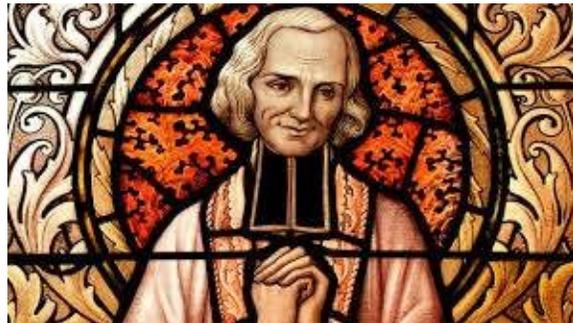
His prayers and supplications were answered. Not long after his return to Canada, Alfred went to see his spiritual Father with whom he had kept contact during his travels, Father Provençal. The same loving, paternal hand which guided Alfred to Saint Joseph while still a child, also brought him to his vocation. He didn't have to take his little one far. Across the street from Father Provençal's parish Church was a new building that had been built during the time Alfred was away from Saint Césaire. The building was a school where some eighty pupils were taught by six brothers, members of a fledgling religious congregation known as the Congregation of the Holy Cross. To fully appreciate the next phase of Brother André's life, we must learn a little about this noble institution.



**Congregation of the Holy Cross**

The religious whom Alfred met were the spiritual children of two fathers. In 1820, Father Jacques François Dujarie founded an association meant to provide sacristans and teachers for the parish priests of France. Such men were sorely needed, for the Masonic French Revolution had suppressed the religious orders in France, depriving the faithful of teachers and the parish priests of the assistance they needed from brothers and nuns. Many religious were martyred for the Faith during the Reign of Terror.

Father Dujarie was a parish priest in a village near Le Mans, France, and founded his association there. He called these men the Brothers of Saint Joseph. Fifteen years later, he put his brothers under the care of Canon Basile Moreau, who had just founded a group of priests called the Auxiliary Priests. Two years after that, in 1837, the Congregation of the Holy Cross was formed. In 1857, Venerable Pope Pius IX made Holy Cross an official Congregation of the Church.



Saint John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, said of the institute, “The Congregation of Holy Cross is destined after many trials, to perform great works.” Indeed the Congregation did perform many great works all over the world. Missionary work, teaching, and writing are all part of the Holy Cross apostolate. It is impossible to go to a theological library and not find several scholarly books written by Holy Cross priests and brothers. Many were great poets too. But they were best known for the Catholicity and academic excellence of their schools. In addition to countless high schools, the Congregation founded, and still operates, Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. We do not know just what the particular work is that the Curé of Ars was referring to, but it is not too unlikely a guess that he meant the great work of Brother André. For, though this Order has accomplished much (the early days in Indiana are replete with edifying stories of astounding zeal and piety), its only candidate for canonization to date is Brother André.

In 1847, a small group of religious was sent to Canada to open a foundation in the diocese of Montreal. The group was led by a Holy Cross priest and included six brothers and two nuns. They came at the request of the bishop of Montreal,

Bishop Bourget, who went to France to ask Father Moreau for their assistance. These pioneer religious founded a college in Saint Laurent, in the diocese of Montreal.



## Acceptance and Profession

Alfred's meeting with these brothers was an event of singular importance. He was impressed by them; their black habit with Roman collar, cincture and medal of Saint Joseph, their manly bearing and devotion all attracted him.

Nevertheless, he was nervous. These men were educated; they ran a school — just the six of them — with eighty children. Alfred was still an illiterate. But Father Provençal soon relieved him of that worry, assuring his young friend there was a need in the order for janitors and manual laborers. His fears allayed, Alfred soon came fully to desire the life which he saw before him in these six men.

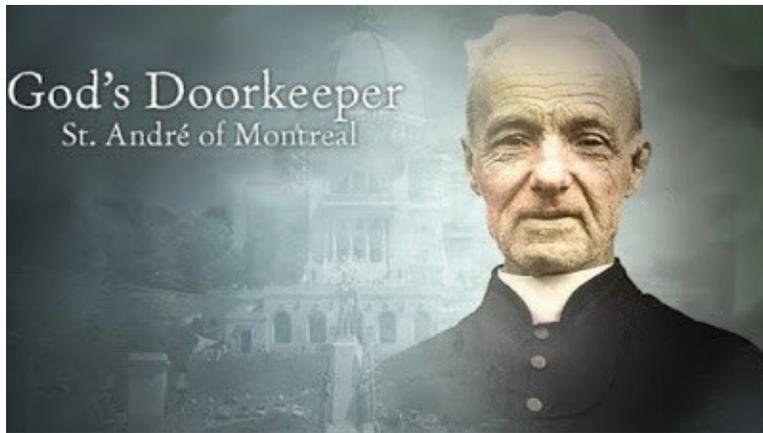
On the brothers' part, however, there was reservation. Could this frail little one actually live up to the great rigor of religious life? Could he take the formation that they had all been through? Was his apparent piety enough to overcome such deficiencies? These were real concerns for the brothers, though they did not express them to the lad. They simply answered the questions Alfred asked about their rule, their history, and their devotion to the Holy Patriarch, Saint Joseph. Without discouraging him, they said nothing to indicate any desire that he join them.

Alfred was not at all put off by the brothers' lack of enthusiasm. As was already his common practice, he sought Divine Assistance to overcome this challenge

and prayed all the more. Then, in 1870, he made up his mind that, if they would have him, he would join the Congregation. They accepted him into the novitiate in Côte-des-Neiges, and he took the habit of the order. The novice master, Father Gastineau, gave him a great welcome. Perhaps he was expecting much of the new arrival, because before Brother André got to the novitiate, the novice master received a letter from Father Provençal which said, "I am sending a saint to your Congregation."

Brother André was a good novice, well liked by his superiors and respected by the brothers. During the novitiate he progressed in the spiritual life under his spiritual director, Father Hupier, and in the religious life under his novice master, Father Gastineau. He also learned to read, a skill which he applied with great fervor to the Holy Scriptures and the Imitation of Christ, as well as to the lives of the saints. As part of the Holy Cross religious formation, novices were required to memorize the entire Sermon on the Mount. But Brother André didn't stop there. In later years, he memorized the Passion of Our Lord as it is contained in each of the four Gospels, being able to recite the entire Passion word for word according to whichever Evangelist he wished. In addition to this, he had whole sections of many spiritual books memorized.

As it would happen, one area of his life which did not improve during the novitiate was Brother André's miserable health. It was so bad that he was not allowed to make his temporary vows as a Holy Cross brother. There was even talk of dismissing him from the community. Naturally, this upset the frail little servant of God, who wanted to work out his salvation as a religious. Desperate to save his vocation, he took advantage of a visit by Bishop Bourget, the bishop of Montreal, to the college. Overcoming his timidity, the novice knocked on the door of the prelate's room and, once admitted inside, threw himself at the feet of his Excellency. In tears, he explained the situation. Towards the end of the conversation, the young brother humbly declared, "My only ambition is to serve God in the most obscure tasks." The bishop, having heard all he needed, said, "Don't be afraid, child. You will be admitted to the religious profession." He was true to his word; Brother André made his profession on August 22, 1872.



## **Our Lady's Porter**

His first assignment was as porter of the College of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur in Côte-des-Neiges, the same college where he spent much of his novitiate. This was the position he held for nearly forty years. As is common in the lives of all of the saints — and, indeed, in the lives of all men — there was never a time when he was without crosses, some of them serious. His superior at the College, Father Louage, was not particularly impressed by Brother André and oftentimes disciplined him in what seemed to be an unfair manner. Because of this, Brother André was given the name “the lightning rod of the college” by the other religious, who said, “He receives the bolts of Father Louage.” In all of this, the pious religious persevered without the slightest protest, wishing to unite his sufferings to Christ’s instead of wasting them by complaining. It was soon after his assignment at the college that those supernatural phenomena which marked the rest of his life started to happen.



## Miracles

God, knowing that men do not think often enough of their final end, nor of Him, nor of the truths of religion, gives human nature external signs of His presence and the truth of His religion. Our Lord Himself, when the disciples of Saint John the Baptist approached him, asking if He were the Messiah, said, Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them. Culminating with His own miraculously prolonged passion and His glorious Resurrection, Our Lord gave ample proof of His Divinity. In addition to His own miracles, He promised His Apostles that signs would follow their preaching. He was true to this promise: But they going forth preached every where: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed. (Mark 16:20) As is plain from Church History and the lives of the saints, the divine foundation of the Church was proved by miracles in every age. Since Our Lord's time, then, there have been sufficient — and oftentimes more than sufficient — extraordinary proofs for all to know the One True God and His One True Religion. And so, in this age of great intellectual pride, God manifests his mercy again to an unbelieving people to give them more than ample opportunity to save their souls.

As for Brother André, the public nature and frequency of the miracles he worked make them impossible to dispute. He cured many of the students at the college, so many that he developed a reputation as a great miracle worker.

One day, as the pious porter was scrubbing the floor in the parlor of the college, a lady came to see him, having heard of his reputation. She was so afflicted with rheumatism that she could only walk with the assistance of two men supporting her by holding each arm. Her request to Brother André was simple enough: "I am suffering from rheumatism. I want you to heal me." Not looking up from the floor he was still busily scrubbing, Brother André said to the men assisting her, "Let her walk." The woman walked out unassisted.

As the school's doorkeeper, Frère André saluted and bid farewell to the many guests who came to the college. Having a keen interest in their spiritual welfare and a sympathetic ear for their problems, the little doorman could often tell who was in need of his prayers or counsel. One day he noticed on the face of a guest — the father of a boarding student — a preoccupied, strained expression. When Brother André learned that the man was worried about his sick wife, he told him, "But she is not so sick as you think. At this very moment she became better."

The man was quite cynical, for he knew that his wife had been ill for many years. Yet upon arriving home, his wife greeted him at the door, perfectly healthy, in good spirits, and inquiring about the couple's children. The man later learned, upon speaking with his wife's nurse, that she had asked to be taken out of bed exactly when Brother André pronounced the words, "At this very moment, she became better."

Father Henri-Paul Bergeron, a Holy Cross Priest who knew Frère André, gives an account in his book, *The Wonder Man of Mount Royal*, of an event that recalls some of those recorded in the Gospels:

"One day as he was going along Bienville Street in Montreal, a sick woman was brought to him. Immediately all of the sick of the neighborhood, children, men and women, were brought out until the whole street was filled with the sick and the infirm. Brother André attended to all with kindness, and his chauffeur. . . making his way through the crowd, remarked:

'How wonderful; it is like a scene from the life of Our Lord: everyone rushed forth to beg for favors and cures.'

'Perhaps so' replied the Brother, 'but God is surely making use of a very vile instrument.'

On another occasion, when the porter was in the infirmary, he saw a student sick in bed. He told the boy, who had been ordered to rest by the school doctor, to get up. "You're not sick, you lazy bones! Go and play with the others." This the boy did, in perfect health and good cheer. The story of the incident soon spread around the college. Teachers, the doctor, students and parents alike marveled at the miracles wrought by the confident prayer of the young brother.

We say that the miracles were wrought by the prayers of the brother. Perhaps, if

he were here, he would rebuke us for saying this. He never claimed that he worked a single miracle. In his humility he gave all the credit to Saint Joseph, in whose power Brother André had infinite confidence. In fact, any attempt to credit him with miracles brought a stern reprimand from the normally kind religious. One day a visitor said to him, “You are better than Saint Joseph. We pray to him and nothing happens, but when we come to see you we are cured.” The brother was so incensed at the slander of the Holy Patriarch that he screamed, “Get out of here. It is Saint Joseph who cured you, not I. Get out! Throw him out!” The incident shook the frail constitution of the holy man so much that he spent three days sick in bed.

If miracles are proof of the True God and His True Religion, then the miracle workers chosen by God are going to have enemies, just as God Himself did when He dwelt amongst us. It didn't take long, then, for Brother André to acquire enemies of his own.

Many parents who sent their boys to the school were alarmed at the activities of its brother porter. Large numbers of sick were coming to the school where their children not only went to classes, but boarded as well. These pathetic masses — many of whom had contagious diseases — crowded about the train station across from the college. In their quest to see Frère André they constantly filed in and out of the very building where the students were housed. The just concerns of the parents, coupled with ill feelings (perhaps jealousy) of many at the college, spelled trouble for the porter. And worse yet, many physicians, whose hatred of religion was deposited upon the little man they styled a “fake healer,” added their venom to the rising fury. Soon Brother André had a mob of hostile enemies complaining to his superiors, the bishop, and even the public health officials. The Bishop of Montreal — at this time, Bishop Bruchesi — dismissed the multitudes who came to complain to him. But this did not mean he was unconcerned. He scheduled an appointment with Brother André's superiors, many of whom were not convinced of the divine origin of the miracles. During the meeting, the bishop asked whether Brother André would cease his activities if told under obedience. The reply came, “He would obey blindly.” To this the bishop said, “Then let him alone. If this work is from God, it will live; if not, it will crumble away.”

Not only was the Bishop won over by the porter's virtue; even the public health officials, who were forced to investigate the goings on at the college, came back from their meeting with him impressed at his common sense and stability. The enemies of Brother André failed, and Bishop Bruchesi's statement was proven true: the work was from God and it did live.

## The Oratory of Saint Joseph

In the midst of all of the excitement, the brother's heart became fixed on one holy ambition: the erection in Montreal of a shrine to Saint Joseph.

Brother André was not the first to conceive such an idea. Years before, in 1855, the saintly Bishop Bourget had written in the decrees of the Second Plenary Council of Quebec:

St. Joseph, then, must have a church which will in a certain sense supply the service of all the others, and in which he may receive every day the public honors due to his eminent virtues . . . We wish to consecrate whatever is left to us of strength and life in the task of having him honored in such a church and of making that church a place of pilgrimage whither the faithful will come to visit him. . .

This is the same bishop whom we reported earlier saved Brother André's vocation nearly twenty years after writing these words. Perhaps he knew that the holy little novice who pleaded with him was the humble instrument through which the Patron of Canada would finally have a worthy shrine built. But even Bishop Bourget was not the first to express the desire that such a shrine be built. Father Moreau had dreamt of a place of pilgrimage to Saint Joseph in the very early years of the Holy Cross Congregation in France. He thought of using the novitiate at Charbonnière, near Le Mans, for such a site. Both men were dead and buried before the Oratory was started, but both had a hand in its foundation all the same.

The shrine was in the thoughts and prayers of the porter for quite some time before he dared ask permission to build such a thing. He let only a handful of privileged friends know of his holy aspiration. Every once in a while he would let out a stray remark impressing on the hearer the need for a chapel to Saint Joseph. Some of these occasions came with certain signs of the divine origin of the brother's dream. One of his confreres told him of a strange phenomenon in his cell: It seemed that every time this religious put his statue of Saint Joseph facing his bed, he came back to find the statue turned around, facing the Mount Royal. Laughing, Frère André told his confrere, "It is not strange at all; it simply means that Saint Joseph wants to be honored on the mountain."

Certainly Brother André wanted Saint Joseph honored on the mountain. In 1890, he took a young student with him on one of his regular Thursday meditation walks. Taking the student up to the mountainside across the street from the school, he told him, "I have hidden a medal of Saint Joseph here. We will pray that he will arrange the purchase of this land for us." For six years he persevered

in prayer for that intention, and in 1896, his prayers were rewarded. The Holy Cross Congregation purchased the land, fearing that such a prime piece of real estate would attract a club or resort which would be an unwholesome distraction so near the students. After the land was purchased, Brother André put a statue of Saint Joseph in a little cave on his chosen site. Placing a bowl in front of the statue, he planned on collecting alms from Saint Joseph's petitioners, alms which would be used to build a chapel.



The building of the shrine was a complex thing. It would be a distraction in this short biography to go into all of the details of what was completed and when. Indeed, at times the biographies of the Blessed read more like architectural manuals than the life of a saint. This is because the life of the little brother was so intimately connected with the building of this shrine that one cannot be discussed without the other. To put it simply, what started out as a fifteen-by-eighteen foot chapel in 1904 became a minor basilica in 1955, and was completed — interior and all — in 1966. In his lifetime, the shrine became big enough to warrant having a full-time guardian, a job to which Brother André was appointed in 1909. For the present, however, we would rather discuss the life of the holy builder than the building itself.

From the moment that he conceived the idea to the day he died, the Oratory of Saint Joseph was a sacred task which Blessed André pursued with burning zeal. Everything that he could do in the confines of religious obedience to make the shrine a reality, he did immediately.

In his days as porter in the college, he also became the school's barber, a position which gave him opportunity to give holy counsel to the boys. When the

students paid him the small fee for their haircuts, Brother André would set the money aside for the shrine.

## **Miracles in the U.S.A.**

The determination that our brother had to build the shrine to Saint Joseph took him well beyond the confines of Montreal to find the money needed for the project. He toured many cities in the United States and Canada in this holy pursuit. Many of the French-Canadian towns around Boston, including the industrial cities of Lowell and Fitchburg, were on his itinerary. In these forays, he made the rounds of factories to beg contributions from their workers. Even today can be found residents of these areas who vividly recall the visits of the saint. A religious in our own order once met such a privileged resident, who related the story of a young couple with an infant diagnosed as having a brain tumor. Upon learning of the child's malady, Blessed André took the baby into his arms, gently rubbing the afflicted infant's head. The moving scene of the aged Brother caressing the infirm baby was more than just a tender moment; the child, it was later discovered, was completely cured.

Another episode in his American travels saw the conversion of a young non-Catholic named Henry Paine. Mr. Paine had pierced his hand with ice tongs and it was so infected that the doctors talked of amputating the affected member. The young man promised his Canadian visitor that that he would convert if he was healed. At the touch of Frère André's hand, the pain left. Almost immediately, the hand was completely cured. Mr. Paine kept his promise: he did indeed convert; and soon after, he married a Catholic young lady.

The miracles wrought at the Oratory were many and spectacular. Still there were critics. Many cynics doubted the efficacy of St. Joseph's oil, medals and novenas for healing bodily illnesses. Others took the cures for granted, thinking that it was the good work of the kindly brother, who, like any other humanitarian, had no other aim in mind than taking away people's suffering. But for Blessed André, the working of miracles had one end and one end only: Faith.

## **Zeal for Souls**

Many of the people who sought cures from Frère André were good Catholics; but others were heretics and unbelievers of all kinds. One of the witnesses at his cause for beatification said, "As to heretics, schismatics and also unbelievers, Brother André treated them with more kindness and sympathy than the

Catholics. He wanted to gain the confidence of such people. When the right time came he talked to them of the goodness of God and of religion. . . He profited by the visits of Protestants and unbelievers to slide in a good word to them, an evangelical word.”

It was by this kind of work that the guardian of the Oratory wrought thousands of conversions, many among lapsed and lukewarm Catholics, but also among Protestants, Freemasons and Jews. Brother André looked upon the humility of the non-Catholic, in coming to a Catholic brother for a cure, as the beginning of faith. In this he was imitating Our Lord Himself. When the father of the possessed boy in Saint Mark’s Gospel begged for a cure, Jesus told him that all things were possible to those who had faith. And immediately the father of the boy crying out, with tears said: I do believe, Lord. Help my unbelief. Like Our Lord, Blessed André took every opportunity to give the gift of faith to the unbeliever. About this, the Blessed said, “Those who are cured quickly often are people who have no faith or little faith. On the other hand, those who have solid faith are not cured so quickly, for the good God prefers to allow them to suffer that they will be sanctified even more.”

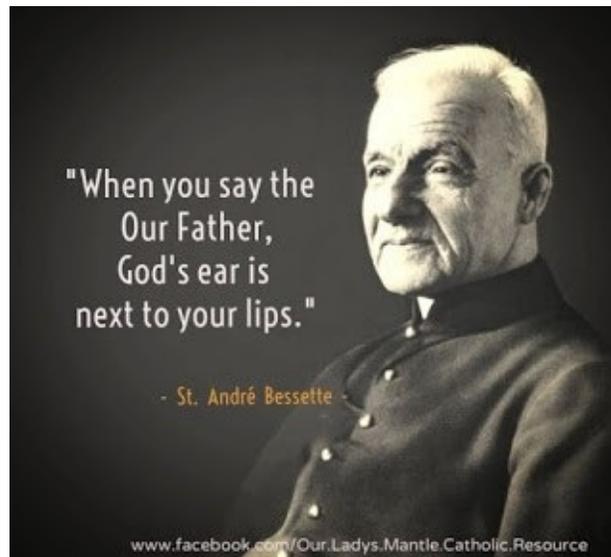
## **Devotional Life**

In early life, our diminutive porter acquired the habit of frequent, long, and devout prayer. As he advanced in years, this habit never waned. During the daytime, which he typically spent cleaning and doing other chores, Frère André received many visitors. At night he frequently visited hospitals, oftentimes returning with crutches to add to the growing collection in the Oratory. After such a day, he would spend much of the night in prayer. One of his intimates said about this, “Frequently, after his sick calls, he invited me to sleep in his cell over the primitive chapel. More than once I struggled against sleep in order to watch him. Towards morning I fell asleep while he remained in prayer. When I awoke, about five o’clock, I often noticed his bed had not been touched.”

Though he is known for his tremendous devotion to Saint Joseph, all those who knew him said that Blessed André’s central devotion was to the Passion of Our Lord. Many times, he would turn a worldly conversation into an emotional narration of Our Lord’s sufferings, often bringing those present, including himself, to tears. Because of this devotion, the good brother led Friday Stations of the Cross every week at the Oratory, hoping one day to construct a large set of stations around the Basilica’s exterior.

His devotion to Our Lady was quite conspicuous too. Logically, with such a love of the Passion, he often invoked Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows, the title under

which she is the Patroness of the Holy Cross Congregation. Frequently he walked around with Our Lady's Rosary in his hand; and in visiting the sick or raising funds for the Oratory, he would take advantage of the car ride to recite not one but several Rosaries. In his simplicity, he spoke of the Virgin as a child would: "If you consider all the saints, you will see that all of them had a devotion to the Blessed Virgin; Her intercession is most powerful, she is the Mother of God and the Mother of men."



The piety that he had toward the Patron of the Universal Church was simple and childlike too: "When you invoke Saint Joseph, you don't have to speak much. You know your Father in heaven knows what you need; well, so does His friend Saint Joseph." "Tell him, 'If you were in my place, Saint Joseph, what would you do? Well, pray for this in my behalf.'" To the people who came to him with their troubles — and thousands did — the friend of Saint Joseph recommended the use of sacramentals, like Saint Joseph's oil or a Saint Joseph medal. Most of all, he recommended persevering and confident prayer, usually prescribing a novena to his powerful benefactor.

A typical example of the favors wrought through the intercession of Saint Joseph is this one: A girl at a convent school not far from Quebec was severely injured when another child struck her in the right eye with an oar. The doctors tried to save the eye, but paralysis of the optic nerve set in, causing the girl to lose her sight. The sisters at the school had heard of the cures at the Oratory and procured a medal of Saint Joseph which had been blessed there. They decided to make a novena. For nine days, all the Sisters and students received Holy Communion and prayed to the foster-father of Jesus, applying the medal to the child's eye. There was no progress at all during the course of the novena, but they remained confident. On the ninth day, after everyone had received Holy Communion, the

child opened her eye to see the chapel's statue of Blessed Joseph. Before the cure, the seriousness and permanence of the damage had been verified in writing by two competent ophthalmologists. Later, these two declared that the eye was perfectly cured, with no trace of injury. Neither could explain the cure. Though Brother André was given the grace to heal others, he was constantly sick himself. He suffered from stomach illness all of his life. As a result, he could eat little more than a mixture of flour and watered-down milk, or sometimes bread soaked in the same. To him, these sufferings were an opportunity for reaching greater sanctity. As we shall see, his final sickness provided him with many such opportunities. When asked if he was in great pain, he said, "Indeed I am, but I thank God for giving me the grace to suffer; I need it so much!"



## **The Death of a Saint**

In the ninety-first year of a life dedicated to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the miracle man sensed his imminent departure from this vale of tears. Late in 1936, he told one of the priests in his order that Christmas of that year would be his last in this life. Once, when he passed the tiny hospital of Saint-Laurent, he commented, "What a fine place for patients to prepare for death." At 8:30 in the evening of December 31, the wonder worker who cured so many was himself admitted to that very hospital for what the physician thought was a mild heart attack, but was later diagnosed as acute gastritis.

He spent his dying days as he had spent his whole life, unconcerned with his own sufferings — which were great, considering that he refused any pain medication — and constantly praying for others. He offered up his prayers and mortifications for Catholic Spain, then being torn asunder by civil war, prior to General Franco's defeat of the Communists. He also prayed for the Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, who was sick and near to death. With friends at the side of his

own deathbed telling him how much he was still needed, the good brother said, “There is one who is far more necessary than Brother André in this world: that is the Pope. If the Holy Father passed away, it would be disaster; he still has much to accomplish.”

The Pontiff lived for two more years, years in which he did accomplish much, addressing problems all over the globe: the Germans losing their faith to Nazism, the Mexicans being oppressed by an evil Masonic government, and the even more horrible menace of Communism. On March 19, 1937 — the Feast of Saint Joseph — the Holy Pontiff published *Divini Redemptoris*, an encyclical letter condemning Communism. As if in gratitude for his own recovery and with great confidence in the mighty Patriarch, towards the end of the encyclical Pius wrote,

. . . We place the vast campaign of the Church against world Communism under the standard of Saint Joseph, her mighty Protector.

Like Our Blessed Lord on the Cross, his faithful imitator spoke many words of piety and holy resignation to God’s will during his final agony: “My God how I suffer. . . Heaven is so beautiful that it is worth all the trouble with which one prepares for it. . . How good God is. . . How beautiful. . . How powerful. . .

Mary, Sweet mother, mother of my sweet Savior, be merciful to me and help me . . . Saint Joseph. . . ”

The name of his holy patron was the last intelligible word issued from the holy lips of Blessed André.



**Immortality**

So Brother André died as he had lived, suffering heroically, praying fervently, and even working great cures. The purely spiritual mission of his life became more evident when, during the exposition of his body — which lasted a week — confessionals were filled with repentant sinners who had been away from God's grace too long. Not only at the Oratory, but all over Montreal sinners were returning to God in great numbers as more than one million people streamed past his poor little coffin. Some of these people had been sworn enemies who had spurned the miracle worker as a fake, having dubbed him, "the old fool on the mountain." The "old fool's" prayers very well may have saved many of these from an eternity without God, just as they may have saved Canada from the clutches of Communism.

Today, the mortal remains of Blessed Brother André lie in a black marble sepulcher in the back of the Oratory, the shrine he dedicated his life to erecting for Saint Joseph. In front of the Basilica towers a statue of Saint Joseph holding the Child Jesus. The millions who file past it every year see on its stone pedestal the words which the saintly old guardian calls out from heaven: ITE AD JOSEPH — GO TO JOSEPH!

**Saint André Bessette, *pray for us!* Saint Joseph, *pray for us!***

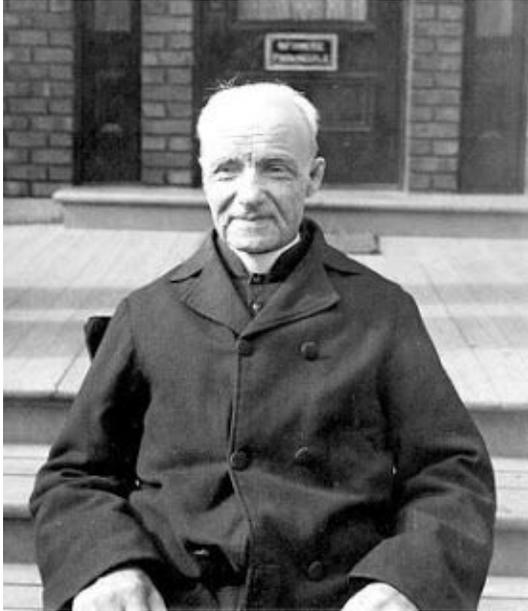
### **Prayer to Saint André for Healing**



Saint André, I come to you in prayer for healing. (state your intention) You were no stranger to illness. Plagued by

stomach problems, you knew suffering on a daily basis, but you never lost faith in God. Thousands of people have sought your healing touch as I do today. Pray that I might be restored to health in body, soul and mind. With St. Joseph as my loving Protector, strengthen my faith and give me peace that I might accept God's will for me no matter what the outcome. Amen.

## Prayer for the Intercession of Saint André



Lord, you have chosen Brother André to spread devotion to Saint Joseph, and to dedicate himself to all those who are poor and afflicted. Grant through his intercession the favor that we now request ... (state your intention) Grant us the grace to imitate his piety and charity, so that, with him, we may share the reward promised to all who care for their neighbors out of love for you. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

[Prayers provided by the Congregation of the Holy Cross [here](#).]

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This contribution is available at <http://www.thescottsmithblog.com/2018/01/saint-andre-bessette-montreals-miracle.html>

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## Laws of life and the road [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

**"And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him."**

OK, so we all, or most of us....no wait, SOME of us abide by the traffic laws: Stopping at red lights, stop signs, and not passing on solid lines. Why we do obey these laws? We believe in them! We believe that they will save lives, prevent accidents, and is the right thing to do. Simple logic, yes?

So, those of us who obey God's commandments obey them because we believe in them. We believe in God and believe they save lives(souls), prevent bad decisions, and is basically the right thing to do. We believe in God, in Jesus Christ and his Word.



Have you ever known people that are not living according to the commandments? Are they happy people? Are they getting anywhere positive? Or do they seem to be simply turning in circles in no real direction?

Now let me show you the last verse in this reading:

1 John 2:11, "But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

Those who chose to abide by the commandment to love God and thy neighbor can SEE clearly the truth. Those who ignore this live in a darkness that gives no love in return. They are blinded by their own decisions. They do not see God in their daily lives, they do not necessarily believe in Him. Perhaps they refuse to believe in him. But see their lives!

With God, there is hope, love, and goodness! With God there is joy! It's not always perfect living, health, and wealth, but without God, well, I don't want to know what life without God is like.

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This contribution is available at <http://acatholicumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2017/12/laws-of-life-and-road.html>

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## Jesus' Birthday Wish List

1. Forgive others
2. Be compassionate
3. Give to those in need
4. Open your heart

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As we near Christmas Day, I want to take some time to wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas! May the celebration of the Incarnation of Christ fill your hearts with His Love, Peace, Joy and Hope. At Christmas, Jesus showers us with many virtues, as His gifts to us. What do you think Jesus would like from you, in return, as His birthday present from you?

Maybe He would like for you to reach out to a relative, or neighbor, who is suffering. You could grace that person with caring compassion. Perhaps He would like for you to forgive a co-worker, or friend, who has wronged you. You could extend that person a little mercy. Might it be a donation to the local food bank/homeless shelter? Consider giving kindness and comfort to those in need. Or perhaps Jesus wants you to open your own heart, in faith and trust, so that He can heal you of a longstanding inner pain.

### **What does Jesus want for His birthday?**

Have you ever given that any thought? We get so “wrapped up” in gift-giving and receiving materialistic things, that we tend to forget that we are celebrating Jesus’ birthday. So, we have a few days left before the big day. Take some time,

and chat with Jesus. Ask Him what He would like for His birthday. Then, deliver on that request, just like you would grant the wishes of everyone on your Christmas shopping list. It will be the best present you give to anyone! From it, Jesus will shower you with many more presents. Merry Christmas everyone!

Note: Due to the Christmas holiday, there will be no post on the 25th.

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

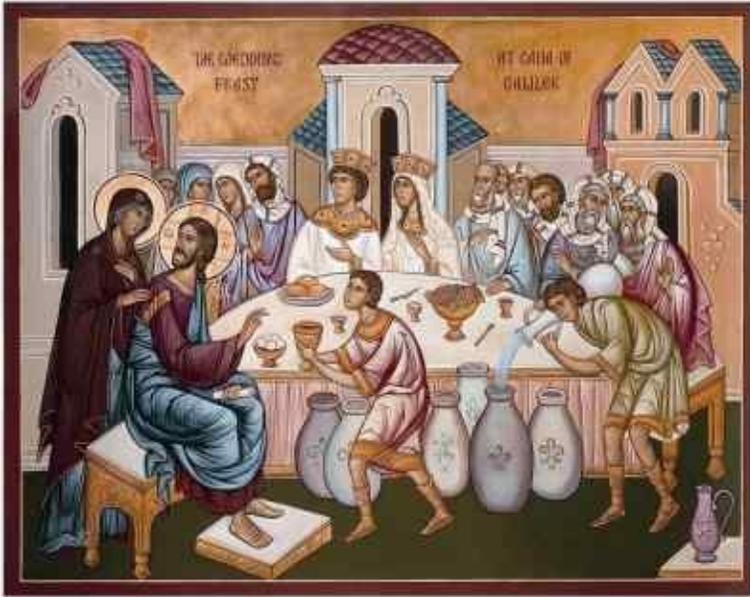
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## Do you have a devotion to Our Lady of Cana?

By Larry Peterson



Wedding Feast at Cana/Our Lady of Cana  
[innsidethevatican.com](http://innsidethevatican.com)

Looking toward the end of the first week of the new year I noticed a feast day that made me take pause. It falls on January 6 and is called Our Lady of Cana. We all know about the Wedding Feast at Cana and how Jesus, at the request of His Mom, performed His first public miracle here. However, I had never heard it called the Feast of Our Lady of Cana.

There are only four instances in the Bible where Mary speaks: first, at the Annunciation; second, at the Visitation; third, when she and Joseph find their twelve-year-old son teaching in the temple; and finally, at the Wedding Feast at Cana, the only time in the entire New Testament when Mary speaks to her son as an adult.

In the Gospel according to John: Chapter 2: 3-5; it reads as follows: *When the wine ran short the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet*

*come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever He tells you.”*

I had never really thought about the significance of the Wedding Feast at Cana. Learning about this day suddenly made me realize I had never fully understood the magnitude and importance of this particular interaction between the Blessed Virgin Mary and her only Son, the God-Man. This was an incredible moment that happened in the Salvation story.

Christ, The Redeemer and King of the Universe, defers to His mom. She did not even have to discuss with Him what she had asked Him. She simply told Him what the situation was and then, without responding to His question, told the stewards to do whatever He told them.

He acquiesced to her request and they followed His orders. Imagine that; The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, honors, without question, a simple peasant woman, who had been given the ultimate tribute of giving Him human life.

The Wedding Feast at Cana and the [Feast of Our Lady of Cana](#) are completely intertwined. They show us how closely linked together are the Son of God and His earthly Mom. Without her there is no Him. Without Him there is no Salvation. The pathway to Jesus is through Mary. No one who ever existed was ever as close to Jesus as was Mary. Mary is the way for us to get to know Jesus.

It is very significant that Jesus’ first miracle took place at a wedding. He was there with His Mom. She asked Him for His help. Was this not all about family and the importance of marriage? St. Joseph had already passed, so it was Jesus and Mary representing their own family. The bride and groom the had just been joined together as a new family. Mary wanted to help the new family and bring them some joy on their wedding day. Jesus helped her to do so. Since she was given to all of us as our Mother too, does it not follow that she will always be there for each of us no matter what we may need. She will talk to Jesus for us.

For those of you who feel called to the married life maybe you might get together and offer Our Lady of Cana and her Son, Jesus, an invitation to your wedding. On your wedding day, even if you cannot see them, they will be there, guaranteed. If you are already married, ask them over for a simple dinner some evening. They will be there also. Bottom line—keep them in your lives. Just ask Our Lady of Cana to pray for you and you will always be in good hands.

Finally, January 6 is traditionally known as the [Epiphany or “Little Christmas.”](#)

In 2010 , January 6, was also shared with [St. Andre Bessette](#). No matter, this date is still listed as the Feast of Our Lady of Cana and can be found on the Marian Calendar, in the listings of Roman Catholic Saints and among the many Titles of Mary that are listed in encyclopedias. When and where this title was bestowed on Our Lady is still unclear.

Our Lady of Cana, please pray for us all, especially all our families.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.larrypeterson-author.com/2018/01/do-you-have-a-devotion-to-our-lady-of-cana/>

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## The Ongoing Invitation to Conversion [at Creo en Dios!]

The University of St. Thomas's Office for Spirituality sponsors seasonal reflections during [Advent](#) and Lent. I authored today's reflection, based on Isaiah 35. Here is the reflection I wrote:

Today's first Mass reading comes from Isaiah, one of the major prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and one of the great prophets of Advent.

The Book of Isaiah opens with what is a scathing indictment of the people of Israel. In the second verse, we hear the Lord say, "Sons have I raised and reared, but they have disowned me!" And immediately thereafter, God laments: "Ah! sinful nation, people laden with wickedness, evil race, corrupt children! They have forsaken the Lord."

But in that same opening chapter, God also invites: "Come now, let us set things right... Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow." Even in the midst of judgment – while cataloging the great sins of the people and the extent to which they have fallen away – is the promise that things do not have to be this way.

Today's first reading captures something of the promise of better things to come. "The desert and the parched land will exult... streams will burst forth in the desert... those whom the Lord has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing... sorrow and mourning will flee."

What strikes me as I pray with Isaiah's indictment of the people of Israel is that our society is not very different from the society that Isaiah witnessed. A world that in many ways has turned its back on God, replacing God with the idols of rampant individualism and money. A world that rewards promotion of the self to the exclusion of others; that encourages individual pursuits vs. communal goals. A world where we worship much that is not good, much that is not God.

Yet, there is still God's promise. One preacher summarizes Isaiah's Advent message like this: "No matter how much the world shatters into pieces, we carry in ourselves a vision of wholeness that we all sense is our true home and that

welcomes us. ‘I have called you by name and you are mine.’”

And just as Isaiah called the people to prepare the way of the Lord, we are called to do the same – not only in Advent, but in each day of our lives. Isaiah’s vision of the kingdom requires our active participation. We don’t get to just sit around complacently and wait for the vision to become reality. Instead, we are called to labor with God to make it so. God continues to work through us to prepare for Christ’s reign.

Note: You can read the daily reflections [here](#); you can also subscribe to receive them by e-mail.

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This contribution is available at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com/2017/12/11/the-ongoing-invitation-to-conversion/>  
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## Faith Conversations: Harvesting hope - Family founds nonprofit [at Peace Garden Passage]

“On a good night, you can see the Northern Lights where the Mary grotto is, and you should see the sunsets in the summertime, setting on top of the trees,” Jason says. “It’s really every little boy’s dream.”

And every girl’s too, he adds, recalling the group of sixth-grade girls who discovered the joy of playing in the mud. “They loved it. They talked about it for days with their parents, and they stunk because, well, mud’s stinky,” he chuckles.

Their home encompasses 13 acres of wooded property in an area thought to be a former path of the Red River, replete with rolling terrain and a creek bed, where cattails and chokecherry and gooseberry bushes intermix with oak trees, and “wild plum that tastes like sugar in the fall.”

It didn’t seem right to keep the gift to themselves, they say, so after praying and plotting, they’re making this place — which they share with chickens, and, soon, sheep and possibly pigs — the setting for a nonprofit for others to enjoy, and where they hope to help find a cure for Huntington’s Disease.

Lynn was only 13 when Huntington’s — a genetic disease that kills brain cells, leads to early death and has no cure — claimed her mother’s life.

“She was diagnosed when I was in 4th grade. I don’t remember her ever being well,” Lynn says.

The loss nudged her to secretly dream of becoming a doctor and discovering the cure for the disease, which also ended her sister Lisa’s life.

Instead, she went into counseling, and currently licenses foster homes for Lutheran Social Services.

But the dream of helping eradicate the disease never left.

“Now, we could potentially be a part of finding that cure,” Lynn says, explaining

the providential discovery of Shepherd's Gift, a nonprofit in South Dakota that raises sheep for Huntington's Disease research.



Olivia Kotrba gathers eggs from the chicken coop at Harvest Hope Farm. David Samson / The Forum

Harvest Hope Farm, the Kotrbas' recently-formed nonprofit, will be multi-purposeful, involving also a farm camp for children, ages 7 to 15, who will raise their own vegetables, interact with farm animals and commune with nature, starting in May.

The initial flock of sheep they'll obtain in March through Shepherd's Gift all will arrive pregnant, Lynn explains, giving the children a chance to help bottle-feed lambs and shear sheep.

"We're going to put collars on the sheep and let the kids walk them; they're very docile," Lynn says, noting the benefits for children dealing with emotional issues.

Kim Kangas, an animal scientist on the board, says her 17 years of working on sheep pregnancies should serve the project well. "I do think there's some Holy Spirit working here, making sure things are gelling really nicely," she says.

She'll also educate visitors on the therapeutic benefits of animals, and other ways they enrich our lives, including through food.

"I'm amazed," Lynn notes, "at how many kids have asked, 'You get eggs from your chickens? Don't they come from the store?'"



Joseph Kotrba sprints ahead of his siblings on a walk through the woods at Harvest Hope Farm. Dave Samson / The Forum

A faith component will involve spiritual retreats and other chances for reprieve. An outdoor “Rosary Walk,” installed by local student Matthew Fischer as part of his Eagle Scout project, will provide a special place to pray.

Lynn says she hopes Harvest Hope Farm will be visited by a diverse group of people, from kids who “want to just come out because they think it would be fun,” to those who might “benefit from being able to pet an animal, run around and play in the dirt.”

Though many needs still exist, including financial help to get the project fully off and running, the couple says by God’s hand, Harvest Hope Farm will become what it’s meant to.

For now, they’ll just keep stepping out in faith, like Jason does every morning to feed and water the chickens before heading to Holy Spirit Catholic School, where he serves as principal.

“It’s really a release for me. You should see the stars at 6 o’clock in the morning,” he says.

“I just want to be grateful and appreciative of what I have,” Jason adds. “I see this growing in me, and turning in me, to give God’s grace to others. I don’t know how it’s going to end up. I just know it’s the right thing to do. So, I’m going to live it and just trust.”

*[For the sake of having a repository for my newspaper columns and articles, I reprint them here, with permission, a week after their run date. The preceding ran in The Forum newspaper on Nov. 25, 2017.]*

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2017/12/faith-conversations-harvesting-hope-family-founds-nonprofit-farm-to-aid-huntingtons-disease-research/>  
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## Advent or Advil?



*“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” — Matthew 11:28*

All the way to the Saturday vigil Mass Diane and I discussed the details of preparing for Christmas. With a three and a half month old and a three and a half year old, the details were exhausting.

We had to make sure we had diapers, formula, shampoo, and wipes. We purchased two car seats, a high chair and bedding that still needs setup. As Mass began, I couldn't help but think about everything that I still needed to do.

That's when my friend Deacon Roger's homily story hit home!

Deacon Roger was teaching a religion class at the grade school next door to the church. He explained that the four weeks that proceeded Christmas was a liturgical season.

He asked the second graders, “Do you know the name for this season?” ... Silence!

“Alright then, how about a clue? The season starts with the letter A.” Again, silence!

Once again he added, “And, the second letter is D.”

This time Andrew from the back of the classroom threw up his hand! “I know, he exclaimed Advil!”

He exclaimed, "Advil."

After the congregation stopped laughing, I asked myself if my season has been Advent or Advil. And, that day it was Advil!

How do we keep the season more Advent and less Advil? Here are a few things we can try.

Let's block out some time each day to be quiet and enjoy the day. I like to sit in our living room and reflect on the manger scene on the coffee table.

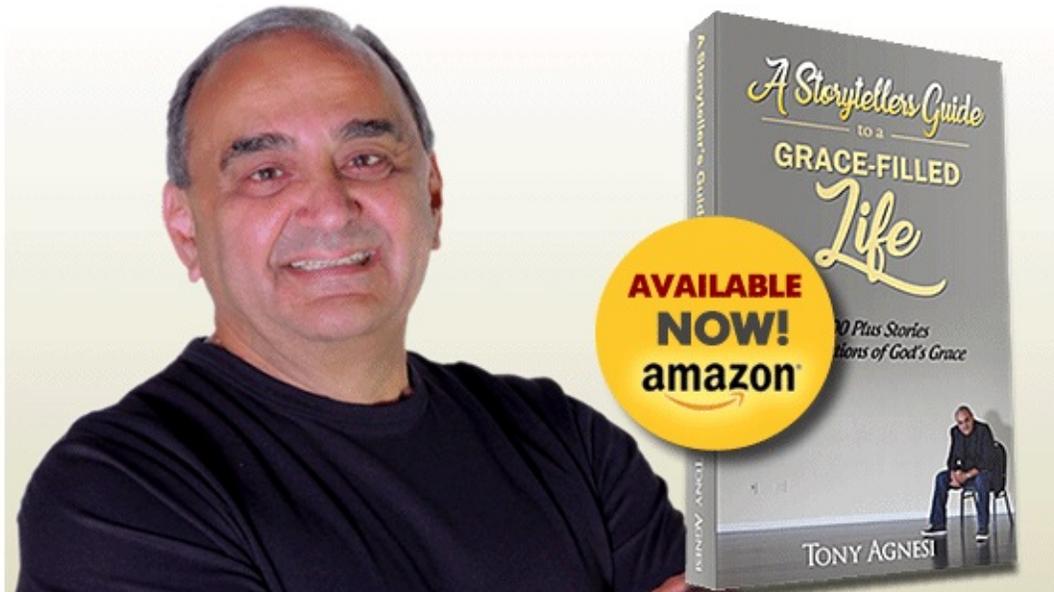
In the anticipation of out-of-town guests, we get fixated on everything that we need to do. Let's not get hung up on the details and miss enjoying their presence. The details will all work out.

I am going to work hard at keeping the season about Advent. How about you? Are you in the middle of the Advent season or the Advil one?

Thanks, Deacon Roger for the reminder!

***A Storytellers Guide to a Grace-Filled life* is available at Amazon.com in both trade paperback and Kindle editions.**

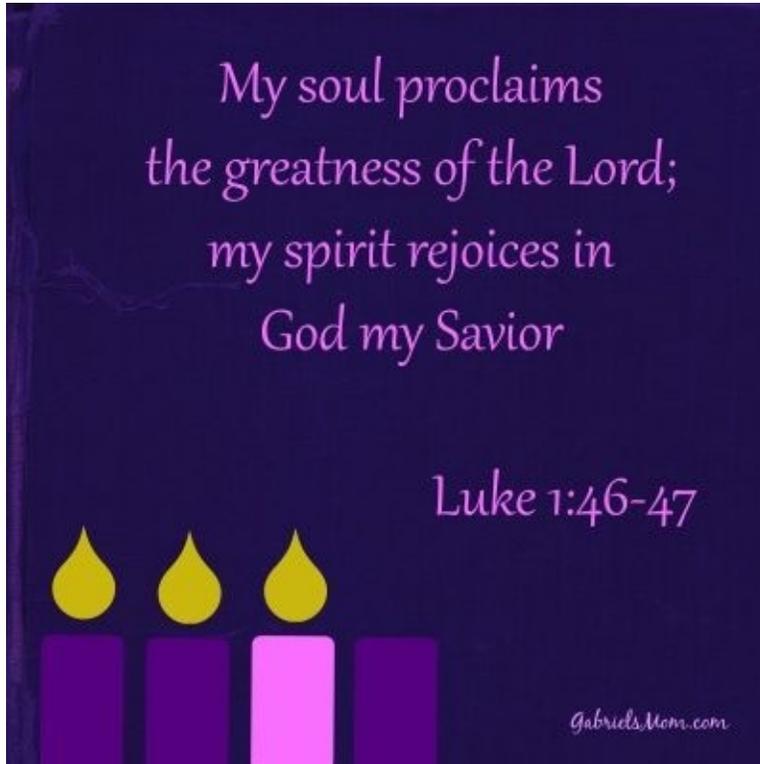
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## When It's Hard to Rejoice



A few days ago, we celebrated Gaudete Sunday. The name comes from the first word of the introit, or opening antiphon, on the Third Sunday of Advent. “Gaudete in Domino semper.” (Rejoice in the Lord always.) Instead of text from a psalm, our responsorial reading is from the Gospel according to St. Luke. It is Mary’s Magnificat... “My soul proclaims the greatness of my God; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”



Now, in all truthfulness, my week did start out with much rejoicing. I attended the vigil Mass on Saturday night at a nearby parish where the pastor was celebrating the 25th anniversary of his ordination. The music was lovely, and the priest was clearly moved and humbled by the occasion. Afterwards, over 200 people, brothers and sisters in Christ, continued to celebrate with a big meal, delicious wine, and live music. I slept in a bit in the morning, but enjoyed breakfast at the local Knights of Columbus and the inaugural meeting of our new Lay Dominican chapter. (More on that in a later post.) After our OP meeting, my husband and I went to Gabriel's grave site to leave some Christmas greenery. We then headed home and decorated our tree. Rejoice!

I spent much of Monday making Christmas cards and watching Netflix. I should have been writing here, but with just two hands, I have yet to figure out how to stamp and blog at the same time. Imagine that!

But yesterday quite suddenly, my heart struggled to rejoice. Tragic news hit our family: one of our nephews was in a major car accident. He was in surgery for seven hours last night. He is still in ICU, and has a very long road to recovery. I went to Adoration tonight, and also to Confession. I was overcome with shame for the times I grumble about arthritic pain or the growing weakness in my legs. Yes, these physical realities have always been a part of my life, even the progressive nature of my condition, but it is so different when an injury is unexpected. My struggles seem so minute now.

Rejoice...always? This is what we are told to do in the sacred Scriptures. I do not believe God wants us to ignore our sorrow or anguish. God weeps with us.

He understands the burdens on our hearts and minds. He is not clueless, nor cold and distant.

So why does His Word say “rejoice always...and again I say rejoice”? Because God wants us to know that He will not ignore us in our time of trial. He will embrace us...if we allow Him to. He will lift us up in some way. Perhaps not in the way we hope, but certainly in the way we need.

Rejoice...God will not abandon you.

Rejoice...God will strengthen you.

Rejoice...God knows absolutely everything you need, and He will supply everything you need.

Rejoice...God still has a remarkable plan for your life, even if you find yourself on a detour.

Rejoice...God will send you people to help you, to encourage you, maybe even to nag you.

Rejoice...God. Loves. YOU!

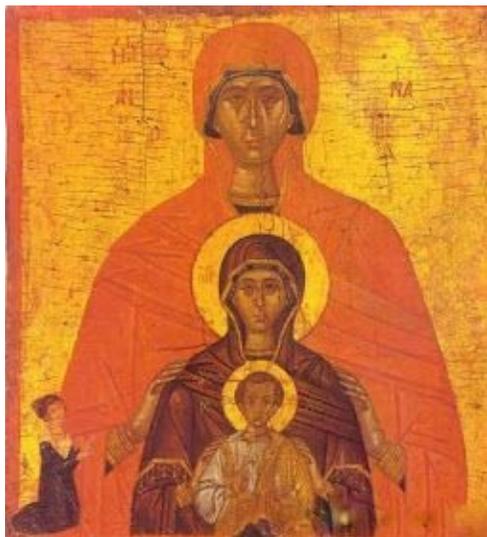
Yes...rejoice in the Lord always. Gaudete in Domino semper!

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This contribution is available at <http://gabrielsmom.com/2017/12/when-its-hard-to-rejoice/>  
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## Every conception is an act of God [at Blog of the Dormition]



Who are the mother and the brethren of the Lord Jesus? Those who hear the word of God and keep it are his mother and his brethren, says the Lord (Luke 8:21). Foremost among these is the Theotokos. She *is* the one who hears the word of God and keeps it.

Witness: the angel Gabriel comes from God with God's message that Mary the virgin will conceive in her womb Jesus the Son of God. And Mary says, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your *word*.” She hears the word of God and keeps it. She receives the word of God into her own body and gives him flesh. The word – who was in the beginning and who was with God and who was God – was made flesh in her womb and dwelt among us. She who is uniquely the Theotokos hears the word of God and keeps it in a unique way. And so she is uniquely the mother of the Lord.

Today, we reflect that even before she became the mother of the Lord by hearing his word and keeping it, she was the daughter of the Lord. Before she was

*Theotokos*, she was *θεόπαις*. Before she conceives God in her womb, she is conceived in the womb of her mother Anna in the natural way by the seed of her father Joachim – yet also miraculously and by the hand of God.

“Today the whole world celebrates how Anna becomes a mother by the power of God. She conceived the woman whose conception of the Word is beyond our words” (Kontakion of the feast).

The truth is, every conception is an act of God. I find it just a little irksome when I hear new mothers and fathers say things like, "Look what we made!" about their newborn babies. Better, I think, is what Eve says after she conceives and bears her first child, "I have gotten a man from the Lord" (Genesis 4:1). The Lord is the author of every human life. Our children do not belong to us. They belong to the Lord.

But sometimes the Lord really underscores the fact of his essential and central role in every conception. This is never more evident than in the case of the conception of Jesus in the virginal womb of his mother Mary. There has only ever been one virgin birth. God only ever became man in the womb of one woman.

But there were many miraculous conceptions before this – pointing to it and preparing for it – and none of them is more significant than the conception of Mary by the holy and righteous Anna, which we celebrate today.

God alone creates his own mother. As a son, in his humanity, Jesus is obedient to the command of the Lord to honor his mother and his father, yet he alone can and does honor his mother even in his divinity. Among other ways, he honors his mother by the extraordinary circumstances of her conception.

Anna was barren and older and had lived in marriage with her husband Joachim for 20 years without conceiving any child. “They prayed to God with their whole heart” for deliverance from “the anguish of childlessness” and for the “fruit of the womb.” They promised, if heard and remembered by the Lord, to “offer the child as a sacred gift” to the Lord in his Temple (Ikos of the feast). Then, the same angel that would later reveal to Mary that she was to bear God in her womb – Gabriel – appears to both Joachim and Anna separately and tells them both that in answer to their prayers, a daughter will be born to them.

In some ways, this is a familiar story for which there are several prototypes in the Old Testament. One of them concerns another Anna – also called Hannah – whose feast day, not merely coincidentally, is also today. She, too, dwelt a long time in marriage – to her husband Elkanah – but was childless. Her womb was closed and this greatly grieved her. So with deep distress and bitter tears she prayed to the Lord and vowed to him that if the Lord would give her a son then she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life (1 Samuel 1:10-11). And the Lord did remember her and she conceived and bore a son and called his name Samuel, saying, "I have asked him of the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:19-20).

Another example is the conception of Isaac in the womb of Sarah in her extreme old age. I think of Sarah and Hannah and Anna and Elizabeth whenever an older couple receives the mystery of crowning. Our Byzantine wedding service is filled with prayers for the conception of children, which can feel a little awkward if the bride and groom are no longer in their childbearing years. Sometimes, hearing these prayers, people will laugh like Sarah laughed at the notion of such a conception. But we can always remember – there are precedents. All children are conceived by the power of the Lord, and nothing is impossible for the Lord.

The many miraculous conceptions in the Old and New Testaments set apart the ones thus conceived for the Lord's purposes. Each of these miraculous conceptions indicates a person who has been given to God's people and not only to their own mother and father. Isaac, son of Sarah, is a patriarch through whom the Lord fulfills his covenant with Abraham. Samuel, son of Hannah, is the

prophet who anoints David King of Israel – David from whom Joseph and Mary and Jesus, the King of Glory, are descended. And Mary, daughter of Anna and handmaid of the Lord, is the Theotokos.

Mary is the holy mountain planted in the womb of Anna; she is the divine ladder there set up; the throne of the great king made ready; the city into which God will enter; and the unburnable bush beginning to bud forth (Sticherion of the feast). So, let us glorify Anna in faith – the mother of the mother of God and the bearer of the Theotokos, the ground upon which is built the living temple of the Lord.

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This contribution is available at <http://holydormition.blogspot.com/2017/12/every-conception-is-act-of-god.html>

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## Someday's here; now what?

My neighbors' generators hum in the background as I rummage through a pile of work assignments in search of one I can perform without benefit of internet. The power's out, after an overnight storm. As a freelance writer and researcher, I find the lack of internet access nettlesome. Even cell service is affected today.

It's quiet as I select the files I can work on. Only a few billable hours in there, but that's better than nothing. I can work without distractions. The only device at hand is a pen.

As I realize that, it occurs to me that I've spent much of my life wishing for days like this. I was sure that if I only had more peace and quiet, less need for structured time, I could...fill in the blank: pray more, study more Scripture, read more devotions, study Church history. I'd go on retreats. I'd have time for more than a morning offering before diving into the day.

I am blessed with children, and grateful for them. I was blessed to be their "stay-at-home" mom. My husband made that possible. Parenthood never ends once launched, but my kids are now grown. The intense day-to-day five-kids-at-a-time whirlwind is behind me. I distinctly remember thinking in the midst of that whirlwind that someday, things would slow down. Someday, I'd have quiet days to work on other things.

So what am I doing this quiet day? Setting up to work, that's what. No work, no pay. The power outage nonetheless leaves me a few hours of open time. What to do?

Draft a pitch to a client. Cull no-longer-useful files. Practice a presentation I'm scheduled to give in a few weeks. The to-do list lengthens.

The quiet day I used to call "someday" is here, and I'm finding all kinds of things to do besides the Mass and prayer and study I was sure I'd spend my somedays doing.

The very intensity of today's quiet – no phone, no apps, no flickering screen – is forcing me to pay attention to what I'm doing, which quickly leads me to what

I'm *not* doing.

I pick up my rosary, trying to put aside thoughts of clients and presentations and when might I get electricity back.

This “someday” stuff is hard. I thought for sure it would be easy, maybe even come naturally. Here I am, though, alone in silence but for the hum of generators down the street. I'm pacing and praying aloud in an effort to turn my attention to God and turn away from the to-do list.

Someday, it turns out, is a matter of intention. Anything less is merely a wish.

As I recite another Hail Mary, a voice inside me is mocking me for ever thinking that someday, all I'd want would be time to live my faith more fully.

Stripped of intention, left to my own undisciplined habits, my spiritual life keeps receding into one someday after another.

What was it St. Paul wrote to the Romans? *The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not.*

Any resemblance to present company is purely coincidental.

I doggedly finish the Joyful Mysteries. I stop pacing. I sit down, pick up pen and paper, and resume work. That comes easily. The prayers didn't.

Maybe that was the best reason to see them through.

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This contribution is available at <http://ellenkolb.com/2017/12/18/somedays-here-now-what/>  
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## Today we observe the Feast of St. Stephen Protomartyr [at Catholic Deacon]

It wouldn't be Christmastime here on Καθολικός διάκονος without a post on 26 December, the Feast of St. Stephen, patron of this blog. Stephen, by way of reminder, was one of the seven Greek-speaking men, filled with the Holy Spirit, who was chosen by the primitive Christian community and set apart by the Apostles for service to the community (see

[Acts 6:1-7](#)

).

The specific reason the primitive Church selected and set apart the seven was to heal a breach between the (presumably) Aramaic-speaking widows (i.e., "the Hebrews") and Greek-speaking widows. The Greek-speaking widows believed themselves to have been receiving the short-end of the stick in the daily distribution of food in the midst of a community that held all things in common. The seven were chosen so that the Apostles, rather than attend to this dispute, could devote their time to prayer and evangelization, both activities being described in the original Greek as

*diakonia*

. It bears noting that, while the service they were called to engage in is referred to as

*diakonia*

, nowhere in the passage are the seven referred to as

*diakonos*

(i.e., deacons). Dealing with multi-cultural and polyglot stresses, given the Gospel's universal scope, have been present in the Church from the beginning;

*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*

.

But in short order, the Acts of the Apostles relate how two of the seven men whom the Church recognizes as the first deacons, though the name "deacon," in Greek

*diakonos*

, is never applied to them directly- though what they were initially set apart to do (serve the widows at table) is described as

*diakonein*

- also begin to preach and evangelize. The two whose subsequent exploits were written down and handed-on were Stephen and Philip. Before the end of the sixth chapter of Acts, Stephen is already stirring people up with his proclamation of salvation in Christ Jesus (see

[Acts 6:8-15](#)

) It is in the

[seventh chapter of Acts](#)

that Stephen's evangelizing is described. The entire seventh chapter, which consists of 60 verses, is taken up with Stephen's preaching, the response, ending with his martyrdom.

When it comes to the Acts of the Apostles, I am of the Martin Hengel school, which holds that the book is rather more than less accurate account of the primitive Church (see

[\*Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity\*](#)

). Hence, I believe that we find in Stephen's preaching, which is set forth in Acts 7:1-53, consists of a fairly comprehensive laying out of the Gospel

*kerygma*

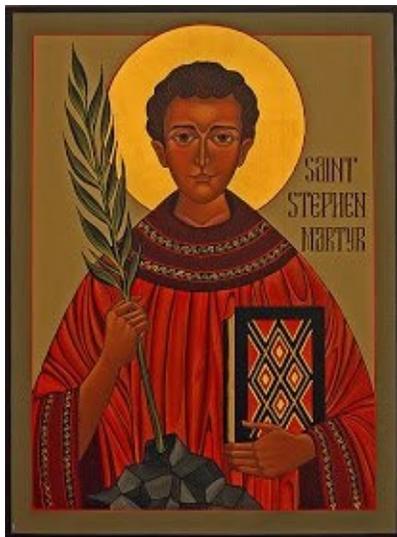
(

*kerygma*

refers to the primitive Church's preaching, its laying out of the essential Gospel message). Stephen was Greek-speaking Jew. His preaching is a surprisingly detailed account of what we now call salvation history, which culminated with Jesus's birth.

Stephen ended his preaching discourse by saying to those within his hearing:

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always oppose the holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They put to death those who foretold the coming of the righteous one, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. You received the law as transmitted by angels, but you did not observe it ([Acts 7:51-53](#))



"When they heard this," the inspired author related, "they were infuriated, and they ground their teeth at him" (

[Acts 7:54](#)

). Grinding their teeth at him seems to indicate they were moving toward him, intent on violence. As they ground their teeth, Stephen cried out that he saw "the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (

[Acts 7:56](#)

). Because, to his Jewish hearers, what he was saying seemed blasphemous, "they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears, and rushed upon him together" (

[Acts 7:57](#)

). They grabbed him, drug him outside the city, and at the instigation of one Saul of Tarsus, who makes his first appearance in the New Testament in

[Acts 7:58](#)

, they stoned Stephen to death. As they threw rocks at him, in

*imitatio Christi*

, the man chosen because he was filled with the Spirit, implored: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (

[Acts 7:60](#)

). Then he died.

More than 10 years ago, on 10 January 2007, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a

[Wednesday catechesis on St. Stephen, the Church's Protomartyr](#)

. In this message, our then-Holy Father said:

Stephen's story tells us many things: for example, that charitable social commitment must never be separated from the courageous proclamation of the faith. He was one of the seven made responsible above all for charity. But it was impossible to separate charity and faith. Thus, with charity, he proclaimed the crucified Christ, to the point of accepting even martyrdom. This is the first lesson we can learn from the figure of St Stephen: charity and the proclamation of faith always go hand in hand.

Above all, St Stephen speaks to us of Christ, of the Crucified and Risen Christ as the centre of history and our life. We can understand that the Cross remains forever the centre of the Church's life and also of our life. In the history of the Church, there will always be passion and persecution. And it is persecution itself which, according to Tertullian's famous words,

becomes "the seed of Christians", the source of mission for Christians to come

Historically, 26 December, the day on which Good King Wenceslas looked out, is a day to celebrate deacons and their service, their

*diakonia*

.

As a deacon, whose middle name from birth (my Dad's given name), is Stephen, and the patron of whose blog "Catholic Deacon" is St. Stephen, I say today and everyday-

*Sancte Stephane, ora pro nobis.*

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This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2017/12/today-we-observe-feast-of-st-stephen.html>

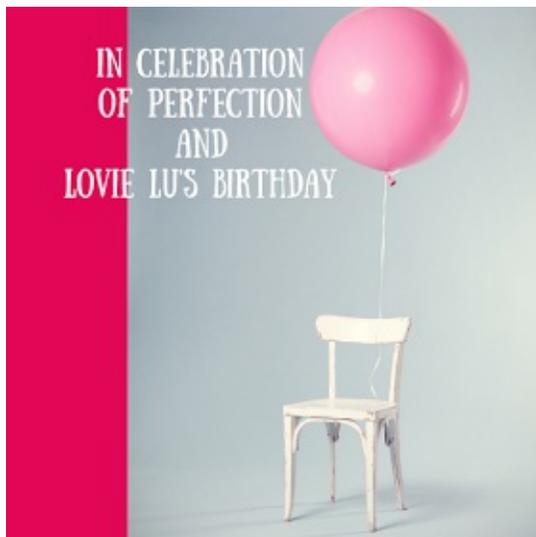
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## In Celebration of Perfection and Lovie Lu's Birthday [at Veils and Vocations]

Time is flying, isn't it? September quickly becomes February. October melts into April. Blink and a whole year has passed!

I have been wanting to post about Advent and Christmas preparations, but the time has just slipped through my fingers. Speaking of time--can you believe my new baby girl turned 1??? I can't either. How could a whole year have passed?



**Party Planning** Although I tried so hard to make this day not show up, to keep her little and let the months stretch out forever, time has a way of marching on and babies have a way of growing. Even though I didn't want to think about her birthday, I couldn't help planning her party. Before she was born, I had picked up a child sized tea cup for Lovie Lu. It is a precious little thing of white china with pink roses and a gold rim. From that little trinket, I planned a whole party--a very first, very frilly tea party! There were nights that I lay awake planning which tea cups would go on which table, how the tables would be arranged, which linens and laces I could use. I rifled through my draws of tableclothes and runners. Gently leafed through the linens that I had taken from my grandmother's home and the doilies my great grandmother made. I searched through my china cabinet and the cedar chest that hold my mother and grandmother's china set for my girls. With all these little treasures, I planned a party fit for a very special

princess. I didn't have much to spend in the way of money, but I made up for that with hard work and creativity--and a little crystal, too! Lovie Lu had a tea party shower complete with china and silver, why not do the same for her birthday? In my humble opinion, it was magical, it was beautiful, it was perfect! **EXCEPT** Except that perfection doesn't exist this side of heaven. A sweet little baby all wrapped in hope and heavenly scents is about as close as we come, but even there, perfection eludes us. In my desire to have the perfect party, I could not wait to share the beauty of the day. I longed to pour over the photos as my little girl poured over her cards, examining each one and squealing with delight. I dreamt of my magazine worthy prints, my fabulous post, my awe inspiring Facebook share. I could see in my mind how all would look. How everyone would ooh and aah over my special celebration. My baby girl is priceless, her party and photos would show the world just that! I lost the forest for the trees! **More Than That and So Much More** Just as each of my children are more than a number, more than just moments or victories or social media likes--the true celebration of my daughter's birth was more than a collection of photos to rival the pages of Martha Stewart's magazine. The celebration was a treasury of memories. An opportunity to thank God for all we had been blessed to have, all those prayers and wishes come true...all those moments that linger in my heart! You see...those perfect pictures, the ones I saw in my mind as drool worthy...that was all pride! And God made sure I didn't get puffed up! Every photo came blurry. Vignettes that I worked hard to create were missed by my resident, family photographer. I felt such disappointment...such melancholy. I gave up on the custom outfit. I gave up on the perfect cake and the Pinterest decorations. We used e-vites instead of engraved invitations. There were so many little touches and treats that I sacrificed for the good of the family, for our meager budget's sake---now even the photos were offered up!



## **Sharing the Good News, Not the Perfect**

How could I share these? How could I scrapbook them and have my grandchildren enjoy this little fruit of my labor from long ago? Why could something just not be perfect after so much planning?

Because, my child, this world is broken!

Only I AM perfect, only with Me are things whole!

--God

You see I was chasing an allusion! I wanted the support of man to cover the multitude of sins that are my life. Facebook likes and blog shares don't equal perfection. This blog is not about making people think I am better--or at least that was never it's intent--it is my little apostolate to spread His good news, not mine!

The photos weren't out of focus--I was!



## **JOY, JOY, JOY....and St Philip Neri**

When I became pregnant with Lovie Lu, I had a strong pull to St Philip Neri. In prayer, his name was laid on my heart several times. Little coincidences--or

God-incences--put his story before me, when I had never even thought of this good saint before.

I began to believe that we must be having a boy who was meant to be named Philip....but baby was a girl! I dug into St Philip's story, wondering why he was the one God kept pointing out to me. You know what one of St Philip Neri's patronages is? JOY! Yes, joy!

Those of you who know me in real life, know how joy filled Lovie Lu is. She is the most lighted filled child I have ever known. Everywhere we go, people comment on how happy she is, how her smiles lights up the room. Everyone she meets is touched by her love.





These photos would never capture who she really is or the wonder of her year with us. They could never really show how her face beamed and lip quivered when everyone sang to her. How she was overcome with emotion at seeing all her loved ones gathered just for her. A photograph would never tell the story of how she took each card and "read" it, sliding her finger under the words, pointing out each design and print or how she hugged those cards to her heart and smiled at each family member who had given it to her. That, my dear readers, is pure joy!





### **And She Pondered All These in Her Heart**

I don't have the words for how amazing of an experience this little party was, and it isn't because of anything that I could have captured in a perfect photoshoot. My Lovie Lu has lived up to her nickname, and patron, she was love and joy!

The heirloom china, the perfectly pink tablecloth, the miniature cakes and artfully set tables...those were nice, but it would have been just a grim gathering had it not been for the gift of my sweet child.

I don't know what God has planned for her, but I believe it is something great!

In my heart there are memories that will warm me all my days...no matter how imperfect the party and pictures were.

We aren't called to be perfect, we are called to love. That I learned from a little child...the Christ child, Our Savior whose birthday is just days away, who came not into a picture perfect palace but a humble, lowly stable. That Christ child is my LORD and I will never be able to thank Him enough for that precious gift, but it took another child, my precious girl, to remind me just what life and Christmas are all about!

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This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2017/12/in-celebration-of-perfection-and-lovie.html>

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## Make straight his paths

When I was 5 my family moved into an old farmhouse on a large patch of land, replete with a barn and lots of wildlife in the back lot. Unfortunately some of the wildlife had become comfortable inside the house, and it took a few years to fully rid ourselves of a mouse problem.

Just days before my brother was due, my mother opened a kitchen drawer out of which scampered a small dark mouse, which ran up her arm and off her shoulder, giving her (and my brother, in utero), the fright of a lifetime. Though my brother has matured into a perfectly normal young man, for years every childhood peculiarity was laughingly explained by this pre-birth shock.

So is it any wonder that John the Baptist, who nearly jumped out of his skin when his mother Elizabeth encountered Mary and Jesus, turned out a little weird? He ate bugs, looked like a wreck, and spent a lot of time shouting.

His lack of social graces may reveal his singlemindedness: he was intent on preparing the way of the Lord, and didn't seem to care if he scandalized the neighbors in the process.

This time of year I can't help but take a look at all the things that are keeping me so busy: writing, singing, conducting, teaching, running a small arts non-profit, visiting family and socializing with friends. Some days it feels like my life is a jumble of activities, until I step back and see the path of discipleship that these are all a part of. There is a through-line here, one that is universal in its objective and unique in its particular stops along the way. My path may not be straight, but it is trying to lay a flat course out in front of it, one that leads to love and justice.

The encounter with Jesus in the Holy Mass is what shook me first as a child, planting a devotion to the liturgical life of the Church at about the same time that mouse took a flying leap off my mother's shoulder. In college I grew to love Scripture and exegesis, service and the pursuit of social justice. Each of these things hooked me and, in some ways, ruined me for life.

With each year that I spend pursuing God, I, like John the Baptist, get weirder. I am more committed to service and inclusion in my artistic pursuits, more intent

on giving to the poor, more willing to appear "uncool" in speaking out against sexism, racism and materialism. And of course, I talk about God a lot.

As I become increasingly committed to my feeble attempts to make straight the path to Christ, I see ever more clearly the many ways that this may be done. I have found a calling in music and theology, but **each individual, with their passions and skills, can point the way to heaven with whatever is in their toolkit.**

So this Advent I am praying about paths, crooked and straight, those that we follow in discipleship and those that lead others to the incarnate Word, to the Love that sets our hearts on fire.



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This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2017/12/17/make-straight-paths/>  
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## Ready for the Day of Judgment? [at A Spiritual Journey]

We will be judged by God after we die or when Jesus comes next, whichever comes first. When the judgment will take place is not important. What is important is whether we are ready to be judged right now, since either can happen at any time.

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This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2017/12/ready-for-day-of-judgment.html>

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## Doing the Most With and For the Least This Christmas [at Carolyn Astfalk, Author]

I considered whether this post didn't belong in November, the month in which Catholics [traditionally remember the poor souls](#) in Purgatory. Is a reflection on conversion, sacrifice, and [the last things](#) too melancholy for the pre-Christmas season?

But “pre-Christmas” isn't really a season. A marketing device maybe, but not a true season and definitely not a liturgical season. The more I thought, the more I became convinced that [Advent](#) is a perfect time to meditate on sin and conversion.

- **Isn't the Christmas season, despite its joy, a time when many experience sadness and longing for Christmases past and suffer anew the loss of those they loved?**
- **What better preparation is there for Christmas than conversion of heart?**

My brief visit to our hometown at Thanksgiving played like a succession of soft, if persistent, calls to a more profound prayer, sacrifice, and conversion on my part.

The pump was primed, so to speak, by what I'd been reading. I'd finally begun a remarkable little prayer book offered to me months ago for my review: [St. Faustina Prayer Book for the Conversion of Sinners](#) by Susan Tassone (aka “The Purgatory Lady.”)

I'd simultaneously been reading and critiquing a manuscript by my friend and fellow author [Theresa Linden](#). *Tortured Soul*, which I can't wait to see published, is a supernatural thriller, which deftly – and very creepily! – brings to life the plight of the poor souls in Purgatory. Especially those who have no one to pray for them.

As I shuffled through my mother's recently vacated, nearly empty home, gazing

at the remnants of a fifty-year marriage, four children, grandchildren, and decades more of life, I uncovered tangible reminders of a soul's worth.

Family photos of my mother and father with her eight siblings (two were already deceased) and their spouses. My mother alone is still with us.

A rickety night stand drawer with banded stacks of memorial cards marking the entrance to eternal life of dozens of my dad's family and friends. A necrology in blue pen on yellow legal paper of celebrities and movie stars from my dad's youth. Tucked in my mother's dresser drawer, a list of the family members she'd faithfully, annually enrolled in the Miraculous Medal Association. On her desk, envelopes marked remembering her husband, my dad, in perpetual Masses.

While we were in town, we took our children to the cemeteries to visit family members' graves. Under gray November skies, no flowers decorated the graves. Only dead leaves skittered in the wind, collecting in front of the headstones.

This is our end. Ours and everyone we love. Everyone we despise.

Death is a great equalizer.

We prayed for our family members, and my daughter, who had visited our parish cemetery with her classmates the week before, recited a traditional prayer for souls:

***Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord. And may perpetual light shine upon them. And may all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.***

And then our son surprised us by repeating it, in Latin. (So maybe the staggering tuition bills for Catholic school are worth it.)

I'm convinced that though this may be the most financially-strained Christmas I've experienced, I am rich with treasures I can give.

- **What better way is there to remember our loved ones than by praying for them?**

- **What greater kindness can we offer the stranger, those living and deceased, than to pray for them?**
- **When has our culture, ravaged by violence, predation, hate, immorality, and cynicism, so desperately needed our prayers and sacrifices?**

Even my easy, comfortable life is ripe with opportunities for simple prayer and sacrifice. I have here, on my desk, a printout of all of those killed by sniper fire in Las Vegas in October. A little photo and a little obituary. Every person and every grieving loved one left behind an opportunity.

When I ignore the urge to check my cellphone, stay in the slow lane, listen through the song I don't like, or smile through a child's ramblings, I can do good.

When I reject a handful of pretzels, keep a snide remark to myself, or squeeze in a decade of the Rosary rather than mindlessly scrolling through Instagram, I can do good. God can take those little things united to Jesus's sacrifice and do something great with them.

For my own soul, I hope. For the conversion of my family. For the souls of loved ones who have gone before me. And for those in most need of my prayers.

I can't cover that with tinsel or top it with a red bow. It's not easily wrapped, doesn't jingle, and won't fit in a stocking.

But I'm pretty certain its value exceeds whatever any one of us will find under our tree Christmas morning.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.carolynastfalk.com/2017/12/11/doing-the-most-with-and-for-the-least-this-christmas/>

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## No More Sunspots? [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

Sunspots come and go in an 11-year cycle. Our sun has acted that way for centuries. With a few exceptions.

The sunspot cycle changed about 23 years back. I think we'll learn a great deal by studying what's happening, but at this point scientists aren't quite sure what to make of the new 'normal.'



- Where we've been
  - In the news
  - What I think
- 

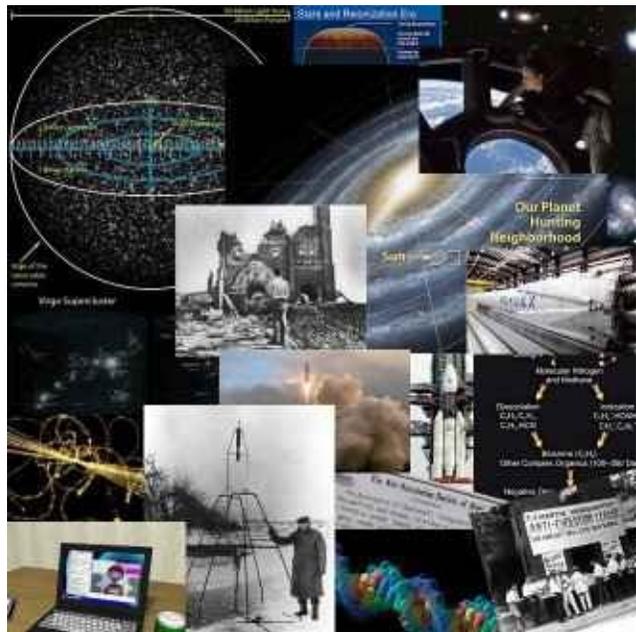
### The Story So Far

We've been studying the great light in our sky and the lesser lights for a very long time. Then, a few centuries back, natural philosophers became scientists.

We're learning that what we had discovered is just part of a vast cosmos.

That seems to bother some folks. I'm not one of them. I **like** living in an era where much of what I learned in my youth is either outdated or simply wrong.

I'll be talking about sunspots, stars, and what we're learning about them. A great deal of that is being uncovered 'now,'



in the years since I was born. But like I said, the basics we've known for much longer.

How long we've known about sunspots depends partly on where you look.

Folks in Korea and China may have observed dark spots on the sun about 28 centuries back. Some scholars think that's how we can read what's in I Ching.

How folks living before today's filters and other tech would examine our sun's surface with comparative safety, I don't know. Maybe something along the lines of a camera obscura.

The trick with observing our sun isn't getting an image big enough to see. It's blocking most of the light so we can see without blinding ourselves.

Theophrastus recorded sunspot observations a few centuries later. He studied with Plato and then Aristotle.

Apparently Theophrastus was more into Aristotle's preference for observation and less attached to Plato's theory of forms. That may help explain why his works were standard references until the Renaissance.

Jumping ahead about a millennium, Adelmus noticed a sunspot, but thought it was Mercury crossing the sun's face. That was in March of 807. I'm pretty sure he's Athelm, a monk who was Archbishop of Canterbury. Or maybe someone else.

John of Worcester, another monk, made the first drawing we have of a sunspot in 1128.

Fast-forward to the 1600s. A bunch of folks observed sunspots during that century, too.

Galileo and Christoph Scheiner both said they saw them first. Both apparently missed that honor by a few millennia, but didn't have today's information storage and retrieval tech. If they'd read I Ching, I like to think they'd have claimed something else as an achievement.

Galileo argued that sunspots were on our sun's surface in his 1613 Letters on Sunspots.

I suspect that helped inspired later accounts of the Church seeing science as a threat. I've talked about Galileo's less-than-winsome personality and 17th century politics before.<sup>1</sup>

Also why I think this universe is billions, not thousands, of years old; Earth isn't flat; Adam and Eve aren't German; and thinking is not a sin. And that's another topic. ([September 23, 2016](#); [August 28, 2016](#); [July 22, 2016](#))

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## Our Inconstant Sun



(From NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

(A solar flare erupting on August 31, 2012)

[“Is the Sun Changing?”](#)

Monica Broba, [Sky and Telescope](#) (January 2018)

“About 290 million years ago, a volcano erupted in what is now eastern Germany. The blast lifted trees straight out of the ground and coated them with liquid rock. Beneath this debris, an entire forest fossilized. Last year, scientists studied tree rings from these ancient trees — but not to learn about Earth. They wanted to learn about the Sun.

“To the naked eye, the Sun looks like a uniform whitish sphere. But the solar surface is often mottled with dark spots, like the peel of a ripe banana. These sunspots emerge, live for a few hours or days (or longer), and then decay. Occasionally, 150 or more spots dot the solar surface. During these times, we observe many eruptions of high-energy radiation and, sometimes, superheated material, which can blast through space and hit the planets. At

superheated material, which can blast through space and hit the planets. At other times, hardly any spots show up at all, and the Sun stays fairly quiet. The Sun smoothly cycles between these two states, ramping the number of sunspots up and down every 11 years....”

Those eruptions of superheated material hit earth’s magnetosphere on occasion. We started calling them coronal mass ejections, CMEs, recently.

They didn’t affect us directly, apart from lighting up the aurora. Not that we know of, anyway. That changed in 1859. Folks had started using telegraphs.

Electrical telegraphs made long-distance communication a whole lot faster than anything we’d had before.

Nearly-instantaneous data transmission helped turn meteorology from a study of past weather to a predictive science. ([August 11, 2017](#))

Telegraphs used a growing web of telegraph lines. Wires and changing magnetic fields interact, and — I am not going to get distracted by the Biot–Savart and Ampère’s circuital laws. The point is that when a wire and/or magnetic field move, we get electrical current.

### Science and Jobs For Humans

On September 1, 1859, astronomers noticed an unusually bright flare on our sun. Auroras that night were spectacular, and seen as far south as the Caribbean.

Scientists noticed a “magnetic crochet,” some telegraph operators got shocked and miners in the Rocky Mountains



mistook the aurora for dawn.

Maxwell published a set of his differential equations around 1860. Röntgen won the 1901 Nobel Prize for discovering X-rays.

The Orbiting Solar Observatory 7's SEC caught a  $256 \times 256$  pixel image on December 14, 1971. A human, David Roberts, eventually noticed it. He figured it was a glitch. Then he saw another one, farther out.

Roberts was an electronics technician, so he had scientists look at the data. They confirmed that it wasn't a glitch. Roberts had spotted the first clear evidence of a CME. ([February 17, 2017](#))

Humans are pretty good at solving 'what's wrong with this picture' puzzles. But AI is getting pretty good at that sort of thing, too. Some AI systems 'look' through the flood of data coming from today's observing tech.

That doesn't mean that folks like Roberts will become obsolete.

Their jobs may, but not the people. I think there'll always be room in science and other fields for our sort of 'smart.'

Robotic road vehicles recently moved from research and development to product design. And that's yet another topic, for another post.



Our jobs, what we do to help others, will keep changing. Some will disappear, or become recreational options. We will keep changing, too: more slowly. But we'll still be 'human,' with the kind of 'smart' that's kept us alive during one of Earth's ice ages.

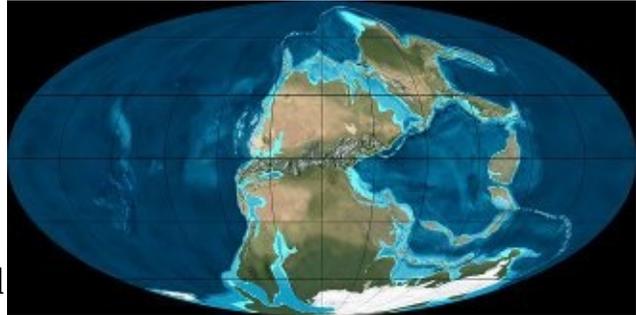
I think the fellow was right.

'Computers are designed to get correct answers based on huge amounts of information, all of which is right. Human brains are designed to get correct answers based on almost no information, most of which is wrong.'

## Forests, Mountains, and Change

About that German volcano, another eruption won't threaten Chemnitz.

My guess is that the Zeisigwald volcano was in a mountain range separating most of Europe from an equatorial ocean, but haven't confirmed that.



The volcano is long since gone, along with the mountain range. The Pyrenees and Alps formed much more recently, and that's yet again another topic.

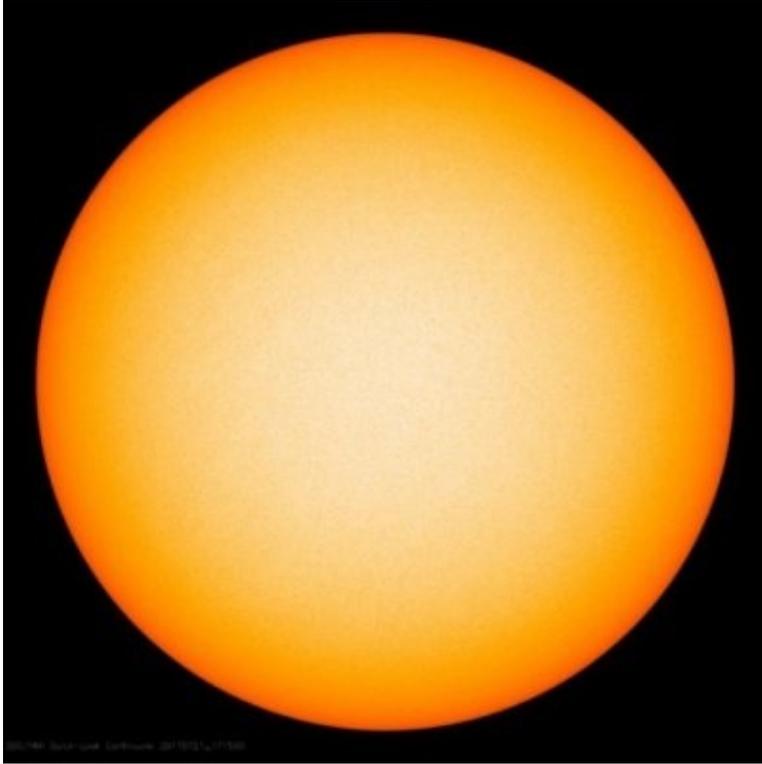
Earth wasn't quite the way it is today. The atmosphere had about 115% more oxygen. The Great Dying wouldn't happen for another 39,000,000 or so years. Pangea wouldn't break apart until tens of millions of years after that. ([June 23, 2017](#))

The territory we call Germany, along with the rest of Europe, was in northern Pangea. Some critters living in the area, like Palaeohatteria, would have seemed familiar. It was about 60 centimeters, two feet, long and looked quite a bit like today's lizards.

The forest itself had trees and undergrowth, like today's woodlands. But forests have changed as the ages rolled past. A lot.<sup>2</sup>

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## A Spotless Sun



(From NASA/SDO/HMI, via Sky and Telescope, used w/o permission.)  
("The spotless Sun of July 21, 2017."  
Sky and Telescope)

["Is Our Sun Slowing Down in Its Middle Age?"](#)

Monica Bobr, Sky and Telescope (July 21, 2017)

**"The Sun, now halfway through its life, might be slowing its magnetic activity, researchers say, which could lead to permanent changes in the sunspots and auroras we see.**

"The Sun has changed its figure, researchers say, and might keep it that way.

"The structure of the Sun's surface, where sunspots live, appears to have changed markedly 23 years ago. That's when solar magnetic activity might have started slowing down, Rachel Howe (University of Birmingham, UK, and Aarhus University, Denmark) and collaborators speculate in paper to appear in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society ([full text here](#))...."

I'm quite sure this isn't a sign in the sky, portending End Times, a somewhat-

tardy Mayan Apocalypse, or cancellation of next year's Super Bowl. I figure it's the start of another Grand solar minimum, or something else. Right now we don't know.

I also figure that “permanent” changes in sunspots aren't likely. Permanent changes in how sunspots change, maybe.

Sunspots have disappeared before. Somewhere along the line we started calling that sort of thing Grand solar minima.

Grand solar minima happen at apparently-irregular intervals. I'm guessing that they're not “random,” but have more complex cycles than the sine-wave-like 11 year maxima and minima we're familiar with. But like I said, right now we don't know.

## Sunspots and Grand Solar Minima

We've noticed that Grand solar minima happen at about the same time as regional or global climate changes.

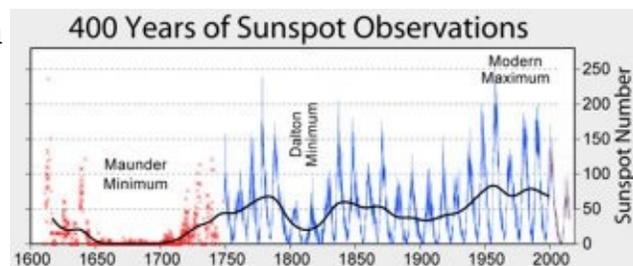
That could be a string of coincidences.

I'd be less surprised if we learn that solar activity affects Earth's climate. It wouldn't be the only factor. I've talked about science, climate change, attitudes, and getting a grip before; and probably will again. But not to day. Not so much.

I put links to a little background near the end of this post. In case you want to read about the the Oort, Wolf, Spörer, Maunder, and Dalton Minima; or Aristotelian physics.<sup>3</sup>

One of these days I'll revisit why I think Earth's climate changes **and** that we should find out more before monkeying with the controls. Not panicking seems like a very good idea — particularly since we've survived some fairly major changes already.<sup>4</sup>

We didn't know about solar minima and maxima, Grand or otherwise, until fairly recently.



They're not mentioned in the Bible, although I wouldn't put it past someone to come up with a 'Biblical' reason for saying they're not real. Maybe Ecclesiastes 1:10. Joel 2:10 might work, too; although that's used more by 'End Times Bible Prophecy' folks.

I'll get back to that, sort of.

I don't see a point in saying that Grand solar minima can't or shouldn't exist. That makes about as much sense to me as believing other worlds can't exist because Aristotle said so, or that we knew everything there is to know about this universe at some arbitrary date.

## A Sense of Scale

I also don't see a point in desperately trying to believe that a 17th-century Calvinist's Bible study proved that this universe started in 4004 BC.

Some folks try, and seem to feel that it's an indispensable aspect of Christian belief.

I think and hope they are sincere. But I am convinced they are wrong.

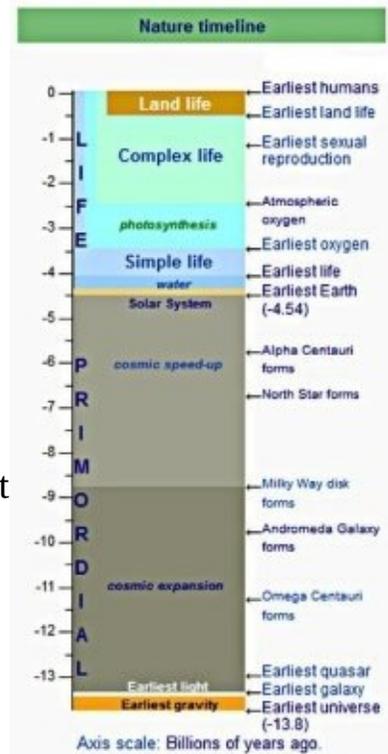
Even if I preferred a tidy little cosmos that was new when Tiān Qiāng sān was Earth's north star, it wouldn't change reality.

Like [Psalms 115:3](#) says, God's large and in charge. I'm okay with that.

Getting back to stars, science, and what we're learning — Emanuel Swedenborg published "The Principia" in 1734.

His ideas about science, intuition, reason, and religion were colorful, putting it mildly. But he also got scientists thinking about what we now call the nebular hypothesis.

Immanuel Kant, Pierre-Simon Laplace and a whole mess of other folks added to

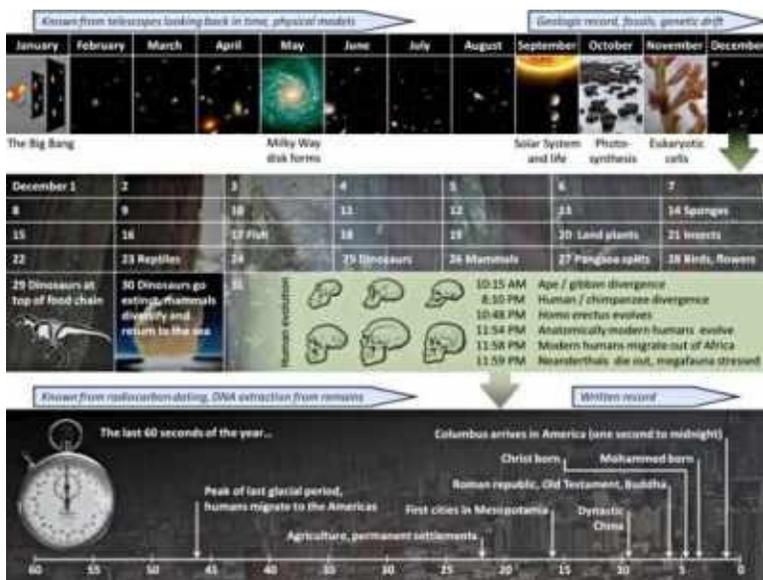


the mix. The nebular hypotheses is still the model that best fits what we've been observing. ([December 9, 2016](#))

Fast-forwarding to the mid-20th century, scientists were getting an increasingly-exact idea of when this universe started. Some scientists, anyway. Hoyle, who thought a steady-state universe made more sense, called Lemaître's hypothèse de l'atome primitif a "big bang."

There's a story behind that, but I'm running short on time. I'll leave it for another post.

### How We Know What We Know

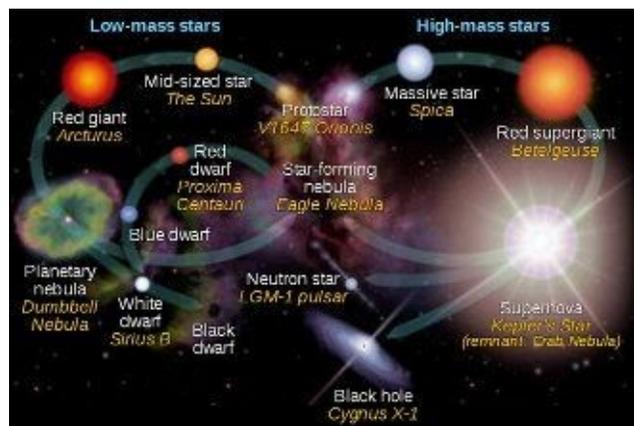


(From Efbrazil, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)  
 (Big bang, 13,800,000,000 years later: mapped onto a 12-month calendar.)

We've been observing our sun and the stars for a long time: long in comparison America's election cycle, anyway.

Looking at time elapsed since this universe started as one year, it's not so long. We didn't show up until "today."

Folks started building cities about 22



seconds back, Copernicus said Earth orbits our sun a second ago — and we've been studying stellar evolution for a fraction of a second.

I don't think we'd have gotten far if our sun was the only star we could observe. Based on what we've seen over the last few centuries, we might conclude that our star didn't change, apart from more-or-less-regular cycles.

Happily, we can see thousands of stars each night: given clear skies and no street lights. More recently we've started studying myriad upon myriad more distant stars. That, and a lot of analysis, lets scientists learn how stars form and change.

Quite recently we've started watching stars that aren't stars yet. We're even pretty sure we've spotted nascent planetary systems.

If I'm going to get this ready in time, I'll have to put off most of what I wanted to say about stars in general, and ours in particular. Also how our star's younger years may have affected life on Earth.

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## Seeking Truth

I said I'll talk about reality, the Bible, and 'End Times Bible Prophecy' folks.

But like I said, I'm running late. I'll mostly talk about the first two, and give the last a 'once over lightly' treatment.

I fine-tuned some of what I thought was so after becoming a Catholic. That's an ongoing process.



But I didn't change anything basic, including how I see truth and reality. For starters, I think reality is real. And that I'm not a figment of your imagination, or vice versa.

That may be hard-to-impossible to demonstrate.

In principle I could convince myself that every argument was an illusion. Or that

I'm something you're imagining, and you're the one thinking my thoughts. Overly farfetched? Maybe, but I've seen some rather odd notions. ([August 13, 2017](#); [February 10, 2017](#))

Part of my job is seeking truth and God. Since all truth points toward God, preserving ignorance isn't a virtue. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, [27](#), [31–35](#), [41](#), [74](#), [2500](#))

I'll find truth in the Bible, sacred scriptures. That's why reading the Bible often is one of my happier obligations. (Catechism, [101–133](#))

## **The Whole Truth**

The Bible is important, but it's not all that's important. I'm a Catholic, so I think faith means willingly and consciously embracing "the whole truth that God has revealed." (Catechism, [142–150](#))

The Bible has God's revealed truth. So does everything we can observe. I'll find truth in the natural world's order and beauty, if I'm paying attention.

Appreciating the world's wonders is a good idea. (Catechism, [32](#), [41](#), [74](#), [283](#), [341](#), [2500](#))



I thought learning how this universe works was a good idea before I became a Catholic, and still do. An interest in science isn't required for our faith, but it sure doesn't hurt.

Each time we learn something new about this wonder-filled creation, it's an opportunity for greater admiration of God's work. (Catechism, [283](#), [341](#))

## **Doing My Job**

Folks who seriously believe the “rapt-cha stuff” aren’t necessarily bumpkins like Non Sequitur’s Eddie.

I don’t know why otherwise-sensible folks occasionally fall for a current ‘End Times Bible Prophecy.’ They pop up fairly often, keep fizzling, and follow pretty much the same script. ([August 23, 2017](#))

I think Jesus is coming back, and that we’ve got work to do in the meantime. Lots of work. ([December 3, 2017](#))

I also take what Jesus said very seriously, including what our Lord said in [Matthew 24:36–44](#), [25:13](#), and [Mark 13:32–33](#).



The way I see it, the timetable for our Lord’s return is available on a ‘need to know’ basis. If Jesus didn’t need to know, I sure don’t.

I don’t mind. That sort of thing strikes me as being a very high-level command decision. I’ve got my hands full, just trying to do my job here; ‘working out my salvation.’ And that’s still another topic.

Some of what we’re learning about this wonder-filled universe:

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<sup>1</sup> Faith, science, and Galileo:

- Wikipedia
- A letter and an international academy
- How I see Galileo and Renaissance politics:

<sup>2</sup> Paleontology and a little stellar physics:

- Wikipedia
- [“Fossil forest reveals sunspot activity in the early Permian”](#)  
Ludwig Luthardt, Ronny Rößler; Abstract; Geology (March 1, 2017)
- [Permian scorpions from the Petrified Forest of Chemnitz, Germany”](#)

Jason A. Dunlop, David A. Legg, Paul A. Selden Victor Fet, Joerg W. Schneider, Ronny Rößler; BMC Evolutionary Biology (April 7, 2016)

- [Alpine Tectonic History](#)

GEOS 427/527, The University of Arizona

- [Aristotle](#)

Alfred J. Freddoso, Professor Emeritus of Thomistic Studies; University of Notre Dame Notre Dame, IN

### <sup>3</sup> Old physics, new knowledge:

- Wikipedia

- [Oort minimum](#)

An Etymological Dictionary of Astronomy and Astrophysics, English-French-Persian; M. Heydari-Malayeri, Paris Observatory

- [Wolf Mimimum](#)

From “A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation” (2 ed.), Chris Park, Michael Allaby; Oxford Reference

### <sup>4</sup> Looking at facts, and thinking:

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This contribution is available at <http://brendans-island.com/catholic-citizen/no-more-sunspots/>  
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## Being All Alone on Family Holidays [at Quiet Consecration]

I have been a widow since August 7, 1987. For more than thirty years I have missed my husband and while I thought I would marry again the honest truth is that Fred is the only man who ever wanted to marry me, a fact I once found puzzling. Quite honestly? It used to make me sad. Not anymore. Today I am grateful that I found him and that we were married, albeit for a short time. Many people never find that person. Many people find them and then blow it. I was blessed. I am grateful for that blessing.

Which is wonderful and oh so very mature of me to state but it does not change the fact that people like me are often alone during holidays. Let's face it, gang...this is a season designed for families. Turn on TV and every commercial, every sappy Hallmark 'Movie', every sitcom pushes the idea that the Christmas Season is for Families to Reunite and Celebrate. Today's culture even makes an effort to redefine the word 'family' in an attempt to make those who do not fit the mold feel better about their status. Good for the culture. It still leaves me flat.

As time goes by my self-pity over being an old childless Catholic Widow Woman lessens. This is not because the wish about the past has changed; rather it is because my acceptance of God's Will in my life has taken on a deeper meaning. I no longer see my life in terms of sadness. Today I see the incredible sparkles of Gold and Silver my life has become and I marvel at the way in which Christ continues to reveal His Love for me in little things.

I will be standing in line at a grocery store and hear my name called out in a childish voice. Turning, I will have a 7 or 8 year old boy or girl throw their arms around me, hug me and shout, "HI, MISS LESLIE, MERRY CHRISTMAS!".

Turning into my driveway at night I will catch a glimpse of my neighbor walking the big, huge shaggy dog. Our eyes will meet and he will wave with a smile, and I swear his dog will smile at me too.

The phone will ring and someone I mentor will be calling with a problem and the first thing they ask me is, "Is this a good time?". This is more than good

manners. This is demonstrating the mutual respect I try to model and showing me that they have that respect for me even though they are in pain and need my immediate attention.

My smoke alarms go off. I cannot do anything other than disconnect them. I am too short and my arthritis is too bad in my fingers to get those stupid little wires back in the stupid little holes. I come to work and share my dilemma with my boss, a PhD and author of critically acclaimed books on Evangelical Christianity and the beauty of discovering Catholicism. He offers to go connect them.

Do I wish I had the picture of me with 8 grandchildren other people have on their Christmas Cards? Of course I do...but you know what?

I have more than that - I have a life that calls me to communion with Christ, a life that challenges me to try harder, be better, do not give up. I have something more than stuff and people....

I have a Family in Christ Jesus and the Holy Catholic Church.



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This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2017/12/being-all-alone-on-family-holidays.html>  
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# Planned Parenthood, Birth Control, and Heresy [at Catholic Stand]

In an effort to justify (and excuse) birth control and require those who conscientiously object to provide it to others, Planned Parenthood has come up with a *cute* little meme. As Christians everywhere traverse the dangerous territory of skewed morality, our rights to deeply held religious beliefs are being put to the test.

The pro-abortion faction is no longer satisfied with thrusting their ideology on everyone through straightforward advertising. Now they have devised a fraudulent method to entice Christians to conform to their way of thinking. Enter abortion giant, Planned Parenthood. Known for ‘cute’ ways of rationalizing deadly behavior; they have created memes for all of us to share.

By choosing the

[meme](#)

that indicates your belief system – Catholic, Baptist, Christian, Muslim, etc. – you can now brightly proclaim that you have deviated from long-held religious beliefs, no matter which form of faith you practice.

Let us be clear. The purported support is for *access* to birth control. What they really mean is that the Little Sisters of the Poor and other Christian groups, businesses, and organizations should be forced to *provide free birth control*, contrary to their firmly held religious beliefs.

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## The Counter-Planned Parenthood Meme

With righteous indignation, my daughter created a counter-meme. In this graphic, she exposes the heretical nature of supporting and using artificial

contraception. After all, publicly and loudly proclaiming to support a practice that has been condemned by the Catholic Church since her inception certainly is not acceptable for Catholics. Not only does practicing birth control represent a sinful act for these individuals, but by their public support they are also leading others astray by [scandal](#).

The pulse racing response to the counter-meme has been enlightening. There have been arguments for using the pill for everything from acne to poly-cystic ovaries. Some stubbornly relate that the decision is ‘between me and my God’. Referencing [Natural Family Planning](#) (NFP) for a preferable and healthy alternative has been mostly met with silence.

### **What Is Heresy?**

Another considerably negative response has been addressed toward the consideration of heresy being committed. I can understand the hesitancy in using the word – heresy – especially when seemly judging the souls of others. But is that what is intended? Is it possible that *some* of the accused *may* be committing heresy? Let’s take a very brief, historical walk through the Catholic Church and her approach to both birth control and heresy.

Let us first take a look at heresy and automatic excommunication. According to the 1983 [Code of Canon Law](#) (CIC), aside from abortion, “eight other sins carry the penalty of automatic excommunication: apostasy, heresy, schism (CIC 1364:1), violating the sacred species (CIC 1367), physically attacking the pope (CIC 1370:1), sacramentally absolving an accomplice in a sexual sin (CIC 1378:1), consecrating a bishop without authorization (CIC 1382), and directly violating the seal of confession (1388:1)”.

Here it is understood that “heresy is the obstinate doubt or denial, after baptism, of a defined Catholic doctrine”.

### **Citing Humanae Vitae and Popes**

Ever since (and before) Pope Paul VI promulgated his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life), the highest Catholic authority has held to the prohibition of all forms of artificial birth control/contraception. While this teaching was difficult to accept by some, its affirmation of the consistent moral teaching of the Church on the sanctity of life was fervently upheld – by both Saint Pope John

Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

This uninterrupted teaching of Catholic Doctrine affirms the danger of contraception to the life of marriage/family (and therefore society as a whole). Given the medically confirmed fact that the Pill (as well as some other forms of birth control) acts as an [abortifacient](#) agent, the consequences progress even to the ending of unborn life.

Therefore, ignoring this clear position of the Church or doing the mental gymnastics required to justify the use of birth control, *could* indicate an “... obstinate doubt or denial, after baptism, of a defined Catholic doctrine” – heresy.

Just because birth control, per se, was not specifically mentioned does not negate the severity of departing from a position held by the Church since its inception. Can you imagine how long the list would be if each and every form of heretical belief was individually listed?

### **When Is It Not Heresy?**

It is vitally important for Catholics to realize that “No one is automatically excommunicated for any offense if, without any fault of his own, he was unaware that he was violating a law (CIC 1323:2) or that a penalty was attached to the law (CIC 1324:1:9). The same applies if one was a minor, had the imperfect use of reason, was forced through grave or relatively grave fear, was forced through serious inconvenience, or in certain other circumstances (CIC 1324)”.

However, I do submit that this stubbornly held belief (contrary to irrevocable Church teaching), shouted to the world, can become heretical. Willful ignorance, after being informed of Church law, is also a means of denial.

### **Meme vs. Meme**

Planned Parenthood persists in twisting and misrepresenting people of faith. Historically, their meme [campaigns](#) rely on misinformation and skewed logic. Bright colors and catchphrases are employed to grab the attention of the public and lead them to accept a misconstrued sort of reality. When countering sound bites and eye-catching graphics, a similar approach often brings the

misconception to light. In creating a similar meme, many people are given the corrected message.

Discussions and even heated debates allowed the truth to break to the surface. I daresay that many Catholics were lead to reexamine their own consciences concerning the topic of birth control and the Church. To this extent, even with the misgivings of some, fighting fire with fire elicited a response that was both educational and effective. Is this method everyone's cup of tea? No. Just as pro-life advocates and even saints employ(ed) different means of preaching the Gospel, the tone of memes are subject to the particular approach of the messenger.

So, was the intention of the countering meme to unequivocally imply that every woman using birth control is a heretic? Absolutely not. However, I do submit that this stubbornly held belief (dangerously contrary to irrevocable Church teaching), shouted to the world, *can* become heretical.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicstand.com/planned-parenthood-birth-control-heresy/>

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## Advent Reflections [at Justin's Corner]



Last Sunday we Catholics began a new liturgical year, entering once again into the season of Advent, which is a period of preparation for the celebration of Christ's birthday. In our increasingly secularized neo-pagan society, which now kicks off its own celebration of the Christmas holiday right after Halloween, Advent generally functions as a sentimental preview of Christmas and a time of frenzied preparations characterized by seemingly endless shopping, decorating of homes and schools and offices, greeting card writing and exchanging, gift wrapping and giving, holiday music and concerts, cooking and baking of meals and treats, partying and entertaining. By the time Christmas Day actually arrives, millions of people have had their fill (or more) of the Christmas season as secular society celebrates it, have entirely missed the real (that is, the sacred) purpose of the holiday, and are ready to return to normal everyday living again, often with feelings of exhaustion and emptiness. That's a shame!

While none of the above mentioned cultural aspects of the holiday are bad or wrong in and of themselves, the problem is that our secularized society's whole approach to Christmas is backwards. Our dominant culture has no interest in, or reverence for, the true meaning of Christmas, which is the birthday of the Christ Child, the Eternal Son of God who became man in order to liberate us from the shackles of sin through His Passion and Resurrection. On the contrary, through the encouragement of rampant consumerism and hedonism, its chief aim is to make the big retailers as much money as possible. The essential religious and spiritual nature of Christmas has been completely gutted, replaced by the

superficial material and commercial aspects.

Our secular culture did not used to be this way. Eighty years ago when my grandparents were growing up, it would be unthinkable for any shops or grocery or department stores to be open on Christmas Day. Today, this is not only commonplace, it is widely accepted and even expected. Christ is no longer part of civil society's Christmas celebration; thus, it's not surprising that even the word "Christmas" and the traditional greeting "Merry Christmas" are now used less and less frequently in public, replaced by generic terms such as "holiday season" or "Happy Holidays," as this devolves increasingly into a "multicultural" celebration of all of the religious and secular holidays that happen to coincide with Christmas but have little or nothing whatsoever to do with it. Our post-Christian secular society has fallen into idolatry, replacing the worship of the Christ Child with the worship of money and material things. Hence the incessant clamor and the frenzied pace of the "Christmas season" that is in full swing from November 1 to December 25--part of what Cardinal Robert Sarah has termed the "dictatorship of noise."

By contrast, the Catholic Church's liturgical season of Advent is a sacred time for prayer and quiet reflection as we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth. In fact, during this holy season, the Church calls us to reflect on three different ways in which Christ comes to us: in history, majesty, and mystery. The four Sundays of Advent symbolize the four thousand years humanity in general, and the Chosen People in particular, waited for the coming of our Savior and Redeemer following the Original Sin of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. During Advent, we recall and re-live to some extent these long ages of waiting, waiting for liberation from sin and looking forward to the Lord's coming into our fallen world. And yes, at the conclusion of the Advent season, we will celebrate the miraculous virginal birth of Christ in a shepherd's cave near Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago, which forever changed the course of human history.

However, there is more to Advent than simply recalling and re-living Christ's humble and hidden coming in the distant past. During this season, we also anticipate and look towards Christ's glorious and public future coming, His Second Coming as Judge of the world at the end of time. While we know for certain that Christ will come again, we don't know exactly when this Second Coming will take place (although Christ Himself has revealed to us certain signs that will precede the Day of Judgment). Just like the ancient peoples who were

awaiting the promised Messiah's first coming, but weren't sure exactly when it would happen, we are now awaiting Christ's promised return. Therefore, we are summoned to live in a state of vigilant preparedness by rejecting sinful ways, growing in our relationship with the Lord, and faithfully fulfilling our obligations to God and to one another. For many centuries, Christian believers expressed this interior attitude of vigilant anticipation of Christ's return by facing east toward the rising sun during the celebration of Mass.

But in addition to his past and future comings, there is a third, less visible, but no less important, coming of Christ for which we must prepare during Advent: his coming into our hearts and our lives right here in this present time. If we don't allow Christ to be born in our hearts through grace, filling us with peace and joy and empowering us to grow in genuine love for God and for each other, then our celebration of Christ's historic birth loses its meaning--and furthermore, we will not be prepared to meet Christ our Judge at the end of our lives or at the end of the world. During this season of Advent, we can prepare a fitting place for Christ within our hearts through prayer and reflection, the reading of Scripture, the worthy reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, and practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Surrounded by our secularized culture's pervasive anti-Christian parody of Christmas, it may take some real effort to get ourselves mentally and spiritually immersed into the true spirit of Advent and to live this season in a truly meaningful way. In contrast to the noise and frenzied pace of "the holiday season," Advent is a time of watching and waiting, a time of hopeful anticipation, a time of yearning for the Lord to come and free us from our sins. Certainly, living Advent properly does not exclude material preparations for Christmas such as shopping, decorating, gift giving and the like within reasonable limits, but these external things should be done within the context of our spiritual preparation for the three comings of Christ.

Since the true spirit of Advent is obviously incompatible with the secular spirit of the holiday season, it's not enough simply to make a little room for Jesus in our lives while allowing the attitudes and dictates of secularized society to guide our Christmas preparations. As Catholics, we should be explicitly countercultural, rejecting the profanation of the sacred feast of Christ's birthday while planting the seeds of a vibrant new Christian culture for future generations. Keeping an Advent wreath on the kitchen table or an Advent calendar on the refrigerator, listening to a CD or MP3 of Advent music, erecting

a Nativity scene in our house or front yard, waiting until closer to Christmas to set up the tree, and preparing within our hearts a personal birthday gift for Jesus are small but significant things we can and should do to prepare our hearts and minds for a spiritually profitable celebration of the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord. When Christ comes, may he truly find us awake and ready to meet Him.

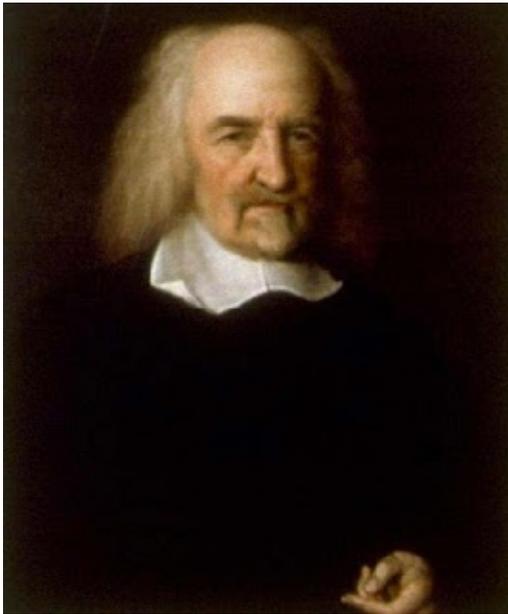
I wish you a blessed and grace-filled Advent season!

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The word *idiot*, I am reliably informed, comes from the ancient Greek δῖωτης *idiōtēs*, via the Latin transliteration *idiota*. On the face of it, an *idiōtēs* was merely a private individual, as opposed to a government minister or military officer. However, among the Athenians, it was a derisive term applied to anyone who declined to take an active role in civic affairs, or who cut themselves off from the community in pursuit of their own interests. This pejorative application became associated with a person of low intelligence or skill, who could contribute little to the *polis*.

## ***Res Idiotica***

America is becoming (or has become) a nation of idiots, according to writers and thinkers who deliberately reference this half-forgotten sense of *idiōtēs*. That's to say, we are becoming increasingly self-absorbed and disconnected, isolated not only from each other but from any sense of community or history. Their critique of millennials has gone beyond sneering at “snowflakes” and hooting over participation trophies. Instead, their concern is for the disturbing number of twenty-somethings checking out of adult social interaction and the burgeoning industry of “self-care” products.

Writes philosopher

[Michael Liccione](#)

, “It’s as if real relationships and real community engagement are all just too much for many people, who prefer to define and live in their own little worlds, insulated as much as possible from the pain and inconvenience of regular involvement with the big bad world.” Another philosopher,

[Reilly Smethurst](#)

, reminds us that St. Augustine “famously associated idiocy with ostentatious self-authorization. In his

*Confessions*,

Augustine referred critically to his younger self as ‘a prisoner, trying to simulate a crippled sort of freedom.’ The specter comforting America is that of the juvenile Augustine — free to enjoy its own vacuity, empowered ironically by crippledom.”

Above all, the one overarching lesson that students receive is to understand themselves to be radically autonomous selves within a comprehensive global system with a common commitment to mutual indifference. Our commitment to mutual indifference is what binds us together as a global people. ... Ancient philosophy and practice heaped praise upon *res publica* — a devotion to public things, things we share together. We have instead created the world’s first *res idiotica* .... Our education system excels at producing solipsistic, self-contained selves whose only public commitment is an absence of commitment to a public, a common culture, a shared history.

## **Hobbes, Rousseau, and the *Idiōtēs***

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But while these thinkers peddle their observations in outlets such as *The American Conservative*, *Front Porch Republic* and *Intellectual Takeout*, I hesitate to call any of them “conservatives.” In fact, Deneen (a self-described “radical Catholic”) is as critical of conservatism as he is of liberalism,

[contending that](#)

“the basic political division in America merely represents two iterations of [classical] liberalism — the pursuit of individual autonomy in either the social/personal sphere (liberalism) or the economic realm (‘conservatism’ — better designated as market liberalism).”

To understand Deneen’s criticism better, we must look at two foundational works of classical liberalism, Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*. Both men posited Man in his primitive or “natural” state as an amoral, self-interested brute — an *idiōtēs* — who took whatever he desired whenever he desired it, and who had no God, no natural kinship ties, and no social obligations to hold him back.

For Hobbes, society exists only to protect us from each other; government’s sole duty (in theologian Benjamin Wiker’s words) is “merely to reproduce a happier version of the Hobbesian state of nature, where there is a maximum of liberty to pursue one’s personal desires but without the nasty, violent death part” (*10 Books that Screwed Up the World*, 39). For Rousseau, society is a positive evil brought on by claims of private ownership of property. Where in Hobbes we see the first hints of free-market capitalism and objectivism, in Rousseau we see a preliminary form of communist thought, in which government exists only to protect the rich from the poor. For both men, though, the cure for all social ills was to return so far as possible to our natural state, in which everyone can get everything he wants and is obligated to nobody for anything.

## **The Idiot as Social Ideal**

Of course, both Hobbes' and Rousseau's accounts of primitive man are myths, Enlightenment-atheist attempts at a "counter-Genesis" (Wiker) to replace the Biblical account of Adam and Eve. Created before the dawn of scientific archaeology and anthropology, they have no evidential backing, no basis in anything we know or can reasonably guess about prehistoric human society. Nevertheless, classical liberalism in all its descendants carries at its heart the conviction that *Homo idioticus* — antisocial, self-referential, materialistic, entitled and libidinous — is not only our natural state but the ideal around which our society should be ordered.

Think about that last observation: Society should be ordered around the idiot, for whom society as such is at best a necessary evil and all too often an enslavement. A common set of values must be erected around the idiot, for whom a common morality is an abomination and an oxymoron. This society must give that idiot access to everything he does not possess, even if it requires government intervention, and at the same time keep other idiots from taking his possessions, especially through government intervention. Ironically, the idiot does not perceive how his minimalist idea of justice can require an ever-mounting pile of laws and regulations to enact and an ever-expanding government to enforce.

The miraculous resolution of all these conflicting imperatives becomes possible through the dangerous fantasy of *enlightened self-interest*: Despite all the detriments associated with society and government, *Homo idioticus* will make (some) sacrifices voluntarily because society and government will provide them with benefits equal to or surpassing the sacrifices. Just as the classical liberal's idea of justice — "I won't hurt you if you don't hurt me" — is negative and ignoble, enlightened self-interest is devoid of true generosity or magnanimity, limited to merely seeking quid pro quos, "win-win solutions," and socioeconomic rent.

**“Men are Born for the Sake of Men”**

But the most relevant observation we can make about any falsehood is that it is false. That we are by nature social, political, and relational is the most profound fact about human existence. We were made not only to live but to live *together* — in families, in bands, in tribes, in towns. Living together requires not merely refraining from doing harm but actively contributing to the common good; cooperation is more imperative than competition and true generosity more necessary than self-interest. Common justice requires a common moral code by which we not only obligate others but allow ourselves to be obligated.

But since ... we are not born for ourselves alone, but our country claims a share of our being, and our friends a share; and since ... everything that the earth produces is created for man's use; and as men, too, are born for the sake of men, that they may be able mutually to help one another; in this direction we ought to follow Nature as our guide, to contribute to the general good by an interchange of acts of kindness, by giving and receiving, and thus by our skill, our industry, and our talents to cement human society more closely together, man to man. (Cicero, [\*De Officiis\* \[On Duties, tr. Walter Miller\] 1.22](#))

In the true business of society, the idiot is deadwood, a leech and an obstruction; he wants all the benefits of community life but none of its obligations. He is a “taker,” albeit the kind of “taker” that can be found in any economic stratum, quite frequently at the top, privatizing the rewards while socializing the costs. A healthy, stable society can tolerate a certain number of idiots, but it cannot dedicate itself to catering to their demands and still remain either healthy or stable. Most certainly, a society ought not to be *run* by idiots.

## Where Orwell and Huxley Erred

Yet that is what Corporate America and the academic left, working from their different priorities, have striven in common to produce: a nation of isolated, self-indulgent ninnies mainly incapable of maintaining relationships, scarcely interested in the public good, mostly unwilling to sacrifice for others' sake. *Nu,*

progress.

Over the last four decades, social critics like Neil Postman and Christopher Hitchens have repeatedly compared American society's decline to both George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. And we can still point to our equivalents of Big Brother and *soma*, or thoughtcrime and Centrifugal Bumble-puppy. But both Orwell and Huxley, their minds formed in the classical liberal tradition, supposed that when Dystopia came it would be a triumph of the collective, a mistake of prioritizing the community over the individual.

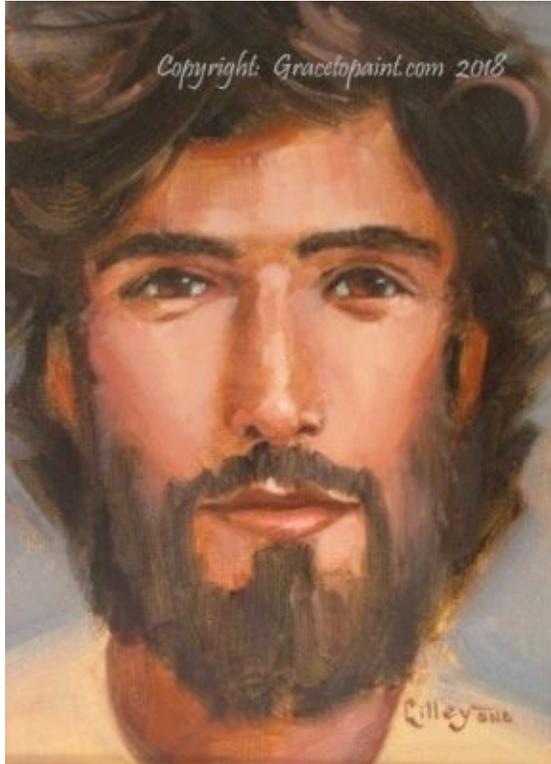
Neither could foresee the triumph of the idiot.

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## Jesus [at Grace to Paint]



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

A very youthful Jesus. When I was a child, Jesus was way older than me; now He is way younger.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2018/01/12/jesus-7/>  
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## Homily @ Christmas: Love Intervenes [at bukas palad]



Year B / Christmas / The Nativity of the Lord

Readings: Isaiah 52.7-10 / Responsorial Psalm 98.1-6 (R/v 3c) / Hebrews 1.1-6 / John 1.1-18

Memories. They have the power to make us smile and laugh when we recall happy times. They can also make us weep in grief or sigh in regret because of a hurtful past. In such moments, memories can trap us in the pain of disappointment or free us with thanksgiving. It does not take much to trigger a memory in all of us: a sound, a taste, a smell, an image, even words or phrases, bring us back to someone, some moment, some experience.

Our memories of Christmas past play a big part in how we celebrate Christmas today. Of Santa Claus and carols and gifts. Of shopping and baking. Of family

feasting and greeting. Of those special curries and festive cakes. Even, of particular Christmas Masses, or homilies or manger scenes that made the Christmas story come alive for us.

A treasured memory I have is of being 5 or 6 years old with my family cleaning up our house on Christmas Eve, decorating the staircase railings with Christmas cards and trimming the Christmas tree—all of us making room for Christmas Day and eagerly anticipating it.

What are your cherished Christmas memories?

Personal memories are powerful. Shared memories of God are more powerful. They are universal and they reside deep within everyone. They influence us individually. Collectively, they shape the whole course of human events. Christmas returns us to this more powerful memory of God. Our shared memory of a **God who could, and would, play an active role in human life and for human history**. Our gospel proclaims this truth: “and the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1.14).

While Christmas is about many things for many people, the one truth underlying all of them is that Christmas reminds all that **God chose to intervene to save us**.

Intervened in the life of one couple. Not an ideal couple. Mary was unwed, pregnant, an illiterate young girl. Joseph’s ancestry was stained and soiled: his ancestors included scoundrels, thieves, schemers, foreigners and adulterers, as Matthew and Luke remind us in their gospels. Yet, when the time came for God to intervene and save, God chose this woman’s womb and this man’s family to bear his beloved son to the world.

Intervened also by choosing Bethlehem, an obscure Jewish village in Roman occupied Israel for Mary to give birth to her son. And with no room in the inn, by providing a manger, the messiest, dirtiest, poorest of spaces, for Mary to lay her son to sleep and Joseph to stand watch beside.

Intervened most of all in the form of a baby. Tiny. Vulnerable. Insignificant. Yet, this is Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, and God for us and our salvation.

As we remember the first Christmas and how God intervened in the life of Mary and Joseph, not such a perfect couple, and we look at our own imperfect lives, we can hope. For if God can work in the life of Mary and Joseph, God can surely work in my life too.

As we remember the first Christmas and how God intervened in the life of Joseph's family full of scoundrels, thieves, schemers, foreigners and adulterers, and we look at our own messed up families, we can hope. For if God can work in Joseph's disordered family, God can surely work in our families with their own black sheep, difficulties and failures

As we remember the first Christmas and how God intervened in the history of one town, one country, and he did it amidst the odor and squalor of a manger, we can hope. For if God can be born in a stable 2000 years ago, then he can be born amidst the chaos, violence and uncertainty of our world today

As we remember the first Christmas and how God intervened in the quietest of ways, in the silence of an ordinary night, and in the smallest of ways, in a tiny babe, we can hope. For if God can come like this once, then, God will come again and again into our lives today in the ordinary and in the simplest, indeed,

always coming to be present to us.

Isn't this why we are here? To remember and celebrate this memory of **God labouring for good at Christmas**? If your answer is “yes”, as mine is, then let us renew our belief wholeheartedly today that “The Word became flesh and lived amongst us” (John 1.14)

It good and right then for us to join the psalmist and “Sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvellous things” (Psalm 96.1). Yes, we have every reason to lift up our voices to rejoice and sing—not just together but with all creation: all lands rejoicing, the sea making a noise, the rivers clapping their hands” (Psalm 96.7-8)

Why such jubilant rejoicing? Not just because God has come to save. But because **we can now see God's glory**. This is what the shepherds saw in the manger: **Jesus, the face of God's love**. Recall these words from our second reading: “We are gazing at the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being” (Hebrews 1.3). Isn't this what you and I do in faith when we come to the manger to gaze upon baby Jesus—to glimpse God?

God did something remarkable at the first Christmas: God turned the relationship between Godself and humankind upside down. Until the birth of Jesus, no one could see God's glory and live. In the Hebrew Scriptures God granted only Moses this gift to approach and see God's glory. No one else could. But with Jesus' birth and in his person, every person, whether male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, saintly or sinful, can now approach God. We can because God in all his glory graciously approached us in Jesus. This is an act of unimaginable love because the unapproachable God became flesh, and came to us in a small child. And on the face of this child we see “his glory, the glory of the only Son of God, full of grace and truth” (John 1.14) This is the wonder and mystery of Christmas. This is our Christmas joy.

And all this happens because **God intervened once, as God will continue to intervene.** Intervene especially in our lives to bring us home to Godself, especially those who are afraid and confused, lost and in sin. Intervene because God will not spurn us, as God did not spurn Mary's womb, Joseph's messed up ancestry, Bethlehem's insignificance, the world's sinfulness.

It doesn't matter that our lives or our families or world are imperfect. **What matters is that we make a space, no matter how small, for God in our hearts.** When we do this, God will do the rest to bring to birth Jesus in the Bethlehem of our lives and the mangers of our hearts.

Maybe then we will come to know the real surprise at Christmas—that **as much as our hearts are restless until they rest in God, it is really God who has come to rest in us in Jesus.** This is the Christmas proclamation. It is our Good News. And we will begin to realise this truth when we see how it is not Mary who is holding Jesus but it is God in Jesus who is actually embracing Mary.

For us, this Good News cannot just be a powerful or joyful Christmas memory. It is **our hope-filled Christian reality:** God always comes to us in love and with mercy. This hope empowers us to live daily: we know God will come repeatedly into the craziness of our lives, our families and our world to embrace us in Jesus—**Jesus who did not come once but will come always to you and me because in God he wants to hold us, cherish us and cradle us, forever.**

Modelled in part on a homily by the monks of the Society of John the Evangelist

*Preached at Church of the Transfiguration, Singapore*

artwork: adoration of the child by gerrit van honthorst

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This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2017/12/homily-christmas-love-intervenens.html>

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## **The Birth of Jesus [at The Shield of Faith]**

**Excerpts from Chapter XIX, "The Nativity," from the book**

**While Luisa was in her mystical state, she felt that she went outside of herself, and saw the Blessed Mother in a cave in the act of giving birth to the little Baby Jesus. It seemed that both Mother and Son were transmuted into most pure light in a wonderful prodigy. In that light she could clearly discern the human nature of Jesus as containing the Divinity within itself. His Humanity served as a veil to cover the Divinity, in such a way that in tearing the veil of His human nature, He was God, while covered by that veil, He was Man. This is the prodigy of prodigies – God and Man, Man and God! He comes to dwell in our midst to take on human flesh, without leaving the Father and the Holy Spirit, since true love never separates.**

**It seemed to Luisa that both Mother and Son, in the happy instant of His birth, remained as though spiritualized. Without the slightest difficulty Jesus came out of the Maternal womb, while they both overflowed with an excess of love. Their most pure bodies were transformed into light, and Light Jesus came out of the Light of the Mother without the slightest impediment. Both remained whole and intact, as they returned to their natural state. Then, the Most Holy Virgin, as though stirred, received her Son in her arms from the hands of an angel. In her ardor of love she squeezed Him so tightly that it seemed as if she wanted to draw Him into her womb again. Wanting to let her ardent love pour out, she placed Him at her breast to suckle.**

**Who can tell the beauty of the Little Baby who at the moment of His birth, transmitted the rays of the Divinity? And who can tell the beauty of the Mother who remained all absorbed in those divine rays? As for St. Joseph, it seemed to Luisa that he was not present at the act of the birth, but remained in another corner of the cave, while engrossed in that profound Mystery. He was enraptured in sublime ecstasy, and if he did not see with the eyes of the body, he saw very well with the eyes of the soul.**



**As Luisa continued to look at the Holy Baby, she saw the Queen Mother on one side with St. Joseph on the other, both profoundly adoring the Divine Infant. They were all intent on Him, and it seemed that the continuous presence of the Little Baby kept them engrossed in a constant ecstasy. If they could do some action, it was due to a prodigy that the Lord worked in them; otherwise they would have remained motionless and unable to attend to their external duties.**

**While Luisa was in her usual mystical state, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her carrying her Baby on her lap. He was wrapped in a little cloth and was shivering. Placing Him in Luisa's arms, Mary asked her to warm Him with her affections, because this her Son was born in extreme poverty, with the highest mortification, and abandoned by men. Luisa saw that He was so pretty, with a Celestial beauty. She took Him in her arms, clasping Him to herself to warm Him, since He was almost numb with cold, having only one little cloth to cover Him. When the Queen Mother wanted her Baby back to nourish Him with her sweet milk, Luisa complied. His Mother then uncovered her breast to place it in the mouth of her Divine Baby.**

**Luisa looked at this Little baby, of rare and enrapturing beauty. From all of His little Humanity, from His eyes, from His mouth, from His hands and feet, came most refulgent rays of light. These rays not only enwrapped Him, but extended so much as to be able to wound the hearts of all creatures. He gave hearts this first greeting of His coming upon earth – the**

first knock to invite all hearts, to make them open and to ask for a shelter within them. That sweet but penetrating knock of light made no clamor, yet it made itself be heard strongly, more than any noise. So, on that night, all felt something unusual within their hearts, but very few were those who opened their hearts to give Him a little shelter. And then the tender infant, in feeling His greeting not being returned, and that no one opened at His repeated knocking, began His crying. With His lips livid and shivering with cold, He sobbed, wailed and sighed.

Thus He received His first rejections as He came forth from His Mother's womb. But while these things were happening with the light which came out from Him, He threw Himself into the loving arms of His Mother, giving her His first hugs and kisses. Although His little arms could not reach to embrace her completely, the light which came out of His hands surrounded her, in such a way that Mother and Son remained invested with the same light. When the Queen Mother requited her Son with her own embrace and kiss, they remained clasped to each other as if they were fused within each other. With her love, she compensated for the first rejection which Jesus received from the hearts of creatures. The little baby Jesus placed His first act of being born, His graces, His first sorrow, into the heart of His Celestial Mother, so that what appeared in the Son could appear in the Mother.

While in the Divine Will, Luisa saw the charming little Baby, after He came forth from the Maternal womb, fling Himself into the arms of His Celestial Mother. Feeling the need to make His first outpouring of love, He surrounded the neck of His Mother with His tiny arms, kissing her. His Virgin Mother also felt the need to pour out her love toward the Divine Infant. She returned to Him the Maternal kiss, with such affection as to feel her Heart come out of her chest. As Luisa contemplated this first outpouring of love between Mother and Son, Jesus told her about the great need He had to make this display of love with His Mother. Everything that has been done by the Supreme Being has been nothing other than a wellspring of love. In the Virgin Queen was centralized all the outpouring of love which the Divinity had in Creation. Since the Divine Will was in her, she was capable of receiving, with the kisses of the Baby Jesus, this great outpouring, and of returning it to Him. One who lives in the Divine Will centralizes within herself the continuous act of all Creation, and the attitude of pouring it back to God.

**As soon as He came out of the womb of His Mother, He could not do without gazing at her, because in her was the enrapturing force of the Divine Will. The sweet enchantment of the beauty and most refulgent light of the Divine Fiat made Him remain fixed on His Mother, who possessed His very life by virtue of the Fiat. Seeing His life bilocated in her enraptured Him, and He could not remove His gaze from her, because the divine force compelled Him to fix it on the Celestial Queen. She often took Him with her most pure hands, covering Him with ardent kisses in order to warm Him and calm His crying. She nourished Him with her most sweet milk.**



**The birth of the Baby Jesus was the most solemn act of the whole Creation. Both heaven and earth plunged into a most profound adoration at the sight of His little Humanity, which kept His Divinity as though enclosed within walls. The time of His birth was a time of silence and of profound adoration and prayer. His Mother prayed while enraptured by the power of the prodigy which was coming out of her. St. Joseph and the angels prayed, and the Creation experienced the strength and love of the creative power being renewed in them. All Created things felt honored with true honor, because the One Who had created them would make use of them for what was needed for His Humanity. The sun recognized the One who had created it, and felt honored in having to give its light and heat to its true Lord. The earth felt honored and exulted with joy and prodigious signs, sensing Him lying in the manger with such tender limbs. Seeing their true King and Lord in their midst and feeling honored, all wanted to perform their office for Him: water wanted to quench His thirst; the warbling and trilling birds wanted to cheer Him; the wind wished to caress Him and the air to kiss Him. All desired to pay Him their innocent tribute.**

**Only ungrateful men were reluctant. Experiencing an unusual joy and strength within themselves, they suffocated everything and were unwilling to move, although the Baby called them with tears, moans and sobs. The only exceptions were some few shepherds. Yet it was precisely for man that**

**the Baby Jesus had come on earth! He came to give Himself to him, to save him, and to bring him back to the Celestial Fatherland. He was all eyes to see whether any would come before Him in order to receive the great gift of His Divine and Human life.**

**He experienced cold in the Cave of Bethlehem, but it was not the cold of the air that chilled Him. No, it was the cold of the human hearts that made Him grow numb, and it was their ingratitude that made Him cry bitterly at His very first coming out to the light. Although the Blessed Mother also cried, she calmed the crying of her Son. Their tears blended together. As they exchanged their first kisses they poured themselves out in love. But their lives were to be sorrow and crying. The Baby had His Mother place Him in the manger, to go back to crying in order to call His children with sobs and tears. He wanted to move all to pity with His moans, so as to be listened to.**

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## Our Lady of Guadalupe: Herald of Hope for Our Nation [at Jean M. Heimann]

[Image](#): The Virgin of Guadalupe

On December 12, we celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe — one of my favorites Marian feast days. Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, brings hope into our lives. She covers us in the folds of her heavenly mantle and cradles us in her arms. Mary is the Mother who tenderly consoles us and protects us from evil. She is the one who crushes the head of the wicked serpent.

### History

Five centuries ago, in the country now known as Mexico, senseless human sacrifices were performed. Between 20,000 and 50,000 human beings were murdered a year in the Aztec empire. Most of them were slaves who included men, as well as women, and children. An early Mexican historian estimated that one out of every five children in Mexico was sacrificed to the gods.

The climax of these ritualistic killings came in 1487 when a new temple (ornately decorated with snakes) was dedicated in what is now modern day Mexico City. In a single ceremony that lasted four days and four nights, accompanied by the constant beating of giant drums made of snakeskin, the Aztec ruler and demon worshiper Tlacauelel presided over the sacrifice of more than 80,000 men.

It was Our Lady of Guadalupe who crushed the head of the wicked serpent in 1531. For, it was then that she appeared to a poor, humble, uneducated man, [Juan Diego](#). In bare feet, he walked every Saturday and Sunday to church, departing before dawn, to be on time for Mass and religious instruction.

On December 9, 1531, when Juan Diego was on his way to morning Mass, the Blessed Mother appeared to him on [Tepeyac Hill](#), the outskirts of what is now Mexico City. She asked him to go to the Bishop and to request in her name that a shrine be built at Tepeyac, where she promised to pour out her grace upon those who invoked her. The Bishop, who did not believe Juan Diego, asked for a sign

to prove that the apparition was true.

On December 12, Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac. Here, the Blessed Mother told him to climb the hill and to pick the roses that he would find in bloom. He obeyed, and although it was winter, he found the roses in bloom. He gathered the roses and took them to Our Lady, who carefully placed them in his tilma (a type of poncho) and told him to take them to the Bishop as “proof”. When he opened his mantle, the roses fell to the ground and there remained impressed, in place of the flowers, a beautiful image of the Blessed Mother as she appeared at Tepeyac.

Today this image is still preserved on Juan Diego’s tilma, which hangs over the main altar in the basilica at the foot of Tepeyac Hill. In the image, Our Lady is pregnant, carrying the Son of God in her womb. Her head is bowed in homage and in humble obedience to God.

When asked who the lady was, Juan Diego replied in his Aztec dialect, “Te Coatloxopeuh,” which means “she who crushes the stone serpent.” His answer recalls Gen. 3:15 and the depiction of Mary as the Immaculate Conception, her heel crushing the serpent’s head.

As a result of that image, nine million Aztecs were converted to Christianity and the human sacrifices were abolished. The image converted their hearts to the one, true God and drew them out of the darkness of despair into the light of hope.

### **Our Lady of Guadalupe Today**

Today, the ancient serpent is slithering around the globe, making big hits in its attack upon human life. Millions of unborn children are murdered every year around the world, in procedures that in many countries are not only legal, but also officially supported and financed.

However, we can be confident that The Woman clothed with the sun, in the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Protectress of the Unborn, will crush the head of the serpent today.

Just as she affectionately referred to Juan Diego as “Juanito” – “her little one” – she calls us to also make ourselves her little ones – her children – and to put our trust in her. As Fr. Marie – Dominique Philippe, OP tells us, “[On] the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe it is truly Mary who shows her presence. This enables us

to understand that in our Christian life, Christ's presence and Mary's presence are primary and come before any spoken words. A mother is a silent presence, a presence that will help her children sleep peacefully, trustingly...a presence of love, of warmth for the heart, so that we might truly be in her hands, asking her to carry us and to teach us this evangelical way of littleness, which will allow us to obey just as a child obeys his mother."

Today Our Mother encourages us with us the same words she spoke to Juan Diego:

"Hear and let it penetrate your hearts, my dear little ones. Let nothing discourage you, nothing depress you; let nothing alter your heart or your countenance. Do not fear vexation, anxiety or pain. Am I not here, your Mother? Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else that you need?"

### **Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe**

Dear Mother of Guadalupe,

We ask you to pray for every child whose life is endangered by abortion.

Lift the veil of deceit from the eyes of all who see the destruction of human life as acceptable.

Help us to be open to life and to realize the precious gift from God that each child is to us.

Heal our country, soften our hardened hearts.

Teach us to be a nation that cherishes life, marriage, and the family

Help us to care for one another with self-sacrificing love until God takes us Home.

Enable us to see one another with God's eyes and never to view another human being as a burden.

We pray for an end to abortion and euthanasia and the senseless sacrifice Of all innocent human life that occurs in our country today.

Protect our borders from the evils of terrorism, nuclear weapons, and all other dangers.

Grant us peace; convert our hearts, minds, and souls.

Help us to be one nation, under God, united in love, and in prayer for one another,

Today and every day.

Mary, Queen of peace, pray for us! Mary, Mother of Mercy, pray for us! Our

Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!

— composed by Jean M. Heimann

~ *copyright Jean M. Heimann December 2017*

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This contribution is available at <http://www.jeanmheimann.com/2017/12/lady-guadalupe-herald-hope-nation/>

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## 10 Quotes from Pope St. John Paul II on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Today, in the Catholic Church, we celebrate one of the great solemnities associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary – the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This doctrine was declared dogmatic on December 8, 1854, by Blessed Pope Pius IX through an *ex cathedra* statement. For a full explanation of this dogma, I would encourage you to read my article, [Special Friday Edition: “Mondays with Mary” – The Immaculate Conception: Explained.](#)

Since you all know that I am a big Pope St. John Paul II fan, I thought I would focus today’s article on some of his quotes about this great Marian solemnity. Taken from a variety of his Angelus’ during his reign, here are 10 quotes from John Paul II on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception –

1. “The background for today’s solemnity is the biblical icon of the Annunciation, when the angel’s mysterious greeting resounded: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). “*Full of grace*”! Here is Mary, as God conceived of her and desired her in his inscrutable plan: a creature filled with divine love, all goodness, all beauty, all holiness.”
2. “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sm 16:7). And Mary’s heart was fully disposed to the fulfilment of the divine will. This is why the Blessed Virgin is the *model of Christian expectation and hope*... In her heart there is no shade of selfishness: she desires nothing for herself except God’s glory and human salvation. For her, the very privilege of being preserved from original sin is not a reason to boast, but one for total service to her Son’s redemptive mission.”
3. “This important Marian feast occurs during Advent, a season of watchful and prayerful preparation for Christmas. She who knew better than anyone how to wait attentively for the Lord guides us and shows us how to make more vital and active our journey to the Holy Night of Bethlehem. With her, we spend these weeks in prayer and, guided by her bright star, hasten to make the spiritual journey that will lead us to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation with greater intensity.”

4. “What happened to Mary turns our attention to Jesus Christ, the only Mediator of salvation, and helps us to see life as a loving plan with which we must cooperate responsibly. Mary is not only a model of the call, but also of the response. Indeed, she said “yes” to God at the beginning and at every successive moment of her life, fully complying with his will, even when she found it obscure and hard to accept.”



Immaculate Conception – Bartolomeo Murillo

5. “Today we contemplate the humble girl of Nazareth who, by an extraordinary and ineffable privilege, was preserved from the contagion of original sin and from every fault, so that she could be a worthy dwelling-place for the Incarnate Word. In Mary, the New Eve, Mother of the New Adam, the Father’s original, wondrous plan of love was re-established in an even more wondrous way. Therefore the Church gratefully acclaim: “Through you, immaculate Virgin, the life we had lost was returned to us. You received a child from heaven, and brought forth to the world a Saviour” (Liturgy of the Hours, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, Benedictus Antiphon).”

6. “The Immaculate Virgin however invites us not to fix our eyes on her but to pass beyond, and as much as possible, to enter into the mystery in which she was conceived: the mystery of God who is One and Three, full of grace and fidelity. As the moon shines with the light of the sun, so the immaculate splendour of

Mary is totally relative to that of the Redeemer. The Mother leads us to her Son; passing through her, we reach Christ. For this reason, Dante Alighieri notes fittingly: “*that her radiance alone can dispose you to see Christ*”.

7. “Mary was pleasing to God because of her docile humility. To the heavenly messenger, she replied, “*Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word*” (Lk 1,38). It is with the same interior disposition that believers are called to accept the divine will in every circumstance.”

8. “Today the Church is celebrating the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. If Christ is the day that never fades, Mary is its dawn, shining with beauty. Chosen in advance to be *the Mother of the incarnate Word*, Mary is at the same time the first-fruits of his redeeming action. The grace of Christ the Redeemer acted in her in anticipation, preserving her from original sin and from any contagion of guilt.”

9. “The Immaculate Conception shines like *a beacon of light for humanity in all the ages*. At the beginning of the third millennium, it guides us to believe and hope in God, in his salvation and in eternal life. In particular, it lights the way of the Church, which is committed to the new evangelization.”

10. “Hail, full of grace. What do these words mean? The Evangelist Luke writes that Mary (Miriam), at these words spoken by the Angel, “was greatly troubled..., and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be” (Lk 1:29). These words express a singular election. Grace means a particular fullness of creation through which the being, who resembles God, participates in God’s own interior life. Grace means love and the gift of God himself, the completely free gift (“given gratuitously”) in which God entrusts to man his Mystery, giving him, at the same time, the capacity of being able to bear witness to the Mystery, of filling with it his human being, his life, his thoughts, his will and his heart.”

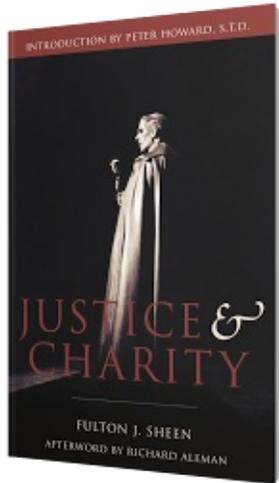
## **Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception...Pray for Us**

### **Pope St. John Paul II...Pray for Us**

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This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2017/12/08/10-quotes-from-pope-st-john-paul-ii-on-the-solemnity-of-the-immaculate-conception/>  
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## A New Book From... Fulton Sheen! [at Practical Distributism]



Publishing is often a pain and a drain, but it is not without a few pleasures. When I started ACS Books as an arm of the American Chesterton Society, it was fun to bring some titles into print that did not fall into any known category, which meant that nobody else was likely to publish them anyway. In general, writers are creative; publishers are not. Being a writer myself, I probably don't think enough like a publisher. Which is why my publishing arm is part of a non-profit organization. And so I have had the privilege of publishing the

[firstever biography](#)

of Frances (Mrs. Gilbert) Chesterton, an annotated version of Hilaire Belloc's oddball masterpiece

[TheFour Men](#)

(with notes provided by Deacon Nathan Allen, who along with three others, recreated Belloc's famous fictional-factional walk across Sussex), a creative and unexpected explanation of the Catholic faith under the cover of

## [The Catechism of Hockey](#)

, and a hilarious piece of crime fiction called

## [Get Louie Stigs](#)

about a low-level mob figure who gets convicted of fraud and sentenced to ... a monastery. You should read them all.

But I've also done something different. Last year, I had the good fortune to publish a new book by a bestselling author. Who? Why, the Venerable Fulton Sheen, of course. How, you ask, did I get a new book from an author who died in 1979? The answer is this:

## [Justice and Charity](#)

is a collection of 18 weekly talks that Sheen delivered in 1938.

In the 1930s, Fulton Sheen was establishing his great reputation as a writer, teacher and lecturer, giving talks throughout the United States and Europe. Interestingly enough, he was being referred to as “the American Chesterton” because of his wide range of subject matter, easy and likable manner, amazing knowledge, ready wit and quotable quotes. And the fact is, Sheen was immensely influenced by Chesterton to the point that some of those famous Sheen quotes are actually Chesterton quotes, as in “We don't need a Church that moves with the world, we need a Church that moves the world.”

And for those who don't know the story, a young Fulton Sheen approached G.K. Chesterton and asked him to write the introduction to his first book,

## *God and Intelligence*

, which was his doctoral dissertation. Chesterton, in typical humility, told him, “I don't know anything about philosophy.”

Sheen replied, “But, Mr. Chesterton, your book

## *Orthodoxy*

is one of the most important works of philosophy of our time!”

Chesterton laughed and said, “I will write the introduction to your book. After all, we’re both Catholic, and we have a responsibility to defend each other.”

And that was the other connection. Sheen’s popularity, like Chesterton’s, was due in part to his profound and joyful and inviting Catholic faith. But in Sheen’s case, one could not help but notice that he was also a priest. Just over a decade later he would be made a bishop and then be featured in a nationwide television show that drew more viewers than anything else on TV at the time.

So what is

### *Justice & Charity*

about? Brace yourself. It’s about economics. Now, there are some people who are passionate about economics, especially if it is tied to political upheaval or leveraging mountains of money, but when I hear the word “economics” I immediately suppress a yawn and give vague consideration to the echoing sound in my checking account. But when Fulton Sheen is discussing economics, it not only gets my attention, it holds it. Even though he is expounding on concepts that can sometimes be difficult for the average reader to grasp, what makes the book so accessible is his clear and crisp writing, and the short and sweet chapters. Sheen always had the gift for being able to connect with his audience, and here is no exception, even with a topic as dry as economics. I would have published this book even if someone else had written it.

He utterly tears apart Communism, using the damning texts of the Communists themselves. But he quickly cautions that attacking Communism does not mean endorsing Fascism. This is especially important, considering that this was written in 1938. One of the tricks of the Left is to accuse Catholics of being sympathetic with Fascism or even Nazism, simply because they are critical of Communism. (They did with Pius XII.)

But Sheen also goes after Capitalism, which he defines as “a system by which great masses of wage-earners are so subject to capital in the hands of a few” that they have no freedom or dignity for themselves and can contribute nothing to the common good.

So, if neither Communism nor Capitalism work, if both inflict injustice on a society, what is the solution? Where do we turn?

To the Catholic Church. Specifically, to the great Catholic Social Encyclicals:  
Leo XIII's

*Rerum Novarum*

from 1891 and Pius XI's

*Quadragesimo Anno*

from 1931. And this is what Sheen does. He uses these texts to provide not only a cure for what ails us, but to lay down the foundation for the right kind of society. Even though the ideas and writing are fresh and timely, it is interesting to note that Sheen is writing this before World War II. In fact, Pope Pius XI is still the pope. And although Sheen sometimes uses terms in a different sense in which we use them today (e.g. Liberalism), he clearly defines his terms so there can be no confusion to current readers or any excuse on the part of those who tend to twist words in order to misunderstand them.

And it should be no surprise that his ideas exactly reflect G.K. Chesterton's: the best kind of society is one based on the family, on widespread ownership, which would provide more freedom and self-sufficiency.

This book appears at a perfect time. We are trying to fix a broken society. It occurred to me recently when I was involved in a debate about all the present problems plaguing marriage and how the Church should deal with them, that if Catholics had simply paid more attention to implementing Catholic Social Teaching, rather than ignoring it or dismissing it, there would be less pressure on marriages, stronger families, and a more stable, less volatile economy. These things are all connected. If we would rely less on big government and be less influenced by commercial trends, if we would do more things for ourselves, including thinking for ourselves, we would not be swept away by the corrosive cultural currents that rob us of our God-given dignity and our happiness. But we have gone too much the way of the world and have been swayed by secular thinking in the social sciences, like economics, and everything else. If we took Catholic Teaching seriously, including Catholic Social Teaching, not only would we be better Catholics, the world would be a better place.

[Editor's note: to purchase

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## We need more, not less.



Welcome to 2018! We are now four days into the New Year and we begin the annual tradition or ritual of the New Year's Resolution. You know what I'm talking about. It's that list of things that we're going to do (or not do) in the New Year; and from what I hear, there's an outcry that people want less, not more: less weight, less stress, less financial worry, less time away from friends, less arguing with family, less health concerns, etc.

I think that we need to demand more in our lives, not less. More time serving those in need, more patience with others, more peace in our hearts, more thankfulness for what we have, more concern for human life, more honesty and integrity, more kindness, more love of neighbor, more compassion and warmth, more reverence for the earth, and more prayer in our lives.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, a woman who was born in the upper class and married into a wealthy family. But when her husband's business failed and he later died of tuberculosis, Elizabeth realized that she needed more out of life, and was awakened to the things of God – dedicating her life to the service of others.

As we head full-steam into 2018, let us demand more out of life and ourselves. May we be awakened to the things of God instead of the things of the world so that we, like St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, can serve more, care more, and love more each and every day of the coming year.

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## What I Fight For [at If I Might Interject]

During the last four years, I have encountered some Catholics who declare themselves in favor of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and oppose Pope Francis. I have encountered others who declare themselves in favor of Pope Francis, but not his predecessors. I believe that both groups are in error, assuming that their preferences are true and the Pope who seems to be in accord with them is considered right.

In defending the authority of the Church over the ten years this blog has been around, my stance has been that to reject a teaching of a Pope is an act of dissent and to reject that Pope in entirety is an act of schism. If a person demands Catholics give assent to a Pope they agree with, while refusing to give assent to a Pope they dislike is to play the hypocrite. The Pope they like teaches with the same authority as the Pope they dislike.

Because I recognize that the Catholic Church is the Church established by Christ (Matthew 16:18), and recognize the Popes as the successors of Peter, I hold that to reject the legitimate authority of the Pope is to reject Our Lord (Luke 10:16).

No, this doesn't mean everything that comes forth from the mouth of the Pope is doctrine. The Pope does not intend to offer teaching binding the entire Church when he gives homilies, addresses, interviews or press conferences. Because of that, he can state things imprecisely. A Pope can pass laws governing Vatican City (or prior to that, the Papal States) that are aimed at governing a specific territory. These are not understood as Church teaching either. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen once used the example of hypothetically asking the Pope about a stock investment. The Pope is not teaching in this example either.

The above (and the label of *Ultramontanism*) are red herrings. No informed Catholic considers those things teaching, let alone infallible. But, it does not follow from the fact that it doesn't fall under the aegis of teaching that it is heresy when it sounds different to our way of thinking. To invoke these things, done by the handful of bad Popes we had in our history, to accuse a Pope of teaching "error" is to miss the point of history in order to slander a disliked Pope today.

The Popes can teach through the Ordinary Magisterium, which is the norm, or the Extraordinary Magisterium, which is rarely used. Many Catholics seem to think that the Pope only need to be heeded when he makes an *ex cathedra* proclamation, and can be safely ignored on other occasions. That view is dangerously misguided. Pope Pius IX Syllabus of Errors (#22) and Pope Pius XII in *Humani Generis* (#20) reject that view. Everything that was taught *ex cathedra* was previously taught in the ordinary magisterium. It was not a case of being an opinion prior to being defined. *Ex Cathedra* does not turn opinion into truth. It defines truth, confirming what was already taught.

Nor should we think assume from the fact that the Church can revise and reform a teaching or discipline to better address a certain age, that these elements "prove" error. Conditions in the times of Pagan Rome, the Dark Ages, the Medieval period, the Renaissance, or modern times are not the same and how the Church responds to the needs of that age can change without denying the Catholic Faith. A Pope can make a discipline stricter or roll it back as the need requires without contradicting his predecessors.

So, with the controversy on the divorced/remarried and the Eucharist, it is possible that whoever succeeds Pope Francis will make clarifications as to how his teaching will be applied. For those who interpreted *Amoris Lætitia* with laxity, such a clarification will probably seem like a "betrayal." For those who disliked what they thought AL advocated, such a clarification will probably seem like a "repudiation" of Pope Francis. But it will be neither. It will be an application of Church teaching for the current times.

We must remember that how we interpret Scripture or Church documents is not the same thing as Scripture and Church documents in themselves. It is easy for the individual, lacking all the information needed to put things in context, to misinterpret Church teaching and assume that misinterpretation is what the Church in past ages meant. We must make our interpretation of Scripture, a Pope, or a Council in line with how the Magisterium interprets it, not by judging the Magisterium by how we interpret it.

If we do not remember this, we will wind up engaging in pointless polemics on whether or not a certain teaching is “in error.” This debate will be rooted in our own preferences and biases, treating them as doctrine while treating the judgment of the Church as “opinion.”

What I fight for is not the “right” of the divorced and remarried to receive the Eucharist. It is not for “conservative” views on moral issues or “liberal” views on social justice. What I fight for is defending that the Church can teach the faithful the timeless truths as they need to be formulated for the needs of saving society in this age. This means rejecting those who try to turn this teaching into factional politics and labeling theological orthodoxy as political based on approval or disapproval.

This fight necessarily puts me at odds with the Catholic who claims to support Benedict, but not Francis, and the Catholic who claims to support Francis, but not Benedict. It likewise puts me at odds with the Catholics who put Trent and Vatican II at odds.

I fight to defend the Church as she teaches in all generations, from the time Our Lord established her to the present, and trusting Our Lord to continue to protect His Church in the future. Because of that, I must reject those arguments—intended or not—which deny that protection exists, and that we can ignore

Church teaching by claiming it errs when it suits us to do so.

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## Awake or Awakened? [at Walking the Path]



### AWAKE AND AWAKENED

This morning I was listening to my daily meditative reflection which focused on the Advent theme of being awake. However, it wasn't so much as focusing on us being awake which is important, but trying to find what God has awakened or tried to awaken in the individual over the past year. I particularly like to focus on the present. For one it seems that I don't have a lot of time to focus on the past and two I like many try not to focus on the past as it sometimes brings back memories of my not so best moments. The reflection really provoked me to search for what has been awakened in me this past year.

I have a tendency to focus on the negative so this was quite challenging. What has been awakened in me? The past year has been quite challenging for me with constant pain due to neck issues that required surgery and then as the recovery process took place back pain that has become chronic and debilitating at times. Knowing that this has caused me considerable amount of emotional and psychological pain is quite clear. Also knowing that these conditions have affected those around me as well has awakened in me the every burdening defect of self-centeredness. A good thing? Maybe God is utilizing my pain to help me rely more on his grace, to take each day, each hour, each second as a moment of his infinite love for me. Although this is difficult because I don't like pain as it puts a crimp in my plans socially and for physical activities such as cycling which has become a passion of mine.



## WHO IS AT THE CONTROLS?

What has awakened in me is a clear sense that I must accept these hardships along with those that affect family members and friends as well. Thus acceptance and surrender are key. I am not in control. Oh, how that pains me to come to that realization. I am a control freak. I like to plan things out whether it be family activities, trips, long term lesson plans, life, and the list goes on. I become agitated when the train derails or takes an alternative route. Conceptually I know that God is in control and the more I turn over my plans, my health, and my life to him things will turn out well.



Spiritually, I always find these life challenges difficult. I like to think that my road map will bring me what is best for me. However, I am usually wrong. Left to my own plans the vehicle would have long gone off the road, the keys would have been taken away, and I would be walking by myself on a road to nowhere to quote the Talking Heads song.

In these early morning moments I am able to find what I think God is trying to reveal to me. Having a deeper sense of being awakened, I resolve to reflect this Advent season on what has been awakened in me and at the same time stay awake for what will be revealed.

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## Through the Looking Glass - A Christmas Message



I saw my grandfather forty years after he died. I loved him with all my heart, not because he gave me toys, bought me ice cream or took me to the funfair, but because he loved me so much. I was only eight years old when he died of a heart attack and I cried myself to sleep. The next day my mother told me that he loved me very specially, so much so that he made special plans for me and so I should always pray for him each day when I said my Morning Prayers. That is why I felt so guilty when I saw him again forty years later. The truth of the matter is I had forgotten to pray for him as often as my mother wanted me to. It was Christmas Eve when I saw him. I usually shaved in the morning, but as I was going to midnight Mass I thought I better make myself a little more presentable. I had removed all the shaving cream from my face apart from a white moustache under my nose, about the same size as the white moustache my grandfather always wore that tickled when he kissed me. I never thought I looked like him, but there he was looking at me from the bathroom mirror. Oh, yes, it was him all right, but he did not look as kind or as loving as the man I remembered.

When my mother died thirty or more years after he did, I was devastated. I not

only missed her more than I could say, but I particularly missed her help and encouragement when I was going through the most difficult period in my life. I not only felt spiritually bereft, but I was physically bereft too, without a home to call my own. It was then that my grandfather came to the rescue. When my mother said that he loved me very specially I knew what she told me was true because I had felt his love, but what she said about his plans for me meant nothing at all, at least until a letter arrived. It came from the family solicitors with news about which I knew nothing. He had left all his money directly to me. My mother only held the capital for her lifetime so she could live off the interest, which in those fairy tale days was considerable. Now everything came to me. At last I was safe and secure; at last I could have a home to call my own, but what was even more important, I felt loved, even though those who loved me were dead. Their love lived on and I could now live on to begin a new life. Thanks to them, to their tangible love for me, all went well, better than I could ever have hoped, so well in fact that self-absorption and self-satisfaction had made me forget those who loved me most, and what they did for me. That is why the face that looked back at me from the mirror that Christmas Eve might have looked like my grandfather, but it was covered with a guilt that I never saw on his face.

When I went to midnight Mass it was to realize that I had forgotten someone else too. Just as my grandfather had given me all he could to show his love for me, God had done the same. He had not shown how much he cared for me by the money he left me, but by the love he left me – his own personal love made flesh and blood for me in Jesus who was born on the first Christmas day. This enabled God to do through Jesus what he was never able to do before. God's infinite love which was in the past too powerful to enter into finite human beings could do so in the future, thanks to the birth of Jesus. Once his human being was filled to overflowing with God's infinite loving, it was transposed into human loving, enabling all human beings to receive God's infinite loving through him. That is why Christmas is such a sublime and inspiring feast, because in the baby in the crib we see the beginnings of God's plan for us that was brought to completion on the first Pentecost Day. It was then that for the first time on earth his human nature became radio-active with the infinite loving mercy of his Father, so that on that day and on every day, he can pour that loving mercy out, onto and into all who are open to receive it. For the first time in my life I began to realise, not just with my head, but with my heart just how much God has done for me and I resolved to make sure that I gave due thanks to God in future in my daily prayer.

However, it was the following Christmas that I came to see and understand a

However, it was the following Christmas that I came to see and understand a deeper reason for giving thanks to God. Making a formal act of thanksgiving to him each day had made me realise that we are all quick enough to storm the gates of heaven when we are in trouble or when we need something, but we are not so quick when it comes to saying thank you. It is in saying thank you as we should, that we are led into the sort of prayer that can change our lives permanently for the better. It is not enough just to thank God for what he has done for us, and continually does for us, but we need to thank him for something further, as I discovered for myself that Christmas. Instead of Christmas crackers the parish priest bought Christian crackers for the parish party. So instead of wearing paper hats everyone wore paper haloes instead and received miniature plastic saints, and instead of side-splitting jokes they had to meditate on mind-bending religious epigrams. Mine not only bent my mind, it tied it in knots for weeks trying to work out what on earth it meant. It was ascribed to a certain H Smith (circa 1630) and went something like this, "He is not thankful before God who only thanks him for his benefits."

I do not think I would ever have fully unravelled its meaning had I not been to a retreat given by Archbishop Anthony Bloom three weeks later. At the end of the retreat the sister in charge said, "I not only want to thank you for what you have given us, but to thank you for being you." It was a popular religious cliché at the time that usually made me squirm, especially when the said sister, not only thanked me for unblocking the convent drains the day before, but added the, "Thank you for being you," bit at the end of it. However, when applied to Archbishop Anthony Bloom it certainly made sense, and gave sense to the religious epigram that had been tying my mind in knots ever since the parish party. The Archbishop had given us a lot to think about in his talks, but he gave us far more by just being who he was, a remarkable embodiment of the man in whose name he preached. It was silly to thank me for being me, just because I unblocked the convent drains, but it was not silly to thank him for being who he was. Who he was, was far more important than what he said, though what he said moved me more than any other preacher before or since. Now I could see what Mr H or Ms H Smith meant. If we only thank God for what we manage to get out of him or for what he has done for us, then we have hardly begun to thank him as we should. He should be thanked for being God, for being goodness, justice, truth and beauty, for displaying his inner glory in the glory of creation that surrounds us. He should be thanked too for entering into our world as a little baby over two thousand years ago to grow into the Lord and King of all creation to take us back with him back into his world to share in his glory to all eternity.

Thanking God for being God leads into the heights of prayer where thanksgiving leads to praise, and praise to glorifying God. Glorifying God leads to adoration, when we just want to gaze upon him with a profound reverence and awe that takes us out of ourselves if only for a time into brief moments of bliss. In these moments we come to know by experience what one great mystic meant when he said, “To adore means to lose oneself in the unfathomable, to plunge into the inexhaustible, to find peace in the incorruptible, to be absorbed into the immeasurable, and to give one’s deepest to the One whose depth has no end.” When we lose ourselves, in doing this then we become our true selves for as St Francis said, “it is in giving that we receive,” and it is in giving our all to him that he gives his all to us, so that Christ can be born again in each one of us.

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## Conceived Without Fear [at Real Life Rosary]



Friday, December 8th, 2017

### Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

What do you think you would do if you were to come face to face with God this very instant? We all like to imagine what we would do, but if we were honest with ourselves we would admit that we would probably want to crawl under the closest rock. Even though we may have just come back from Confession and Mass, we would still know that we are not worthy to stand in the presence of God.

Throughout Scripture we are given examples of how people react to encounters with the living God and His messengers, the angels. In the first chapter of the book of Revelation John encounters Christ and says, "*I fell down at his feet as though dead*" (Rev 1:17). Later on in the same book John is speaking with an angel of God and here John says, "*I fell at his feet to worship him*" (Rev 19:9). Now, of course all of this is in a beatific vision so we could excuse John in this case for he is at this point out of place. He is allowed to catch a glimpse of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the experience surely overwhelmed him.

However, we see the same reaction from John, James, and Peter at the

Transfiguration. Here Jesus is transfigured, His divinity shines through His humanity like a light through stained-glass. The disciples see this event and hear the very voice of God and "*they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe.*" (Matt 17:6). Again, we could excuse this behavior because of the magnitude of the event.

Yet, again, we see others falling before God, trembling in fear throughout the sacred writings. When the angels appear to the shepherds announcing "good news of great joy" the shepherds are "*filled with fear.*" When Gabriel appears to Zechariah he "*was troubled...and fear fell upon him.*"

In today's first reading, Adam hides himself from God out of fear, "*I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.*" Eve too was naked and afraid, hiding herself from God, right there beside Adam.

But there is one person who experienced a revelation of God's power and love through the message of an angel who was not "*filled with fear*" and who did not "fall on her face." In today's Gospel, Mary receives her visitor with wonder but not fear. For the one who is "*full of grace*" could not also be "*filled with fear.*" She does not fall on her face for she has been chosen as the Queen of the Angels, The Great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy. When the angel says to Mary, "*Do not be afraid*", the angel is not trying to ease her fears of himself or the glory of God that surrounds him. Rather, he is comforting her and helping her to overcome the natural, holy, and humble fear or awe that would arise with the announcement of this, her vocation, to be the Mother of God.

You and I would most certainly follow the lead of the Saints like John, Peter, James, and Zechariah in falling on our faces before the living God and His messengers. We would do this because unlike Mary, we have sin and its effects to deal with. But let us remember that the Woman, the Great Queen of Heaven and Earth, is also our mother (Rev 12:17). She is our mother and she will pick us up and bring us to her Son if we only learn to imitate her beautiful example. "*Fiat!*" - "*Be it done unto me according to thy word!*"

In Mary there is one who was not only conceived without sin but also one who was conceived without fear! Let us celebrate the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the great gift that she is to us. Why would God choose to create Mary without sin? [Watch this short video for the answer...](#)

FROM THE SAINTS - THE LORD IS WITH THEE - *"He is more with you [Mary] than he is with me; he is in your heart, he takes shape within you, he fills your soul, he is in your womb."* - Saint Augustine

Learn more about Our Lady with this wonderful, easy to read book by Dr. Scott Hahn (no relation) - [Hail Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God.](#)

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## **Our Reflection [at The Frank Friar]**

When I look at myself in the mirror at times I do not like the person I see. I see myself as one who is fat, kind of simple, tired, and distracted. I know what dwells under the surface of my reflection. Things I, like others, try to hide, but are always present in that reflection. There is pain, woundedness, sadness, burdens, guilts, regrets, and past mistakes, forgiven, but not forgotten that whisper through the mirror feeding a darkness that has taken root in my heart. I am not even a priest for a year. Yet, I have heard enough confessions to know I am not alone in this struggle with the reflection that resists in the mirror and the darkness that resides in the heart.

### **Darkness Transformed**

The darkness needs healing, that is why our God, the Divine Physician, enters and takes us through, what the Carmelite tradition calls the Dark Night of the Soul. A term coined by St. John of the Cross.

The darkness goes to the depths of our soul, a place that it seems only God can go for it is in that place where God fashions His home. It is in the depths of our heart, where the roots of our darkness find they nourishment in our pain that God alone begins the process of healing. God pulls up those roots and embraces our pain. God's process of healing is beyond us, yet so intimate to us that the only way St. John of the Cross could write about it was to transform the word of darkness itself. Through God's healing presence the darkness is transformed. It is no longer a darkness that begins the night, but has become the darkness that awaits the dawn. Through the darkness before the dawn, hope has now found its place in the heart once again.

### **His eyes**

The process of healing, the Dark Night, is not easy. I know, as my morning reflection waits for me, it likes to remind me of darkness that resists God's healing presence. Although, sometimes, in that morning reflection, it is not my eyes that look upon me, but the eyes of another. His eyes are in that reflection, and they see someone loved, beautiful, and precious. Those eyes see and reveal

to me, a being who is held in a tender loving embrace, simply because of who I am. Those eyes remind me that I am a child of the Father, and there is a Truth within me waiting to be known by me. Finally, those eyes leave me with the sense that it is with their gaze that someday I will truly see as I am meant to see. It is through His eyes that the gift of love finds its place in my heart, and thanks to His love, I know that someday the darkness will be no more.

*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ~~ 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:2*

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