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*June*  
*2018*

# **New Evangelists Monthly #66**

June 2018

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## Forward

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

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

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

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## A Celtic Style Blessing in the Springtime [at Pauca Verba]



**My paternal grandparents** were Irish born, having come to the United States around 1900. My grandmother, Catherine, was from a poor farm in Galway, and my grandfather, John, a Catholic from Belfast. Not easy. John shod horses in Manhattan and Catherine was a maid to a wealthy family on Park Avenue. She lived with us for some time when we were kids. That makes me second generation Irish. I can feel it.

The low temperatures here are in the 50's now and the parsley, lettuce and spinach seeds have sprouted. Spring is finally winning over winter. And from that place, I'm sending my own version of a Gaelic Blessing to you - from my garden to yours. Maybe you have a garden out back. Or maybe you admire a neighbor's garden. Or maybe your garden is your indoor potted African Violets by the window. Maybe your garden is one of those huge cement pots filled with spring flowers you pass on a Manhattan Avenue on the way to work. Doesn't matter. I'm sending the spring blessings to you and your family - your spouses, your children and grandchildren, your siblings - mindful that some of them may be having a hard time of it.

*Deep peace of the forest's layered greening to you.*

*Deep peace of the birds returning to you;*

*their nesting,*

*their surround-sound song.*

*Deep peace of the fawn's birth to you.*

*Deep peace of the seeds sprouting to you;*

*the wisteria bud-swell,*

*the lilac scenting.*

*Deep peace of the days lengthening to you;*

*its warming,*

*its brightening.*

*Deep peace of the morning fog to you;*

*its dew and mist.*

*Deep peace of the frog's pond-life to you.*

*Deep peace of the bee's foraging to you.*

*Deep peace of the soil's softening to you.*

*Deep peace of Mary's faith-smile to you.*

*Deep peace of Christ's trillium-red wounds to you.*

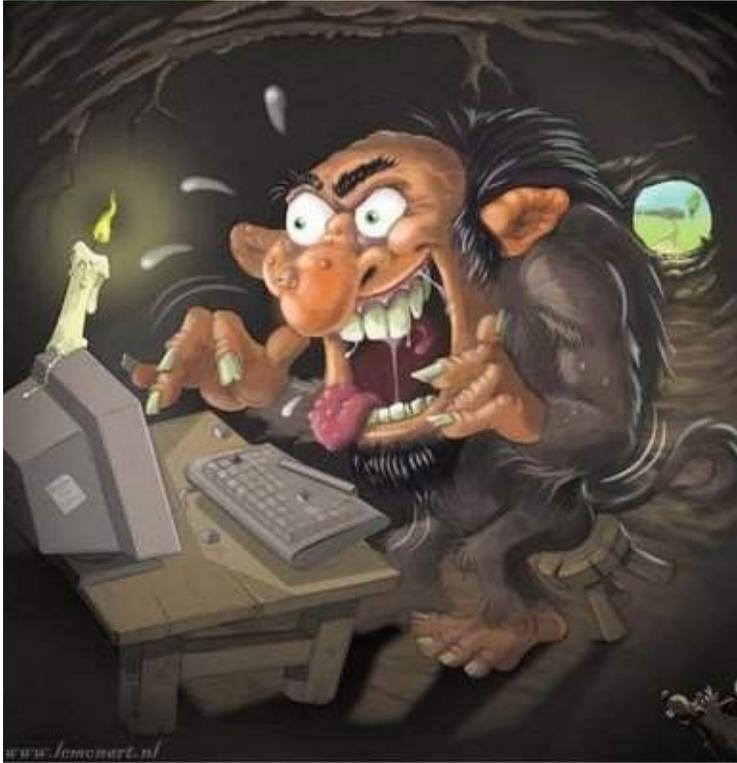


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This contribution is available at <http://paucaverba.blogspot.com/2018/05/a-celtic-style-blessing-in-springtime.html>  
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Troll, via Uncyclopedia

Out there on the interweb, there are trolls. Many of them. Occasionally I like to feed them. I'd feed them [pork](#), but they're Adventist, so one of the few rules they have is to not eat pork. (They only have 10 rules, which are to keep the sabbath on Saturday and to not eat pork. [Abortion](#) and [dishonesty](#) are permitted)

The first rule of troll feeding is to know that you will not win an argument or debate. Arguments and debates are things you have with people willing to respond with intelligent answers. Not with trolls. But that doesn't mean don't feed them. Feeding them gives you examples of trolling to share with friends and neighbours, or in a blog post. [And a follow-up blog post.](#)

Adventist trolls are interesting. They have all sorts of forums on the interweb where they hope to attract Catholics (and other Christians, but especially Catholics) and frustrate them. And they usually run them, and they set the rules. Not all Adventists are trolls, but Adventist trolls end up showing how many Adventists think about the rest of Christianity ([whom their prophetess said all pray to Satan instead of God](#)). Non-troll Adventists look at the Bible with special

lenses that filter out anything contrary to their prophetess Ellen White and their core belief, the sabbath. Present them with evidence, and they shut their eyes and think about something else. I've seen this with years of discussing the Bible with Adventists. It just stands out more strongly when they are trolls. So, when reading the trolling in this post, realise that getting through to the non-trolls can be just as tough.

Note to non-Catholics reading this – please try to understand our perspective, even if you disagree on the doctrinal issue being discussed trolled. I'm sure you can identify with trolls.

## **Anatomy of an Adventist troll, or troll feeding [at Catholicism and Adventism]**

A troll [posted](#) the following:

*Catholics who is your mother advocate?*

*The Bible says There is only one advocate.*

**The troll's strategy:** trap a Catholic who admits that the term “advocate” can apply to Mary, and then proclaim that our only true Advocate is Jesus.

**Catholic reply:** Explains the role of Mary, “Mother of my Lord”, and the fact that “Mother of my Lord” meant the queen in ancient Israel (cf 1 Kings 2, especially verse 19).

**Troll response:**

*A queen, who says she is a queen or is it your opinion?*



Forest Troll

**The troll's strategy:** ignore the evidence provided. Try to trap the Catholic.

**Catholic reply:** A further explanation of how the queen of Israel was the king's mother, and a link to a book on the topic.

**Troll response:**

*God is not Married to Mary.*

**Catholic:** flabbergasted at the stupidity of the reply.

**Further response from the troll:** nothing. He moves on, his job done, his ego stroked, his tummy full.

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Elsewhere in the same thread, the honesty of Adventists in the forum is discussed:

Catholic (me): *Adventists here are constantly bearing false witness against Catholics and the Catholic Church. It's a joke.*

**Troll response:**

*stay on the op*

So I decided to play his game back at him. And he didn't like it at all.

**Troll:** *Who is your mother advocate?*

**Me:** *Who is yours?*

**Troll:** *Christ is my advocate*

**Me:** *As is he ours.*

**Troll:** *Now who is your mother advocate?*

**The troll's strategy:** the troll wants us to declare Mary our advocate. In his mind, he's referring to the one primary advocate – Jesus. So I gave him that answer. And then played his silly word game.

**Me:** *Christ is our advocate.*

**Troll:** *And who's is your mother advocate?*

**Me:** *My mother's advocate is Christ too.*

**Me:** *Who is your sister advocate? And your cat advocate?*

**Me:** *SMH*

**Troll:** *Good bye*

**The troll's strategy:** He didn't like that one bit. His own game was turned on him. So, as he is an admin of the forum, I was blocked for three days as punishment. Ego fixed, tummy full.

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A few notes:

The term "*advocate*" simply means someone who intervenes on behalf of someone else. Jesus Christ is our only mediator between man and God – only he can be that because only he is both Man and God. In that unique sense, Jesus Christ is our only mediator, only advocate, only intercessor. Only he can bridge the gap. But we can all intercede for each other. Which means we can all be advocates for each other. And sometimes the word "*mediator*" gets used as

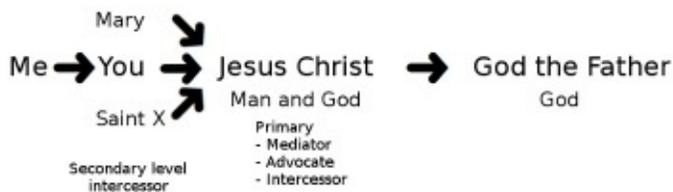
another synonym there. It's just important to realise the difference – Jesus Christ, and ONLY Jesus Christ, is the primary mediator / intercessor / advocate. We can participate in that, but in a secondary sense. See the following images showing direction of the flow of intercession.

First, the primary role that ONLY Jesus Christ performs:



Intercession – primary

Second, how we (and Mary and the saints) also act as intercessors / advocates:



Intercession – secondary

### **Further information on the queenship of Mary and Jesus’ sole mediatorship:**

[One Mediator Between God and Men ... Catholic Answers](#)

[Is Mary’s Queenship Biblical? ... Catholic Answers](#)

[Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary’s Queenship ... by Edward Sri and Scott Hahn, Amazon](#)

[What Catholics Believe – Mary, the Virgin Mother of God](#)

### **Further posts on Adventist dishonesty:**

[Troll feeding, part 2](#)

[Shame on you – Adventists, dishonesty, and the Catholic Church Dishonest Adventists](#)

[Adventist desperation on Usenet – Statues and idols](#)

[Spiteful remarks from Dr Frank Steyn, an Adventist pastor/sociologist](#)  
[An analysis of an essay by the Adventist pastor/sociologist Dr Frank Steyn](#)  
[Adventist dishonesty in the way they present the Catholic faith](#)  
[Adventist Church: “Bible not true”](#)  
[Adventist anti-Catholic hatred is alive and well](#)

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## Homer, Hegel, History and Hope [at A Catholic Citizen in America]



Folks who saw virtue in unquestioning devotion to established values didn't like the 1960s. No institution, custom or belief seemed safe from scrutiny.

Even the idea of progress — a cherished heirloom from the Age of Enlightenment — was challenged, disputed, and ultimately rejected.

Visions of a technotopia, where our greatest challenge was deciding how to spend our leisure time, were fading.

Hopes for nuclear power's abundant clean energy were giving way to fears of an atomic holocaust and reactor meltdowns. Assuming that pollution didn't kill us first. ([July 28, 2017](#); [February 17, 2017](#))



Perhaps even more disturbing for social Luddites, the nation's youth seemed ill-suited for their assigned role as torchbearers for liberty, conformity and suburban living.

Earnest articles and op-eds warned that television was rotting the minds of

America's youth. And popular music was subverting values which so many held dear:

“...Creature comfort goals  
They only numb my soul  
And make it hard for me to see....”  
(“[Pleasant Valley Sunday](#)” The Monkees (1967))

“...If the mind is baffled  
When the rules don't fit the game,  
Who will answer?...”  
(“[Who Will Answer?](#)” Ed Ames (1967))

“...Go ahead and hate your neighbour  
Go ahead and cheat a friend  
Do it in the name of heaven  
You can justify it in the end....”  
(“[One Tin Soldier](#)” Dennis Lambert, Brian Potter (1969))

Some felt it was the end of civilization as they knew it. I think they were right.<sup>1</sup>

America has changed. So has the world. I think some changes were improvements. Some aren't turning out as well as I'd hoped. And many are simply change: which happens, whether we like it or not.

I'm cautiously optimistic about our future, partly because I know a bit about our past.

## **The Walls of Troy**



That's part of Troy VII's acropolis: what's left of it after the Trojan War and Late Bronze Age collapse.

Until around the 19th century, most folks thought the Trojan War had happened pretty much the way Homer described it in the Iliad: the non-mythic parts at any rate.

Then some European scholars took what they'd been learning about ancient history, and compared that to Homer's account. Parts, at least, didn't match what they expected. Either their educated guesses were wrong, or Homer's epic poem was basically fictional.

Quite a few decided that they knew more about history than some ancient chap. Some also figured the Iliad, fictional or not, was composed by some other poet.

Academic one-upmanship — it's a [real word](#) — followed. A humorist's opinion probably made as much sense as many: Homer didn't compose the Iliad. It was some other Greek in Homer's day — whose name was Homer.

There's still considerable debate about how much of the Iliad is strictly factual. Even Thucydides figured Homer had stretched the facts a bit, and that's another topic.

I think poets of ancient Greece were a bit like today's screenwriters: more interested in drama and spectacle than accountant-like precision.

Professional scholars weren't the only folks who wondered if Troy really existed: and if it did, where we might find "[the lofty gates of Troy.](#)"

Frank Calvert, an Englishman born in Malta, learned about Hisarlik, a hill in what's now northwestern Turkey that might conceal Troy's ruins.

Frank and his brother Frederick bought a farm that included part of the hill. They uncovered part of what Frank thought was Troy.

A German archeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, met Calvert and thought the Englishman was right. Schliemann dug into the hill and uncovered what had been a city. More exactly, he excavated Trojan ruins from at least two periods.



Schliemann had also, regrettably, obliterated what we are pretty sure had been significant parts of the city. Archeologists are much more careful these days. As I keep saying, we do learn. Eventually.

It's still not unanimous, but these days most academics think Troy was real and Hisarlik is where the city used to be.<sup>2</sup>

The Trojan War was real, too, and almost certainly part of the Late Bronze Age Collapse. We haven't had a catastrophe quite like it since. ([November 3, 2017](#))

### **“Nothing Stands Still”**

Descendants of folks who survived the Collapse eventually returned and lived where Troy had been.

But the city never fully recovered. Partly, I think, because the river which flowed past Troy kept carrying water and sediment to the sea.

The site's a few miles inland now. Troy's natural harbor long since filled in and became farmland.

The Hellespont is still part of an important trade route, but today's major east-west crossing point is Istanbul. Another three millennia or so, and some other

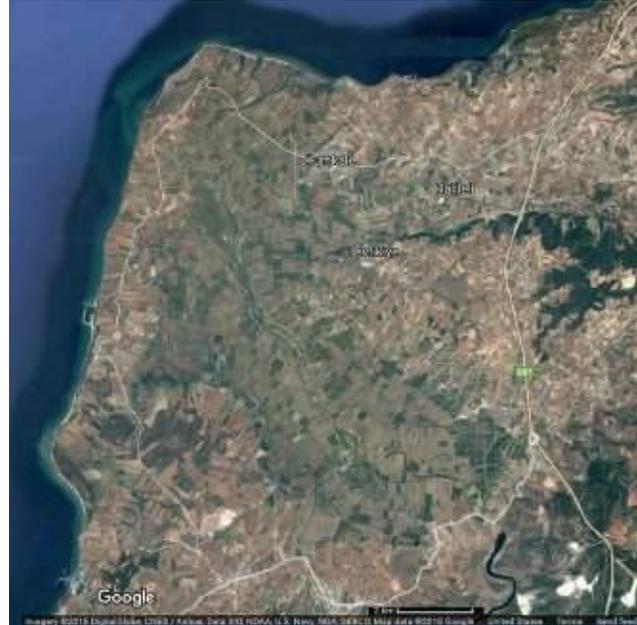
place may be the region's major metropolis. It's like the fellow said:

“πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει”

“Everything changes and nothing stands still.”

([Heraclitus](#), As quoted by Plato in “Cratylus”)

## Learning From the Past: Or Not



Our cultures and tech change. So do our jobs, roles we play in society. But human nature doesn't change. Not that I can see. Whether that's hopeful or not may depend on attitude:

“Perhaps the cause of our contemporary pessimism is our tendency to view history as a turbulent stream of conflicts — between individuals in economic life, between groups in politics, between creeds in religion, between states in war. ... History has been too often a picture of the bloody stream. The history of civilization is a record of what happened on the banks.”

([Will Durant](#), As quoted in “The Gentle Philosopher” (2006) by John Little at Will Durant Foundation)

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

(“[The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress](#),” George Santayana)

(1905-1906))

“What experience and history teach is this — that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it.”

“[Lectures on the Philosophy of History](#),” Georg Hegel (ca. 1830s)  
Introduction, as translated by H. B. Nisbet (1975))

The Durant and Santayana quotes are closer to what I think than Hegel’s. I am quite sure that we’re not doomed to ignorance and futility.

But I can appreciate Hegel’s viewpoint.

The Enlightenment was in progress when Hegel was growing up. Enlightenment ideals, valuing liberty and reason, offered hope for a better future. ([November 6, 2016](#))

As an adult, Hegel saw the French Revolution’s bright promise of Enlightened and rational government produce the Cult of Reason and mass executions.

[Napoleon](#) sorted that mess out. He had been a military commander for the Revolutionary government before having himself elected Emperor of the French.



Meanwhile, Europe’s other leaders continued having their subjects slaughter each other in a seemingly-endless succession of turf wars. Napoleon followed suit, which brings me back to Hegel. He saw Napoleon just before the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt.

Hegel was a 30-something university professor at the time. Napoleon won, adding the Kingdom of Prussia to the French Empire.

Hegel's brother joined Napoleon's army and was killed a half-dozen years later, when Napoleon learned why invading Russia is a bad idea.



German states joined other countries for the War of the Sixth Coalition. Or War of Liberation, depending on who's telling the story.

Hegel published the second volume of "Wissenschaft der Logik," "Science of Logic" around that time.

The War of the Sixth Coalition ended in 1814. Napoleon was exiled to Elba, ushering in an era of peace — which lasted until the War of the Seventh Coalition in 1815.

Several wars, epidemics and a cholera pandemic later, Hegel was living in Berlin. He got sick and died. Doctors said it was cholera, possibly because the disease had reached Berlin by that time.

A lifetime immersed in Europe's turf wars, epidemics and politics might leave anyone a trifle less than optimistic about humanity's capacity for learning from mistakes.

**"...The Future, Far as Human Eye Could See..."**



"...For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,  
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be..."

“...Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags were furl’d  
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world...”  
(“[Locksley Hall](#),” Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1835))

I’m not sure why I think Tennyson’s imagined “Federation of the world” isn’t entirely a poetic pipe dream.

I’ve known folks around my age, with similar backgrounds, and some who aren’t, who apparently feel that government leaders don’t learn, or can’t. Others see climate change, genetically modified organisms, vaccines or the Internet as a dire threat.

There’s probably considerable overlap among those groups.

I think folks who fear that it’s the end of civilization as we know it — are right.

But unlike many, I think that’s a good thing. Partly because I think we may finally have seen the end of Western civilization’s empire-collapse-rebuild cycle. ([April 15, 2018](#); [February 5, 2017](#); [July 24, 2016](#))

And partly because I think God didn’t botch humanity’s design. ([July 23, 2017](#))

### **“We Should Work Together”**



We’re made “in the image of God,” matter and spirit, body and soul. Each of us is a person, made from the stuff of this world and filled with God’s ‘breath.’ ([Genesis 1:26–27](#), [2:7](#); Catechism of the Catholic Church, [355](#), [357](#), [362–368](#))

God gave us dominion over this world, and let us decide how we'll act. The first of us made a really bad decision. We've been dealing with its consequences ever since. The mess we're in isn't God's fault. ([Genesis 1:26](#); Catechism, [390, 396–401](#))

Our circumstances have changed, but not our nature. We still have “dominion” — and the responsibilities that go with it. ([January 21, 2018](#); [August 20, 2017](#))

What we decide to do is still up to us. We all have free will. We can decide that loving our neighbor, and seeing everyone as a neighbor, makes sense. ([Matthew 5:43–44, 22:36–40](#); [Mark 12:28–31](#); [Luke 6:31 10:25–27, 29–37](#); Catechism, [1704, 1730, 1789](#))

That's not easy for me. But easy or not, I think it's a good idea. So is passing along what we've learned, and some of our goals.

“...In this sense the future belongs to you young people, just as it once belonged to the generation of those who are now adults.... ...To you belongs responsibility for what will one day become reality together with yourselves, but which still lies in the future....”  
(“[Dilecti Amici](#),” St. John Paul II (March 21, 1985))

“...The answer to the fear which darkens human existence at the end of the twentieth century is the common effort **to build the civilization of love**, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice, and liberty....”  
(“[To the United Nations Organization](#),” St. John Paul II (October 5, 1995))

Building a close approximation of St. John Paul II's "civilization of love" will take many generations of hard work, and willingness to remember that truth and love matter.



“...For our part, the desire for such dialogue, which can lead to truth through love alone, excludes no one, though an appropriate measure of prudence must undoubtedly be exercised. We include those who cultivate outstanding qualities of the human spirit, but do not yet acknowledge the Source of these qualities. We include those who oppress the Church and harass her in manifold ways. Since God the Father is the origin and purpose of all men, we are all called to be brothers. Therefore, if we have been summoned to the same destiny, human and divine, **we can and we should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace....**”

(“[Gaudium et spes](#),” Second Vatican Council, Bl. Paul VI (December 7, 1965) [emphasis mine])

Working together to build a better world.

It won't be easy, but I think it'll be worth the effort:

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<sup>1</sup> Change happens, so does how we see it:

- Wikipedia
- My views, some of them

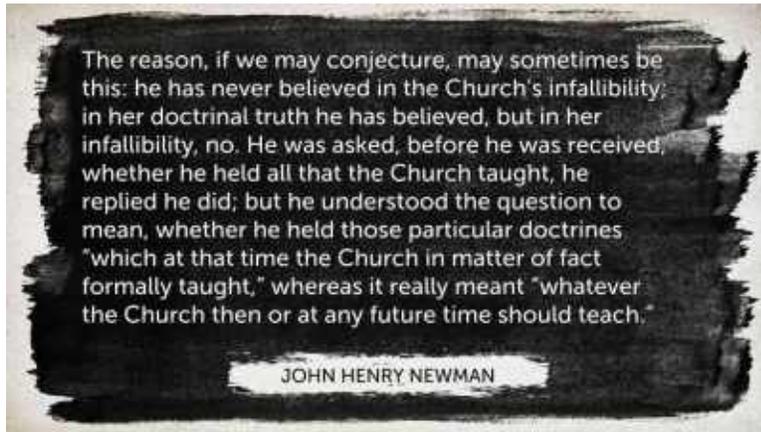
<sup>2</sup> Troy, Homer, and all that:

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This contribution is available at <http://brendans-island.com/catholic-citizen/homer-hegel-history-and-hope/>  
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## Reflection on Modern Rebellion in the Church [at If I Might Interject]



**From *An Essay in Aid to a Grammar of Assent* (page 240).**

**I believe it also applies to “cradle Catholic” dissenters.**

The current dissent within the Church today is scandalous. Catholics who were once diehard defenders of the Papacy are now undermining the current Pope, inventing a theology of dissent while pretending to be faithful. At the same time, certain Catholics who rejected previous Popes are now misapplying what Pope Francis says to portray their long-running dissent as being justified.

The only way I can think to explain it: one faction of Catholics merely happened to agree with St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and mistook that agreement for obedience. Now that we have Pope Francis, they don't agree and justify disobedience because they never learned the obedience the Church has always required. Another faction rejected Church teaching under St. John Paul II and

Benedict XVI and just happen to agree with what they think (inaccurately, in my view) Pope Francis is saying.

Some confused conservatism with Catholicism. They assumed that because some teachings lined up with their labels, Church teaching was “conservative.” They praised or condemned it based on their ideology. Others confuse Pope Francis’ Catholicism with liberalism. Both factions downplay or attack Catholic teaching that doesn’t match their ideology. None of them consider the possibility that they’re wrong; that they, not the Pope, cause the confusion in the Church by pushing an ideology and calling it “Catholic.”

We must remember we still have the same Church which teaches with the same authority. Discipline has changed in different eras of the Church but it still revolves around gathering people in so they might learn what they must do to be saved (Acts 2:37). An act that is intrinsically evil (always wrong, regardless of circumstances) remains wrong. But how the Church reaches out to the sinners who commit these acts can change depending on the needs of the time.

So, both insistence on changing what the Church cannot change and insisting that the Church remain attached to the discipline, customs, or practices of a certain age are to replace the virtue of obedience with following the Church only to the extent that it supports what we were going to do in the first place. That’s not obedience. That’s just membership in a group.

One of the radical ideas of Catholicism is that Jesus Christ established a Church which He intends to teach with His authority. He made clear that rejection of this Church was a rejection of Him (Matthew 18:17, Luke 10:16). If this is true, then we must obey the Church when she intends to teach. If it is not true, then there is no real reason to be a Catholic in the first place.

I think we've lost this sense today. We think that we are the ones who "know" the truth and we are "cursed" with a Church steeped in "error." But we forget that in past ages, when we really did have Popes of dubious character, the saints still insisted on obedience, that we trust and obey the Church even if it ran counter to our own perception.



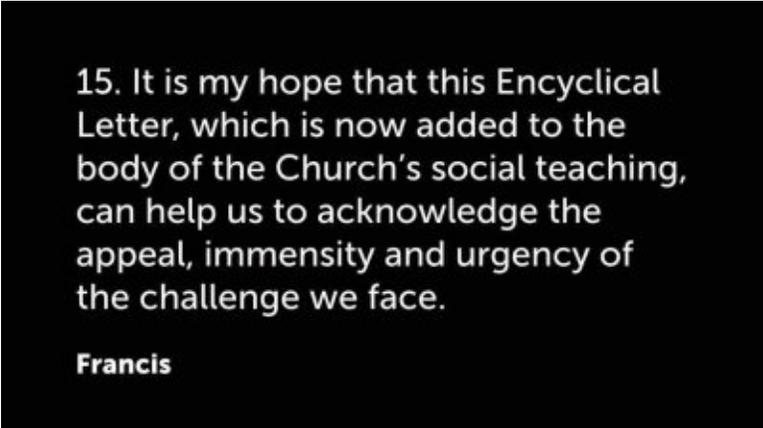
**From *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius***

Note that St. Ignatius does not create exceptions for Popes we dislike. He does not limit this obedience to *ex cathedra* statements. He affirms that when there is a conflict between ourselves and the Church, we must obey the Church because of we believe God protects and guides her. If we do not believe this then, again, there is no reason to be a Catholic to begin with. If we believe that God can protect the Church from a Benedict IX, John XII, Liberius, or Honorius I, why do we believe that He *stopped* protecting the Church in 1958 (the beginning of St. John XXIII's pontificate), 1962 (the beginning of Vatican II), 1970 (the implementation of the Ordinary Form of the Mass), or 2013 (the beginning of Pope Francis' pontificate)?

Either we trust the Church because we trust God to protect her, or we lie when

we say we have faith in God. The authority of the Church is not in the holiness of her members (we would have been debunked millennia ago if that were the case) but from God. Sometimes, this authority of the Church shocks—remember that members of the Church were shocked when St. Peter baptized the first gentiles (Acts 11:1-3)—but we believe that teaching is binding.

The problem is people confuse things that are not universally binding with teaching. When the Pope has a private conversation or a press conference, this is not teaching. When a Pope promulgates a law for Vatican City (or previously, the Papal States), this is not teaching. But when the Pope published *Laudato Si* and *Amoris Lætitia*, he was teaching [†]. For example, he explicitly identified the authority of *Laudato Si* saying:



15. It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face.

**Francis**

We cannot call this an “opinion.” The

*Code of Canon Law*

makes clear that when the Pope teaches, we must give our submission—even if the teaching is not

*ex cathedra*

.

can. 752† Although not an assent of faith, a religious submission of the intellect and will must be given to a doctrine which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops declares concerning faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim it by definitive act; therefore, the Christian faithful are to take care to avoid those things which do not agree with it.

**Catholic Church; Canon Law Society of America**

So, regardless of the faction one comes from, there is no basis for the rejecting the

*teaching*

authority of the Pope and there is no basis for trying to deny that a teaching is a teaching. Accepting the authority of the Church comes from putting faith in God protecting His Church. If we won't do that, we are

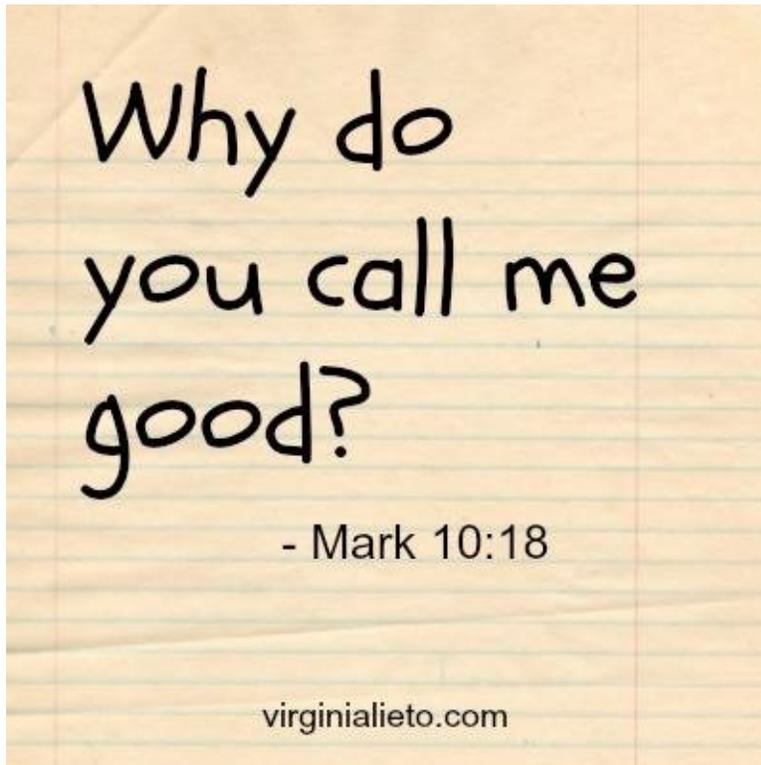
*NOT*

faithful Catholics. We're merely dissenting about different things.

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[†] It is downright bizarre that critics of Pope Francis reject *Amoris Lætitia* because it is “only” an Apostolic Exhortation and appeal to *Familiaris Consortio*—which is *also* an Apostolic Exhortation.

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In today's Gospel, Jesus asks, why do you call me good (Mark 10:18)? In the Gospel reading, we hear the story of the rich young man who seeks information from Jesus about what is required to enter Heaven. The rich young man refers to Jesus as "Good Teacher." It is an interesting, brief exchange between the rich young man and Jesus. The reference to the goodness of Jesus might easily be overlooked, when reading the passage, simply because Jesus gives a quick retort. "*No one is good but God alone*" (Mark 10:18). He then moves on to the gist of the story, that has nothing to do with His goodness. Yet, I find it to be a very intriguing question.

The rich young man knew of Jesus's work. That is why he approached Jesus in the first place. He must have had some personal experience to draw upon, and for that, chose to call Jesus good. With two thousand years of history, this question might be easier for us to answer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as hindsight is 20/20. We have the luxury of studying documented Scripture, filled with New Testament passages oozing with Jesus' goodness. Eyewitness testimony, as documented within the New Testament, espouses Jesus' ability to heal, forgive and love. With Jesus being the epitome of virtue, He is good.

Yet, how would you respond to this question, if Jesus stood before you today?

## Why Do You Call Me Good?

I call Jesus good, because He is God, the Supreme Good. He is sinless and perfect. As part of the Blessed Trinity, He creates only good things. He defines goodness. It is God who determines what is morally right and wrong. If one were to read a few more verses from Mark 10, we would read Jesus' response to the rich young man as to what it takes to get into Heaven. Jesus refers to the Ten Commandments, which is God's law for man, outlining what to do and not do; goodness versus evil. It is with adherence to the Ten Commandments, along with placing our faith and trust in God to provide, that we gain the treasure of Heaven – the ultimate goodness – God Himself.

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/jesus-asks-why-do-you-call-me-good/>  
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## Worn and Weathered [at Theologyisaverb]



Physically and mentally exhausted, and having just navigated through a harried drive home I slumped through the door. Admittedly this extroverted people loving person was not in the mood to be in community for the rest of the evening. Yet, since being a wife and a mother total isolation is never a true viable option, I needed a plan b. Unfortunately I had determined, this master plan would have to wait as dinner would not make itself.

As I worked, however, I began to reflect on the days prior and just how I had found myself in this unpleasant state. I had allowed project deadlines, emails and unexpected conversations to wear my customarily sweet disposition down its foundation. Truthfully, I was beginning to feel much like the weathered statue of Mary that sat in my backyard looked. Though clearly resembling the beautiful image of Mary, time and environment had chipped her exterior paint and weathered parts of her revealing a rough texture underneath. Well loved and remaining a figure of grace, humility and faithfulness she had endured many a New England winter. Accordingly, she needed a new coat of paint and a grotto again and I could not help but see that I too needed the same.

*“For he will conceal me there when troubles come; he will hide me in his*

*sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock” Psalm 27:5*

**This is when I remembered my spiritual director’s advice.**

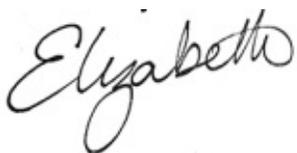
It’s ok, in fact necessary, for each one of us to take time away to get away and be with God. Scripturally, time and time again we see Jesus seek this respite to pray, connect and renew with his Father. ([Mark 1:35](#), [Mark 14:39](#), [Luke 5:16](#) , [Matthew 14:23](#) , [Luke 6:12](#)) And while I am certain he considered the apostles good friends, perhaps he also needed this time to discern how best to lead them given their unique personalities, gifts and limitations. Whether it be a desert, mountain top, or seaside the demands of the world around us compel us to find this space in the midst of our daily life.

We, like Jesus, need this time to care for our soul so that we can begin to love others as God loves us. While the conversation might entail a good deal of self righteous complaining, without a doubt I usually discover moments where I have missed the mark that day. Things said or thought out of frustration instead of prayerfully considering. Instances where I lacked compassion or allowed the circumstances to steal my joy and peace.

Yet, God does not seek us to remain in a state of desolation over these misgivings but in prayer is there to guide us to learn and discern. Here God speaks, a burning flame reminding us how very much we are loved and his promise to always be with us. Lovingly leading us from a darkened state of exhaustion and frustration, to an openness to assent to the life he has planned.

“Today Father I seek to rest in your embrace. I offer up all of my concerns, irritations, sorrows, hopes and fears. I know that you can handle all of these and oh so much more. A brokenness made beautiful and whole. You love me as I am, yet call me to an incredible life in You. Thank you Father, for this time to be recreated anew. Lead me now to serve you with a renewed purpose and a spirit of joy!”

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid, with a small dot above the 'i' in "Elizabeth".

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# Paul and the Ephesians [at Creo en Dios!]

Today's first Mass reading from Acts is one that never fails to move me. It is part of Paul's farewell address to the people of Ephesus.

Paul had been living among the Ephesians, teaching them in public and in their homes, and clearly developing close relationships there. Yet, he is now "compelled by the Spirit" to go to Jerusalem. And Paul seems to know this is no quick vacation from which he will return to his friend; he tells them that the Holy Spirit has been warning him that imprisonment and hardships and his likely death await him in Jerusalem. Paul thus is aware that he is speaking to the Ephesians for the last time, knowing he will never see them again.

Part of what moves me in this passage is imagining how hard I would have found it to be in Paul's position. I find it difficult enough to say goodbye to close friends when I know several months may pass before I see them again. But to say goodbye knowing it is the last time your friends will throw their arms around you and kiss you (as the Ephesians did to Paul after they prayed together), let alone knowing you are headed toward likely death, how hard must that be?

But the other part of what moves me is Paul's absolute clarity about what matters. "I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the Gospel of God's grace."

As I sat with the passage this morning, I had to acknowledge that I don't always have that same clarity of vision. As committed as I am to my ministry and life in Christ, sometimes I get a little distracted and give importance to things that don't deserve it. Sometimes my anxieties take time and energy away from what really matters. So I pray for the clarity and strength evidenced in Paul's words today that I may "bear witness to the Gospel of God's grace" in all I do.

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This contribution is available at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com/2018/05/15/paul-and-the-ephesians/>  
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Life is messy; life is hard because we all suffer on our journey towards the heart of God.

Recently, one of my daughters, feeling overwhelmed by her circumstances, was feeling sorry for herself. In the space of a week, she met three people, all who appeared successful and problem free on the surface, only to discover each one was suffering deeply. She literally ran into one woman who was jogging through their affluent neighborhood. This fashionable-looking woman's husband was bedridden, her family had been forced to sell their home and live with her elderly parents, her teenage kids were acting up, and she was trying to run a home daycare so she could be physically available to her parents, her kids and her sick husband.

We must often draw the comparison between time and eternity. This is the remedy of all our troubles. How small will the present moment appear when we enter that great ocean. -St. Elizebeth Ann Seton

## **Suffer With Joy**

People cannot avoid pain but only choose how to go through the difficulties which rain down on them. It is possible to live a hard life yet be filled with joy and peace. I am a joyful person, even though by society's standards I should be miserable because Jesus has finally managed to show me how to be filled with joy as I journey into the heart of God.

If we only knew the precious treasure hidden in infirmities, we would receive them with the same joy with which we receive the greatest benefits, and we would bear them without ever complaining or showing signs of weariness. -St. Vincent dePaul

Christian cognitive therapy is a wonderful tool to shake us out of our self-pity. Take a step back, count all your blessings, stay focused on receiving God's love, pray, and watch the mountains you face grow smaller. When I focus only on my problems, they grow larger and more difficult. I also discovered much of my anguish is self-inflicted because I try to steal God's job by trying to save myself and everyone else around me. The large weight of despair lifts off the moment I surrender my pain to Christ, asking Him to truly be my savior in the nitty-gritty

reality of daily life.

*He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. [1 Peter 2: 24](#)*

When I focus only on my problems, they grow larger and more difficult.

## **Saint Paul**

Saint Paul is an example of a man who lived in the joy of the Lord, even though by the world's standard's he should have been miserable and full of complaints.

He was the most important apostle to the Gentiles, well-educated, and famous for founding churches all over the Roman Empire. In unity with the Holy Spirit, Paul discovered and articulated the new Mystical Theology of the Christian life. His letters were read and reread by the first Christians, the ultimate standard on how to live as a Christian.

Yet, when he was over 60, he was not enjoying retirement but in a Roman prison, awaiting a trial which could result in his execution. Although he was in his own quarters, he was chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day and suffered under unfair criticism by jealous Church leaders. He had endured another two years confined in Caesarea earlier never mind he almost died after a shipwreck on his way to Rome.

Despite all these hardships, St. Paul was filled with joy because he did not demand comfort but had the grace to live in the Love of Christ no matter if he was rich or poor, in prison or free. He realized God was using his circumstances to purify him. God allowed him to suffer.

Jesus suffered and died to save us. One day Christ will wipe every tear wiped from our eyes (Rev. 21:4). However, Jesus also promised us that if we are truly His disciples, we will suffer because it is the only way to bring us closer to the heart of God.

Suffering teaches you to love. -St. Gemma Galgani

connecting with [theology is a verb](#) and [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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## Like Jesus, we need to see others as people first [at Grandin Media]

The eighth chapter of John's Gospel begins with what I assume must have been a pretty ordinary day in the life of Jesus. It says that "early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them" (John 8:2).

Sounds nice, right? Just another rabbi in the temple teaching the crowd gathered around him. But this peaceful scene changes quickly, as we go on to read that "...the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" (John 8:3-5).

I don't know that you could find a more awkward scene anywhere in the Gospels. But this woman is there, her sins have been made public, and she alone – not the man she'd been with – is facing death for her sins.

I agree that this isn't fair and that the punishment is excessive, but I've got a different point to make today. We read that the scribes and Pharisees were doing this in order to trap Jesus (John 8:6): either he'd call for mercy and let her go free, making him a lawbreaker, or he'd have her killed – making his message hypocritical when compared to his actions. In either case, they would have succeeded in discrediting Jesus and diminishing his influence over the crowds. You'll likely recall that it was here that Jesus did something surprising: calling for anyone without sin to "cast the first stone" (John 8:7). In doing so, he was able to diffuse the situation and save this woman's life.

The whole sequence helps bring to life in a tangible way the mercy of Jesus. But there also seems to be another, deeper lesson here for us to learn.

Put yourself in the shoes of this woman. Throughout this story she encounters men who are ready and willing to use her. First, there's the man with whom she is having an illicit relationship. As mentioned above, she and she alone faces

death for the actions they chose together. I don't believe that love puts the life of one's beloved in this sort of danger. Second, the scribes and Pharisees are not intervening in the woman's life for her sake. Although their care ought to be for her soul and her spiritual well-being, their single purpose in this story seems to be in harming Jesus' ministry. It isn't a stretch to say that they don't care whether she lives or dies. Finally, you have a crowd of people who've gone to the temple that morning in order to pray, worship, and learn about their faith – and they are quickly sidetracked with the possibility of a public stoning.

Everyone involved – the man, the scribes & Pharisees, and the crowd – are all too willing to use this woman for their own particular purposes during this incident. And it brings to life something the late, great Archbishop Fulton Sheen said: “You must remember to love people and use things rather than to love things and use people.” This is hard because we live in a world that has a habit of doing the opposite, whether we speak of corporations choosing profits over people or individuals who use one another in relationships for a variety of reasons.

Here in the 21st century, we are facing a much more insidious way of using people: pornography.

While pornography has been around for a long time, the age of the Internet and smartphones has made it readily accessible to people. When you think about it, we're currently living in the midst of a social experiment: What happens when you raise a generation with limitless, unfiltered access to pornographic content? People continue to get used.

The website [Fight The New Drug](#) writes from a completely secular perspective on pornography, [like this article presenting some of the most disturbing statistics surrounding pornography today](#) (it started out being 10 statistics, but they've since updated it to 18). Aside from the money being made and the sheer volume of content being produced, the statistic that bothers me the most is that the average age someone first sees pornography today is 10 or 11 years old. That's young people in Grades 5 and 6, who often come across this type of content through no fault of their own. But it's shaping them and teaching them use others like the crowds, scribes and Pharisees, and the man all did to the woman from John 8.

[Bishop Paul Loverde, the Bishop Emeritus of Arlington, Texas wrote:](#)

“(Pornography) obscures and destroys people’s ability to see one another as unique and beautiful expressions of God’s creation, instead darkening their vision, causing them to view others as objects to be used and manipulated.”

How do we turn the tide against this habit of using others? I’d suggest it starts by doing what only our Lord did for the woman caught in adultery: He saw the person and neither the bad decisions she’d made nor the politics his enemies were trying to drag him into. We need to similarly resist the insidiousness of pornography drag us in, as [pornography is highly addictive](#), and choose to see others as persons first.

(Need help fighting a pornography habit or addiction? Check out [Dr. Peter Kleponis’ Path to Recovery](#).)

*–Mike Landry is the chaplain for Evergreen Catholic Schools. He is based in Spruce Grove, Alberta.*

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## Waiting for Communion [at Beware Yon Dragons!]

Someone at Mass today did not come forward to receive communion. How do you feel when you hear that? Sad? Confused? Happy? What thoughts go through your mind when you see something like that? Have you

*ever*

seen something like that (except for non-Catholics)? What would you say (if anything) to the person after Mass if you saw that? All of these questions are important for you to ask yourself, because they will reveal much about your understanding of Holy Communion.

The first question that many ask in this regard is, "isn't that wrong? aren't you supposed to receive communion every time you go to Mass?" I would really like to know where this idea came from. Somewhere along the line the faithful were encouraged to receive communion at Mass regardless of whether they were in a state of grace or not (which is an insidious error). The faithful are forbidden from receiving Holy Communion if they have unconfessed (and therefore unforgiven) grave sin in their lives. What have you been taught in this regard?

Did you know that many of the Saints of years ago received communion only on rare occasions? This was not because they were lazy or disrespectful toward Jesus (just the opposite!); it was because they wanted to be sure that they were "rightly disposed" before they partook of the Sacrament. There was something else going on here as well; they realized that the sacrifice of the Mass was more important than their personal reception. In fact, only the celebrant is actually

required

to receive at the Mass, for when he receives he is completing the sacrifice itself (and the consecration is not considered complete until the priest has received both body and blood).

There certainly might be various reasons why someone would not receive communion at Mass; both good and bad. Maybe someone does not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament and wants to avoid "superstitions"

(someone once told me this was his belief). Maybe someone has just returned to the Church after being away for years and wants to go to confession first (a great reason!). Finally, maybe someone is not Catholic and knows that he is not supposed to receive the sacrament (regardless of what some German Bishops would say). Other than something similar to these three reasons, the primary reason why a Catholic would abstain from the reception of communion in the Mass is because he knows that he is only supposed to receive communion in a state of grace and that to receive otherwise is another grave sin on top of what is already there.

Technically speaking, since none of the faithful are required to receive communion more than once a year (yes, you read that right), there is nothing wrong with attending Mass faithfully on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and not receive for quite a while. Because the Sacrament provides grace for the life of faithfulness, we would not want someone to err so far in this direction that he were

*avoiding*

the Sacrament. There is still grace to be received in the body and blood of Christ, but it is better to be working on your sins and abstain than to ignore your spiritual condition and come to communion in a state of grave sin.

It would be better to take those few minutes before the Mass to do a healthy self-examination and ask yourself "am I rightly prepared to receive communion today?" (how many times have you done that?) than to assume that you are required to receive communion every time. Furthermore, in this context, it is obligatory for the rest of the faithful to look with humility upon someone who stays in the pew during the distribution of communion (there is no criticism for someone who respects the sacrament so much that he chooses to wait to receive it).

So when someone does not receive communion at Mass, and is doing it because he or she is concerned with being right before God, it is commendable -- did you read that?

**Commendable!**

It is a good and godly thing: it says "I'm not taking this for granted" as well as "I am concerned that I be fully and rightly prepared to come to the rail." In fact,

were everyone in a single parish to acknowledge this important truth, then less and less people would come to communion every week. In addition, more and more people may very well spend more time working on their spiritual state and less time trying to look perfect in front of everyone else.

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This contribution is available at <http://bewareyondragons.blogspot.com/2018/05/waiting-for-communion.html>  
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## Divided by Birth Control? Naah [at Clinging to Onions]



*“Purity is the beginning of all passion.”*

The 50th anniversary of

[\*Humanae Vitae\*](#)

is coming up in July, but the

*Wall Street Journal*

got a jump on the commemorative analysis. “Catholics have overwhelmingly rejected the document’s teaching,” Francis X. Rocca avowed on Saturday, and the upshot of that rejection was captured in his essay’s title: “

[A Church Still Divided by Birth Control](#)

.” Rocca offers as evidence the Pew Research Center’s 2016 U.S. study which “found that only 13% of weekly Mass-going Catholics thought contraception was morally wrong.”

Since “weekly Mass-going” is one of my own criteria for distinguishing between “practicing” and “cultural” Catholics, I was taken aback. How could it be that so few practicing Catholics in this country embrace this essential teaching of the Church?

So, I tracked down the

[study](#)

– and what Rocca reported is true (if you trust Pew Research – which I do). But, as usual when it comes to Catholic controversy, there’s more to the story. A couple easy hyperlink clicks later, and I came across

[additional Pew data](#)

on American Catholicism that I found illuminating. “Most U.S. Catholics rely heavily on their own conscience for moral guidance,” goes the headline, and by “most” the Pew folks mean 74% of the weekly Mass crowd as well as 73% of their “not highly religious” (non-weekly Mass) counterparts – a statistical dead heat.

As the Pew summary noted, the Church herself strongly

[endorses](#)

reliance on our consciences when it comes to moral decisions, but there’s a caveat: We have a duty to form our consciences properly through ongoing recourse to Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium (

[CCC 1785](#)

). Claire Gecewicz, the Pew researcher who summarized the Center’s findings, acknowledges this, but then she goes on to speculate that U.S. Catholics “may not look directly to the Bible, the pope or the Catholic Church’s teachings when making difficult moral choices, but they may be guided by these sources indirectly through their own ‘well-formed’ conscience.”

Is it just me, or is Gecewicz describing something that sounds like circular reasoning?

In any case, I do not accept Rocca’s assertion that U.S. Catholics have dispensed with the teaching of

*Humanae Vitae*

for the simple reason that U.S. Catholics seem to be, by and large, unfamiliar with what Paul VI's encyclical

[actually teaches](#)

– or else, they've forgotten what they should've heard in their Pre-Cana classes. I admit I have no Pew Research to back me up on this, and I could be totally off base, but I'll bet your typical weekly Mass-goer who dismisses

*Humanae Vitae*

assumes it's a document exclusively about what you

*can't*

do.

Yet, those of us who have taken the trouble to read the encyclical and ponder Paul VI's teaching know that it's mainly about what you

*get*

to do – that is, fully experience mutual self-giving in marital intimacy as God designed it, along with all its benefits beyond the bedroom. Conscientiously following the teaching of

*Humanae Vitae*

does involve some sacrifice, but it “fosters in husband and wife thoughtfulness and loving consideration for one another,” Pope Paul explained, and it “helps them to repel inordinate self-love, which is the opposite of charity” (HV 21). And that's just a sample of the Holy Father's wisdom. There's plenty more where that came from – we just need to get the word out.

How? The best way is to really live

*Humanae Vitae*. [Teach](#) *Humanae Vitae*.

And be unabashedly grateful for

*Humanae Vitae*.

It's true and beautiful and a sign of hope in a confused and confusing world.

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This contribution is available at <http://clingingtoonions.blogspot.com/2018/05/divided-by-birth-control-naah.html>  
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## metamorphosis of a soul

More toxic to the soul than deadly poison is to the body-- is unforgiveness.

It eats away at our very core causing ill health: spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and even physically.

How do we get free from this snare?

Let's unpack it and see what it is at its very root and unmask the enemy of our soul who sets the deadly traps that cause us so much harm.

Unforgiveness comes as the result of an action that has caused us to take offense. This offence can either have been intentionally or unintentionally directed towards us, large or small, it matters not, if we take offence we are trapped.

The word "offence" comes from the Greek word "skandalon".

Skandalon is primarily "a trap-stick," "a bent stick on which the bait is fastened which the animal strikes against and so springs the trap," hence, it came to denote a "snare," or anything which one strikes against injuriously (it is Septuagint's word for moqesh, a "noose" or "snare," "a stumbling-block").

[NETBible](#)

The first line of defence is to become aware of what the enemy is trying to do.

Avoiding the trap altogether is best, refusing to take offence and seeing all “offence” as rolling off of you and falling onto Jesus. Upon the cross, Jesus took the sin of the entire world upon Himself, so let the insult fall upon Him. (“The insults of those who insult you fall upon me.” Romans 15:3). Then ask Him for the love He had from the cross to speak the words He spoke: “Forgive them Father, they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). And thank Jesus for taking the hurt and giving you the love you need to handle the situation and even go one step further... bless the “offensive person.” (“But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Luke 6:27-28). And see the results of this below.

If you find yourself already in the “offence trap”, there is only one answer to spring you out.

Choose to FORGIVE.

Forgiveness is a choice, it is not a feeling. It is not dependant on whether the offender is “sorry” or ever acknowledges what they have done. It does not mean you need to re-establish a relationship or in any way erase “healthy boundaries.”

No. It means you are handing over the situation to more Capable Hands. You are releasing the situation and the person who caused the offense into the Hands of Jesus.

The beauty of this is that you are not denying that it happened, you are simply giving it over to the Just Judge who can handle the situation far more astutely than you can. Along with this, you are releasing the “fixing” of the situation and the person to the Great “I AM” who can bring peace, goodness, and even blessing out of the worst we can hand to Him.

Try it and see.

1. Cup your hands and place in them all of the “offences”, naming them one by one. Pray telling Jesus, “I release all of this into Your more Capable Hands to wash over and to forgive. I acknowledge that it is too much for my humanity to deal with or to bear.” Brush off your hands.

2. Now cup your hands again and place in them all that these “offences” caused you to do. Perhaps you withheld forgiveness, retaliated, or refused to be loving to the “offender”. Pray telling Jesus, “I release all of this into Your more Capable Hands to wash over and to forgive. I am sorry for my part in this and I acknowledge that it is too much for my humanity to handle or to bear.” Brush off your hands. (You might feel the need to go to Confession! If you do...even more graces flow!)

3. Cup your hands again and place all the good that you would like to see come to the “offender” in them. Perhaps you would like this person to change to become a more loving individual, more generous or kind. Pray telling Jesus, “I release this person into Your more Capable Hands to wash over and to heal (I leave the “fixing” to You.) I acknowledge that this is too much for my humanity to bear and not my job.” Brush off your hands.

4. For the last time: cup your hands again and place all that you would like to see that is good that could to come to you from this in them. Perhaps you would like to become a more loving individual or to be able to react differently to this person or in this situation. Pray telling Jesus, “I release myself into Your Capable Hands to wash over and to heal (I leave the “fixing” of even myself to You.) I acknowledge that this is too much for my humanity to bear and not my job. I ask for the will and the ability to cooperate with Your grace.” Brush off your hands.

Now thank Jesus for hearing your prayer and bringing peace and wholeness as you choose daily to forgive...again and again and again.

**SPRING THE TRAP! FORGIVE!** And leave it all in the more Capable Hands of Jesus!

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ Rather, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.’ Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.” Romans 12:17-21.

Amen! and AMEN!

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## Holy Anticipation [at Shifting My Perspective]

**He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:2-3**



*Shifting My Perspective* Jocelyn received her First Holy Communion a few weeks ago. Although I do my best to make sure my kids behave appropriately in church, she's been acting out ever since. But it's not how you'd think.

Right before Communion, Jocelyn starts bouncing up and down in her seat, literally. It's as if she's swallowed a Mexican jumping bean and can't sit still. Despite being a stern mom in church, I just can't bring myself to stop her.

I know all that energy is a result of her soul dancing inside her. She has waited so long to be able to receive the Eucharist. For years, she's watched all the parishioners walk down the aisle, and open their hands, mouths and hearts to receive Communion. Whereas, she's had to cross her arms as a signal that she wasn't of age and couldn't receive yet. We all looked at her crossed arms as a sweet way to get a blessing. I think she saw her crossed arms as a barrier keeping her from communion with the congregation, and God.

Now that's all a thing of the past. She's in the big leagues now; and she's elated. Sure, part of it is becoming one with the community and doing what everyone

else does. Most of it is getting to receive the Eucharist and all its graces. She has that child's heart that Jesus talked about in Matthew 18, and she's beyond delighted to receive His gift each week.

I think God is just as delighted. I think the reason He had Jesus talk about the importance of having a child's heart is because He has a child's heart too. He's been waiting for Jocelyn to receive her First Holy Communion with far more anticipation than she ever had. And now, when He looks down on her each Sunday, I think the elation He feels has Him bouncing up and down on His Heavenly throne too.

***Question for Reflection:***

***\* Does my soul dance with excitement when I receive Communion?***

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## **Make NO Mistake and Never Forget; Mothers are Women and Female is their Gender [at Cradling Catholic]**



A Mom & Her Son—Bound Forever  
by Author

By Larry Peterson

I found myself writing this for Mother's Day because the legal definition of "gender" has become controversial. I begin with a quote from Cardinal Giovanni Ravasi; President of the Pontifical Council of Culture: ***"The love of man and woman, capable of generating life, is a sign that points to God."***

The following comes from personal experience. My youngest brother, Johnny, had just turned two when Mom died. The previous six months she had been, for the most part, in the hospital. Johnny grew up without ever knowing his mom and her hugs or her voice or her caress. His 'shrink,' told him his "problems" with relationships were due to the fact he had lost his Mom as a baby. Johnny took his own life three years ago.

Bobby was six years old when Mom died. He always had an anger in him that could expose itself to perceived provocations. He passed away suddenly, eleven years ago. His killer was congestive heart failure. I still think his heart had been irreparably broken at age six and it just took another forty years to give out.

Danny was ten. He is still fine, and we are in frequent contact. I was the oldest,

and my sister was second. Dad died a few years after Mom, and we tried to be a mom and a dad to our three brothers. We did our best, but we were in water way over our heads. We did survive as a family but, as you can see, having no Mom had profound consequences (the dad part I will leave for another day).

I move ahead 16 years to the birth of my daughter. Times were changing, and when Mary came along, I was present, and all decked out in my scrubs and sterile gloves (Prior to that time, Dads were not allowed into the delivery room).

I was sitting at the end of the delivery room table with my right hand holding the top of my wife's head. I was looking up into a mirror watching the birth take place. And then, Doctor Butler began to lift his arms and in his hands was a baby. Our baby—a girl.

It seemed that almost instantly the nurse was next to me handing me, my daughter. Her face was still gooeey, and her eyes were wide open. She was not crying but rather, she kept staring at me. Her eyes were as blue as the sky and as big as saucers. That was my moment, etched within my mind forever. A more profound moment was on the way.

Within moments baby Mary was being lifted from my hands and taken to her waiting Mom. Still lying on the delivery table, Loretta reached out for her baby. That was the moment I understood the power and intrinsic importance of a mom. A mother and her child are forever bound by an unbreakable bond that can only be felt between them. I also believe that dynamic is similar to every child that a mom gives birth too.

There are many moms who have, because of whatever circumstance and oftentimes out of love and humility, given their child up for adoption. In my heart of hearts, I do not believe any woman “happily” gives away her own child. Interestingly, the adoptive parents will generally love that child as if she or he was their very own and the children would assuredly love them back.

But, at some point in time, the children have a need arise within themselves to “find” their Birth Mom and/or Birth Dad. That is because an unbreakable bond is always there. No one can remove it or take it away or replace it. It is what it is.

For some, Gender Neutrality may be the “feel good” movement for the present moment. But it is a premise built on quicksand and defies all of the Natural Law. Pope St. John Paul II summed it up best: ***“God has assigned a duty to every***

***man, the dignity of every woman.”***

Within those words are the inspiration for both men and women to defend what God has created.

Wishing all Moms, both living and passed on, a ***HAPPY MOTHER’S DAY***

And please say a prayer for all those folks who cannot remember what having a Mom was like.

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This contribution is available at <http://cradlingcatholic.com/2018/05/12/make-no-mistake-and-never-forget-mothers-are-women-and-female-is-their-gender/>  
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## BamBam is Gone [at Convert Journal]



Eight years ago I wrote a piece called [Fear the Lord](#) in which BamBam, our then 10 year old shih-tzu, had a starring role. At that time I wrote of him and his sister Pebbles, in part:

I imagine one day that a visit to the vet will not end in just another treat for them.

Today was that day. BamBam died peacefully this afternoon at his veterinarian's office. I am heartbroken. It was really, really hard to take him there but it was time. In the last year or so his quality of life has steadily declined. The dog that was with us since we moved into our current home when our daughter was 8 (now 26, married, moved away, pursuing a Ph.D.) is gone. We treasured his younger and very mischievous personality. I could tell so many stories of his antics! He played an important part in our family life. One of his special contributions was when any of us were sick in bed – BamBam could be counted on to lay quietly with us for days.

As a Catholic, I struggled with his death in several additional ways. First, understanding who or what is being lost? As dear as BamBam has been to us and as attached as we were, he was an animal. One of God's very special creatures to be sure, but not a person. Like all loving pet owners, we interacted with him many times every day, took good care of him and considered him as a member of our extended family. Although we projected onto him human-like attributes, it is important for me to remember he did not have the rationality nor dignity of a person.

The second issue is euthanasia. For people, this is absolutely out of the question. When I allowed myself to reflect on BamBam like a person (shih-tzu are relatively small dogs, so I often referred to him and his sister as “little people”), the thought of euthanizing him was repugnant. Were he a person, however, he would (justly so) be receiving a good amount of end-of-life medical care at this point. That is not appropriate for a pet. It is appropriate, as best as we are able, to treat him humanely. For animals (unlike people) euthanasia *sometimes* becomes the most humane, most unselfish option.

The third issue I reflect on is attachment. There are many things I am attached to on my earthly pilgrimage, but none more than God. After God comes family, friends, all other people, then pets and all other things. My attachment to BamBam was alright in its place, yet the world is a little emptier without him. Like people, I have found every dog I ever had to be unique.

My fourth and final issue is “where is he now”? He is simply gone. He had an animal soul, not a *rational* human soul. He did not face judgment because he ended here and could not actually sin. He was not made in the image and likeness of God, was not beloved as God’s children are, is not an heir to the Father’s kingdom, is not a beneficiary of the Son’s sacrifice – so for BamBam, life ends here. Of the four last things, only death may apply.

My prayers are of thanks for the gift of BamBam to us, but not for his soul. That is gone, along with his place in God’s creation. While he has not “passed on” and is not “resting in peace” – he is not suffering, will be fondly remembered and will be missed. Anything more than that is entrusted to God’s providence. Goodbye my very special, four-legged friend.

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## **Liturgical Abuses and Moral Corruption [at Catholic Life In Our Times]**

The encroachment of liturgical abuses in the Church is a long debated bone of contention between various members of the Body of Christ. In addition to the diverging thoughts about the ordinary and extraordinary forms of Mass, the Spirit of Vatican II brought a divisive opportunity like no other. Back then, the laity could not research on the internet we now rely on. Quotes and complete Vatican texts at a click of a mouse were not available. Therefore everything altered, every renovation, had a captive audience. Those who sought creativity or watered down meaning in the liturgy simply did what they did. Years of respect for authority built almost automatic acceptance. Few people in the pew questioned.

### **Through Baby Boomer Eyes**

This lack of questioning, however, did not mean total acceptance. The times simply dictated respect for the voice of authority. My six decades as a Catholic, however, have ensured my place in the debate. Having been a part, albeit a youthful part, of the Church ‘before’, my memories share the history.

At parochial school Mass, we young ladies wore beanies or lace caplets with our school uniforms. We never questioned the sisters, nor fought the devotion. It was as understood as genuflecting and kneeling to receive Him on the tongue. As His creations, we owed Him respect – both inward and outward. Demonstrating rightful respect to Our Creator relied on perception and acceptance.

As a young Catholic, I clearly recall my first guitar Mass. Tears, painfully fought back in my throat, involuntarily welled up at the twanging lack of reverence I perceived. Accustomed to reverent hymns played on a pipe organ, my entire being revolted.

As a teen, I heard jean and sandal wearing priests refrain from talk of sin and damnation. They served up guitar accompanied songs of only peace and love in the youth groups of the 70’s. It was a time of feeling good and going with the

flow.

## **Liturgical Abuses Lead to Irreverence**

One cannot help but notice that, with the abandonment of traditions, an unseemly, casual attitude was born. In earlier times, the norm was weekly confession. Many abstained from the reception of Holy Communion, from time to time. Unlike those days, we now see an entitlement attitude. Although confessions are at an all-time low, reception of the Eucharist is practiced by almost the entire congregation at any given Mass. One has to wonder what will result from the Spirit of [Amoris laetitia](#), where the requirements to receive the Holy Eucharist are being debated among bishops – often based on individual interpretation.

Self-described ‘baby Catholics’ and ‘progressive’ Catholics have built quite the soapbox in response to the call for more reverence. Whenever a yearning for devout liturgy, theologically correct hymns, respectful attire, and adherence to the [rubrics](#) are mentioned, unflattering labels quickly come out. Descriptions of judgmental, legalistic, meanies are bandied about.

We are regaled with tales of poor girls, with little catechesis, who are turned off by the mean-spirited modesty/liturgy police because they can’t afford anything other than mini skirts or belly tees.

Even now, however, the pursuit of humility before our Creator leads some of us to reclaim the optional devotion of veiling. This often [misunderstood, voluntary tradition](#) offers a beautiful way to physically proclaim the Kingship of Christ. We do so, not out of pride but out of our innate need for reverence – to capture what has been lost in a society focused on self. Yet we, too, are met with disdain.

And those self-congratulatory hymns songs are perfectly fine because they make you ‘feel good’. If the liturgy isn’t followed properly and someone expresses dismay, they are quickly labeled as Pharisees and accused of caring more for structure than Jesus. Jesus, after all, is a God-Man of love and inclusion. He never took appearances seriously or castigated those who trivialized His Father’s house. Oh, wait! Yes, he did! Remember the turning of the tables in the temple or the expectation for wedding guests to wear the proper garments?

## **The Harm of Liturgical Abuses**

Actually many clergy, including popes, weigh in quite often about proper disposition and decorum. Pope Benedict XVI famously said that “Wherever applause breaks out in the liturgy because of some human achievement, it is a sure sign that the essence of liturgy has totally disappeared and been replaced by a kind of religious entertainment”. Since this type of entertainment cannot compete with similar secular pursuits, “(s)uch attraction fades quickly”. and “incorporating as it increasingly does various forms of religious titillation”.

This wasn’t some off the cuff remark that should be viewed lightly. The point was that he wanted the people in the pews to remember that worship is not horizontal (people to people) but is, in fact vertical (people to God). When we sing songs about ourselves and how important we are, when our priests ad-lib the prayer that is the Supper of the Lamb – Heaven on Earth – Mass, when the faithful come dressed for the beach instead of the wedding feast of the Lamb – then they are misplacing the Jesus is my friend idea by forgetting that Jesus is also the King.

“We do at least need a new liturgical consciousness, to be rid of this spirit of arbitrary fabrication. Things have gone so far that Sunday liturgy groups are cobbling together the liturgy for themselves. . . . The most important thing today is that we should regain respect for the liturgy and for the fact that it is not to be manipulated.” [Pope Benedict XVI](#)

The Mass is not some overview or blueprint upon which man can build his own celebration. It is not about us at all. Mass is worship. It is man, coming to God, and strengthening his faith through divine instruction.

“When you are studying theology, your intention is not to learn a trade but to understand the faith, and this presupposes, as we said a while ago, using the words of Augustine, that the faith is true, that, in other words, it opens the door to a correct understanding of your own life, of the world and of men.” Pope Benedict XVI

## **Learning the Liturgy**

In understanding that the Divine Liturgy, the Sacrifice of Holy Mass [is from God](#), we must step away from ourselves. Through the Church and Tradition, the Mass is specifically choreographed by Someone much greater than we. When we fail to recognize this and attempt to remake it according to human preference, we

deny that it belongs to God. It is in humility that we acquiesce to a Higher Power but it is in pride that we make it our own. This wrong-headed way of thinking then leads to the denial of our obligation to live according to His Will.

“There’s no question in my mind that the abuses in the sacred liturgy, reduction of the sacred liturgy to some kind of human activity, is strictly correlated with a lot of moral corruption and with a levity in catechesis that has been shocking and has left generations of Catholics ill prepared to deal with the challenges of our time by addressing the Catholic faith to those challenges.” Raymond Cardinal Burke

Cardinal Raymond Burke, in [comments](#) as prefect of the Vatican’s Apostolic Signatura, further shared his conviction that a fitting worship of God is essential to the moral life. He went on to say that “You can see it in the whole gamut of Church life”. There is evidently “a levity in catechesis” that has been “shocking” and left generations of Catholics ill-prepared to deal with today’s challenges.

## **Liturgical Obedience Begets General Obedience**

As citizens of an independent democracy-minded country, we Americans tend to apply this form of thinking to life in general – and by applying it to the Mass in particular. It is difficult to change one’s perspective from autonomy to dependence. Yet, if we are to enter His Kingdom in Eternal Life, our view must change. Our decisions and the way we live our lives are our own. This is the gift of Free Will. In pursuing our purpose on this earth, however, we are admonished to be obedient to One who is greater.

It is our choice but that choice has a price – if we choose independence, we will not have the desired eternal outcome. Our choices will literally mean death. While earthly freedom may appear attractive, it would be wise to consider the benefits of obedience. Even the smallest measure of it can build into a mighty service to God

“He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater: and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater.” [Luke 16:10](#)

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## Blind Tears [at The Frank Friar]

### A Moment at the Mass

Even though I am recovering from surgery, I can celebrate the Mass. Currently, as I recover, I am in our ‘retired’ community, where the friars celebrate the Eucharist together daily. During, one of these Masses, as I uttered the first two words of the Our Father, my eyes filled with tears. As my eyes teared up, I had a strong feeling of compunction coupled with a sense of my heart rising within me. In that moment, I sensed these things were not from me, yet within with me and impacting me, helping me to see in a way I could not yet understand. The compunction in my heart, showed me that the Lord has called me to a deeper way, yet I regularly settle for the easier path. This easier path was making me blind, so I did not have to see the deeper path the Lord has offered me. In that moment of compunction, which stood out of time, my lips kept speaking the Our Father, but my heart simply whispered to God ‘Thank You.’ Since, that Mass the Lord has kept the eyes of my heart focused on those two words ‘Our’ and ‘Father.’

### ‘Our’

How often do I just sit with the word ‘our?’ A question that I asked myself the days following that experience at Mass. My mind just became amazed by that little word, which was flooding my heart with gratitude. The Lord has allowed us to say a word that permits us to ‘posses’ God. The God of all creation, who is infinitely beyond us, yet came to us, allows us to use this possessive word in relationship to Him. Yet, this gift of ‘our’ is not a term of isolation, but inclusion. How? We can only ‘have’ Our Father in community. Remember, Jesus did not teach us to say, ‘my father,’ but Our Father. This word ‘our,’ makes a community possible. Even when the prayer is uttered in private that word hints at the community we are a part of. The ‘our’ of the Our Father reveals to us not just the God, who is love, but the limitless family He creates through His presence. In a world, torn into many pieces, because people see differences, as either a means of power over others or an inequality that must be eradicated. We, as Christians, utter, in the air of the Spirit, the prayer Jesus used to form His Body. In speaking the ‘our,’ like Jesus, each heart can be directed towards the

Father, just like His Sacred Heart.

## **‘Father’**

‘Why Father,’ was the other question brought to my mind after that Mass. This word father, to me, seems like such a contentious word these days, particularly in the USA (my homeland). It seems to me that fathers have been pushed to the fringes of society. Why? Currently, masculinity is believed to be toxic for the culture. Subsequently, this movement of masculinity to the fringes has offered men a license to disengage and relinquish the gift and responsibility of fatherhood. Yes, earthly fathers, even before this culture shift, were not perfect, a surprise to no one, I hope, but they were at accepted by society. Now, whether a person had a kind, abuses, or absent father, one thing that this term always provokes, I believe, is a sense of intimacy. Fathers are a necessary part to the equation of life. They do not merely provide a substance for life, but they give it form through their presence, which is why fatherhood will always be a word of intimacy. As Isaiah teaches us “Yet, Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you our potter: we are all the work of your hands (Is. 64:7).” Unlike the hands of the potter, our earthly fathers us their hands to hold us and by their tender touch build that intimate bond of father and child. This gentle and intimate touch is not foreign to our Heavenly Father. His gentle and intimate touch is offer to us through His Son. As Jesus told us “[...] I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:26b).” A father’s love is never meant to be withheld, weaponized, pushed, or hidden away.

## **Blindness**

“How blind do I make myself!” This is not so much a question I pose to myself, but a statement I speak to my heart regularly. I know in my self-inflicted blindness, I grant my soul permission to become lazy. I tell myself things like ‘I have done enough,’ ‘I am owed this,’ ‘God understands,’ and ‘God will have mercy.’ However, in my blindness, I cannot notice that His mercy that I invoke flippantly, comes as a purifying flame, casting the darkness from my eyes, like it did for St. Paul. The moment of compunction during that Mass, was that gentle fiery kiss my eyes needed to see what was being offered, that I so willing took for granted. The deep path of intimacy and community that the Father created for me and called me down is not a path that I (or anyone) can ever fully exhaust

during this life or the hereafter. It is a gift. Gifts are meant to be opened, embraced, and celebrated. It was these gifts, present in my life, that that moment of compunction opened the eyes of my heart too. As a result, with that new-found sight my heart could respond with thanksgiving.

*In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. ~ 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5: 18*

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## Grief—the Price We Pay for Love [at Tony Agnesi]



*“Grief never ends...but it changes. It’s a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith...it is the price of love.” —Unknown*

Everyone will experience grief in their life. To never experience grief is to have never loved. You see, grief is the price we pay for love. The more we love someone the greater the grief.

Even Jesus grieved. When Jesus heard of the passing of his best friend Lazarus, even though he would raise him from the dead, Jesus wept. He loved his friend and grief was the price that even Our Lord paid for that love.

Grief is connected to love in a very special way. The loss of a loved one—a spouse, child, parent, or close friend, even the loss of a pet can trigger the grief that is intricately connected to our love. Grief is the last act of love.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. — (Matthew 5:4, NAB)

The grieving process is a journey and not a place. It never ends it just evolves. We will get through the toughest parts, but grieving is a passage. The only cure for grief is to grieve.

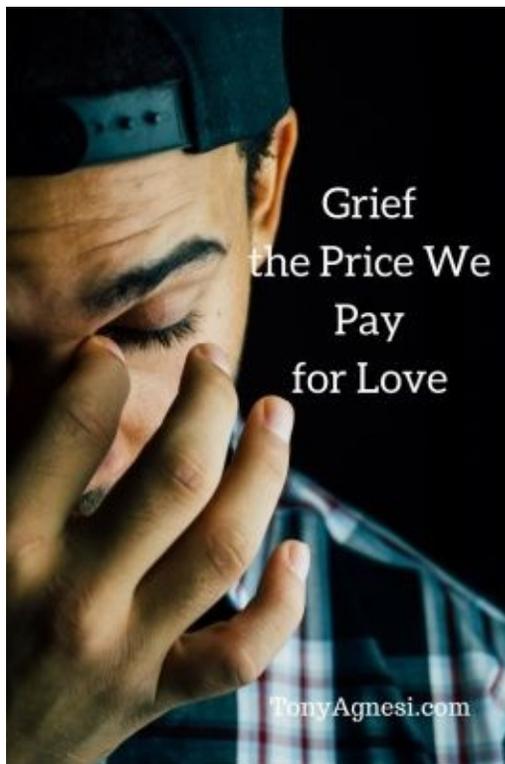
What emerges from our grief is a new person capable of helping others. We can turn our misery into ministry and help others get through their toughest times.

So what can we do to help a friend that has suffered a loss and is overcome with

grief?

1. Never tell them, “you will get over it.” They won't. Grief never ends, it just changes.
2. Let them know that it is OK to cry. Remember the shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35, “Jesus Wept.”
3. Understand they will be facing emotions they have never felt before. Help them to get over the initial shock and sort through the emotional roller coaster by being patient with them.
4. Depression is a part of the grief cycle. Stay in touch, call them or better yet visit them. Invite the grieving person to lunch or dinner and don't be afraid to talk about their deceased loved one.

Yes, grief is the price we pay for love. If we don't love, we don't grieve. It is that deep love that will sustain us and the beautiful memories of our loved one will always be with us. God bless you in your grief, my friend.



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**Get an autographed copy of A Storyteller's Guide to a Grace-Filled life at the new reduced price and free domestic shipping. Just click on the link below.**

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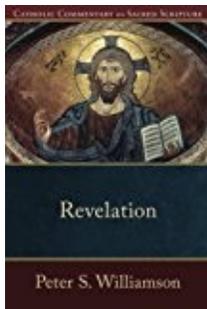
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## You Say You Want a Revelation [at The Wayward Catholic]

My apologies to John Lennon for using a line from one of his songs but I couldn't help it. I have been looking into the Book of Revelation over the last week or so and this line kept going through my head. I have always wondered about this book as it seems pretty scary until you take the time to look at it more closely.

This book describes a vision that came to the apostle John from Jesus on what was about to happen. Now like every other book in the bible there is plenty of disagreement as to who actually wrote the book but I believe it was John.



[Revelation \(Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture\)](#) believe it was John. If you have never read Revelation think of it as another Lennon classic, “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” with a biblical background.

The book is full of symbolism. Many people, including myself until I actually studied it, believe this is a prophecy of the end of the world and what is going to come. Others believe it is a vision of the fall of Jerusalem and eventually the fall of the Roman empire. And yet another school of thought believes it is both. This is where I stand.

For centuries people have read this book and have tried to fit the world of today into the signs that Jesus revealed. They try to use this book (and others) to predict when the end of the world is coming. There are two problems with these lines of thought:

- As we are told in Scripture: *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not*

*even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” – MT 24:36*

No matter how hard we try we won't be able to determine when this is going to happen.

- This book was written almost two thousand years ago and needs to be understood using the symbolism of the times. Jesus wanted the hearers of these visions to be able to understand them at the time he was writing them.

It was written at the time the church was being persecuted by the Romans, including both Judaism and the newly formed Christian church. He was warning them about this and what they would need to do. If we look back to this time, we can see that the symbolism fits the times and what happens.

But what about the other books of the bible? The prophetic books of the Old Testament are full of the death and destruction to come, but when you look at Revelation, the symbols there are all taken from those books. This leads me to believe they are also foretelling the fall of Jerusalem as well. (Fortunately, there are bunches of people smarter than me who already have figured this out.)

What about the New Testament? Jesus seems to do a lot of talking about the end times and what will happen then. Is he talking about the world or just Jerusalem? My not so learned opinion is both. He talks about his second coming and this would be the end times. Some of the other things he talks about refer to Jerusalem and the Roman Empire.

Why am I writing about this? Because there is a lesson for all of us to learn from the Book of Revelation. I always talk about “Living with the End in Mind” and that is the lesson here. There are only two choices we can make in our life. We can choose Jesus or we can choose Satan. There is no middle ground. We can't hedge our bets. It is one or the other. Our choice will determine where we will end up on Judgement Day, where we will spend the end. Revelation reveals the two choices and what they will be like. One isn't very pleasant.

Making this choice is not easy in today's world. Satan's pull is greater than ever. I believe this is because he knows his end is near. He wants as many of us to go with him before he is destroyed. We need to resist his advances. He comes after us in all forms, in all ways. We can't shut ourselves off from all of this, but we need to stay alert so we know what comes from Jesus and what comes from Satan. Sometimes the difference can be subtle which is why we need to stay awake.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” – RV 21: 1 – 4

To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” – RV 21: 6 – 8

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## The Nature of Sin [at On the Road to Damascus]

I am more than fifty pounds overweight. I have suffered with high blood pressure and gout since I was about eighteen. I am also a type two diabetic and have the beginning stages of neuropathy and vision problems related to that. I have heart disease and had a quintuple bypass at the age of forty-five. My heart was over 90% blocked. Needless to say, I am in poor shape. Sadly, I am not alone. Over 40% of the American population is in the same boat and that number grows every day. As the American lifestyle spreads throughout the world so do our health problems.

Yet, there is hope. I have found a cure. I have found a pill that reverses every disease that I suffer with. It has been medically proven to end obesity, reverse diabetes and heart disease, and even clear my blocked arteries. There are doctors screaming at the top of their lungs trying to get the news out. People in my predicament either haven't heard, don't believe, or choose not to accept the cure. My brother in the diaconate told me about it and I have seen this miracle work in his life. I've done my research. I am a believer.

What is this miracle pill you may ask? Well, it's not really a pill. It is a whole foods, plant based diet that concentrates on starch as the primary fuel source. Whoa, hang on a minute. That's code for vegan. Well, yes and no. A WFPB diet does qualify as a vegan diet but many vegan diets don't qualify as a WFPB diet. It's a square-rectangle sort of thing.

Now, I know that I have lost over half the people reading this blog. There is just no way they are willing to look at giving up eating meat and oil and fat even it is the key to having a long healthy life. They are unwilling to listen even if it means saving their life. They want their hamburgers and bacon and steaks more than they want a healthy life. The desire for something pleasurable today outweighs life in abundance tomorrow.

And that is exactly the nature of sin. Christ offers us life in abundance if we love him. What is the proof of love?

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” – John 14:15*

So, we show our love for Jesus by following his teachings. Only the Catholic Church has the fullness of truth. Jesus passed his teachings down to his Disciples, who passed them on to their replacements, continually through time, until we end up with the Pope and the Magisterium. The Catholic Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth today (1 Timothy 3:15). When people disagree with the Catholic Church when it comes to faith or morals they do not disagree with the Church, they disagree with Jesus.

We sin, that is, we choose to disobey one of God's commands for one of two reasons: desire or fear. We choose to disobey God because we desire a temporary pleasure that we are not allowed or because we fear some sort of pain or suffering. Our society is not only physically obese but we are spiritually obese as well. Our society, which once claimed to be predominantly Christian, is leaving the mainstream Christian faiths for a more "spiritual", personal relationship with Jesus. Of course that relationship is more like the one you have with a neighbor you never talk to and only occasionally wave at if you happen to see them taking out their trash.

People claim they love Jesus yet have no desire to follow his commands because, well, they are just too restrictive. I want to sleep with anyone I please, marry whomever I desire for any amount of time I deem long enough, lie, cheat, steal, and kill offspring I am not ready to care for. As a matter of fact, I don't even want to follow the natural law and define my gender for myself solely based upon what my feelings are today. God created them man and woman in his image. Man and woman pushed God out of the picture and recreated themselves in an image of their choosing.

We are physically obese because we choose our desire to eat what we please over what we are designed to eat. We are spiritually obese because we choose to sin through desire over loving Jesus. Both types of obesity lead to death. Physical obesity leads to a poor life and mortal death. Spiritual obesity also leads to a poor life but ends with eternal death.

For some of us it takes a near death experience, like a clogged heart and a quintuple bypass, to wake us from our slumber to make the changes necessary to live. It is not too late to throw out that bacon and pick up an apple. If you are reading, this it is also not too late to start actually loving Jesus and begin following his commands. God desires obedience more than sacrifice – 1 Samuel 15. Turn to him with a contrite heart and take that first step to spiritual fitness.



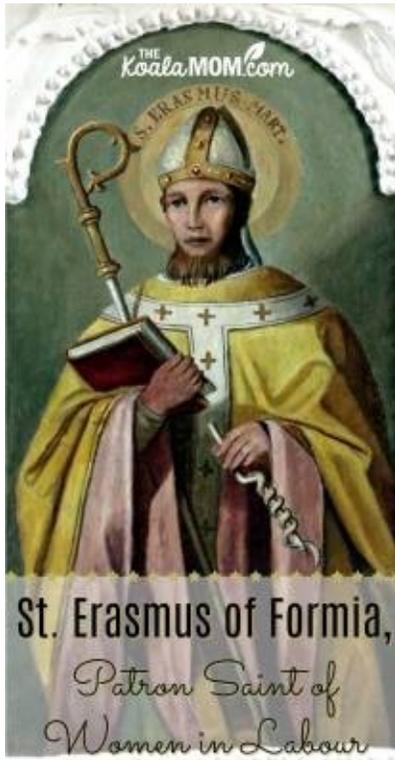
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# St. Erasmus of Formia, Patron Saint of Women in Labour [at The Koala Mom]

**At first glance, St. Erasmus of Formia is an unlikely patron saint of women in labour.** He was an Italian bishop and an early Christian martyr. He may not have gone through childbirth himself, but he suffered a similar pain, which makes him able to [empathize and intercede](#) for women in labour.



## St. Erasmus' Story

**Like most early Christian saints, little is known about St. Erasmus** (also known as St. Elmo). [As one biographer states](#), "The pious historians of the early Christian times state, as a rule, only what the Saints did and suffered for the

Faith, and how they died. They deemed the Martyrs' glorious combat and their victorious entrance into Heaven more instructive, and therefore more important, than a lengthy description of their lives.”

Erasmus was a bishop of the Catholic Church, likely in Formia or Antioch. He lived during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian, who is now well-known for his violent hatred of the Christians and his persistent persecution of them. St. Erasmus was able to escape these persecutions for a time by hiding out in a cave on Mount Lebanon.

After seven years of living as a hermit, Erasmus was either discovered by Roman soldiers or attempted to return to his home on his own. He was then sentenced to be tortured. The legends surrounding these tortures are suitably gruesome and holy; many miracles accompanied his tortures, preserving him from harm. Throughout all the cruel pain, he refused to renounce his faith in God.



## Patron Saint of Women in Labour

**One torture said to have been inflicted upon him** was having hot hooks

embedded in his stomach. He is usually pictured with a hook or with his intestines being pulled out. Because he endured these agonizing abdominal pains, he's often asked to [intercede for women in childbirth](#), as well as people with intestinal ailments and stomach pain, including children with colic.

*Holy martyr Erasmus, who didst willingly and bravely bear the trials and sufferings of life, and by thy charity didst console many fellow-sufferers; I implore thee to remember me in my needs and to intercede for me with God. Staunch confessor of the Faith, victorious vanquisher of all tortures, pray Jesus for me and ask Him to grant me the grace to live and die in the Faith through which thou didst obtain the crown of glory. Amen. ~ [Novena in honour of St. Erasmus, EWTN](#)*

**St. Erasmus endured his pain because of his love for God.** He can inspire us as women to endure our pain for the love of the baby we're bringing into the world. His sufferings brought about the conversion of many around him and still gives glory to God today. Our sufferings bring the joy of new life, a new little person to raise to love and give glory God.

St. Erasmus died around the year 303. His feast day is celebrated on June 2.

***Have you invoked the intercession of this patron saint of women in labour?***



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## Saint Joan of Arc: Warrior and French National Heroine [at Jean M. Heimann]

Saint Joan of Arc, the courageous warrior and French national heroine, is the saint of the day for May 30<sup>th</sup>. She was born in Domremy, France, 1412 and died in Rouen, France, 1431.

At the age of 13, Joan began to hear the voices of [Saints Michael the Archangel](#), [Margaret of Antioch](#), and [Catherine of Alexandria](#), telling her that she had been chosen to free her country from the English. Joan's visions told her to find the true king of France and help him reclaim his throne. She resisted for more than three years, but finally went to [Charles VII](#) and told him of her visions.

After overcoming opposition from churchmen and courtiers, she was given a small army with which she raised the siege of Orleans on May 8, 1429. Carrying a banner that read "Jesus, Mary", she led the troops into battle.

Saint Joan of Arc followed the famous campaign of the Loire during which the English were decisively beaten. Charles was then crowned at Rheims, on July 17, 1429.

When she was captured by the Burgundians during the defense of Compiegne, she was sold to the English for 10 thousand francs. She was then put on trial by an ecclesiastical court conducted by [Pierre Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais](#), a tool of the English. Although she astounded the judges by her answers, she was condemned to death as a heretic, and burned at the stake on May 30. In 1456, her case was re-tried, and Joan was acquitted (23 years too late). She was canonized by [Pope Benedict XV](#) in 1920.

Saint Joan of Arc manifested many virtues: she was trustful of God, courageous in battle, benevolent in victory, and merciful toward those who betrayed her. Saint Joan of Arc is the patroness of: France, martyrs, prisoners, people ridiculed for their piety, rape victims, soldiers, and the Women's Army Corps.

### Saint Quote

“About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they’re just one thing, and we shouldn’t complicate the matter.” — Saint Joan of Arc, as recorded at her trial

## **Prayer to Saint Joan of Arc for Healing**

*Composed by Andrea Oefinger*

Holy Saint Joan, compassionate to the sick and wounded, who, while on earth, nursed so many back to health, hear me.

You who wished to see no one injured or in discomfort, pray for me and guide me through this difficult time.

Daughter of God, wounded many times in battle, I petition you for healing (here mention your request here) so that I may be better able to serve God in whatever capacity He wishes. Intercede for me.

It may not be in God’s will for my body to be healed, for my sufferings may help another or my own soul. If my request is not granted, help me to remain strong, and instead be healed emotionally and spiritually. Amen.

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## Humanae Vitae's Profound Message of Responsible Parenthood [at Plot Line and Sinker]



Photo courtesy Tim Baklinski at Two Trees Photography

In this year of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of [Humanae Vitae](#) (Pope Paul VI, On Human Life), I'd like to share our family's experience with how this encyclical shaped our decision making with regard to responsible parenthood.

*“Responsible parenthood... has one further essential aspect of paramount importance. It concerns the objective moral order which was established by God, and of which a right conscience is the true interpreter. In a word, the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society.”*

I drifted in and out of consciousness in the ambulance. I didn't have much time for retrospective thoughts, except “Please God, I can't die. I don't want my little boys growing up without a mom.” I was bleeding internally, the complications of ectopic pregnancy surgery two weeks previous, and quickly becoming weaker and weaker. Waking up later in the recovery room, I was thankful to be alive.

“You should not be having any more children.” The words were harsh and at first, we took them as truth. I was capable of having more, but after two ectopic

pregnancies and complications from one of the surgeries, we were told that we must limit our family to three boys. One of the doctors suggested that I be put on hormonal contraception. He later advised me to have my remaining fallopian tube tied. The physician wasn't the only one to give the 'order' to stop having children. Well-meaning relatives and friends felt it was their duty to tell us that we should not get pregnant again. "You don't want to be irresponsible, do you?"

*"It concerns the objective moral order which was established by God..."*

It became evident, as we dialogued with both the physicians and the well-meaning relatives and friends, that they were concerned only about my physical health. Most of them cared little, if at all, for my/our spiritual well being. And, initially, in those first few weeks after my surgery, we felt that we ought to listen to the "doctor's orders."

However, as the months went by, I began to regain my strength. We continued using NFP in the most conservative way, often adding one or two days to the rules for extra security. A year later, with heaviness in my heart, I thought of the future and the fact that we would not have anymore children. I wondered whether God was calling us to actively seek another pregnancy. My husband and I discussed it, then brought our concern to our spiritual director, explaining to him that the doctor told us that we should not have any more children. "James and Ellie," he said, "that is a decision to be made between the two of you and God." He encouraged us to pray about it and he further recommended that we talk to a faithful Catholic doctor. We knew of a Catholic physician through a neighboring homeschooling community. Her response after reviewing my file was that we could try for more children, but that I would need to be monitored carefully in the first several weeks to confirm that it wasn't another ectopic pregnancy.

*"... a right conscience is the true interpreter..."*

For the next several months, we prayed together. We deeply desired another child, but we did not want to be careless or irresponsible. After much prayer and discernment, and weighing all the risks, we decided to actively seek another pregnancy.

*"...the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities..."*

A year later, we were still not pregnant. We felt at peace with our decision to seek another pregnancy and, although disappointed, we trusted that God knew what He was doing. Eventually, we stopped charting. Another eight cycles went by with no pregnancy and I began to sell off most of my baby furniture. A few weeks later, it dawned on me that I hadn't had a period in six weeks. The next morning, I took my temperature and it was 98.9. After 18 months of saying no to us, God was saying yes and blessing us with another eternal soul. I was thrilled that another new life, the fruit of our love, had begun, and would be sheltered lovingly in my womb.

With the blessing, however, soon came extreme suffering. I began having debilitating migraine headaches, and some days I could not get out of bed. Worse than the physical pain, however, was the emotional suffering. Doctors, well-meaning friends and relatives told us that we were being "irresponsible" and "selfish," and that if I was suffering, "I had asked for it."

At 30 weeks, our unborn baby was six pounds and I had already gained 50 pounds. That might not seem like much, but with my four-feet-nine-inch frame, it meant that I could not drive (the seat had to be pushed back so far to allow for my large stomach that my feet couldn't reach the pedals) and I could not walk the last six weeks of the pregnancy.

Our son, Adam, was born eight weeks later at nearly ten pounds. The pro-life Catholic doctor who delivered Adam by C-section told me that we could try for another baby someday, but that the pregnancy would again have to be closely monitored. Three years later, our youngest son, Paul was conceived after only one month of trying and born just two days before my 40th birthday.

*"... recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society."*

The words of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* courageously proclaim the truth of responsible parenthood. The decision to have or avoid another child remains a decision between the couple and God. No one else ought to make such a life-changing and important choice because no one else will have to endure the consequences (and joys), nor will anyone else have to stand before God someday and explain their actions.

Although we could have used NFP to avoid pregnancy permanently and to limit

our family to three sons, we chose to listen to our hearts, to answer God's calling, and to seek more children. When I consider that our two youngest sons (now ages 19 and 22) might possibly not be here today, my heart becomes heavy. Both are unique, talented and amazing human beings who have already given so much to our family and to society. I am grateful to God – and to Blessed Pope Paul VI – because I can't imagine our family — and our world — without them.

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copyright Hrkach (Adam, left, Paul, right)



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## Man & God - Part Two

Sorry for the disappearing act from my blog. There have been a couple of health issue skirmishes over the past year, and they have been quite the preoccupation. I'm getting better, and so, I hope to reengage my readers with my continuing spiritual voyage. I promise you all, this voyage is going to become one that should tingle and hopefully illuminate the core of your beliefs about your metaphysical composition, as well as your eschatological future.

There is some good news midst the trials I have faced recently. My completed book, *The Road to Spiritual Iron*, has been published, both in Kindle and paperback formats. I'm quite excited about the whole thing, and do hope you check it out. The link is right here. Give it a read, and tell me what you think.

So, let's proceed from my earlier post.

I ventured into a subject in *God & Man, Part One*, of what I refer to as the particulars of creation. They're around whether man is or not, though not in such a profusion as with man sticking a communal nose in the creation process. Particulars, as I said, are simply the stock-keeping units of all of creation. See it, hear it, smell it, taste it, touch it; name it or not, point at it or poke it, breathe it, ingest it, be ingested by it; walk on it, swim in it, fly through it, wear it or bear it; everything is a particular. These are the physical particulars. What is common between them all, is the capacity for humanity to know they are in one reality of our existence and are of one use or another in man's quest for continued existence. Particulars can be more than simply sensory and intelligible though.

Particulars can also be quite illusionary, virtual, unconscious, formative, and manifestory; in short, things in the immaterial realm that make one do things in the material realm. And there's a big immaterial realm out there. For those who question the existence of a non-sensory reality of another kind, I suggest one considers what physicists and cosmologists believe is a reality: dark energy and dark matter. This is not the place for further discussion on such things, but it is said that dark matter might well account for 80% of all matter, and dark energy weighing in at over 68% of all energy in the cosmos. Interesting bit of news, and we haven't sensed a bit of it; or have we? Perhaps we are greatly influenced by dark matter and energy in ways that quite physical and psychological, and

common to our everyday realities.

I had previously talked about the issues of humanity as being particulars.

There's even more to that discussion. What about platonic forms, ideologies, perceptions, and concepts? And what about humanity's individual and collective conscience? Are not immaterial particulars more responsible for how the human species behaves than any set of physical particulars ever could? And is there not a common goal in all of this; that humanity might one day achieve some kind and level of comprehension of all particulars? Does this not sound familiar?

There are whole philosophies structured about the particulars. One may consider *epistemological particularism*, for example: A common attribute of human thinking in which one is quite comfortable in believing and acting out through self-evident knowledge that has yet to have been justified through empirical study. Then we have *historical particularism*, which simply argues the obvious; that each society is unique as it has been formed by a particular set of particulars that are common to that society's environment. While comparative goals from other societies are common perhaps, the paths by which to achieve such a common, human goal are diverse. *Moral particularism* asserts that morals and ethics are relative to any one event, and established, institutional morals are irrelevant and impractical. (That won't go over well with most people, even today.) Of great popularity today is the idea of *multicultural particularism*: *vive la différence* over conformity. And then there's the bane of the political right: *political particularism*. This is the old-fashion notion (currently in vogue once again) that if a politician caters to a specific interest, their opportunities for power are enhanced and prolonged.

So many particulars... what's a good person to do? Have we authority over the particulars? Perhaps some symbiosis, or are we totally controlled by them? We are certainly subject to them, for without particulars, we could not exist. We are, in fact, particulars ourselves. And if that's the case, then is humanity a subject or an object in the grand scheme of things?

It's obvious to me, at least, that the more we engage the particulars, the more we become the object, and not the subject, in the relationship. Religions have always understood this occurrence as objectification; as humanity physically and intellectually blossoms, so withers his spirituality. To a large degree, that's what religions are all about; the preservation and advancement of one's spirituality. However, the more one is the object, the less they are the subject.

It's interesting to observe current society's fascination with subjectivity as they rapidly dissolve into the objectivity of their technological environment. It's like trying to swim upstream, or even better yet, it's like trying to fight against a riptide. In desperation, subconsciously knowing you are losing the battle for your soul, you consciously and imperatively demand your individual subjectivity. "Well, I might lose my soul, but to hell with you if you think I'm going to lose my intellect!"

It's also fascinating that the contemporary, conservative movement considers subjectivity as the enemy to the absolute nature of God and society. That's two issues I will address in future posts. For now.....

Particulars, for the first three-hundred millennium of the existence of homo sapiens, were simpler. In those early days, the particulars were more direct and observable in their manifestation upon the individual and society at large. Then, around sixty millennia before this century, a shift occurred in the human experience, in which the slow, grinding machinery of objectivity began to exercise its weight upon humanity in quite a different fashion than previously. In this era of humanity's evolution, the inventive mind of homo sapiens began to make a profound change in human society through tools and those things brought about by tools. Humanity's path of existence veered away from other species at this juncture, and things proceeded once again in a more or less stable fashion until about three millennia ago. It is here, where some proposed, like Julian Jaynes of Princeton University, that humanity finally "woke" to the reality of their self-conscious minds. Reason left the intuitive realm of instinctual reaction and gained a foothold in the cognitive realm of action. With this revelation, humanity entered into a new phase of species evolution that has never been experienced before by any creature of the earthly kingdom. In each of humanity's first three phases, the particulars played a pivotal role in propelling humanity forward along this new path. The self-conscious, reasoning human being began to grasp the significance of particulars in a whole new way, and with that also came the judgement of those particulars that affected us the most. Some were judged and elevated to the status of virtue, while others became vice. Good and evil entered the arena of human thought.

It is here where religion gained the high ground in society for it offered the methodology by which to procure the particulars of virtue and the suppression of the particulars of vice. In all of its forms and at least for those religions found successful to one degree or another, all religions employ two concepts in a desire

to check the objectification of the individual: submersion and asceticism. “Do this, and only this, and all will go well”, would be the prescription of religion. To some small degree both concepts have worked in moving humanity along its path of existence in this cosmos, though for most of us, those methodologies are about as tasty as cod liver oil. Religion has always been about a love/hate relationship.

We all understand asceticism, but what am I referring to when I use the term submersion? There’s nothing complex about it. Each religion sets forth ideologies for the composition of the perfect human being. For Christianity, it’s the Christ, Jesus. To live in the manner that He lived, and died. Its foundational morality for the soul, and outside of the familial structure and religion itself, morality is little taught as it has little to do with the basic sensory and gustatorial needs of the average human being in its quest for every day survival. The premise goes that if we hold our heads under the dogmas of religion long enough, we’ll soon develop the gills of sainthood.

Now, if I were to ask a religious person about the efficacy of asceticism, the answer would be a responding “It definitely works!” Though, such a quick response gives me pause. Do you understand the question? “Does asceticism work?” “Is asceticism a cure for objectification?” (Is objectification a disease?) What I am really asking is whether asceticism – the denial of those things deemed frivolous to the soul, as detailed by one’s religion of choice – has been an aid to humanity’s collective, evolving spiritualism, or is its employ just a temporal placebo for the temporal individual? When one embraces asceticism, does it benefit the collective soul of humanity in a permanent, absolute manner, or does its practice simply retard what is perceived as spiritual erosion?

“Christian asceticism – at least as so far as it was not influenced by decadent Hellenistic philosophy – had as its purpose not the suppression or even extirpation of natural drives, but rather their control and complete spiritualization. It is positive, not negative, asceticism; aimed fundamentally at a liberation of the highest powers of personality from blockage by the automatism of the lower drives.” Max Scheler, *Vom Umsturz der Were*.

In other words, your base desires have a negative effect on your ability to express yourself in a communal manner. One’s base desires inhibit commitment to the communal purpose and sustenance of a culture.

The notion that Max Scheler is proposing above is that Christian asceticism is a positive force that promotes one's spiritual identity and elevates the spirit-within an individual above that of the other elements of one's soul and their base desires. Does it? Is asceticism the virtue that Christianity seems to think it is?

Humanity's ever-increasing ingenuity of application of the particulars of God's creation appears to be benefiting humanity since the beginning of homo sapiens. Yet, the influential religions all seem to assert that a necessary control of the particulars will enhance humanity's relationship with its perceived metaphysical goal; whether that be Heaven, Moksha, Nirvana, or other perfected state of being.

And is it not true that the proper measure or dose of asceticism in one's life has dramatically changed over the past three millennia? What would an ascetic from 900 B.C have to say about the lifestyle of an ascetic in these times? Today's call to asceticism says to forgo the excessive use of the smartphone, the internet, the television, and the automobile. But, what about the call to asceticism in the days of Jesus? Was it the same; stay away from smartphones, the internet, television, and the automobile? Quite a different set of particulars that man was called to forgo; yes? Needless to say, most of the indulgent and excessive particulars of Jesus' time would be considered basic rights today.

Discussing asceticism is a bit of tangent to my purpose, however, it is necessary to my hypothesis as one of many issues will be handled as I build the argument. The practical point I am making here is that humanity is evolving, and not just physically and intellectually. While I believe the spirit-within an individual is absolute, human evolution can affect the efficacy of the spirit-within in guiding a person towards their ultimate, spiritual goal. It's a matter of revealing and concealing.

Despite humanity's desire to see good and evil in all things (particulars), a particular, created by God, is inherently good, while a particular created by man is only as good as it is of God's will; at least that's Judeo-Christian thinking.

Let me repeat my hypothesis from the last post: Man & God – Part One.

Try to consider the possibility that God created and continues to create only good things. And try to imagine that no good thing can stray from being a good thing; for to see such happen would render God as less than good himself. Now

consider, therefore, that mankind is thus good and has not strayed from the course that God set forth for mankind when created. Mankind is evolving; this we must acknowledge, for man has changed in all ways physically and intellectually since recorded historical evidence began, and therefore, this evolution is of God's will. Here comes the hard part for many. Now imagine that where man is today and where man will be tomorrow is also in God's plan and of God's will.

I want to keep this hypothesis front and center as I proceed into future posts.

God Calls Us All Into His Service – Reese

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## Reboot [at With Us Still]

There was a time when I found it pretty amazing – my Cisco LINKSYS Wireless-G 2.4Ghz broadband router. Yesterday, on the eve of Pentecost, it officially met the scrap heap.



Wow...wireless connectivity!

I'm not even sure when I first put the gizmo into service...or took it out of service. I do know that it's been gathering dust in my basement for several years, though – and that earned it a spot among the impressive pile of electronics we cast off as part of our burg's "environmentally responsible recycling event."

The same point could be made, I suppose, about several other items in my stack of to-be-recycled stuff: The Mac PowerBook 170, for instance. I recall being astonished to encounter its versatility and usefulness when I first powered it up in the early 1990s. But at some point, it stopped powering-up at all...so it too secured a niche in a dusty corner of my basement for many years.



...and wow...an entire computer in my lap!

Heck, I'm even old enough to remember when the fax machine was mind-blowing technology. And yeah: Had one of those tucked away somewhere in the trunk-load I schlepped to the "recycle event" yesterday.

The timing was fortuitous. Less than an hour before, you see, I'd been gathered in an upstairs room with a handful of other men from my parish — in our weekly "Sunday scripture" faith-sharing group. We'd been talking about today's readings — in particular, the passage from [Paul's letter to the Galatians](#) where he lists the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

One of the guys mentioned how he thought they were pretty cool, those gifts — and best of all, they were "free"! There's no law against 'em...so they don't come laden with guilt or sanctions like the other behaviors on Paul's list. And I noted that, in fact, we all possessed them. They'd been given to us (in some cases, many years ago) when we'd each received the sacrament of Confirmation.



So much stuff!

Amazing things, these gifts of the Spirit. With power and efficacy far beyond a wireless router, or a fax machine, or even a PowerBook 170. But it occurred to me, as I waited in line at the recycling event, how we often let dust gather on these gifts. How we tend to tuck them away, unused, in a gloomy corner of our lives.

What better day than Pentecost, then, to haul them out into the light — and fire ‘em up for a reboot? Who knows? We might even find that they still work...and that they truly do have the power to change the world.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Happy birthday, Church!



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

*IHS*

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## **Silence Slays Souls - the Souls of Individuals and the Souls of Nations [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]**

Sunday's Gospel **command** (Matthew 8:16-20) to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit prompts this question: Have we Catholics abandoned our Christ-given mission?

For years, our Church has downplayed the importance of conversion and the salvation of **all** souls, choosing in their stead the promotion of social justice and worldly objectives. We act as if the solution to the world's problems remain in the secular realm when in fact it can be fought and defeated only on the spiritual plain.

Our silence in light of such misguided efforts slays souls and emboldens Satan.

We have limited our ineffective evangelization efforts (for the most part) to just those calling themselves Catholic, thereby reinforcing the secular belief that one religion is just as good as another. Most Catholics do not know their faith and few live it – because they have often not been taught it. Even though God's Truth will set a soul free, we far too often insist on substituting His full and complete (and no doubt challenging) Truth for a watered down, pastorally comforting non-truth, that can never nourish and foster authentic spiritual growth.

Our silence in light of such misguided efforts slays souls and emboldens Satan.

God's law and commandments are applicable to all human beings, whether they be Catholic or not or whether they believe in a supreme being or not. God's Truth is implanted in the hearts, minds and souls of all whom He has created. We humans know intuitively what is right and what is wrong. Why have we not shouted this Truth from the rooftops and reflected it in the way we live our lives?

Our silence in light of such inaction slays souls and emboldens Satan.

No one (relatively speaking) comes to Church on Sunday. We, our bishops and priests, for the most part, remain silent about the eternal consequences for those souls who do not participate in Sunday Mass.

Our silence in such situations slays souls and emboldens Satan.

We are told that of the few Catholics who come to Sunday Mass, upwards to seventy-five percent no longer believe that Jesus Christ is really truly and substantially present, Body Blood Soul and Divinity in the Eucharist hidden behind locked tabernacle doors and in the Sacred Host placed on their tongues.

Our silence in light of such non-belief slays souls and emboldens Satan.

We wonder why so many Churches have been closed and abandoned. Surely, if we believed that Jesus is present in our Churches we would act with the reverence such belief requires and spend time with Him. Obviously, our catechesis and example have failed to teach that essential and fundamental Truth.

Our silence and poor example slay souls and emboldens Satan.

Rarely are our Churches the silent, reverent, sacred spaces they were intended to be and which our Lord deserves – unique places where one can in quiet, adore, worship and speak to the God who longs to be loved. Yet we do little or nothing to correct this tragic state of affairs.

Our silence in light of such irreverence slays souls and emboldens Satan.

When was the last time the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops spoke with one uniform, persistent, fearless and endless voice, not just condemning such evils as abortion, contraception, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, fornication and active homosexual lifestyle, but with love and in fraternal correction, explaining to everyone (not just to Catholics) why such conduct is evil and leads to eternal punishment?

Our silence in light of such failures slays souls and emboldens Satan.

How many more lives will be brutally ripped out of the wombs of their mothers before we, our Bishops and our priests will call this evil what it is – murder not health care, not the right to choose, but murder? If the harvesting of human body parts from aborted human beings and the use of taxpayer funds to support such evil will not receive the universal persistent and unending condemnation of all God-fearing people, priests and bishops of our Church, what will?

Our silence in light of such evil slays souls and emboldens Satan.

How do we save souls if we, our priests and our bishops create or acquiesce to

ambiguity in Church doctrine where none had heretofore existed? Let me offer a few examples.

The Church has taught that there are eternal consequences to those who have rejected God's grace and die in the state of mortal sin unwilling to repent and seek forgiveness. How can any Catholic now accept the suggestion that "No one can be condemned forever because that is not the logic of the Gospel?" Such a concept appears contrary to all that the Church has taught (see Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1033 and 1035).

Our silence in light of such error slays souls and emboldens Satan.

It has always been undisputed Church teaching that it is a mortal sin to receive Holy Communion if you are a divorced and remarried Catholic who never sought or obtained annulment of one's marriage (CCC 1650). How can we support assertions to the contrary today?

Our silence in light of such error slays souls and emboldens Satan.

The Church's constant teaching has been that a soul in mortal sin receives no spiritual benefit from receiving Holy Communion, but rather eternal condemnation if such conduct is left unconfessed. (CCC 1384-1385) Why would we, our bishops or priests encourage others to commit such sinful acts?

Our silence in light of such conduct slays souls and emboldens Satan.

It has been the teaching of the Church that we **MUST** strive with God's grace to overcome our sinful behaviors and that with His grace all things are possible, including abandoning long-standing sinful acts. Even if we are never fully successful in overcoming our sinful behaviors, we are never exempt from trying to do so. How can we now teach that such a standard is too high and those who have been unsuccessful in striving to free themselves from entrenched sin, are no longer obligated to do so?

Our silence in light of such erroneous teaching slays souls and emboldens Satan.

How can we have a reasonable hope that all souls will be saved or that atheists (who die not knowing Jesus) are in heaven, or that God makes a person gay, or that gay sexuality "in some way be Eucharistic," that "it can be expressive of Christ's self-gift" or that "*it can be expressive of mutual fidelity, a covenantal relationship in which two people bind themselves to each other for ever*" or that *it is licit for a non-Catholic spouse to receive Holy Communion?*

Our silence in light of such false assertions slays souls and emboldens Satan.

Who would ever had thought that the administrators of a Catholic College would fail to unequivocally support a well-respected tenured faculty member and a student who were attacked for simply proclaiming and defending the teachings of their Church against those who promoted error and sinful conduct?

Our silence in light of such failures slays souls and emboldens Satan.

Were you shocked that a once vibrant and faithful Catholic nation has approved the killing of children in their mother's womb and celebrated this tragedy

joyfully and unashamedly? You shouldn't be. That is what happens when we remain silent and don't engage in spiritual combat. When the Church and its members fail to teach and defend the Truth, Satan offers a counterfeit substitute truth – one that leads only to hell.

Our silence slays souls and emboldens Satan.

Is it not time for we silent souls to defend God's Truth, to fulfill our baptismal obligation to be the Gospel to those we meet as Matthew told us yesterday, and to more fully engage in the spiritual battle for the salvation of all souls?

Or do we want to remain silent and slay souls and embolden Satan?

[If I have written anything that is untrue or inconsistent with Church teaching, please let me know. I do not want to be the cause of any further confusion.]

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<http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2018/05/monday-musings-silence-slays-souls.html>  
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## Relevant Fiction Reviews: The Beginning of Life [at Carolyn Astfalk, Author]

Because fiction excels at creating empathy, books that involve deeply personal, emotionally-intense issues help readers consider situations in a whole new light. Over the years, I've read many books that touch on life issues – both at its beginning and end. These books are ones that touch on abortion and related life issues.

The reviews may not even mention abortion, as these aren't "message" books but rather novels that skillfully weave life issues into the plot. Beneath the reviews are several other books that merit being included, but for which I did not post a review. (There was actually a time when I didn't review almost everything I read! I also haven't reviewed my *own* book, for obvious reasons. )

And finally, there are four dystopian series listed, which were also included in the end-of-life post. I hope you'll click through and read more about these exceptional books!

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### [Anyone But Him](#) by [Theresa Linden](#)

*Anyone But Him* is brimming with delicious romance, keep-you-guessing mystery, and a dose of humor. Wonderfully written with well-developed characters, and a solid plot – all hallmarks of Theresa Linden's books. With her first novel aimed at the new adult market, I hope many, many more readers are introduced to her writing. It's a joy to read novels both well written and underpinned by the Catholic faith and the values Catholics hold dear. [[Learn more about \*Anyone But Him\*.](#)]

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### [Shadows of Hope](#) by [Georgiana Daniels](#)

*Shadows of Hope* is a book-length exercise in dramatic irony that kept me engrossed until all was revealed, in dramatic fashion.

From the first pages – or from the book description alone – the reader knows that Marissa counsels Kaitlyn throughout her unplanned pregnancy and that, unbeknownst to both women, Marissa’s husband Colin is the father.

Tension builds as various conflicts unfold and layers of the characters are revealed: infertility, the absence of a father, infidelity, insecurity, and more bring great depth to Marissa, Kaitlyn, and even Colin.

The reader gets to examine the situation from each of the three characters’ points of view – closest with Marissa (1st person), but also Kaitlyn and Colin (3rd person).

Georgiana Daniels resists an easy resolution, instead delivering a true-to-life examination of the shared heartache, joy, and, eventually, hope, of three imperfect people bound by an unborn child.

Fans of women’s fiction will especially enjoy this well-written, thoughtful story. I look forward to reading more from this author.

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### [Discovery](#) by [Karina Lumbert Fabian](#)

If your mental picture of religious sisters is dour, old women with wimple habits and ankle-length skirts, then scrub that image before opening *Discovery*. The sisters in the Order of Our Lady of the Rescue are post-modern, brave pioneers with habits suited to work in zero gravity.

The challenges to their present mission on the alien craft *Discovery* are best summed up by Sister Rita’s exclamation of “Codists and Wiccans and evangelists, oh, my.” Sister Rita, along with stalwart pilot Sister Thomas and “spacey” but brilliant Sister Ann, have all sorts of conflicting interests to contend with: the brainy researchers, the working-class rockjacks, and, oh yeah, that alien ship.

Interwoven amongst the crew’s scientific discoveries are their personal discoveries, brought to light within the desolate alien craft. Karina Fabian does a good job of managing what could be an unwieldy cast of characters, two romances, devious intrigue, and a guilty conscience.

In the end, the most profound discovery isn’t an alien life form, but a

relationship with God, whose love knows no boundaries, whose mercy overflows, and who calls us each for a unique purpose.

Just enough bread crumbs are dropped to keep the reader intrigued by the various interpersonal relationships and cryptic messages of Sister Ann, mounting to page-turning suspense in the final chapters.

Discovery is a journey worth taking.

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### [Unfailing Love](#) by [Julie Lessman](#)

I awaited *Isle of Hope* for months, eager to read Julie Lessman's voice in a contemporary novel. She did not disappoint.

The characters have depth, are well-drawn, and inhabit their modern coastal Georgia isle so naturally they made me long for a beach vacation. The dramatic plot turns in *Isle of Hope* call to mind a soap opera (as they often do in Julie Lessman's historical novels), which is less a criticism and more a testament to the author's savvy given the enduring popularity of soaps (and perhaps a nod to her well-known love of *Gone With the Wind*). The novel includes perhaps the best one-sentence chapter-ending cliffhanger I've ever read.

The faith element is organic to the story, but is more extensive than in most inspirational romances or women's fiction as multiple characters' arcs echo the themes of forgiveness, (re)conversion, and redemption. I highlighted several passages that struck a chord – something I typically don't do. By showing the natural consequences of selfish actions, the narrative deftly demonstrates how no sin is truly private, and its repercussions affect many people besides the perpetrator.

Some beautiful, tender, heart-melting moments of grief and sorrow are interwoven with the painful longing and simmering passion you'd expect.

A little tightening to reduce thematic repetition and some of the analogies would only make this good novel even better. As it is, it's an engaging story of love, forgiveness, healing, and rebirth that left me looking forward to the next book in the series.

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[Life-Changing Love](#) by [Theresa Linden](#)

Not only is Life-Changing love an entertaining read, but it's a great tool for launching conversations between teens and parents about their expectations for dating and relationships.

Caitlyn Summers is in love with being in love. She yearns for her first boyfriend and her first kiss. And she knows just the boy to make those dreams come true: Roland West. Only Roland, despite the mixed signals he sends, is not interested in having a girlfriend.

By contrast, Caitlyn's gorgeous best friend Zoe has gone from zero to well beyond the speed limit in mere days with Roland's dangerous older brother Jarret.

When Jarret's twin Keefe returns from a trip to Italy with his father, he's changed -unwilling to allow Jarret to manipulate him, introspective, pious, and intrigued by Caitlyn.

The lives of the West brothers and Caitlyn and Zoe turn topsy-turvy as they struggle to navigate obedience to their parents, the longings of their hearts, and the predicament Jarret and Zoe have created for themselves.

Theresa Linden does an outstanding job of capturing the tension of the teenage years. The result is a moving story that shows the consequences of premature sexual relationships and the value of pursuing friendships that honor God and respect the dignity of each person.

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[The Truth and Nothing But Lies](#) by [Cheri Vause](#)

The Truth and Nothing But Lies is an engaging tale that could be ripped from the headlines if only the media delved so deeply. Its intricate plot and suspense hold attention and draw the reader to the end. Its greatest value, however, lies in its plain demonstration of the dire consequences of all-too-familiar actions cloaked in euphemisms of sexual liberation and freedom to choose.

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[Rapunzel Let Down: A Fairy Tale Retold](#) by [Regina Doman](#)

“Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” – Rom 5:20 In this modern adaption of the classic tale of Rapunzel, Regina Doman brings us the story of Hermes, a conservative senator’s son, who falls in love with Raphaella, the adopted daughter of a radical feminist. Hermes impregnates the innocent Raphaella and from there, sin begets sin and suffering. Fans of Doman’s fairytale novels and new readers alike will enjoy this adaption that brings to life both the dire consequences of sin and the graces borne of virtue. The contemporary setting meshes wonderfully with the timeless fairytale sprinkled liberally with a Catholic worldview. Reminiscent of Doman’s other novels, the heroic ending will have you on the edge of your seat.

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[Image and Likeness: Literary Reflections on the Theology of the Body](#) edited by [Erin McCole Cupp](#)

Even if you’ve read St. John Paul II’s Theology of the Body from start to finish and a half-dozen nonfiction books about it on the side, I guarantee this collection of shorts will uncover the teachings in ways you hadn’t considered. It will challenge you in unexpected ways. One or two (or more) of the stories may make you uncomfortable. While the writing is polished, the varnish coating the darkness of our lives is stripped, laying bare the truths written on our heart and the lies we tell with our bodies.

Recommended for reading, reflection, discussion, and even entertainment. A gritty but beautiful introduction not only to the Theology of the Body as it is lived (or rejected), but also to the breadth and promise of Catholic fiction being written by contemporary authors. These shorts are accessible to any careful reader, whether familiar with the Theology of the Body or not.

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## Fraud [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

When I reread a section in Deuteronomy, a section in chapter 31 caught my attention: “*The Lord said to Moses, behold, you are about to lie down with your father’s; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake me and break my covenant which I made with them. Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them*” (verse 16).

I put the Bible down for a few minutes and let my mind drift to several liberal commentaries I’ve read over the years regarding passages like this one. Instead of permitting the text to speak for itself – in this case, the supernatural gift of foretelling – instead of permitting the text to remain in the realm of the supernatural, liberal commentators tell readers that a later editor inserted this section a few centuries later. And so the text marking Israel’s rebellion was not a prediction of future events, but an historical detail of the past.

What that allegation does, of course, is to replace the supernatural with the natural. And sadly, the Books of Moses are not the only books of Scripture wherein liberal commentators slice and dice away the supernatural. They do it in virtually every Old Testament and even many of the New Testament books.

I can only guess why such commentators suggest God’s word is rife with fraudulent ‘prophecies.’ Such accusations do nothing less than pervert God’s holy and inerrant word, and help destroy the faith of men, women, and children.

No wonder so many people today take the Bible with the proverbial grain of salt. Why bother to read it – except perhaps as ‘literature’, but certainly not the inerrant word of Almighty God? Indeed, if the Bible is full of deceitful texts and contexts, who’s to say the concept of God Himself is not part of the fraud?

This race toward emasculating the Word of God is not a new phenomenon. As early as the first century, the Holy Spirit moved the apostle Paul to pen these words of encouragement to Christians:

*“I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument . . . .*

*Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith . . . See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority . . . (Colossians 2:4-10).*

Christian! There is far too much at stake for your eternal soul to let faithless commentators rob you of your confidence in the supernatural God and His supernatural book. The omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God we serve is certainly able to ensure the accuracy of His words over the centuries. The eternal God who knows the future as intimately as He knows the past – for He remains above and outside what we call “time” – He is eminently able to provide a word of future knowledge to any of His servants.

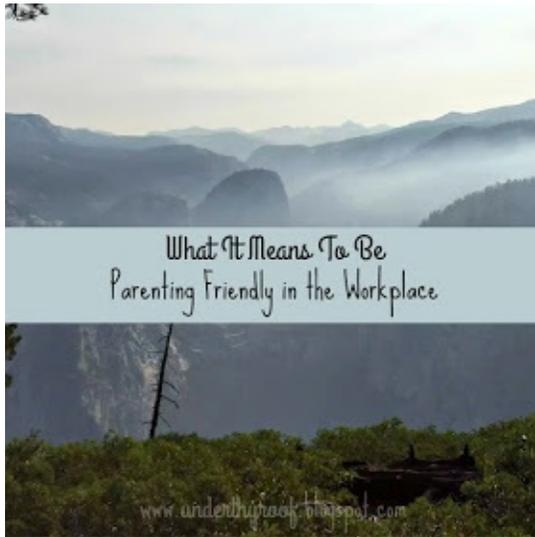
He is, after all, God.

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## What It Means To Be Parenting Friendly in the Workplace [at Under Thy Roof]



I was at a career expo for people in the theater industry this past weekend. After months of auditioning, and feeling stagnant, I wanted to learn where are the miscommunications happening? What am I missing that casting directors and hiring directors are looking for?

My second goal: find someone on this green Earth who is pursuing theater work while parenting small children!

Many women in theater take the 10 years (or more) until their children are in school to return to work. I tried that for a year, and it's not working for me. I do much better with both/and instead of waiting for a "someday" that may very well never show up.

The working world is not set up for both/and, it's an either/or game. Whether it is acknowledged or not, parents face well-meaning, but never the less prejudicial, beliefs about their abilities and availability.

When I was graduating from college, I was in my third trimester with my first child. I decided to run for some of the alumnae positions. It's mostly emailing the class quarterly, and compiling and sending updates to the alumnae association

for placement in the alum magazine - not a difficult job. I lost out on the vote, but that didn't bother me as much as the reasoning behind why some people did not vote for me.

Women would actually tell me that they didn't vote for me so I wouldn't have to choose to spend time away my baby. As if I was not capable of understanding both the job description and the implications of my huge belly when I put myself forward.

Note this was a WOMEN'S college. To say that they should have known better would be an understatement.

It becomes more apparent to me as I spend more years at this parenting while trying to interact with the world thing, that the greater culture has NO IDEA what I do. None. At all.

Which explains some things about well meaning attempts to be inclusive to parents, and mothers in particular, fall flat.

A huge hurdle to having useful and effective work environments for parents is that each parent is working with a different set of parameters. Some need to be able to pick kids up from school, some need lactation rooms, some need flex time, some need site based child care. Often the same person will need all of these things at different points in her parenting life.

The typical American workplace is not so great with evolving needs. I've found many individuals aren't so great at evolving needs. It's much easier to say "do x, y, z and you are parenting friendly!". It's not that simple.

What I think *\*does\** make a workplace parenting friendly is a self-aware workplace.

If a mother has to continuously inform HR that the lactation room is not up to code or that she is being given more work than she is being paid to do, that workplace sends the message that her work and needs are not valued.

It's not the job of parents to educate each and every employer on how to not be a jerk to working parents.

It's not my job to teach other women not to be patronizing and diminutive to

another woman just because she's a mother.

Frankly, I'm frustrated to be hearing that the working world is still in denial that parenting is a necessary part of the continuation of the species, but here we are. Because, really, this comes down to having respect for human life and the importance of the work of parenting AND the work of the economy.

*This is not just a discussion for parents who work your typical 9-5 job! What about you parents who are freelancers, community leaders, or gig workers? What has been your experience?*

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## Coming into the Fullness of the Spirit [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

### *About Coming into the Fullness of the Spirit*

***“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”***  
(Acts 2:1-4)



My dear fellow pilgrims in Christ Jesus,

Just recently we celebrated Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Church, that is, the day when those who first believed in Christ came together as an anointed community to form the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to act as His witnesses to the world. Today, we continue in community through the anointing that is imparted to us through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation bringing us to life in Christ so that we, His Body, may continue to be His witnesses to the world until He comes to reign as King of Kings and Lord of lords.

However, for some of us, our celebration of Pentecost tends to be that of half-hearted traditional routines that honors the tradition and spirit of the historical event of Pentecost but not a celebration of something that should be an integral part of our lives in that it is something we have personally experienced – that is, the personal outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our own lives. It is in this sense that the “fullness” of Pentecost has not yet “fully come” for many of us today.

Yes, we all, in faith, have come to a new birth in Christ and have received the Holy Spirit in the inward man”, but for many of us Pentecost remains merely a historic event because we have not fully come to a realization of what that “fullness” really means. We have not fully yielded ourselves to the Holy Spirit and His Gifts so that He may truly take His place in our lives and thus have not released Him to complete the work in us for which He was sent, that is, to bring us into full conformity to the image of Christ – both through an inward transformation and an outward empowerment to preach and live the Gospel with His power working in us and through us. Instead we have taken our consecration as merely being a signal for us to use our own self-willed energies to attempt to please God with our own works and ambitions.

Yes, we are taught and believe that we are recipients of the seven sanctifying gifts that the Spirit of God uses to form the Character of Christ in us. We likewise expect the fruit of the Spirit to be manifest in our lives through the indwelling Spirit of Love that has been poured in us by the Holy Spirit. But, in many of our lives the fruit of the Spirit is unable to come to maturity, mainly because, through ignorance and the gut-wrenching circumstances of our daily lives, our thinking and our behavior is being conformed to the world rather than to Christ. This conformance includes an attitude of pride and self-sufficiency that thinks we can do everything on our own, not understanding that the desire of the Father is that He wants to work through us and in us by the Spirit of His Grace which he so generously places in us. This attitude of conformance to the world also looks to the world for acceptance rather than to the Gracious God who created us.

You can sense this even in how we moderns define the graces received at Pentecost. Note that only the “socially acceptable” gifts of the Spirit (cf., Is. 11, Gal. 6;22) are mentioned in our churches. Whereas, the nine foundational or [empowerment Gifts of the Spirit](#) (cf., 1 Cor. 12) which were referred to by Jesus as the “Promise of the Father” and which were actually the gifts manifested at Pentecost, are hardly ever mentioned in polite religious society. Why do you

think this is? I suspect that the main reason is that we don't want to look or be different from the world. We want to be accepted in the world and so we compromise the Word of God to match the world's expectations.

This attitude weakens our faith and without faith we cannot please God – thereby hindering us from activating the actual release of the Holy Spirit into our lives and into the lives of those around us.

In this post it is my desire to discuss three of the most common problems (aside from plain ignorance) facing us Christians in exercising the spiritual gifts in the modern world – problems that hinder us in realizing the fullness of the Spirit in our lives. These three problems being: 1) grieving the Spirit, 2) quenching the Spirit, and 3) unbelief or “hardening of our hearts”. It is my hope that by bringing the awareness of these problems to the surface we may take action to repent and ask the Holy Spirit to renew us and restore us to the place in our walk with Christ so that we may truly be fruitful workers in the Kingdom of God! Praised be His Holy Name!

### ***Grieving the Spirit***



The Holy Spirit is “grieved” or “saddened” when we turn aside from His leadings in our lives and we instead begin to form attachment to the world and its lifestyles. He is grieved with us just as Jesus was grieved over Jerusalem because their unwillingness to receive Him at the time of His visitation (Matt. 23:37-39). Let us then not grieve the Spirit by distancing ourselves from the

world and welcoming Him and His Gifts into our lives.

Perhaps no one other than other St. Paul is better able to express the need for the Christian community to align itself with Christ and detach itself from the world. Listen to what he says to the church in Ephesus:

***“Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to [be renewed in the spirit of your minds](#), and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.***

***So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.***

***Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** (Ephesians 4:17-32; 5:1-2)

You may be sure my brethren that, because God is Love, He, in His compassion for us, will lovingly intervene in our lives to confront us with our sin in this regard, because it is a sin. Indeed, a sin that Paul refers to as “grieving the Spirit of God”. A sin that usually leads to another sin, that of “Quenching of the Holy

Spirit”.

### *Quenching the Spirit*



Scripture commands us not to “quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). To “quench” is to extinguish something, like throwing water on a campfire as you are preparing to break camp. The sin of quenching the Holy Spirit is when God’s Spirit is prompting us to say or do a certain thing and we refuse. Quenching the Spirit could also be failing to discover and use the gifts that God has given us.

The reason this is important is because we are ignoring or not using the charismatic gifts mentioned by St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians (cf., 1 Cor. 12). It is through these nine foundational or empowerment gifts that the members of the church are empowered to carry out the church’s ministry of taking the Good News to the world, making disciples, and manifesting the power of Father’s Kingdom to the world. The Sanctifying Gifts (cf., Is. 11) permit the Spirit to bring us in conformity to the character and spirit of Christ but it is the endowment with the charismatic gifts, however, that permits us to share in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that was on Christ so that His ministry of manifesting or enforcing the Kingdom of God in this world may continue through us, His Body!



Because this ministry dethrones the power of the Evil One and the dominance he holds over the world and fallen humanity, he will do everything in his power to extinguish the Holy Fire of the Holy Spirit that has been placed in us, the Body of Christ. He does this on three main battle-fronts: the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have already spoken of how the world conforms us to its thinking and behavior. This conformity to the world also acts in us to extinguish the fire or leadings of the Holy Spirit in carrying out His purposes for us in this world.

Remember the warning of preparation that Jesus gave His disciples:

***“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. “This I command you, that you love one another. “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:16-19)***

Thus, you should not be surprised that the world will not accept you if you deviate from what it expects and demands of you. This, of course, includes the “politically correct” suppression of the spiritual gifts that have been distributed to us by the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purposes in us and through us.

In attempting to hinder us, the Ruler of this world takes advantage of our fallacious human reasoning, our weaknesses and our lustful desires (the flesh) so

that we might succumb to the lures and demands of this world. And, to our dismay, he sometimes even uses the voice of misguided religious authority to attempt to shut the door to our exercise of the gifts by telling us that they are not needed today or that they (ironically enough) are of the “devil”.

The devil also tempts us by presenting us with counterfeit “gifts” that are really witchcraft under his control rather than from God. He also hinders the use of the actual gifts by presenting skepticism or doubts as to our worthiness or the appropriateness of our exercise of the gifts.

All of the above briefly summarize the means by which we may fall into the sin of quenching the Spirit. For this reason, brethren, it is very important in walking the walk of exercising the spiritual gifts that you keep in mind St. Paul’s exhortation and admonition to the church of Thessalonica:

***“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”*** (1 Th. 5:16-22)

### ***Hardening of the Heart***

Regarding hardness of heart I refer you again brethren to St. Paul’s admonition to the church at Ephesus:



***“... you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness [blindness] of heart.”***

(Eph. 4:17-18)

In this citation Paul makes it clear that the condition he terms “hardness of the heart” (the term “blindness” is used in some translations) alienates us from the life of God. This alienation comes because the “hardness of heart” condition blinds our spiritual understanding, making us ignorant of God, His Grace, and His purposes for us in this world. In other words it is an attitude of heart that leads to unbelief.

What we sometimes miss in Paul’s exhortation is that he is directing it to baptized Christians with the implication that these Christians, although converted are still living within their un-renewed worldly mindset – that Paul terms the “futility of their minds”. The reason we miss this point is that we modern Christians don’t realize that we are pretty much subject to the same condition, that is, we too are affected by a “hardening of the heart” or “unbelief”, the cure for which involves the “renewing of our minds”.

The main reason we miss this point that Paul makes is, because we consider ourselves faithful Christians, supposedly operating in faith, we find it difficult to understand how there could be unbelief in our lives.

This failure to understand is, in itself a sign of a certain level of unbelief. *You see brethren what we don’t understand is that we, as fallible human beings can harbor both faith and unbelief within us at the same time.* The vestiges of our fallen self, although crucified with Christ are still with us, even though we are in the process of transformation into the image of Christ. But we are not there yet and never will we be completely there until we are united with Him in the life to come.

These vestiges of the flesh still mould our thinking into the ways of the world and place a veil over our minds when it comes to understanding the Spirit of God and walking in the Spirit. Although we may see our spiritual path clearly in some areas of our lives there are some areas where the old way of thinking still holds sway.

For instance, supposing that upon your yearly medical checkup your doctor discovers some shadows in your x-rays and, upon more testing, informs you that you have a variant form, of lymphatic cancer. The first anxious thoughts and fears you encounter within yourself are those of your old nature. Yes, you

believe in healing and Jesus' promises regarding healing, but you find your heart placed in a test between your faith and your anxieties and fears. If you place more value on your anxieties based on what the doctor said than your faith in what the word of God says, then you have entered the realm of "hardening of your heart" and this places a veil over your faith in the promises of God.

The more our mind is "renewed" in Christ the less influence the world and our "old man" will have on our thinking and judgments because Jesus and His Word will be the center of our focus in life. When our focus is on Him and His Word our faith will overcome the world just as He overcame the world (John 16:33).

There are many instances in the New Testament where Jesus admonishes his disciples for their "weak (or 'little') faith" caused by their hardness of heart. This is not because they did not have faith in Jesus it is because their own faith was still linked to what they observed in the world and was thus diluted by the circumstances they were facing, as in the multiplication of the loaves (Matt.14:13-20 and the healing of the demon possessed boy (Cf., Matt. 17). In this latter case, when the father came to Jesus saying that he had taken the child to His disciples and they could not heal the boy, Jesus said, ***"You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me."*** ( Matt. 17:17)

After delivering and healing the boy, the disciples asked, "why could we not heal him?" Jesus answered them saying, ***"Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."*** (Matt. 17:20).

So clearly, if we are to exercise our spiritual gifts fruitfully, as Jesus tells us from the citation above, we cannot afford to have this veil of unbelief or "hardness of heart" be a hindrance to us. That is why it is so urgent that we cooperate with God's grace not only in discerning and exercising the gifts that have been allocated to us, but also in continuing to grow in the Spirit through [the renewal of our minds](#), so as to minimize the hindrances that so easily disable us from carrying out God's purposes for us in this world. Praised be His Holy Name!

In conclusion, brothers and sisters in Christ, I urge you to take everything I have relayed to you here, that has touched your heart, and present it sincerely, in prayer, to the Holy Spirit for confirmation and impartation so that you may be

fully enabled by Him to enforce the Father's will here on earth as it is in Heaven!

Baruch ha Shem!

Your Brother In Christ Jesus ... Bartimaeus

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### ***Links to Related Articles***

<> [\*\*\*Sweet Yoke of Love\*\*\*](#)

<> [\*\*\*Releasing the Spirit\*\*\*](#)

<> [\*\*\*Prayer to Receive the Holy Spirit\*\*\*](#)

<> [\*\*\*The Renewal of Our Minds\*\*\*](#)

<> [\*\*\*Hearing His Voice.... and Obeying it!\*\*\*](#)

<> [\*\*\*Praying In the Spirit\*\*\*](#)

<> [\*\*\*Responding To the Spirit's Call\*\*\*](#)

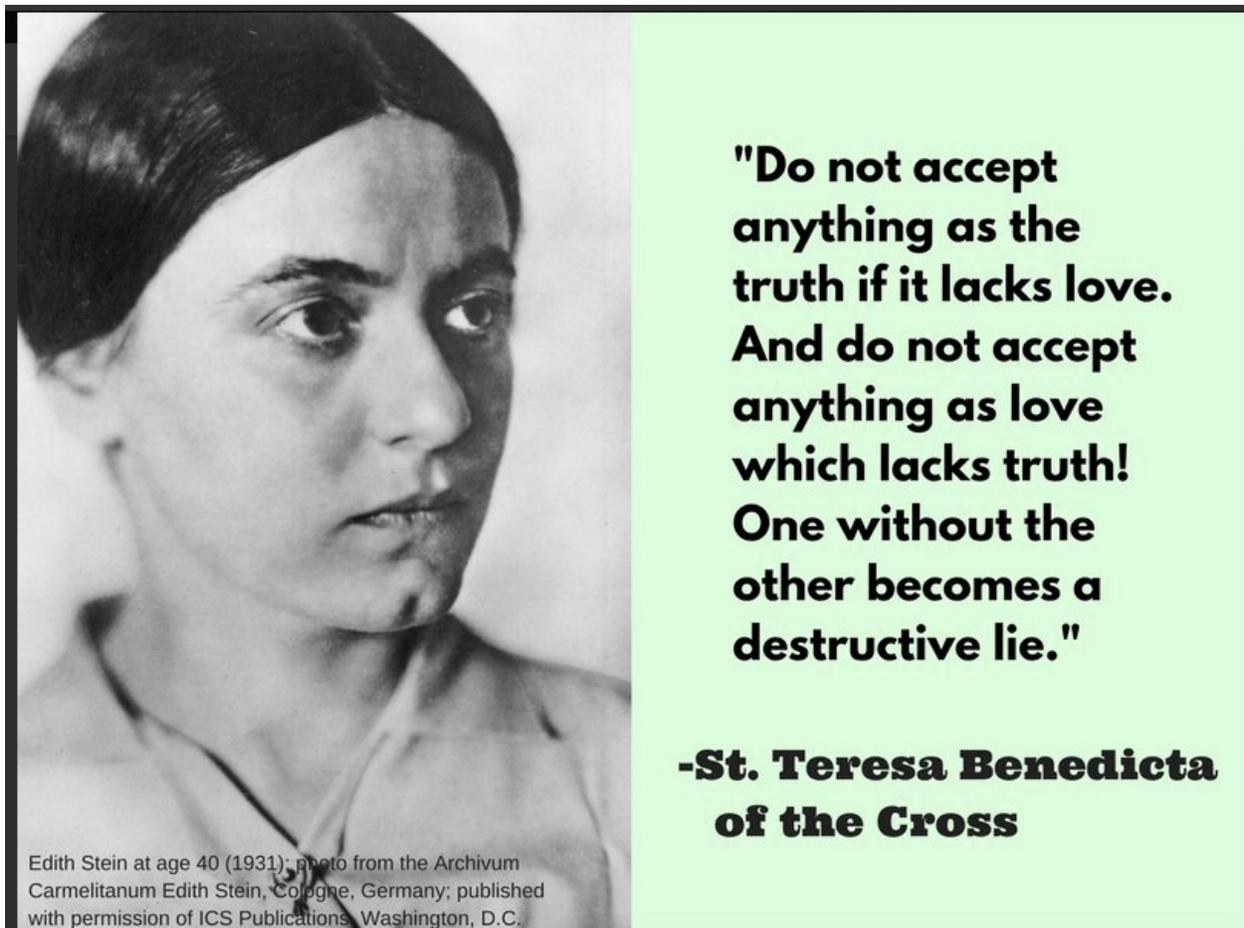
<> [\*\*\*The Kingdom of God Our Spiritual Inheritance\*\*\*](#)

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# Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love [at Leaven for the Loaf]

h/t to the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops, Office of Religious Liberty for this meme with its quote from Edith Stein, AKA St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Something to think about, whatever the aspect of pro-life ministry in which we might engage.



*"Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks truth! One without the other becomes a destructive lie."*

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## **Why does God allow us to be tried, tested, and made to suffer? [at In the Breaking of the Bread]**

Indeed, why does God allow us human beings to be constantly tried, to be tested all our lives, to be tempted at every turn, and in countless unrelenting ways made to suffer?

We believe - and are on solid ground in believing so - that God the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are almighty God, all knowing and all loving. It follows that God who is almighty knows of every instance in which we suffer because of evil, or because we are tempted, or because we are tempted and, no longer resisting, fall into and succumb to sin. Our Roman Catholic, Eastern Catholic, and Orthodox Christian traditions all agree in teaching that evil, temptations, and sin only occur to the degree that God allows them to occur; for without his permitting them, none of these could befall us or come to pass.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola in this "

### [14 Rules for the Discernment of Spirits](#)

" taught that God indeed does allow us to suffer in these three ways - evil, temptations, sin - for his good and kind purposes. Jesuits continue today to offer the teaching and guidance of their founder Saint Ignatius, and one way they do it is in terms of

### [spiritual discernment](#)

and making good decisions.

Unless one is willing to have faith in God - to believe in the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit - to accept as true and totally reliable that nothing evil can come from God but only good; then there is no way out of the tortuous doubts that come to human beings in the throes of struggles with evil, disease, pain, death, violence, the sins of others, temptations, and our own sin. If God is evil or cannot be trusted to always be good or if there is no god; then we are on our own and we are lost.

In his Ninth (9th) Rule, Saint Ignatius teaches that the drama is not so much about the fact that there is evil (we can understand here in all of its forms including evil deeds, illness, human violence, and natural disasters, without exhausting the list), pain and suffering, temptations, and sin. Now, what is most dramatic and fraught with the gravest of consequences for us and for others, is not so much the evils or temptations or sins themselves, but rather our inner dispositions and reactions to all of these realities of life.

Saint Ignatius makes much of two opposite but related inner states within human beings: spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation, and he devotes several rules to explain

how we are to understand what is truly happening

within us in the face of these two states,

how then we are to govern ourselves under these circumstances,

and what that signifies for our life and the lives of others.

So it's not so much the fact of evil or violence but how we react to it, or the fact of being tempted, but how we conduct ourselves in the face of it, or the fact that God allows us to experience these things, but how we respond to the Lord and conduct ourselves in these situations.

To be more specific, when I suffer because of evil or am tempted or sin, if I trust in the Lord and welcome my trial, suffering, or humiliation; then I will certainly come to experience God's consoling love and mercy. However, if I am "tepid, slothful or negligent in (my) our spiritual exercises" (Rule 9) then it will be "through our faults (that) spiritual consolation withdraws from us." This is the first cause "for which we find ourselves desolate" (Rule 9) in the face of evil, suffering, temptation, or sin. God allows these experiences to "purify the intentions of our heart" so that we discover the degree of heat or cold in our faith and devotion to God.

The second cause "for which we find ourselves desolate" would be "to try us and see how much we are and how much we extend ourselves in His service and praise without so much payment of consolation and increased graces." (Rule 9) In other words, a second reason God allows us to experience trials, suffering, temptation, or sin and so find ourselves desolate, is so that we might discover the

strength of our resolve to love God for his own sake without looking for "rewards", and, discovering how weak may be our resolve, decide to love God with purer intentions and with a more selfless heart. By this second scenario, God allows our trials to make us stronger in loving, praising, and serving Him and our fellow man and woman.

The third cause "for which we find ourselves desolate" would be "to give us true recognition and understanding so that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to attain or maintain increased devotion, intense love, tears or any spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and so that we may not build a nest in something belonging to another, raising our mind in some pride or vainglory, attributing to ourselves the devotion or the other parts of the spiritual consolation." (Rule 9)

So, first God allows us to be tested and suffer, to be tempted and even to sin; so that we may better know the true intentions of our heart, discover our lack of resolve to love, praise, and serve God and do something about it. Secondly, God allows us to endure these things in order to struggle, resist, and grow stronger. Thirdly, God allows us to endure these things in order to discover the great joy that all good things - including our own life, love, and growth - are God's gift and the result of his gifts. The antidote to pride is wholeheartedly giving all the glory and praise and thanks to God.

The Lord needs us to trust in Him above all things, rather than in ourselves or our own efforts, in the power of others, or in the riches of potential donors... because it is only when we are weak or weakest that God can manifest his power, because it is only then, in our weakness, that it can become evident to the world that the only explanation for the wonders that come about within us and through our poor human efforts is that God must have done it, there being no other possible explanation.

The reason why all the glory must be given to God is that He needs to draw all people to Himself, since He alone spontaneously gives life and salvation. God alone is totally disinterested - not seeking anything for himself - totally focused on the good of the other. God alone is a "self-bestowing being" who doesn't just give things of limited value but gives of his own substance, which is of infinite value. Our human drama is that it is such a challenge for human beings to trust in God rather than trust in ourselves first and foremost.

In fact, that was precisely the scenario of the "original sin", the rebellion of Adam and Eve, the first human beings. They were tempted and seduced by the "stranger" to stop putting their trust in God, to trust first of all in themselves, and rather than expect good things from God, to go ahead and grab whatever they wanted. Why be burdened with gratitude to God when they could rely on themselves?

Well, we all now suffer the consequences of that failed logic, that lie, that untruth, which turned the focus of the human spirit away from the most awesome Being in the universe, the very Source of life and love, in order to narrow and "dumb down" the focus of our human spirit into a navel-gazing exercise which isolates and reduces us to fearful, neurotic, lonely individuals separated from others, from life and love, and from our origin and destiny, which are both in God our Creator.

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This contribution is available at <http://fathergilles.blogspot.com/2018/05/why-does-god-allow-us-to-be-tried.html>  
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## Tell That Fox [at Grace to Paint]



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

When Jesus was told that Herod wanted to kill him and that he should run away to another place, Jesus answered: “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ (Lk 13:32)

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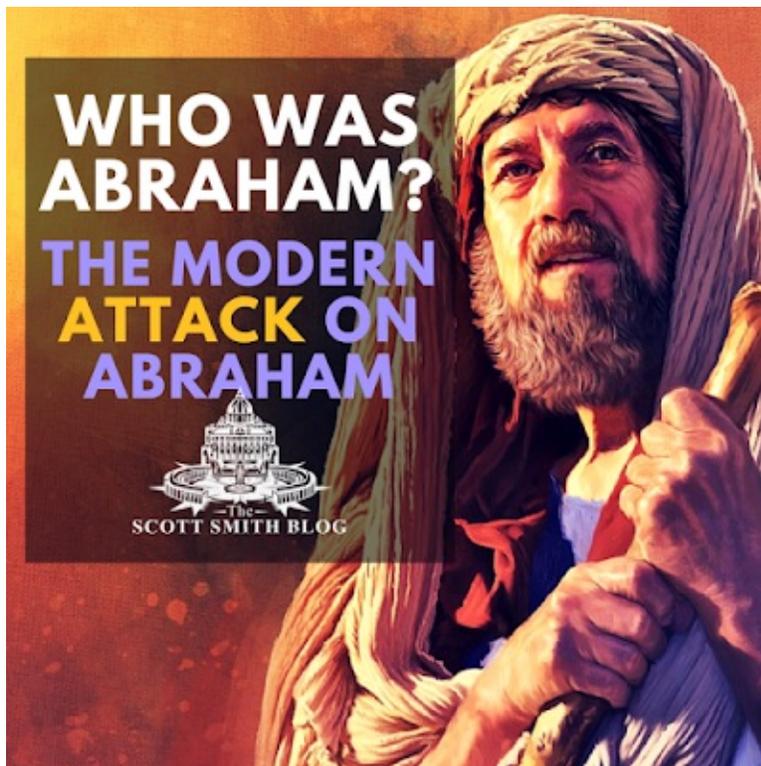
This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2018/05/25/tell-that-fox/>  
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The typical depiction of Abraham as a poor desert nomad is likely *completely wrong*. The archaeological and even the Biblical evidence presents a very different picture.

It is possible that Abraham was actually a much more interesting and important figure, *even before* he forever altered the course of world history.

You're not likely to hear this part of Abraham's story, though ...

Modern academics are trying their best to minimize and fictionalize every aspect of Abraham's story. Read below how archaeological evidence actually supports the Bible's account of Abraham.



This article covers all of the following topics:

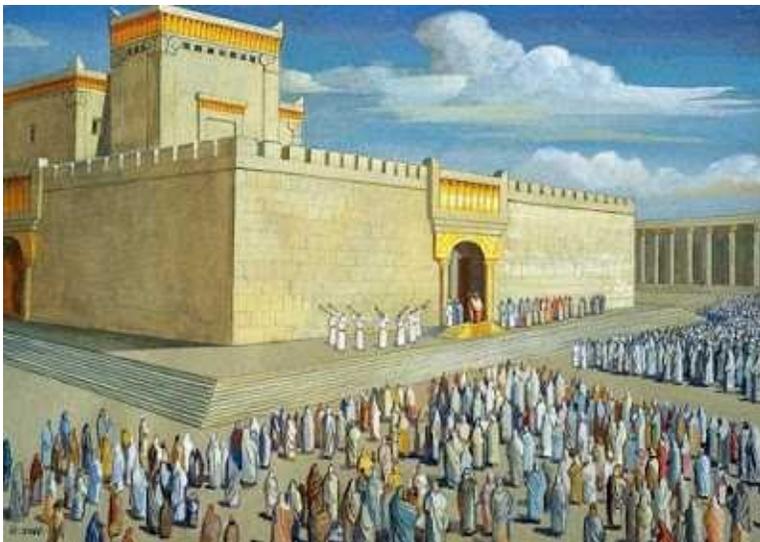
- ○ When Did Abraham Live? When was Abraham born?
- ○ Modern Attack on the Timeline for Abraham and the Exodus

- ○ Another Modern Attack: Is the mention of camels anachronistic in the account of Abraham?
- ○ Abraham's Timeline [chart] with Abraham's Ages
- ○ Who was Abram/Abraham?
- ○ The City of Ur during Abraham's Time
- ○ Cyrus Gordon & David Noel Freedman: Abraham, the Merchant Prince
- ○ William F. Albright's View: Abraham and the Great Caravans

## When Did Abraham Live? When was Abraham born?

First off, when did Abraham live? What were the years of Abraham's life? Working backward, we can trace the chronology of Abraham's life through the text of Genesis and Exodus.

Let's start with the Dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. According to [1 Kings 6:1](#), this occurred in the fourth year of King Solomon's reign or 966 BC. 1 Kings 6:1 also states that this was the 480th year since the Exodus from Egypt. The Exodus would have occurred, therefore, in 1446 BC.[1]



The Book of Exodus ([12:40-41](#)) tells us the following: "The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."

There were 430 years between Jacob and his sons entering *into* Egypt and the Exodus of the Israelites *out of* Egypt. This takes us to 1876 BC.

There were another 215 years between Jacob entering Egypt and Abraham entering the Land of Canaan, according to Genesis. [For a more detailed calculation see Footnote #1] This takes us to 2091 BC.

Abraham entered Canaan when he was 75 years old, so 75 years before would be 2166 BC, the birth year of Abraham in Ur.

### **The Modern Attack on the Timeline for Abraham and the Exodus**

This is something you ought to be aware of ...

Unfortunately, many modern scholars completely disregard the text of Scripture when constructing a timeline for Abraham and the Exodus. Most attempt to place the writing of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch much, much later than stated by the historical sources. This is an attempt to undermine the history of the Jewish people and Scripture, itself.



What's worse, there's some pretty contrived hypotheses floating around out there which attempt to fictionalize the account of Abraham found in Scripture.

Jean-Louis Ska, S.J. describes one such theory in *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, which is also referenced in the "Abraham" article on Wikipedia, unfortunately. [2] Ska states "we can affirm that the book of Genesis was intended as a reply" to the land dispute between rival claims to the Promised Land following the exile.

Did you catch that? The account of Abraham was added in a thousand years after the fact. Why? To settle a 6th century BC land dispute. A land dispute which occurred almost 1500 years after Abraham's death.

The support for this theory? A couple verses in Ezekiel.

Up until the last centuries, it was nearly unanimously held by historians and theologians alike that the Biblical timeline was correct. Why have scholars suddenly abandoned this theory? What is their evidence?

Camels. Anachronistic camels, to be more specific. In Genesis 24 and elsewhere, Abraham is described as possessing camels.

Unfortunately for Abraham, there were no domesticated camels in the Middle East until the 10th century BC, at least according to *one* [2014 study](#). This would mean Abraham's camels were *one thousand years* out of place.



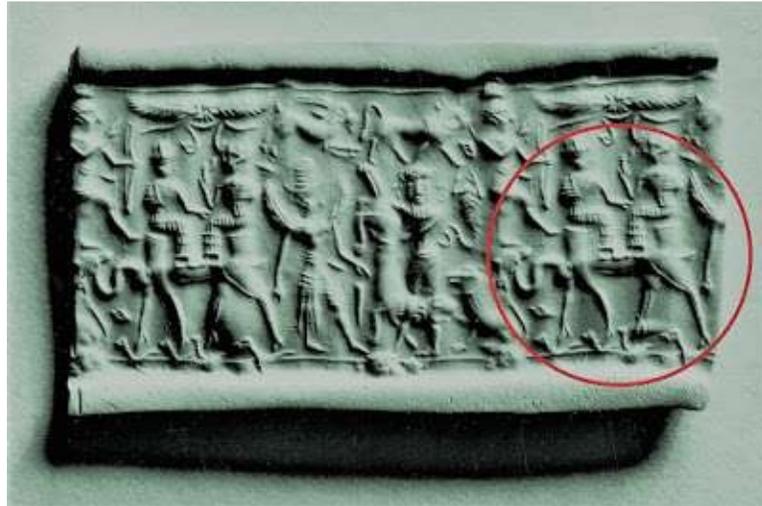
The study in question, conducted by archaeologists Erez Ben-Yosef and Lidar Sapir-Hen of Tel Aviv University, used radiocarbon dating to determine the age of camel bones found in a copper mining in the Arava Valley, south of the Dead Sea.

That the fate of thousands of years of camels should be in the hands of a few copper mining camels seems unfair. That's a huge extrapolation. Regardless, is there any other evidence that would refute this?

Easily. Depictions of domesticated camels have been found on ancient Egyptian artifacts dating back dating back to the First Dynasty (3100-2850 BC) and perhaps even further.

For example, a petroglyph dated to the Sixth Dynasty (c. 2345-c. 2181 BC), i.e. just before Abraham's *birth*, was found near Aswan and depicts a man leading a dromedary camel.[3] (Ripinsky, p. 139).

There is also this artifact from the lands Abraham would have traveled through to reach the Promised Land. This is a Syrian cylinder seal ca. 1800 BC which depicts two figures riding on a two-humped camel: [4]



And again, the figurine below ca. 2300-1700 BC was found within the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), a large region spanning parts of Afghanistan and three other countries:



Notice that the camel is wearing some sort of harness. Wild camels typically don't wear harnesses, right? Again, this shows that camels were domesticated in

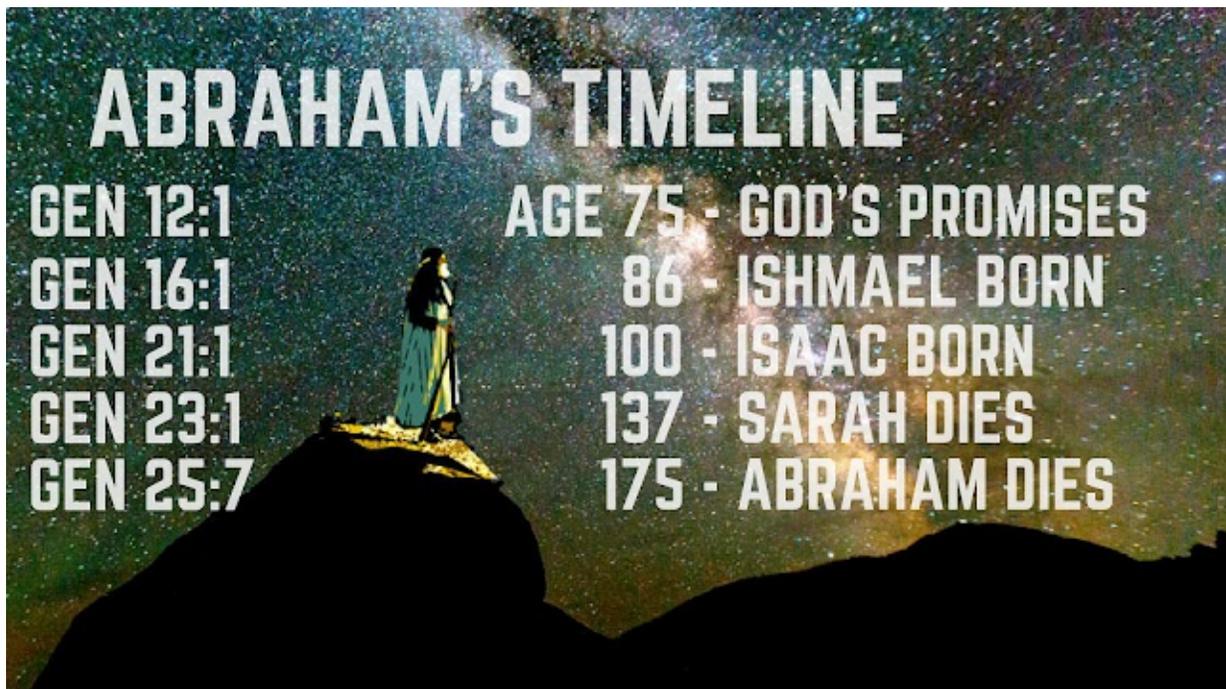
regions adjacent to Ur, Abraham's home, in Abraham's time.

Isn't it interesting that this figurine is made of copper? It was the camels used in the mining of copper that supposedly disproved the existence of domesticated camels during Abraham's time.

There's a lot more that could be said in this section. There is other evidence cited by the critics of the Biblical timeline, such as different forms of God's name, duplicative accounts of events, etc. These also do not hold much water ... far less than a camel, anyway. I'll be covering this in greater depth in a subsequent article.

## **The Ages of Abraham - Abraham's Timeline**

Abraham's entered into the Land of Canaan when he was 75. Here's a look at the timeline of Abraham's life between entering the Promised Land and his death.



## **Who was Abram / Abraham?**

Abraham was born "Abram." Abram didn't become Abraham until he was 99

years old, when God changed his name to "Abraham," meaning "a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5).

Abram was a tenth generation descendant of Noah, through his father Terah. Terah was the father of three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran is better known for his son, Lot.

Abram married Sarah, his half-sister, who was then known as Sarai. Sarah was also barren. Abram departed for Canaan along with his father, wife, and nephew, Terah, Sarai, and Lot, respectively.

## **What was Abram / Abraham's Role in Society**

We may think of Abraham as a wandering nomadic chieftain or as an ignorant, migratory Arab sheik. The evidence just doesn't support this.

## **The City of Ur during Abraham's Time**

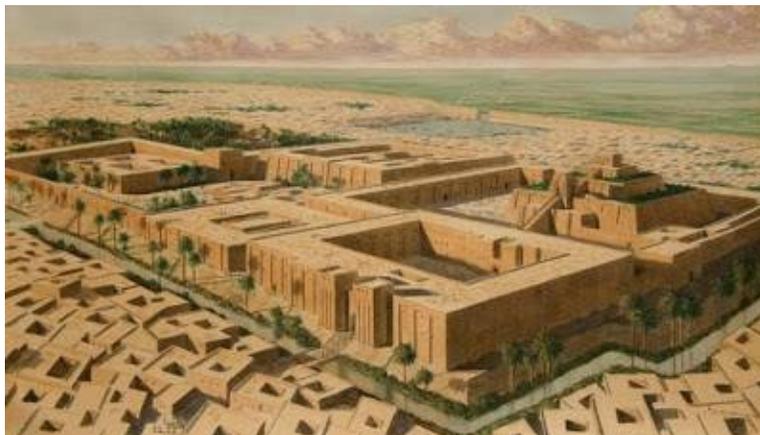
Abraham came from Ur, which was a very powerful place in Abraham's time. Ur was also a wealthy and sophisticated urban area surrounded by sedentary farmers, i.e. not wandering nomads.

Here's a computer reconstruction of Ur based on the archaeological excavations that have taken place:

2166 BC, the date of Abraham's birth, corresponds to the Third Dynasty of Ur. Ur at this time was at the height of its glory, it's golden age.



The empire was ruled by Ur-Nammu, the governor-king of a region roughly the area of modern Iraq. This would have encompassed the territories of Sumer and Akkad.

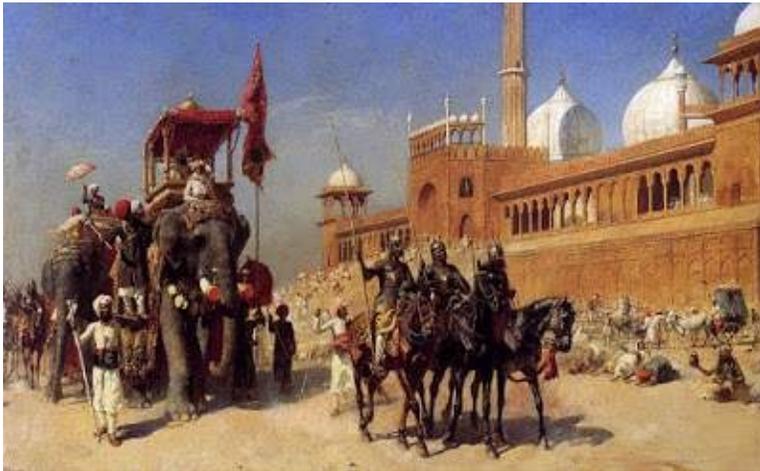


Ur-Nammu ruled the large area through appointed regional administrators. The state operated massive factories which employed thousands of workers and produced commodities like textiles, flour, and even *beer*.

The state controlled not only factories but international trade, itself, according to French scholar, Georges Roux.[5] Merchants were actually civil servants, employed by the state. Private merchants likely existed as well, but the best surviving records are *government* records.

## Cyrus Gordon & David Noel Freedman: Abraham, the Merchant Prince

Cyrus Gordon, an American scholar of Near East cultures and ancient languages, advanced the idea that Abraham was not just a powerful patriarch but a **merchant prince**. Using different data than Gordon, David Noel Freedman of the University of California also believed Abraham to be a "merchant prince" who belonged to the "urban culture and civilization" of Ur.



Gordon's theory is based on texts discovered at Ras Shamra in Syria. In one of these ancient texts, the king of Ras Shamra is complaining to the Hittite king about the merchants from Ur.

Gordon cites several verses from the Bible which indicate that the patriarchs were merchants:

(1) Abraham was able to buy land from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver, weighed "according to the weights current among the *merchants*." ([Genesis 23:16 RSVCE](#)).



It is elsewhere noted that Abraham was rich in gold and silver, cf. Genesis 13:2 and 24:35. The French Assyriologist Georges Roux observes that such silver was "used as a standard for exchanges" and was "hoarded by high officials and did not circulate unless authorized by the palace." [5]

How then did Abraham acquire so much silver and gold? Was he an official merchant of the government of Ur?

(2) The Schechemites gave permission to Jacob's household to "dwell and trade" and "acquire real estate" in their territory (Genesis 34:10).

(3) After Joseph released his brothers from prison, they relayed his message to Jacob. The message was, if they could prove their honest intentions, they would be permitted to "trade in the land" ([Gen 42:34](#)). Joseph's brothers weren't just permitted to buy grain from Egypt's storehouses; they would become *merchants* with Egypt. The context was a formal trade alliance.



It's no wonder Joseph rose so rapidly in the Egyptian ranks. He was descended from a line of merchant princes. His family had been negotiating trade in commodities for hundreds of years.

Gordon concludes that "the patriarchal narratives, far from reflecting Bedouin life, are highly international in their milieu, in a setting where a world order enabled men to travel far and wide for business enterprise ... Abraham comes from beyond the Euphrates, plies his trade in Canaan, visits Egypt, deals with Hittites, makes treaties with Philistines, forms military alliances with Amorites, fights kinglets from as far off as Elam ..." [6]

NOTE: Gordon dates Abraham to the 1500s BC. While this is still 600 years more recent than the Biblical timeline, it is getting us much closer. Also, Gordon provides Abraham with an historical context, rather than a fictional context as Ska did, above.

### **William F. Albright's View: Abraham and the Great Caravans**

William F. Albright, formerly a professor at Johns Hopkins University, arrived at the same conclusion as Gordon and Freedman while taking a very different approach.

Albright also dates the years of Abraham very close to what appears in the Bible.

Albright relied on the work of several archaeologists, including Yohanan Aharoni, Nelson Glueck, and Beno Rothenberg, who traced the ancient caravan routes of the Middle East. These caravan routes navigated the deserts of Sinai and the Negev circa 2000-1800 BC.



Not only that, Albright notes, the caravan routes led from Egypt, Sinai, Negev, Jerusalem, Bethel, Shechem, Damascus, Aleppo, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, basically most of the sites referenced in Abraham's travels.

Not only that, while still in the region of Ur, Abraham lived in the important commercial center of Haran. *Haran* actually means "**caravan city**."

Abraham, therefore, spent most of his life on the main trade routes of the caravans.

Abraham also had a very large entourage. Abraham fielded an army of 318 "retainers" in the battle recorded in

[Genesis 14](#)

(specifically v. 14). Along with their families, 318 retainers would mean that Abraham's entourage numbered over one thousand people.

**Conclusion: Who Was Abraham?**

Does that reshape your understanding of Abraham? From desert nomad to merchant prince is quite a difference.

What about the modern skulduggery with the dating of Abraham's life? Have you encountered any of this suspicious post-dating? I hope this article will provide you with some evidence to counter these attacks.

Please remember to comment below and share. Let me know if there is any more that needs to be covered in this section or if I've left anything out.

## Footnotes:

[1] *The calculation of 215 years relies on Genesis 12:4; 21:5; 25:26; and 47:9, as described on p. 11 of Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs.* Abraham entered Canaan when he was 75 and was 100 when Isaac was born (a difference of 25 years). Jacob was born when Isaac was 60 and was 130 when he stood before pharaoh. We add 25, 60, and 130 to get 215 years. Add another 75 years, and you arrive at the year of Abraham's birth. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs (Vos, Nashville) provides a thorough dating of Abraham's life based on Scripture (p. 11). Click [here](#) to purchase a copy.

[2] Jean-Louis Ska, S.J., *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, Eisenbrauns (2006), p. 169 (incorrectly cited by Wikipedia as pp. 227-28, 260)

[3] Michael Ripinsky, 1985, 71:139-140 - more Egyptian examples can be found [here](#).

[4] Barnett, Richard D., 1985, "Lachish, Ashkelon and the Camel: A Discussion of Its Use in Southern Palestine" in: J.N. Tubb, ed. *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Papers in Honor to Olga Tuffnell*, London, Institute of Archaeology, pp. 16-30, 16. For more on this, click [here](#).

[5] Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 3rd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 1962, p. 172-73.

[6] Cyrus Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *Journal of Near*

*Eastern Studies* (January 1958), p.28-30.

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## **Eucharist: The Gift that Keeps on Giving [at A Moment From De Sales]**

When Jesus refers to himself as the “living bread come down from heaven,” do we ever wonder what this really means for us? Jesus is saying so much more than words can ever convey. When Jesus talks about “bread from heaven,” Jesus is revealing His actual mission.

First of all, Jesus is stating why He came down from heaven to walk with us. Specifically, that He came to fulfill the will of His Father. Jesus came because God sent Him to save us.

Second, why is the bread called *living bread*? Since Jesus comes from His Father, the God of the living, what He brings is life. Our God does not dwell among the dead; He dwells among the living. Jesus, the bread of life, comes down from heaven, rises from the dead on the third day, and now lives with His Father and is here among the living.

Third, Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God and embodies God the Father. What Jesus says and preaches is what the Father says and preaches: love, compassion, mercy, and eternal life. These are sent as gifts to bring us home to our Father.

If we accept Jesus as the living bread come down from heaven, we also accept His Father, and His forgiveness. And finally, when we accept and believe in Jesus we also embrace His Father and gain the reward of eternal life. With our deep faith in Jesus and firm trust in God’s promises, we can always nourish ourselves in this limitless living bread.

However, the faith that Jesus seeks, and His Father desires is not a one time “Yes,” but rather a continual affirmation. We respond by living daily Jesus’ teachings and building God’s kingdom. Our response is to live like Jesus in all we do.

Nourished on this living bread, we can easily stay faithful and we can better trust in God’s promises, especially when our dreams collapse, or praise our God when our dreams come true. Eucharist keeps us steadfast, on healthy sunny days or when the sun seems to hide behind numerous dark clouds.

Eucharist keeps us open to serving in the Lord's name. When others need help, and we provide it, we fulfill Jesus' quest to seek the one lost sheep. When we see a fainthearted stranger and provide assistance without judgement, we are seeing Jesus.

In these ways, the living bread nourishes us and Jesus lives again through us. Jesus also knows we love Him, because what we do for the least of Jesus' flock, we do for Him.

Jesus invites His followers to feed on Him. He wants us to draw His life into our own everyday living. If we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we become a vessel of grace for others around us. Eucharist becomes complete when we connect with another. And we are living the great commandment: **“to love one another, as I loved you” – one person at a time.**

*O Lord, it is not the various kinds of food that nourish, but your word that preserves those who believe in you! (Wisdom 16: 26)*

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## Memorial Day - Missing In Action [at Quiet Consecration]

I have written about my father before and will not revisit the problems. Suffice to say, he was not a good father. As a girl child I suffered because of that but I have a pretty strong mother. If the most important parent for a child is the same-sex parent then I scored, and scored well.

Yesterday I visited his grave and left flowers. On the grave was a white cross with a poppy and a small US Flag. I placed the roses on his grave and cleaned up the marker a bit. I stood back and said a prayer.

Looking over the grounds I could see what seemed like thousands of the little white crosses and flags. Many men and women were being remembered that day.

I wondered if any had been missing in action from their lives in the way my father was while I was growing up? I know it is easy, nowadays, to dismiss what he was as being the result of PTSD. He was a combat veteran in WW2. He took part in the only battles fought on North American Soil. He was only 17/18 years old.

Yet his inability to love and be loved cannot only be the result of combat terror. I see in others the results of the kind of inner-self-focus that makes unselfish love virtually impossible. Not everyone there fought hand-to-hand combat in the fog on an isolated island off the coast of Alaska. Not everyone was beaten as a child. Not everyone has been Depression Era Poor.

My own battles with selfishness and self-centeredness are legendary (in my own mind) so I know that it is a part of the disease I have smashed into remission, just for today. It would be easy for me to look at others and decide that they, too, must also be fighting the same demon but that cannot be the answer every time.

So what is it? What makes the type of self-love necessary to think through every action one takes before taking it - how will this affect my children? Will it hurt someone close to me? What allows us the wisdom and prudence to know when we are taking or not taking an action for the right reasons and not as a way to try

and manipulate someone into thinking how fabulous we are so we can get something from them later?

God's Grace.

I have received Sacramental Gifts as the result of being Catholic. If I ask specifically for those Gifts to give me the strength, fortitude, wisdom and prudence necessary to make right decisions I will be granted that request. It is, however, up to me to ask and it is up to me to be open to that grace.

Without Sacramental Grace the struggle is a heckuva lot more difficult. With it, I can soar...and I want to soar.

Thank you for your service, Dad. I love you and I miss you.



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## If You Know What You Are Doing!

### Abortion

*"We argue that all human beings have a special type of dignity which is the basis for the obligation not to kill them, to take their well being into account when we act, and even the obligation to treat them as we would have them treat us. Indeed All human beings are equal in fundamental dignity,"* (Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *The Nature and Basis of Human Dignity*)

by Susan Fox

In 1984, in Cahersiveen, Ireland, a three-day-old infant was found dead on the beach on the outskirts of town, strangled and stabbed 28 times. He was named Baby John.



His community still grieves for him, while his parentage remains a mystery.

CNN International, affectionately called the the “Communist News Network” by many reasonable Americans, has resurrected this sad story in a bid to prove that women need to rise up and claim ownership of their Irish bodies, rebel against their society dominated so cruelly by selfish Irish men and the evil Catholic Church. These groups are responsible for women not having “freedom” —

“freedom” defined as access to abortion and contraception. Such freedom will make them equal to men, able to work and make loads of money. Hence a woman’s value lies only in how much she earns.

Based on CNN’s post, [“A baby’s murder opened a dark chapter in Ireland that still hasn’t been closed.”](#) Irish women now have the opportunity to get this “freedom” on May 25, 2018, when they will be able to vote to legalise abortion by repealing the



8th Amendment. It offers equal protection to mothers and their unborn children, guaranteeing both the right to life. If it is repealed, Ireland may soon have permissive abortion laws.

I agree that we should grieve over the life of three-day-old Baby John, but I find the inference that we need to legalise the murder of countless other little persons to make up for the loss of one infant is irrational at best. But such is the disordered thinking of CNN.

Grieve, yes, grieve for Baby John. But grieve also for the 60.3 million tiny Americans who legally died in exactly the same manner as Baby John, slashed, torn apart, sold for parts, having their living brain torn out of their face while their tiny heart still beat.

It is a fact that the largest U.S. abortion provider was doing just that until they were caught on film in 2015 by the Centre for Medical Progress. They were manipulating abortions, making them more painful for the mothers, so that a live birth would ensue, giving them fresh tiny organs to sell on an extremely

lucrative market.



This organisation, Planned Parenthood, is still receiving over half a billion dollars every year from the U.S. Government.

Sixty-six years ago it was Me in my mother's womb. Would you kill me? Sixty six years ago there was a doctor who tried. If he had succeeded I would have been deprived not only of my life, but 65 years of productive work. Countless lives I have touched in my volunteer work would not have been assisted, consoled or educated. My husband would have been deprived of 34 years of joyful marriage. My son would not exist. Every life snuffed out before birth has the same rich potential.

The condition of pregnancy is not an illness. The bodily support of a woman is indispensable for any human being to survive to infancy. Every child conceived has an absolute right to its natural development in the womb, the care of its parents, an education and the benefits of citizenship in a human society because he is a unique and unrepeatable human creature with its own inherent dignity.

He belongs to himself and not to somebody else. We don't believe in slavery, why would we support abortion? What has happened to our moral grit when the pleasure of two adults



trumps the life of a child? The fact we are talking about a helpless human being increases the moral claim of such an individual on our kindness and support. People just can't be flushed down the toilet.

A human being is not a word magnet. He is not a set of attributes or capacities, which define him as a human person. We don't suddenly become persons when we are able to live on our own sometime in our teenage years, nor do we cease to be human persons when we slip into a coma or go to sleep at night. The gorilla may have more intellectual capacity than a human embryo, but he acts on instinct. He will never be a rational animal. But each unique and unrepeatable human creature, existing for his own sake, not for the benefit of another, is a member of a rational kind whether born or unborn. Abortion turns the death of a human being into someone else's benefit.

The Spirit of God breathed into man at the beginning of Creation so that "man became a living being," (Gen. 2:7)



Pope Saint John Paul II [told the youth of New York](#) in 1995. "This is what

makes us different from every other creature. In our bodies we are a mere speck in the vast created universe, but by virtue of our souls we transcend the whole material world.”

“I invite you to reflect on what makes each one of you truly marvellous and unique. Only a human being like you can think and speak and share your thoughts in different languages with other human beings all over the world, (and then) through that language express the beauty of art and poetry and music and literature and the theatre,” the pope said, adding that human beings are capable of loving.

“Love makes us seek what is good; love makes us better persons. It is love that prompts men and women to marry and form a family, to have children... Every genuine human love is a reflection of the Love that is God Himself,” he said.

If we try and count every person in the human race today, we would become very weary, but each person is unique and contains the potential to grasp with his mind and his heart the whole of the universe. And something in us desires to touch Someone Greater than Ourselves, who loves us and looks out for us. A whole universe can be found in a single human being.

"There are ultimately no private acts. Everything we think, everything we say and do, however privately, shapes and influences us, our families and friends, and so touches the world outside," wrote Piers Paul Read in "Can Catholicism save Christian England?" *The Spectator*, March 31, 2010.



Today we face a demographic winter that will seriously impact future generations. The world's most advanced and emerging economies (China, India and Russia) are watching their working age population decline for the first time since 1950, according to the United Nations. People over 65 years are expected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history in the next two decades. This is a drag on the economy. Economic growth is a function of an expanding labor force and rising productivity. (Source: Wall Street Journal)

Every country in Europe has a below replacement level fertility rate with the European Union running at 1.58 babies born to one woman. Immigration will never replace the skill set of our ageing population. The wisdom is gone. This is the end of stable society.

We all begin in relationship. No one who is alive today came into this world without an interconnected, mutually dependent group of adults, who loved and raised him. A woman's unilateral choice made in desperation and fear divorces the baby from a relationship with himself, his father, his grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts, from the whole human race. Nobody has the right to make that decision for another human being. [Reasons for Abortion: Fear Tops the List](#)

Just as we ourselves were looked after, there is a presumption that we will look after our dependent family members. It's part of the covenant between generations. It is a form of freeloading to deny your children the benefit of support that brought you into the world.

This generation is plagued with free-loaders. And I don't mean the women who get an abortion. I have close friends who have had multiple abortions, and not one of them

willingly went through that procedure. Their mother, husband, boyfriend, rapist or relative forced them to have an abortion. That is the dirty secret. Abortion is rarely a woman's free choice. But each woman who has one, alone bears the guilt and depression that follows.

Even in economics, it is not strictly true that whenever a supply of goods rises, the value of each unit drops. The value only drops if the demand remains the same. With each new person, there is not only an additional good, but also a new demand for the good. No one else can satisfy the person's demand for himself.

If a person were only a good to be had by another, then indeed the existence of a second being just like him in goodness would mean that he could be eliminated. But if his goodness is for him to have, then no substitute can serve.

A child belongs to himself. His body is never his mother's.

“When a parliament authorises the termination of pregnancy, agreeing to the elimination of the unborn child, it commits a grave abuse against an innocent human being being utterly unable to defend itself. Parliaments which approve and promulgate such laws must be aware that they are exceeding their proper competence and placing themselves in open conflict with God's law and the law of nature,” wrote Pope Saint John Paul II in his last work, *Memory and Identity*.

And what would he say about a whole people choosing abortion through a popular vote?



“If man can decide by himself, without God, what is good and what is bad, he can also determine that a group of people is to be annihilated,” Pope John Paul II added. “Decisions of this kind were taken, for example, by those who came to power in the Third Reich by democratic means, only to misuse their power in order to implement the wicked programs of National Socialist Ideology . . . Likewise all those who were “inconvenient” for the regime were persecuted.”

“The cemetery of the victims of human cruelty in our century is extended to include yet another vast cemetery, that of the unborn,” he wrote sadly.

And I wonder, really wonder when I consider how incredibly sensitive that Germany is about their past, that they cannot see they are acting no differently now than the Nazi regime? The only difference is the people killed are their own children? Does no one see that Hitler’s suicide was a temporary setback? He really won the war of ideas.

The New York Times charmingly wrote about this Buddhist practice. Routinely mothers and even abortionists visit a special temple to console a tiny statuette, known as a mizuko jizo, which represents the baby or babies lost.



Quoting one mother, the newspaper said that she knows she did something evil, but she believes it was necessary. Still she seeks forgiveness from the child in the form of the tiny statuette.

"I think I've done something bad enough to be cursed," said Miss Yuka Sugimoto. "I'll be scared when I have my next baby."

"The fact that you have murdered someone will be with you all your life -- it will not disappear," said a 27-year-old salesman, whose words prompted a swell of tears from his girlfriend as they stood before a mizuko jizo.

The newspaper opines that despite the fact that there are no abortion protests in Japan and most people support the practice, "the signs of a pervasive but silent mourning over abortions are the tens of thousands of mizuko jizo, or guardians of aborted fetuses, miscarried and stillborn babies and those who died very early in life." They dress up the mizukos like little newborn children.

I find the practice interesting because it reveals a human population that recognises the personhood of the foetus. Technically they don't. They say the baby doesn't have a soul yet. But their actions afterwards say otherwise.

Now compare that with the jaded jokes about dead babies thrown around American abortion clinics. This is from [Abby Johnson](#), a former director of Planned Parenthood and author of *Unplanned*. The book is about her decision to quit her job at an abortion clinic after she witnessed a baby struggle against the abortionist's forceps on an ultrasound.

Early in her abortion career, she was introduced to the freezer in the abortion clinic holding the Products of Conception (POC). The dead children were held in the freezer waiting for the biohazard truck to come for disposal. "I found out the name for the that freezer ... the nursery. That was a joke. How had that become a joke?" she wrote.

Then she walked in on her supervisor joking with the abortionist in the POC lab. They said the foetal tissue floating in the dish looked like barbecue. Another disagreed, "I actually think this part looks like strawberry jam."

Such macabre humour is commonplace in an abortion clinic, wrote *Catholic Stand* author Leila Miller, quoting a number of other jokes. The normal outlet of guilt is remorse, confession, atonement, reconciliation and justification. But if this is part of your job, then one must shut down one's conscience. So they seek companions as guilty as themselves — not to become just, but to justify themselves, Miller wrote.

"Thus in the buildings where women's wombs were forcibly opened, where their living babies were shredded, dismembered, and thrown out with the trash, the reinforcement of evil is heard: 'We laughed. We thought we were so witty.'" Miller said.

When I argue on Twitter with atheists, some tell me that a woman must give two consents. She must consent to sex, or it is rape. She must also consent to

pregnancy or the child in her womb is an alien parasite that must be removed. I think, “If a child in the womb is a parasitic alien, then what are you? The same?” Only you are not. You are this wonderful unique creature who can contain the whole universe because your mother choose to keep you. And the rest, parasites! Throw them in the “nursery!”

Literally, woman are being assaulted by their own pregnancies. Doctors who treat normal healthy physical conditions as if they were deformed are practicing quackery, asserted Mary Rosera Joyce in her article “Are Women Controlling Their Own Minds?”

She continued: “Roe v Wade (U.S. Supreme Court decision legalising abortion) was not acknowledging a woman’s dignity as a person, but was adjusting to something construed as defective in her nature; her inconvenient tendency to produce unwanted fetal tissue as a result of her sexual contact with an infecting male...”

What is the purpose of the female womb? How can giving birth be a dysfunction? Pregnancy cannot be compared to rape. It is reasonable to expect a mother to carry her child to term. Parents do not expect to be physically assaulted and neither should the child.

And once abortion is introduced into a society, the way we think about ourselves changes. Every man will become an alien parasite. Could that be the reason we are facing mass murder in our schools, concerts and along the crowded roadsides? Have the elderly in the U.S. and some places in Europe been starved and dehydrated to death because they have become like the unborn — road kill? When is this chaos going to end?



## My Sources:

"Is Uniqueness at the Root of Personal Dignity? John Crosby and Thomas Aquinas" by Stephen L Brock. He argued that persons are individuals who exist for their own sake, not for the benefit of some other.

Instruction Dignitas Personae On Certain Bioethical Questions (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)

"I Was Once a Fetus: That is Why Abortion is Wrong," Alexander R Pruss.

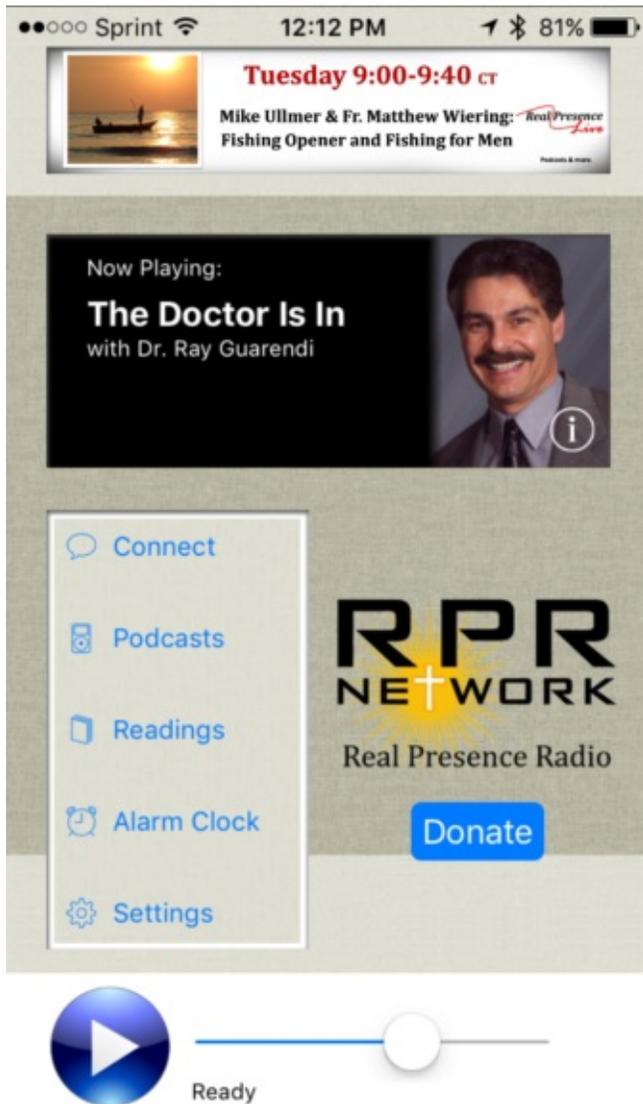
*The Ethics of Pregnancy, Abortion and Childbirth: Exploring Moral Choices in Childbearing* by Helen Watt

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This contribution is available at <http://christfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2018/05/of-course-its-murder.html>

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## "We'll be judged by our fidelity, not its fruits." Boom! [at Peace Garden Passage]



I'm an avid listener of Catholic radio. For our area, that means, more specifically, Real Presence Radio, which has two weekly local shows (for which I'm one of the hosts) and many shows in between filled in by the Eternal World Television Network.

For the past 10 years or so, these shows have been lighting up my soul with information, wisdom, and hope. I love hosting, and I love listening to the many other offerings. I've even, in the past year, begun to rely on the phone app,

which allows me to hear my favorite shows whenever it's most convenient.

Recently, I had clicked onto my app, and found that my favorite show, “Called to Communion” with Dr. Anders, was airing that moment, so I didn’t have to find the podcast version. As I circled our neighborhood on my nightly walk, I became absorbed in the conversations. Two calls in particular really moved me. I couldn’t wait to get back to find the podcast the next day to review and possibly take notes. I wanted to remember what Dr. Anders had offered the callers, and possibly share his gentle wisdom with others.

But when I found the podcast for that day, it was a different show. My heart sank. I emailed our local producer, who put me in touch with the folks at EWTN. It took a few tries, because apparently the show I heard was not the one that was supposed to be aired that evening — it was a mistake (or perhaps what one might call a “God-incident”). After I described a bit about the calls, they finally located it ([here](#)). I share this background because it impressed me how willing they were to go on this search with me, just so I could review the material that I’d found so meaningful.



I’d invite you to take a listen to the show that’s labeled, “How do I discuss Catholicism with non-Catholics?” that aired first on April 18. But in the event you don’t have an hour to spare, I’ll summarize the two calls that had me so ignited (starting at **41:33**).

The first came from Columbus, Ohio, from a man who’d begun his faith life as a Catholic, but left the Church, and in the process, led his whole family away shortly after the baptism of his now-grown daughter. In his later years though, now seeing the treasure he left, he has returned to his Catholic faith, and is grieved over the fact that his family is not with him in this journey. He sees his loss as everyone’s loss, and looks at it with regret. He asked what he could do, if

anything, to help draw his daughter to the Catholic faith.

Dr. Anders proposed “a third alternative,” between “doing nothing and trying really hard to persuade her.” He suggested that the caller lengthen his “time horizon indefinitely,” proposing that he be “intellectually open” to the possibility that his daughter might become Catholic, but also, that her “being drawn to the faith could very well happen in a way that doesn’t make sense” to him. “I would take some of the onus off yourself and throw it back on God and the action of the Holy Spirit, where it belongs,” Dr. Anders suggested. “I would relieve yourself of all anxiety in the matter, and entrust yourself to God and his providence.”

Furthermore, he suggested to this man that he make his principle focus on “generously living the Catholic faith” in his own life, not just apologetically to persuade people, but to seek “actual wisdom and prudence, growing in the virtues,” so that he can share the fruits of Catholic life with his daughter, in even very subtle ways. Maybe she will come to him with a problem, Dr. Anders proposed, and in offering his wisdom, the fruit of his generous Catholic living which come through the sacraments and faith, may end up being what helps her. “You’re building a bridge of love,” he said, noting that his efforts of loving in this way will not end when his life does, assuming he predeceases his daughter in death. “You’ll keep this up in the next life.”

Dr. Anders concluded with, “God loves her more than you do. He desires to be united with her in charity more than you do. He’s in control...we’ll leave up to God how those things are going to be dispensed for the sake of the salvation of the soul of your daughter.”

So beautiful, I thought. Worth repeating.

Then came the call from another father, from Boulder, Colo., who shared that he and his wife had raised their two boys in the Catholic faith, but have watched with sadness as neither practices his faith in a vital way. The man seemed forlorn, defeated. My heart went out to him. And then he asked a question that he admitted probably was “dumb,” but was an honest thought he’d had: *If they hadn’t raised their boys Catholic, maybe they wouldn’t have had anything to walk away from. Would that have been better?*

I understand this man’s heart. I’ve been in this same place. And so I was listening carefully to Dr. Anders’ response.

Gently, he assured him he had not made the wrong decision, that his moral obligation is to raise his kids in the faith and in the moral life to the best of his ability, not to ensure they use their freedom wisely, since the latter is out of his and his wife's control. "You only have control over the catechism you were able to give them, not their willingness or ability to assimilate that or choose to follow it," he said.

But what he said next really resonated. "Keep in mind, you're in confrontation with a very, very anti-religious and hostile culture. It's more difficult to transmit the faith through successive generations today than it probably ever has been in the history of the world, so it's *a great battle that lies in front of us, and we're going to be judged by the fidelity of our vocation, not the fruits of that fidelity.*" [my emphasis]

Wow. Wow! Yes, this is true, and I think on some level we know it, but at times, it can become lost. The earlier parenting years, we are so attached to the outcome of our kids' daily lives. It is a process to learn to let go of this very real responsibility, and let God take over where he's meant to.

"In terms of the hope for your children, of course there's hope," Dr. Anders continued. "Where there's life, there's hope, and God is the judge of souls, not us." He told the father that, of course, he had no way of seeing into the future. "You can't possibly see the end from the beginning."

Then he suggested something rather profound — something I have wondered about, and hoped for, in faith, myself.

"It could be...that the trial you are facing now in your own spiritual life — the realization that it doesn't all depend on you...that we're beggars and we hang from cradle to grave on the mercy of God...how we come to bear these things up in our old age and the degree of surrender to divine providence that we experience — may be in fact the means that God chooses to reconcile our kids to himself."

Wow, again.

"We believe as Catholics," he concluded, "that the merits of our sacrifices, including our willing surrender to Divine Providence in the face of apparent evil, that those sacrifices that we make have spiritual value that God can use for the good of his Church, including for our kids and our friends' kids."

Yes, what a hope! And one we can only entrust to the mercy of God to accomplish if he wills it. But we have to trust that he might.

I was blown away by these exchanges. And I know for any parent who has, in pain, watched his or her child walk away from a gift like the everlasting gift of faith, will appreciate the hope herein, and the important reminders Dr. Anders illuminates.

Thank you, EWTN, for going the extra mile to track down these healing words. Thank you, Dr. Anders, for your heart that is so aligned with Christ and His Church that you would summon these words from your heart, on the spot as you did. It's an amazing grace, and we are the beneficiaries, thanks be to God.

#### **Q4U: When did you lose hope, and then regain it, and how?**

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2018/05/well-be-judged-by-our-fidelity-not-its-fruits-dr-anders-says/>  
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## Prayers for Us [at bukas palad]



Year B / Eastertide / Seventh Sunday

Readings: Acts 1.15-17, 20a, 20c-26 / Psalm 97/102.1-2, 11-12, 19-20ab (R/v 19a) / 1 John 4-11-16 / John 17.11b-19

Sisters and brothers, do you remember when someone said to you, “I prayed for you today”? How did you feel?

My mother often reminds me that she prays for me. “I kept you in my prayers”. Sometimes, I smile when I hear this. Sometimes I say, ‘thank you’. Sometimes however I don’t pay attention to her gift of prayer.

How do you respond when someone says they have prayed for you?

“I prayed for you today”. “I kept you in my prayers” Do these acts touch you and me deeply because they speak of another’s kindness, care and generosity? Shouldn’t they matter because they express someone’s love for us, especially,

our mothers? Or, are we regretful because we took these prayers for granted and are not as appreciative as we ought to be?

To be honest, I don't spend enough time thinking about my mother's prayers. I am thankful I did to write this homily. I know she prays for her children and grandchildren, for family and friends. I know she prays for our happiness and health, for us to remain close to Jesus and steadfast in our faith. I know she prays for the sick, the dead and those needing prayers. Her frequent prayer is for peace.

Mom speaks often about the goodness of prayer and the need to pray daily. "Just pray" she says often; **"God answers our prayers"**. She has confidence when she prays.

I believe many mothers pray like my Mom does, with great faith in God and with fervent prayers for us. I think this line from St Paul's letter to the Philippians describes how they pray best: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

I believe this is how Jesus also prays for his disciples in today's gospel. Here is Jesus praying at the Last Supper: not for himself but for them. He is not teaching them how to pray and what to ask God for, like he did with "The Lord's Prayer". This prayer is different. He is praying to God for those he loves.

What does Jesus pray for? Not that life will be easy for them. He knows it won't because they are in the world and it is soiled by sin. Sin that leads to scarcity instead of abundance, fear instead of courage, injustice instead of fairness and selfishness instead of sacrificial love in the world.

So, Jesus doesn't pray that it will be easy for them. Rather, **he prays for God to support the disciples amid their challenges and that they will be united together, and one with Jesus and the Father through the Spirit.**

But Jesus doesn't only pray for his disciples. Immediately after today's scene, Jesus will say: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one" (John 17:20-21a). Yes, Jesus also prays for us. We who gather here, whether saintly or sinful, whether our Christian lives are in order or disorder. We are the ones that Jesus also prayed for then, as he continues to pray for now.

And Jesus prays for the same things for us: that we may find God's support and encouragement and that we may be one in fellowship with each other and God. These two things go together. Here we are to be nourished by Jesus, God's Word and God's bread; these are how God supports and encourages us to live. And here we are to deepen our relationship with Jesus; this is how we grow and live in Christ-like fellowship with God and neighbour.

Jesus' prayer finds its fulfilment in us when we let Paul's teaching in our second reading become our way of life. This is Paul's teaching: "if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us" (1 John 4.12). God's love is the strength we need to live. It gives us the courage to face the challenges to live in the world and bear witness to God's love. **God's love perfects us to live the Christian life.**

In our everyday life, Jesus' prayer resounds in the many prayers said for us. Whether these prayers are said by family or friend, by intercessory group or religious and priests, by those who love us or strangers who don't know us, they all pray for us like Jesus prayed for his disciples then: for God to protect us, for God's joy be our joy, and for God's love to be our love.

Don't we hear these hopes echoed in their prayers to God for us to have:

Patience to be a better parent or friend.

Encouragement amid the difficulties and challenges we face.

Courage to stand up to a class or workplace bully or befriend a friendless classmate or work colleague.

Consolation the face of the loss of loved ones or the end of a relationship.

Hope when we despair and feel all is lost.

Companionship at a time of loneliness.

Healing of body, mind, or spirit.

Forgiveness, or the ability to forgive another.

Joy in living with God.

You and I must learn to appreciate the love that gives rise to such prayer. We can by allowing ourselves to savour the goodness of those praying for us and the goodness they ask God for us in prayer. Yes, to savour and experience their prayer, not to simply read or listen to them.

I can't help but imagine that when disciples overheard Jesus praying for them, they savoured the goodness of his prayer and felt a little less troubled. Less troubled as they struggled with Jesus' impending death, Judas' betrayal and their fear of an uncertain future. Recognising their anxieties and concerns, Jesus knew that they did not need another lesson, another miracle, another example. **What they needed Jesus knew and he gave the best to them: prayer.**

Those who pray for us pray like Jesus: they know what we need because of our circumstances, especially mothers who know us best. This is why we should

never underestimate the depth of love and care of those who pray for us. Let us therefore pay more attention to what it might feel like and sound like when we overhear others praying for us. Perhaps, then we will know how high their prayers for us soar upwards to God because their love for us springs forth from the very depths of their being.

Let us also learn from them and from Jesus about how and what to pray for others. Whether we pray for them daily, or over a hospital bed, or at a home visit, or in school and work, or at dinner time and Mass, let us not underestimate what our prayers can mean for them and how they can uplift them.

This week, prayers will continue to be said for you and me, for our needs and our hopes. This week we will pray for our loved ones and those we know who will need prayers. And yes, this week, I will hear again my mother's reminder, "I prayed for you". All these prayers echo Jesus' prayer for his disciples then and for us now. **They seek only God's best for us**, like Peter did for the first believers when electing Judas' replacement that the first reading describes.

Yes, many prayers will be said for us. It's not that we deserve them. It's not that you've earned them. It's not that I ask for them. It's just that many good people want to pray for us, like Jesus prayed for his disciples. They will pray to God because they know we need prayers. And maybe we really do. And this is more than okay, isn't it?

*Preached at Church of the Transfiguration*

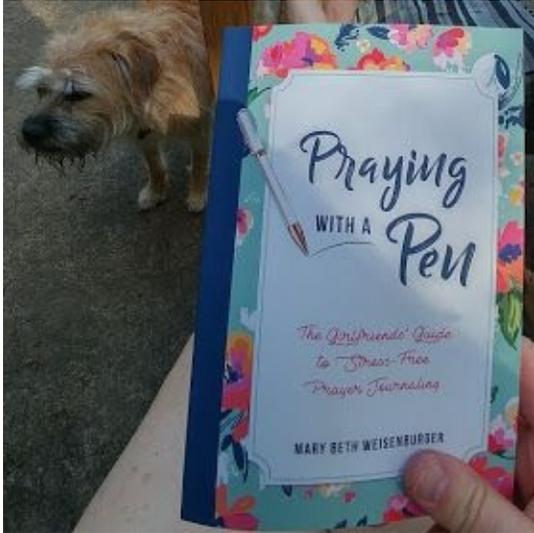
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## Learning the Ins & Outs of Prayer Journaling [at The Not]



I recently read the book

[\*Praying with a Pen\*](#)

by Mary Beth Weisenburger (Dynamic Catholic) to

**learn the ins & outs of prayer journaling**

. (Pssst! It's

*free...*

just pay S&H!!!) I have friends who are into Bible Journaling using artwork but I'm no artist. What I do love to do is write. I sat down with the book and a highlighter, ready to learn what I could about how to journal. I ended up only highlighting one thing from the book, and that was a statistic. It's not that there isn't great information in the book, but the big idea that Mary Beth wants to get across is that it's

*yours*

. You have to find what works for you and make it yours. Not hers, and not mine, but yours.

## My Evolution

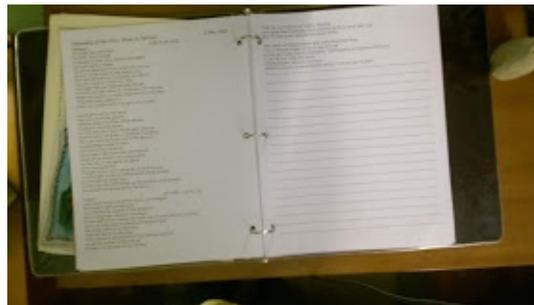
The

[Blessed is She](#)

journals for Advent & Lent were my introduction to prayer journaling. After my first one for Lent, I decided to branch out on my own. I went through the Mass Readings on

[USCCB](#)

for the liturgical season and printed out the Daily Readings as well as lines to write on.



I also had a monthly calendar in the front where I would write a word or short phrase as a "word of the day". I wrote names of people around the calendar who were in need of prayers.



I'm not gonna lie: that took a lot of time and paper & ink so I knew there had to

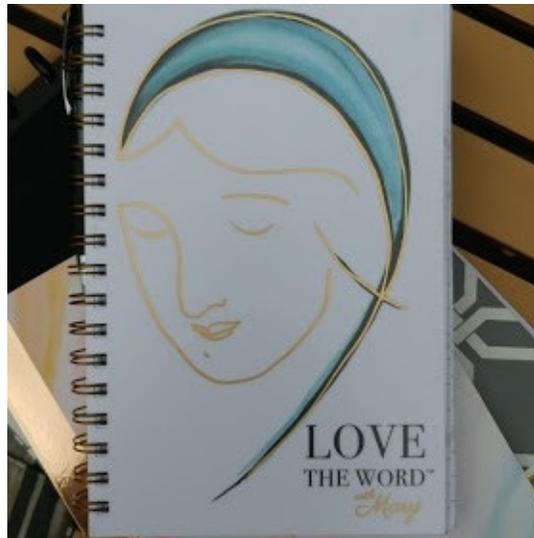
be a better way. I decided to buy an inexpensive paper notebook, read the Readings in Magnificat and journal that way.



I used my *Blessed is She Planner* and continued to write down a word of the day.

Today, I'm using the Magnificat for the Daily Readings. I purchased the [\*Bible Study Evangelista's Love the Word.\*](#)

While it's not perfect, it's pretty close. There are tutorials available but they don't tell you exactly how to use it, so I'm making it my own.



The only downfall is that some days the space for writing your thoughts isn't enough!



I still have my inexpensive notebook to write down thoughts and conversations. One of the most difficult things for me is to be able to actually *talk* to our Lord and to be silent. The being silent thing is the most difficult...the talking isn't quite so difficult! I take it into Adoration with me. Some nights there are pages, some nights I may not even get a fully formed paragraph. But it doesn't matter because it's *mine*.

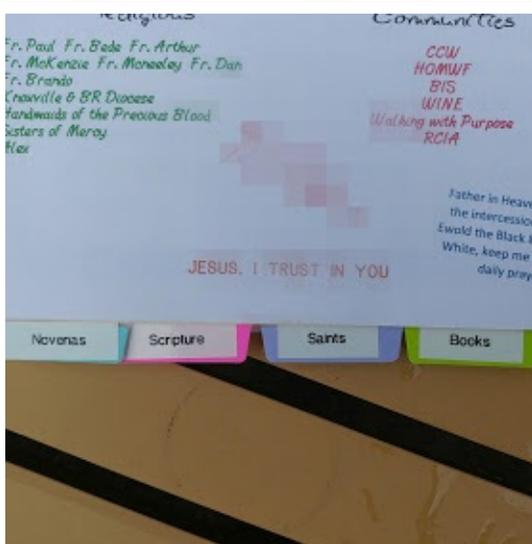
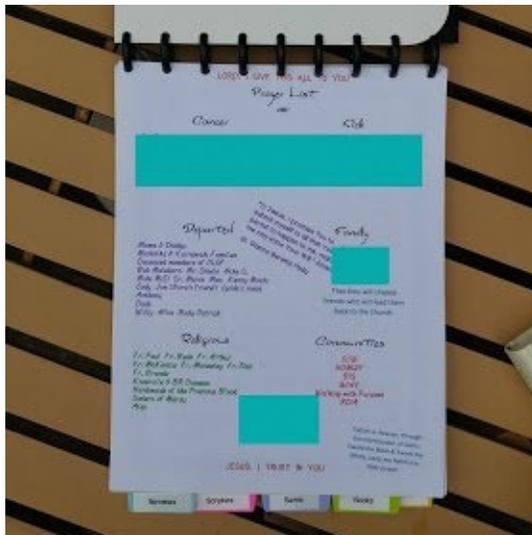
## **The Where, When, and a Routine**

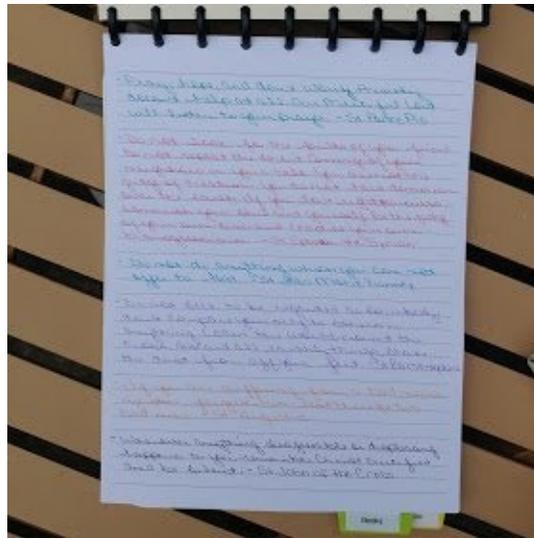
Mary Beth stressed the importance of having a designated prayer space...a space that's yours. It needs to be a quiet place, a place away from everyone else. You need to protect that space from little ones who may be curious or older ones who are looking for a pen. My boys are grown and 2 are no longer at home so this was fairly easy for me. During the school year (I'm a Speech/Language Pathologist for a school system) I sit in my chair at my desk in a spare bedroom. The downside to that is that my laptop is on my desktop and very often I get distracted by thinking about that email I need to send or about other things I need to do on the computer. Now that school is out, my favorite place is on the back porch.



I'm getting into a routine of walking the dogs (out of the house around 5:45 so we have the park to ourselves!) and coming back for "God time" on the porch. It's my happy place: the birds are busy chirping and singing and gathering food and the rest of the world is going about their day. In my little corner of the world, it's peaceful and quiet, except when one of our dogs can't decide if she wants inside or outside.

I pray the Liturgy of the Hours (which I am just learning...it's a bit confusing!) then my morning prayers as well as personal intentions. I made a notebook using the "disc system" (you may own or have seen planners using the discs):



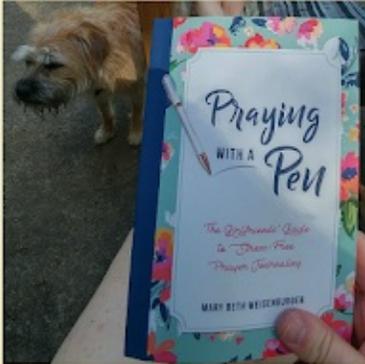


One of my Lenten "sacrifices" a few years ago was to wake up 30 minutes early to pray and read the Daily Readings, which started my whole journal journey. In the book, Mary Beth talks about how important it is to find your time. Since I'm an empty-nester, that was a no-brainer for me. I don't have anyone to get ready for school except myself, and most days my husband is still in bed when I leave for work so it really wasn't a big deal for me to get up earlier. In fact, I liked it so much that I continued to get up 30 minutes early for my God time. When I went through a period following that Lent when I didn't get up early I could tell something was amiss throughout my days. I just force myself to go to bed a little earlier to make up for that extra 30 minutes. Since I started praying the Liturgy of the Hours I thought I would have to wake up even earlier but choosing to pray instead of checking my emails and Facebook takes care of that wasted time.

So there you have it. That's how my prayer journaling has evolved and is still evolving. It works for me, but it may not work for you. There is no right or wrong way to talk to God. I've always thought that one's faith is a very personal thing and it's not going to look the same for everyone.

Do you pray by using prayer journaling? What works for you?

Learning  
the Ins & Outs  
of  
*Prayer Journaling*



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## The Story is Not Over [at Walking the Path]



### AND ONE MORE

This weekend the most recent series of Star Wars movies Solo: A Star Wars Story was released. I am old enough to remember the original Star Wars: Episode 4 released in 1977. It seems that this series will continue on with new characters or different versions of the original ones. Our world is populated with Star Wars fans young and old, but the discipleship passes from generation to generation as people my age have passed their dedication to the series to their children who then have passed their own faithfulness to their children. The story seems to never end nor does the dedication to the saga. As of early this morning 81% of Google users gave it a thumbs up. So what can we take from this?

Being a casual follower of the characters and even of the eleven releases, I can see the connection with today's Gospel in which Jesus gives the disciples their marching orders to spread the word and make disciples of all nations.(

[MT 28:19](#)

). We see this in the many people who as mentioned above spread the word of the saga to others. Some become ardent fans and others fall away. If one were to look at the various releases and the commentary on the religious connections they would spend hours reading from lay people to religious experts on the forces of good and evil, laying down ones life for another (Yoda), Darth Vader redeeming himself, and of course the saying, "May the force be with you." The last one is a running joke among Catholics who quickly respond to their Star

War friend, "and also with you."

## **CONNECTIONS**

The reoccurring themes of fear and courage resonate throughout the series as Luke is faced with the daunting challenge of leading the Federation against the Evil Empire in what is seen as an exercise in futility. However, spurred the spirit of Obi-Wan Kenobi he leads the Rebels on a successful attack of the Death Star. Faced with equally daunting odds of the chaos in our own world, including rejection of Church teachings, governments that support suppression of rights for all people, the incessant clamor for material items such as phones, TVs, video games, a social media culture that is more about taking down and edifying, etc.

Moses tells the Israelites in the first reading (

[DT 4:32](#)

) that there is no other God but the one Lord and this God is with you always even in the midst of difficult times. He enjoins them to follow the commandments and statutes so that they the people and their children may prosper. Rings familiar to some of the themes in Star Wars.

Paul also provides inspiration with his message, " For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but received the Spirit of adoption..." (

[ROM 8:14](#)

). I find that fear inhibits me from speaking out about my faith especially when people attack the Church. I lack the courage to promote the goodness of the Church especially when people recount their negative experiences with Catholic schooling or teachings in general. This is in part to wanting not to stand out as one of those Catholics who adheres to the teachings of the faith. I am like Luke in a way with much doubt. I don't realize the power of the sword as the spirit works in me.

## **THE SPIRIT IS AT WORK AMONG US**

We are not alone in this trek. There are many among us who hold faith that all things are in God's hands, and as such we are not to slink back and become

wallflowers. This being said the challenge is not to try to conquer everything at once which happens when we look at the big picture. The disciples we remember began with a small group. We know the rest of the story.

I was reminded of this when this past week when at our church's men's meeting of which I am a co-leader, there was talk of how to proceed on a regular basis. We have been on a hiatus due to lack of interest for over a year but were able to bring in Fr. Jack Stoeger to speak. He provided inspiration for us to carry on despite the small numbers and our own residing priest gave us some ideas to continue as well. His overarching message was to let go and let God. A moment of clarity for me for as a person who is a control freak and desires that everything be a raging success in order to appease my ego. Discipleship and the building of community is through the Spirit and most of the time I see that Spirit is working through others.

Fr. Jack concluded his talk with the final words that Jesus spoke to the disciples, "I am with you always." Despite the sufferings and challenges we might encounter it is the knowledge that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is with us. It then becomes incumbent that we take time to recognize this in quiet time and prayer. And just as importantly for me is to recognize that the Holy Trinity is not exclusive, but can be found in all people and in all things good. May the Force be with you.



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# Liguorian Series 1C: St. Alphonsus Advice for Becoming That Repentant Sinner/Saint a.k.a. How to Get to Heaven

Hello faithful reader,

It has been a while since we've been together to discuss the bountiful wisdom of the great Saint, Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Redemptorist order of priests in the Church. To refresh your memory on what we explored, from the first volume of his Ascetic Works called

## Preparation for Death

, I invite you to revisit

### [Part 1A](#)

dealing with those at the state of death who are not in God's friendship and favour, and

### [Part 1B](#)

of those who are able to die a happy death/in God's friendship and favour.

In this part, 1C, with helpful quotes from the holy Saint, and writing in his style somewhat, we shall explore how one avoids the fate of souls as in part 1A, and end up happy on our death beds like those in Part 1B. Where to begin? ...

*Keep the end in mind ...*

Before one can remedy their state and end up a happy soul on their death bed, one must have a purpose, an aim in life, or shall we say in modern times, an "Endgame." Should we go by the old adage, "eat, drink, merry, for tomorrow we die," we live our lives as a series of endless pleasures, maybe throw in a family, but to what end? No living soul or deceased person has come back from eternity to tell us whether heaven or hell exists. But should we live by the adage above, then there is no point to anything we do: education, careers, family ... even pleasure and people in life are all for naught!

Therefore, we **MUST** have a guiding principle in our lives to guide us before we can even journey to being like those happy souls.

### **We must begin with the end in mind**

, and that applies to our life's journey! It is clear, as explored in

#### [Part 1A](#)

, that the hedonistic, sinfully obstinate souls die fearful, unhappy deaths, begging for more time on earth.

*They know their end*

. With that evidence in mind, there must be something they fear ...

*hell, for eternity*

. They may not say or think such aloud, but their emotions and physical symptoms tell the tale.

So start with the end in mind ... the end that awaits you lest you choose the path of grievous sin! Begin with Hell in mind as such:

*"... if you do not now change your life, if you commit another mortal sin, the*

*Lord will abandon you, and, in punishment of that sin, send you to suffer forever among that crowd of fools who are now in hell ...* **When the devil tempts you again to sin, remember hell, have recourse to God and to the Most Holy Virgin. The thought of hell will preserve you from hell, because it will make you have recourse to God.** (*Preparation for Death, p288-289*)

Now, to just say that fear alone of hell will keep you astray will be foolish! Thankfully, we do have a ``testimony`` of sorts, those who HAVE decided not to be like the souls in Part 1A. Those souls in

### [Part 1B](#)

, die happy, relieved, calm, and ready for the eternal reward ahead that awaits them.

But how do we, become like those happy souls who have prepared for death well? Clearly, most of us aren't "blessed" with the disposition of a saint or are of the handpicked few that get in the Saint hall of fame. We become easily discouraged, thinking we aren't lucky, or have the "patience of a saint" for holy things. Also, we become even more discouraged, particularly when we observe the follies of those around us. We think of how many times our parents or grandparents strayed from the will of God, yet properly catechized about the four last things of death, judgement, Heaven, and Hell.

For those reading NOT Christian, obviously, our own mental fear of doing something bad or that we've done before, clearly isn't enough! We are but feeble and weak creatures with such a temptation and draw to sinful things that we know damage us physically and spiritually, but we do them even when we vow not too!

Thankfully, St. Alphonsus in Preparation for Death, provides us with three main tools to combat ourselves from falling back to black, and allows us to make it to the end, a happy soul upon our death beds.

## *The First Tool, Avoiding the Temptation/Occasion of Sin*

The first tool is quite simplistic in its understanding: Avoid occasions of sin. It goes without saying that if you are placed in the vicinity of whatever vice you are tempted to, you won't likely be able to withstand it. Whether that be your favorite junk food that you must down the whole container or bag for, boundless quantities of liquor that dulls the mind, or other such vices. It goes without saying, remove yourself from the situation, and don't put it in your home or invite it in. Alphonsus states the following on such avoidance:

*"... You must on your part labor hard to take away the occasions of sin, to avoid bad company, to resist temptations by recommending yourself to God as soon as you perceive them ... You must do violence to yourself: otherwise the threat of the Lord against obstinate sinners will fall upon you. You shall die in your sin."*  
(230.)

It is even worse if the very sin you must avoid is one of the flesh and/or sexual, hence chastity must be adopted quickly to avoid such sins:

*"Whenever the devil tempts us, let us place our entire confidence in the divine assistance ... to Jesus Christ ... to the most Holy Mary. We ought to do this particularly as often as we are tempted against chastity; **for this is the most terrible of all temptations and is the one by which the devil gains most victories. We have not the strength to preserve chastity; this strength must come from God ...**" (314)*

Should sins of the flesh be the particular vice you must dispose of, avoiding your favourite area where you "fraternize" with women and tempt them, or are tempted by them (even without intention,) might not be enough. In this, in our

modern day world of the third millennium, this even includes the Internet on computers! We will explore more on that in the third necessary tool of Prayer. Yet let's go on to another key tool, one that must work in tandem with prayer, and yet would be even more vital to be covered first: The Eucharist/Penance.

### *The Second Tool, The Sacraments, but Particularly the Eucharist*

The next, critical tool that St Alphonsus says we must embrace to make ourselves for for heaven are the Sacraments of Holy Mother Church, but particularly the sacrament of Penance, and the Holy Eucharist consecrated at Mass. We should not be surprised at these tools, as the Church's sacraments are the most tangible and visible ways Christ expresses Himself and His salvation to us on Earth, with each one uniting us closer to His Will and Mission.

Were he not to express himself and his Will and Mission of Holy Mother Church in this way, He would be as deists describe him, or detractors of the Church and Christ, as an unattainable figure atop His holy little cloud in a far away universe we could never find him. With nothing to guide us but our wills and flawed selves, we alone would never be able to obtain salvation.

In addition, why would someone go on such a journey as life without having the tools needed to travel through this land? Our Lord is not a cruel Greek "god of the Theban plays who creates and leaves humans to their misery or even uses them as playthings? No, for he is a Loving Father, who like a RESPONSIBLE father in a human family, provides sustenance for His children, his adopted sons and daughters of God. The father knows of this world and what is out there, and raises his children to become sufficient to survive, but also keeps loving and caring for them all throughout their lives.

Also as a forgiving father, he knows his children will mess up, with their imperfect wills, and temptation to sin. It is but part of the human condition. He knows that His children, in being tempted, will hurt him, and thus, in the sacrament of Penance, like the Prodigal Father for his lost son, he provides the bridge of mercy, the open door, for his adopted children to come home, and start anew in living that full life once more. By this sacrament we restore the Sanctifying grace needed to live in Eternal life after death, lost by Mortal sins, but also receive forgiveness for those lesser sins, including those that weigh us

down to be susceptible to mortal sins.

Hence, we have our sacraments and the Eucharist in the Holy Mass to give us those actual graces. It is both a literal, and a powerfully spiritual food, aiding us in avoiding and resisting those slings and arrows of temptation that lead us to sin, even against our concupiscent (sin-seeking) selves. St Alphonsus makes this point as follows:

*“ ... the second, is, to frequent the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist ... by the sacrament of penance the soul is purified; by it, it obtains not only the remission of sins, but also help to resist temptations. The Communion is called the bread of Heaven; because as the body cannot live without earthly food, so the soul cannot live without this celestial bread....” (323)*

Finally, there is one more essential tool needed in order to place one's self on the road to Heaven, and remain in the direction of that course: Prayer.

### *The Third Tool, Prayer*

While avoiding occasions of sin and reception of the sacraments are a great start, it is prayer that is the vital, third tool required to keep one's direction ahead to a happy death. Think of one who is attempting to undergo a change in lifestyle or habit, such as a diet/exercise plan. One might be able to remove sweets from the house, and might be starting great workouts which gives one an endorphinic high, but longevity is where most commonly fail. The slugfest of life and all those around us, work or at home or in one's personal life (save perhaps, those single people) will wallop us with blows, until our minds are tired and worn, and there we relapse and go off course.

The path to eternal salvation is no different. The Devil is particularly an angry, dark and vile creature, who will be more than happy to step up and be the one to challenge your resolve. He enjoys such temptations and throwing them on end. Will he stop? No. A non-biological creature such as he needs no physical rest, and can happily continue to throw constant barriers to you.

Further, one might find the "holy" or "Catholic" life, boring, lacking energy, agitating, a "thorn" in one's side that they might consider drifting back into whatever sinful and darkened path they had abandoned, or started to abandon.

Finally, one must be WILLING to ask of the Lord Jesus/God through prayer

what one needs. As always, God/Christ allows us our free will to conduct ourselves without him. It is no different from parents in a loving home (where they are responsible and not selfish, despite their flaws,) that will aid their sons and daughters if they ask them, even when said children are older adults. Nor is it different from trusted friends and/or colleagues. If you do not ask, they will not help. If you ask for help, that is when those you know can be called to act to help you.

How necessary is prayer to keep one on the path to not falling back to where they were? Vital! St Alphonsus in

P.F.D

, tells us how vital a tool it is:

``...

*He who prays is certainly saved; he who does not pray, is certainly lost. All the elect are saved by prayer; all the damned are lost by neglect of prayer, and their greatest despair is, and will be forever, caused by the conviction that they had it in their power to save their souls so easily by prayer, and that now the time of salvation is no more.*`` (306)

Furthermore, not just out of the sake of avoiding Hell (though you do need prayer for this purpose,) prayer is like the gym coach at your side, enhancing the exercise in the gym that you do, and pushing you forward to ensure you make progress in your exercise. He can't make you exercise, but he will be there to keep you persevering to the last repetition you can do. St. Alphonsus dwells upon past saints of the Church in his explanation of prayer in this way:

``.... St. Chrysostom says that, as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul is dead without prayer ... as water is necessary to prevent the decay of plants, so prayer is necessary to preserve us from perdition .... St. Augustine teaches that God gives without prayer the first graces ... but all other graces, and particularly the gift of perseverance, he gives only to those who ask them.`` (304-305)

Now that one knows to do prayer you are likely asking, what do I do? How many prayers a day and/or times to pray? Scripture already can answer the when, as per Luke and Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians:

``

**We ought always to pray`` (Luke 23:1). ``Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times. Pray without ceasing.`` (1 Thess 5:17)**

As for what specifically, the range of prayers varies from the traditional triad of: Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be; there are those of the Saints throughout the ages. There are numerous, self-composed prayers of laymen, diocese in the church, on cards, books, there is even just short one-two line prayers called "Ejaculations," which are small spiritual prayers with high meaning, internal intensity, and petition from the person praying them. There is exception, however, as when the sin is of

*chastity*

, as mentioned before in the first tool of avoidance, to throw one`s self at the mercy of Jesus`Mother, Mary, for this particular category of sin.

However, it is more important to focus on the "HOW" of prayer, as that is what will make or break the prayer being efficient, rather than which specific prayers you include in your arsenal. Firstly, when one prays, it MUST be out of a spirit of humility, instead of self-interest or pride. That is NOT the same as asking for necessary help with dealing with sin. Here, St. Alphonus explains:

*``... To pray well, it is necessary, in the first place, to pray with humility. ``**God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. (James 4:6)** God rejects the petitions of the proud, but does not allow the humbler to depart without hearing all their prayers .... This holds, even though they have been hitherto sinners.`` (307)*

In other words, asking for physical things or powers such as money, cars, houses, material goods, wealth, fame, glory, power ... unless it is absolutely in HIS will for you to have them for HIS purpose for your life, these prayer will NOT be granted. However, aid to conquer your sin, get through your struggles, and keep you on the narrow path to salvation, THAT is what the Good, Good Father will grant you, for,

``

*... spiritual graces, such as pardon of sin, perseverance, divine love, and the like,*

*should be asked absolutely, and with a firm confidence of obtaining them.``*  
(309)

Speaking of confidence, that is the second element as to HOW one should approach prayer. One must pray with confidence, not with fear and trembling, nor with lackluster effort, or sheer doubt what you ask will be granted (if it is NOT of selfish interest, as mentioned above.) Does this Scripture passage from XX:XX not bring this concept to memory, if you have been a faithful, weekly, Mass attendee, and even "church" goer for those non-Catholics?:

``

**If you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him!`` (Luke 11: 13)**

Thirdly, one must be willing to pray not just at weekly Mass (service), or just routinely at meals as of habit, but rather ... constantly, all the time when you can, wherever you can. St. Alphonus explains this with the analogy of the homeless beggar:

``

*... the Lord wishes us to understand that we ought to imitate beggars, who do not cease to ask, to eantreat, and to knock at the gate, until the receive an alms ... final perseverance ... is a grace which is not obtained without continual prayer.`` (308-309)*

This analogy is actually quite true. Where I work, there is a homeless, or less fortunate, older gentleman I must pass by on my way to public transit that I take to get home from work everyday. He is at the same location when he begs. He is a polite gentleman, who says "good day" to those who pass by, who is not aggressive in his panhandling, and even sometimes, will have conversation with those of us who stop to talk. Rarely is a day when he is not present there, but frequently he is, with ball cap in hand, dwelling on our charity. He has not disappeared permanently (yet,) and when I return to work next week, he will likely be there, in the same spot, begging once again.

THAT is exactly how we are to act with regards to prayer, though with one key difference. Christ, being the Good Lord, will not pass by you, the

*spiritual*

beggar, as most of us do without giving the beggar even our pocket change. When we pray to the Lord in earnest, he will grant those true prayer every time, albeit on HIS own time, and not always in ways we can visibly see. But in the case of perseverance, He will grant us that resolve.

### **CONCLUSION**

Three tools to salvation. All vital. These are the three keys revealed to us by St. Alphonsus in

P.F.D.

which release the locks on the treasure chest that holds the pearl of great price, our eternal salvation and a happy death, towards the Kingdom of Heaven for eternity. St. Alphonsus partially summarizes this on p. 230 of

P.F.D.

, which we revisit from earlier, but with some additions of mine for what is not included in the citation:

``

*... if you wish to recover from your illness, there is a remedy for you; however you must not expect a miracle of grace. You must on your part labor hard to take away the occasions of sin, to avoid bad company, to resist temptations by recommending yourself to God as soon as you perceive them: you must adopt the means of salvation by going frequently to confession, by reading a spiritual book every day, by practicing devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and continually [implore] her to obtain for you strength not to relapse into sin ...."*

... especially those sins of the flesh/of a sexual nature. In addition, seek the Eucharist in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass alongside Penance, which is the most powerful, strengthening sacrament against our temptations and those that the Devil and his minions will throw against you. Finally, pray unceasingly,

whenever, wherever, to keep one`s strength for the long journey to conquering those sins and temptations we must battle. In doing all this, we prepare ourselves for that happy, yet eternally promising death to endless eternity in Heaven, with God, the angels and the Saints, those lost loved ones who were fortunate to be there, and most of all, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pax Tibi Christi, Julian Barkin.

**NEXT IN THE SERIES: 1D - Miscellaneous tidbits not falling specifically under 1A to 1C.**

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This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.com/2018/03/liguorian-series-1c-st-alphonsus.html>

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## **The Final Question: Are You Prepared to Accept Children Lovingly From God? [at Martin Family Moments]**

Scene:

Her in a beautiful white gown.

Him in a handsome tux.

Their friends and family watching with hearts full of joy.

A priest begins to speak...

"Have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?"

"I have", answer both sweethearts, gazing into each other's eyes.

"Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?"

"I am", they answer again in unison, unable to control their affection for one another.

"Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?"

Silence. With panicked looks in their eyes, they both whisper "I am" knowing

that's the last question they have to answer before they can get married already. Let's just focus on our marriage, they think, we will worry about starting a family later.

Errrrrrr, wrong answer! Marriage is ordered to family, but fear not, young couple! It's not as scary as you think. Let's break it down...

## **Are You**

You. Plural. Now that you're married, together you're one and these decisions need to be made as such.

## **Prepared**

This is a reminder that married couples must always be ready to become parents.

It doesn't mean you have to try and conceive a baby on your wedding night.

It doesn't mean you have to set up the crib when you return from the honeymoon, it doesn't even mean you have to be financially able to buy the crib.

It also doesn't mean that you're guaranteed a baby...ever.

It just means that we need to be ready for a baby to come if we do *the one*

*married act* that makes babies. We say yes to each other fully, and sometimes that little yes needs a name in 9 months. Simple.

## **To Accept**

Here's where we realize that children are a gift, a blessing. We don't EXPECT them, we ACCEPT them. This tells the married couple that they must always be open to the possibility of new life during their whole marriage. It does not mean that everyone has to have a huge family or a small family. What it means is that we need to let go of our plans, and let Him plan our family for us. We need to work with the cycle of fertility He gave us and remember that we are called to always be open to life even during the times when adding a new family member might seem impossible. If we are willing to talk the talk, we have to be able to walk the walk.

## **Children**

Not puppies, not kittens. I don't know about you, but I've never birthed a puppy. You can love your pets, but they're not your children and they are not the result of married love. Whether or not you can actually physically have children is not the issue here, it's being open to potential children, through birth or adoption.

Sometimes babies are surprise (ask me how I know!) and sometimes they can seem overwhelming, but we always receive them with love. We will all go through plenty of feelings - scared, confused, upset, bitter, elated - when we find out a new child is coming and that's ok! We will most definitely adore that baby when he/she is born. It's a love like no other.

## **From God**

God designed the human bodies in such a way that when a man and a woman have sex during a fertile time of the woman's cycle, without any type of barrier between them or suppressing their fertility, and everything is in working order, a baby can be conceived. God didn't have to create humans this way. He could have just created us as He did Adam and Eve (poof, there you are!), but he allowed us to be part of His creation plan. He lovingly blesses us with children when we lovingly give ourselves freely to our spouse. Life should always come from Him in the natural ordered way. It's hard not to get what we want when we want it, but only He knows what we truly need for eternal happiness.



And that's it in a nutshell! First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the possibility of babies in baby carriages :)

Change can be scary, but becoming parents is seriously the greatest gift ever. We like it so much that we can't stop! Ha! I want to hug every soon-to-be-married couple and let them in on the secret that children are such a blessing to a marriage and family is the root of much happiness in this lifetime.

Don't be scared of it and don't think there's only one size fits all for families. I would never, ever think that having a big family is the way it's supposed to be for everyone. I would also never think that having a couple kids is the way it's supposed to be either. Some of us may have to suffer from infertility. Some of us may struggle with super fertility. We just don't know the future. Let God into your marriage and discern with your spouse what He's calling you to receive...and that my dears, will make you happy!!

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This contribution is available at <http://martinfamilymoments.blogspot.com/2018/05/the-final-question-are-you-prepared-to.html>  
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## The Mission of Saint Thorlak



### **Mission Objective #6: To encourage people to live as God sees us**

Having spent several weeks reflecting on how God sees us, we finally get to put things in action. As Missionaries of Saint Thorlak, we are called to encourage others to live as God sees us. True to our style, let us take this objective apart in order to understand it fully.

To encourage: At the root of this word is "-COR," referring to the innermost feelings of the heart. The prefix "EN-" suggests the action *to put in* . We are called to put the idea of how God sees us into the innermost feelings of our hearts, and the hearts of those around us. Wow.

To encourage people to live as God sees US. Not how God sees *them*, but how God sees *us*: ourselves, and, collectively, every person, as His beloved children.



A good number of us have difficulty believing that God is in love with us and longs for a relationship with us. Traditional logic says this is a matter of self-esteem. The messages of our culture constantly hammer us down, and the temptation to compare and compete with one another pervades nearly everything we do. Self-esteem is an important and valid reminder to each of us that we are valuable as ourselves, and that it is healthy to acknowledge our talents, assets and achievements. To the degree we are willing to believe in our worth, we are able to celebrate our uniqueness, abilities and station in life. With enough trust and practice, everyone can learn to believe they are worthy of being loved - so the logic goes.

Yet there are many among us who have reasonably good self-esteem, and who genuinely believe God desires a relationship with us... and still hold back. Why? If we believe we are worthy, and we crave the thrill of unconditional acceptance, why hold back?



Fear.

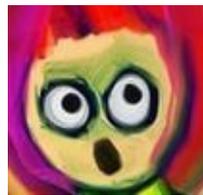
Consider this personal testimony:

"I have often had the experience where I will get together with a friend, or speak with someone about a business matter, or even have an ordinary phone conversation, and I am well enough at ease that I engage fully and sincerely with that other person. I feel genuinely connected and comfortably myself. But then, after it is over, a surge of agitation hits me. It feels like part anger, part terror - toward myself. It is not at all the same as beating myself up for not doing a good enough job or wishing I had said things differently; I've done that enough times, and that's not what I'm doing here. This is like a need to flee. The more

intimate the connection, the greater this terror afterward. It has puzzled me for years. If it is not low self-image or regret over anything I said, what is it? I have thought about it, prayed about it, and thought about it some more, and it makes no sense to me.

"I prayed about this specifically one day not too long ago. As I did, a memory came to me from when I was a very small child. My father at that time had a full, bushy beard. One day, he shaved his face clean without telling me he was going to do it. When I saw how different he looked, I panicked. I screamed at him in anger - *GET AWAY FROM ME!!! YOU'RE NOT MY DADDY!!! WHO ARE YOU?* His stature was the same, his eyes were the same, but his face had changed, and I was terrified.

"I re-lived that memory vividly, and then I realized the terror I felt that day was the same way I feel after I get close to someone. It occurred to me that I appear differently to other people than I appear to myself. It dawned on me that the more



other people know me, accept me, like me, value me, love me - the more surprised I am to realize their perspective, because they are reflecting qualities to me that I do not routinely think about in myself. Likewise, when God makes a connection with me through them, it reveals how He sees me!



“It is not self-loathing at all - it is fear of seeing the difference between the way I imagine I look, and the way others perceive me. All this time I have tried to help myself by working on self-esteem, and it never got any better. What I needed was to see that my reaction is just a startle reflex. There is no stranger here! It's just my own reflection through God's eyes.

“I thought more about that memory and recalled that my terror subsided as soon as I heard my father's voice, *'It's okay, it's only me!'*. Such relief came over me when I heard him speak and recognized who he really was. So, too, does relief flood me now as I sense Our Father's voice reassuring me

in prayer, *'It's okay, it's only Me.'* "

Awareness is the first step to seeing that fear is not an absolute barrier, but is more like a countercurrent we ford as we choose the course that will lead us to the realization of our true selves in God's eyes.

Our ability "to encourage people to live as God sees us" can only come after we have taken the leap of belief ourselves. Only then can we know the moments between certainty and trust, and how long it takes for that wave of unknowing to subside. Our Mission is not to change minds or change behavior. Our Mission is to reassure ourselves and those around us that the resistance we feel toward seeing ourselves is just the startle of realizing who we really are in God's eyes; that, *"it's okay, it's only me."*



**Pray:** Heavenly Father, help me to hear and recognize Your voice until I no longer feel afraid.

**Contemplate:** What obstacles in my spiritual life are rooted in fear?

**Relate:** Am I ever afraid to see my reflection through others' eyes? Notice...

and, pray about it.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.mission-of-saint-thorlak.com/mission-activities/missionary-thought-for-the-week-of-may-21-2018-its-okay-its-only-me>  
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## God is mercy, God is love... but God is also Justice. [at Ordinary Time]

I was going to save the following homily for a future date. The more I tried to write the more it felt as if I were making a sermon out of it, instead of giving the message God was trying to speak to me in the readings. So here it is.



My grandfather Jim had this beautiful farm in the mountains. When he first got the land, it was nothing but weeds, rocks, and briars. Over the years he slowly tamed that land. There were big piles of stones in the forest that my brother and I used to climb on. All of those rocks he had moved by hand out of the fields to prepare them. It was such a beautiful place too. Acres of manicured grass in the middle of the forests of Virginia. An apple orchard, a grape arbor, a garden filled with vegetables, not to mention all the animals. He would take us for a tour every time we came by. Letting us hold the baby chickens, ducks, geese, and doves. There was even this spectacular overlook that he had made with a firepit and some chairs. You could sit and watch the sunset over the lake hundreds of feet below. It was a beautiful place, a peaceful place.

A few years ago my grandfather passed away, and my grandmother was placed in a home. The executor of the estate sold the land to someone outside of the family, and things began to change. We were no longer allowed to visit. It wasn't in the family anymore. I could see it from my dad's house, less than a mile from his back porch. There was a real sense of loss. A sense of sadness that it was no longer ours. It was now someone else's. I watched as other people walked those paths and climbed those rocks. There was a pain in my

heart that I can't really describe in words. Not jealousy. Just longing. I think that's how the people must have felt in hearing this parable from Jesus. Fear that they might go through something like that. That they might long for something, they could never touch again.

This parable could bring that same fear out in us, and maybe it should. We too are now responsible for the vineyard of the Lord. Just like my grandfather worked long, hard hours clearing the land to make it a beautiful place; we are supposed to be using the gifts we have been given to produce fruit. Each of us is a unique person with our own set of talents. We are supposed to use them to make this world a better place, to show God's love for everyone in it. How many times have we, like the people in the parable, been sent someone made in the image of Christ and treated them poorly?

Sure, we haven't killed anyone. We didn't beat them or throw them out. But what about with our words? Have we ever beaten someone verbally? Or killing their good name with slander? Have we ever rejected someone who has asked for help? Earlier we also said we can do wrong with our thoughts too. Have we thought poorly of someone? Been jealous or angry? Annoyed that someone doesn't do things the way we want or has some habit that just gets under our skin? I know at times I am guilty of all these things. That parable doesn't leave much hope. It seems hard.

How are we to make sense of it? If God is mercy and love, how can he take away the vineyard? He is mercy. He is love, indeed. So much so that here in a few minutes we are going to celebrate the gift that makes it possible for people so unworthy to stay working in the vineyard. God has indeed sent His Son to us time and time again, in the Holy Eucharist. Even though we continue to do exactly what they were guilty of, He gives us another chance. It's as if he is saying "I am sending my son, surely they will treat him better this time." As the priest elevates the precious consecrated host in a few moments, realize that this right here is God saying to you "I want to see your fruit."

Again I say, God is mercy. God is love. But God is also justice. Ronda Chervin once said "If you want to see the infinite love and mercy of God, look at Heaven. If you want to see His Justice, look at Hell." Now, in this life, at this moment is the time to start producing a harvest.

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This contribution is available at <http://the-friar.blogspot.com/2018/06/god-is-mercy-god-is-love-but-god-is.html>  
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## It's Not About You [at Deacon Allen Tatara]

A while back, I was having a particularly rough day. At the end of a long, frustrating afternoon, I laced up my tennis shoes and headed out for a long walk. I needed to vent, and God was my best option. I spent most of the two-mile trail near my home expressing an entire grocery list of complaints.

The Bible says we're supposed to offer up our concerns to God, so I thought I'd super-size my offering. I poured out my heart in what became a thirty-minute gripe fest. As I rounded the final turn toward my driveway, I ended my tirade with a groan that resembled more of a "So there!" instead of an "Amen."

As I briefly paused at the bottom of my driveway, I felt one thought that flooded my mind: it's not about you.

That thought was so loud and clear that I knew it was God speaking to me. And to be honest, they weren't the words I wanted to hear. God was reminding me that all my concerns and complaints, all my worries and frustrations were centered on one person: me.



In Scripture, whether we are looking at the Visitation, Annunciation, the Wedding in Cana or other events, Mary says very little, but her words are packed full of meaning. The one thing that underscores all of her communication is that it's not about her – it's about Him.

Her only desire was to be known as a lowly servant – a handmaid, if you will – of God. She wanted nothing more and would settle for nothing less than total

surrender to Him.

What difficulties are you facing in your life? What conflicts do you find in your workplace, your family, or among your friends? Could it be that God is using these as a gentle reminder that it's not about you and cause you to grow and experience the transforming power of God in your life?

Let us pray that "It's not about you" rolls through our minds daily. Let us feel the invitation of God's Spirit to change our attitudes and behaviors so that we become less self-focused and begin to see things as God sees them.

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This contribution is available at <http://deaconallen.com/its-not-about-you/>  
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## **Our Lady of Good Success Teaches Us How to Respond to the Crisis in the Church.**

An article written for the website [Rosary to the Interior: For the Purification of the Church](#) discusses the fourth Joyful Rosary mystery, the Presentation of Jesus / Purification of Mary, in the light of the prophecies of Our Lady of Good Success (OLGS). These Church-approved apparitions and revelations were made to Mother Mariana de Jesus Torres (1563-1635), a Conceptionist religious in Quito, Ecuador. Unlike many of the recent articles on OLGS, its primary focus is not on the dramatic prophecies that describe the current crisis in the Church. Rather the emphasis is on the hope for final victory, and God's "Secret Designs" on how attain it, as indicated by Our Lady. The lengthy article provides an excellent overview, with appropriate details, of the entire drama of the Conceptionist Nuns of that era, interwoven with the apparitions, teachings and messages of Jesus and Mary. The basic principle of God's "Secret Designs" according to the article is this: "God's promise of Our Lady's Triumph (and thus the Church's) will be fulfilled through the formation of souls who, with the graces which make this possible, will live a profound victimhood in imitation of Christ – a victimhood which they will suffer at the hands of both good and evil persons." The laity are called to participate in this victimhood, and the key to this victimhood is remaining truly and fully united with the Church no matter what sufferings or deprivations this may bring.



From a study of the OLGs apparitions, the author states that rendering full obedience to the Vicar of Christ, after understanding the limits placed upon the powers of the Papacy, “is not at all inconsistent with criticism of a Pope’s personal errors in regard to doctrines and their implications, nor is it inconsistent with refusing to follow these errors and policies if they are contrary to the Gospel.” He bases his conclusion on the way the Conceptionist Nuns offered their “victimhood” that was suffered at the hands of their Superiors, who wanted to mitigate, weaken, and relax the Rules of the convent. Rather than rebelling, the observant nuns accepted the lawful jurisdiction of those over them, however unjust it was, even to the point of being cast into the convent prison. “For those who choose not to abandon the Cross, however, it is within the depths of this suffering that is to be found the grace of victory.”

### **Instead of Despair, there is Hope.**

Applying this to the Church of today, he writes: that “the rejection of obedience to the Pope in his government and discipline of the Church entails the loss of that grace which is the very life-blood of the Church. Such is the position in which such groups as the SSPX and the Sedevacantists find themselves. They are depriving both themselves and the Church of the grace whereby Our Lady’s Triumph will be achieved.” These choices and others which revolve around defiance of the pope, the validity of his election, or plotting to depose him, assert at least implicitly that “God does not know what He is doing, that God is not trustworthy in his promises, or that God has failed.” The jurisdiction of the Church hierarchy must be accepted, we must remain within the fold, but we

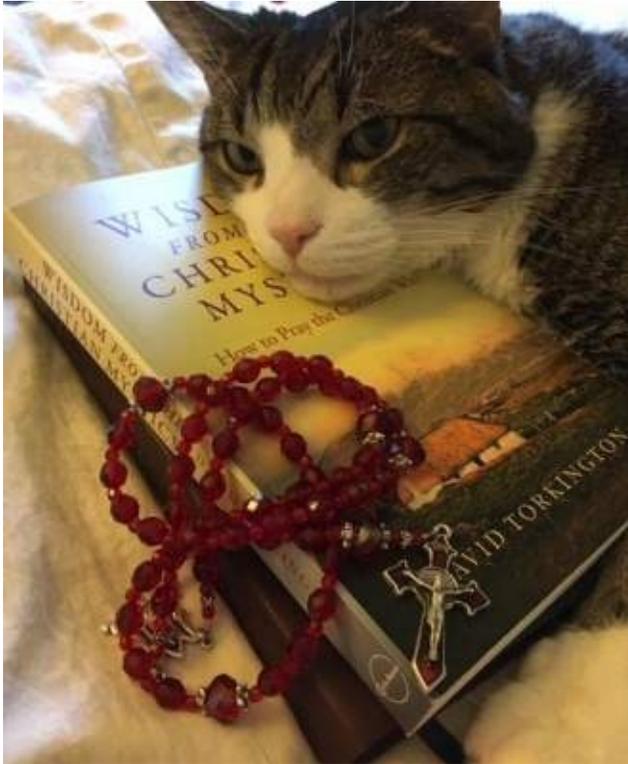
should not be silent in the face of Modernist fantasies that are taught or proposed, which seek to mitigate and relax our obligation to follow the teachings of Christ. “If, on the other hand, we unite ourselves to the Heart of Mary, now pierced with the sword of sorrows and suffering necessary for the purification of the Church and the triumphal re-entry of the Light of Christ into his temple, then our Lady’s Immaculate Heart will not only be our refuge and the way that will lead us to God, but the means by which we also may become true vessels of merciful love and full participants in God’s “secret designs” of mercy for a suffering, sinful world. Unquestionably, the primary means which Our Lady has given us to effect this spiritual childhood in service to Her Triumph is the Rosary.” I highly recommend reading [this very important article](#) in its entirety.



My books on the Blessed Mother, Padre Pio, and others may be viewed [Here](#).

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## God's Love and How to Receive it



With thanks to Marilyn Nash and Jasper her cat

Some events and some experiences are so awesome that we find it difficult to capture them in words. The first Christians, for instance, found the Resurrection so utterly amazing that words failed them. Only the sun in all its splendour seemed an appropriate symbol to express the inexpressible world-shaking event that took place on the first Easter Day. That is why they called their holy day, the day of the sun or Sunday as a weekly reminder of this stupendous event. The sun not only reminded them of the love of God that filled Christ at the moment of his Resurrection, but of that same infinite love, as it was released to fill them on the first Pentecost day and on every subsequent day if they were open to receive it.

However, unlike the sun this infinite loving radiates outward and into all who would receive it, not just during the day, but day and night, to the end of time. If you think that I am indulging in pious hyperbole then think again. No man-made

myth, no fairy tale has ever told any story like this before. No dreamer has ever dreamed such an incredible truth as this – yet it is the greatest truth ever told by the greatest man who ever lived.

Before the Resurrection Jesus was limited by the physical body into which he freely chose to enter. His choice meant that he could only be in one place at a time, so meeting him would have been as difficult as meeting any major celebrity in our time. But that has all changed now, because the same other-worldly love that raised him out of this world on the first Easter day enabled him to re-enter it on every day. So now he can enter into us as he promised, so that he can make his home in us and we can make our home in him, as he promised at the Last Supper. All this is possible, not in some distant pipe-dream, but here and now in this present moment. That is why Jean Pierre de Caussade, the great Jesuit mystic said,

“The present moment contains far more than we have the capacity to receive, for it is full of infinite treasures.”

These infinite treasures are all contained within the love of God. Then, as this love first strikes a human heart that is open to receive it, that heart acts like a prism, distributing this love to every part of the human personality. These spiritual treasures are not only full of the love we need, but the virtues too that love generates within us, enabling us to return this love in kind to God and then to share what we have received with others. Jean Pierre de Caussade calls the here and now, ‘the sacrament of the present moment’, because it is the only moment where time touches eternity.

It is the only moment where the love of God can reach out to us and we can reach out to him, to begin and to continue the journey for which every human being yearns deep down within them. It is the journey to the ultimate mystical marriage for which we all yearn, where our love and the love of Christ become one, in the Three in One, and to all eternity. This is what we call the ‘Good News’ because it is the best possible news that anyone can ever hear. But the bad news is that the infinite love that is continually available to us is different from all other forms of energy, because love cannot be forced. We know this from our own experience as human beings. No matter how we might love someone or no matter how much they might love us, if that love is not welcome, if it is not received and reciprocated, then it will have no effect at all, no matter how powerful it may be.

It is the same with God's love. That is why from the very beginning the first question asked by the great saints and mystics is not, "How do we love God?" but, "How do we freely choose to turn and open ourselves to receive his love?" It is only then that his love can begin to enter into our love in such a way that it can suffuse and surcharge our human loving with the divine.

Then it can begin the ascent, in, with and through Christ, through whom this love is given, to contemplate the Father in whom our final destiny is brought to perfection. But, and there always seems to be a 'but' when we hear good news; if we do nothing to try to receive God's love then nothing will happen except that instead of going forwards in the spiritual life we will go steadily backwards.

Making the spiritual ascent into God is rather like trying to run up a downward escalator. The moment you stop moving steadily forwards is the moment when you start moving steadily downward. A hermit once said that they did not fear a precipice, for only a fool would fall over it. It is the steady downward slope that we should fear in the spiritual life.

Going steadily forwards means finding daily time to do what St Peter told his listeners to do when he was the first to announce the good news that God's love had just been unleashed on the first Pentecost day. He told them to keep turning and opening themselves to God's love every moment of their lives. This turning and opening oneself to receive the love of God has to be learnt, and the place where it is learnt has traditionally been called prayer. That is why there is nothing more important in our lives than prayer, because without it we cannot receive the only love that can make us sufficiently perfect to enter into the life of the Three in One to which we have been called. That is why St Teresa of Avila said, "There is only one way to perfection and that is to pray; if anyone points in another direction then they are deceiving you." There is nothing therefore more important than prayer.

Many years ago I was privileged to attend a retreat given by Cardinal Hume. He first quoted and then slightly modified the definition of prayer given in what used to be called the penny Catechism. "Prayer," he said, "is trying to raise the heart and mind to God." The word he introduced to the old definition was 'trying', to emphasise that the essence of prayer is all in the trying.

The quality of our prayer is ultimately determined by the quality of our endeavour. It was for this reason that the great mystic and mother, Blessed

Angela of Foligno said that prayer is, ‘The school of divine love’. In other words, it is the place where we learn how to love God by daily trying to raise our hearts and minds to him. There are different means and methods that tradition has given us to help us to keep trying to turn and open our minds and hearts to God.. There are no perfect means to help us keep trying to raise the heart and mind to God, just different means. What helps you at the beginning, may not help you later on. What helps you in the morning may not help you in the evening What helps me, might not help you.

## **Praying Made Simple**

Remember the famous words of Dom John Chapman, “Pray as you can and not as you can’t.” The acid test is, does this means of prayer help me to keep trying to keep raising my heart and mind to God? Some months ago I was commissioned to write three little inexpensive books about prayer by The Catholic Truth Society: *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)

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