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monthly

*May*  
*2018*

# **New Evangelists Monthly #65**

May 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.

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## Jesus our Rising Sun, Light of the World [at Catholicism and Adventism]



### The Resurrection of Christ

Adventists shy away from anything to do with the sun. Sun worship, they say. But comparing God to the sun is not wrong.

Jesus claimed to be the light of the world.

John 8:12 – Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

In the physical world, what is the natural light of the world? The sun, obviously. Jesus is the spiritual light of the world, the creator, without whom even the natural sun would not exist.

Malachi 4:2 – But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

Jesus is called the Sun of righteousness, rising with healing in his wings. The wings of the sun are the rays of light. Ever see Jesus depicted with rays of light coming from him? Ever be told that that is a sign of sun worship? It's not. It's biblical symbolism.

Luke 1:78 – Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.

Dayspring? Dawn. The rising sun.

Psalms 84:11 – For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

2 Sam 23:3-4 – The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.

Next time you see a halo around the head of Jesus in a picture, remember that light forms a circular glow, and this simply is a symbol of Jesus as the light of the world.

Next time you hear that the symbol of the sun is pagan, remember that the Bible uses the symbol of the sun to refer to Jesus.

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## How God Sees Us (continued) [at The Mission of Saint Thorlak]



Last week’s Missionary Thought generated a good deal of discussion, which is exactly what we hope for week by week. Thanks to everyone who shared feedback and asked questions. In a sense, our weekly posts are thoughts on human spirituality, “letting people with autism lead the discussion.” It is true that people with autism offer a fresh perspective on interpersonal connection, a distinct manner of looking at the philosophy of relationships, and perhaps draw different conclusions than we are accustomed to hearing.

Revisiting last week, we said that there are limitless ways we could say that God sees us, but the one we pick for our Mission’s focus is God perceiving us as who He imagines us to be, in the fullness of our potential. The closest we ordinarily come to seeing others in this way is when we encounter children.

To expound on that a little more before going on, we want to add back in what we discussed previously – that, in order to be known, we have to be willing to be

known. In order to be seen as the children we once were, we must know that aspect of ourselves... and allow it to be known.



Here is what that means, in practical terms.

As children first encounter each element of the world around them, emotions are felt more profoundly than after those things are experienced routinely. The older we get, the more accustomed we are to things around us, and the less we notice them. Children, on the other hand, are easily mesmerized by things we take for granted. Colors... sounds... shapes... birds... vehicles... machines... things that evoke wonder, or joy, or delight... or fear, uncertainty, or trepidation, for that matter. The size, predictability and intensity of each new thing plays a large role in how they are perceived, as does the reactions observed of other people nearby. If an animal looks charming but is treated fearfully by adults in the vicinity, it is more likely to be feared by the child seeing it for the first time.

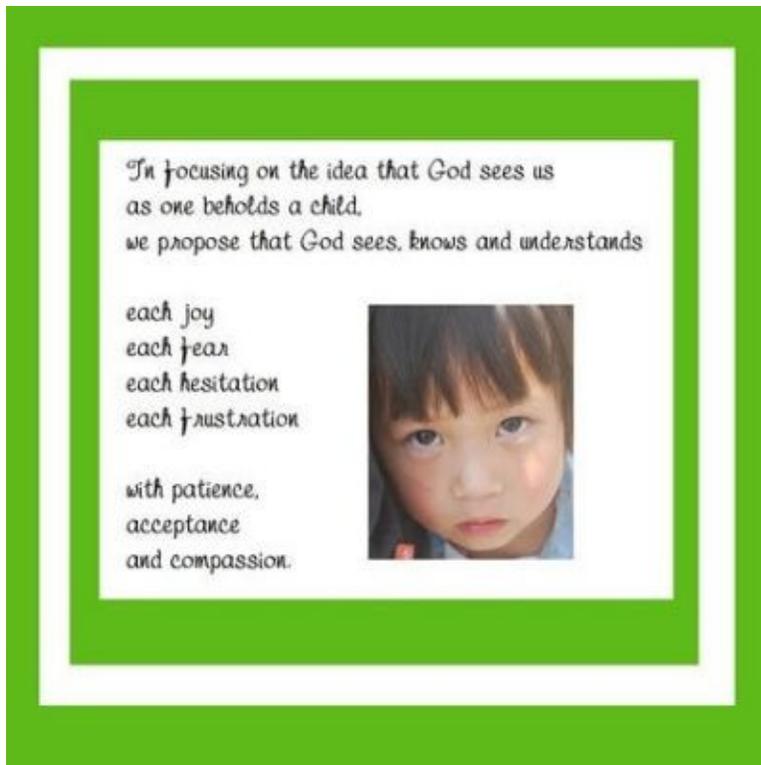
All of these emotions are intense, and betray our vulnerability – particularly because, at this age, we do not have enough experience to know what will happen, and we lack the words to explain how we feel.

Any one of us who has been in a new place without a guide has these feelings all over again.

Any one of us with sensory processing dysfunction has these feelings all the time.

Any one of us with speech impairment knows the vulnerability of emotion without words.

No matter what age: the deeper the emotion, the more difficult to assemble words to adequately explain ourselves to others.



And so, now, we look at that second sense of the question, “How does God see us?” – meaning, *in what manner does God take us into His perception?*

We, the Missionaries of Saint Thorlak, propose as our particular focus, that God sees us as someone who waits.

God, the Unseen Creator, is not one who intrudes, overwhelms or insinuates. He waits. He meets us where we are, and until we willingly expose our hearts to Him, He waits.

And, here is the biggest rub. God is God. People are not. People are everything from sensitive to insensitive, compassionate to indifferent, thoughtful to clueless. When we reveal our deepest emotions to other people, we get a huge range of reactions which shape the way we trust and relate to others. If we expose our hearts to people who ignore or hurt us in our vulnerability, we quickly learn to keep ourselves hidden. Inversely, when we reveal our deepest

joys and are met with joy in return, we learn the joy of being known... and are more comfortable being vulnerable.



How can we know? How can we tell which people will treat our exposed hearts with care, and which will walk past – or, worse, mock our littleness?

We can't.

But we CAN be 100% certain that God will meet us with perfect love, perfect care, perfect joy, perfect understanding. He imagined us. He knows us even better than we know ourselves.

Any time we have the human need to be known, we can turn to God, Who waits until we are ready to expose our hearts to Him, and then receives us with perfect knowledge.

All we need to do is make ourselves known to Him.



**If we lack words, or confidence, we can make ourselves known through what we love.**

Think about it:

Among people, even the quietest among us, for the sake of shyness or speech impairment or various degrees of nonverbal autism, can communicate what they love.

We give ourselves away by what we wear, what we do, what we make, what we study, what we listen to, what we gaze upon... what we smile after experiencing.



**How does God see us?**

**By seeing what we love. By seeing how we love.**

**And meeting us there.**



**Pray:** Dear God... in order that You may know me better, I offer to You today the things that affect me the most. Help me to be aware of Your presence and feel You with me, that I may learn to trust You more.

**Contemplate:** Take that prayer one step further and imagine God present at each deep movement of our emotions. Is it comforting, or unsettling, to think that God sees us in these moments?

**Relate:** How often do we include others in our deepest experiences? How does that reflect our readiness to be seen by God?

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This contribution is available at <http://www.mission-of-saint-thorlak.com/mission-activities/missionary-thought-for-the-week-of-april-23-2018-how-god-sees-us-continued>  
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## Conscience Meets Access (and Takes a Hit)

*The original version of this post first appeared on [DaTechGuy Blog](#).*

In the days leading up to the adoption of the latest spending bill in Washington, my social media feeds were full of posts from a variety of pro-life groups addressing one topic: including protection of medical conscience rights in the spending bill. To anyone unfamiliar with the federal budget process, an appropriations bill would sound like an odd place to mention conscience rights. But as we know, all kinds of oddball things work their way into budget deals.

As it happens, the conscience protection act promoted by pro-lifers was not included in the spending bill approved on March 22. I would have shrugged – *a pro-life initiative rejected in Washington? so what else is new?* – if not for a similar disappointment closer to home. A week before the federal spending bill was adopted, a bill to protect the conscience rights of medical professionals was rejected in my state’s legislature by a two-to-one margin.

Lest you think this is a partisan problem, note that the GOP holds majorities in the legislative bodies at issue here.

I was at the hearing for the state-level bill. The thrust of the opposition to conscience legislation boiled down to this: abortion is health care, and those who don’t want to participate in abortions have no business in the medical field.

By the way, this is where we wind up when we hear the abortion-is-health-care lie without pushing back. But back to the arena...

The argument against the state-level bill was couched in terms of denial of access: if a pharmacist doesn’t want to hand out an abortion-inducing drug, that might prevent or delay a woman’s abortion; if some doctor refuses to participate in abortion, he might let a hemorrhaging woman bleed to death. (Nonsense, but some legislators swallowed that whopper whole.)

There were also some dark mutterings about slippery slopes, although no one used that term: if we respect conscience rights for one or two or three procedures, where will it end? How much disruption can we tolerate in order to

accommodate “conscience”?

The supporters of conscience legislation testified to the primacy of conscience, which our own state’s constitution explicitly recognizes as a natural right, not one that needs to be granted. They cited the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. They spoke of their religious and ethical beliefs and how they shouldn’t be fired for sticking to them.

“Access” met conscience, and “access” won.

These state and federal votes were hardly the last word. They’re intriguing, though. They indicate to me that hostility to conscience rights is alive and well, even in more-or-less respectable circles. Indifference to those rights might as well be open hostility. Fortunately, there are people pushing back.

I kinda liked [Cardinal Dolan’s pushback](#) on the federal vote.

*The failure of Congress to include the Conscience Protection Act in the 2018 omnibus appropriations bill is deeply disappointing. The CPA is an extraordinarily modest bill that proposes almost no change to existing conscience protection laws on abortion—laws that receive wide public and bi-partisan support. The CPA simply proposes to provide victims of discrimination with the ability to defend their rights in court to help ensure that no one is forced to participate in abortion. Those inside and outside of Congress who worked to defeat the CPA have placed themselves squarely into the category of extremists who insist that all Americans must be forced to participate in the violent act of abortion. We call on Congress not to give up until this critical legislation is enacted.*

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## Holy Sexuality Through the Theology of the Body [at Plot Line and Sinker (Ellen Gable, Author)]



Photo courtesy KJ

Re-posting an article I wrote a few years ago:

Marriage is a holy vocation that leads to the creation of life and family, an essential way of spreading the Catholic faith and of attaining holiness.

Taking the four components of God's love for us (free, total, faithful, fruitful) and comparing them to marital love, we can discover how we can live the sacrament of matrimony as a vocation in the most free, total, faithful and fruitful way, the ultimate expression of not only God's love for us, but in our love for our spouses. We can discover how we can best express and preserve our Marital Unity.

**Free:** We need to be able to give our love **freely** to our spouse. If we ask for conditions, like... I'll love you IF, then that's not love. If we force our spouse to do something, that's not love. If we cannot control our passions, if we cannot say no to our sexual urges, then we are not free. If we cannot say no, our yes means nothing.

**Total:** The love for our spouse must be **total**. We can't say, "Well, I'll give you everything, honey, except for my arm or except for my leg." Everything means everything. Total means total.

In the CCC, 1643, says: "Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all of the elements of the person enter – appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance, which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values." Sex is holy, but the world doesn't see it that way.

**Faithful:** We must be **faithful** to our spouse. Obviously, we must only have sexual intercourse with our spouse and no other. However, adultery is not the only way we can be unfaithful to our spouse. Indulging in fantasies, pornography of any kind and flirting all offend the sixth commandment. If we want to be truly faithful to our spouse, we must be faithful in word, action, and thought.

**Fruitful:** We must allow relations with our spouse to be **fruitful** – to be open to children – each and every time we have sex, whether or not we are planning a child. That doesn't mean we will conceive a child with every marital embrace. It also doesn't mean that we must *try* to get pregnant each and every time we have relations. It just means that we need to be open. [Natural Family Planning](#) allows a couple to avoid pregnancy and still be open to the possibility of pregnancy.

Artificial contraception, in fact, **destroys all four of the essential components** (Free, total, faithful, fruitful). Birth control violates not only God's plan (because it does not image God's fruitfulness) but it also destroys a couple's marital unity, encourages an "I can't say no" mentality to sex. When a device, medication is used or an operation has taken place to purposefully remove fertility permanently, a couple cannot give themselves totally, no matter how much they love each other. (This does not include couples who have regretted and repented, nor does this include couples who have lost their fertility through no fault of their own).

Contraception also does not allow a couple to totally give of themselves to each

other. You can't say, "I give all of myself to my spouse – except my fertility." That means you're not giving your total self. Contraception destroys marital unity by separating the couple physically. Natural Family Planning preserves it.

Living a holy sexuality through the Theology of the Body is not always easy. But I can say from experience, it is most definitely worth it.

For more information on Natural Family Planning:

[The Couple to Couple League](#)

[Billings Ovulation](#)

[Creighton Model](#)

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## Latin: A Convert's Romance in Three Movements [at God-Haunted Lunatic]



“This ‘one language’ ...was an expression of the unity of the Church and through its dignified character elicited a profound sense of the Eucharistic Mystery.”

~ [Pope St. John Paul II](#)

### **Allegro**

The waitress dropped off our check, and the busboy was starting to clear away our syrupy dishes. “Do you have any other questions?” the priest asked.

Like the waitress, Fr. Tom was itching to get on with his day. He’d already given up a good chunk of his morning over breakfast with me, but he was being trying to be understanding and polite. I was an utterly naïve Catholic wannabe who had parachuted intellectually into the melee of early-1980s catechetical confusion, and I was desperate for straight answers and guidance. As pastor of my [Uptown](#) parish, Fr. Tom was generously taking the brunt, and he did his best to field my many questions about Mary, the papacy, confession, and the like.

“Well, yes, I do have one more,” I replied. Fr. Tom waited – I hesitated. It was an embarrassing question that I knew would expose my flights of anachronistic Catholic fancy. “I bought this Rosary the other day” – my first one; I still have it! – “and there’s some Latin on the crucifix. Can you translate it for me?”

I figured (correctly) that Fr. Tom had gone to seminary when Latin was still required, and he nodded as I handed my beads to him. “Let’s see...*Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi*. Basically it [means](#) ‘Behold the wood of the cross which holds the savior of the world.’” It was a condensed line from the Good Friday liturgy, with which I’m well familiar now, but Fr. Tom didn’t mention it at the time. I thanked him and accepted back the Rosary without further comment.

Inside, however, I was thrilled. It seemed so mysterious, so obscure, and yet so solid, so reassuring. Somehow, it meant more to me that the words were in Latin than if they’d been in straight English – or Italian, or even Biblical Greek for that matter. The Roman part of Roman Catholic seemed inexorably bound up with the Latin language, and now I not only had my own little token of it, but I even *understood what it meant!* It was like I’d been granted an insider’s glimpse of something essential about the Faith – its character, its personality. It was a small emblem of entrée into a world utterly foreign to me, but it was significant. The Church, to me, was like a family, a big, messy family, with its own bewildering constellation of traditions and quirks and esoteric language, yet it was to be my own.

I clutched my Latin-laced token as if it was a ticket for an ocean crossing.

### **Andante**

“But why is the word for ‘ship’ feminine when the word for ‘sailor’ is masculine?” I asked my long-suffering Latin instructor. “And a farmer is masculine, but farming itself is feminine?”

He sighed, and I suspect the others sitting around the long table did so inwardly. It was supposed to be an accelerated Latin course for graduate students, not a seminar in philology. “There is no reason,” he calmly explained for the umpteenth time. “It’s just how it is. It’s just how the language developed.”

I didn’t buy it, but I let it go...again. We resumed our plodding through Allen and Greenough, and I shelved my curiosity. I was working on a master’s in medieval history at the University of Colorado, and my goal was supposed to be acquiring a reading knowledge of Latin, not unpacking its subtle linguistic lineage. Yet, as I struggled with vocabulary, conjugations, and declensions, I kept coming back to Latin’s alluring temperament. I should’ve been anxious to get on with utilizing the language to tackle minims, miniscule, and manuscripts,

but I was getting bogged down in the language itself.

Then the moment came when it became clear that medieval studies were not to be my life's work. A different instructor took over the second half of the accelerated Latin course, and, on a lark, he decided that we'd spend the final weeks of the semester translating the Vulgate's version of John's Gospel instead of Cicero. Who knows why he chose this – at a state university of all places. Regardless, we all dove in – and I was transfixed by the text. The debates about translation naturally revolved around meaning, and I swiftly drifted away from caring much about paleography and medieval charters. What mattered was John's theologizing about the God-man's invasion of our world.

As you'd expect in such a class, the goings were slow, but we managed to arrive at John 6 before the term concluded. "The [text](#) is pretty straightforward," the instructor indicated. "*Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem habet vitam aeternam* – 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.' And it aligns well with the [Greek](#). Thoughts?"

It was an open invitation and I jumped at it. I gave a rudimentary overview to my classmates of Catholic teaching on the Eucharist, but with a revealing enthusiasm that marked me for a divergent future. Clearly my career trajectory wasn't going to involve staid academic impartiality. I was a sectarian partisan, and it wasn't long after that day that I dropped out of the medieval studies program and headed off to [Steubenville](#) to study theology. Once again, a singular encounter with the Church's dead language had resulted in a lifegiving epiphany.

### **Presto**

Mrs. Dance had Ben's folder open and it was time to choose his freshman language requirement. "I don't care what else you take in [high school](#)," I told my teenage son. "But you have to take Latin."

Why not Spanish? Why not something useful? Why not, why not, why not...? I wouldn't budge, and I haven't budged since. Ben and two of his siblings have since graduated high school having enjoyed (or endured) at least three years of Latin each; Crispin will graduate this spring after a full four years. Cecilia is in her second year, and her two younger siblings will follow in her footsteps once they get there. Honors courses, dual-credit college courses, calculus and trig (or drawing and digital photography) – whatever they'd like. But Latin? It's a must.

For one thing, I'm still persuaded by the argument that there's no better way to buttress vocabulary, writing skills, and critical thinking than a hefty dose of Europe's original *lingua franca*. My collegiate children back me up on this to a certain extent – although there's a considerable lobby there to allow their younger siblings to acquire a modern, “practical” language.

Overruled.

Besides, in addition to Latin's value as a prep for the S.A.T. and college-level composition, there's also the fact that it has always been everybody's high school home base – an oasis in their daily grind, a safe space, both intellectually and socially, even emotionally. This stands to reason if you consider the camaraderie that would naturally emerge when kids of varying classes and backgrounds are compelled by their backward parents to study an ancient tongue. “It was great,” Crispin told me. “There were people I've been close to in Latin that I'd never run into outside of class.” And whenever our teens over the years have laughingly shared school-day anecdotes, they've more often than not emanated from Latin class.

**But this is all smokescreen.** The real reason – the ulterior motive, as it were – for my insistence on Latin for my kids has always been because it's the language of the Church – the syntax and structure of how the Church thinks, the way our Faith family communicates at her very core. I want that drummed into their heads, along with sound catechesis and regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church, so that, if they're ever to stray, they'll be plagued by Latinate cadences. They'll be haunted by the drumbeat of ecclesial sentence structure, and their very imaginations will be penetrated by Romish categories of reason.

That's not to say that I don't want them to think for themselves, to think broadly and openly – far from it. “Of its very nature Latin is most suitable for promoting every form of culture among peoples,” [Pope St. John XXIII](#) declared. “It gives rise to no jealousies. It does not favor any one nation, but presents itself with equal impartiality to all and is equally acceptable to all.” Its static character is its very advantage, for it fosters organized thought while allowing for wide-ranging entertainment of other and opposing views. And can there be a better foundation for achieving fluency in other languages – Romantic and otherwise – which, in turn, will lead to intellectual meanderings and couplings well beyond the Catholic fold?

Yet, no matter how far they wander, their years of Latin study will ensure an ingrained mental link to the liturgical language of their ecclesial homeland. Even if they come to reject and despise their baptismal heritage, they'll carry with them that heritage's mode of expression. That's critical, because they are coming of age in a culture "often characterized by concern with appearance, superficiality," as [Pope Francis](#) put it recently, "the division between heart and mind, interiority and exteriority, consciousness and behavior." Study of Latin and Latin literature, the Holy Father said, can be part of the antidote to such postmodern existential caprice, for it can help young people find "the path of life, and accompany them along paths rich in hope and confidence," to connect them to "the inner and intimate essence of the human being."

Certainly, in a much more limited and haphazard way, that's what Latin did for me – at least insofar as it contributed to my grounding in the life of the Church. And there's nothing more important to me than fostering a similar [grounding for my children](#). It's the best I can offer them, and they shall have it, despite their objections. *Felix culpa* – amen.

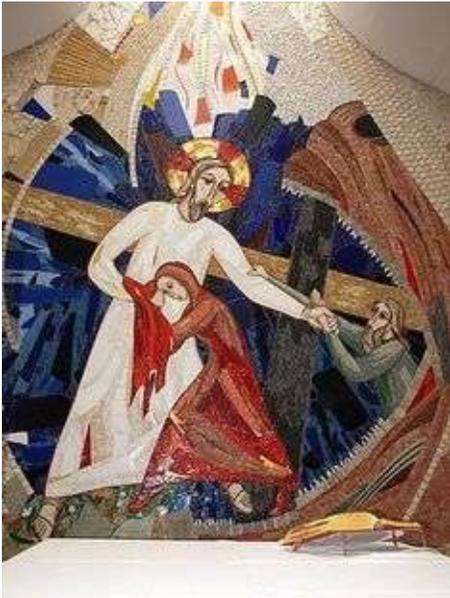
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In fact, everything that exists and moves in the Church – the sacraments, doctrine, institutions – draws its strength from Christ’s Resurrection. (Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, [Life in Christ](#), 67)

Even though the Church continually invites Catholics to live in the Resurrection of Christ, many of us cling to our suffering. As a result, our spirituality is focused mainly on the Crucifixion even though we celebrate our release from prison liturgically every year. The candles we light at the Easter Vigil symbolically illuminate our path forward, showing us how to move through the darkness of our sin and suffering to victory with Christ. During the [Easter Proclamation](#) (Exsultet), the deacon or priest sings:



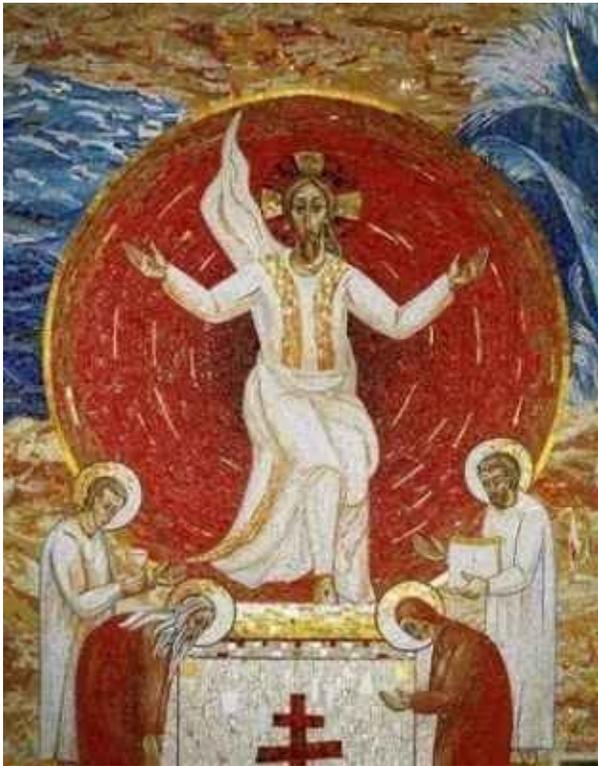
Father Marko Ivan Rupnik

This is the night when Jesus Christ  
broke the chains of death  
and rose triumphant from the grave.  
What good would life have been to us,  
had Christ not come as our Redeemer?

The power of this holy night  
dispels all evil, washes guilt away,  
restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy;  
it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly

pride.

Yet, as we listen to this prayer, the obvious question we must ask ourselves is, “Do I allow Christ to redeem me, to set me free in truth, in the nitty-gritty of my daily life?” It is not easy to actualize our faith, to move beyond mere ritual and lip service. I know I spent years thinking I was a committed Catholic but I was in fact closed to the power of Christ’s death and resurrection as it applied to me personally.



Father Marko Ivan Rupnik

Thank God for my kids because they shook me out of a phony piety by stripping away distractions, stripping my life down to the basics and forcing me to turn to Christ the Saviour in desperation. I was a perfectionist, who strove to raise polite, Godly children and keep an immaculate house. It took living on a limited income with nine kids, a husband struggling with depression, and overwhelming chores on a small hobby farm to bring me to my knees. Only when I experienced Christ’s redemption could I experience the resurrection and say with joy, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”

### **Kids Stripped Away the Excess in My Life**

Years ago, when my kids were still small, I was ironing dresses and shirts for Easter Sunday the next day. Six-year-old Claire watched for a while and then pointed to the iron and asked,

“What is that mummy?”

I was shocked and then I laughed and laughed because I realized this little girl had never seen me ironing. I usually used the clothes dryer as my wrinkle smoother when I wasn't looking for perfection but rather efficiency. Actually, it was not just the iron which seldom received attention as I mothered a large family, something I considered essential was eliminated from my life with the birth of each child. Painting portraits went with my first-born. Other births gave the boot to crafts, dusting, making bread, interesting meals and folding laundry. As every mother knows, a newborn takes at least eight hours a day to nurse, burp, rock, comfort, bath, change, and to wash diapers, clothes, receiving blankets, sheets, and baby blankets. Then you have to deal with your own clothes which tend to get covered in vomit and other nasty surprises. The lack of sleep leads to a rather narrow existence where the best days are when you can sneak in a 10-minute nap or shower and dress before noon. Those were the days when life was reduced to the basics.

Guess what?

Those basics were actually miraculous when I relaxed and allowed myself to live in the moment, enjoying my newborn and loving my other children and not bemoaning all the important activities I couldn't seem to even start.

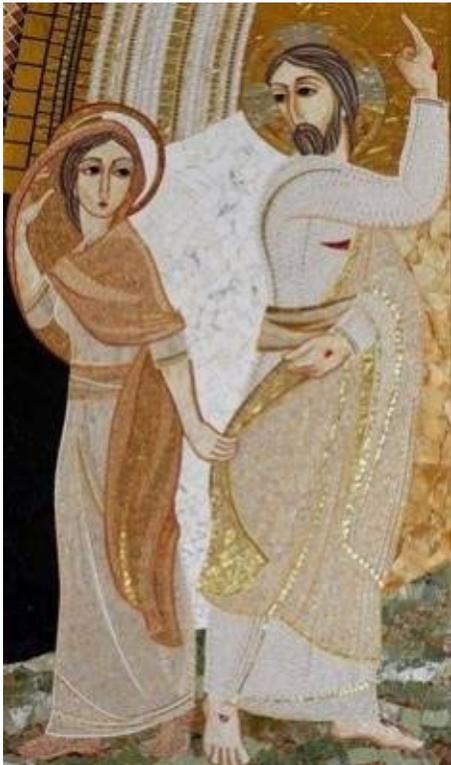
## **Suffering**

In the same way, we all strip off the superficial during Lent to discover what is really important in life. Then, we can rejoice during the Easter season; we can be filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost once again. In fact, the word “lent” comes from an Anglo-word meaning “spring.” It is a special time of renewal and preparation for Easter. I love this season because it is a time to renew my prayer life and as a result refocus on the most important aspect of my life which is my relationship with God and with the people I am called to love

Often people think of Lent as a time to share in the suffering of Christ yet when they do so they become morose and end up centering more on their own

sacrificial devotions than on God. Lent IS a time to get rid of the fat in our lives but only so we are able to connect more to the heart of our Beloved. I am thankful for all the suffering in my life because it has brought me closer to God.

In fact, I say bring on suffering because I want—no I *need*—to live in reality. I can think of no greater tragedy than to die and discover I had deluded myself, simply living happily on the surface, eating, drinking, doing chores, sleeping, and yet missing out on the core reality of what it means to be fully alive, fully human, in relationship to other people and to God. God always manages to use those moments when I am shattered to crack my heart and soul open to more of His presence and healing. It is like childbirth; the pain is forgotten when I hold my newborn. If there is no pain, no suffering, there is no baby or new growth in the Spirit.



Father Marko Ivan Rupnik

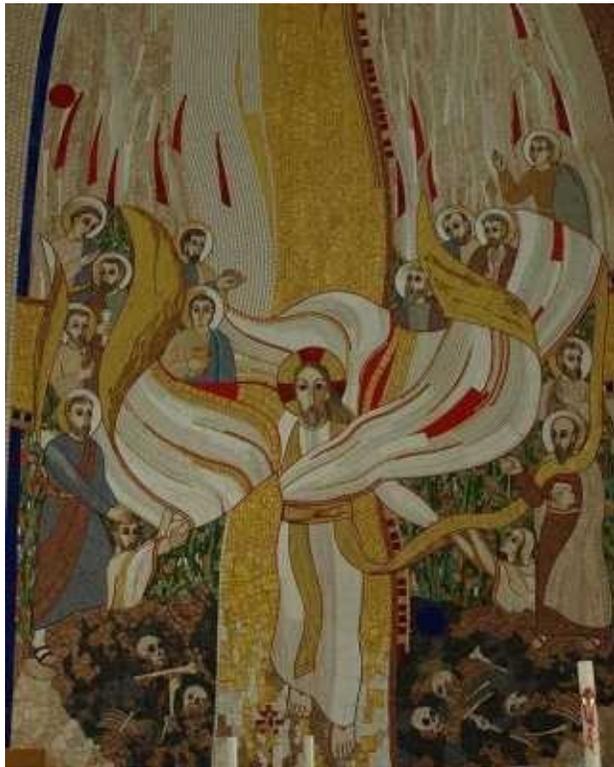
On this Easter, I am grateful for the ever-renewing Life within me which is constantly growing and changing. As long as I relax and say yes to God, His Spirit sinks deeper into my heart, soul, mind, and spirit

[Pope Francis](#) hit the nail on the head on Holy Saturday a few years ago when he proclaimed the truth that God calls us out of our comfort zone to grow and

change. Indeed, Baptism makes us children of God, and the Eucharist unites us to Christ. This must become our very life on a daily basis, not just on Sunday.

The Gospel of Easter is very clear: we need to go back there, to see Jesus risen, and to become witnesses of his Resurrection. This is not to go back in time; it is not a kind of nostalgia. It is returning to our first love, in order to receive the fire which Jesus has kindled in the world and to bring that fire to all people, to the very ends of the earth.” ([Pope Francis, Easter Vigil Homily, 2014](#))

Initially, I resist change out of fear of the unknown but when I let go of anxiety, relax and surrender, I can feel the Flames of Love becoming stronger within me. I crave to join my voice with St. Paul’s and say, “No longer I that lives but Christ that lives in me.”



Father Marko Ivan Rupnik

This transformation is simply the normal Christian’s life. [St. Pope John Paul II](#) said it best when he described Christians as Easter People.” We are the Easter People and Alleluia is our song.” Catholics don’t stop at the cross but continually allow the power of the resurrection to set us free. [Saint Teresa of Avila](#) explains how to experience the resurrection, “let this presence settle into

your bones and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise, and love.” This process of spiritual transformation ushers in the tangible, infectious joy of the Lord.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed

connectin with [theology is a verb](#), [reconciled to you](#)



## Published by melanie jean juneau

Melanie Jean Juneau serves as the Editor in Chief of Catholic Stand. She is a mother of nine children who has edited her kid's university term papers for over a decade. She blogs at joy of nine9 and mother of nine9. Her writing is humorous and heart warming; thoughtful and thought-provoking. Part of her call and her witness is to write the truth about children, family, marriage and the sacredness of life. Melanie is the administrator of ACWB, a columnist at CatholicLane, CatholicStand, Catholic365 , CAPC, author of Echoes of the Divine and Oopsy Daisy, and coauthor of Love Rebel: Reclaiming Motherhood.

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## Psalm 33 ~ The Earth is Full of God's Creative Love [at Pauca Verba]

**Before reflecting on Psalm 33** we might take note of verse 11 in the preceding Psalm 32. Here is the invitation:

*"Be glad in the Lord and rejoice O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."*

Some parishes spend months and endless committee meetings creating their mission statement. I'd suggest we can't do better than this: be glad in the Lord, rejoice, shout for joy, have an upright heart. Now Psalm 33.

**Verses 1-3:** *"Sing joyfully,"* what a summons. *"Praise the Lord."* *"Make music."* *"Sing a new song."* *"Play skillfully."* *"Shout for joy."* The love of God, the claim of being dependent upon God, the desire to be the Lord's servant - all of these begin with praise. Then why is church singing so tired and lifeless. Praising God is the offering of self.

The scriptures are loaded with references to the instruments of temple praise. God isn't partial to pipe organs. The little non-denominational churches that are springing up everywhere and which are filled with former Catholics, especially young former Catholics use guitars, banjos, flutes, harps, drums, tambourines and bells. I was in a monastery where a monk play on an old scrub board at Mass. It wasn't irreverent in the least.

But it's the goal of praising God and celebrating God's rule that ultimately matters. If we really understood and accepted that of course we might *shout out loud!* At Mass we might start with the sung *Gloria*, the *Alleluia* before the Gospel, the *Holy, Holy, Holy* and the *Acclamation after the Consecration*. God is God! We each owe our existence to God. Shouldn't be be raising the roof over that? And with more than just the minimal *one* verse.

**Verses 4-5:** Here the psalmist gives us reasons for praising God. God is always expressing God's self. God is always giving himself away to us in God's Word and works. Praise God because God is faithful and true. Praise God because of God's justice (how to be on this planet according to God's intentions). Praise God because God's love is unending. God's purposes spring out of God's love for us. *How wonderful is this!*

**Verses 6-9:** Creation is carried on God's breath. The stars in the sky are placed by God's exhaling them. And of course, the life within each human person is animated by a breath of God. No one, however mistaken, however twisted up or various, is without that God-infused dignity.

The line here about the "*waters being kept in a jar*" would resonate with the ancient Hebrews who witnessed the sea opening and dividing for their passage to freedom. *Fearing the Lord*: not that God will ping me off into a black hole for being naughty - but that I would fear anything that would take me away from the love of this all-providing God. *Fear the loss!*

**Verses 10-12:** But now there is a shift. Notice that it's not us (even a nation) who choose God, but God chooses us. There's a difference. Our money reads: *In God We Trust*. Really? God is in charge. We're here and gone. Our plans and projects and even our achievements come and go, but God's heart-thoughts endure.

**Verses 13-15:** God sees humankind - not like the teacher who had *eyes behind her head* but as a loving creator. Notice too that God sees and knows each of us personally *in the heart* which God has fashioned.

**Verses 16-19:** These verses say it all. *Are we ready?* These are the verses that for ages upon ages we have failed to accept. The earth, the world, this planet - it all belongs to God. Bow before that and everything is changed.

We think we're in charge with our science; our life-extending, plague-containing medicine; our satellites; economic systems; generals and admirals; our *fire and fury*; border patrols; walls and defenses; the next generation of social media, smart bombs and artificial intelligence. We have used our divine gifts wrongly and forgotten that while God has made us co-creators, we remain creatures.

*"A king isn't saved by an army; a warrior not delivered by his strength; a war horse is no guarantee of victory, might doesn't save."* The psalmist-servant said it; the priest only points to it.

**Verses 20-22:** The people who call upon and love God as their helper carry within them the life-themes of faith, hope and joy. Only God's world-filling love is sure. Indeed, it is the only real power. The whole world can deny God's sovereignty (or pay polite lip-service) while we live celebrating and congratulating ourselves in political illusion, exploitation, manipulation, self-protection and control.

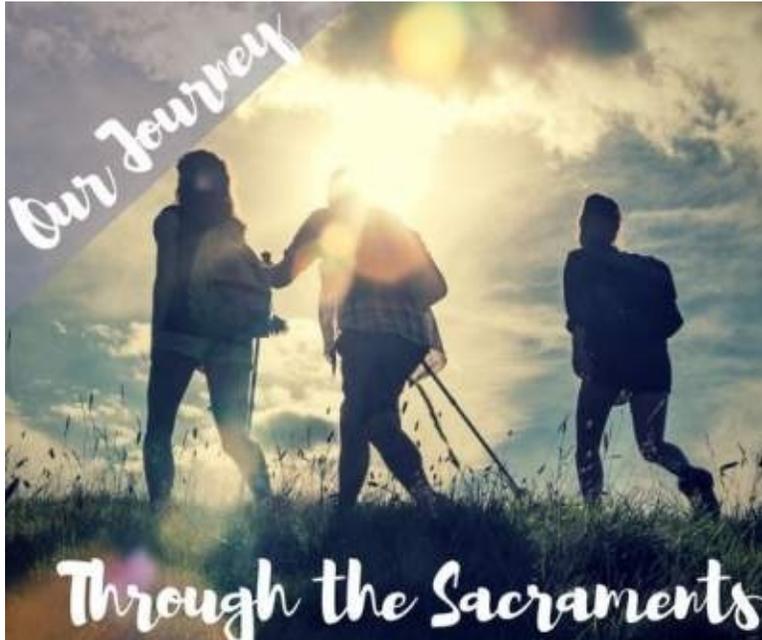
May we allow God's rule in our lives with joyful, free and happy hearts, full of praise, *"as we wait in joyful hope...."*

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This contribution is available at <http://paucaverba.blogspot.com/2018/04/psalm-32-earth-is-full-of-gods-creative.html>  
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## Our Journey through the Sacraments [at Theologyisaverb]



*The other day I was having a conversation once again with a friend of mine who is the parent of a teen who was now experiencing a conflict about her daughter's unwillingness to attend church. Her daughter argued that she,*

*“does not need to go to church or receive the sacraments to experience God in her life because she experiences God in creation. Further that church is boring and most of the people who attend are hypocrites anyway”.*

*This certainly is not the first time many of us have become acquainted with this perspective, and yet how would we both address the daughter's concerns and that of her parents?*

It must be noted that this discussion fully involves the skill of listening, even more so than providing a correct answer. Allowing each a chance to be heard, to articulate their concern is the first step in being open to consider how God might be meeting these concerns in every situation. Yet, there are theological premises here that can be invaluable in such a discussion as this.

To begin, I would say yes, we can encounter God in creation! There is no doubt

that when we look at a sunrise or the beautiful world around us that God is there. We innately sense our relatedness and connectivity to the Creator of it all. Yet, this is the broadest setting in which we can experience God's presence and action. For, in and through the church and the sacraments we are given the opportunity to visibly and intimately experience God's grace through God's greatest gift of Himself that of Jesus his son.

Here are tangible moments where we are met with mercy, love and unconditional forgiveness that are welcoming, nourishing and healing, felt on both personal level and in unity as a community. This is the beauty of our faith- it speaks not only to our desire for relationship with our Creator, but to our longing to be in relationship and communion with one another. Moreover, God's offer of love, mercy and forgiveness is continuous so should our response to his offer be.

Have you thought recently about the sacraments? Perhaps you are thinking that they are simply an event to be completed once that no longer requires any new action on your part?

If so, maybe that is why your experience of church has become boring and one dimensional. Let's take a new look at a few of the sacraments:

### **In Baptism**

you were cleansed, blessed and welcomed into community, with promises from your parents, grandparents and the church to help guide and support you in responding to God's offer. Each time you bless yourself, or are making a professing of faith you are giving your response and yes to that offer of God's salvation in your life.

### **In the Eucharist**

we are given the opportunity to join our yes to that given by Christ on the cross. There is Christ's offer of himself in ultimate love and mercy for us, but also we bring all that we are and do and offer it to God as well. We bring all of our strengths, and weaknesses, all of our joys and sorrows. We bring, in truth, our brokenness. Notice that I said "our" because we do this also as a community. So, when you speak of hypocrisy- we all come knowing that there are times when we have sinned and our relationship with God has suffered.

In the Eucharist we are renewing that relationship, and recommitting ourselves with our lives. All of this requires our participation and our response. Do we look for Christ's presence in the priest? In the people gathered? In the reading of the word, listening? In the offering of the gifts and see Christ's sacrifice and reconciliation to us? How do we respond? Jesus took the bread, blessed, broke it and shared it with all- we are called to do the same both in bread but also with our very lives. And as such we need to be committed to dealing with hunger, poverty and justice in the world around us.

### **In Reconciliation**

we are giving the opportunity to experience and celebrate God's grace, love, mercy and forgiveness in our lives and in community. God isn't as concerned with the "mistakes" but with repairing the relationship that has suffered. Jesus takes our frailties, and our with health, peace, and hope. We are called to seek to reconcile or repair relationships, love justice, and seek peace and hope for those who have no hope.

Think for a moment about your relationship with your best friend. If you think about your relationship with God, how could this be better? Have you made time for your friendship with God in prayer, answered his calls of love and grace? Have you said sorry when you realize that you have chosen to act unloving? In those times, we don't just hurt ourselves but our choices effect others we love and the community in relationship. Therefore, in penance we are given a chance to receive forgiveness, to show we are sorry and to repair these relationships..and celebrate as a community.

### **Even Confirmation**

is not an end but a challenge to go forth and to be a visible sign of the body of Christ in the world. God confirms you as a member of the body of Christ and then the response and choice is yours. It is a call to a higher standard to strive for love, mercy and peace not only within the doors of the church but in the world.

***To the parents specifically,*** there is a challenge to be a model of faith: more than going through the motions. Also seek to encourage your child to become involved in youth and peer ministry activities so that they can experience community more fully. Participate in outreach activities together, so that they too

can come to understand God's offer and our response to care for others, to love deeply and show forgiveness and mercy.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth".

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This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2018/04/30/our-journey-through-the-sacraments/>

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## Marital Intimacy is Worth the Risk [at Christ's Faithful Witness]



Oh she was lovely, the perfect ballerina. But her mother wanted her to stay that way.

So my dear young friend, danced and played and frolicked — with many men.

She got pregnant. Her mother forced her to have an abortion so that her perfect figure would not be marred.

She got pregnant again, and had another forced abortion.

She got pregnant again, and again. In all, she had four abortions, and then she slipped from her mother's leash and married her dearly beloved Robert, a virgin. He adored her. He had lived a chaste life before marriage, waiting to meet her. When I knew her, we called her the one-armed bandit because she always had her baby daughter in one arm while her other arm was busy doing other things.

She loved her husband. I watched her straighten his tie with deep affection. But she was long past enjoying conjugal intimacy. She told me she was burned out sexually because of her promiscuous life before marriage.

So she explained to me how they had relations. There are positions in sexual intercourse that are not uncomfortable, but which do not require the active

participation of the female partner. The man is able to reach a climax, and his wife need not be involved in the conjugal act.

This story still makes me sad. Intimate relations that give pleasure to both married partners is a gift one spouse surrenders to the other. It is the gift of chastity. Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being, according to the Catholic Catechism. It's worth fighting for.

“Sexuality becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman.” (CCC 2337) The Catholic Church is not talking about faking a response.

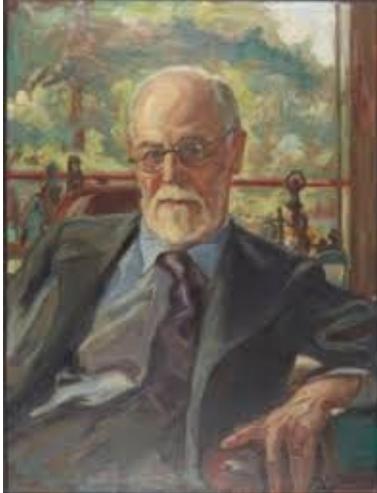
Jane was cheating Robert out of something important — her female passion responding to his masculine initiative. They were not using contraception. They were married, in love, and wanted children. But Jane had previously used men and been an object of use by men, and now she was left with no enthusiasm for sex. Concerning Jane and Robert's situation, Pope Saint John Paul II said “From the viewpoint of loving another person, from the position of



altruism, it must be required that the conjugal act should serve not merely to reach the climax of sexual arousal on one side, but happen in harmony, not at the other person's expense, but with that person's involvement.”

Strangely enough the Jewish founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, (1856-1939) agreed with the Catholic Church on this one point: sexual intimacy should be altruistic. It should combine affection and desire, but a mature person will want, altruistically, the good of his or her partner. And that means both

participate in the act.



Freud and Pope Saint John Paul II said these things so that people like Jane and Robert would have a guideline on how to lead happy lives. St. Paul cared too, warning couples, “Do not torture your wife! Or your husband!”

I'm joking. My marital chastity professor often speaks of historical figures who "tortured" their spouses by withholding sex because of scruples. The exact quote of St. Paul is this: “*The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.*” (1Cor 7:3) I knew a priest who ran into a couple arguing about this issue in a restaurant. She wanted to stop having intimate relations so she could pursue her prayer life. The priest leaned over their table and told the wife she was wrong.

Jane’s problem obviously stemmed from the poison in our culture . She rebelled against her



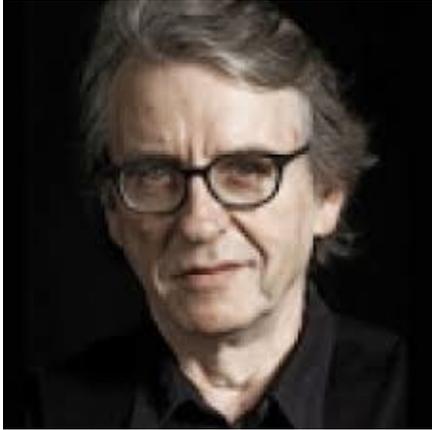
mother by engaging in relationships with multiple partners. Affectionate families are more likely to raise virgins. The poor little dancer did not receive love at home, only adoration for her outward appearance and her ability to perform. I think Robert could have and may have changed that little by little because he did love her. He didn't treat her as an object of use. He treated her as a beloved person,



with whom he intended to stay married exclusively until death. They were both open to new life. That is the Catholic definition of true marriage.

In his article on “Erotic Traps,” famous German sexologist Ulrich Clement explains that diminished desire in sexual intimacy is not a lack but a symptom. That’s true. We are talking about a pair of young newlyweds in which the bride does not enjoy sex because of her previous lack of chastity and multiple abortions.

He also notes that partners fail to communicate about their differences in sexual desire to protect themselves against the risk of being hurt. Did Jane tell Robert about her trick of not participating? It was something



she whispered to a female friend on the side. And would Robert, who never had sex before, know something was missing? Maybe with experience and maturity, he would recognise it. Men are thrilled by the noises their wives make when they are responsively involved in their lovemaking.

It's interesting the way Clement begins his article: "Some people have often firm conceptions, such as the fact that sex must be or should be present in a relationship. But with these conceptions they are building traps, in which the desire is slowly misplaced." Perhaps the trap in Jane's relationship with Robert is that they did need a long chaste courtship before marriage. Sex was not immediately necessary. But given her past, it probably didn't occur to her to insist on such a thing.

Clement is right. If the couple does not bring the underlying problem to the surface and talk about it, it will have lamentable effects in the erotic context. But it need not destroy the marriage especially if the couple had children and practiced Natural Family Planning earlier in their marriage. NFP has a honeymoon effect.

What if Jane and Robert later tried Natural Family Planning to postpone a pregnancy after the baby was weaned? This might



have helped their sexual relationship. Jane needed a period of romantic abstinence. She needed courtship without sex. She needed to know she was loved for herself.

Using NFP, one must abstain for a few days from intercourse during the woman's fertile period and then one can engage in marital intimacy the rest of the cycle. Practicing NFP requires mutual decision making and deeper communication. Robert might have finally found the key to open Jane's heart to loving sexual intimacy.

"If the couple does not change their sexual behavior pattern, then they will continue having problems involving sexuality. With certain painful, but nevertheless trusted discontent, the couple remains in the foreseeable comfort zone of their relationship," Clement wrote.

Certainly this is true for many couples. Suddenly, the husband of one my friends quit having relations with her and wouldn't tell her why. Communication in the marriage deteriorated. It appeared they were headed for a divorce, not by her choice. When a spouse suddenly stops having conjugal relations without explanation these questions arise "Do you still love me? Are we still together?" Many times the problem is a medical one, and the spouse with difficulty is unable to speak about it.

Clement writes about a routine quality in everyday sexuality. Couples who use NFP rarely feel sex is a duty. His viewpoint is the product of the sexual revolution, pornography, the deadening of hearts, the depersonalisation of conjugal life.

It is the breaking of the "nuptial bond between man and life" as outlined by Gabriel Marcel in the *Mystery of the Family*. In short, modern man is bored.

Marcel wrote in 1942 about human



beings losing a sense of reverence and awe for life itself because of the dissolution of the family through divorce, contraception, abortion, promiscuity, unchastity, treating man as a machine whose sexuality can be fixed with a pill. Chaste married relations without contraception, open to new life, are rich with joy. Throughout the years of a long relationship, a thousand ways to delight one another will occur to the couple. And only a few of those involve actual sexual intimacy.

Sexologists are not trained to take this perspective. They realise conjugal intimacy happens between persons, but it is not their starting point. Sexual ethics cannot be sexology, a view of man and woman that posits the problem exclusively from the point of view of “body and sex,” wrote Pope Saint John Paul II in *Love and Responsibility*. “The only fully true view is the one that proceeds from a thorough analysis of



the fact that a woman and a man are persons, and that their love is a reciprocal relation of persons.” Sexology, focusing on biology, medicine and the efficient climax, can only provide a partial view of the matter.

Many fear that communication about a problem of this nature will risk the relationship, according to Clement. But isn't the reward of a lifelong happy

marriage worth the risk?

“From nothing, nothing comes. Without investment there is no result,” Clement admonished. I think it is well worthwhile to continue intimate relations throughout the entire marriage barring illness or the rare case when the mutual decision is made to live celibate for the glory of God.

In old age, the NFP couple will already be habituated to voluntary abstinence, so the necessity of living without sex in the midst of illness will not be an undue stress on the marriage. However, if one wants to continue that side of the marriage, the couple must take action.



“The longer a relationship lasts, the more is eroticism a matter of decision and of active organisation. While with young sex the desire precedes the sexual acting, the decision for desire proceeds with mature sex,” Clement wrote, explaining that marital intimacy needs to be invited into long-term relationships.

Take the risk.

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This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.co.at/2018/04/marital-intimacy-is-worth-risk.html>

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## **How easily we misunderstand [at In the Breaking of the Bread]**

It has come home to me even more forcefully recently how easily we misunderstand one another and give others cause to misunderstand us.

We believe in giving others the benefit of the doubt, wherever this civility is valued, primarily because we understand how easy it is for human beings - failing the opportunity to be fully informed of all the facts and factors involved in any situation - to jump to conclusions which are as deficient as the bases upon which they stand.

What is most troubling in our human condition - post the original sin - is our inclination to take offense and hurt before the possibility of giving the benefit of the doubt even arises in our awareness. One truth or reality that the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman and their subsequent "fall" from grace certainly makes clear, is that we are all suffering - in every generation since then - a profound insecurity in the very depths of our sense of identity and dignity. This insecurity in turn is a grave obstacle to open and trusting relations among us.

The Creator revealed to his creatures the nature and reason for this insecurity and how differently we women and men experience and suffer it.

The man is perennially insecure in his labors, in his relationship with the Earth and the world around him, and in his visceral passion to survive and to provide for his family. Because our progenitor broke faith with his Creator, believed a lie about his Creator insinuated into his mind by the persuasive "stranger", and acted in direct opposition to what he knew first hand to be the will of his Creator - ignoring the very precise warning he had received from his Creator - the man became estranged from his Creator, from himself and his own integrity which he had now undermined, and subsequently with innumerable practical consequences, he became estranged from his world and his place in that world.

In addition and perhaps more seriously, the man failed to watch over and protect the woman when she was assailed by the persuasive stranger. Where was the

man and what was he doing when the stranger arrived and approached the woman? What was he thinking when she brought to him the stranger's insinuation and suggestion to ignore the Creator's warning? Why did he not explain to her the error in the stranger's suggestion and motivate her to join him in remaining faithful to the Creator?

We men, as his inheritors, now suffer the very same consequences of insecurity in our dignity and place in the world. We struggle and labor and all our efforts eventually terminate in frustration and the production of "thorns and thistles", spending our life force and energy apparently to no avail.

Why did the seductive stranger approach and attack the woman and not the man? The great respect and reverence Christians inherit from our Jewish sisters and brothers - our religious tradition from theirs - resides precisely in the importance and value given by the Creator to woman as the one who has been designed by God to be the bearer of new life - in the image and likeness of the Holy Spirit who is the "Lord and Giver of life" - even more so than the man, who has been designed by God to "fertilize" this new life within her, to stand by her, and to cherish her for all that she gives as she pours herself out in selfless and devoted service.

That was the Creator's plan, but now, the woman, for her part, is perennially insecure in her relations, first and foremost her relationship with her husband, her man. Although the account relates that she only knew of the Creator's warning indirectly from the man, she nevertheless knew it to be true and reliable, as God her Creator is himself reliable. Still, she allowed herself to be persuaded by the stranger, accepting as true his insinuations that the Creator was not truthful, nor reliable, but in fact stingy with his blessings.

She was seduced with the desire to be like God, even though she already experienced the fullness of likeness to God in her own being and dignity as woman. She was tempted to no longer trust in God or wait for his blessings to unfold, but instead, to grasp at them and seize them herself, alone, independently of her Creator.

She could still have been saved from her error had her man resisted her proposal, but he didn't. As a result, she not only fell from grace herself but also drew her husband into falling from grace. How could she then continue to trust in him and in his love for her, now that she too began to suffer the consequences of their

break from trust in God.

Gone was the intimacy with God that they had until then enjoyed with their Creator in the wonderful garden He had created for them. In their guilt and shame they no longer looked forward to their intimate walks and chats with their Creator in the afternoon warmth of the garden; instead they feared their Creator and hid from Him in their shame.

No longer certain of her man's strength or confident in his love and care, the woman began to suffer uncertainty of being loved. The more she seeks to be reassured that she is loved, the more her man resents being reminded of his failure, and the more he reacts badly in an effort to quell her grasping and, in effects, behaves in a rather domineering way.

Both men and women are not only estranged from each other, and from their Creator whom they now fear rather than seek out, but they are also estranged from the garden and all its wonderful creatures, of whom they are also a part and fellow creatures before their Creator. Gone is the order and peace of the natural environment of Earth, because her caretakers - the man and the woman - have taken a mortal wound in their own sense of dignity and identity, and they have forgotten how to care for their fellow creatures. In their insecurity and fear, they end up pillaging and raping the Earth, never feeling satisfied with a sufficiency, but ever seeking more and more....

They continued to suffer in this tragic way until the advent of the Savior and the realization of the promise made to them by the Creator. In joining the human race through Mary, Jesus of Nazareth has opened up a path of return to the garden and to intimate life-giving relations with the Creator, whom we now know as our heavenly Father. Jesus has obtained for us the forgiveness of all our faults and, in the giving and our pouring of the Holy Spirit, has opened up for us a new way of living, a restoration of the original innocence and life of harmony ever intended by our Creator from the start for us to enjoy in his presence and with his company.

Those who accept his call and invitation and repent of their death dealing practices, committing now their faith and trust in the One and only Savior of humanity, Jesus Christ, are baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit with water and the Holy Spirit and are born again, regenerated, and adopted by God as his very own children. Jesus leads them and

sends them out into all the world to extend this good news and opportunity to be restored to grace to all of humanity, to all who will accept the priceless gift ever offered by God to humanity.

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This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2018/04/how-easily-we-misunderstand.html>  
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**Gianna Beretta Molla was a pediatrician, wife, and mom of four children.** She was also a skier and mountain climber who also enjoyed concerts and theater. She is known for giving her life for that of her unborn child, and is now a Catholic saint. As I've read her biography, I've been amazed by her story and character. She died twenty years before my birth, yet I feel we could have been best friends. St. Gianna Beretta Molla truly is a saint for modern moms.



## Raising a Saint

**St. Gianna's story begins with her parents.** Elio Guerrerio devotes only a couple chapters to Alberto and Maria Beretta in [Saint Gianna Molla: Wife, Mother, Doctor](#), yet I feel this remarkable couple—like St. Therese of Lisieux's parents—deserves canonization themselves. Maria considered a religious life before marriage, as Gianna did. She took her children to daily Mass before school. The family also prayed a rosary every evening. Gianna followed both of these habits with Pietro and their children after her marriage.

Alberto and Maria had thirteen children, three of whom died during the Spanish

flue and two during infancy. Gianna was the second youngest. Like Cardinal Martini, “I am impressed by the fact that Gianna and her siblings all achieved prestigious professional qualifications: two engineers, four physicians, a pharmacist, and a concert pianist. These results certainly reward the intellectual gifts and the conscientious efforts of each of them. They also reflect the family’s financial resources and prudent administration. But I believe that the determining factor was the parents’ way of listening to their children.”

Gianna’s childhood wasn’t easy. She struggled at school and was kept home from school for one year because of ill-health. Her older sister died when she was thirteen. She also lived through [World War II in Italy](#). She was deeply involved in [Catholic Action](#), just as her mother was. For a time, she considered becoming a missionary, but her poor health prevented this, and she discerned a vocation for marriage instead.

“I make the holy resolution to do everything for Jesus. All my works, all my disappointments, I offer everything to Jesus...” ~ Gianna

## **Marriage & Motherhood**

Gianna’s parents died within months of each other in 1942. She and her siblings scattered to their studies and professional pursuits. Gianna graduated in 1949 with a degree in medicine, and then earned a specialty in pediatrics. She met Pietro Molla in 1954 and they quickly fell in love.



Gianna and Pietro were married in 1955, with all the joy and expectation that a young couple faces. Gianna continued her medical practice, while Pietro worked at a nearby factory. She still enjoyed skiing, rock climbing, and hiking whenever she could. Their first son was born a year after their wedding. Two more children followed, then a couple of miscarriages. Pregnancy and labour weren't easy for Gianna, but she loved being a mom.

“Gianna was a joyful person, but when a child was born, her joy was full and perfect. Nothing was lacking. She was radiant. From the beginning of our marriage she prepared herself with prayer to create the most welcoming, the most serene environment for our children.” ~ Pietro Molla

In 1961, Gianna was again pregnant. This time, however, complications developed when a fibroid tumour was discovered on her uterus. She had three treatment options: abortion and surgery to remove the tumour; a complete hysterectomy; or surgery to avoid only the tumor so she could continue her pregnancy. She chose the latter option, and Guerriero says, “She understood the risk she was taking, but her vocation as physician and mother was to support life, not to threaten it.”

When I first heard Gianna's story, I thought she died from this surgery. However, the surgery to remove her fibroid in September was successful. Gianna continued her pregnancy with no further complications, and her daughter was

born in April. Gianna's first three children had been born at home, but (likely because of the fibroid) her fourth was born in the hospital.

“Another of Gianna's traits was the great importance she gave to the children's birth. The arrival of the children was the grace par excellence. There, although she was a doctor, she would say to me that it is good for children to be born at home within the family. So it was for the first three children. The doctor and the nurse were there, but the birth occurred at home.” ~ Pietro Molla

After her daughter's birth, Gianna developed septic peritonitis, an infection that could have likely been treated with modern antibiotics. She died on April 28th, 1962, during Easter week, at the age of thirty-nine.

## **Gianna Beretta Molla's Canonization**

Because Gianna was a doctor and very involved in Catholic Action, she was well-loved and well-respected in her community. Within a decade of her death, her cause for canonization was begun. Pietro and his children were understandably reluctant to have their private lives exposed to the public in this way. They agreed to the process because Gianna in life had always been willing to help others. Now, she would be a model to inspire women around the world.

“[T]here is a theme that recurs in letters from so many mothers that I receive... All those mothers write that they turn to the intercession of Gianna because as a mother she must have faced their same problems and so is able to understand them and help them.” ~ Pietro Molla



The miracle for Gianna's beatification happened in the hospital in Brazil founded by her brother, Father Alberto. In 1977, a young mom was recovering from an infection she received after having a C-section to deliver a stillborn baby. She was to be transferred to another hospital for a dangerous operation. A nurse asked others to join her in requesting Gianna's intercession for the young woman's healing. The next day, the doctors discovered she had recovered and no longer needed the dangerous operation.

Her canonization miracle occurred in 2003. A mother-to-be experienced a tear in her placenta when she was 16 weeks pregnant. She lost all her amniotic fluid and was told that her baby couldn't survive. She asked for Gianna's intercession and resisted doctor's recommendations to terminate her pregnancy. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl whom she named for Gianna.

Gianna was canonized during Easter season the following year, just forty-two years after her death. Pietro died on Easter Saturday in 2010, after attending his wife's beatification and canonization masses and testifying to her faith and love.

***“Gianna Beretta Molla was a simple, but more than ever, significant messenger of divine love.*** In a letter to her future husband a few days before their marriage, she wrote: *Love is the most beautiful sentiment the Lord has put into the soul of men and women.* Following the example of Christ, who *“having loved his own... loved them to the end”* (Jn 13: 1), this holy mother of a family remained heroically faithful to the commitment she

made on the day of her marriage. The extreme sacrifice she sealed with her life testifies that only those who have the courage to give of themselves totally to God and to others are able to fulfill themselves. Through the example of Gianna Beretta Molla, may our age rediscover the pure, chaste and fruitful beauty of conjugal love, lived as a response to the divine call!”  
~ [Pope Saint John Paul II on Gianna’s canonization](#)

## St. Gianna’s Example for Modern Moms

Gianna Beretta Molla was a remarkable woman who managed to juggle motherhood, faith, work, recreation and volunteering. While she is known best for her heroic sacrifice for her youngest daughter’s life, her entire life is a model of faith and virtue. Despite the suffering and hardships she faced, she chose over and over again to submit to God’s will and to live a life full of love and joy.

“Mothers today face all sorts of challenges, from managing finances so there’s food on the table to carting children to play dates and sporting events. It seems there’s just never enough time for anything, including our children’s formation. Sometimes, we forget that we inform our children’s faith by our actions when we do our jobs or our volunteer work or our family service, no matter how difficult, with the love of Christ in our hearts.” ~ Melanie Rigney, [Sisterhood of Saints: Daily Guidance and Inspiration](#)

**St. Gianna Beretta Molla is the patron saint of mothers, physicians, and unborn children.** Her feast day is celebrated on April 28.

You can find out more about her, including quotes and photos, by visiting [the Society of Saint Gianna website](#). To ask for St. Gianna’s intercession, you may pray [this litany](#) or [novena](#).

*Photo credit: [the Society of Saint Gianna](#).*



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## To Be Alive [at Sunflower Sojourn]

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.~Ephesians 2:10*

**I celebrated my birthday recently.** I'm not going to tell you how old I am... Most people are shocked at my age anyway, since youthful genes run in my family. Additionally, I'm quite petite. Put simply, the number doesn't matter. **These days, I'm pondering life and the lessons I've gained more than before.**



Photo by [Janko Ferlič](#) on [Unsplash](#)

**I no longer put societal expectations about age and the timeline for God's plan for my life together.** God has given us each a different story to write. It's refreshing that none of us is exactly the same. We can always learn from one another and the different ways that God works in each our lives. It can be difficult to understand why the Father gifts one person in a certain way and not another person, but He is sovereign. **Only He knows why, as tough as that can be for us to swallow.**

**In the past year, I had many opportunities to actually "walk in faith."** By the world's standards, I went about a lot of things in a way that isn't normally recommended. I think some people think I'm crazy for the peace I've gained from Christ about certain areas of my life. But you know what? We serve a faithful, all-powerful God. ***He has never let me down, and I know that same faithfulness will continue this year and forever.***

**I am astounded when I think upon the gift of life.** Earthly life is definitely not perfect and there are always struggles of various types. Yet when I ponder that this life is a gift, and I could have never existed at all, or even not been given the chance to live...It puts it into a whole new perspective! ***What a tremendous gift, to live, learn, and love.***

**I was an idea of the God of the universe!** So were you, and every other person in existence at any time. I don't think our minds can fully comprehend it. **What is also profound is that each of us were created for a specific & unique purpose!**

**I can't wait to grow closer to Jesus Christ during this next year of my life and to see how He leads me further into the purpose I was created for...**



Photo by [Rob Bye](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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## Countermagisterium [at If I Might Interject]

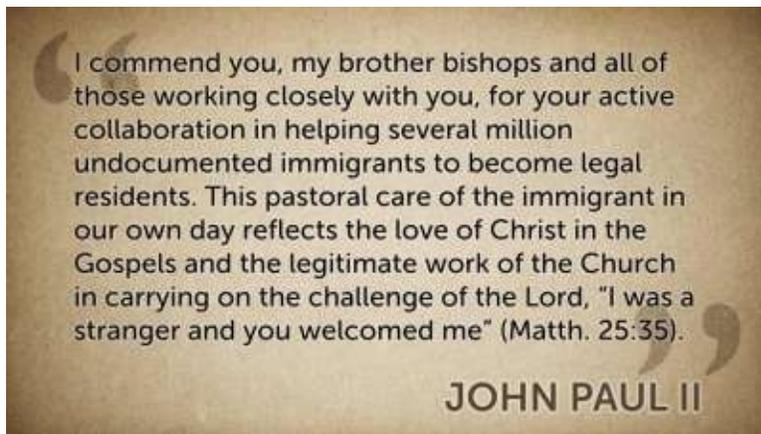
For the entire history of the Church, we had an understanding that the Magisterium of the Church—the Pope and bishops in communion with him—are the ones who determine what is orthodox and what is not. They are also the ones to determine whether it is an appropriate time to change the discipline of the Church. That’s not to say we didn’t have disagreement in the Church, or that all of those with authority exercised it in an unblemished manner. But the point is, when the Church taught, orthodox Catholics recognized the obligation to give assent. Those who refused to give assent were recognized as dissenters or possibly even schismatics and heretics.

But in these current times, stretching back to the end of Vatican II, we’ve seen the rise of a new way of thinking, one which claims that a person can be a “good Catholic” while rejecting portions of Church teaching they disliked. Initially, it seemed like this movement was politically “liberal.” We had people arguing that *Humanae Vitae* was not binding, or that the teaching on abortion was in error. They appealed to either dissenting theologians like Charles Curran and Hans Küng, or to spurious interpretations of past saints and legitimate theological concepts like *double effect*. These people argued that anything which was not *ex cathedra* was not protected. Since it could not be protected, it could be in error. Because it could be in error, it could be rejected.

There was no basis for those claims. It depended on the interpretation of people with no authority to interpret and rejected the authority of those who did have that authority. But people fabricated their own theology to justify what they intended to do anyway. When the Popes and bishops rejected their views, they were seen as trying to “undo” the work of the Council. This movement was, of course, in error. Faithful Catholics flocked to the defense of the Church.

There was a problem though. Because the dissenters of that time tended to be

politically liberal, it became easy to confuse the defense of the Church with political conservatism. Some defenders of the Church were actually defending conservative politics—which did not always line up with Catholic teaching. When this happened, it was easy to downplay the teaching that rejected conservative politics... but the fact remained that Church teaching did not line up with one political faction. [†]



### **St. John Paul II, September 16, 1987**

Advancing to the time of the current pontificate, we see that the current dissenters are behaving just as wrongly as the dissenters of the past. They are again falsely citing the words of the saints and legitimate theological concepts. They are again rejecting those with the authority to teach while promoting those who either have no authority to teach, or are confusing their teaching office with their personal views. When the Pope says X, this countermagisterium argues that the Pope had no right to say X. Like the previous generation of dissent, the current faction is choosing to listen to the countermagisterium while treating the

*real*

magisterium as a false opinion.

One of the tragedies here is seeing members of the Church I hitherto respected

taking a path I cannot follow if I want to be faithful to the Church. When the Church permits Eucharist in the hand and Mass celebrated *ad orientem* and a respected churchman is telling us this is diabolical, then I cannot follow that churchman in this matter. When a high ranking member of the Church openly questions the teaching of the Pope, a red flag goes up in my mind. When a theologian starts questioning the orthodoxy of the Pope, I start questioning the orthodoxy of said theologian—did he *really* understand the teaching of the Church? Or did he confuse orthodoxy with conservatism?

The reason I do this is not because I am a liberal dissenter who wants to undermine the Church [§]. Rather, I think they do not speak rightly about the Pope. While I will not judge their motives [¶], I believe they are reacting to a caricature of the Pope. Therefore when the Pope teaches X and the countermagisterium says the Pope is wrong, I believe that the Pope has the authority while his opponents offer opinions which they confuse with authority.

For example, reading *Amoris Lætitia*, I believe that the accusation of “opening up Communion to the divorced and remarried” is a false charge. It is clear that the Pope is asking bishops to apply the determination of culpability to these cases instead of assuming all elements of mortal sin are present. It’s quite possible that the number of cases where culpability is reduced is ZERO. But we can’t presume that. Therefore when I read something that claims that the Pope is “opening up Communion,” I believe we have a false statement—even if sincerely believed to be true—on par with “Catholics worship Mary.”

Some critics reading this far may accuse me of trying to match my theological knowledge against men who served the Church faithfully for decades. That would be false. I don’t presume to challenge them. However, when one considers the words of Our Lord on authority (Matthew 16:19. 18:18, Luke 10:16), I am pitting the *authority* of the Pope against the *opinions* of these men. Put that way, I must be obedient to the Pope to be faithful to the Church. Therefore, if the countermagisterium opposes him, I cannot listen to them.

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[†] There were warnings of course. The advent of groups like the SSPX were serious threats and the magisterium recognized that. But it was easy for them to be tolerated by conservatives who argued “liberals were greater threats.” In my opinion, the current problems in the Church has that mindset as at least part of the origin.

[§] I have also defended his predecessors from critics on both sides of the political spectrum. Liberals have accused me of being heartless. Conservatives have accused me of being ignorant of Church teaching.

[¶] This is important. The average person who misinterprets the Pope as teaching error can quite easily misinterpret the Priest, Bishop, or Cardinal who expresses concern. We would be wise not to judge them by those anti-Francis Catholics who cite them.

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## Community [at With Us Still]

The first thing I noticed, as our Kairos Weekend began inside the prison last week, were the guys who *didn't* show.

It's rather an odd thing to experience among inmate-retreatants. Most *welcome* the chance to get some time out of the cell...even if they are not in the least bit interested in the message of the Kairos Weekend. They'll [show up for the cookies](#), on Thursday night anyway. And then, sure, the number of participants may decrease a bit as the days go by.

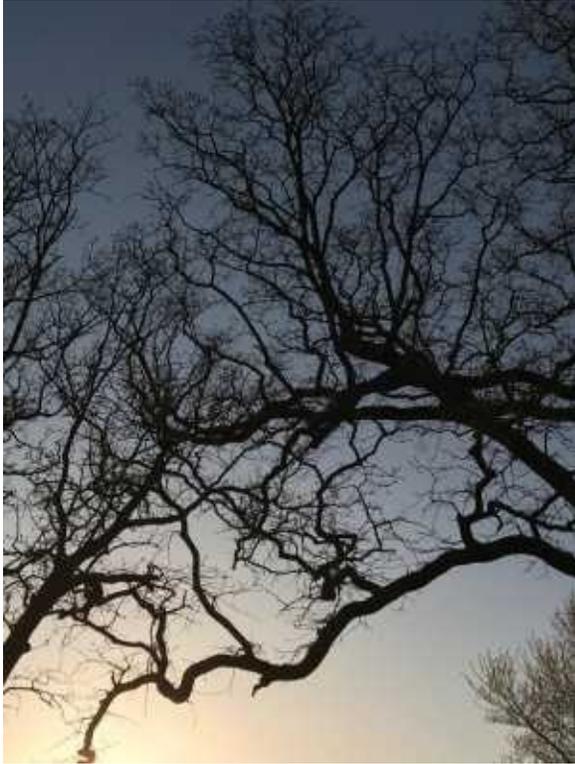
But this time, even our *opening* session started with far less than a full house. Half-a-dozen of our scheduled participants never did come to Randolph Hall – and it set a decidedly peculiar tone for how I encountered spiritual gifts in the days that followed.

In large part, that had to do with the role I'd taken on for this Kairos Weekend: As “Observing Leader,” one of my [primary responsibilities is that of timekeeper](#) – keeping things on track throughout the course of a jam-packed four-day agenda. Plus, having a large number of no-shows meant spending a LOT of time and energy rearranging our “Table Families” and “Team-Host” assignments.

Important administrative details, I suppose. But with my *head* buried in those details, I noticed, it didn't leave much opportunity for my *heart* to become engaged in personal connections. I didn't really get to know any of the Resident participants during the Weekend. Even my “quality time” with teammates seemed truncated by the relentless, ever-evolving demands of the leadership role.

Still, a bit of strange beauty managed to work its way into my experience of the retreat. It came in the gloaming...outside the prison, as we gathered for dinner.

Check this out:



Even a harried, preoccupied Observing Leader had the cranial capacity to appreciate the moment: This one tree, with its many branches...some, seemingly insignificant...but all, essential to the whole.

And this fleeting beauty became something of a cherished take-away as the days – and their demands – wore on. Recalling the tree, I could see the same sort of vascular communion taking shape inside Randolph Hall. A roomful of strangers, becoming less enigmatic to each other with each passing hour...until by Sunday, the Trunk had been fully revealed: Christ, among us – feeding us...making us One.



...and then, sending us out – into our cellblocks, and into the world – while also answering the very plea we'd been making throughout the Weekend as we prayed the Kairos Community Prayer:

*Teach us to love each other*

*as You love us,*

*to give ourselves*

*as You give Yourself, so that the*

*Kingdom of God might be made*

*present to all. Amen.*



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

*IHS*

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## Choosing Government over God has a Difference; One is Death, and the other is Life [at Cradling Catholic]



AP photo

(I chose not to put any photos of Alfie in here. His parents deserve some privacy)

***“I do not hesitate to proclaim before you and before the world that all human life — from the moment of conception and through all subsequent stages — is sacred because human life is created in the image and likeness of God.”***

**Pope St. John Paul II**

By Larry Peterson

The saga of Alfie Evans sickened me. Except for two overriding factors, his death was unnecessary. First, the feigned necessity of his death is embedded within the secular practicality of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century judicial system. Secondly, among many medical practitioners who lean on their own omniscient ability, it was in Alfie's "best interests" to die. You see, they had to help him because he refused to do it on his own. He had become a "burden" to secularism.

I write this because I have experienced circumstances similar to Alfie's parents. My wife was on life-support, but unlike Tom and Kate Evans, I had the task of allowing the machines to be turned off. It was not a judge or a doctor or the courts or anything like that. It was ME, the woman's husband. The end result was different.

My wife, Loretta, had been ill for a long time and on April 6, 2002, she fell into a coma. By that evening she was on life support. There was a Catholic living will on file for each of us, and I signed a DNR (do not resuscitate). A DNR gave me control over life ending processes. Even though her final breaths were expected, signing the DNR was, for me, akin to signing a death warrant.

Although my wife was a middle-aged adult and Alfie was a baby, the parallels in each case are quite similar. Alfie, at the age of seven months, developed seizures and they caused him to go into a "semi-vegetative state." Alfie did have brain function, but most doctors agreed that his condition (which they were not sure of) was incurable. Most importantly, his parent's rights to try to save him were stripped from them by the courts.

We tried for three days to wean Loretta off the ventilator. Each time her breathing stopped in less than a minute. Six doctors told us it was "no-use." On the third day, my grown children took turns going to their mom's bedside to say their "good-byes." One at a time they came from that room sobbing like babies. I was last and sat by her side, looking at her, holding her hand and saying whatever it was I was saying. Those words I do not remember. I do remember one word; I was called a "murderer" by someone in Loretta's family.

Unlike Alfie's parents, I had control over the machine that was doing her breathing (she had been on life-support for three weeks). Three of the doctors were there and the chief-of-staff. I asked them to pray with us, and they all did. The machine was switched off, and the intubation tubes were removed. A minute passed by and she kept breathing. Then two minutes passed by and then five and

ten and then one hour. The cardiologist said, “Don’t be fooled, she won’t make it.”

Three days later she was up in a room, and three weeks later she came home. She had earned the title of “The Miracle Woman of Northside.” Her recovery was not only baffling; it was unexplainable. Ironically, cancer killed her exactly one year later. The “murderer” comment was never retracted.

In Alfie’s case, his parents had no choice. They were invoking God along with countless others around the world. The Pope had secured citizenship for Alfie, and the Italians were ready to transport him to Italy to be cared for. Unfortunately, in the world of the “nones,” secularists, and atheists, God is not part of the equation. He was the common denominator in ours.

Virtually every court in the U.K. ruled against the parent’s rights. The government and their “experts” knew best; Alfie must DIE. I cannot imagine standing by as my child’s life was taken from him by court order. It is incomprehensible to me.

So the state took away the parent’s right to protect their child. They subjugated Natural law and vanquished the very nucleus of any successful civilization, the family. They pulled Alfie’s tube. He lived for five days breathing on his own. Was that a message from above that those in charge should have tried harder?

Unfortunately for Alfie, his “quality of life” was not deemed worthy to move forward. Loretta kept breathing and did use oxygen intermittently. If the doctors were in charge of the breathing apparatus, they might have simply left it off when her breathing failed on the first day.

Unlike the Evans, we were able to take three days before we agreed to leave it off. On the third day, she kept on breathing on her own and came out of the coma. Doctors do NOT know everything. They are definitely not equal to the God who created each and every one of them.

I can end this with one irrefutable fact. Tom and Kate Evans will go home, and when they close the door behind them, they will realize that little Alfie is gone—permanently. Therein lays the lonely heartache they will forever live with. You cannot understand that unless you too, have lived it.

Please pray for them both that within each other they find the strength to move

on. What happened to them and their son was a terrible thing.

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## God's Recital [at On the Road to Damascus]

Susan was a six year old ballerina. She worked hard for weeks and now was on stage for her first recital. She wanted nothing more than for her daddy to see her dance but he was away on business. He had hoped to make it home but with flight delays due to bad weather it didn't look good.

Susan stood on stage with the other little girls as she scanned the audience. Her eyes desperately darted about looking for her father but he was nowhere to be found. Her heart began to sink as the music started. Then she saw his smile. He was sitting front row center. He had made it and she was filled with joy.

My older children were brought into a life of faith when they were older. It is not something they grew up with. They are now rebellious teens and question the things they have been taught. They are not sure if they believe or if they don't or really what they believe. Mass is something they do only because it is required.

I have struggled with that. During Mass we make a few oaths that we will live for Christ and die for him if necessary. Whether we realize it or not we swear our eternal lives as part of these oaths. Yet many, including my children, don't have the slightest clue what they are actually doing or committing their lives to. We come to watch other people sing. We take communion. We get donuts afterwards if the youngest is good. Really, there is nothing to get excited about.

There are days that this really bothers me. Why require them to go and take a half hearted oath they do not understand? There are times where I just throw up my hands and say fine – stay home. That is exactly what I did when I got confirmed. I left the church. That wasn't God's plan for my life and he continually beckoned for me to return home for over a decade. Eventually my ears were opened and I heard his voice. Can I trust God to do the same with my children?

Mass is the single greatest event in human history, second only to the incarnation. In each and every Mass heaven is connected to earth and we are allowed to stand at the foot of the cross during the sacrifice of our Lord with all of the angels and saints that have ever existed and who ever will. We cannot see this supernatural reality happening around us in our fallen nature but it is

happening none the less. If we could see this reality there is no other place we would ever want to be. I get to make up for what is lacking in Jesus' crucifixion. What possibly could be lacking? Quite simply, my participation. That is what Mass does. It allows me to participate in the greatest sacrifice of all time. I get to stand at the foot of the cross with Mary.

Susan so desperately wanted her father to see her dance. She worked hard trying to get the moves just right. It was something extremely important to her and she wanted to share that experience. Mass is that for me. I don't require my children to attend Mass because I am a mean dad. I don't have the misconception that they will suddenly be filled with the Holy Spirit and commit their lives to God. I do it because I know it is the most beautiful and important thing we can ever experience on this side of heaven and I want to share in the beauty with them. I am less, my family is less when they aren't there with us.

Lord, I will get them there. The rest is up to you. Help me to open their hearts to your beauty and love.



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## Daily Prayer to the Blessed Virgin for the Month of May [at The Shield of Faith]

Prayer to the Celestial Queen for each day of the month of May

Immaculate Queen, my Celestial Mother, I come onto your maternal knees to abandon myself in your arms as your dear child, and to ask of You, with the most ardent sighs, in this month consecrated to You, the greatest of graces: that You admit me to live in the Kingdom of the Divine Will.

Holy Mother, You who are the Queen of this Kingdom, admit me to live in It as your child, that It may no longer be deserted, but populated by your children. Therefore, Sovereign Queen, I entrust myself to You, that You may lead my steps in the Kingdom of the Divine Will; and as I cling to your maternal hand, You will lead all my being to live perennial life in the Divine Will.

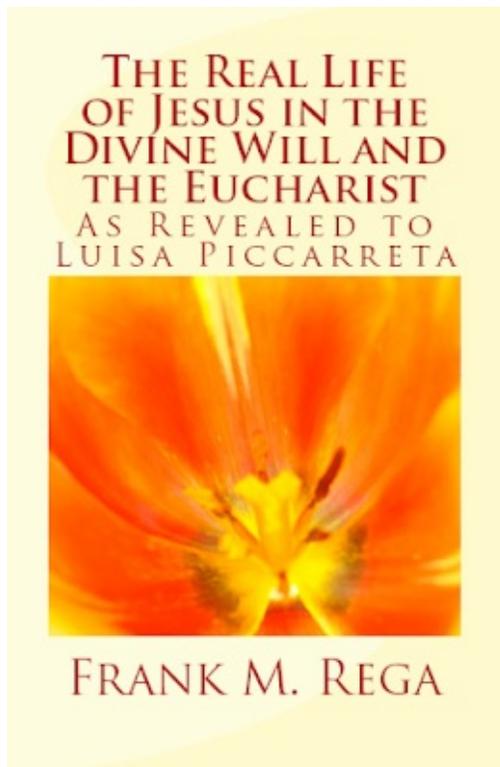
You will be my Mother, and to You, as my Mother, I deliver my will, that You may exchange it with the Divine Will, and so I may be sure I will not go out of Its Kingdom. Therefore I pray You to illumine me in order to make me comprehend what '*Will of God*' means.

*(Hail Mary)*

Combine this prayer from the book *The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of the Divine Will* with its daily meditations on the Heavenly Queen for the month of May, available at this [Link](#).

Quoting from the [Doctoral Thesis of Fr. Joseph Iannuzzi](#), approved by the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome, and authorized by the Holy See, " . . . Luisa wrote *The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of the Divine Will* that Mary dictated to her for mankind's sanctification in the Divine Will." (p. 26.)

View my books on Luisa Piccarreta and others [Here](#)



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This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2018/05/daily-prayer-to-blessed-virgin-for.html>  
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## **A Mother's nightmare: Perinatal Mood and Anxiety disorder [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]**



Recently, I joined the efforts of a fellow parishioner in supporting women suffering with postpartum mood disorders. I suffered depression with my first two births, but had no idea how severe it can be, especially left untreated. This April, I attended a 2-day training by an organization called, "Postpartum Support International". I learned more than I ever could have imagined about this devastating hormonal disorder. How critical this condition effects women, babies and the entire family!

Having a child is an exciting event in a woman's life for most. But it also bring a great deal of stress and anxiety as her hormones fluctuate during her pregnancy and postpartum period, considered the fourth trimester. Though this is a normal occurrence in the biological system, a new mother may not have the ability to identify such swings. Coupled with having to handle a crying or colicky newborn at the same time is overwhelming at best. Nearly 35% of reported new mothers suffer from postpartum mood disorder, of one kind or another. If left untreated, this condition can often move into a psychosis, which is the most dangerous condition for the mother and the infant. The problem is many of these mothers do not know or want to call for help.

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders, (PMAD) is one of the most under-diagnosed condition in today's medicine. Over 400,000 infants are born to mothers with depression. Many practitioners do not recognize, or are equipped, to help these mothers beyond the postpartum period. This lack of information leaves these mothers and families at risk of a more serious problem, a psychosis.

Identifying and preparing women for this period is the mother's lifeline. Many women have no idea how their emotions will change within a day or a few hours post delivery. During this time of confusion, she feels overwhelmed and lacks confidence. She may feel that she is not a good mother and become detached from her newborn.

Screening is a must in order to make sure the correct therapy and/or medications are in place for the mom-to-be. We are learning that mood enhancing drugs such as Zoloft are not toxic for the baby during pregnancy and does not penetrate breast milk, as once thought. We are learning more and more that mothers can be medicated safely during pregnancy and postpartum periods and beyond while breastfeeding. Along with this, they are finding out that changing medications in the middle of any of these stages of childbirth can detrimentally effect the mother's depressed condition.

Who is at risk of perinatal mood and anxiety disorder? History is one place to look, both family and personal with a diagnosis of depression, anxiety, OCD, eating disorders, or bipolar disorders. Did she have significant mood changes during puberty, PMS, or hormonal Birth control? Pre-pregnancy diabetes, thyroid imbalance and other endocrine disorders also heighten the risk of PMAD. There are many other life situations that can be a precursor, as well.

Is there support for the mother during this time? Women need help through this initial period of parenthood; does she have it within the family? If not, this will have a detrimental impact the mother, infant, and entire family. With support, which could include a postpartum doula, the mother's ability to care for her newborn will greatly improve. A postpartum doula is trained to help the mother in caring and nursing her baby during the "fourth trimester."

Finally, the pharmaceutical and obstetrican worlds need to get together more for the women in these situations. Also, women need to know that they can and should call, not wait months enduring their condition until the postpartum period is over. They need to let their practitioner know what's going on now.

Treatment at the onset of PMAD is crucial for the mother, but also the baby, and the entire family. As I look over my notes from this training, I am overwhelmed myself as to how much to touch on and leave off in this article. We are a prolife community and all phases of life have trials and triumphs, childbearing is one that needs it's own special attention. The Postpartum phase of life is a special time with special needs for each individual mother and family. It is my prayer

that more physicians, therapists, and family members become aware of this critical time, for helpless infant and the family as a whole.

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This contribution is available at <http://acatholicumclimbingthepillars.blogspot.com/2018/05/a-mothers-nighmare-perinatal-mood-and.html>

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## **When is the Last Time? [at Catholic Life In Our Times]**

The anger welled up inside like a white hot coal. Why were relationships so darned bumpy? Verbal responses pinged around in my brain like multiple metal balls in a pinball machine. What was said, what should be said, and would be said – all kept my mind buzzing as I negotiated the familiar road.

My internal video evaporated as I spotted the red flashing lights of an emergency response vehicle. Ahead I saw waving firefighters, more county vehicles, and the undercarriage of what had previously been a vehicle driving down this same road. As the first responders waved me toward a detour I took in the scene. The rest of the vehicle – no longer attached, was spread in all directions. This did not bode well for driver or possible passengers. I prayed a Guardian Angel prayer for all involved.

### **Wake Up Call**

Immediately my focus shifted. I was no longer angry. My thoughts turned to my loved ones and hovered, hesitantly, over visions of their location and safety. That wake up call summoned up instant remorse, forgiveness, and unconditional love. What foolish creations we are! How can we originate from a creator Who unhesitatingly gave His only Son to die for us and our transgressions?

The answer is unconditional love. We fail to maintain awareness of the constant blessings of our lives. Our many gifts are taken for granted while we focus on minor irritations. But what would happen if we tried to make more sense out of this earthly life? Focusing on gratitude and realizing the inevitability of the ‘last time’ could provide a much needed wake up call.

### **A Last Time**

Remembering the last time my mother and I went on one of our customary shopping trips escapes me. She and I were quite the team, with trailing kids (hers and mine) to stores. We enjoyed a bit of retail therapy and found bargains that

would make any penny-pincher green with envy. Then, during an ordinary checkup, she was diagnosed with cancer. In that instant, life changed for our family.

In a five year cycle she had surgery and chemo, recovered, was re-diagnosed, had chemo, and failed to recover. Mom died at the tender age of 58. All the while I cannot remember the last time ‘the girls’ went out on the town for a day of fun and laughter. It is a memory I hold dear but it has an elusive quality, because it was not marked by any one special ending. There was no warning; it just ended and that, was that.

Hopefully, with each experience, we grow in wisdom and many realizations come to us. Like Adam and Even after The Fall, we become more aware. We no longer simply exist, pursuing one pleasant pastime after another. Instead, it becomes our mission to find relevance and purpose in life’s events. This is as it should be.

## **My Time**

After my own cancer diagnosis, at the age of 48, I found myself becoming more introspective. There is nothing quite like the jolt into reality provided by the looming evidence of mortality. In searching for a way to deal with the possibility of an early demise, I became more fully aware of life’s priorities. This eye opening conclusion did not come all at once; it came after quite a bit of self searching.

My initial reaction was a combination of foreboding and defeat. I remember telling my husband that I was determined not to undergo treatment because my death was a certainty. Only by God’s grace and the intervention of a holy priest did I come to the conclusion that surrender was not a just option. With the grace bestowed by being anointed, the priest’s counsel began to lift my mental fog. Not only did I owe my family my best effort, God deserved my faith in His plan for me.

Aided by His grace and God-given determination, I successfully battled cancer and have been blessed with twelve years as a survivor. Through the grace of God I hope to continue and grow old with my husband. As God’s gift to me through the Sacrament of Matrimony, he is my earthly [priority](#). Yet, I realize that some day there will be a last time for one of us. I also find less trepidation in that

reality.

## **Contemplate**

Silently contemplating last times, led to a conversation with my husband. Desiring to share my thoughts with him, I asked, “Have you ever thought, when will be the last time in our lives?” His response was spot on. We should enjoy each day and occasion as if it was the last. Our conversation continued as we recalled things we enjoy doing together and vowed to be more aware each day. God truly put this man into my life for a reason. Each day we pursue the goal of helping each other attain heaven.

“By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God.” This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple’s love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they “help one another to attain holiness in their married life...” Catechism of the Catholic Church [1641](#)

## **Time Marches On**

Last times usually go marching by without any fanfare, unless there is a milestone: the last ball game, the last year of school, or the last day at work. Unknowingly, we while away our days in oblivion. As the days, weeks, months, and then years flit by we drift in our unmindfulness. Yet it is a good idea to live today as if it is our last, whether spiritually or mortally.

Our Eternal Destiny depends on our believing that Jesus will come “[like a thief in the night](#)” – that is a worthy focus. However, there are earthly reasons to sharpen awareness as well. We should cherish the times we spend with those we love or those who depend on us – taking care to treat each contact as if it were our last.

We attended to a funeral recently. It was for a husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. The family had many wonderful memories. He had known of his impending death and had had an opportunity to share a ‘last time’ with all of his loved ones. Some people, however, are not so lucky. They go in an unexpected instant...that last kiss goodbye really is the last kiss goodbye. This

fact should remind us to make each ‘goodbye’ special – each ‘I love you’ an aware, “look that person in the eye and mean it”, special. You never know; it may be the last time.

Our souls, too, need this awareness. Being prepared for His Coming is the most important goal in our lives.

Take ye heed, watch and pray. For ye know not when the time is. Even as a man who going into a far country, left his house; and gave authority to his servants over every work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore, (for you know not when the lord of the house cometh: at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning,) Lest coming on a sudden, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all:

Watch. [Mark 13:33-37](#)

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## The Terrorist and the Cross [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

*"Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God "(Romans 1:1).*

As I prepared for this week's Sunday message (you can search for me on YouTube), I paused at the first word of this verse and reminded myself about the author.

We might today call him a religious terrorist. That's not a point to gloss over. Here is his own testimony as he spoke before King Agrippa and the governor Festus: (Acts 26):

*"So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."*

Why is it important that we know Paul's history? Because God demonstrates through this man – as He has demonstrated to us again and again throughout history – no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy.

No one.

Then this morning, as I read Paul's comment to Timothy, I thought once more of God's astounding, most gracious promise of forgiveness. Here is what Paul wrote to Timothy: *"I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience . . ."* (2 Timothy 1:3)

Did you catch that? This former terrorist said he served God "With a clear conscience"! How could that be, knowing what we know of his

past?

The answer to that question is the same answer to anyone who has brought their sins – whatever the sins – to the foot of the Cross. *“If we confess our sins,” another apostle wrote, “God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Do you want a clear conscience? Then with your heart, confess whatever sin it is that keeps you from entering into full fellowship and full intimacy with God. He did not lie when He promised to forgive the penitent. He is not toying with us when He swore to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He is being eternally honest and forthright when He tells us, *“Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool”* (Isaiah 1:18).

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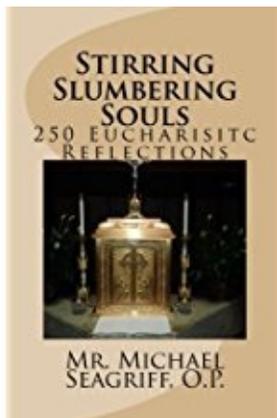
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## A Painful and Upsetting Truth [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

**Let's be frank:** If we really believe that Jesus Christ is truly and substantially present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the tabernacles of our Churches, we would be there with Him. We would do everything in our power to spend some time with Him and to encourage others to do so as well.

But we don't really believe this essential Truth. We have abandoned our Loving Lord to his prison-tabernacle and locked the doors of His Churches so that even the few drawn to be with Him are unable to get in.

Stop for a moment and ponder this shocking reality from our Lord's perspective. Is this anyway to treat the Son of God? Of course it isn't.



**Go visit and comfort our abandoned and forgotten Lord**

. Bring a copy of

[\*Stirring Slumbering Souls - 250 Eucharistic Reflections\*](#)

with you and let the wisdom it contains draw you into His loving embrace and Presence. Enlist in His army of Adorers. Let Him change you and the world!

Here is a sample of what others have recently said about *Stirring Slumbering Souls*:

"I'm still reading *Slumbering Souls* and wanted to thank you for reawakening my adoration and love of Jesus. - Patricia Grant

“Thank you so much for sharing this beautiful gem with me. I feel like every single Catholic should read it and have a copy and then share it with someone who isn't and then we would be all set in this world. Such richness here and it stirs up so much in the soul.” - Anne Costa

"Love your

*Stirring Slumbering Souls.*

Beautiful, inspiring work."- Patricia Casey Vanderloo

"I absolutely LOVED this book. The saints' quotes about the Eucharist were so profound. The author did a fantastic job getting inspirational quotes from so many different sources. I didn't want to put this book down and have purchased it as gifts for several friends." - An Amazon review by Janeen

**Stop what you are doing and go visit Him!**

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<http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2018/04/a-painful-and-upsetting-truth.html>  
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For my first time as a Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) Coordinator, I attended the Easter Vigil. We welcomed four, fine women into the Church, where they received the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Communion. We also witnessed the baptism of 17 people!!! Yes, it was a long evening, but a wonderful experience to witness, as well. Our celebration at the Easter Vigil, began the Easter Octave; an eight-day celebration of Jesus' Resurrection. Easter is so important, so vital to the essence of the Catholic faith, that we need eight days to soak in the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, mercy, and salvific power.

## **Remember Christ's Sacrifice During the Easter Octave**

Easter is the most important day on the Christian calendar, as it marks the fulfillment of God's plan for redemption of His people. Christ conquered death and sin with His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Think about that for a moment. Without the Resurrection, we have no hope for eternal life. Yet, because of Christ's sacrifice, we do have the hope of one day being resurrected. Christ shows us that there is life after our human deaths!

## Remember Christ's Mercy During the Easter Octave

We end the Easter Octave with the Feast of Divine Mercy Sunday, a day set aside to specifically remember Christ's font of unending mercy. Through the Resurrection, Christ gives us hope. Through His mercy, Christ makes eternal life possible for each of us. He wants us to seek out His mercy, as it is there for the taking. None of us are worthy enough to receive it on our own merit; yet, it is exactly what we need to one day be granted entrance into Heaven.

## Remembering Christ's Salvific Power During the Easter Octave

Jesus entered humanity, grew to manhood, and willfully fulfilled the Father's plan for salvation by embracing the mantle of Messiah, "the Anointed." As our Messiah, His salvific power gives us the gateway to Heaven. He now asks us to pick up our mantle, as Disciples, and follow in His Way; the Way of Virtue, the Way of Beatitude. He asks us to model His behavior, by loving our neighbor as ourselves.

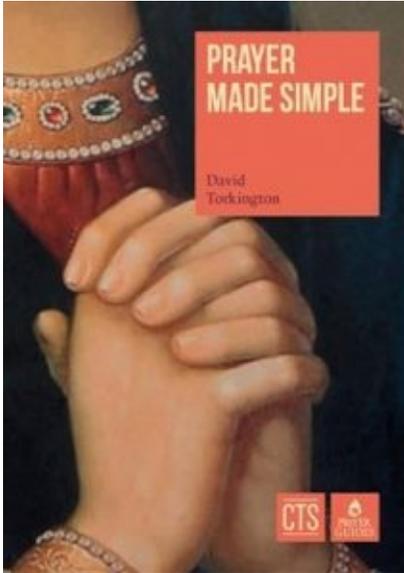
Are you ready to accept Christ's offer of salvation? Will you accept Christ's mercy? Will you pick up your mantle and become Christ's Disciple?

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

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This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/celebrating-the-easter-octave/>  
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## A Practical Guide for Daily Prayer



In answer to a recent letter asking me how to pray, I sent back nine prayers that have been a great help to me over the years. It seems the receiver found them very useful and so did her friends. I thought therefore they may be of some help to you too, so here they are.

Begin with Psalm sixty-nine with which St Benedict instructed his monks to start the divine office. Then it can be followed by the Glory Be, immediately followed by Psalm sixty-two.

O God, come to my aid

O Lord, make haste to help me (Psalm 69).

Glory be to the Father and to the son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

O God, you are my God, for you I long;

For you my soul is thirsting.

My body pines for you

Like dry weary land without water (Psalm 62)

## **Morning Prayer**

Say the Our Father and then using the Our Father as a memory jog, say the following prayers:

### **Our – Offering – **the Morning Offering****

God, our Father, I wish to consecrate all that I say and all that I do to you in this forthcoming day, just as Jesus did every day of his life on earth. Please accept what I do so imperfectly and unite it with the perfect offering that Jesus continues to make to you in heaven. I offer to you my joys and my sorrows, my successes as well as my failures, because these especially show how much I have need of you. I make my prayer in, with and through Jesus in whom we all live and move and have our being. Amen.

### **Our – Union**

Father, I know that the more your Holy Spirit draws me into your son Jesus, the more I am united to all who are within him. I therefore ask Mary and Joseph, Peter and Paul and all the saints, especially those to whom I have a special devotion, to be with me now as I pray so that my prayers may be fortified by theirs. I also want to pray for all my family and friends, and all who have asked me to pray for them. May they benefit from the day ahead that I wish to make a perfect prayer, as I offer all I say and do to you, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

### **Our – Resolutions**

Jesus, help me to review the day ahead to anticipate all that I should do, so that I can love God as you did, through everything that I do and love my neighbour too, as you love all of us. Help me to forgive my enemies as you forgave, as well as my friends. And give me the grace to seek forgiveness from those I have offended; and never to cease trying to be like you and to behave like you in all that I say and do. Amen (Short pause to make resolutions for the day ahead)

## **Evening Prayer**

### **Father – Faith**

Father, I know and believe that you are all loving, that your love has been

permanently transformed into human loving through the human nature of your son Jesus. I know and believe that his love is perpetually poised to possess me at this moment and at every moment. Penetrate and possess me now, permeate my whole being as I try to turn and remain open to receive you. Melt my heart of stone, re-make it and re-mould it, so that it can at all times be open to receive you. "For I, unless you enthrall me, never shall be free, nor ever chaste except you ravish me" (John Donne). Amen.

### Father – **Abandonment**

Father, you have freely chosen to share your own inner life and love with me now through Jesus, as a foretaste of the ecstatic joy that you have planned for me and for all who love you in heaven. As there is no limit to the way you have poured out your loving goodness and mercy on me, I can only totally abandon myself to you in return. I therefore solemnly consecrate every moment of every day to you and to your honour and glory, in and together with your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Father – **Thanksgiving**

Father, although you are infinitely distant you are infinitely near too, for you inhabit the inner marrow of my being. I thank you for being with me, and for all you have given me today, for life itself and all and everyone that has made it worth living. Give me the grace to praise, honour and thank you, as much as I am able and more than I am able, not just in words but in a life that I freely dedicate to you. Amen.

### Father – **Holy Communion**

Jesus, at the Last Supper you promised to make your home in all who would obey your new commandments. Help me to obey them now and at every moment of my life. For when I love the Father and love my neighbour, as you did, there is nothing to stop you making your home in me and me making mine in you. Let the joy and the peace that comes from abiding in you suffuse all I say and do, so that others may be drawn into the Holy Communion that begins in this life and comes to its completion in the next. Amen.

(Now is the time to remain still and silent for a few moments of contemplation to relish what, or rather whom we receive in this Holy Communion. A short prayer could be repeated gently whenever distractions threaten to draw the attention

elsewhere. A prayer such as *Come, Lord* or *Come, Lord Jesus* would be ideal or another short prayer of your choice.)

### Father – **Examination of Conscience**

Lord, that I may see, so that all that prevents you making your home in me may be spirited away. Strengthen me to live the new commandments as you lived them, so that the same Holy Spirit who filled you, guided you and raised you from the dead may do the same for me. Show me the sins that keep you out and give me the power to overcome them, for without you I have no power to do anything. Amen.

### Father – **Repentance**

Father, I ask your forgiveness for the sins that have prevented you from possessing me as you would wish this day. (A short pause to review our behaviour in the past day.) I am deeply sorry for failing you yet again, and with your grace I will never let my pride cause me to delay from turning back to you the moment I fall. Until I can love everyone as I should, help me to do them no harm and give me the sympathy and compassion of the person in whose footsteps I want to walk. Amen.

Conclude with an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be.

If you like these prayers and would like to have them to hand, they are in my little booklet, *Prayer made Simple*, published by The Catholic Truth Society. It only costs a couple of pounds and should be at the back of your church now if you have a Catholic Truth Society stand. Some months ago I was commissioned to write three little inexpensive books about prayer: *Prayer made Simple*, *Meditation Made Simple*, and *Contemplation made Simple*. The last two will be published later this year. The first, however, was published on March 8th this year and it should be available at the back of your church now if you have a Catholic Truth Society stand where it should be displayed. It is also available on [Amazon.co.uk](http://Amazon.co.uk) and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), or directly from [The Catholic Truth Society](http://TheCatholicTruthSociety.com)

David Torkington is a spiritual theologian, author and speaker, who specialises in prayer, Christian spirituality and mystical theology. His latest book [\*Wisdom from the Christian Mystics\*](#), is now available

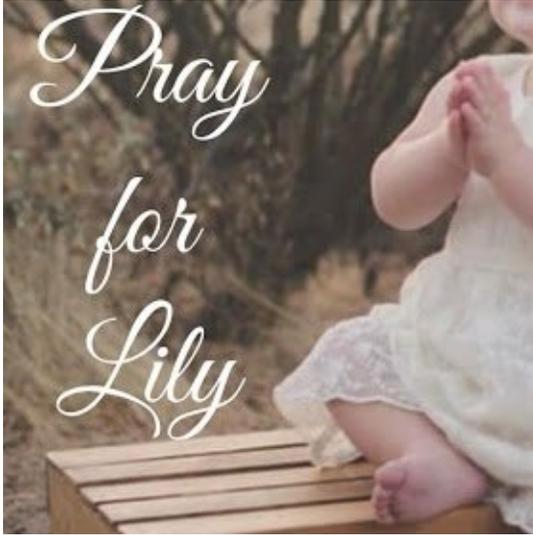
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This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/a-practical-guide-for-daily-prayer/>  
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## Please Pray For Her Rescue [at Veils and Vocations]

Dear Friends,



Lily, who is named for Our Lady, is desperately ill and in so much pain.

Her mother explains the situation here:

*"Lily was just diagnosed with Macrophage Activation Syndrome. A serious complication of SJIA. Her immune system is attacking her blood cells. We are trying an aggressive treatment at home but may need hospitalization. MAS gets bad FAST and its deadly. It's also heartbreaking because only 3% of kids with SJIA get MAS the fact that she did so soon after diagnosis is not a good sign. It means her case is more complicated than we hoped. She has a more serious case. Lily is hurting."* Lauren, her mother, says the steroids seem to be helping but this poor baby is still suffering and far from out of the woods. Lauren and her husband, Erik, have asked for this request to be shared on as many prayer chains as possible. Please pray and share! The photo above is Lily's twin praying for her! Thank you! My heart is so heavy for my friend and her baby, thank you for caring! *Dear Father in Heaven, hear our plea and delivery baby Lily from her suffering!* Do you have an intention in need of prayer? Please comment below so we can pray for each other.

[her-rescue.html](#)

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## The Vine and the Branches [at Creon Dios!]

I was asked by the editor of the newsletter of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians to write a reflection on today's readings for this week's newsletter. Here are the thoughts I shared on today's Gospel (John 15:1-8):

### **Reflection**

In today's Gospel from St. John, Jesus tells his disciples that he is the true vine and they are the branches. And, he warns them, "Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me . . . Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing."

I find this is, at one and the same time both humbling and empowering, and it is both of those for the same reason. What we do we do, not through our own power, but through the Spirit of God that flows through us. Without God, we can do nothing; the branch without the vine will never bear fruit. That is a humbling. But at the same time, it is empowering because it reminds us that with Jesus, there is no limit. "Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear

much fruit.” We see evidence of that fruit in today’s first Mass reading – where we hear that the church was at peace and grew in numbers through the disciples’ preaching in the name of the Lord and the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

For me, the Gospel is also a reminder that what we do – in our ministry and in our lives – is for God’s glory, not our own. We do what we do, not only through God’s power, but on behalf of the building of God’s kingdom. It is God’s work and God’s plan we are about, not our own.

Jesus also tells his disciples in the Gospel that the vine grower, the Father, prunes the branches that bear fruit so that they bear more fruit. We might profitably reflect on the questions: Where do I need some pruning? What in me needs to be pruned so that I can bear more fruit for God?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, help me to remember that my strength lies in you, that through your grace I can accomplish much for the greater glory of God.. In the face of all temptation to stray, keep me yoked to you.

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This contribution is available at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com/2018/04/29/the-vine-and-the-branches-2/>  
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## Why St. Peter is my Favorite Apostle [at Quiet Consecration]

St. John, in his writings, shares an amazing moment with us. After Jesus has made it very clear to those listening to Him that eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood is the way to Eternal Life most people left. "After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer walked with him", John writes. It was a watershed moment for those people. Up until then Jesus has fulfilled something inside of them without asking too much.

Like many today who call ourselves Christian, Jesus has become a kind of quasi-spiritual-guru. We are quick to quote those sayings of His that don't really challenge our view of reality. We are REALLY quick to quote sayings that can PROVE those OTHER people are not REALLY Christians. Catholics are adept at this as are those of our brothers and sisters who reject the idea that Jesus founded a Church. On social media I read many a thread by Self-Proclaimed Catholics that support lifestyle choices outside of the Teachings. Woe be to anyone who upholds those Teachings. I still shake my head in amusement at one woman whose response to being referred to the Catechism of the Catholic Church in answer to a question was "I had a very good priest tell me that the Catechism is only to be used as a guide". I remember thinking at the time that no good priest would ever tell someone that; for the love of all that is Holy, The Catholic Church is not a 12 Step Program. Someone in a 12 Step program that says the 12 steps are only suggestions and so adherence to them is not required for membership in that fellowship is correct. Anyone who tells someone that the Teachings of the Catholic Church are only SUGGESTIONS is a danger - to both themselves (their own soul) and to others.

"After this", writes St. John, "many of his disciples drew back and no longer walked with him".

For me, the operative word in this sentence is "many". Many is not ALL. It seems to me that from the very beginning the Church was not going to appeal to every person, despite being available to them. Jesus knew this. I believe it is the great sorrow He carries today - the rejection of The Creator by His creatures. That sorrow and His mercy is amazing to contemplate. He loves me despite my

inability to accept His gifts with my whole heart and my whole soul. He honors my inherent dignity - a dignity HE bestows upon me as Creator - by not forcing me to love Him.

It is this aspect of His love for me that gives such poignancy to the question he posed to The Twelve (The Church). "Will you also go away?".

Will we? Will we walk away from Him when His Teachings get too hard to accept? Will we demand that God change His mind, soften His Truth to make it easier for us to hang out with our friends and family around the dinner table? Will we stay when others leave because the Teachings do not fit their political agenda, their ideology, their need to be 'in the know'?

The resounding answer from St. Peter sums up my attitude: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God".

He is my favorite Apostle for this reason: He didn't understand. He didn't have a full grasp of what Jesus was saying or teaching. He TRUSTED...at that moment (a moment that would not last and yet lasts forever) St Peter stood tall and said, "I am stuck - WE are stuck. We have nowhere else to go".

This idea - the idea that I have nowhere else to go - is what keeps me in The Catholic Church. When people - Catholics and non-Catholics alike - vilify Pope Francis, or tell me I am a pagan Christian, or that I have succumbed to the 'laws of men' I shrug my shoulders in the way I imagine our first Pope shrugged his. Ok. You are probably right and this Pope is an idiot and Vatican 2 let in all the masons and the Novus Ordo Mass is horrific and the architecture of the churches built in the 1970s suck but WHERE ELSE AM I GOING TO GO?

No other group HAS what The Catholic Church has - the Sacraments...the Eucharist.

SO...if the Pope asks me to consider compassion towards immigrants as a totality of a pro-life stance, I am going to give it some thought and try my best to be compassionate while upholding the laws of the land.

If the Bishops ask me to consider how best to guide those living in a marriage arrangement outside of the teachings so that they can possibly come into full communion and receive the Eucharist, I am going to think on it and try my best

to give correct guidance.

If telling a misguided woman that the Catechism of the Catholic Church is not a self-help guide book to health, wealth and prosperity and that she needs to adhere to ALL of it, even if she does not understand (or even KNOW) all of it gets me unloved, unfriended or attacked...so be it.

Like my favorite Apostle, I will stumble and I will fall and I will deny and I will fight and I will ask for forgiveness and I will try again. I will take this journey one day at a time.

Because...well...

I have nowhere else to go.

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# The Request of the Holy Spirit [at The Frank Friar]

## In the Company of the Spirit

Recently, my mind wants to rest upon the Holy Spirit. Yet, this desire is impossible for my mind to achieve from its own strength. Why? Because, the Holy Spirit, the Love of God sent to us from the Father and the Son, offers Himself through resting upon another. Not by strength does one gain the Spirit, but through surrender. One must surrender to the Spirit's request for rest. Through this request of the Spirit to rest upon person, one is brought into the Spirit's company. Let us not forget that the Spirit is a person, sure we can argue over the use of he or she for the Spirit, but at the end of the day no person can force themselves into the company of another. To reside with someone begins with an invitation. To be in the company of the Spirit is an invitation that the Spirit offers to each soul freely, through the request of resting upon them.

## The Wind

We know not when or how often this invitation will come. Why? As St. John teaches us the Spirit is a "wind that blows where it wills [...]" (John 3:8a)." Nothing can contain the wind, it moves, touches, and comforts those it wills to care for. As I get older, I find within myself the desire to simply rest with and be present to my friends. However, when I was younger I got lost in wanting to learn all that I could learn about those I called my friends. Within that desire to know all I could about them, I got lost in the details and set aside the ability to just be and rest with them in peace. The desire to know, if not rooted in humility, easily becomes a craving to control. The Spirit will not and cannot be controlled.

## To Know the Spirit

Yes, the Spirit is uncontrollable, but this does not mean the Spirit is unknowable. When we accept the invitation of the Spirit and enter His company, the very air of the Spirit fills us. The wind that roamed over the waters of chaos, comforted Elijah on a mountain, and drove Jesus along in His mission, has now

chosen to rest within our being. To have the Spirit resting in our hearts, begins a journey that moves the heart into a new way of Love. For it is by the wind that a ship moves most freely from one shore to another. How are we to understand this journey of love? Let us think about what the world offers. The love offered by the world is a closed fist, using its strength to hold on to that which it covets. The love, that is the Spirit, is an open hand willing to give all that it must for the other. It is through the peace of the Spirit that a person's hands become open willing to offer the gift of love that resides within their hearts.

## **A Participation**

Thus, to be in the company of the Spirit, in the journey of love, means we must begin to participate in the life of the Spirit (Phil. 2:1). A life marked in compassion and mercy, which shapes the whole being of person. In the journey of love, offered by the Spirit, compassion and mercy are fruits that spring up when and where they are needed, not for their own sake, but for the needs of those called to join the company of the Spirit, so they too may begin the journey of love. For as the Spirit is, we are all called to be, in this world (John 3:8b). The air within our lungs that we use to speak the words of compassion, hold within themselves the invitation of the Spirit's love. The wind that comforts our weary flesh in the dark hours of our lives, is shown through same comforting touch of mercy offered to a person by the hands of one already in the company of the Spirit. Through these moments of being with another, the wind of the Spirit, begins to move towards the other, asking if He may rest upon them. Why? It is in that moment of rest that the Spirit chooses to make Himself fully known, so the Love of God may be known by another.

*“Oh, Powerful love of God, how different are your effects from those of the world's love!” ! St. Teresa of Avila (Soliloquy 2, 1)*

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This contribution is available at <http://thefrankfriar.com/2018/04/20/the-request-of-the-holy-spirit/>  
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## **Of all His feasts, Jesus loves Easter best [at A Moment From De Sales]**

Jesus truly loves the Easter season. It is a happy and delightful time for Him, His Father, and all the people they love so much. Easter reminds us that the last chapter of our lives is now safe and secure once again. The awful stain of the sin of our first parents is gone, and with that, the gates of heaven are reopened. And when our time is right, God, our Father, waits with welcoming arms to embrace all His children as we enter.

God the Father looks forward to that special day when He greets us. With a smile on His face, God waits ready to give us the gift of resurrected life and an eternity to share it with Him. We will do all this with those relatives and friends we knew and loved while walking on this earth. This is why Jesus is so happy. It's all about us.

After He rose from the dead, Jesus didn't stop working for our salvation. He took not a day of vacation. And He works until every part of our body, and earthly existence is risen and alive. Jesus desires to ensure that new life flows over all that is still dead within us.

He wants our stubbornness to soften. He wants our laziness replaced with excitement. He wants our weariness refreshed with enthusiasm – dispelling any lingering darkness. Jesus remains in work mode until He sees everyone wrapped in the fond embrace of His Father's love.

Jesus always knows where we are on our Easter journey. If He sees us climbing a mountain too steep to manage alone, He accompanies us making the climb easier. Jesus strengthens our steps with fortitude and determination – keeping us trying until we reach the top.

Knowing this new life is difficult to see, even as it is hiding in plain sight such as the smell and sight of flowers or the touch of warm breezes. Easter has enormous power. It presents us with the ability to heal and transform our ordinary lives into something extraordinary. What Jesus wants is our belief and our ready and frequent grasps of its power, giving life, hope, love and Easter

joy.

This gift comes each day as a nudge with Jesus touching us as He did the young dead girl in Scripture, saying, “Tabitha rise up and live.” At this very moment Jesus is nudging us to new life in some part of our lives. Now to be clear, He may not take our pain or hurt away, but He promises to give us the grace to bear any hardships. This Easter, Jesus speaks to us, saying “Tabitha, rise up and live.”

***Jesus asks us: This Easter are you ready to live anew?***

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## **Boldly Catholic [at Boldly Catholic]**

### [Confession \(2\)](#)

#### [David Mills understands fully the essence of the Sacrament of Reconciliation:](#)

*You want to feel comforted and encouraged? Just sit in the church during a penance service. I was there only as the taxi driver waiting for his fare, or so I had thought.*

*Every kind of person stood in line. There were the well-dressed people stopping by on the way home from work. As is inevitable here, there were the people in Penguins jerseys. There were mothers and fathers with their children, a lot of older people, some alone, some with spouses, and what seemed to be groups of friends. Every line even had a few 20-somethings — not enough, but some.*

...

*All around me eight people were confessing their sins to eight different priests who'd given their evening to telling people God loves them. Those eight people were getting counsel, telling God how sorry they are and asking his help to do better, and hearing the priest speaking for God declaring their sins forgiven. Dozens of people were waiting to do and to hear the same thing, while others prayed Our Fathers and Hail Marys as the priest had told them. Some were fulfilling what used to be called our "Easter duty," and some were coming back to confession or even to the Church after months or years away.*

*Every confession is a conversion, a turning, a transformation of a sinful creature into a holy creature. The world was being set right, redirected, brought closer to its creator and redeemer, a little, in the lives of all the people who came to St. Joseph's church for the penance service on the Monday of Holy Week. Very quietly and methodically, without the drama and spectacle we expect from worldly transformations. It was good to be there.*

You should do yourself the favor of reading [the entire piece](#).

Once one understands the Sacrament, once one gets the sense of being absolved by a Priest acting in Persona Christi, it is most definitely good to be there, and to appreciate the mercy that is being offered.

Carry on.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.boldlycatholic.com/2018/04/every-confession-is-a-conversion.html>

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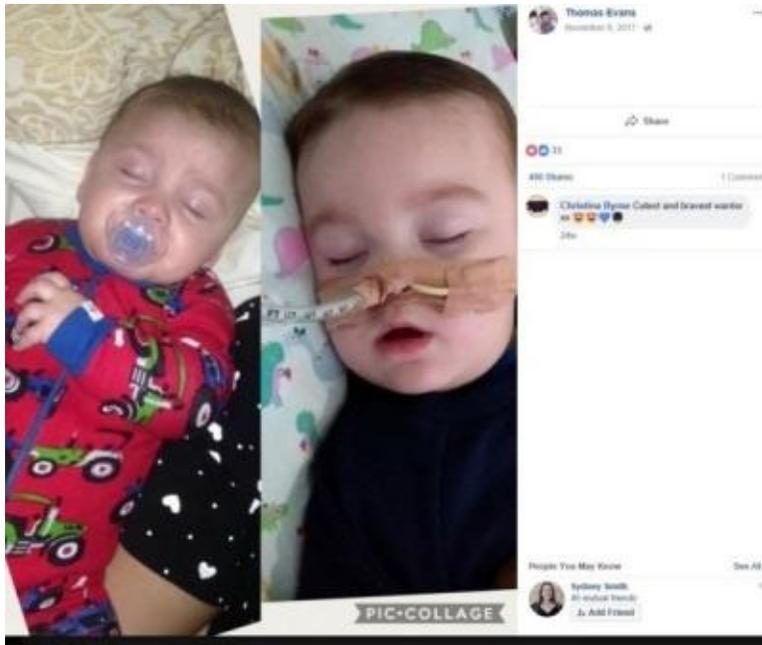
## What's it all about, Alfie? [at Peace Garden Passage]

It's an oldie, but somehow, as I sift through the long-ago memories of my past, it is accessible — the song composed for the 1966 film “Alfie,” by the same name, by songwriters Burt Bacharach and Hal David.

Never, though, have the words risen to the top of my consciousness with such purpose, for I can't help but see how very fitting they are as we confront, this week especially, a modern-day controversy over the life of one little boy named Alfie.

Those who know his story, which has gone viral in recent weeks, will recognize the parallels:

What's it all about, Alfie?  
Is it just for the moment we live?  
What's it all about when you sort it out, Alfie?  
Are we meant to take more than we give  
Or are we meant to be kind?  
And if only fools are kind, Alfie  
Then I guess it is wise to be cruel  
And if life belongs only to the strong, Alfie  
What will you lend on an old golden rule?  
As sure as I believe there's a heaven above, Alfie  
I know there's something much more,  
Something even non-believers can believe in  
I believe in love, Alfie  
Without true love we just exist, Alfie  
Until you find the love you've missed you're nothing, Alfie  
When you walk let your heart lead the way  
And you'll find love any day, Alfie  
Alfie



Plenty of pieces have been written about this sweet little man, so I'm not going to recount the many details and passionate arguments already recorded and bantered over. What I want to share are my thoughts on why we do — and should — care so much.

Even Pope Francis has chimed in with his support for Alfie, and the possibility of transferring him away from the hospital in the UK where he's been, in the minds of some, hostage, to another in Italy where, it is hoped, he would receive more compassionate attention.

I've had one friend defend the hospital. She works in the healthcare field, and I can only imagine how this case must challenge her. I do want to be sensitive about the fact that despite the scary anti-life sentiments that have been raised here, there are likely just as many compassionate and truly loving people in this field, and even within this hospital, who would lay down their lives to help Alfie live.

But the Culture of Death, like its master, works quietly, stealthily. And so it is present.

As a mother, I see this case primarily in the light of the deep, undaunted parent-child bond. If I were Alfie's parents, I, too, would be doing everything to make life as gentle as possible for my child, for as long as possible. Though it's likely the hospital never meant for this all to happen this way, many troubling realities have been revealed through Alfie's case; dark things meant to be hidden.

But now, an innocent boy has brought light into that darkness. He has, through his sweet face, the passionate love of his parents, and his will to live in response to the love that surrounds him, shown the world that love is still the best thing around, and still worth fighting for.



It's been reported that the medical staff was shocked that Alfie, when removed from machines helping him breathe, continued to breathe on his own. In my own life, I have witnessed both the sweet sacrifices and the painful pride of the medical community.

In Alfie's case, I see pride through medical decision-makers wanting to take control of a child's life, not trusting enough in the power of the love of his parents. And I see how people around the world have been touched — and mobilized — by this one precious child.

Alfie is the sacrificial lamb, reminding us of Christ and what he came to show us. And what is that revelation but love, borne from the hearts of a father and a mother for their flesh and blood; a child who is a body and soul manifestation of their love for one another.

It's a reminder of the eternal truths of love, that it cannot be suppressed, unconvinced, or killed, no matter how much the darkness of this world might wish it.



To me, THAT’S the answer to the question of, What’s it all about, Alfie?

Alfie’s family was allowed this cross of being invaded, misunderstood, undermined, and left flinging and fighting for their little boy to the point of exasperation.

And these sacrifices became a gift to us all, reminding this weary world, once again, of this unshakable, unparalleled force of light called love; pure love.

**Q4U: When did the power of love show you its gentle might?**

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2018/04/whats-it-all-about-alfie-2/>  
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# Quiet Light [at Grace to Paint]



8×8” oil paint on gessoed artist board; use ‘comment’ below to inquire.

Here is another image of Mary painted from Greek or Roman standards of beauty. Hopefully she is painted as ancient yet ever new.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2018/04/17/quiet-light/>  
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## The Joy of Being Wrong [at bukas palad]



Year B / Eastertide / Third Sunday

Readings: Acts 3.13-15, 17-19 / Psalm 4.2, 4, 7-8, 9 (R/v 7a) / 1 John 2.1-5a / Luke 24.35-48

He waited expectantly for the promised Thomas the Train set. Mommy and Daddy handed down his elder brother's train and he cried out "No, don't want; old!"

She placed the earrings, a family heirloom, into her daughter-in-law's hands. "They're not even 24 carat gold," the wife complained to her husband.

They moved into their renovated offices: the paint was fresh, the fittings new but some furniture was as before. "Still broken," they grumbled.

No to the old. Out with the dull. Reject the broken.

Isn't this how you and I sometimes look at things in our lives? Don't we prefer the new, the bright and the expensive? Who amongst us happily accepts and gives thanks for what we don't like?

And isn't this how we sometimes treat others: the poor, the criminal, the prostitute, the homosexual, those domestic maids, those foreign workers, those aged aunties and uncles selling tissue at hawker centres? These who some consider alien, sinful, spoilt, lesser, dirtier.

Isn't it ironic then that the one we most long for, the risen Jesus, comes to us wounded, broken, scarred?

This is how Jesus comes to his friends in today's gospel story; he stands alive in their midst but with his wounds visible, to greet them with "Peace."

I'm sure the disciples did not expect "peace" to be the first word the risen Jesus would say to them. They had failed him, and they probably expected to hear words of regret, recrimination, and reproach.

But "Peace" is all Jesus said.

In this moment of astounding simplicity, Jesus simply offers the gift of silent acceptance and unconditional love.\* His peace that accepts them as still his

friends and his love that still wants to care for them. Peace Jesus gives them, his peace, no matter how much his disciples had failed him.Â

**And yes, Jesus' peace for us too, no matter how grave and how often we sin.**

â❖❖Peaceâ❖❖ helps us understand why Jesus asked them, â❖❖Why are you troubled?â❖❖ Troubled because they wanted to make sense of Jesus risen and alive. But troubled much more, I think, because Jesus continues to love. â❖❖How can Jesus still love, after we have failed him?â❖❖ they could have asked themselves.Â

We too should be troubled by Jesusâ❖❖ continuing presence in our lives, moment by moment, and in every choice we make for good or for bad. We should be troubled by his unconditional love that wants to save us.Â Â

How does Jesus prove his enduring, saving love for us all? â❖❖Touch me and see,â❖❖ he says.Â

The wounds in his hands and on his feet speak of Godâ❖❖s love. With his wounded, broken and scarred body, Jesus revealed the love of God to his disciples once, and again to us today. This love of God led him to the Cross, and to being disfigured with wounds and bruises.Â

In the Resurrection, Jesusâ❖❖ risen body continues to be scarred by his wounds. Now, these wounds are however transfigured by God's love into channels of mercy through Jesus for us. **Jesus' wounds are salvific: God's life flows through them for us.**

In today's gospel story, Jesus patiently led the disciples to experience and believe in his resurrection. He came to them where they were. He invited them to touch his body; it may have been wounded, broken and scarred by human evil but it was raised into life by the love of God. And by eating a piece of baked fish, he testified that he had indeed risen.Â

Doesn't Jesus also patiently bring us into his resurrection life?  
Doesn't he come to us where we are -- to touch us with his forgiveness, and to invite us to come to his table, feeding us with his risen Body, wounded, broken and scarred as it is?

In a few minutes, we will hold Jesus' body in our hands, before nourishing our lives with his body in Communion. Isn't this the most concrete way Jesus continues to prove his saving love for you and me no matter how saintly or sinful we are as we come to him?Â

Touch; see; eat.Â And so we do because we believe in Jesus risen and alive.Â

Amen is the right and holy response we can make as God's creation to the resurrection life we partake of in Jesus, most palpably at every Mass. It is in fact the most human response we can make to God. Yes, Amen, so be it that you, my Lord and my God, have risen, and we, your friends, are alive.Â

Today we are being invited **to let the risen Jesus come alive in us and for us.** But let us do this so that the risen can come alive amidst all that we don't like and all that we don't want.Â

Can we let the risen Jesus reveal himself in the old we don't want, in the dull we would rather shun, and the broken we prefer throwing out? Do we dare step back and allow Jesus to come alive in our encounters with those we have judged wounded because they have sinned, or those we have branded broken by their lifestyle choices, or even those we have scarred by our hatred, bias, discrimination, rejection, gossip?

Perhaps, if we dare to let Jesus reveal himself in our lives and in our encounters with others we have rejected, ignored, judged lesser, we might discover the gracious mercy of God labouring in them all for us and our salvation. **That divine mercy which never condemns what human evil disfigures but bends low to embrace everyone and everything up, like a mother for her child, so as to make better by transfiguring them in divine love.** This is the glory of God's saving love that Jesus reveals through his wounded, broken, scarred but risen body.

So, let us invite Jesus to come alive in us. This is how we can experience the immense goodness of God's merciful love in us and for us -- we who are also wounded, broken and scarred by sin yet are profoundly loved, mercifully forgiven again and again, and truly saved already by God's love in Jesus.

Then, we can come to really know the depth of Easter as God wishes for us. And it is simply this: **to experience the joy of being wrong.**\*\*

Wrong to see that God's saving love is restricted to the good, the wholesome, the clean of heart: because God is also there in the bad, the broken, those whose hearts are stained by sin to redeem them like God has redeemed us.

Wrong to insist that God's saving love depends on how many boxes we tick "yes" as obedient Christians: because God is also there for us when we fail to tick those boxes or when we fail as Christians because God sees our faith in God, no matter how little it is.

Wrong to think that God's saving love is mine alone in Jesus: because God is always there in Jesus for all people of goodwill, even if they are of another faith.

Yes, Easter life is to have the grace to look back on our sinfulness of not liking and not wanting what we have or what we are given, and to appreciate how God is already there waiting to redeem us for life.

This then is the Easter joy of being wrong about ourselves, about who God is and who we are to God in Jesus. The disciples discovered this truth in the risen Jesus' first word that consoled, uplifted, and loved them:  
"Peace." They then went forth and proclaimed this good news.

Will you and I let Jesus speak his peace to us, and show us the Easter joy of being wrong today? **For only when we humble ourselves in our wrong because we come to know that God loves us even more, can Jesus teach us how to proclaim to another and to all, "peace be with you".**

Let us ask for the joy of being wrong today.

\* The Monks, Spencer Abbey

\*\* James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*.

*Preached at St Ignatius Church and the Church of the Transfiguration*

photo: [www.cruxnow.com](http://www.cruxnow.com)

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## Tossing Carrots [at Shifting My Perspective]

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13**



I eat a bowl of raw carrots, mid-morning, every day. On the days I don't finish them, I randomly toss the remaining carrots all around the first floor of our house. There is a method to my madness.

Our indoor rabbit, Oreo, has no sense of smell at all. Since he was a rescue bunny and has some other battle scars, we assume he lost his sense of smell in whatever fight he got into before we got him. Nevertheless, he spends hours each day sniffing out every square inch of our first floor, scavenging for something to gnaw on.

It's so fun to see him stumble upon the carrots as he goes. By instinct, he grabs the treasure and runs. He finds some nook where he can feverishly devour the carrot before anyone or anything can take it away. The irony is: I left them out for him; I'm not about to pull them back.

Even more interesting is when there are carrots out in plain site but the poor little guy can't seem to see or smell them. At the end of the day, rather than letting them dry up and rot, I gather those carrots together and put them in his bowl.

We may not be rabbits, but I still think we're a lot like Oreo.

God is always tossing out carrots of hope for us to stumble upon. If, like Oreo, we persistently search them out, we discover treasure upon treasure, right in the midst of our ordinary days.

Of course there are those days when we can't seem to find even a sliver of hope, no matter how hard we search. I believe, on those days, our old battle wounds rear their ugly heads, blinding us to the good. As we dwell on old issues and rehash past mistakes, the sweet smell of all that is beautiful in our lives is lost on us.

However, despite being blind and unable to smell, hope is still right in front of us. If we can't overcome our own limitations to find it, all we need to do is go to God in prayer. It's there we discover He never lets hope dry up and rot. Instead, He gathers up an abundance of it and lays it at our feet.

***Questions for Reflection:***

***\* Are there days when I can't seem to find hope, no matter how hard I search?***

***\* In my prayer time, have I experienced God gathering up an abundance of hope and laying it at my feet?***

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This contribution is available at <http://shiftingmyperspective.com/2018/04/26/tossing-carrots/>  
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## I grew a beard and now I'm getting married [at TOM PERNA]

Yes, you read the title of this post correctly – I grew a beard and now I'm get married. I heard this statement and statements like it for years but refused to grow a beard for a long period of time. In the past, I would grow one for a few weeks and then eventually shave it. This all changed last summer when on July 16, 2017, I decided to take the plunge and grow out a beard, and yes, I was open to meeting a good Catholic woman. So many of my Catholic guy friends, who have beards and were either married or engaged to be married, said to me for a very long time – Perna, if you grow a beard, the right woman will come into your life.

Between you and me – I thought they were all crazy, absolute lunatics...**and then it happened!** On August 18, 33 days after I started growing a beard, I met my future wife at a Catholic Beer Club at Helton Brewery in Phoenix, Arizona. The full story is good and maybe I will share it with all of you at some point, but I will tell you this – she and her friend approached me (Ha ha!). There were a few reasons why they approached me, but one of the reasons why she came up to me was because I had a beard. At this point, it was in the beginning stages but it was still a beard. Things moved quickly because that night she knew she wanted to marry me and the following night I knew I wanted to marry her.

About one month into our relationship, it hit me what all my beard-growing Catholic guy friends had said to me in the past – if you grow a beard, you will meet the right woman and get married. It turns out that these men weren't crazy or lunatics but were right on the money! In just about 5 months from now, we are going to be married. Please pray for us as we continue our marriage preparation.



From our Engagement Photo Shoot by Man in the Moon Studios: Arizona Wedding Photography.

Now you might be asking yourself at this point – Tom, why are you writing a blog post about growing a beard and getting married?

I am writing this post because I want to share some information about this awesome Catholic beard balm that I have been using since my fiancée gave it to me as a gift for Christmas. If you are a Catholic man who has a beard, you're thinking about growing a beard, or you know of a Catholic man in your life who has beard, here is a great product that allows one to share in the traditions and beauty of the Catholic Church.

I had heard about this Catholic beard balm from my former pastor and boss, [who by the way has a phenomenal beard](#) (my new boss has a rather awesome beard too), but since I wasn't growing a beard at that time, I never gave it much thought. As my fiancée and I continued to date, she suggested I check out this Catholic beard balm her older brother uses. It happened to be the same stuff my former boss mentioned long ago. Since she bought me the first tin in December, I have since purchased two more tins (see my favorites below).

If you're a Catholic man like me who loves Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin

Mary, all the Angels and Saints, and the vast traditions of the Catholic Church, then you're going to love the Barbatus Beard Balm created and sold by Catholic Balm Company.

Every morning when I put it on, I think how awesome it is to be Catholic. It reminds me of how I have to live my life as a Catholic man in this world and how devoted I need to be to Our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the coolest aspects is that when your order arrives, there is a prayer card that also comes in the box that tells you how to apply the balm to your beard on one side, and on the other side, there is a *Daily Blessing of the Beard*. This daily blessing is by far one of the coolest things I have seen in a long time. It actually mentions our Baptism!



Together on a day pilgrimage to Our Lady of Solitude Monastery.

When I tell people about this beard balm, especially non-Catholics, they're amazed that such a thing even exists, but in the same sentence they want to know more about it. You have to admit that a lot of non-Catholics are somewhat intrigued by the Catholic Church and her 2000-year traditions. When I first shared it with my barber, a non-Catholic, he was totally amazed at the idea of a Catholic beard balm and wants me to bring it next time for him to see it, and of course, smell it!

So where do you get this awesome Catholic beard balm? Please visit the [Catholic Balm Company](#) website and check out all their products. You should definitely read [Their Story](#) to learn how and why they started the company. I would also encourage you to follow them on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) if you have these social media platforms.

Personally, my favorite Barbatus Beard Balms so far are Holy Smokes and Chrism. I have not tried any of the oils yet but want to soon. I have a beard brush that I use daily, but not from the Catholic Balm Company. I need to purchase one from them as well. At some point, I might join the Order of St. Barbatus, but it's not doable right now.



If you decide to try out these balms and/or any of the other products for yourself or buy them for the Catholic man in your life, come back to this post and let me know your thoughts. If you already use the beard balm or other products, let me know today what you think.

I leave you with the words of the Early Christian Father, [Lactantius](#) –

“[T]he nature of the beard contributes in an incredible degree to distinguish the maturity of bodies, or to the distinction of sex, or to the beauty of manliness and strength” (*On the Workmanship of God*, Chapter 7).

**825th blog post.**

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This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2018/04/06/i-grew-a-beard-and-now-im-getting-married/>  
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I am currently sixty-two years old. I began studying judo at the age of twelve. I have for the past fifty years practiced, studied, and taught martial arts. Officially I am nidan, second degree black belt, as for many years I had no regular instructor to mentor my promotions. I was offered sandan, third degree in both judo and jujitsu, in the early 1990s at a summer camp, but at the time the rank fees were more than I could afford.

I bring up this history to bolster my cred in speaking about a warrior's mindset.

Within the martial arts, the idea of situational awareness is taught. This means being alert to what is happening or can happen around you. In other words, you are prepared for an attack or a dangerous situation (like a car racing toward you).

In addition to my martial arts training, I also have work experience in mental wards with behavior patients where acts of violence were part of the daily routine. You expected the unexpected to happen and were ready to react instantly.

As a father, you need to understand that attacks against your family can come from any source, even those places you expect to be safe and where the staffers claim they want only what is best for your family. One such place turned out to be the obstetrician's office.

About twenty-two years ago, my wife was pregnant with our seventh child. We were familiar with the way her doctor cared for his patients and quite comfortable with his skill and bedside manner. That made what we experienced all the more surprising to us.

They scheduled an ultrasound, which showed everything was normal. The nurse then asked about scheduling an amniocentesis, which we declined. Later, when we met with the doctor, he asked about the amnio, and we again declined. We finished the appointment and went home.

Over the course of the next two weeks, we received numerous calls from the nurse at the office asking about scheduling the amniocentesis. She was quite adamant that it was necessary to check on the health of the child. We repeatedly said no. Amniocentesis is not without its risks to both the child and the mother. The nurse began to speak about how an ultrasound does not always show all the

possible problems with the child and the risk of having a child with deformities. If the deformities are detected early enough, we could do something about it. She meant an abortion, although she did not use the word.

During the fifth phone call, the nurse was browbeating my pregnant wife, who is not the argumentative type. I was standing next to her when I told her to give me the phone. I read the nurse the riot act. I told her we would not consent to the test. The test for us was meaningless, as even if the child had three arms and five legs, we would accept and love them. I told her I understood the risks of both the pregnancy and the test. I told her to go away!

On our next visit, I talked to the doctor, who said he had not instructed the nurse to call us about the test. We had said no to it and he was fine with that.

It was clear to me that this nurse had an agenda. Fortunately, we were able to stop her. My wife had some problems as the pregnancy advanced, but Joe was born healthy, if not a bit early. Unfortunately, at age one, he suffered a febrile seizure that did cause brain injury.

Joe is now twenty-two years old. First, he is alive. Second, he talks, walks, helps with the family newspaper route, is an altar server at church, and is slated to receive his green belt in hapkido, a martial art, this spring.

The nurse was wrong about Joe. After his seizure, some doctors proclaimed Joe a vegetable — *their words* — and suggested institutionalization. That is a story for later. For now, the important point is that no one can predict the future, and all fathers must be prepared to fight to make sure their children have one.

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This contribution is available at <http://blog.catholicwritersguild.com/2018/02/all-fathers-are-called-to-be-warriors-the-battle-can-begin-early.html>  
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## May: The Month of the Blessed Virgin Mary [at Jean M. Heimann]

May is the month of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. As a child, I attended a Catholic parochial school named in honor of Mary taught by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. Each May, we celebrated the Blessed Mother's month with a procession in which we crowned her statue with a beautiful wreath of pink and white roses.

One year, when my older sister was in the eighth grade, she received the special honor of crowning the statue of Our Lady. She was so happy to have been selected for this special honor. She wore a pink lace taffeta gown with a full skirt, a wreath of matching flowers on her head, and white gloves on her hands. After the entire student body prayed the Rosary, she placed the crown of roses on Our Lady's head. Then, we all sang the traditional hymn "Queen of the May."

Since my sister had an amazing lyric soprano voice, she also had the privilege of singing solo the "Ave Maria", a hymn which has always stirred something deep within me — a unique love for my heavenly Mother. It reminds of her fiat — her "Yes" to the will of God. As the Mother of God, Mary is radiantly beautiful. She is totally pure, modest, chaste, humble, and obedient. Her soul is immaculate — free from the stain of original sin. Mary is often referred to as the "New Eve." Through her fiat — her obedience to the will of God — she opened the doors of redemption and salvation to all her children which had been closed by Eve in her disobedience to the will of God. Because of God's eternal design, she became a necessary element for our redemption from the bondage of sin.

Some have asked, "Why is May the Month of the Blessed Virgin Mary?"

We know that in classic western culture, May was acknowledged as the season of the beginning of new life. It is the month of motherhood, when new life and fertility are celebrated. It is the month when the spring flowers blossom. As the flowers reappear, we honor Mary whom we call the "Mystical Rose." Mary brought new life into our world as the Mother of Jesus, who brings eternal hope to our hearts.

This Christian custom of dedicating the month of May to the Blessed Virgin Mary began at the end of the 13th century. The practice became particularly popular among the members of the Jesuit Order — by 1700 it took hold among their students at the Roman College and shortly thereafter, it was publicly practiced in the Gesu Church in Rome. From there it spread to the entire Church.

In May, we celebrate many beautiful Marian feast days, some of which include:

May 13 – [Our Lady of Fatima](#)

May 24 – [Our Lady, Help of Christians](#)

May 31 – [Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces](#)

May 31 – [Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#)

Have a happy and blessed Month of Mary!

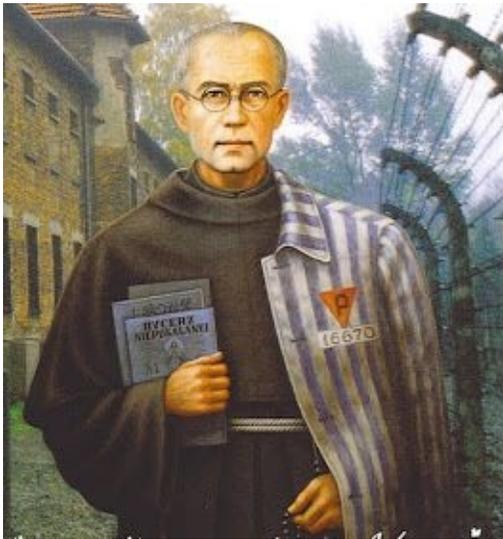
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This contribution is available at <http://www.jeanmheimann.com/2018/05/may-the-month-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary/>  
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## What St. Maximillian Kolbe and Franciszek Gajowniczek Taught Me About Being Saved [at Martin Family Moments]

I have strong devotion to St. Maximillian Kolbe.



I first heard of him in middle school, when my parents became Third Order Franciscans with the [Franciscans of the Immaculate](#). The friars here use media and radio to evangelize, imitating the way of St. Maximillian Kolbe. I found the life story of St. Max (may I call him that?) absolutely fascinating. I even named one of my sons after him. He just has a way of being in my life, even in his death.

~

There was a priest, Fr. James McCurry, who used to visit our Cape Cod home often. He would drink tea in my parent's kitchen and keep us laughing from his stories until way too late into the night. I grew very close to him and he even concelebrated our wedding mass. His love for St. Max was strong. He received the Kolbe Award a few years ago, and the reporter told his story ([source](#)):

*Father McCurry, during his funny yet profound remarks upon receiving the award, told of his encounter with Pope John Paul II at the [canonization](#) of St. Maximilian in 1982. He asked the Holy Father if he would pray that we might all be as consecrated to Mary as St. Maximilian was.*

*The Pope did not hear him at first and said, “huh?”*

*Speaking more loudly, the question then prompted a smile on the Holy Father’s face. He pointed to Father McCurry and said, “You do that!”*

*Taking this as a papal command, Father McCurry did do it as the long-time president of the Militia Immaculata (founded by St. Maximillian Kolbe in 1917).*

~

When I was sixteen, my mom and Fr. McCurry were involved with getting Franciszek Gajowniczek, the man whose life was saved by St. Maximillian Kolbe in Auschwitz, to come to our parish to speak. He was 93 and it ended up being his last public appearance.



Knowing he was older and unable to go up and down stairs easily, my mom had him and his wife stay in their master bedroom on the first floor. She planned an elaborate polish meal for him and he got misty-eyed as he saw his favorite traditional polish dishes. My mom even tucked him into bed like a child and kissed him on the cheek!



When they left the next day, she stripped the bed and saved the sheets, fully believing that they will be relics one day when Mr. Gajowniczek is canonized. Why would HE be canonized, you might be asking? Because he spent the 53 years of his life after being saved by St. Max in dedication to him. When he had

returned home at the end of the war, and discovered his two sons had been killed, he was heartbroken. He didn't know why his life had been spared while theirs had not, and he felt that perhaps it was because the world needed to hear the message of St. Maximilian Kolbe.

So that became his mission. He traveled the world to talk about the amazing saint, and the faith and love for God in his own life was palpable. "The gift of life", he said during his visit, "is what energizes me to travel around the world".

His life was saved...and so he spent it trying to repay the debt. It makes sense, doesn't it? I'm sure we would do the same.

~

And yet....

Jesus has saved our lives as well.

He literally died on a cross so that we could have eternal life.

How do we repay him? Do we even thank him daily...weekly...monthly? Do we try to spread the message of his love and mercy with all we encounter?

I had never thought of it this way until this year's Easter homily. I \*knew\* He died for us but I never felt that He *saved my life*, you know? Our priest used a

different story to make the same point and it's a message I won't soon forget. Jesus stepped in to save us! I hope to be more like Franciszek Gajowniczek, feeling indebted with gratitude for the gift of my life, and letting others know the goodness of God.



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This contribution is available at <http://martinfamilymoments.blogspot.com/2018/04/life-savers-what-st-maximillian-kolbe.html>  
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## 7 ways to bring Mary into your marriage [at WordPress.com]

During our wedding ceremony, we presented flowers to the Blessed Mother, entrusting our marriage to her.



Honestly, I don't think we fully grasped the importance of that at the time. But as years have gone by, we've realized more and more just how vital our Mother is to our marriage.

She is the ultimate example of what it means to say "yes" to God's will and to trust Him in everything. Her fiat – her "yes" – led to the salvation of the whole world. Not only did she have the perfect marriage, she was the perfect mother. As a woman, I look to Mary as a guide as I strive to become a better wife and mother.

(But a man could totally consider Mary as an example too! She was so trusting and self-sacrificial, two qualities essential in a marriage. The most awesome

priests we know are the ones with a devotion to the Blessed Mother.)

Plus, the devil is terrified of Mary – have you noticed that many statues of Mary have her crushing the serpent? She is the WOMAN. Her prayers are so powerful, as she can literally whisper into the ear of Jesus. And he listens to her, just like he did from the very beginning of his ministry at the wedding at Cana.



How can you bring Mary into your marriage? Here are some ideas:

1. Place a statue of Mary in your home, specifically in your bedroom.
2. Pray the Rosary together.
3. Have images of Mary hanging on your walls, especially in your bedroom. (We also have one of Mary and baby Jesus right outside our boys' room, which I love.)

4. Create a Marian garden in your yard. (We just did this! See our video at the end of the post!)
5. Celebrate Marian feast days. (One of our faves is the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe!)
6. Read [\*33 Days to Morning Glory\*](#) together.
7. If your church has a place for flowers in front of a statue of the Blessed Mother, present those to her together and pray a Hail Mary for your marriage. (Our church has a little grotto which is perfect for this!)

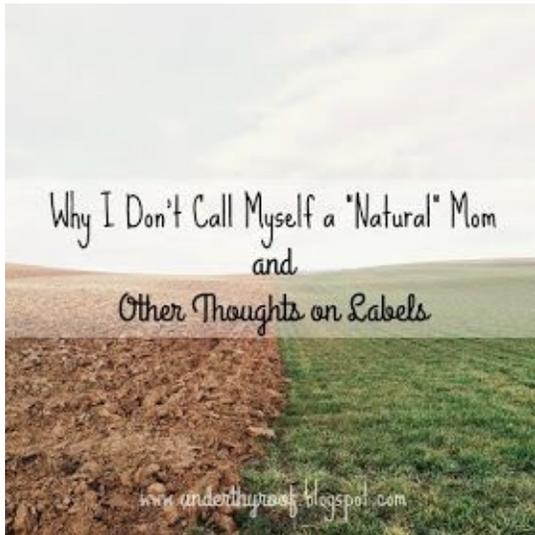
May is the month of Mary, so this is the perfect time to think about how you can Mary into your marriage! **Do you have any other ideas to add to the list?**

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This contribution is available at <http://surprisedbymarriage.com/2018/04/25/7-ways-to-bring-mary-into-your-marriage/>  
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## Why I Don't Call Myself a "Natural" Mom and Other Thoughts on Labels [at Under Thy Roof]



There's a particular aspect of mom culture, and among women in general, that has bothered me for a long time. I'll call it over-identification with an external. I see it in the leagues of "natural moms" who band together over their shared choices....until someone makes a different choice.

Are you still a "natural mom" if you can't/don't breastfeed?

If you don't have a super strict diet?

If you had a c-section?

Everyone seems to have their own, differing, definition of what makes a "natural mom" and thus social inclusion becomes a roving target. At any moment you might slip and become not "natural" enough. What then? Are you out of the "natural mom" club?

I'm picking on the "natural mom" label first because it is probably one of the most egregious examples, but I see this among other groups of women too. There's the marrieds, the singles, the married with kids, etc. In our quest to find people who share our experience, we have all managed to create our own little

sparsely populated boxes.

What happens next?

We take to the internet to complain about how lonely and isolated we are.

After that.

We complain about how the internet, and social media, is making the problem worse.

Y'all, the internet didn't make this problem. Plenty of people felt isolation before social media. What social media did do was provide another avenue to do what we were doing before - over-identifying with externals that ultimately say nothing about who we ARE.

All those labels? They are all about what we do, what we think about ourselves, but not who we ARE.

Homeschooling might be a big part of my day to day, but my soul does not have a mark on it that says "homeschooler". No matter how many labels you collect to try and name for your own personal constellation of attributes, those labels tell me nothing about YOU. They might tell me how you spend your time, but we are all more than our day jobs.

There is a notable exception! My label of "baptized Catholic"

*does*

say something about who I am. Baptism left an indelible mark on my soul, and I couldn't deny it or get rid of it even if I wanted to. Being a baptized Catholic is now an enduring part of my being, and it makes sense to convey that identity.

I can't fail to be Catholic now. I can fail to fulfill my duties as a Catholic, I can dislike Catholicism, but I cannot unCatholic myself. That's a safe identity.

While I appreciate the yearning to share commonalities with others, I wish I saw less of a use of those commonalities to triage who is enough like ourselves to be worthy of our social energy.

The fact is that I am doing all of those externals just for a time. What happens when that external ceases to make sense in my life? Do I then become too different to be close to those with whom I used to share a label?

Over-identifying with an external means that our identities, our concept of ourselves, are only safe as long as we keep doing things the "right" way. It often means going with the crowd for the sake of relationship. That sounds like an exhausting way to live!

Lately I've been consciously avoiding calling myself by a label. When I meet someone I try not to immediately list out my marital status, number of kids, diet, schooling choices, etc. Instead I focus on having an organic conversation. And it has been HARD! You don't notice what a bad habit triage by label has become until you try to consciously shift your own interactions.

It has been a worthy experiment, and one I recommend. Perhaps there are labels that you would be better off letting go. Perhaps there's a person you have seen around, but never gotten to know because y'all didn't seem to have a lot in common. Give her a chance to be more than your perception of her.

*What are your thoughts on labels? Do you agree that social media didn't create the storm? Have you ever clung to a label for the sake of belonging?*

[Share via Facebook](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://underthyroof.blogspot.com/2018/04/why-i-dont-call-myself-natural-mom-and.html>  
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## Spiritual Journey with the Surprise [at A Spiritual Journey]

Achieving union with God is our greatest challenge, precisely because it make us saints. Actually, the hard part consists of just one sticky point: surrendering yourself to God. Here is how a fruitful spiritual journey progresses. You struggle along and eventually reach that sticky point. You stop, but you brave yourself and decide to go beyond it. Now God picks you up and carries you all the rest of the way! *This is the big surprise.*

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This contribution is available at <http://journeyofimperfectsaint.blogspot.com/2018/04/spiritual-journey-with-surprise.html>  
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## Samaritan Woman: Imaginative Meditation [at One Pearl]

I hope this meditation on the Samaritan woman blesses you and shows you the fruit of imaginative prayer.

Big drops of salty sweat sting my eyes. I blink rapidly to relieve the burning sensation. I wish I could wipe them away, but my large water jar requires the use of both hands. Just a little further. I squint my eyes and think the desert heat must be playing tricks with my eyes. I feel the hot sun beating down on me. I feel like my skin is going to burst into flames any moment from its unrelenting gaze. I long for just a moment of relief. At least my head scarf protects me from inhaling the gritty dust suspended in the air.

I look ahead of me again and the figure is still there. The heat must be getting to me. Who in their right mind would be out here at this time? Finally, I am within feet of the well. I can already taste the relief the water will bring my cracked lips and sandpaper tongue. At least until tomorrow...when I have to do this all over again. I am close enough now to make out the figure sitting on the edge of the well. I hesitate, wondering what I should do.

There is only one reason for a man to be at a well, especially this well. Jacob came to this well hoping to find a Godly wife, and Rachel was sent to him. They too, had met at high noon. Is this man looking for a wife? I rub my arm, which is covered with tender bruises. I picture him, my...not my husband, my...lover. I cringe at the word and wonder how I got here. I take a step towards the well and towards this mysterious man who seems so out of place. Maybe he is lost? Maybe he will be different than the others.

I begin to sashay confidently towards him, but hesitate once again when I get a good look at him. A Jew. I'm not that desperate. By this time he has seen me. I am a Samaritan woman, so I do what my people always do with Jews: I ignore Him. I place my jar within the rope harness and lower it into the well. My thoughts turn again to the man who brands me daily with these bruises, who marks me as his own. I am being pulled into the seductive darkness of the well, thinking how easy it would be to just disappear. No one would miss me.

I am jerked back to reality by a rough voice beside me. “Give me a drink.” Not a question, or even a polite request. A demand. My blood begins to boil. “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?” I look him defiantly in the eyes. I start when I see the way he is looking back at me. There is no contempt or judgment in his eyes. He is not backing down, but his look is not confrontational. It feels like the first time someone has really seen me. He holds my gaze. He doesn’t scan my body, assessing it. I pull my water jar up and pull a small cup out of the folds of my dress. I offer it to him timidly. He dips it into my water jar. Instead of bringing the cup to his mouth, he holds it out to me. I look at him, confused.

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

I took that as permission to ask the question that had been on the tip of my tongue since spotting him from a distance.

“Who are you? Where do you get this water? You ask me for a drink, and yet you offer me living water?”

“Whoever drinks the water I offer will never thirst again.”

This is music to my ears. I don’t know what he means, but if it means never coming to this well again, I want this water. I will do anything for it. I come at noon, at the hottest part of the day, to avoid the stares and gossip of the other women. I choose the heat over ridicule. But if there is another choice...

“Sir, Give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

“Go, call your husband, and come here.”

I falter. The truth had to come out eventually. Why do I need a husband to get this water? All husbands had ever brought me were trouble. Something about this stranger demands truthfulness.

“I have no husband.” I hang my head in shame, looking away from his soul searching gaze.

“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.”

I look up at this stranger in surprise.

“How do you...are you a prophet?”

“Do you want this living water?”

“Yes,” with my whole heart.

He takes my cup and slowly pours the water over my head. This is a mikvah, a ritual purification, a new beginning. He has given me new life. I close my eyes as the cool water runs down my face. Then I remember who it is that will bring living water to my people. My eyes snap open with this revelation.

“You are the Messiah, the Christ.”

“I AM.”

### **The Samaritan Woman is each one of us**

The Samaritan Woman is an outcast, ostracized for her uncleanness. And she is the one that Jesus wants to marry. She represents all of us, who try to satisfy ourselves with other husbands, with other lovers that leave us perpetually thirsty.

Jesus knows all of this and he is waiting at the well just for me, sitting in the hot sun, without food or drink. He has traveled out of his way to show me a different way of living. He asks me for a drink! He frees me from my shame. He knows all that I have done, all that I am, and [wants to marry me](#). He wants to be seen with me, to declare to all the world, “this is my bride!” I no longer need to hide. I can run through this town that has cast me out and proclaim that I have been chosen, that the God of the universe chose me to be his bride. He knows all that I have done and loves me. He has chosen me, as unworthy as I am, and that means that [no one is too far from His love](#). I have found the courage to call others to come see for themselves. “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” Through my testimony, through my witness, I help give birth to new believers, help free them from their masks of righteousness, from their slavery to cultural expectations.

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## The Dream [at String of Pearls]

*She was a young mother when she had the dream, just thirty, with four little boys between the ages of one and five. She would not give birth to her fifth, and last, son for several years.*

*She was normally not a dreamer. Always an exceptionally deep sleeper (the alarm had not yet been invented that would easily wake her--except, of course, for the middle-of-the-night cries and calls of her children), she rarely dreamed--and even when she did, she even more rarely remembered the details of her dreams, which would grow hazy as soon as she opened her eyes and then quickly evaporate, like a misty fog being chased off by the sun. "I was having the strangest dream," she might tell her husband. But when he asked her what it was about, she could almost never clearly recall the particulars.*

*This dream was different.*

*THIS one the heavy-sleeping young mother remembered vividly upon waking--every excruciatingly painful detail of it.*

*In the dream, it was obvious that the young mother was no longer of this world. She was floating down to earth, ghost-like, to visit her husband and sons, the beloved family from whom she'd been cruelly separated by a premature death (the reason for her untimely demise unclear, unexplained). She had been unwilling to ever purposely leave them while she lived; separation anxiety had been a hallmark of her brand of motherhood. How unbearable it was for her to be separated from them now! She just had to see them again. She had to.*

*She located the house. There they were: her boys! Hopefully they would be as glad to see her as she was to see them. She passed easily through the see-through roof and floated inside, her heart fluttering in anticipation of the sweet reunion.*

*Sadly, nothing about this reunion was sweet. In a similar fashion to those nightmares where you try to run from danger but you realize with horror that your legs are suddenly paralyzed, she kept yelling frantically, through tears, trying in vain to get her boys' attention, but it was as if she had no voice at all, or as if they had gone completely deaf. Going to them one by one, she cried, "It's Mom! I'm here! I'm so sorry I had to leave you! I miss you and I love you!" Not one of them turned his head at the sound of her voice, not one; they didn't hear her or see her, didn't feel her presence, even though she was pouring her love out over them with every ounce of strength she had left. It was as if she didn't exist at all. They kept doing what they were doing, heads bent over their toys, utterly engrossed, oblivious to her presence; the youngest napped peacefully in his crib...and from all appearances, they were as happy as they'd ever been. How badly she wanted to hug them, to see their faces light up and to hear the older ones say, "Mom, you're back! We've missed you so much!"*

*It seemed as if they'd forgotten her altogether, and her heart felt as if it was cracking into a million tiny pieces.*

*Profoundly saddened, she reluctantly left her babies to go in search of her husband, her only love, the high school sweetheart who'd been her best friend for half of her earthly life and with whom she'd been chosen by God to raise those precious boys. On her way to him, floating down an unfamiliar hallway in that unfamiliar house, she passed a doorway and looked in to see a lovely woman sitting in an easy chair, with her head bent over a book...and she was visibly pregnant. The sight of this woman, a complete stranger who was now the woman of this house, apparently, pierced the young mother's heart.*

*Finally, she found him--the high school boyfriend-turned-husband who had always and forever been the only man for her. He was alone in the master bedroom--a room that he should be sharing with HER, she thought, and not with that other woman out there who was sitting in a chair, reading and growing a new baby.*

*When he saw her, the husband dropped the folded-up t-shirt he was holding and his face immediately lit up with joy. "It's SO GOOD to see you again," he said, and she could tell that he'd missed her and he loved her still.*

*"You can see me? Oh, thank God you can see me!" she said. She could always count on him. "The boys..." A sob caught in her throat. "The boys can't see me! I tried to talk to them, and they can't hear me, either."*

*He looked at her with love (and pity, too, perhaps) in his eyes. "We're okay. We're doing okay. You don't have to worry about us; we're all going to be fine."*

*How could they be fine without her? How could they be? Oh, yes...that woman reading in the chair, who now had the coveted job of caring for her boys--she was their mother-figure now...*

*It was then that the young dead mother in the dream realized that her beloved men--all five of them--had moved on without her, and she began to keen...*

*The young mother's eyes popped open. She had woken herself up with the actual sound of a strangled cry in her throat, a sound that put a merciful end to the unspeakably painful dream, and there were actual tears soaking her cheeks. This had never happened to her before; she had never cried herself awake. She*

*was shaken to her core. It took a long time for her to feel the consolation that comes from realizing that none of that awful stuff had really happened, that it was all just a bad dream--that she was alive, that her precious boys were sleeping in nearby rooms, that her husband was still all hers. But it had seemed more real than any dream she'd ever had (if you didn't count the part about floating down from the sky and passing through the roof of a house!). She could not seem to shake the sadness it left in its wake. Not for hours.*

The question I pose now, dear readers, is this: was it a bad dream, or was it, in some ways, a good one?

Yes, yes, I know: it was very sad, for what mother can fathom leaving her babies motherless when they're so little? But it was also ultimately hopeful, wasn't it? Didn't the young widower prove, by marrying again (even though he still felt love for his departed wife), that with the grace of God, we can endure even the most painful losses and still find a reason to keep on living? Wouldn't any mother be comforted to know that her husband and children were going to be okay, even if she couldn't be with them?

You might have guessed by now that I was the young mother who woke up crying, having just experienced in my dream existence what was one of my greatest real-life fears at that point in time. (My other fears were so terrifyingly painful to imagine that I guess my subconscious didn't even dare to produce dreams about them--or if it did, I was thankfully too heavy a sleeper to remember them.) At the wise old age of going-on-60, however, I realize now that my faith back then was not what it should have been; and had my faith been strong enough, I might have found more comfort than sadness in that dream--which I imagine now could be a glimpse of what Purgatory might be like for someone like me.

It's easy for me to look back on this dream now and wonder why it tormented me so at the time, I guess: after all, I have been granted the privilege of living long

enough to see my boys (all five of them) grow up; to see the four oldest get married and become fathers; to live past middle age with my first and only love and meet a dozen of our grandchildren (with more already on the way). I am luckier than most. God's plan for me was not to die young and leave my sons when they were small, and for that I am eternally grateful.

When I was a young mother, I had an intense and irrational fear of flying that could more accurately be described as a fear of dying. (And I'm married to an airline pilot--go figure! I know better than most how safe airline travel is, and yet...) I am a bit ashamed now that I wasn't able to put my life completely in God's hands back then, to trust in His goodness and mercy and without fear say, "Your will, not mine, be done." Because of my fear of flying and my separation anxiety, I couldn't bring myself to fly AWAY from my boys; but when they grew up, left home, and scattered to the winds, I was able to fly TO them with little trouble. Wanting to see them when they were far away cured me of my long-held phobias. I wish I could say that faith alone had done it.

I still fear death (which is to say that I am like most normal humans). I can only hope that when my time comes, I will be so much stronger than the dream-frightened young mother I was 30 years ago, and that I can fly to Our Lord without fear, like my father did when he died in November of 2016.

When Dad was given his final prognosis--that the chemo was not working, that his leukemia was terminal, and that he had only a week or two to live--he took that news bravely and thanked the doctor for his honesty. He calmly faced his end, surrounded by his family for one beautiful week that I will always remember with fondness. His last week on earth was one of peace, grace, courage, love, trust, and acceptance. He gave himself back to God without one tear falling down his face, without one complaint--even though he knew that he was saying goodbye to my mom, the beloved partner with whom he'd shared his life for 60 years. His was the happiest, holiest death anyone could ever imagine. Right before he passed, as he was struggling to take his last breaths, his eyes suddenly popped open and he stared at a spot on the ceiling. His lips moved as if he was trying to talk to someone. My husband and I both believe that he was seeing Our Lady, and that She was there in his last moments to take him to Her

Son.



That's my dream now: to die the way my father did.

(I'm sorry if this post was a little heavy! I just recalled that long-ago dream the other day and felt compelled to write about it. Actually, I used memories of this dream as inspiration for some parts of *Finding Grace*, when talking about Grace's mother, Peggy, and her feelings regarding faith and motherhood. Perhaps there will be a Grace-filled Tuesdays Book Club post tomorrow?)

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